

Australians at War Film Archive

Kenneth Young - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1740>

Tape 1

00:53 **Thank you for doing this. The Archive wouldn't exist without you generously donating your time.**

01:00 It's my pleasure.

To begin with we need a summary of your life as an introduction to the interview. So can you briefly take me through your life without much detail from where you were born to now?

I was born in Bristol on the 23rd of December 1921. My parents moved to their own house nearby and

01:30 ...I've always had an inkling to go to sea. My father was in the navy in the First World War. He was wounded and captured at the landing of Gallipoli. I was always asking him questions about the sea and I always wanted to go to sea. I was already working in the engineering industry. So I thought right, the time had come. Anyway I could see all the news about it and then the headlines in the Daily Express one day

02:00 said something about Merchant Navy desperately needing engineering crew for their ships. So I went down to the Shipping Federation. They said I was just what they wanted and I told them where I was working and they said, right on one condition. When you come back on your first leave, you wear your uniform, so we can see you in it. So I joined the ship called the GS Walden. Do you want the dates?

No, no. The dates we can pick up later on.

02:30 It was a tanker. A standard oil tanker from New York. So off we went to New York. That was very nice. I got to know New York reasonably well because I think, it was that ship we spent about a week in dry dock. The dry docks were just chockablock with shipping for repairs and what have you. So I got to know New York well and met some very, very nice people there.

03:00 After a successful trip back to the UK [United Kingdom], I left it. I had short leave and then joined another ship, the George W M'Knight. Now that was in a similar situation and that was very, very good. The same trip. Went to Staten Island. Loaded up with fuel.

03:30 A mixture of aviation spirit and diesel, and back we go to England. The second trip...they always ask if you want to come back on another trip...I said, I don't know, I'll think about it. The other engineer said, "Are you coming back?" And I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well if I come back will you come back?" And I said, "Yes." So we signed on again for another trip.

04:00 When he signed on he was taken ill and went ashore. I can't remember what it was now but he ended up in hospital. Then I came back to the Ardenvohr.

04:30 I signed on as the engineer there on the 10th of June '42. I was the engineer.

05:00 I signed on for foreign trade. I've got those dates wrong. Sorry about that. I signed on on the 8th of August '42, and the ship was torpedoed on the 10th of June 1942. We spent about five days in the boats. That was a lot of hilarity and a lot of laughter.

05:30 After a while of course you settled down. During the day we would have our 'one solitary biscuit' and some of the equivalent of a mixture of vegemite and peanut butter. That's the nearest I can describe it. A bit tasteless but full of nutrients. We used to have that and a small measure of water.

06:00 You would take it in turn. You'd be watching everybody, both sides of the boat having their daily drink. And then it settled down of a night time and someone started up, 'Now is the hour...' and we would burst into song and from there on right the way through...we were basically exhausted, we were singing as loud as we could. We don't think we woke up any German submarines. One time, early in the piece, this submarine did come up and

- 06:30 it said, "Ahoy, what ship?" And I said, "Ardenvohr." And I said, "Ahoy what ship?" No answer, but the bosun who was pretty good at hearing said, "JBC...a U-Boat [Unterseeboot - German submarine]." Then we could hear the throttle of the diesel and a voice came up and said, "Have you any injured?"
- 07:00 I said we didn't have any injuries. We didn't want to be abusive or we might have got the 'bad end of the stick'. He asked me politely and I was the only junior officer there, so I answered him politely. So I said, "No thank you, we have no injuries." He said, "Have you any whisky or brandy?" I said, "Yes thank you, we have." And he said, "I suggest you steer south east" and I think (I'm not sure) he gave us a wave.
- 07:30 Anyway, he said, "Good luck, steer south east" and away he went. We could hear the diesel thumping off. Well that took the wind out of our sails a little bit. But at least we had no injuries or bad language or anything like that. As fellow seamen we felt quite at ease.
- 08:00 **We'll come back to those five days in the boat and we'll talk about them in detail later on. Eventually you were rescued, you went back to the UK. What ship did you go to after that?**
- Do you want me to go back to when we were picked up?
- What we need...I want to just move through the whole thing now and then we'll come back and talk about it all in detail. So after that ship, where did you go to then?**
- 08:30 After the Ardenvohr we went to the Stirling Castle I think it was...no, Levenbank. I joined that at Swansea on 30th November 1942. Yes we did a couple of trips up north, to Scotland.
- 09:00 We were going 'trooping' but then went back to Swansea again and then we sailed for North Africa. We went to numerous little ports in South Africa which was very nice. But when I think of all the places I've seen in Africa, I never have any wish or desire
- 09:30 to go ever again. It was very depressive, and once you settle down to a quiet night they call everybody to 'prayer and Allah' over the loud speaker. And it didn't go down very well with me.
- What cargo was that?**
- General cargo. Mostly munitions, military equipment.
- 10:00 Just military equipment and general cargo which would be food stuffs. General cargo, machinery and stuff like that.
- Moving on, after the Levenbank was that the Stirling Castle came next?**
- The next one was the SanVurlfarno. That was another tanker.
- 10:30 I signed on at Swansea in November '42, and that was a tanker and we were just paddling around with the usual pick up and discharge and what have you. I left that in '43
- 11:00 and...oh that's right. We came back and we joined a ship called the Sulphur Bluff. I signed on at Cardiff on 11th June '44. That was for running petrol
- 11:30 and aviation fuel to the beaches. The war was on then. I think the war was on, maybe a week or something before. The beaches were partly cleared for cargo and freight supplies we'd go through. I think we did about eight or nine trips back and forth. That was quite interesting, although the skies were pretty well cleared by the air force.
- 12:00 We had no problems with that. When we went ashore the fuel would be put into army tankers and also a big storage tank was being built at the time. Sometimes you'd walk along the beach and there was quite a lot of war time wreckage. I saw a skull lying around
- 12:30 which wasn't exactly very nice. During those trips it was just the same old routine. We would fill up with petrol. Eventually we didn't go ashore really at all because there was nothing to see. Very few people at the port in Bassin. There were just a few people there. There was a NAAFI [Navy, Army Air Force Institute] Canteen.
- 13:00 More or less for the troops. We could have got what we wanted but we were back and forth to the U K every days, so we didn't need to go there at all. Only for a chat or a yarn. That was quite good.
- After those eight or nine trips, what came next?**
- There was another,
- 13:30 after the Sulphur Bluff. It was a 'Chant'... a horrible little barge thing, it was. The reason they were called 'Chants'. They were classified as Churchill's Auxiliary Naval Tankers. It seemed a bit silly. They wouldn't be much bigger than a house I suppose. I did a couple of trips in that. We went up to ...
- 14:00 We were at a Naval Base. That was all right, but very boring. I got 'cheesed off' with that, so I signed off that. Then I went to The Empire Wansbeck. We had an engagement at Harrick.
- 14:30 That was mostly taking freight from the UK back to England. After that one I joined the Kaikora. I joined

that in August 1947 and it was then that I discovered Australia.

15:00 So which ship were you on when the war came to an end?

That would be...well basically it was the Empire Wansbeck. That was a trooper. Basically at the end of the war.

15:30 That was at troop ship. Then again, it was just loading up and taking troops over and then bringing troops for leave back etc.

So in 1947 on the Kaikora you discovered Australia?

Yes. We went to Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane.

16:00 We spent some time in most of those ports. We came back to Sydney for dry docking and a bit of a clean up and this particular day...what I saw of Sydney, I liked very much indeed. The shops and that. I liked it that much, I started taking notes of furniture generally and just general items.

16:30 I had a photograph taken. I'm stood against one of the pylons looking west which is now the Opera House and the big tower block there. But in those days it was just one big barren block of land, vacant block of land. I thought this is Australia. A June day and the sun was out.

17:00 I was with another fellow. We went to Manly and had a swim. They must have thought mad, bloody 'Poms' [British]. But we enjoyed it and I thought I'm definitely coming out here. By that time, the girl of my desire was waiting for me, so I got back home, signed off before I could be shipped off again. We got married and I got a working job ashore in the engineering field.

17:30 Then we settled down. I saw in the paper one day that the merchant navy...I'm getting mixed up about that...that's right, I came out to Australia and I liked it so much....that's right, we saw in the paper one day that Australia was desperately short of tradesmen.

18:00 So I thought right this is it and I went down and made the appropriate enquires. 'Bang' you're accepted. I went to London for an interview and threw in my job. We were directed to the Estorius which we boarded and we arrived at Circular Quay on Labour Day the same year and we've been here every since.

18:30 We've been over a couple of times, once in '70 and once in '80, but since then, all my relatives and my wife's relatives have gone and I have no wish to go back there again now. I'm an Australian now.

Did you ever go back to sea after you left the merchant navy?

No. We had a cottage down the coast

19:00 early in the piece and our youngest son had been overseas travelling around. When he came back he said, "I think you had better go home and fix up your mother's kitchen." So, because I didn't have the finance for the trip, I sold my boat, a 25 foot sailing boat. And by the time I had sold it, my brother rang up to say she had passed on.

19:30 So I told him to do what he could to sell her house. I told him I would take two thirds...the house was directed to me, and he was to take one third for his trouble. So that was that. We haven't been back since...no, we went back in '80. The house looked just the same. We stayed with the wife's relatives.

20:00 I haven't been back there since and really I have no wish to go back at all.

So you brought up an Australian family?

Yes. That twelve month old boy...he's married and settled down on the south coast. He lived in Sydney for quite a long time. He's moved down there now and has a job. The eldest one, he works for the Water Board...

20:30 he's an architectural draftsman.

So just the two boys?

Yes just the two. Their families have grown of course. So apart from that we're very happy we came out here. Wouldn't have it any other way.

All right. You're a great advertisement for immigration I guess. Let's go back to the beginning. I'll get you to put your glasses to the side.

21:00 **So that's a fantastic overview. Now we'll go back and look at all those things you brought up and we'll go into it in my detail. We have all day. The first thing I want to go back and talk about in more detail is your childhood in Bristol. Can you tell us a bit of your early memories of that place?**

I was right at a big sandstone building. Two stories. Bay windows, top and bottom.

- 21:30 In those days the big loungeroom was downstairs, and then the war started so that downstairs room became the general all day room. And the upstairs room became a bedroom.
- 22:00 It was rather silly really. We had part of a car land on our roof one night. Apart from that there was no major damage done at all. I had a happy childhood I suppose. I was able to meet one of my school friends in North Africa. He gave me his number...he said he wasn't suppose too but as he said, we had known one another long enough.
- 22:30 So he said if I was ever out that way, to see the military police at the docks and they'll contact me. Which in due course I did. That was interesting. I used to keep in touch with quite a lot of the old school friends. The headlines of the papers said
- 23:00 'Australia was short of tradesmen' and so I thought this is it. I loved the climate. I noticed yesterday's temperature was the same...this is in the middle of our winter, it was the same as an English summer. So you can see why I wanted to come out here.

Tell us a bit about your mother and father?

My father had a fish shop...or his parents had a fish shop. He was the buyer, and he would sell it and prepare fish and deliver it and what have you.

- 23:30 Mother was....her parents...he was a big city contractor. Ropes, painting bridges and I think one of the main things, looking after and maintaining all the tram power lines. The overhead power lines. General
- 24:00 external maintenance of tram way buildings and things like that. He would tell me little bits about the war. I would ask him about.

What was his war service? Can you tell us a bit more about that?

He got three medals but I can't say I've got them now.

- 24:30 But he had these three medals because he had landed at Gallipoli. There was the Gallipoli Medal I think. He was a prisoner for most of the war and he was in the RNVR, the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. We had a good, happy, friendly sort of life.

What did he tell you about his time at Gallipoli when you were talking to him as a lad?

That was interesting. I was anxious to hear about it. He said, "To be quite honest it was over and done with in a matter of hours". It was so quick. He did say he shot one man, fired a few rounds and numerous other people.

- 25:30 But in the mean time, someone got up behind him and cracked him across the head with a rifle butt. The next thing, he woke up and he was in a hospital bed in a hospital tent, and the next thing he was on a train heading for Germany and spent the rest of the time of that war in a prison camp, which he said was absolutely boring, boring, boring.
- 26:00 But after a while...some people that they could trust they would put out to help the farming. So he was farming every day, and of course they were 'fed like a Lord' there. Bacon and eggs and everything was always completely rationed. He said they really wanted him to come back and manage the farm, but he was
- 26:30 anxious to get back. He had had enough of the Continent and the war. So he got back. I don't know how he met my mother, whether it was through business or what, I have no idea.

How do you think his war experience and time as a prisoner of war effected him as a man?

I don't think so. He said sometimes it was a bit rough,

- 27:00 but generally speaking you would go with the time. His fellow prisoners would always have a bit of a laugh and a joke. They were always in a group together. He seemed quite happy and I know the Armistice Day I went to when I was a kid, I would see my father march down around the 'Obelisk' [The Cenotaph] there.
- 27:30 They would have talks and speeches and saluting and bands and what not. There were quite a few of his old prisoner mates, his navy friends. During my seafaring days I lost contact with a lot of people. Like I lost contact with a lot of my school chums too.

How much was the First World War in evidence during the 30s and 40s in Britain? Were there plenty of veterans around?

Oh yes, there were plenty of veterans. You only saw them on these special days with their medals. You'd see them war injured with their legs blown off or arms blown off.

- 28:30 But he would just be an elderly individual. But there was nothing outstanding.

What kind of relationship did you have with your father as a boy. Were you close to him?

Yes I was. Very close. He would tell me tales about

29:00 various people he knew and being in that sort of business he always had jokes and things. He might say, do you remember so and so? It was just a nice happy family. We would go out on the weekends or something like that. We'd drive down the South Coast which was very nice. And apart from that it was just a happy childhood.

29:30 **Can you tell us about your mother. What was she like as a woman?**

She was a real softie she was. She was one of either six or seven, and her father was a major contractor.

30:00 He used to do a lot of maintenance on the local tram lines. I think all the family were pretty close. The youngest sister married a Colonel in one of the military regiments. She moved to Edinburgh.

30:30 The next sister married an insurance man in London and she died. She died quite young.

When you say your mum was a real softie what do you mean by that?

She always considerate...when I came home from school she would be there to give me a hug and how did you get on at school today, were you a good boy.

31:00 After a while you would say, no I've been a bad boy. We had a good rapport. It was the one thing I was sorry about leaving. Leaving her. Although we went back and saw her in '83.

31:30 **What kind of boy were you, were you a good boy or a bad boy?**

I was perfect. I don't know...I used to build model airplanes and we would fly these damn things of a Sunday morning. I had a good childhood. I had a lot of friends, school friends and friends I met during 'the Scouts'.

32:00 That's how I met my brother-in-law. He came home on one leave and I came home too and he was getting married and he said he wanted me to be the best man at his wedding and he said to wear my uniform which I did. And that's how I met that gorgeous creature over there.

32:30 **Just more of your life as a boy. Do you remember ever getting into trouble? Anything you got punished for?**

Yes. Practical jokes more than anything else, like throwing pins on seats, putting pieces of wood underneath chairs so they would fall over. I would be sent up to the headmaster to get the cane

33:00 and he would look at me with a silly grin on his face and he would say, "Young, won't you ever learn. Go on, bend over." And 'bang'. It wasn't a hard 'whack'. He was a terrific bloke. No, I can't say I got into much trouble at all. I was a perfect child.

Tell us a bit more about school. Where did you go to school?

You want the name of the school? Redland High School Bristol.

33:30 **What sort of school was that?**

It was a private school. It was very nice. I wasn't exactly brilliant at school but I enjoyed geography most. History was very interesting. I just enjoyed it. I played sport. In the winter months it would be soccer. There was no rugby. I asked why not and they said,

34:00 that apparently a boy died of injuries playing rugby. So it was scrubbed completely.

Were you reasonably well off in your family? Was there any problems with money during the 'Depression' years?

34:30 I was at school then. I don't think so. The house was nicely furnished. I know sometimes Mother would say she couldn't afford it. But we fed well. We had loads of food and we fed well. I was always dressed well.

35:00 I remember on one occasion I had a nice brand new navy blue raincoat. I was very pleased with this rain coat. I went out and came back covered in clay. Father wasn't too happy about that so he got stuck into me with a cane and mother came up and interfered. Anyway I eventually laughed because it flew up and hit him in the eye.

35:30 He was wild but he settled down and he had a grin himself. He went off down stairs. I had a happy life.

Were there hard times in that part of England?

There was a lot of unemployment.

36:00 I don't really think it affected our particular household. But you used to read of unemployment queues and whatever. I remember seeing a lot of these queues myself before I packed up for the sea.

36:30 **What did people around that area do for a living. Was Bristol a working port?**

Well the actual port of Bristol would be about two or three miles away. A lot of the people who associated with the docks would be like wharfies I suppose...apart from the large factories and industrial plants and things like that..

37:00 Dry docks. I think Bristol generally speaking, there was a big 'WD and HO Wills' tobacco company there. I think my mother was working there for a while. There was the Bristol Airplane Company. That was at 'full chat' [busy] all the time. That was all sorts of aircraft being built all the time. And you would hear aeroplanes flying around

37:30 day and night. And in night time, during the war time it was usually the 'Jerry' [Germans] flying over. I have no sad recollections of my school life really.

You mentioned going on holidays to the coast, where would you go on holidays?

Well we lived in Bristol and that's at the top end of the Bristol Channel, and the southern side, the English Channel side

38:00 there would be Weymouth and all the various resorts there. That's where we used to go for a week or ten days. Or Bournemouth or any driveable distance. My father had a car. He would drive this car down.

38:30 We visited Weymouth on one of our trips over there and it looked just the same, and I thought 'gosh', how drab it looks. But it was basically the same as what it was then. The beach front, the sand. There were lots of things that would go on there. Lots of places you could go to

39:00 within easy cycling range.

What was the furthest trip you took as a boy? Did you go up to London for instance?

Oh

39:30 yes we used to go to London quite a bit. I had two relatives up there. My mother's youngest sister, the second youngest sister and then the other youngest sister. She was up there as well. So between the two of them I would spend quite a lot of time up there. Especially with the younger one, May. She was terrific and we got on like a house on fire.

40:00 I used to go up there quite a bit for the school holidays. I would be taken down to the station and the guard would see me on the train and tell me when we got to Paddington. I had a very happy school life.

Tape 2

00:43 **Living near the coast in Bristol, what did you do down at the seaside? What sort of relationship did you have with the sea I guess as a boy?**

I was very keen on swimming. I was a swimming instructor actually. I got my 'Bronze Medallion' early on in the piece and won quite a few races

01:00 in speed. Before I left school I joined the local Henley Swimming Club, and I would spend all my spare time down there racing. I can't say I was interested in any club racing.

