Australians at War Film Archive

Geoffrey Kerrison (Geoff) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Can you give us a summary of your life for us?**

Yes. I was born in 1933 which was slap bang in the middle of the Depression in Bulli, New South Wales and as a six or seven year old we moved to Lithgow in 1939, ‘40

01:00 and I spent the next ten years in Lithgow in my schooling both at primary and high school, Lithgow High School, prior to joining the navy as a seventeen and a half year old in August 1950. I went to Cerberus for initial training for three months and then had joined the [HMAS] Tobruk I think at about

01:30 February ’51 briefly then I was transferred to HMAS Sydney, spent the next four years on HMAS Sydney with two tours of Korea, Montebello explosion. I went to the coronation as a chosen member representing the navy for the coronation of the queen in ’53. We circumnavigated, which was a wonderful

02:00 trip going through both canals, that’s the Suez and Panama Canals. Then in ’55 I was drafted to Japan at HMAS Commonwealth which was part of the occupation forces in Japan, coming back to Australia in about June, July ’56. Had some leave then rejoined the Sydney

02:30 and we went down for the Olympic Games in ’56. I came back to Sydney and was discharged on my twenty fourth birthday, 1957 having done six and a half years service. I signed up for, there was a program to sign up for reserves for five years at that time which I did. Subsequently from there, from the navy in ’57 I took advantage

03:00 of the returned servicemen’s program under rehab and started with Rex Hotels at Kings Cross and East Sydney College. I spent some time there, after about twelve months I became the catering manager and from there I met my first wife,

03:30 who had three children. I didn’t, yes, I met her just before. I came to Surfers Paradise in ’58, cheffing briefly before I returned to Sydney and had my first marriage in November ’58. I was married for ten years. During that time I joined the rag trade in 1959. About 1962 I set up my own business as a fashion agent

04:00 and worked in the fashion game for the next twenty odd years or most of my business life. My first marriage collapsed in ’67. I subsequently re-married in 1983 so the first marriage was ten years, second marriage five years. Then at that stage

04:30 I was suffering pretty badly from alcoholism and had quite a battle to overcome that in the years. I had about six trips in various alcoholic hospitals including McKinnon Ward at Callan Park and I like to say these days I’m a graduate of Langton Clinic.

05:00 I’ve now been sober for the last twenty six years. That is a fair plight in my life and was actually the reason for the break up of my first two marriages. I spent about five years then, about 1976 I had more or less ruined my reputation to a point in the rag trade through my drinking and

05:30 took a break from that. Got sober in ’78. I went into Langton Clinic in 1978 on 23rd May and came out on 3rd June and I haven’t drunk since then. I spent the next five years more or less putting myself together. I started in a building company, a tiling business called Anne Macquarie Tiles at Hornsby.

06:00 Spent three years there and then left there and I was, I had some, I did quite well there in business, owning part of the company and I left with some money and ended up buying five brood mares. In traveling round with those, I discovered a foaling alarm called Magic Breed or was subsequently called Magic Breed, a brood mare monitor in Tamworth which was

06:30 invented by John Parker. He couldn’t get it on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] Inventors program which was operating at that time in competition with Channel 9. Anyway I knew a director of

production there so I got it on the program and we won the Inventors in October 15th 1980. I subsequently was given the world marketing rights for that

07:00 and took it to Geneva in 1980 to the 9th International Convention Exhibition of new techniques. We won a bronze medal for it which gave it world credence. Then I came back to Australia. In ’82 I had my first heart attack probably partly through stress and strain of varying things and subsequently

07:30 lost my managing directorship of the foaling alarm. I’d taken in partners for capital reasons, and today that’s the most successful foaling alarm in the world, so I’m proud of that achievement. ’83 I’d sort of, because of the up and down nature of the fashion industry, where you’re more or less starting a new business every season with the creativeness that’s involved,

08:00 I had taken that seven year break. I was eventually approached by an old friend and became his marketing guru and we established, he asked me what we should go in to and I said let’s have a crack at budget maternity wear so we established the label Precious Cargo in 1983 and that wound up after two years. We were the major supplier to all

08:30 the maternity wear houses, mainly Grace Brothers and Myer Melbourne. We built that over a five year period and then eventually I came to, I met my wife Ethel in ’83 and we were subsequently married in Honolulu in ’85, January ’85 and spent a couple of years where I had my office, home