01:30 I was always trying to improve. I swam a mile in the 'baths' [public swimming pool] which is a monotonous thing, swimming up and down in the baths all the time. That was a different situation. It would be about 100 yards at a time. It would get monotonous after a while. I used to enjoy that and meet some of my Scout friends or some of my school friends.

02:00 Most of those people are long since gone or I've lost contact with. I had a very happy life really. My father had a good sense of humour and I spent a lot of time with my mother's mother, my grandmother. She was a wonderful soul. That was the most upsetting to me....my grandmother, my aunt, my two

02:30 uncles, they all died while I was at sea. When I would come back I would look forward to seeing my grandmother. She was a wonderful woman.

Were you an only child or did you have brothers and sisters?

I had a younger brother. He went

03:00 to London. He was working in insurance somewhere in London I think. We were never really close. Not very, very close. He sort of went his way and I went my way. When we went back to England in the 70s we made arrangements to meet, and we met and had a talk. Also years later, he came out and spent a couple of weeks with us which was very nice because we had a lot to talk about and we just renewed our compassion for one another. When he went back to England...we went back again in 1980,

- 03:30 anyway, he rang to say my mother had gone and I said, "Right you sell the house, you take one third and I'll take two thirds." So he sold the house and I think he came out to see us and spend time with us. We had a ball and we thoroughly enjoyed it.
- 04:00 It was nice to be reacquainted with one another. That was good.
- How much younger was he?**
- 04:30 He was about seven years younger than me.
- Did you look after him a bit when you were growing up? Were you the protective older brother?**
- Well
- 05:00 he had his mates and I had mine. We used to cycle off to different places. Down around Centennial Park which was a big area. He had his friends and I had my friends and sometimes we would meet and sometimes we wouldn't. We were never exactly close, put it that way.
- 05:30 **You mentioned that at school you liked history and geography, what ambitions did you have for yourself?**
- I always wanted to go to sea. As I said I had a bit of a 'crook foot' [injury]...
- What's the first time you remember wanting to go to sea? When did that start up for you?**
How young were you?
- Fifteen, sixteen. I might have been younger. I think
- 06:00 it was hearing the tales told by my father. They would have a meeting sometimes down there, sometimes an open day and he would take me down, which was very interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I more or less decided then that the sea was for me.
- What sort of tales did your father tell? What were those about?**
- 06:30 Mostly about the landing at Gallipoli. He didn't go into much about the prison camps. I think possibly there was more to it, than he wanted to divulge.
- What was it about all that that made you think about the sea?**
- I don't know. I just ...
- 07:00 When we used to go for holidays at Weymouth, there was always naval ships there and they'd send a small boat ashore and take the kids out and cruise around the bay. Sometimes I would swim out to where the boat was and they'd pull me in and then take me around the bay. I just thought...on one particular ship,
- 07:30 I just suddenly thought, 'that's it, I'm going to sea'. I think on another occasion my father met a...I don't know if he had sailed with him before, anyway this fellow was in submarines. So he showed us around this submarine and
- 08:00 he convinced me then that I was definitely going to sea.
- Where was the submarine, can you tell us a bit about that?**
- It was in Weymouth. Portland was the main base but Weymouth Bay was the big...most of the ships would anchor in Weymouth Bay. And the 'Liberty men' [American 'Liberty' transport ships] would come ashore and tie up to the local quay. They wouldn't come to the beaches but they would come up to the local quay. They'd load and discharge there.
- 08:30 **Who did you talk to about this desire you suddenly had to want to go to sea, your parents?**
- Yes I spoke to my father about it and he said, "Well if you feel you want to go then go by all means. It will be a great experience." So anyway I got into engineering and what have you, and I saw one day in the paper that ...I'm getting ahead of myself now.
- 09:00 **The engineering, you haven't told us about that. What did you do when you left school? Did you do more study?**
- Yes I did a lot of study. The war was on.
- Did you have a shore job?**
- Oh yes.
- 09:30 That was engineering. It was basically aircraft engines. They're very long complicated pieces of equipment, those engines. I was working on assembly checking and inspection. Then they moved me off to engine testing somewhere else. It got

10:00 a bit boring after a while, long hours. Then I saw in the paper that the merchant navy was desperately short of engineers. So I thought well I've got the background, I applied and 'bang', I was in.

The aircraft factory is something quite important to the archive because it's something that directly related to the war effort. That was at the Bristol Factory?

The Bristol Aeroplane Company.

10:30 **Can you tell us a bit about what stage their production was at when you joined them. What was going on?**

Well it was war time and they were working twelve hour shifts, day and night. They were working non stop and the aerodrome was a stone's throw away and there were aeroplanes landing and taking off all the time.

11:00 Engine testing. Aeroplane engines were tested in special test beds. You could hear them, depending on the wind, you could hear them going all night. One would stop and another one would start up. It was a long job, these aeroplane engines. I suppose they were about nine or ten feet in diameter. Sixteen cylinders which is a lot of cylinders.

11:30 They made an awful lot of noise too.

Was it just engines or air frames as well?

The air frames...that was a different building all together.

So was that already in Bristol before the war?

12:00 Yes. That was in operation after the First World War apparently. My father worked there for a while. I think it was thought by him that I more or less got interested in going there. It was very interesting but

12:30 I just wanted to go to sea. One of my school mates, his father was the captain of a 'Mud Hopper'. They would go into the docks at Bristol and dredge the mud out of it and come out with the high tide. They would float out into the Bristol Channel, empty the lot and then you could see the whole boat riding up and then they'd float back in.

13:00 That was just a non stop operation all the time. I spent a lot of time in the engine rooms of these ships. So I was definitely interested in these things. So I got to know how to...not that I was allowed to...I would go down to the engine room before he took off and telegraph a ring, 'dead slow ahead' or what ever it was. I would watch the old pistons going around, and I really enjoyed that. I spent more time in the engine room than on the bridge.

13:30 And that was more or less the final urge to go to sea.

Had the war started by this stage or ...

Yes.

Can you tell us a bit about the lead up to the war? Was it obvious that there was going to be a war for everyone in England?

I think so because

14:00 the invasion of Europe was gradually getting bigger and bigger. There were refugees coming over, places being bombed

14:30 and of course the aircraft industry was flat chat. And it was there...in the engineering business and as I said before I saw the headlines about the merchant navy.

What can you tell me about the outbreak of war and the announcement that England was at war?

15:00 It was...I won't say it was a 'kick in the guts', but it was just a sort of... 'war', you had no idea what it was like. But we had to get on with it. There was little or no unemployed.

15:30 The factories and everything else were taking on extra people. The war equipment had to be manufactured and what have you. Petrol was rationed. There were black-outs to contend with. It was a bit scary but it wasn't frightening.

16:00 There were so many things happening that it didn't really sink in probably really. I felt a bit worried on occasions. I was more concerned about my parents than I was about myself. The house wasn't damaged. There was a house on the corner about four or five houses away from. That was demolished.

16:30 We had a car engine plonked on our roof, but apart from that there wasn't any broken glass. All the windows were all covered up with masking tape so the glass wouldn't shatter or break. Travelling was restricted. Street lights were dimmed or abolished.

17:00 You just had to button down. Black-out curtains all the time. It was hard but you always looked on the bright side that one day it would be over and we'd get back to a normal life. And it was then that I thought right...after seeing this bit in the paper about volunteers.

17:30 **Can you tell us a bit about an air raid like the one that ended up with an engine on your parent's house. What happened?**

The sirens would go. You'd hear the aircraft and then you'd hear the tone...sometimes you'd hear the tone alter a little bit. Other times you wouldn't hear much about it at all. But the sirens had already gone and then you'd hear a sort of

18:00 whistle, and then 'bang'. The whole house shook. In the street two houses disappeared. There was an enormous crater about 30 feet deep. The houses all the way around were damaged, broken glass and a car engine up on the roof.

What would you do when you heard the sirens?

Well they had 'Anderson Shelters' and everybody was supposed to have an 'Anderson Shelter'.

18:30 I think you could have them where ever you wanted them but ours was an older style house of heavy sandstone blocks and there wouldn't be enough room in the garden for an Anderson Shelter. So we just had a...father rigged up something like it under the stairs, in the cupboard there.

19:00 So that was our shelter. But generally speaking you could hear where the aeroplanes were and you just carried on. You could hear them a long way away and you'd know how close to your house they were. At an airfield nearby, Felton, they were taking off and landing all the time. They were also engine testing. And also the local air force base

19:30 that was on the move...flying too or coming back from...

What was in your shelter under the stairs? What did you have down there?

Lots of blankets. I'm darned if I can remember now. You would just go in there...

20:00 I didn't stay there very long. I used to like to get outside. Same with my father, he used to like to get outside. I volunteered in the home guard as a motor cycle dispatch rider and I had 'Home Guard Dispatch Rider' on the bike. If it was a duty night

20:30 they would contact me and if not I would just carry on as usual. Sometimes I would have to take a message from here to there. I used to thoroughly enjoy myself screaming along above the limit. Doing 'wheelies' around the corners. Not quite as bad as that.

What did you have to do as a motor cycle dispatch rider?

Pick a message say up from you at your office and

21:00 take it around to the hospital or something like that. There also might be a message to bring back. In a lot of incidences the telephone lines were down or cut off for some reason. And not everybody had telephones anyway. We did because

21:30 of the business and what have you.

Did you have to go to drill or any other home guard activities?

Oh yes, there was drill and everything else. And because my Dad was in the navy he was doing the same sort of thing. He souvenired a couple of rifles. I think one was German and the other one was French... or was it German and English.

22:00 I think it was English. A 'Lee Enfield'. I was always playing around with these things. He would show me what to do and he would stand me in the corner with the rifle and tell me to do this, present arms and all the rest of it. He loved that. I think after the war was over he gradually got rid of these things.

22:30 They were cluttering up the house and my mother was terrified of these things. She hated me playing around with them and looking at them as a kid. I think they eventually went.

Did your father join the Home Guard? What did he do when the war broke out?

He was a fish monger.

Did he do anything for the war effort though?

Apart for the Home Guard, and he was too old for ...

23:00 ... I'm not sure about that.

But he was active in the home guard?

Yes very much so. He was more or less an instructor for that I think.

When the war first broke out you would have been just approaching your 18th birthday,

23:30 **what did you think you would do in this war? Did you have any ambitions to go out and fight? What did you want to do?**

I couldn't make up my mind. I had a leaning towards ships. I just thought...my father had told me a lot about ships and shipping and I was interested. I was always interested to go aboard ships. As I said, one of my school chums'

24:00 father was the Captain of a 'mud hopper'. It wasn't much but it was a pretty big vessel. They would take me out on that and I would spend more time in the Engine Room. So war progressed and then all of a sudden there were headlines in the paper one day that the merchant navy was desperately short of engineers. So I thought this was it so I went down and saw the appropriate people

24:30 and I was exactly what they wanted.

Before that, did you try and join the regular navy?

No because I had a...my right foot...under the foot, you know from under the foot to the toes it curves up? Well mine curves down a little bit and I knew damn well that if I went in the armed forces

25:00 they'd put me in an office job or something like that which I didn't want at all. Then I saw this ad in the paper about the merchant navy, so I applied for it and got it.

I imagine your job in the engineering business would have been a protected occupation?

It was.

How did you deal with that?

25:30 Well the merchant navy were desperate for engineers...even though I was in a reserved occupation, that was also a reserved occupation. And I wanted to go into that. So I was offered the job in the first place, gave in my notice and that was it.

Why was it something you wanted to do? Was it for 'King and country' or was it for adventure?

26:00 I think it was just the thought of travelling around the world and being up near the war front. It was just as important to import munitions as it was to import food stuffs. There were lots of ships there...more ships than there were personnel.

26:30 So the desperate plea for engineers, and all seamen as far as that went. But this ad was specifically for engineers and engine room staff. So that was it. I applied for it and got it. I had to go to London. They asked me to bring my wife and child with me. So I rang them up and said that the baby had a cold

27:00 and the wife wasn't prepared to come up while the baby had a cold. So they told me just to come up myself. I had to bring references and things like that, which I did. They accepted me right away.

Sorry to keep pulling you back, but when did you get married?

That was after I packed it up in 1947, no '48 we got married.

27:30 **So when you joined the merchant navy you had to go up to London...this was in '42. What happened when you went to London? What happened there?**

They said, "You've volunteered for the Merchant Navy." And I said, "Yes."

28:00 I told them all about what I had been doing, where I was etc etc etc. I'm getting mixed up now with coming to Australia. The merchant navy. I had the qualifications. I had the references. Not full but mostly all the qualifications, so

28:30 they accepted me in the engine room.

And did you have to undergo some seamanship training?

No.

What, they just put you straight on a ship?

The Merchant Navy and the proper navy, you start sweeping the floor if you've got the High School Certificate. You started mid way up sort of business. In the merchant navy,

29:00 they were desperate for personnel. It was in the headlines in the Daily Express. 'Merchant Navy desperately short of engineers'. So that was the one that tipped the scale.

How did you get on with your foot?

No trouble at all. It doesn't bother me at all. It still doesn't bother me.

29:30 **Was there any medical test for the merchant navy before you went in?**

No, none at all. I don't think, I would have been knocked back health wise. The merchant navy and the Royal Navy are two different things. The same as the army, navy and air force. And I thought, if I was called up would I be accepted?

30:00 On once incidence, I was in hospital. I had lost the top of my finger in an accident on this ship. We had been loading munitions and there was the 'second mate'...he was the duty officer on that thing.

30:30 So I went up to him and I said to him that he had better make some arrangements to cart me off to hospital. There was an army major or captain or something there, so he detailed a driver and a car to take me to the hospital right away. That was about the only problem. But it didn't interfere with my work. In fact I don't even miss it.

31:00 I don't even miss it. Writing was a bit of a problem to start with but that's ok now. I've been engineering all my life and tool making and welding, drilling, lathe work. Don't miss it at all.

You're right. The merchant navy is different from the other forces, can you tell us a bit about how it operated when

31:30 **you joined up in 1942? Did you sign on to a ship for a particular period? How did they employ you? Where did you have to go?**

Where's the Merchant Navy Discharge Book? Ok. I was accepted and I went down

32:00 I had a note or 'referral' and I went down to the vessel. Junior Engineer. My age was on the form. So you sign on as a Junior Engineer. You were signing on, on what ever day it was. You put your signature on. The dates on the discharge book

32:30 say when you signed on, entered and departed. And then you're part of the crew. You're under Merchant Navy pay and ten pound a month war bonus. A lot of the military personnel, the army navy and air force used to whinge about us getting ten pound a month. But the thing was, once the army navy and air force people ended

33:00 up as prisoners of war, their pay still went on. But in the Merchant Navy once your ship is torpedoed, 'bang' your pay stops. So you're literally a 'Distressed British Seaman' [financial classification]. I don't know if things have altered now but that's what it was like in those days. And having a trade school, I was fortunate to go through it, enjoy it and get promoted.

33:30 **I've heard from others that the Merchant Navy was a pretty rough place in terms of conditions. How did you find it when you first went on to your first ship?**

The first ship was a tanker. Now tankers usually have better accommodation than conventional ships because tankers are in

34:00 and out in five minutes whereas a cargo ship may take three weeks loading and or discharging. But a tanker just pulls up to the wharf, various pipes come on board and it is pumped in. The accommodation on tankers being dangerous...it's good accommodation. I had a nice little cabin about eight by twelve or something like that.

34:30 There was a bunk up against the ship's side, the bulk head. There was a port hole which of course during war time is open during the day but at night time it's closed down. The accommodation as far as I was concerned was perfect. You're an officer and therefore you had officer's accommodation.

That tanker was the Walden, can you describe the rest of that ship for us?

35:00 Tankers...you know what tankers look like don't you? There's the engine room section and the engineers were all on one side. The other side were for some of the crew and or storerooms. Most of the crew were

35:30 in the 'forecastle'. The aft end was taken up with steering, engines, propeller shafts, steering gear, spares, rope storage and the likes of that. Some ships, cargo ships, there was always accommodation then, but on tankers there wasn't much accommodation, in fact it was all crew and then the tanker itself.

36:00 Mostly we lived in the forecastle. Bosuns and quartermasters and things like that, they might be in mid-ships.

So how big was the crew on the Walden?

36:30 There were seven engineers. Four mates. There would be three quartermasters. A bosun, and I wouldn't like to guarantee the number of personnel. But in the engine room there was always a Fireman. The Fireman looked after the Auxiliary boilers. I was on diesel ships anyway, so the only steam thing there was running the steam generator.

37:00 There were always big crews and most of the crew lived aft in the 'poop' at the end of the ship.

Just to fill in people without the knowledge of a ship, where are these places, the forecastle, the midships, the aft?

37:30 Well put it this way, the front end, the middle and the back.

And what...

38:00 **You've describe the cabins for us, but what were in the other two places?**

The bow was the front end, the pointy end. There would be paint stores. In some ships there would be accommodation. Accommodation for seaman. It was just like two large areas and you're just split up in the one big area. The same thing applies

38:30 on tankers. There were still people living forward and there were still a lot of people living aft. The engineers and engine room crew are all aft as well. There were some seamen forward and

39:00 most of them were aft in the aft end. Most of the accommodation was.

What surprised you about joining the Merchant Navy when you went on that first ship, that was different to what you may have expected?

I just don't remember. It was just something good. 'This was lovely, I'm enjoying this'. And then you get down in the engine room and

39:30 you look at the engine and it would be longer than a double decker bus and about the size of a double decker and a half bus in height. The pistons were two foot six in diameter. On one ship we went out to the Panama Canal and I was 3rd Engineer there, one of the senior watch keepers,

40:00 and the 'chief' was taking soundings and readings. So we stopped the engine. It was a double acting... and I think it was the top piston which was playing up. So we stopped. Engines all stopped and we worked around the clock.

40:30 I think it was about ten or eleven o'clock when we stopped. I didn't come up until...I think we worked through until well passed midnight until we got the piston back in again. That was the first part, when the ship was rolling and you had this piston which would be about two foot six in diameter, nearly three feet I suppose...on a ladder trying to angle grind some high spots. And the ship's rolling and you're trying to keep your backside stuck up so you don't flop back because if you flop back the power comes off the angle grinder and you could fly. It was a bit hairy but you got used to it. The motion of the ship. I've no regrets. I believe it taught me a lot. And you got to know people pretty well in those situations.

Tape 3

00:41 **We'll just go back to where we left off with Chris [interviewer], when you joined the Merchant Navy, did they give you any sort of training before you went aboard?**

No, none at all. I was already in the engineering industry

01:00 and they didn't want any certificates at all. They were desperate for tradesmen. So I applied and got it just like that. I went down to the Maritime Board of Trade...Board of Trade. They were desperate for Engineers. I told them what I was doing, and 'fine'. So then I put in for it, went to London,

01:30 was officially accepted and whether they arranged for transport then I don't know. I found it quite enjoyable. We had hard moments, paddling around...not paddling around...we had the sails up.

That was the life boat?

02:00 **We'll come to that. Was a pre-requisite of joining the Merchant Navy to be able to swim?**

No. I didn't worry about swimming. I think I was a school champion. I know I set up the school mile. Don't ask me what it was, I have no idea.

02:30 I got my Bronze Medallion Life Saving. And I was in the Scouts. I was always the first one in to check out whether the water was safe. So I went in first and swam from that point to that point and came round and that was it.

03:00 **What about some of the other fellas in the Merchant Navy. Did they all know how to swim?**

I've sailed with some people who could swim but not very far. I don't know whether it was any extra qualification. It certainly came in handy. I have met several people who ended up in the water and clambered onto

03:30 boats and they couldn't swim at all. So it's the luck of the draw I suppose. If I was in the water for any length of time I knew I was quite happy and safe. The only time I did swim was when we were in the life

boats. It was pretty hot and there was strange looking fish swimming around. Anyway, one of these days there were no fish around....whether they were young sharks I don't know.

- 04:00 But by this time the second mate he was more or less in charge of the boat. He was like a navigator and I was an engineer. I said I was going over the side for a swim and he said, yes go for it, don't get bitten. So I just dived in and had a quick swim just to exercise the old body...you sat down like this with your feet stretched.
- 04:30 There were quite a few people in the boat. We picked up I think four or five survivors from an American ship, so we were pretty full. But the one big thing about it was...after our evening meal,
- 05:00 one bloke started up, 'Now is the hour...' and he would sing this song and from there on until dark it was just one long sing-song. The 'Cliffs of Dover'; 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'. All the dirty and smutty songs imaginable. Modified songs.
- 05:30 It wasn't terrifying. I won't say enjoyable but there was a real camaraderie. There were always jokes flying around and there were always lots of laughs, 'leg pulls'. It was just a happy occasion. Although it was pretty tough...although I was a good swimmer, I would just walk from the transom of the ship which normally under normal circumstances would be 25 feet above the water. By the time
- 06:00 I got to my boat and I was waiting for the abandoned ship siren, and by the time I went up on deck, I got my life jacket. I put all the coins in my pocket and just put the paper money in my wallet. My passport remained in the office in the UK. But
- 06:30 everything else I took with me. Cold weather gear, jacket. That was like a yellow rubber suit. It was like putting on pyjamas. You put your arms through and then pull the neck tight and that was the hood. So if you were in cold weather the idea was to keep your body heat in. One of the blokes, he was torpedoed and he was 'in the nuddy' [naked]. Completely in the 'nuddy'.
- 07:00 He said to me, "Can I borrow your suit?" And I said, "By all means." So I took it off. I had my life jacket on. So he had that. Once we got back to...I can't remember if it was on this American destroyer, that he
- 07:30 gave me back my cold weather jacket. It was the only piece of clothing he had, or whether it was when we got back to Fort Davis in the channel zone, the Panama Channel zone. We all ended up in American army uniforms. Tropical khaki trousers and shirt. The only thing was that if we went to the pictures of a night time
- 08:00 we had to wear our sleeves down. I think we had good camaraderie in the boats. No actual regrets. It was tragic really for some people. Some people, one or two were a bit teary and weepy, but we all had a laugh
- 08:30 and a joke and we had the singing. All the smutty jokes etc. I can't think of any hardships at all. Thinking all round, it was perfect. I think I told you before about this aircraft flying about...

We'll come back to that. Can I just ask you a few questions, again coming way back to the very beginning, before we actually get on board. Just in respect to the Merchant Navy, what was your parent's response?

- 09:00 I think my father said he was proud of me and put his arms around me and gave me a hug. He said I would enjoy it. My mother? She was pleased but yet she was a bit teary and she told me to look after myself and don't do anything silly.
- 09:30 It was just one of those things. How she reacted when I left, I had no idea. She always put a brave face on and had a big smile. Sometimes she wouldn't smile and I would say, "Smile please." And she would start to laugh. She was a lovely person.
- 10:00 That was the one thing I did miss leaving the UK, leaving my mother. My father was a 'bonza bloke' but he was a mate, more or less. We just enjoyed one another's company.

Some people say in the navy they have a girl in every port, did your parents give you any advice in respect to girls or women?

None whatsoever.

- 10:30 No recollection of any.

Did you have any girl friends at that point?

Yes, I had a couple of girl friends at that stage. But once I went to sea that was the end of it. Eventually they sort of faded from the scene

- 11:00 and ...one of my fellow 'Cubs', he wanted me to... I was either on my way home or home and he asked my mother that when I came to put my uniform on and come to the wedding. Did I tell you that before?
- 11:30 I went down to his wedding and there I met this gorgeous creature in here.

Just in respect to being a junior engineer about the GS Walden what was your role? What do you actually do?

You regulate

12:00 the temperatures and pressures. You're in charge of the main engine, so when you're entering or leaving port, most of the ships I was on, or all of the ships I was on were all diesel. So you had high compressors going to keep air bottles full at all time. If you had too many movements, you won't have any room at the start. One particular ship...the one we went on for the invasion...

12:30 not the invasion but five or six days after the invasion, I think about twelve of them were built in America and they came to the UK. As we joined them, in my cabin there was that 'Red Ensign' [Royal Navy insignia] there. I took it up to the second mate and he said, "Don't worry, you keep it". The second mate was more or less in charge of flags and signals.

13:00 He said, "keep it, it's yours". So I kept it.

So just in respect to the hierarchy. In this case, you were the junior engineer, who was above you?

I was on the 'eight to twelve' [watch]. Well the next one was the 4th Engineer, then the 3rd Engineer was on 'twelve to four'. Normally on steam ships he's the electrician as well.

13:30 But on a diesel ship there's always an electrician because there's separate generators, a large generator for general ship's use. But a small one, a steam ship there's no need for electricians at all.

14:00 The 3rd Engineer does that. That only entailed 'checking light globes'. One of my fears was to have to go up the main mast. I went up the main mast once just to see what the ship looked like. It scared me to death. So I can imagine going up there in the middle of the night in high winds. No way. Not that you would in war time.

14:30 **So changing a light bulb. Is it like changing a light bulb in a house?**

It's a threaded thing, like the American style. One hundred and ten volts.

And how big are the lights?

Just the same as these. Identical. Except the fittings were a screw fitting.

15:00 I think all round the bayonet fittings are more efficient because there's a lot of vibration in a ship, and you'd think it would shake them loose. But all the ships I've been on I've never had to do anything at all about changing globes. I took a dry run one day when we were at anchor. I went up the main mast and had a look and

15:30 I thought fancy going up this, no way. But an electrician would have to do that. If you were going up to the Bridge, there was a door there and you'd put your hands through and take out the odd dummy... there were always spares in there. So there's two globes and if one's out the other one takes over and that's replaced when its noticed.

16:00 **So going through for me, there was the junior Engineer, the 4th Engineer, the 3rd Engineer... could you keep going up the ladder towards the Captain?**

16:30 Not Captain, Chief Engineer.

So who's above the 3rd Engineer?

The 2nd Engineer. He's on the 'four to eight' watch in the afternoon and early morning. The 'eight to twelve' was the 3rd Engineer, the day watch; and then there's the 3rd he comes on from 'twelve to four'. Then at four o'clock the 2nd Engineer comes on from 'four to eight' in the afternoon and the same again in the morning. So there's three constant watches doing the same thing. So you'd do eight hours a day.

And the 2nd Engineer is above the 3rd Engineer?

17:00 Oh yes. He has seniority. He's basically in charge of...he looks after the electrics if need be and if not you hang on until you get into port. But otherwise...

And the 2nd, what does he look after?

He's more or less...he's in charge...he's like the senior working man ...the Chief Engineer is just the number one boy. He's like the Captain. Well the Captain is on the Bridge all the time but the chief engineer might come down when you're entering or leaving port, but after a few times you never seem him

17:30 because he knows what his crew is capable of. I know when I started my first trip

18:00 as Junior Engineer, I was on 'movements'. The Bridge would ring down 'dead slow ahead'. I would check the time...a clock similar to that only it was brass and that's silver. I'd write that down. Answer the

telegraph, and the engineer concerned would work the controls. Luckily the 2nd or 3rd Engineer came down

18:30 and said, "Your turn to have ago now." I knew what to do. The main air supply was open and you just pushed one lever through and that allowed the air to go into the cylinders. And the next lever was firing the

19:00 fuel and then you had a big throttle and that was the speed...dead slow ahead it was just so far, but you still went high to get the thing going. Like you put the foot down in the car when you start it up. The same thing applies. You get the revs going up and then you slow it back down. But if you bring it back too slow then you could get a critical

19:30 speed or too fast you would get a critical speed. Once you get a critical speed the whole ship vibrates like mad and that's 'verboden' [forbidden]. That's a no-no. You had to keep within your safety range.

So that description you're just giving us is when you're leaving port and you're starting up.

Yes. Entering or leaving port. Or entering or leaving an anchorage.

20:00 Leaving an anchorage is not quite such a hassle. We all knew the routine. The chief engineer very seldom came down after a while. He was invariably watching the funnel which would indicate which cylinder or which lot of fuel valves weren't working as per expected.

20:30 He would be taking pressure grafts of each side of the cylinders. These cylinders are maybe three or four feet wide, like a case with the cylinder inside that. When you're inside these things with an angle grinder, there's not much movement except for when the boat's rolling.

21:00 But all these thing had to be fixed and cured and anyway we got this piston back in and hooked it up and away we went.

Just a question, the GS Warden how many funnels did that actually have?

Most ships...all the cargo ships I've been on have been single funnel.

Could you just go through the commands when leaving port, what would actually be said by the chief engineer to the engineers down stairs?

21:30 Down below. If it was just an ordinary cargo watch, just a normal day, there would be maybe a junior engineer down there. A senior engineer wouldn't be down there. He would make sure the water pressure was ok. Then when it was time to leave port

22:00 the watch keeper comes down when the watch starts. When the watch starts he comes down and in the mean time you've got the auxiliaries running such as the oil pressure, circulating pumps and cooling. You've topped up your fuel tanks with fuel oil and when you leave port everything's all topped up and ready to go.

22:30 The air cylinders are all topped up with air and you're ready to go and they ring down, 'Stand by'. And the next thing will be 'Dead Slow Ahead' or 'Dead Slow Astern' what ever the case may be. Whatever they ring down from the Bridge. So it's like a dirty great big quadrant here

23:00 going 'half astern'. You pull this thing....and then you've got another big lever in the middle and that supplies the air into the cylinders and you're watching the tachometer and once she's fired you pull that back. And then you increase the fuel which is like the throttle. And which ever speed they want. I never had any problems at all really.

23:30 On some occasions prior to going on the beaches they had a compass check, and this character was running around yelling, 'Full ahead, full astern.' So I rang up the bridge and I said if you keep these movements going much longer we'll run out of air. So I think the old man must have given him a bit of a lecture.

24:00 You had your air compressors going full chat all the time, and when you go to stop, the engine stops. It's not like pulling a dirty great big clutch over, you just stop. So you need a lot of air to start. One of those pistons would be about two foot six in diameter. And you've got about two in each cylinder and they work that way. That's a lot of air to start all that machinery going.

24:30 So an air start was most essential and important. The bottles of air would be from here to that wall I suppose and about eight or nine feet in diameter. Four metres, five.

25:00 And in diameter they would be two and a half. I've been engineering all my life and I've worked to a thousandth part of an inch, imperial and it's hard to cotton on to the metric.

So with these air cylinders. How many starts could they start up the ship before they ran out of air and wouldn't work any more?

25:30 That's an hypothetical question that is. I don't know. The thing was...on one particular ship I did ring up

the Bridge and I said, "If you have any more 'stops and starts', we'll run out of air." I don't know if he told the pilot. See who ever was testing the compass... they have a compass test. We were a steel ship and 'loaded up to the eyebrows'

26:00 and periodically you have to have them checked otherwise you just carried on as usual. But the thing was you had to keep the air bottles topped up all the time. Even when you're at sea. When you on a long trek say from the UK to Australia,

26:30 you've gone to like 'an auxiliary'. The main board is shut down and the heat generated from the exhaust is fed into a separate board and the fireman just adds a torch to occasionally keep the pressure up. You still had sufficient power to keep your air bottles topped up. If they were only say fifteen pounds then you made sure they were topped up to

27:00 twenty pounds or whatever. Some ships varied in the air pressures and in the engine starts.

What was the noise like once the engines started up and were running?

Nothing bad. It wasn't loud or noisy. It was like a 'shushing' sort of noise.

27:30 There are some engines... I found there was a six cylinder four stroke engine...that's with the overhead inlet and exhaust valves, they

28:00 were a darn sight more noisy than the two stroke which is like a two stroke motor bike, you've got no overhead valves. You've got them at the side, little ones. With the diesel engine there's none of that at all, so you're starting and stopping and so long as you've got air to start your engine. Once you're moving...you've got a steam auxiliary, that will keep the steam generator going

28:30 which supplies lighting. It supplies all the water to the toilets, bathrooms. You name it, water on deck... although water on deck is usually salt water pumped straight from the ocean and or tanks straight onto the deck to wash it down. There was always...noise? Some ships are very noisy.

29:00 I used to find the over head valve engines were very very noisy because you've got two, sometimes four inlet valves and some of those valves are say twelve inches in diameter. It's a bit different to a motor bike or a car. It's a little thing like that. And when you get half a dozen of those things slamming up and down, it's pretty noisy, plus

29:30 the explosion of the combustion in the cylinder. And you can see that from the funnel...not that you look at the funnel, but the noise from the engine can be a bit noisy but after a while you don't notice it. But a two stroke was the best of the lot.

So what engine did the GS Walden have?

She had 'Krupps' two stroke.

30:00 And the smell on board in the engine room?

Just hot oil, steam. There was an oily smell. There wasn't much in the way of exhaust smells. There were always big ventilators taking in fresh air and pumping out the stale air. A lot of the stale air was usually circulated back through the engines.

30:30 Ship's toilets are always interesting things. On board the 'Walden', obviously it didn't have a flushing type toilet...could you describe it to me?

It was just like an ordinary sit down toilet. It was like an air valve of about the height of that glass.

31:00 It had a lever. You just pressed the lever and away it went. And that went over the side. Straight over the side. Whether it went through a settling tank inside I've no idea. As far as I'm concerned it went straight over the side. On some docks you might see bits of toilet paper, so you know damn well where it's come from.

31:30 The vessel has off loaded her cargo and her outlets have become over the quay and of course you get the waste on the deck, but normally that's strictly forbidden. It's just one of those things you've got to be careful of. Not to do too much. Or too much which might be exposed to the public you might say.

32:00 Otherwise it just goes into the ocean.

Can you describe your memories of your very first trip on the Walden over to New York?

I thought this was really marvellous. I thought, 'why the hell didn't I do this before'. This is lovely. I love this. This is terrific.

32:30 It was just nice...you were watching other people like the senior watch keeper and you could put your hand up against the crank case or the side covers...like the sump covers. Imagine a car sump, only they're that that big, you could take the doors off and you could get inside and stand up with a dirty great big tup, which is

33:00 like a cast iron keg about that long and about that round. It's on an eye bolt and a handle on this end. And you put a wing spanner...and some of those nuts holding that bottom edge would be between six and eight inches across the flats. They were a big nut and of course the bolt would be similar. And you have this up in the crank case and you'd pull it back and then you'd throw it and it hits

33:30 the spanner and starts it, and then you could use an ordinary spanner to take it off. You don't have much room in these damn things. I've been there and done that.

Sorry, what was the spanner and the nut for?

Securing the piston...the piston's on the cylinder head....on the 'con rod', and the con rod goes down to sit over the main

34:00 bearing. Now the main bearing on these big things may be twelve or fourteen inches in diameter. They've got big nuts to hold the bottom piece up...have you ever pulled a car engine to pieces?

Once but I never got it back together again.

Well visualise those crankshafts...

34:30 the crank would be anything like that wide across and about that deep. Now that's some big engine and naturally you've got big nuts as well.

So if I understand correctly, while on board the Walden something went wrong with the pistons...

No not the Waldan, that was the Kaikora.

35:00 It was a little bit dicey and that's when the Chief decided...temperature wise, we were a little bit higher than normal. We always kept the same pressures. You could adjust each cylinder to what it should be but sometimes you had to add more pressure because you were

35:30 losing revs or something. So that's when they decided to shut the engine down when we got to the other side of the 'canal zone'. The Panama Canal, that's when we shut down and worked on replacing the piston, which we did.

So you were losing pressure because the piston had been worn down was it?

Well the rings had been worn down and we had to re-ring the whole thing.

36:00 But then again we always had standby pistons. So you would take the standby piston...on this particular trip we took the standby piston and put it in, then we found it was a bit big on the 'bore' [shaft], so that was the worst part of the whole operation. All the engineers had a go at it. There was the 3rd, myself and the 4th and there was

36:30 ...there was another electrician, a junior, and the Chief came down. He was more or less the boss man, the king pin. So we took it from there. I enjoyed the whole lot.

So that was 1947 on the Kaikora?

Yes. That's when I discovered Australia

37:00 and decided to make Australia my home.

On the other ships that you worked on, did you have piston problems?

We had valve problems on the Stirling Castle. No, Levinbank.

37:30 That was a twin screw job and that had overhead valves. Most of the ships I've been on were all two strokes, but this was a four cylinder overhead valve. That was a noisy damn thing that was. But then again visualise a valve grind on a car

38:00 about that big, about as big as a twenty cent piece or maybe smaller. This thing would have been about twelve or fourteen inches in diameter, and the valve itself was just a great big heavy lump of cast iron. So you had an over block and tackle to hoist it up. You had a lever bolted into it. You would hoist it up so far and you'd put carborundum cutting paste around the rim, lowered it down

38:30 and ground away. Then you had a foot pedal to turn it around and so you would do this non stop all by hand. 'Hard yakka' [work].

What was the valve problem that was on the Levinbank?