09:00 office, rented unit in Ocean Avenue, Double Bay. Then we came here to Magic Millions with my involvement in the thoroughbred industry. I’d actually used, when I gave up the alcoholism, drinking in 1978 I started studying genetics and thoroughbred breeding and so for the last twenty five years

09:30 I’ve been carrying on that. We came here in ’87 to the first Magic Millions. We came looking for land and we found this present spot which was just a paddock, the idea being to establish a small boutique stud where I could keep a few brood mares and that would be my income in retirement. So we’ve now been here

10:00 fifteen years. I’ve had some success. Actually, right now we’ve got a very successful horse that we own in partnership with friends, it’s a lease partnership and he’s won five hundred and fifty six thousand dollars. He’s currently an entry for the Doncaster in Sydney which is the major mile race in Australia, a group one. So we’re hopeful. He won

10:30 the Magic Millions cup here in January, four hundred thousand dollar race and first prize was two hundred and sixty thousand. The efforts are starting to pay off, or the capital that we had involved over the years is now paying off. That’s where we’re at. Ethel and I are just blissfully looking after each other here in Mudgeeraba.

11:00 As one of my friends described it, a tranquil setting in Mudgeeraba.

Fantastic. That’s a wonderful summary, thank you. That’s really wonderful. Okay, so let’s go right back to your childhood. Can you describe for us what life was like during the Depression?

Earlier on I can’t that much. I remember my grandfather as about a three year old, four year old in Hopetown Street, Bulli where we were.

11:30 Things like there was a railway line close by and a pussy willow tree. I remember my father swishing the pussy willow behind my little backside. For some reason I had a fetish for an overcoat. I had a little overcoat and I used to wear it everywhere so they called me Overcoat Bill was my nickname. I’m the first son and second child of my mother and father. I’ve got two brothers and two sisters, one brother deceased.

12:00 Basically we were a struggling happy family. My mother and father were wonderful parents. Subsequently Dad worked in the mines. He was a blacksmith, engine smith with a miner certificate as well. He had an invitation to come to Lithgow and move to Lithgow in ’39 to work at the state coal mine which he did and we eventually

12:30 followed. The managers name was Mr. Fulliger As an aside to that, right now that state coal mine they’re creating a, my brother’s involved with that, my youngest brother, they’re involving a tourist attraction where the mine is now closed. On my naval papers you’ll probably see where my job before joining the navy was a black smithstriker where

13:00 I swung a seven pound hammer for my father. In those days we used to hotweld the cage rings, splice the big wire housing and Dad was a very clever blacksmith, or engine smith, and meant he was capable of forging lathe tools and that sort of thing. We also made horse shoes in those days from scratch. He didn’t stamp them out

13:30 with the machinery like they do today. Basically following school, my early years I left school in 1948 I think it was, when I was fifteen or sixteen. My first job was a bowser pumper. During the war, the Second World War as an eleven, twelve year old, I sold

14:00 papers after school and they were, my commission was twopence farthing a dozen. I used to sell about

five dozen papers in an afternoon. There were thirteen coal mines and a small arms factory operating in Lithgow at the time so it was quite a, twenty five thousand people. We had tent cities. They used to travel from Blackheath and Leura and that sort of thing on trains on a daily basis because

14:30 the small arms factory made the Bren, the Vickers and the 303 rifle and never closed. My father worked six days a week and I can recall on Sundays as a twelve year old we'd pedal a pushbike out to Lidsdale and we'd shoe little pit ponies and sharpen the, do the pace drills. They had a hand drill that

15:00 they drill into the face of the coal, put the gelignite in and that was, probably one of the first areas of open cut coal mining using that. Subsequently there's the Wallerawang powerhouse there that actually electrifies the line between Lithgow and Sydney. So they were pretty rugged days. We used to have to wear a balaclava.

15:30 The other thing I did whilst I was at school, was on Saturdays, I helped a local baker on a bread cart. So my second job in actual fact was when he left at sixteen I took over that and I had three hundred and twenty customers and operated that for a year and a half, about a year I think.

16:00 **Can I ask you what do you remember about the war?**

I think what's interesting I thought about that and what I remember most about the war, the Second World War, was the uncertainty of it all in the town. Because at my age and others that were born during the Depression it meant that when war broke out in '39, '40 I was seven. When war finished in 1945, I

16:30 was twelve. All I knew as a child was total uncertainty. Communication was minimal. You had Dad and Dave on the radio, crackling, there was no television. You aspired to a pushbike, not a motorbike or a car. I remember the taxis had big balloons on top of them, gas balloons, they ran on gas or probably

17:00 now it's the LP gas but in those days they had these big wax balloons on top, on a frame. My school mates, I know one of my buddy's brothers was killed in the air force. There's a lot of uncertainty and of course joy.