Basically rings. Whether anything was found with the piston I don't know. But basically the problem was piston rings. They would put the new

39:00 piston in so they could modify and alter it rather than working on the job. You still had to valve grind them but every time you were in port you were working on them. That was a lousy rotten mongrel job that was. Fortunately it didn't happen when I was at sea. Not valve grinding on a multi cylinder.

39:30 I think that was a shore job because they had more personnel and they had more equipment. They would take them out, reservice them and put them back in again.

So you didn't have to do that, that particular job?

Well when you're in shore, if you're not in dry dock, you might be doing something like the valves that are normally open to the water. You might be open to them. Then again the shore

40:00 people could be doing them. But generally speaking we always liked to make sure that the ship's company was doing it because at least we know what's it for and why it's important that it should be a perfect surface. No doubt the shore people may possibly be ex-marine engineers, but you don't really know. But we would make sure they were perfect.

Tape 4

00:42 **The GS Walden, was it a happy ship as you were travelling over?**

Yes, most of the ships I've been on have been reasonably good and reasonably happy. The Mates, the Captain, The Chief Officer or 1st Officer, the 2nd Mate, the 3rd Mate

01:00 and the Chief Steward, they all lived amid ships. Now all the engineers were in the after end of the ship, naturally alongside the engine and some of the crew

01:30 like the bosun and senior members of the crew would be on the other side and or in their forecastle which would be the other side of the vessel. So you were on one side and they were on the other side. Some ships, they were aft in the 'poop' area at the end. The back end. That's a normal freighter.

02:00 The engineers would be midships like in easy access to the engines. Although they were the after part of the ship that's where their accommodation was.

Who did you make friends with on board the Walden?

I think

02:30 you sort of 'palled' up with your fellow watch mates. It's like getting into a bus or a train on a long trip. You'd have a bit of a conversation with the person next door or something like that. It was just one of those natural things. Sometimes you'd get on with people and something you wouldn't.

03:00 I was fortunate. I listened and learned a lot but then again I would talk to a lot of people too. No, we got on pretty well. We were always swapping jokes and silly things like that. One or two people were a little bit 'up in the air' or didn't quite know at all...you obviously had to be experienced to be in the first place. Generally speaking there was a good camaraderie between everyone.

03:30 **You mentioned to Chris that when you were growing up you were a bit of a practical joker, were you a practical joker on board the ships as well?**

04:00 I don't really think so. In the Mess Room the knives and forks and serviettes were all nicely laid out and sometimes switch them over, back to front. Being a happy bunch of sailors, it would be, "Who the hell did this?"

04:30 But generally speaking not too much because we could run into serious problems. Anything associated with boilers. You would never play around with boilers because of fuel fires.

05:00 You wouldn't do any silly things. You just didn't because it was for your own safety as well.

What disciplinary action could be taken against a man if he did break the rules of the ship?

05:30 If it was really serious, like a criminal act, the chief engineer would have a listen to it and then possibly refer it to...if it was really serious, the captain. Then the next port he would be put ashore and a replacement brought in.

06:00 But to be quite honest I don't think it's ever happened on a ship I've been on. I have wondered...there have been incidences where people have died from injuries or something or heavy weather and they've been swept over the side. But generally speaking we haven't had anything like that at all.

You're saying that people died on some of these ships that you served on.

They might have died but not when I've been on it, put it that way.

06:30 That was only hearsay, like 'Fred 'Nurk' died.' Or something like that. It was never harped on. Submarines were the biggest worry. So therefore anything else regarding ships and sailors there was never any jokes as far as safety was concerned.

07:00 Some might do silly things but otherwise you just didn't do it.

Was there any theft amongst the crew?

I have heard of such but I've never witnessed any. I haven't heard of anything like that.

Once you got to New York the first time what was your first impressions of the city and America?

07:30 Well we went to Staten Island...now what was the name of the ship yard...I'll think of it in a minute.

08:00 We saw the New York skyline which is fascinating. Then we went to this ship yard which was chocoblock, so we went into this particular ship yard...which I can't remember its name. We were there for about a week or ten days.

08:30 That was enjoyable. There was another fella and myself. I was the junior engineer on the twelve to four. We were going ashore one day, we were going outside the docks. A car pulled up and someone with a real Scottish accent said, "Where are you fellas going to?" We told him we were going down to post some mail and so he took us down.

09:00 That couple...well to me it was my second home on Staten Island New York. Mariners Avenue, Staten Island, New York, but for the life of me I can't remember the postal number. It was a four digit number. He let me drive his car. He told me to drive his car and when I got to know them...I would go back every time. And eventually he told me that if I wanted to drive the

09:30 car and we're not here, there's the key. Just like that. Marvellous people. They came out from Dundee. They came out during the 'Depression'. Real broad Scottish accents. Bill and Dot England. Wonderful people they were. It was my second home. She used to give me a dirty great big food parcel to take back on board.

10:00 I saw them...the last time I saw them was on the way out on the Kaikora in 1946. I haven't seen them since. I've been in touch with them. I asked them to come to my wedding but they couldn't afford it and I haven't heard from them since. I haven't written.

10:30 But it was my second home. It was beautiful. So to the rest of New York. I know it. If I came over on the Staten Island Ferry I knew where to go to Grand Central [Railway station]. I knew where the Q and R Wharf was. One experience I had which was fascinating. We went into the Q and R Wharf in the main bit of New York. And there was the Normandie...remember seeing the picture of

11:00 the Normandie like that, but this time she was like that in the water. A most fascinating thing I've ever seen. To see the tide floating in through her funnels and then the tide coming out when the tide turned. But policemen, there were thousands of them. I think they must have come from all over the country to see what sabotage could do.

11:30 And all around the docks....they would say, "if you've got a uniform, wear it". If you don't you're libel to be stopped. And that happened many times, so you wore your merchant navy badge on your lapel. But I would play it safe and where my uniform.

And driving in New York. How did you cope driving on the wrong side of the road?

12:00 Oh it was a bit strange at first but after a while I think...in fact I've often thought to ring up Alan Jones and wonder why we have to drive on the left side when most of the world drives on the right. It's all France and Europe, the whole of the American continent. They drive on the right.

Food and supplies were short in England, did you stock up for your family or yourself when you were in America?

12:30 Yes. Well, a few things. These people in Staten Island gave me great big parcels. My mother couldn't get a dress with her coupons so I said, I would get her a dress. So she gave me her dimensions and I went to New York with Dot England and we bought this dress and I took it home.

13:00 Apparently it fitted quite well. She gave me a big hug. That's the only time. I used to take home food parcels, but then again my father was in the food industry.

13:30 And all my school mates, one was the local butcher. The scout master was the local plumber...in fact there were two plumbers down there. Grocers, green grocers, butchers...they were all in school together.

14:00 We were never short of anything at all. A little bit of extra meat here and there. Being in the merchant navy you had a pretty good whack of meat because ...one trip I went on...I forget where I bought the stuff now, but I said I wanted to have the whole piece, the whole ration in one hit. So I got a bloody great

14:30 big lump of meat like this. It would been about fourteen inches long and about seven inches wide. I struggled into the house with that and my mother nearly dropped dead. "What's that?" And I said, "It's

my meat ration for the leave." She was tickled pink with that.

15:00 Their meat ration you could basically eat it in two meals. So this was a Sunday Roast and that lasted two or three days. Sandwiches. We didn't starve. As I say, we knew grocers and butchers. It was always ... "How's the meat?" And that was it. And sometimes I would go

15:30 down on leave and I would get a merchant navy ration card. Sometimes I thought we were pushing it a bit but anyway, that's how I got the big lump of meat that time.

16:00 Food was short but as I said we did reasonably well. I can't say we ever felt hungry for anything. There was always a lot of stuff like butter and margarine. You gradually got used to eating margarine on your bread instead of butter.

16:30 Butter didn't bother me personally. Even to this day...ask the cook there. I have butter on my toast now, but it didn't bother me, if it was margarine.

17:00 **So from New York on the Walden where did you go from there?**

Straight back to the Stirling Castle where I joined up. That's where I joined first up. That was a nice ship that was. She had a big Krupps

17:30 **Sorry, this second ship was called?**

The Stirling Castle. I think it was part of the Bank Line. That always had a bit of a reputation of being the 'starvation line', but I can't say that applied because I had perfect food.

18:00 There was an Alaskan crew. There were always nice Indian curries which I have a strong taste for these days. No ship I was ever on could I say I felt hungry. There were loads of food, always too much in some instances. There weren't too many empty plates left after I had finished my meal.

18:30 Maybe a bit of the gravy. No, we fed very well. I would have almost two days ration in one meal. But when you get ashore it was a different matter all together.

What was your role on board the Stirling Castle?

Junior Engineer. In other words you assisted the senior watch keeper and he would work the telegraphs

19:00 and the Junior Engineer would work the engine throttles. The telegraph would ring and he would possibly ring it to what ever it was and then he'd start the engines. Well the diesel engines had a dirty great big lever on like a big quadrant...

You covered that a bit earlier...just in respect of the two ships, the Walden to the Stirling Castle, was it the same in the operation,

19:30 **the actual engines?**

The same...the Stirling Castle was an overhead valve like the convention side valves of a car, like a motorbike or a 'Holden' or most of the cars today are all overhead valves.

You mentioned you were a Junior Engineer, how does one actually get promoted?

20:00 Just time really, and I suppose the company writes references, I don't know. The chief engineer may write references. I don't have any idea. It's more or less time served. Once you've been doing it for 'X' number of years

20:30 and there's a vacancy on a ship which might 'bump you up a notch'. There was one particular ship we sailed on. It was going to be a one way trip and the senior watch keeper asked if I was coming back next trip and I said, "I don't know. I haven't been asked."

21:00 He said, "I'll come back, if you'll come back." So I said I would come back. So we both signed on again but eventually he went to a party of one of the senior engine room staff. He was getting married or something and we were invited. This chap

21:30 had his wife and kiddie down on the ship. Anyway they went home and we went to the wedding and apparently he stood, held his stomach and just heeled straight over. He had a burst appendix or something like that. Of course he was rushed off to hospital

22:00 I went back to the ship and they had to get a new engineer. I had done a trip on the ship, so I knew the system right the way through so the Chief Engineer said, (it's always Mister). He said, "Are you quite happy with this Mr Young?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm glad about that because you're going to have to run your watch.

22:30 We've got a new second. He'll be spending most of his time in the room studying. He's got things to do and I've got things for him to do, can you cope on your own?" I said, "Yes definitely." Apart from entering or leaving port. There was always a two hour standby before arriving at port which would give

you a chance to 'crack

23:00 steam open' for the daily service pump, and steam on the fore deck or steam on the after deck. You could just crack it there for the heat to go through, and then the bosun would open the cock, so when the fresh water came through that was all pumped out, and then they'll close those cocks off.

23:30 So it worked to a tight schedule you might say. But once the steam was going through, you had air going to the compressors all right. So you had no trouble at all. Perfect.

You mentioned you got a promotion because this fella got a burst appendix, were there proficiency's that one had to do so you could climb to the next position?

24:00 No, I was a junior engineer and the Chief came down and he said, "Young do you think you can handle it." It was a 'Krupp Two Stroke'. He said he knew I could do it. So right I was it. He told me there was a new second

24:30 and he was still studying, so he would be spending most of the time of his watch in his room, and I said it wouldn't be any trouble.

What was he studying?

He was doing his Chief Engineer's 'ticket', or studying for it. He had the time, so he was studying for it.

Just a general question in respect to engines? You're at sea in salt water, what did you do to prevent rust?

25:00 Well rust will start on the ship itself won't it. You dry dock occasionally and that's ground back with chipping hammers. All the paint work taken away and fresh 'red lead' [paint] goes on. Once the ship is 'red leaded' with a good dry dock cleaning,

25:30 it would be all painted. You sneak down occasionally and have a look where everything is. It's nice to see where certain valves, you look inside and put your hand in. So once that was fixed, no trouble at all.

So it was never a major problem?

So long as lubrication and the appropriate paint, Red Lead was applied. It was fine. The biggest problem was on the deck.

26:00 Heavy seas would be flushing the deck. Naturally with a riveted ship or even a welded ship there was always movement. Even with riveted ships there were banks of five different lots of rivets

26:30 and there's a certain amount of play in those rivets. If it was all solid and in one piece in dirty weather it would crack in two. So that's the reasons why and pros and cons.

Ok, where did the Stirling Castle go once you got aboard her?

The Stirling Castle?

27:00 We went to...I'm going to get my dates right...

27:30 **What are your memories of the Stirling Castle?**

A big, twin screw, 6 cylinder, overhead valve engine. A dirty, stinking, noisy thing. It was very noisy.

28:00 Always smoking.

28:30 **A lot of smoke you were saying?**

Yes. It would get in your nostrils and down your lungs. For a handkerchief you'd just use an old rag. It was just a dirty, lousy, rotten ship.

29:00 I didn't stay in that for very long. I think it was that ship...we were loading for North Africa and I was the duty engineer on that particular occasion, and at night...it was all diesel winches. And

29:30 on this particular ship...after it had been running all day and we had spares...I switched this one. You bar it round to a starting position and the fly wheel would be about seven feet in diameter. A heavy cast iron thing. You would bar it.

30:00 There were two of you on the job. You would bar it round so you would get two pistons just ready on top of the stroke so when the air comes in you would give a full...well this thing got so far and it went off with a rush and clunked my finger on the crowbar and by the time I pulled my finger away it was...the nail right the way back to the joint was gone. We were loading army trucks, and I went

30:30 up to the 2nd Mate and he was the Navigator of the ship itself. I went in with blood everywhere. I showed him what I had done and this army bloke said right, "I'll detail two men to take you to the hospital right away." So

31:00 he got two men to take me to the hospital. So that was the end of that. I went to hospital but they couldn't do much with it. The other part of my finger was in the engine room and they said it was too late and it wouldn't be any good. It would have been 'impregnated' with dirt and flattened. So that was the end of that.

So basically you were 'prepping' the pistons, is that right before your finger got crushed?

I was bringing the fly wheel round so when you applied the air the air would come in and

31:30 engage the majority of the pistons, or maybe one or two of the pistons at the top of the stroke. So it would give them the power to bring them down and get the other one up, and that was the main thing about getting all the valves fixed up and cleaned.

32:00 And then you had to bar it around to the starting position. Some of the other generators which may have been six cylinder things with an air start, were no trouble at all. But this thing you had to bar it round to the right position, then once the air came in away you went. If it was in the wrong position you would waste a lot of air trying to get the thing round. If you got it in the firing point then it would be no trouble.

32:30 **Once you got to hospital what was actually done for the finger?**

I don't know. They put me in a bed and gave me the usual lovely night attire that people wear in hospital. They wheeled me off. I had something put on my face and the next thing, I woke up in bed.

33:00 My hand was just a mass of bandages. At least the finger was all wrapped up. I was there for two or three days and then I went home on leave for awhile. It was a bit hard to get used to it for a while. A bit tender but after that it didn't make any difference at all. You use big hammers and chisels.

33:30 Drilling I don't even notice it at all. I can still hold a schooner all right.

We might test that out a little later on. Was any skin grafted to the finger?

I don't think so. If the bone goes there's not much meat there to start with. I would imagine there was something hanging over. Whether they pushed what was there and squeezed it up over the top I don't know.

34:00 Likewise in the front because the bone itself is still there. The other bit would be like the ball joint. That was gone. So it didn't bother me one iota. I can do anything.

34:30 **So how long were you off for?**

Two or three weeks I think it was. I could check in the discharge book from the time I left that ship to the time I entered another one. I had sick leave and then what ever leave was due to me from the previous signing on.

35:00 I'm not quite sure without checking the dates.

I mean these days you would financial compensation for losing a finger, did that happen then?

No, I heard of a carpenter, he had lost the same part of the finger and he got compensation.

35:30 But I didn't because I was an officer which seemed a little bit off hand, to me. But that's the way it was. He was in the army I think. He got compensation and I didn't.

36:00 But then again you can turn around and say you had your merchant navy pay and you had a ten pound a month bonus which a lot of military personnel thought was a bit rough, but on hindsight, any military people when they become prisoners of war, their pay goes on and on and on. But in the merchant navy

36:30 on my discharge book it says, signed on and signed off at sea, and that's the end of that.

What happened after the hospital. Did you return to the ship?

No, I was sent home for a couple of weeks and then I had the leave due to me.

37:00 They had brought in another replacement engineer by that time. A funny thing about that ship, we were coming across, there were two of us and we said what a lovely looking vessel it was. A big tall high forecastle, funnel and a real lovely looking vessel. I didn't know I was going to end up on it and I was on it very long.

37:30 It was a mongrel thing in the engine room. Filthy, smoky. It didn't worry me when I left it. There were plenty of other ships around.

So after you were in hospital with the finger what ship were you posted to then? Was it the George W McKnight?

No, the George W McKnight was...

38:00 that was the second ship I was on. The Stirling Castle. That's where I did the finger. So the next ship... I'll have to have a look at my book.

Was it the Ardenvohr?

The Ardenvohr? I think my typist made a mistake there, it should have been the other way round. It was the Ardenvohr I sailed on in 1941.

38:30 **Can you describe the Ardenvohr? What did she look like?**

A single funnel. Must cargo ships were single funnel. A

39:00 nice high rise forecastle. A cruiser stern, like a round stern. The midship accommodation was normal. All the crew staff, lived on the after end.

How many crew were on board?

I don't know, I think about thirty three or thirty five. There would be more seamen, deck crew

39:30 quartermasters and the like. Radio operators come under the class of navigators and engineers. Engine room crew. There weren't too many. There

40:00 would be four...I think there were about six or eight. There was one fireman. He used to look after the auxiliary boilers. He would keep the steam generators going and the generators to keep the compressors going and what have you. I was never on a steam ship. So I wouldn't really know. They've got lots of big

40:30 boilers on a steam ship because that's your main supply of power. The other ones are just diesel like a jumped up car engine.

Tape 5

00:41 **Before you joined the Ardenvohr you were given some leave. What would you do on your leave back in England during the war?**

Nothing very much. Look up any friends and school friends. Most

01:00 of them were in the army, navy or air force or something like that. I would go and see relatives. It was just nice to sit at home. I might go to the pictures or something like that. Most of my friends and acquaintances were away at sea.

I've heard it said that the British community really came together during the war. And

01:30 **it was a great atmosphere in some ways, despite what was going on. Is that true?**

Oh yes, I think so. If you were ashore in uniform all the service people would always give you a salute, and naturally you would return the salute. If you went out to a pub or anything like that, there was always room for you to go up to the bar.

02:00 There was one place I went to...they wanted to put on a bit of a do for all the local servicemen... sometimes I would go in 'civvies' [civilian clothing] depending on where I was going to go. But generally speaking, I was in civvies most of the time. It was very nice with bus fares. They would invariably

02:30 give you a wink and let you through. There was no big deal there.

What was the relationship like between Merchant Navy men and the Royal Navy?

Well, little or none. The navy men were more or less guarding the Merchant Navy convoys. They were circling the convoys all the time.

03:00 There was always one ahead of the convoys and there was always one on the port and starboard side and there might be one or two floating around aft. There could be people far out over the horizon. If there was anything coming through that was suspect, we would always hear about it. "U-Boat suspected approximately..." at say, 11 o'clock at night.

03:30 So you just carried on doing your usual duties. If there was anything doing at all you would hear from the Bridge if there were any mines going off. You could always hear the damn things. Incidentally it is a horrible bloody sound. You would hear them from other ships and then we got to hear it for our own ship.

Back in England on leave when blokes met each other, what was the relationship like in that situation?

04:00 **Was there respect on both sides. Was there a bit of tension?**

I think so. A lot of the navy people would often ask, "How come you merchant navy people get so much money?" We would get the ten dollar a month war risk. And once the ship was torpedoed that war money stopped. Now I've got it in that discharge book,

04:30 I signed on at Avon on such and such a date and signed off at sea on such and such a date. Now once the ship goes down and or torpedoed, that's it, you're on your own.

It's not very fair in some ways is it?

Well if you're a prisoner of war for any length of time you don't get paid at all, nothing. But the armed forces get a certain amount of pay.

Were there any fights about that between the navy and the merchant navy?

05:00 I don't think so. I think the navigators, especially the 2nd and 3rd Mates, they'd have a bit of rapport with the signalman. They would send out some silly remark and get one back and then it could be quite serious. You knew how to receive their messages and we got to know how to send them.

Still on leave and back on land,

05:30 **was there severe rationing? Can you talk a bit about that?**

I don't think so. Some people were pretty severely short of food. But as far as we were concerned, I think we managed quite well. Tea might be running out or coffee. Not that I was worried about coffee. I was always...

06:00 As far as we were concerned, we lived with our rations. We had no problems at all, but then again my father was in the food business, fish. So naturally through a lot of his school mates and choir mates and what have you...they all had businesses, so one helps the other and the other helps the other and so on.

What was the fish monger business during the war? Was that a controlled produce?

No it wasn't controlled,

06:30 but it depended on the fishermen going out to catch the fish. If they were caught then they'd go to the markets but if there was nothing going to the markets, there was no fish.

The government had no say in where it was sold?

I'm not sure. I wouldn't know. There was the Ministry of Food and whether they controlled it I don't know.

Were there any special entertainments for sailors on leave?

07:00 **The Lady Ryder Scheme or concert parties or anything like this?**

Not really. Maybe the local area, the church hall might put on a dance or something like that. I'm no dancer, so I didn't go to many of these dances.

07:30 We managed. We managed quite well without it. If you were in a foreign port, two or three of you might go down and tour the pubs. Of course, only inspecting them. We might go down there and you might have a meal. If you had meals it was usually in the States because meals in Britain were rationed.

08:00 And a normal meal wouldn't be very much. So we didn't eat out at all.

You told us about the hospitality you received on Staten Island New York, did you get good hospitality elsewhere during the war?

Well that Staten Island business was because we were there for quite a long time overall and in that time we got to know people pretty well.

08:30 It was just nice to see these people and they made me promise to come back and see them the next trip, which I did. We always kept in touch, but once the war came to an end, I packed it up. Some I wrote to and said I wouldn't be seeing them any more.

During your first trip there, just going on your dates, America wasn't actually part of the war.

Not then, no.

09:00 **What was their attitude towards it, what was their general attitude towards the war?**

I think it was pretty good. They were supplying us with food and munitions, petrol. Petrol was the biggest thing because the eastern Mediterranean lot, that was all closed down, well partly. But as far as fuel was concerned we had to rely on American and Canada.

09:30 New York was a big tanker place. Dozen and dozens of little harbours just near the tanks.

I think it was your next trip, the Stirling Castle that America entered the war, that the Japanese bombed them and they came into the war, did you learn about that at the time?

It might have been picked up on the radio.

10:00 Normally...you had your own radios but you were not to use them at sea because the submarines could pick up the frequency etc and home in on where you are. So your radios were handed in and put under lock and key. So any news like that, would come down from the bridge.

10:30 Or from the wireless room. It would go to the bridge first and then sent down to the engine room.

And what sort of news do you remember hearing that way? Did you hear about Pearl Harbour?

I think I saw something about it when I was home on leave. I never heard too much about it at all.

11:00 It was just another bombing raid as far as we were concerned. Little did we know of course.

There was after that moment a separate war going on if you like, with the Japanese. Did you hear much about that, about Singapore?

Well we knew about Singapore because the army was out there and the air force.

11:30 But personally I had no contact with any of those countries. The closest I got to it, was on the ships that were taking military supplies to the Mediterranean.

Going back then to the Ardenvohr

12:00 **you were describing it a while ago as a good looking ship...**

Yes. There was a picture of it...did I show you that?

What was it carrying?

Just general cargo. It could be...the first time I saw Australia, we went to Canada first, Quebec and Montreal,

12:30 and loaded up a lot of rolls of paper. Of course this was peace time. We went to New York and picked up the general cargo. General could be military equipment and food stuff's I suppose. Butter, I don't know. We used to bring back...coming back from Australia there was always refrigerated ships. One particular ship I was on,

13:00 the Kaikora brought back a lot of refrigerated lamb from Australia. Frozen food stuff. American frozen canned food stuff. There was always sugar...I'm not sure about flour. A lot of that stuff comes in bags, like

13:30 flour. It comes in a big bag. Some of the stuff was crated. But I know it was just general food stuff and general cargo. How the food stuff was wrapped up, I wouldn't know really.

Where was the Ardenvohr running to?

We were bound for Sydney.

14:00 We got maybe a couple of days run from the Panama Canal and I think I had just come off watch. It was the only ship I was on where you finished your watch and you went 'down the tunnel'. Do you know what a 'tunnel' is? Like where the propeller shaft leaves the engine room and it gives down the whole after end of the ship. And there's bearings down there and an automatic lubricator.

14:30 It was the only ship I was ever on, where the junior engineer after his watch went down to check these things. It was checked during the middle of the watch and also afterwards. I was checking the steering gear...I was coming up on the platform near the main deck...the troop ship alongside us, she was torpedoed, bang.

15:00 And then 'action stations', then all of a sudden, a matter of minutes afterwards, we got the same treatment.

Just to fill in this context when this happened, you were running to Australia...who were you with, was it a convoy?

The Ardenvohr and this empty troop ship.

15:30 We were independent. Getting down towards the Panama Canal you were on your own. It was a big ship. And our Captain suggested we stay together for company which fortunately, or unfortunately... when they got torpedoed, they got torpedoed at the same time.

Was there a danger of submarine attack in those waters? Were you on the lookout?

16:00 Well you were always on the lookout. Your ship was always blacked out and there were no lights at all. You were in radio touch with the American coastguard or the Marines people were always in touch or calling you up. There was always some communication, one way or another.

16:30 Also sometimes they would come down, "Suspected submarine pack approaching approximately

midnight". Well the only thing you could do is if you had a life jacket handy....that was about all I think, having a life jacket handy.

Was there a drill you had been taught in the merchant navy in the case of abandoning ship?

- 17:00 There was always 'boat stations' which would be the same thing. But most of these things happened in harbour. But if you were in safe waters there could be a dry run. But normally always in harbour, a safe anchorage or a port. If everybody is on deck or away from their guns or what have you...but
- 17:30 if those gun crews go up to their guns, then that's where they go. I was on a ship...we went to North Africa delivering a lot of stuff and on the way out there was 'action stations'. I was on a gun crew.
- 18:00 We had a few lessons on light ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] material. You had a certificate for that. This particular incidence the alarm bells had gone and I went up to the boat station and it was fully manned....sometime there would be a navy man or an army man up there looking after the guns.
- 18:30 This particular time I was below the 'gun pit' just looking around and I could see this white arrow coming towards me and I yelled out, "Torpedo starboard side". Whether they heard me I don't know because there was a lot of gun fire because aircraft were bombing us. This was when we were going out. If we had been coming in, I might not have been here today because
- 19:00 we would have discharged all our cargo and naturally we were lighter in the water, and this torpedo was coming straight for us, like looking at me now, straight for us and I could just see it disappearing under the side of the ship. We could feel and hear a thump. What might have happened. Like the front end of the torpedo is like half a ball...what I think
- 19:30 happened was the bump just kicked it on the curvature of the bullet head, put it like that. But the actual fuse or contact was right in the middle. So it just bumped the keel and then I could see it disappearing into the distance. That was the nearest one we had apart from receiving one.

Again we'll come back to that. We'll keep in order so we'll go back to the Ardenvohr for a moment.

20:00 On the Ardenvohr what was the life boat situation? What did you have in case of emergency?

Well there were always lifeboats fully equipped with two kegs of water. Always biscuits. Sometimes there's corn beef. Water...biscuits and maybe half a teaspoon of corned beef to go with it.

20:30 That was the main diet.

Where did the lifeboats normally sit on the ship?

They're up on the...as far as a cargo ship is concerned, they're sat up above the accommodation. You know the bow end, then there's the 'low decks' where you get to the hatches, then you get 'high rise' where the Bridge is and behind that the funnel and the upper midship area,

21:00 and the rest of it is flat for deck cargo. So there's an awful lot of stuff to be carried around and there's an awful lot of damage when the ship goes up.

How big were those lifeboats on the Ardenvohr?

About twenty eight or thirty feet I suppose.

21:30 Maybe less than that. They were licensed to carry about thirty two, I think it was. But by the time our lot got into it, prior to us getting hit, we picked up some survivors from an American ship. There was one boat...I think there were four or five and

22:00 amongst them was an engineer off the ship. We got talking and chatting and one thing and another, and he did say when you get yourself sorted out we can guarantee you a job on the American ships. You would get bigger pay and everything else. I thought that was very nice but I had a family over on the other side

22:30 and the likelihood of me seeing them again would be very remote. So I thought, well I get pretty good money as I am and I got to know it pretty well.

So the lifeboat could take about thirty, how many were there on the Ardenvohr?

About thirty two odd crew and we picked up five people.

But the boats themselves, was there just one lifeboat?

23:00 There was two big lifeboats, the main lifeboats. They would be about twenty five to thirty feet long. They were licensed to carry about thirty odd people.

How were they gotten into the water? What was the procedure for doing that?

Well, you had your 'boat rank'... 'saddles' on top of the accommodation decks. The 'davit' cranes were swung out...at sea during war time the davits were out there permanently all the time.

- 23:30 So if anything happened you would just go up to your boat stations and you get the thing ready for lowering. Then the word came through to 'abandon ship'. Well I was coming out the steering flap after checking out the steering gear. I was on the deck and there was this almighty crash when the torpedo hit the ship alongside us.
- 24:00 I think it was the Surrey. She could have gone faster than us but they decided we were going to the same place so we would come for company. She got it first and at the same time I went to my cabin. I put all my paper money in my wallet and the coins I left behind.
- 24:30 I put my cap on, patrol jacket on. I went up to the boat stations, and the forward boat, the jolly boat that fell vertically straight down into the water. The afterfore, the back one was just trailing down and by this time there were so many torches.
- 25:00 It was like Sydney Harbour on a weekend. I followed the torch line with my torch and there's my boat right on the 'transom'. Well the transom under normal conditions, you would be twenty possibly thirty feet above the water. Once you were loaded you got down to twenty three maybe. And when I looked down there was my boat right along side.
- 25:30 Now that thing normally would be thirty odd feet above the water. When I got to it, climbing down, there were armoured vehicles and tanks on the deck. Of course all these are wired and stapled down to the decks. You had to use a torch or you would trip. We got over that. By the time I got to the transom, I got over the rail and stepped into my lifeboat. Normally
- 26:00 that was twenty five to thirty feet above the water. The ship was sinking down pretty rapidly by that time. Luckily the bosun was there and he saw me coming along. He held on and said, "Anyone else 3rd?" And I said, "No, cut her loose. That's it. Finished." So he got the axe out and chopped it and away we went. And it was a matter of seconds of course and she disappeared and blew up.
- 26:30 As she went under the water she blew up under the water and the whole ocean around you was lit up. A very very whitish pale green. I'll never forget that. And an enormous explosion.

When the torpedo first hit, what did it sound like?

If you had a pair of boots on and you kicked an oil drum it would be like that.

- 27:00 It was a thud...just an ordinary thud. Like if you dropped a brick on a tin shed I suppose.

Were you aware immediately what had happened?

Well I knew then because the Surrey was hit. They were scrambling to their boat stations.

- 27:30 As I was coming out they were scrambling back in to get the life jackets. It was warm weather so they used to sleep on deck and you were supposed to take your life jackets with you, but a lot of people didn't. But anyway I got out, walked across the deck, went to my cabin. Put my wallet in my pocket. Removed the coins

- 28:00 and anything heavy that wouldn't float,

Were you as calm as that picture suggests?

Well if you panic you don't know what you're doing. You have a certain amount of training, a bit of experience. It's like if something 'big' happens with one of the engines. You know what it is, a valve spring might have broken. A sudden noise and

- 28:30 you're prepared to meet it and solve the problem.

From your training what was your job in that situation...what did you need to do if the ship was being hit by a torpedo?

My particular job would have been to basically stand by the engines I suppose. If you were torpedoed then that's a different matter. You abandon ship. So I went straight to my room. As I said, I picked up my wallet, clothing, jacket.

- 29:00 **Was there anything else you took with you?**

A water dipper. It was so much water we could have per day. Once in the morning and once at night.

This was in the life boat?

Yes. We also picked up...when the American air force spotted us

- 29:30 they dropped two flares. It was like a long orange streamer with a canvas pocket. That's the only thing I got out of it.

When you were abandoning ship what was the rest of the crew doing?

I wouldn't have a clue because I was in the engine room. When she hit I was coming up the steering

flap...as she hit there was everybody trying to

30:00 get down to get their life jackets. I was able to get up on deck and look around and see lights and torches. I was rather surprised to think there was so much light around. Some were using torches and some were using flares. And there were two ships that were involved.

30:30 Thinking back it seemed to me to be a rather lot of light and it's all very well to criticise that but a lot of people would possibly be frightened to death. I wasn't exactly enjoying myself but I knew I had to get there and I had to do this and that. In which case I had to get to my cabin to get my life jacket, my

31:00 valuables other than my torch. I had a waterproof torch which I had in my pocket. That came in pretty handy later on for ...

Who was responsible for making sure that everyone got off the ship?

Well, normally the Captain is more or less responsible. He's up on the bridge directing and once all the lifeboats are gone and then that's it. In this instance the ship was hit and

31:30 there was no standby at all. It was just abandon ship. We seemed to be floating all right. It was a bit down in the stern. But I got to my cabin, sorted myself out, put my life jacket on, got my valuables and went to my boat station.

32:00 As I walked up through the main accommodation I could see the 'falls' on the port side of the boat... both 'falls', forward and after falls, were hanging straight down. So I looked at my boat. The forward falls were straight down and the after fall was going down...I followed it down with my torch, and there's my boat right on the transom. That's right on

32:30 the back.

So you got into the boat. You were one of the last people in, is that right?

Yes I was about the last one in.

Can you describe again what you saw as the boat pulled away?

I think we were all busy more or less sorting ourselves out. A lot of people were just piled on one side. So we had to organise, say ten that side and ten that side, to equalise the weight all the way around.

33:00 Once we settled down we were on an even keel and everything was OK.

What could you see of the ship sinking?

You couldn't. It was black, night. All we could see...we were in the boats and all of a sudden there was an almighty explosion, and all you could see what the sea going from black to a very pale green. An enormous explosion. It

33:30 shook the boat. You couldn't see anything other than the colour and from where we were, I suppose the boat slew around into its original course and we didn't see any flash. But then

34:00 again it could have been absorbed into the body of the hull itself.

What was the reaction of seeing the explosion under the water?

Well we were all busy getting ourselves sorted out, you sit there, put that there...just getting the weight equally distributed around the boat. You know with a lifeboat....you had to equalise the weight and if the side seat

34:30 were occupied then there was seats in between. So when you're rowing you use one of these seats to put yourself against. To row...you know when you row a boat, you put your feet on something solid. So people sat on that.

35:00 The American survivors we picked up were already down there keeping out the way of everybody else.

So where did you find them? What happened next?

There was nothing we could do. I think after a while we heard a voice in the deep ...did I tell you this before? We had a voice in the deep saying something like, "Ahoy what ship?" And I was the only junior officer there so

35:30 I thought, 'did I hear right?' The bosun was on the tiller steering. And then it came again, "Ahoy what ship?" So I stood up, looked towards where the voice was coming from and said, "Ardenvohr" And then I said, "Ahoy what ship?" No answer.

36:00 And then the bosun who had better hearing than I did, said "That's a JVC, a U-Boat." And sure enough, we heard a rumble rumble rumble. Then the voice gave us a course to take, wished us good luck and away he went.

36:30 **How long after the ship went down did that happen?**

A matter of...maybe half an hour.

In that half an hour period, what was going on? Did you pick up American survivors then?

No we had picked up the Americans two or three days before that. They

37:00 were pretty good. They got themselves sat in the middle of the boat on these seats I was telling you about. Their Chief Engineer was in amongst them as well. Once we got...on this particular night...I don't know why I woke up, I heard something, and I saw two

37:30 pink glows in the sky and I knew that was a 'Catalina' flying boat. There were so many in the sky over there that you know the sounds, and I pulled out my torch and blinked off 'SOS'. What I could have done was go 'AA', 'AA' and then he would have answered with a 'T'. But anyway I did the 'SOS' and then I passed the torch to the 2nd Mate. He was on the transom,

38:00 and he morsed off the name of the ship and things like that. We got the message back, 'Help will be arriving in the morning.' So he said to me, "Mr Young, you can open up the bar now, drinks all round."

I want to talk about that rescue again, but you were in the boat for a number of days before that happened...

38:30 From the time we were torpedoed to the time we were picked up it was about five days.

Can you just go through those five days and talk about what happened during them. On the night firstly...how did the rest of that night go? What was going on around you in the water and what could you see and hear?

We couldn't see anything. We couldn't hear anything. Everybody in the boat were liked 'stunned mullets' I suppose.

39:00 It was a bit of a rough old trip. We had our meal. I think what started it all...someone started it up. He sang, "Now is the hour" and we had a singsong every night after that.