17:30 Also I remember just following the Second World War, Lithgow took some of the first of the Latvian and Lithuanian migrants to come to Australia who settled in, where they were housing workers during the war, so they turned those into settlement camps just across from the railway line. I lived in Academy Street in

18:00 a rented house. My mother and father actually bought their house up near at 23 Park Parade in 1950 as I was joining the navy for twelve hundred and thirty five pounds, I think it was, which was a weatherboard cottage on quite a good block. It was terrible uncertainty and then following that the next thing was the threat of communism. The unions were communist,

18:30 particularly in the mines. In actual fact in '38 or '39 they put the troops in the state coal mine for six or seven weeks to break the strike.

Can you tell us about that strike and what happened there?

You had, the unions were dominated by the left wing communist party and of course following the Second World War, the next threat was the cold war, with the division

19:00 of Berlin. I watch historical programs now on the history channel and that's brought back a lot of reasons why. Anyway they broke the strike eventually and in 1949 the Labor Chifley government that had done such a good job during the war lost power because they wanted, basically because they wanted

19:30 of that influence of the trade union. Also they wanted to nationalise the banks. So subsequently [Robert] Menzies [Prime Minister of Australia] got into power and he was there through all the fifties whilst I was in the navy. Menzies was in power until I think early sixties, I'm not sure now. I actually went

20:00 and joined the navy initially in 1950, I didn't want to finish up in the mines. There was thirteen coal mines in Lithgow at the time and there were young boys that were brighter than I was at school that finished up down the mines because that's what their Dad did. I think also prevailing at that time was the fact that my father always had a job during the Depression because he had a trade

20:30 and he was a hard worker. So the influence for him in his thinking was that if you had a trade you had security. That was the paramount thinking in those days. Strangely enough or oddly enough, about fourteen when I was at school I did an aptitude test which they gave all students at that time and they said I had no mechanical

21:00 ability at all and my best function would be as a salesman. Subsequently they were right. That's basically what I'm spent, marketing most of my life. I was influenced in joining the engineering department in the navy because of that trade background. I used to work in the engineering shop at the small arms factory briefly as well.

21:30 So there was some influence there.

Can I just ask you a little bit more about the mines before you go into that? Why were you so opposed to going in to the mines? Can you describe the mines for us and what life was like for people working there?

It was death in the end, emphysema, coal dust, dampness. I think the shaft of the state coal mine was something like three hundred feet down.

22:00 But not only that, for some reason I could also see that there was a better world out there and I wanted to improve myself. I knew early on that my parents couldn't afford me a higher education. As it was I didn't get my intermediate certificate, which was the prevailing three years, I repeated second year probably because of my emphasis on earning a quid, so to speak.

22:30 I just wanted, I didn't think there was a lot of future there anyway. That proved correct. I think there might be one coal mine operating in Lithgow and they closed shortly after. There was a great exodus in the post-war years of Lithgow people to Wollongong because BHP was expanding there. At one time of

23:00 course Australian Iron and Steel I think it was called was started in Lithgow by the Hoskins family. So there's now the Hoskins Institute and the nice Presbyterian Church was built by that family in Lithgow. So Lithgow reduced from say twenty five thousand and a city to about fifteen thousand or something like that. I think it's probably down to twelve or thirteen. Although my younger brother Neville

23:30 who was born in '38, he's never left there, he's still there and forged a career first in the motor trade and then in real estate.

Are you able to tell us any more about that strike and what it was all about?

I think it was pay and conditions basically. They were fairly horrendous and what you've got to realise, during the war soldiers were paid seven and six a day and food found.

24:00 I don't know what Dad's take home pay was but he always bought the envelope to my mother unopened. I think, she would then manage the funds. I can clearly remember getting pocket money from her,

24:30 you know, to go up to town and have a drink or something. That was an influence on my life, I never wanted that to happen. I understood why because there was five mouths to feed and mother was a fantastic manager, actually lived to ninety one, she outlived Dad.

So what was life like for someone like your father working in the coal mines?