Where were the other boats?

We just lost them

39:30 in the dark. See we were on the edge of the Gulf Stream and the American navy told us that if we hadn't been picked up then, we would have made a land fall twelve days later in Cuba. In other words it was going in the opposite direction to where we were going. But we were on the edge of the Gulf Stream. The rest of them were heading South East,

40:00 and getting near civilisation and they were picked up pretty quickly. So we were on the edge of it and when day light came you couldn't see anything at all.

Had the crew off the empty troop ship been rescued?

Well...

40:30 as far as I know they all got away.

Did their ship go down?

Yes it did go down.

Tape 6

00:51 **On board the lifeboat, can you tell me what food stocks were there and what medical supplies**

01:00 **and other things?**

Well food. There was always two big kegs of water. One aft and other near the tiller or where ever the bosun was. He was aft on that, on the tiller. I was in midships with my eye on the second barrel.

01:30 We didn't have any meals...and one of the blokes on the side started singing, "Now is the hour." And then one takes it up and the other takes it up and eventually the whole boat load takes off.

02:00 Maybe just before that we had the submarine come alongside us. I couldn't see it but it spoke to us. Anyway back on the life boat. We had this terrific sing song. All the silly songs imaginable. Of course one or two would drop off to sleep. We just sleep where we were like I am now.

02:30 You would put your head back or spread your legs out. You couldn't move. There was someone next to you there and there was someone next to you there. All along this side of the boat and the same thing applied on the other side of the boat. So there wasn't much room to walk around. You couldn't.

Who were the fellas on board the lifeboat with you?

Mostly seamen. Some of the engine room staff. There might have been one or two of the stewards.

03:00 The American survivors. I was the only engineer or officer on board. The bosun was on board. He more or less handle the steerage of the boat. Well he knew more about boat handling than I did. I was more on the engines but it had no engine, so that was it.

03:30 How many people were on board the lifeboat?

About twenty eight maybe thirty people. That was including some of the American survivors we picked up. And next morning we encountered some of our other boats. We either rowed over to them or they came to us. We

04:00 sorted ourselves out. The 2nd Mate came over and before I was the only officer and when he came over...he was like the Navigator on the Bridge. He came over and he brought some more people. Some of their boats were overcrowded and the Surrey who went down, so there were some of their boats.

04:30 So there were a lot of people, and anyway we had some more people come on board. So all the seats on both sides from the transom to the bow was occupied. The same on both sides. There were a few people, like the Americans, they plonked themselves on the seats underneath which are normally used for when you're rowing.

05:00 They were just seats. Some people sat in those and some used to try and sleep in them. I don't know how many would be on the boat now...thirty people.

What was the sea like, calm?

Beautiful. Just like a mill pond.

05:30 We hoisted the sails but it didn't do much good. But we hoisted the sails up and all of a sudden I woke up and the sails had altered course to be broadside on a squadron of aircraft. And as it went over the sail whacked my hat off, and the

06:00 2nd Mate said, "Where's your cap?" And I said, "It went over the side when you went about." He said, "Why didn't you sing out?" I said, "I would rather be spotted by an aircraft than be worried about a bloody cap. I can buy one of those anytime I want." We all spread ourselves out a bit. It was a bit boring. Every night we would have a

06:30 sing song. That was enjoyable but you would get so exhausted from singing as loud as you could.

You mentioned the singsong a few times. The Archive is interested in music and the songs that were sung during the war. For the sake of the Archive can you remember a couple for us?

'Now is the hour, when all the best of friends must meet'

07:00 ...that sounds terrible. Apart from that just some of the music hall songs. I wouldn't have a clue what the words were. Not now.

What about some of the more dirtier songs...for the sake of the Archive can you give us an outline of how they went?

07:30 Well put it this way. I wouldn't like to sing it in a concert. Not really. Some of the ordinary songs, the music hall songs. Some of the American up to date jazz music.

08:00 Mostly songs. Someone knew the words. They would burst out singing.

What about some of the joke songs you sang, what about those? Is there one you can bring to mind for the sake of the Archive?

Well they're sort of jokes I wouldn't like to tell to kindergarten.

08:30 I mean they're real smutty dirty jokes. When you're desperate for something to talk about or sing about, you've sung or the songs and told all the jokes, by that time you're semi exhausted and you sleep.

We appreciate that and obviously this isn't for a kindergarten. But just for the context of the time would be a great social setting for the Archive.

09:00 It was and we would laugh and joke but eventually it got so bad that you were coughing and laughing so much. Your stomach muscles would ache. Of course that could be through hunger as well. You only had a small container of water twice a day.

09:30 Just staying on the music because you have brought it up about two or three times, can you sing one of the songs that you did sing, of the jokey type?

I don't think I could to be quite honest...as music. Ordinary jokes possibly. There's always smut goes into a lot of jokes and music.

10:00 But to be quite honest I can't answer that question.

Were their jokes that you told each other that you can remember?

About the Archbishop of Canterbury and the chorus girls, and all these sorts of things. A fella came down on leave and found someone else with his wife and all these sorts of things. Jokes about one ship I was on blah blah blah. Different experiences on different ships and or ports or towns.

10:30 Really speaking, thinking back, we had a lot to talk about and a lot to listen to. There were so many individuals on the boat, there were so many sources of conversation or singing.

11:00 I can't say...it was a bit nerve racking but our morale was top. We had a good old singsong. The last time, I don't think we had any singing at all. We were just so happy to know we were going to be rescued the following morning. We just down sails and hoped for the best. Everybody was awake in the morning and we could just see on the beam, what looked like a small motor boat but as it

11:30 grew and grew and grew we could see it was a destroyer. It was one of the US Navy four funnelled things from the First World War. The USS Barry. And that came...we were being morsed to the 2nd Mate.

12:00 "Because there are U-Boats in the vicinity we will circle you until we can slow down and come along side you. Be ready to stand by and jump for cargo net." Meanwhile quite a lot of their crew were standing by with grappling hooks and ropes and God knows what. So once they came along side...there were blokes being pulled out just like that. I was

12:30 on the opposite side and eventually I worked myself up and someone grabbed my hand and I was straight up on top. I felt a bit strange at first. I stood up and tried to walk but I sat down for a while. It was just a lovely feeling. A couple of days before

13:00 I went over the side for a swim. I was a pretty strong swimmer in those days. I have been all my life really. It was just to get my legs going and to get a bit of action into them. That was all right. But once we got on board the USS Parry we were treated like lords. The crew were all hassled off, and the 2nd Mate and myself were directed to the wardroom and

13:30 we were given clothing. They showed us where the shower was. And I slept in the bed of the...I don't know if it was the captain's bed or the chief officer's bed or bunk. Once you've had a meal, a good shower and clean clothing

14:00 you are just really relaxed and we went to sleep right away. Once we came too, I got out and walked around the deck. Someone came down and asked if we would like to come up to the Bridge. So we came up to the Bridge and the officer and the captain were up there and they wanted to hear all about it. So

14:30 I was telling them all about it. That rather surprised me because the Merchant Navy have a certain amount of discipline and ruling and the Royal Navy would have a lot of that but I was surprised with the American navy. Then it was the navy reserve, they were all ships from the First World War. But apart from that they seemed like a nice bunch of blokes.

15:00 They made us feel welcome. We went up on the bridge and had a conducted tour around the engine room. It was a steam turbine job and it was very very nice. They treated us like Lords. I went up on the Bridge with them. The trouble was, telling them all about it. The number of people who came up from the lower deck and came around

15:30 to hear us talking. I think that night, the 2nd Mate slept in the fleet commander's bed or bunk. That was like the opposite side of the vessel to where the present captain was on. Like the commodore. The Admiral of the Fleet type of thing. And apart from watch keeping, I slept in the wardroom on a nice long settee in the wardroom.

16:00 I had as many blankets as I wanted and you felt nice and clean and treated us like lords. The waited for us to arrive at the breakfast table. I don't know whether we said thank you or not, but I think the 2nd Mate should have done that. I know when we were talking in the wardroom I thanked them profusely.

16:30 Thanks for picking us up.

Just coming back with a few questions. While on the life boats...you mentioned there were two gallons of water which it appears you were in charge of. The food stocks, where were they stored and what was there?

There's lockers. You had the seats. Like that, that's the seat and underneath the seats there are lockers which would contain a

17:00 certain amount of food. It would contain sails, and they also contained tins of food and tins of milk. So even if we were in the boat for many many days there was still enough food to keep us all going for that length of time.

17:30 **Just in regards to food, how much was there aboard for the twenty five or thirty fellas?**

There was ample. All those people would go through a few tins of bully beef and there were always plenty of biscuits. There was no fear of us having to cut back. We knew we were going to be picked up. The 2nd Mate said,

18:00 "Mr Young you can open the bar."

But obviously when you first went aboard the lifeboat, you didn't know how long you would be there. It could have been five days or longer...so you were senior officer in charge, did you take stock of what was aboard?

I could see that we were equalised. The bosun organised that. And once we were clear

18:30 of the ship which was going down, and he had organised a lot of that stuff before I had joined the boat. He would ask me this or that and we just went along together. Food wise we didn't...naturally you were hungry but you weren't ravenous.

19:00 **But in respect to water, we've taken that photo of the water kegs. But there was a water ration that you worked on?**

We had one of those beakers in the morning with two biscuits. And then we had another one just after dusk. Exactly the same menu. It got a bit boring after a while but to be quite honest I enjoyed them all. I can't say

19:30 I got bored with it. Let's face it, it was the only thing to eat anyway.

Wasn't there bully beef?

Yes there was corned beef and biscuits. There was no milk...

Condensed milk?

Not to my knowledge.

I thought you said that earlier that's all. In the cupboards under the seats.

20:00 I can't remember saying that.

So there was bully beef, there was biscuits and there was water?

That's it.

And so you rationed the water and biscuits, what about the bully beef?

It was a spoon full of bully beef on one biscuit and another on top like a sandwich. Two or one mouthfuls and it was gone.

20:30 But you ate it slowly. You felt hungry and of course if you had to live like that for say, maybe a week or two weeks, you'd either run out or you'd feel very very hungry. So really thinking, truthfully, I was never desperately hungry at all.

21:00 **Given that you were the senior officer on board, what decisions did you make while on board the lifeboat?**

Well I was...until the 2nd Mate arrived...he was like a navigator and I was an engineer. If there had been engines in the boat, then I would have been in charge of the boat. So naturally the 2nd Mate is in charge.

21:30 If he wanted anything it would be, "Mr Young, do you mind doing this or that." He would check water. We were always looking for leaks. Someone would always be on bilge pump to pump out the water that had seeped through. See these things were hung up on davits all their working lives, and the timber dries and the seams open up and once they get in the water they take a while before they close up and become water tight.

22:00 So water is the biggest problem but after we were in the boats for a couple of days it was all right.

Where did you go or what did you do when you needed to go to the toilet?

Well fortunately being males we just turned seaward and do it. If you wanted to do the other we just sat on the edge of the boat and pulled your pants down and did it that way.

22:30 On one occasion, the water was flat as a tack. There were no fish around, no sharks and I said to the 2nd Mate, "How about me going over the side for a wash." Just to freshen up. He asked whether I knew what I was doing. And I told him what I was...life saving etc.

23:00 So he said to just go in and out, he didn't want me coming back with half a leg on. So I took a dive in. When I was coming up I just had a quick look around and couldn't see a damn thing. I broke the surface

and did a crawl about the boat length and grabbed the side and the other blokes just heaved me out of the water. I was so refreshed.

23:30 Moisture got into my body through a different way. It did me a lot of good that.

Were you the only fella to go for a swim?

Yes. Whether I was a nutter I don't know. I don't think so. From an engineering point of view, I was thinking of all the timbers. Now these boards would be ...

24:00 say three inch planks going the whole length and width of the ship and once they dry out, the spaces in between take a long time for the water to get in and close. So you could be making water fairly quickly. Luckily for us, it was a new boat.

24:30 I don't know whether the other boat got a hole in it or whether it was washed off in bad weather, I'm not sure. But this was a new boat so we didn't have any trouble at all. The reason I went over was just to have a look underneath and have a look around. You would see lots of small fish coming around. Some of the blokes, I think the 2nd Mate, he had a fishing line...I don't know if he was going to eat raw fish.

25:00 But he never caught anything. There was lots of fish swimming around and you could also see some about three or four feet, they could have been sharks. There was none this particular day I went in but I didn't go in again. It was more or less to exercise and get my arms moving. You just sat. You could put your leg out that way

25:30 provided it didn't clash with the bloke's feet in front of you. You weren't overcrowded but just more or less the maximum.

Given that everything was tight. Not overcrowded but crowded none the less. Did fellas start to snap at each other and lose their tempers?

No. That was one thing...why this one bloke started off this singsong

26:00 every evening. It ended up in shrieks of laughter, jokes and things like that. It was just to keep talking. You would sing and someone would listen. It was just...in hindsight it was just a wonderful experience. You can always laugh at danger.

26:30 It did you good to hear people laughing and it did you good to laugh. A bit of laughter and a few jokes... it took your mind off the situation. I'm glad we did.

You mentioned one of the other fellas had a fishing line, did the lifeboat actually have fishing gear or blankets?

I'm not sure. I don't know about fishing gear.

27:00 I'm not sure.

What about first aid gear, what was there?

I wouldn't have a clue. I think there was a first aid box but where it was, I don't know. It could have been at the aft end, where the 2nd Mate was. There would be lockers there. Underneath all those seats on the side were locker space.

27:30 And the masts...that was all tied to the centre of the lifeboats, along the seats. So they were out of the way. There wouldn't be much more room for anything else. And also buoyancy tanks. They were underneath the side seats. Without those, if the boat was flooded it would be the buoyancy tanks that kept it above the water.

28:00 **Your ship has just been sunk, how many days was it that that submarine came along and said, "Ahoy there?"**

That was the same night.

28:30 We got clear. We sorted ourselves out.

Did you realise immediately that it was the enemy?

Not at first. His English was perfect. But he spoke, one seaman to another. "Ahoy, what ship?" I answered, "Ardenvohr" And then I said, "Ahoy what ship?" No answer. But the bosun heard it and he said, "JVC, U-Boat."

29:00 **So did you think before you realised it was a U-Boat, when you got the 'ahoy there', did you think you were going to be rescued immediately?**

No. I didn't think that at all. Once we knew who he was, he just advised us on the course, wished us good luck and went. He could have boarded us.

29:30 He could have confiscated the whisky. But he was a real seaman, a sailor and he just wished us good

luck. We couldn't see him. But I can imagine what he would have done. He possibly would have given a bit of a half salute and away he went. That same man wrote the book, a war story. It was released quite recently.

30:00 My neighbour it and let me read it. "Submarine Successes of the Axis." And this captain wrote it. I wouldn't have a clue what his name was now. But he was obviously a real seaman.

Well firstly, the whisky that you had, was that from the lifeboat or did someone grab that before hand?

It was in

30:30 the lifeboat I think. I'm not really sure. He asked me, "Have you any whisky?" And I said, "Yes." Normally there's always a bottle of spirits but we didn't actually need it and as far as I know, it went down with the ship. Somebody might have put it in their pocket. I don't have any idea.

And was he offering you some in case you didn't have any?

Well, he said,

31:00 "Have you any injuries?" I said, "No we have no injuries." He then said, "Have you sufficient food?" "Yes thank you we have sufficient food." "And water?" "Yes we have sufficient water." He was asking me civilly so I was answering him civilly. But he seemed quite happy. He told us to steer south east and away he went. The next morning

31:30 we picked up some of the other crowd and sorted ourselves out as far as crew was concerned and then the 2nd Mate came on board after that.

It sounds almost in completely contrast to war, the fact that he had sunk you one morning and then was wishing you well, offering you supplies the next. Was this common?

There's always a camaraderie between sailors.

32:00 Whether they be the enemy or not. It's not uncommon I don't think. I've heard of other people being torpedoed and hit and they've been offered spirits and water and supplies if needed. I can't say I've ever heard of any bad stories.

32:30 **I mean you've never heard of U-Boats firing on lifeboats?**

No. That would be like riddling an ambulance full of bullets. It would be detrimental. You just don't do those things.

So, you've been travelling for a few days,

33:00 **the morale's reasonably high because of the singing, when this plane came over the top, were you asleep or were you awake at this stage?**

I think I was asleep. I woke up...I heard something and I could see like two orange glows. So I pulled out my torch and morsed SOS.

33:30 By this time everyone was awake and I passed my torch up to the 2nd Mate. So he sent off in morse who we were, what we were and they came back and said we would be picked up at daylight the following morning. So that night the 2nd Mate said, "Open up the bar, drinks on the house."

34:00 A few snide remarks. It was the only time he offered a drink to anybody. So it was a good happy night. Songs again and sure enough next morning. There were subs in the area so they came in an ever decreasing circle. We were rowing and once they were nearly alongside we pulled the oars in. He just came along side us with grappling hooks and

34:30 took us aboard. Half the crew were up there ready to grab people. So we got plonked on board deck. By this time we had been sat down for about six or seven days in one position. So naturally when you stand up and walk you get very wobbly legs.

We took a photo of what looked like a yellow scarf, what is that and how did you get it?

That was when

35:00 these aircraft flew low and dropped two of those. They were flares. There's a pouch in the bottom to put in whatever message you want. In other words it was for air force. There was a \$50 fine if anyone was found using these things illegally.

35:30 It didn't apply to us of course. It was an emergency. But it was just a flare for passing a message from you to me. I have something in my possession you might be interested in. What assistance do you want. That's part of the boat equipment those flares.

So this aeroplane...do you know what type it was?

The Catalina Flying Boat.

36:00 **So he could have landed as well?**

There was about twenty five of us in the lifeboat. He could have...I don't know if he could have or not. I think the 2nd Mate said something about there being too many for him to pick up. But seeing there was a destroyer in the area, he would pick us up at daylight.

36:30 **So he's come down low flying over the top of you and dropped two of these flares?**

No, that was the first lot of aircraft we spotted that dropped the flares.

Ok, so I'm getting a bit confused. So when the first aeroplane came across, what was that?

That was one of squadron and they were on a training run I presume. They were flying south and these two broke off, and that when we went

37:00 about so the sail was full on to them, and that's when I lost my cap. And the 2nd Mate said why didn't I let him know, he would have gone back.

So these first two planes had come and you had SOS'd them with the torch, is that right?

He sent the morse and the 2nd Mate was the navigator and he was also good on the morse lamp. So he gave

37:30 them the details. The number aboard. The name of the vessel and the came back with the reply that we would be picked up in the morning.

The reply came through Morse or flare?

Through Morse. But the flare

38:00 bit was with these first lot of aircraft we spotted flew overhead and two of them broke off. That was when we were obviously in the Gulf Stream and instead of going south we were being swept north. So no doubt they had been searching for us in the south and we had been drifting north all the time. Then the second aircraft came along...

38:30 that's right, night time came along... and spotted us or we spotted him. I morsed off SOS.

Ok. So the Catalina came second and that was at night time and the two earlier planes which first saw you, that was in the day time, and they flew over and dropped the flare?

Yes.

Was there a message inside it?

No message inside it. Yes...something like your position has been reported or something like that.

39:00 There was nothing in it when I picked it up. Or the mate might have taken it out. I've got no idea. But there was nothing in it when I got it.

So when you were first spotted that was on the 4th day?

It would be...

39:30 either the first or second day. Everybody was going south and we were drifting the wrong way. It was only the Catalina flying boat...I heard it and morsed off right away...I knew the sound of a Catalina. Then the 2nd Mate took over from that. In the meantime there was a destroyer in the vicinity

40:00 on a patrol, so he was obviously directed to where we were and he picked us up the next morning. He came alongside the life boat and we clambered aboard, and then he went full ahead and then he wanted to riddle it.

So you were spotted either the first or second day while in the lifeboat. The Catalina came along about the fourth night and then the fifth day you were picked up?

Yes. About five or six days we were in the boat.

Tape 7

00:44 **The USS Barry. You spoke a bit about being picked up by it. Can you describe what sort of ship it was?**

It was a destroyer of the 1914 vintage. It

01:00 was a four funnelled destroyer made of quarter inch plate. Once we were on board I was given a conducted tour of the engine room. One of the blokes said, "See this plate here, when we were at New York I was outside with the chipping hammer and it went straight through. Quarter plate eaten out with

rust..”

01:30 I thought ‘gee whizz’, sending these out. But then again they gave Britain about four or five of these vessels. When you know what salt water can do to steel plate, it’s a bit frightening. Quarter inch and a chipping hammer goes through it. What’s it going to do even if an air gunner comes down.

Do you remember what the first meal they gave you was?

02:00 I think it was breakfast. We were given a complete set of clothes. I still had my engine room shoes though.

02:30 When I came out and was directed to the Mess room and there was the captain and all his immediate staff and crew. His petty officers and some of the senior ratings. It was an enormous long table.

03:00 They waited for us to start. I think the 2nd Mate thanked them all. And then we got stuck into bacon and eggs. By that time, after the bacon and eggs and coffee of course...that was lovely,

03:30 and I was shown to the captain’s room...it was the room opposite the captain’s. He was on the port side and this was on the starboard side. It was used when the fleet admiral came on board. The 2nd Mate...I can’t remember where he went. But I slept in their lounge room, and the

04:00 2nd Mate slept in the old captain’s room. We were treated like lords.

What news were they able to give you about the rest of your crew?

04:30 I just don’t know.

Did you find out what had happened to them?

We heard that they had been picked up and I think, transferred to a troop ship that was going to England. But that was all the information they were able to give us. We had spent five or six days in the boat and they were picked up right away.

05:00 They were put in a troop ship and straight over. So they weren’t too long in the life boats.

The life boat you were in was scuttled or shot up...

Riddled and rammed and smashed up.

Why was that?

Not to encourage...I don’t know...maybe so there wouldn’t be any evidence left of

05:30 the sinking I suppose. It was a wooden boat and there was an awful lot of timber in a wooden boat. The wooden planks would have floated away all over the sea. Apart from not being of any use to anyone, I don’t know. It seemed a bit strange to me. But then again as someone said, it could have been a hazard to other vessels.

06:00 There were no explosives on board. There were maybe flares. Obviously tinned food and biscuits and fresh water and flares. Hand held flares.

How did you feel about seeing it go down considering it had saved your life, this life boat?

06:30 I didn’t look. I think I was with the 2nd Mate. One of the POs [Petty Officer], the seamen came around and told us they were going to do it if we wanted to watch. The said it could be a hazard to other ships. I don’t how it could have been. A small fishing boat. A wooden life boat.

07:00 I said, not for me. That’s been our home and it was our life saver. It would just tear my heart out to see it smashed up and destroyed. So they used a bit of gun practice on it.

07:30 There were about four or five Oerlikons and about three Brownings shooting at it. So it received quite a few holes. I didn’t see. I didn’t want to see. I didn’t want to hear about it. It was our home for over a week.

How long were you on the USS Barry for?

I think it was

08:00 about a day and a half. I’m not sure. He said we were going to tie up in the canal zone area...I’m trying to think of the name of the place...

08:30 The other side of the Panama Canal. Port Tewfik. When we got there the ship was all laid out. They had a movie on so all the forward deck had chairs lined up and we were guests of honour on board. We had the best seats

09:00 and they were ready to start and then somebody came along, these two army trucks were going to take us to this army camp. So we didn’t see any movie there. It didn’t give us much of a chance to say

thanks.

- 09:30 So anyway we were taken off in these army trucks and they took us to this camp. We were taken to these barracks which had rows and rows of single beds and we were allocated a bed and a shower if we wanted. So we had a shower the following morning and then
- 10:00 we were presented with American army summer wear. Khaki slacks and shirt with the ruling being...oh and army boots and socks, so we looked like everybody else. The only thing was, if we were out we couldn't walk around with the sleeves rolled up or the
- 10:30 shirt undone. We had to look smart. So I was quite happy with that. We were there a couple of days I suppose and then the same trucks that took us there picked us up and took us down to this troop ship that was going back to the UK. There were a lot of Australians
- 11:00 on board. We were scattered all over the thing really. I shared a two birth cabin with another merchant navy survivor from another ship. I don't know what ship it was and off we went to New York. I made contact with some very dear friends there.
- 11:30 When I got there, she saw me in these strange clothes and said, "What's happened to you. Something's happened!" And I said yes. The night I was torpedoed my photograph fell off their wall. And that sounded a bit 'iffy', but she knew something was wrong. They're inclined to be rather religious.
- 12:00 I got a real family welcome. There were tears. I had bought a zipper jacket just up the road at a little shopping centre there so they went right away and bought me another one. Same bloke. They treated me very very well in New York. I loved it. I wouldn't want to live there.

12:30 **So another troop ship back to England?**

Yes we got back to Liverpool. I think it was Liverpool. Anyway the powers to be, the Shipping Federation people came down and sorted all the survivors out. The troops went off one way and the

- 13:00 merchant navy survivors went off another way. We were given our railway passes and so next morning... I can't remember if a coach or a bus took us to the station or not. But anyway we got a train and I went straight back to my home town.

- 13:30 So I didn't have to change anywhere, I just went straight through. Of course I didn't have much chance to contact my parents, but once I got to the UK, I rang through to my father. He knew we were on the way.

Had they had any information about what had happened to you?

No.

- 14:00 That sort of information would have been news for the enemy I suppose. So everything was kept confidential. Of course they were a bit stunned and shocked when I told them all about it. I said, "Look your little boy's back again." The old man and I got on very well. He gave me a friendly punch. He had been sea faring, as well.

- 14:30 It was good to settle down and it was nice to have some nice home cooking. I was spoilt rotten again.

You were given what was called Survivor's Leave. Can you tell us about that?

Well if you lose your ship and you're rescued...once you lose your ship your pay stops, I think the only

- 15:00 thing that goes on...I think your pay stops and I think your ten pound a month stops too. The ten pound a month goes towards your eventual rescue apparently. But once you got picked up, I suppose from then on it's a matter of office administration. I was still on the permanent list of potential staff

- 15:30 and I had survivors leave for a couple of weeks, I think it was. Then you're on part pay. Then I was offered another job on a similar sort of thing.

16:00 **The Levenbank is the next one.**

The Levenbank.

Was there any trepidation about going back to sea?

None at all.

How did you feel about it. Were you keen?

Well it was another ship. So it didn't worry me at all. As a matter of fact on the way back we were admiring this ship.

- 16:30 It was real smart. It had a bit high forecastle and a lovely tapered deck and a nice surround transom or the poop. And it looked a real racer. Very, very smart. And we both said, "That's a lovely looking boat". And little did I know I would be on it a couple of weeks later. And it was a filthy, dirty thing. Twin screw

diesel.

17:00 And it was a filthy, dirty thing and noisy and smoky. You were breathing exhaust fumes all the time. You would blow your nose after half an hour and it would be black. I won't say sooty but just unpleasantly black. So I didn't stay on that thing very long.

17:30 It should have gone in for a major refit for the engines especially because it was twin screws. I think it was a Bermanstine Wane. Overhead inlet and exhaust valves, and also fuel valves. Fuel valves don't cause any problem but these inlet and exhaust valve they're...the inlet valve is about nine or ten inches and the exhaust valves would be about two or three inches bigger.

18:00 And when you're hand lapping those in on a pedestal...clean it up, resurface it and drop it back in. That was a horrible long job for a junior engineer.

This was the Levinbank? You went up to Scotland first on that?

It was going to be used for troop carrying, so we went up to Scotland, Glasgow.

18:30 They started putting stuff in and then all of a sudden we had to rip it all out to go back to Swansea or Barry...and load up munitions for the Mediterranean. So off we went down to North Africa. It was a nice ship. A good crowd. Good people on board.

19:00 But it was a filthy, dirty thing. It wasn't itself, just the engines. It really wanted a thorough overhaul. So of course it had a complete change of crew every time it came in. What happened to it, I have no idea.

What did you know about what was going on in North Africa?

Only what we hear on the radio,

19:30 and or what we were informed by the powers to be and local radio and papers. We didn't hear much about it except that the allies were winning, which was nice to hear. I think we went to all the ports. We had some cargo for

20:00 Naples and we were only there for a matter of a couple of days. That was an unusual experience because it was an Italian crew lying alongside. The Italian sailors would come alongside in one of their lifeboats and they would take ashore and pick us up for a packet of 50 Woodbine cigarettes.

20:30 One packet of cigarettes.

So Italy had left the war at this point?

Yes.

So where did you go. Can you give me an idea of some of the port you called at?

There was Algiers. Port Tewfik.

21:00 One or two other places. I just don't remember the names. We would be lying off at anchor or trying to sneak in on a high tide and get out on the next high tide. It was mostly munitions that were being transported over there. I can't give much detail. They were little ports. I've gone through my Atlas many times

21:30 and there were lots of places not even on the Atlas. So I really don't know.

All those places would be a lot more exotic than the European ports and American ports you'd been at, did you see any things that were new and exciting for you on that journey?

No. The ports were more or less the same as other places.

22:00 They weren't as big as what we had been used to. Some of them, the accommodation and houses and shopping areas, were real slummy. The same thing when we went to Naples. There were hardly any people there. There was just this Italian navy ship there.

22:30 And all the houses were all boarded up. We walked through the main street and came round, walked out and went back to the ship again. It was just nice to have a walk and stretch your legs. But I certainly wouldn't want to go back again.

It would have been a very interesting time to be there though, considering the Italians had left the war,

23:00 **did you have any contact with them apart from the sailors on this naval vessel?**

Not really. I think they were pleased to see us. They treated us all right. They were after tobacco of course and cigarettes. They rode us ashore and would pick us up two or three hours later. But the whole place, the area where we were

23:30 was absolutely deserted. Nothing. And to get to Naples, there's a big narrow harbour entrance with a swing bridge. Even a big battle ship goes through these things. It had the draft and the depth of water,

but it was completely deserted. That was the war. Whether the people all moved up to the northern parts, I have no idea.

24:00 **In the Mediterranean at that time, what was the situation like in terms of submarine or air attacks?**

There were submarines in the area but they had been partly all cleared out. The air attacks, we had some,

24:30 and everybody had 'ack-ack' guns, but then again they were crafty. They kept out of the range of the guns. I think we all had certificates to operate Oerlikons and Lewis guns and what have you. I fired a few

25:00 rounds at targets but nothing in war time. It was like practice runs. There were army gunners in charge of all our guns. Merchant navy officers use to man the guns because of the Alaska crew. But as far as North Africa was concerned, it was just a no-mans land. As I say, if I had the opportunity to see it again, I wouldn't go. I wouldn't want to see it again.

25:30 **What was your action station on board the Levinbank?**

Well at sea, the action station is down in the engine room, or a gun pit. We all had gun passes.

26:00 So any action stations, if you weren't on watch...but if you were on the watch ahead of you, you would possibly go down into the engine room. If it was your watch and nothing happened then that would be it. Apart from gun crew. They wouldn't allow the others to be manning the guns.

26:30 **Can you tell us a bit more about this 'Alaska crew'?**

Not really. We had I think, three on the eight to twelve. I think there were two on the boilers. Or one on the boiler and one for each engine.

27:00 Then again each engine had its own automatic oil feed and fuel feed. But I can't say...if we were at sea and the action station warning went, they would watch you like a hawk. And you would do your best to ignore it.

27:30 And you would saunter around touching this and touching that, checking this and tapping a gauge. You would just walk around, as if nothing was happening at all. But if you made a quick move they would be gone. Some of them might be all right. They were all right.

28:00 They did their job once they knew what their jobs were.

Did you talk to them much in free time?

Not really because a lot of them can't speak English. There were some words, 'jildy jildy', hurry up. There were one or two other words. But it's a long time ago now.

28:30 I can't answer that question properly.

Why weren't they trusted to man the guns?

They're were Alaskans.

29:00 Not exactly a brilliantly educated bunch of people. The labourers of the country, I suppose you could call them. Some of them like the bosun and the men at the wheel, they seemed to have some English, but

29:30 most of them couldn't...even the stewards. Sometimes they couldn't understand you. You would have to speak very slowly and clearly and thankfully they would 'twig' [understand].

Is there some sense that they may not have been entirely behind the cause, and mutinous under the right conditions?

I wouldn't

30:00 like to say. They were basically our allies. An English educated country. English finance got their various industries going. I think they were all right. They were very, very religious. That

30:30 was the trouble. When they were saying prayers they would all take their shoes off. But not being....they're not bad people at all.

Did you work with them often in the merchant navy?

No.

31:00 I saw them as stewards and they all seemed to be very polite and very civil. The understood what you wanted. The would go away and bring what ever you wanted.

You mentioned before that there was a close call in the Mediterranean, was that on that

31:30 **ship?**

Yes.

Can you tell us when that occurred and what you were doing at the time?

I was off watch and the alarm bells went and my position was up in one of the gun crews, but

32:00 on that ship there were quite a few...there was six or eight Oerlikons and some Brownings, and we had licences to operate them. We never had to use them, only once or twice, that was going through the Mediterranean, when this strange torpedo came along and

32:30 clunked underneath the hull and there she was sailing off the other side.

Where were you at the time. Where were you going from and to?

We were going from North Africa to Gibraltar. The good thing was being caught there because if it had been the other way we would have been down in the water and I might not be here today.

33:00 **How long did it take you to work out what had happened? Did you realise it had gone under?**

Well I was watching this thing and I yelled out, "Torpedo, starboard side", and I could just see it disappearing and I felt this 'clunk'. What it was I assume was the big end of the torpedo which was like a football...

33:30 like a big round dome. It would have just hit part of the keel, just enough to deflect it and it came up the other side. Had we been lower in the water, it would have been a direct hit in the engine room.

What happened immediately after that. Was everybody called to action stations?

We were at action stations at that time.

Was there a reaction

34:00 **on board?**

What do you mean, gunfire or something like that?

Did you retaliate. Did you find something to shoot at?

No, we couldn't see anything. It was either a submarine or an aircraft. We couldn't find anything. And the escorts appeared from nowhere.

34:30 **How many aircraft did you see. You mentioned there were a few air attacks?**

Maybe twos and threes. I've seen four I think, that's the most all at one time. Single ones look for ships, and if they spot it, then out comes three or four or five.

35:00 In that case everybody's ready for them and give them the usual welcome.

You're travelling in a convoy at this stage?

Yes. Always in convoy.

How were they organised?

Well there's the commodore, the senior captain. And he would organise his 'number one' at the head of the convoy. And then there would be a line of three ships, one two three columns behind him and he would be the escort ship and would float from port to starboard the whole time.

35:30 Then the escorts would be one on the starboard side and one on the port side. Then there would be one maybe two on the after end.

36:00 He'd be doing the same thing, weaving back and forward. If there were any torpedoes flying around then they'd be missed. The merchantmen were in the middle in the one place and so naturally they would get the torpedo. I've been in a couple of attacks in the Mediterranean similar to that with no serious damage at all. Eventually the Mediterranean was unsafe with German aircraft because once the allies got to North Africa,

36:30 they were clearing them out right away.

Who were the escorts, what sort of ships were they?

They'd be anything from World War I destroyers, current trawlers, maybe a couple of good front line destroyers.

37:00 Usually a couple of mine sweepers floating around. There was always...if an escort had to 'drop off' everybody closed up. Convoys had to stay in a straight line. In other words, when you're driving through the city you might say, I watch your rear lights and I follow your rear lights

37:30 until you give the appropriate signal that you're going left or right. Well the same thing applies in convoys. The one in front...but you've still got the mean course...the course you're told to steer.

If every ship has a different speed does that pose problems in keeping in that line?

It depends on the engine I suppose.

38:00 All the ships I've been on have been diesel. Some times they would be twin engines. Sometimes single. But we used to find anything from 60 to 70 up to 80 revs a minute...those were the revs double acting. They're an engine where you've got two pistons and you work like that all the time. Opposed. Repairing one of those at sea is a bit of a problem. You would be at that for over a day.

38:30 Admittedly after the war we wouldn't have stopped, we would have done it in port. But we had to do it at sea. Otherwise we had no problems at all.

39:00 Would you have to be constantly altering speed?

Yes. Your speed might be 70 revs or something like that. The convoy might speed up and the bridge will ring down and say up two or down two. It was always twos and sometimes

39:30 after a while you got to know ...that's like revolutions basically. And invariably you'll find that each revolution on each ship is a little bit different to one ahead or one astern. The ships are moving like that head on. I'm coming up to your stern and you back off and it's very hard to get down to a constant steady speed.

40:00 Sometimes they might ring down with up one or down two. You know the sequence of what's coming through. You know they're going to increase it later on so you just back it off as little as you possibly can. And sometimes that works out quite well. They don't ring down so much. But generally speaking...

Tape 8

00:42 Just on the last tape, for context we were finishing off in convoys and telegraphing the information. Can you explain how that worked, from the lead ship telegraphing back and how it got to the engine room?

01:00 Well there was always one ship that was the 'pace ship'. That was usually the commodore. He sets the vessel at so many knots. In steam turbines you can regulate that very easy by just dropping now the revolutions or the steam pressure going into the turbines. With a diesel ship you've got like a double acting...

01:30 the engine for instance. It's got two pistons in each cylinder and they both work against one another. And once you get down to a low speed on any diesel engine, they're mostly six cylinders, you start to get down to what they call the critical speed. It's like in your car sometimes. If your engine is idling very slowly it jumps and changes, the critical speed. The same thing applies to big diesel engines.

02:00 Invariably you get the critical speed and you get the constant vibration. They ring down 'up two revs' or 'down two revs.' You do what you can....one notch on the big quadrant where the main controls are. So you just bring it down and you're watching the revolutions on the big dial on the bulkhead,

02:30 and all the rest of the dials, the fuel temperature, oil pressure and what have you. But you've got to try and get those two revolutions just right and invariably it's either too slow or too fast. And to try and get in between is damn dear impossible. If the ship ahead of you...if you go a little bit faster than me, and I speed up and the other bloke speeds up, then you slow down, I slow down and then there's all this

03:00 going on. He's got to avoid you when you fall back and visa versa. So you've just got to be very careful on the revolutions every time. It's a bit tiring. You're stood up watching your temperatures and your pressure and they ring down with the command to go up two or it may be three. And so you alter the three notches on the engine,

03:30 you watch your tachometer which is a great big dial, and that gives the engine revs. And you're trying to jog around to get those speeds right by adding more throttle or less throttle. A lot of ships, you get a lot of vibrations when you get down to critical speed. The ship shakes like mad. So you either go above that or you avoid it like the plague.

04:00 But those critical speeds only happen when you're going very very slow. You can always speed up or go astern or something like that.

So there's constant adjustment when you're in a convoy?

Yes. It could be fine weather, it could be dirty rotten weather. I was on a few convoys going across the Atlantic and ships there, 10, 12, 15,000 tonnes; tankers;

04:30 and a couple of times going across the Atlantic, going and coming back, you'd be down a dirty great big

green valley...and you couldn't see a ship anywhere. It was broken seas. I tell you what. It's the most extraordinary feeling. Like where we are now and we'd be looking at the ceiling. Fascinating. Then all of a sudden the seas are different and all of a sudden you're on top of the mountain,

05:00 and you're looking down at the whole convoy. Trying to keep station in those conditions was very, very hard. A lot of people drop off and drop off, so eventually 'tail end Charlie' is almost stopped. And the escorts and smaller vessels are doing everything bar turning over. They're short and stubby and they roll like a barrel.

05:30 So you had to be able to find the constant speed. If you get too fast...in fact quite a few times where the convoy's going, going, going, and the destroyer might go 'flat chat' all the way and back again to his place...but it's invariably to give the engines a bit of a go. As far as diesel engines are concerned, sometimes they get overheated. They haven't got enough

06:00 pressure or they get the wrong revolutions. There's always a critical speed on a diesel engine. Not so much on the steam but it's always on the diesel.

What are we saying in respect to critical speed, one knot, half a knot, five knots?

I don't know about the knot business. You'd start to get about fifteen or twenty revolutions...

06:30 It could be higher than that too. Once they get too low there's no movement at all. It's like entering or leaving port. They ring down every so often and they might ring down to go astern, and you go stop and go astern. Like coming out of Southampton, going to the beaches, we had a new captain.

07:00 And he was ringing up, go ahead, slow ahead. Oh it was the pilot, that's right. A compass check. I had to ring up and say could they reduce the engine movements please, I can't keep up the air pressure. Of course the air pressure is in great big bottles. What would they be? About ten feet in diameter....

You shared that with us a bit earlier. Excellent.

07:30 **Just before we move forward again on the ships you were on, in the navy and the sea, the culture. Like a girl in every port, and also the homosexual side of things. Did you ever come across that type of culture while in the merchant navy?**

08:00 There was one ship I was on. There was a quarter master. He used to 'ponce' around advertising what he was. He wasn't a bad bloke. He was a good helmsman or so I hear. But he wasn't a bad bloke but everybody on board avoided him like the plague. He lived down on the after end of the ship.

08:30 As far as the midships were concerned we didn't have much to do with him. There's always good and bad in all things. I had a engineer, junior to me, on one ship. He was one, and I suspected he was but he never made any advances or did

09:00 anything out of place. I treated him with respect and he treated me with respect. We even had a couple of beers ashore together. But he was definitely on the 'look out'. He would invariably go off on his own. He was a nice bloke, but just one of those.

Were there any restrictions or regulations in respect to people who were homosexual?

09:30 Not to my knowledge. I suppose you would classify that type of person like fanatical and religious, I suppose. The Indians were inclined to be saying prayers half the time. Bowing and banging their heads against the deck.. My

10:00 shadow crossed them one day when they were saying their prayers and gee whiz, 'Allah won't like this' and we'll tell 'Chiefie' Steward. Or words to that effect. We never had any problems like that. It was noticeable but it didn't interfere with the running of the ship.

10:30 Indian crews would watch you like a hawk because any sudden movement and they'd be out of it. We had to be cool, calm and nonchalant. It was hard to do sometimes when there were submarines firing off torpedoes and or bombs coming down, and even bombs in the harbour, in port.

So why did you have to be so cool with the Indians?

11:00 Well I wouldn't say cool. No matter who was down there, they were on the ship as engine room crew for looking after boilers. You still had to keep your eye on them. They would always want to try and work one over you, type of thing.

11:30 So they didn't have to do this or that. So you would have to keep an eye on them to make sure it was all right. So hence the long walk. It was a different proposition when we got back to the UK. On one occasion there was an air raid and there were some bombs falling around and they would watch us like a hawk. If there was a slight movement, bang they'd be away. That was, on one ship I was on.

12:00 But others, they were damn good blokes. But that was only in the one ship I encountered where they were all a bit on the panicky side. You'll find a lot of Indians in a lot of ships. You'll find them in a lot of the big passenger ships. They will be stewards and seamen, cooks.

12:30 And if that's their job, then they cook. And they have to cook pork as well, even though they mustn't eat pork. I wouldn't be surprised if they do eat pork because once it's cooking, it smells very nice doesn't it.

The next ship you were on after the Levinbank was which...

The Sanvurlfarno. That was a tanker.

13:00 **Where did you go to on that one?**

We went to the Mediterranean. That was the ship where the submarine torpedoed....no, we went to two or three North African

13:30 ports and once we were empty ...yes that was it. On the way back there was a bit of trouble with a torpedo. It hit the bottom of the ship and just went out the other side, no trouble at all.

Excellent. You shared that with Chris.

14:00 **Coming back after that, did you only do one voyage on that ship or did you do more than one?**

I think it was one of those ships that I...

14:30 It was one of those ships where I lost the top of my finger. Of course I was left in hospital.

Well let's move on to the Sulphur Bluff. An interesting name for a ship. You don't know where it got its name from do you?

I understand there were twelve of them built in America.

15:00 They were more or less built for the invasion...not the actual invasion itself. But once the invasion was pretty well underway, the facilities became available in all the local seaports for petrol and or oil or aviation fuel. So in this Sulphur Bluff, this is when we went back to the beaches and I think we did twelve trips. You always go out on high tide.

15:30 Arrive on a high tide and then we'd go back and forth. We did that for twelve trips. First off, it was no trouble at all. We might get a bit of a warning of aircraft. The sky by that time was literally full of the allied air force.

16:00 We didn't have any problem at all. It was rather fascinating because you'd go in at high tide...there's a very heavy rise and fall in the English Channel. We'd tie up and start pumping and then the tide would be out and the ship would be bone dry on a sandy bottom. So you could walk around, right underneath and have a look if there was any weed growing

16:30 or see the propeller was all right and everything working OK. Then the tide would come in, you'd float high, back off and away you'd go. It was just like a bus service. We did twelve trips altogether. Twelve or thirteen ships. The idea was that we would go back for a thorough refit and it was supposedly coming out to Australia. I personally...

17:00 I just wanted to get out of these 'yo-yo' trips. It was a bit boring after a while. So I went back on leave and then went back again.

So the Sulphur Bluff was a reasonably new ship since it had been built for the invasion. How was it different, particularly engine wise to some of the other boats that you had been on.

17:30 Well this Sulphur Bluff was a small ship like a coaster you might say. So we'd go in on a high tide and float out on a high tide. Then you'd sit on the mud or sand.

18:00 The difference being was, that ship, the cooling water which you had from circulating through the auxiliaries all went through an inboard tank and it was cooled by circulating salt water, and that kept the water cool before it was recycled back into the boilers again. So it was always the case of keeping things going.

18:30 When you got low revs at sea, that's when you start to worry about the oil pressure as well. In which case you have to dash around the side and open that valve to increase the pressure and or lower it as the case may be. But once you settle down to a steady convoy speed, you can pretty well guess exactly what is going to happen and you can work accordingly.

19:00 **And how many knots would the Sulphur Bluff do?**

I don't know. I suppose about ten or twelve. I'm not too sure about that.

Can you share with me the very first time you actually beached the ship and what you saw as far as the invasion goes?

Well the fighting was a long way ahead of us. We could hear the fighting going up at Cannes. But we got in. I can't remember if

19:30 we had a pilot or not. But the Captain was a coaster man so he knew the coast. I don't think he needed

a pilot. He had obviously been there before but not in such a big tanker as we had.

20:00 So we would get in, no trouble. Nearly all convoys but later the convoys would go out on their own. But the same old thing, revving too fast or too slow. It's nice when convoys come to an end. Full throttle, wide open and give the engines a damn good blow out and get rid of the carbon.

I mean, for the first time you actual landed

20:30 **in the Sulphur Bluff on high tide, where did you land?**

A little fishing port.

What was it called?

Post En Bessin I found it on my Atlas but there was one or two little ports especially in North Africa which I couldn't find. But Port En Bassin was the nearest port to where the fighting was, and that coast, the northern tip of

21:00 Burgundy...now I've forgotten what your question was.

Where you landed?

Yes, so that was the nearest one. We went there every time.

You mentioned earlier in the day that you saw some

21:30 **skulls or bodies...**

Yes I saw some skulls or something that I suspected was a skull...but that's something you don't like to see. On one occasion, I don't know if it was that trip or the next trip, we were going back, and whether it as another skull we found on a broom handle stuck on the pump room. It wasn't there very long.

22:00 We came out the engine room...being engineers we had to check everything, so we went down to the engine room, the pump room just once a watch or something like that, just to make sure there was no leaking valves or anything like that or the oil pressure was working ok. Then I saw this skull on the door and that gives you a shock, you know. But that was the only time I saw anything like that. I saw things floating in the water. Whether they were bodies or bits of old canvas, I wasn't going to investigate.

22:30 But generally speaking we were completely free of war relics and damage. You might see an occasional life jacket floating about but nothing else.

So did you go ashore and have a look around?

Yes

23:00 we went ashore. There were only a few locals and they would just wave and go back inside. I suppose, then again they were so used to having so many people charging through there, they were fed up to the back teeth with all these ships coming in. It wasn't even worthwhile going ashore. There was nothing there. Just a little fishing port. Whether there was a pub there or a bar, I don't know.

23:30 A lot never even went ashore. I used to just to stretch your legs. On board you walk up and down the floor plates and that's about all the exercise you get. So I would like to go for a bit of a walk.

Now your role or position on board. Were you...

Third Engineer.

24:00 **You did nine trips. Did any of the fellas get off the boats and try and get any sort of mementoes from the landing side?**

They could have. As I mentioned just now. I saw this skull on the beach and the next trip it was on the end of a broom handle outside the pump room.

24:30 In these tankers all the engine room accommodation is right aft and just forward of the bridge on deck level is like a separate housing which is the pump room. In other words you're pumping fuel from the engine to the shore and they've got to go through this pump and portable hoses into the tanks. So you always check that out for seepage or wastage.

25:00 So this time when we were in port I came around and saw this skull on the end of the broom handle. I didn't go back and have another look but I knew it was there. It soon disappeared. Somebody must have dumped it over the side.

And ashore there was a canteen as well?

Not to my knowledge.

On board the boat at Breeson...Port Breeson?

25:30 **I may have misunderstood. I thought there was a canteen where you were able to get supplies.**

Port En Bassin?

After the Sulphur Bluff what was next for you?

It's in the discharge book there.

26:00 A Chant. Now that was supposed to be a soft job. It was just like a mechanical barge. They were built by Churchill's Auxiliary Naval Tankers was their name. I think 'Jo Blow' in the back yard garage must have made some of the bits and pieces.

26:30 There were no curvatures and no lines at all. It was just flat surfaces that way and that way and flat underneath. And the bow was just a point. There was no cut to it or anything else. And the same thing with the stern, the transom. It had a bit of bent plate right on the transom itself.

27:00 But they were just plain ugly looking ships.

To do what?

They were originally built for the invasion and also running petrol into small harbours that wouldn't take a full sized ship. But after things were going pretty well, a lot of those vessels just remained in harbours for...

27:30 on one occasion we missed a couple of trips so we went in Weymouth harbour and a destroyer might go along side or we'd go alongside a destroyer and pump fuel into it. And or a cruiser or something like that. They might not have had the time or whatever for refuelling. It just might need its tanks topped up.

28:00 **You mentioned this was a softer job compared to the Sulphur Bluff. Are you therefore hinting that the Sulphur Bluff was a hard job or a dangerous job.**

I wouldn't say that. All tanker jobs are dangerous as far as that is concerned. You do so much on that particular run that you get fed up with it.

28:30 **Fed up but it's a more dangerous job?**

All tankers are dangerous so most people only spend one or two trips on a tanker. But as far as the beaches were concerned. We knew what we were carrying was petrol, so basically petrol back and forth to the beaches and it gradually got to the stage where it became boring. When we went back that time, going back to port,

29:00 she was going in for a complete refit and then supposedly coming out to Australia. I didn't want to go in there and come out here. It would take us a month to get out here. Anyway I didn't come. I eventually came out here on a different ship.

So where were you when the war came to an end?

29:30 Not sure where I was now.

Empire Wansbeck?

Could be. It was an ammunition ship.

Do you remember hearing the news that the war had ended?

30:00 Yes it might have been...oh dear. Empire Wansbeck or Sulphur Bluff? It might have been the Wansbeck. We had been out to North Africa.

30:30 The Sulphur Bluff went back to the UK for a complete refit and overhaul prior to coming out here and I think I joined the Wansbeck after that. The ship I was coming out here in

31:00 was the Ardenovohr.

That's the one that was torpedoed?

Yes.

Can you remember where you were when the war in the Pacific came to an end?

I'm not really sure. We never got to the Pacific. We just operated in the

31:30 Mediterranean. The Pacific was ...if I had been on the way out to Australia, I would have known all about it. As I said, she was going in for a complete refit prior to coming out to Australia and then I joined another ship after that.

When the war did come to an end

32:00 **did you want to continue in the merchant navy as a career?**

No that was the ...I joined the Kaikora. I did two trips in that thing. I think it was two trips.

32:30 I know the war was ended at the time. That's right, I think it was...I think we were working out in the channel ports. What we had done before, like the beaches and what have you, we worked on auxiliary tankers and the likes of that. So eventually I got fed up with that.

33:00 **The Kaikora, coming to Australia. It was your first time. What were you coming out for?**

Well I was coming out on the Ardenvohr in the first place and it got torpedoed and I never saw the place. So I came out in the Kaikora, the same company. I wrote to that previous company to

33:30 see if they had any vacancies for an engineer. I got a letter back to say yes, the Kaikora. We went to Canada, Montreal and Quebec and New York and then straight out through the Panama Canal and straight to Melbourne. There were a couple of ports there we looked in to. We came to Sydney,

34:00 Brisbane and came back to Sydney again. Then we tied up to that land that is now opposite to the land where the Opera House is and that big tower block. This particular morning in June, a beautiful day, blue sky and not a cloud to be seen, the equivalent to an English summer day and I thought this was the country for me. I had already cased the joint, up and down

34:30 Pitt Street and George Street, comparing prices of Australian furniture. Just general things. Went to Manly. Went swimming at Manly, in the middle of winter. I like the place very much. I liked New Zealand too but it was damn cold. So I decided Australia was for me. So I packed up the sea because

35:00 I was engaged to that gorgeous creature and I came back and said, I had packed it up. I got a job ashore and we got married.

What year were you married?

I think it was 1948. We arrived out here in 1948.

35:30 And we arrived out here on Labour Day.

Just a few general questions. Reflections on the war...now you've come to Australia and you've been a part of Australia for so many years now. Does Anzac Day have a meaning for you given your war service?

Well

36:00 it did do but it doesn't now because...well a lot of people I knew, the majority of them like school chums and people I used to know, friends and relations,

36:30 they've basically all passed on. I used to go to the Anzac March quite frequently. But the last three or four years, or maybe five years...I used to live in Tara Street since 1953, we moved here. No garden, no grass, no nothing. Just beautiful. A smaller house. We're happy here.

37:00 **So what was the meaning of 'Anzac' for you many years ago?**

It was nice to remember...as far as I'm concerned...the beaches and some of the North African fighting. The same applies...

37:30 this school chum of mine. He was over there. He had a rough 'old trot' [time], but he survived it. But we were able to compare notes. He died a few years ago. In fact all my local contacts of seafarers, have all passed on.

38:00 **Your wife shared with me that for a few years after the war you were a bit emotional about some of the memories you had, what were those memories that really stuck in your mind after the war?**

I think it was the torpedoing and prior to that,

38:30 one of the ships I was on, there was this engineer. He said he would do another trip if I would. I said I was coming back so he did. We went to one of the bloke's wedding. I think he was the head man in the engine crew's quarters.

39:00 The foreman you might say. We were invited to his wedding. Everything went fine and this other chap stood up, grabbed his stomach and hit the deck. The ambulance came and took him away. I went back to the ship and then we were informed that he died. That was a sad moment because I knew his wife

39:30 and his daughter. In fact when he was on a previous trip his wife had come down with a little girl. I said to her, "Are you going to help me." And she said, "Yes." So I took her around and gave her a lemonade. We got on like a house on fire. He was

40:00 a very nice bloke. He died of a burst ulcer. He was the only one or two people I met on the Ardenvoehr. I was on it 12 months. I can't say...I met the 2nd Engineer. He was my immediate chief. He was pleased to see me. He was all over me like a rash. We had a good laugh and were talking. We've lost contact since. I don't know where he is. And whether he's here or gone, I don't know. I'm 82 now. I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of my friends and relatives have passed on. That's life.

Listen Ken. Thank you so much for today, we greatly appreciate the interview.

INTERVIEW ENDS