25:00 Well he was up on top of course, in the forge area of the mine. He used to go down. As I said earlier he had a miner certificate which was a foreman's certificate for underground work. The ponies were kept down in the mine all year, they came out at Christmas time and they were blind of course when they came out, blind to the daylight. They actually lived underground for the total year, were fed and so forth.

25:30 They used to haul skips. This was before, I think the other thing that was happening at that time now I recall was mechanisation was starting at the coal face. So miners were losing, there was a loss of jobs, there were closures and I suppose mines were uneconomical to work.

Do you remember what the sort of

26:00 **scene was like during this strike and when they brought the army in to break the strike?**

Horrendous, yeah.

Can you describe what happened?

There was a great to do, I can't remember details. I can just remember the scenario at the time which was traumatic because the miners were on strike, had no money for nearly two months. You know, I don't think there was any

26:30 such thing as the dole in those days. You fed and helped yourself. I can tell you this, that rabbits were ninepence a pair. The rabbitohs used to come to the door and my mother, yeah.

Was there a bit of an outcry?

Oh yeah.

Can you tell us what you remember, what you saw of that?

If you can imagine the trauma. During the war there was rationing for starters.

27:00 Bread and dripping off your roast with salt and pepper was a really tasty. My mother was a great cook. Of course I was in short pants during the war and I can tell you the linings were made out of the rolled oats bags. You got rolled oats bags. So what they'd do is boil them up, get some of the print

27:30 out of them, turn them inside out and a lady up this road, make these little, you'd have your pants were grey serge, that was about the only colour, like today mostly everything's black pants for guys and she'd

line these with a rolled oats bag and it had a little dicky front, you know, for urinating through. Of course if the seat wore out, a patch went on.

28:00 So butter was rationed, petrol, well, we didn't have a car anyway, my father used to travel from Extension Estate which was the small arms factory, he'd ride a pushbike to the state coal mine which was way up in a valley the other end of town and he'd ride it back home again. At that time, my father was born in 1955, 1985, he subsequently died

28:30 in 1967. So, twenty years, he was in his forties riding that push bike back and then riding of course on Sundays we'd go and do the pit ponies and so forth.

So when the army was brought in to break the strike, what happened in the town, what did people do?

They had to cop it. There was picketing and all that sort of thing.

29:00 I wasn't there to see it all but I remember all the dissension and the bitterness because it's not like today with demonstrations you'll see on TV, they make a crowd of twenty five on TV look like three hundred with the cameras,

29:30 the angle of the camera. It wasn't like that. Whoever was there, was there. I'm sure there was threatening with picks and shovel. They were the tools they used, in the mines, picks and shovel.

Do you remember actually any violence at all about it?

30:00 Well there was violence but I can't remember details of it because I was kept well, I was still a child of course, was twelve so by '48, I was fifteen.

What about your father, in what way did it effect your father at all?

I'm not sure. They would have closed the mine down so I don't know whether he was on

30:30 part standby work or something like that. I can't remember whether he was actually out on total strike or not. This was to do mostly with the miners and underground. I think from memory there were separate unions from his union which would have blacksmith, engine smith union as opposed to the miner's union itself. I'm trying to think of one of the, funnily enough one of

31:00 the leading communists at the time I subsequently used to go and collect a commodore from Rose Bay when I was in the navy. He was a doctor commodore, take him to HMAS Penguin at Balmoral and his brother was a leading communist. Perhaps later on I'll remember his name. He was a well known communist leader. The wharves were controlled by

31:30 communist unions. The wharfies were the strongest union and until just recently, when I say recently, probably the last ten years, they still had a stranglehold on the wharf area of Australia which was I think hampering our progress particularly with the turn around of ships and that sort of thing.

Do you remember your parents, your mum and dad talking about what was going on with the strike?

No. Children in my day were seen and not heard.

32:00 My parents were of Victorian upbringing and basically my mother was one of nine children and she was a religious lady. I went to Sunday school religiously. I think I was a Sunday school teacher when I was fourteen or fifteen. We had the Sunday school across the road. My mother was a very strict, my father couldn't bring alcohol in the house.

32:30 No drinking in front of the children. But they loved one another and basically they were struggling on one wage to bring up five children. We were all about two and a half years apart. I remember about twenty years ago I said, when I had more communication with my mother.

33:00 My mother was that way that, when I say they were non-demonstrative, I don't think I ever hugged my mother or kissed my mother until I was about thirty five. Not that she didn't love me, she did deeply but there was that sort of system. That's the way she was. I said to her,

33:30 I did ask her later on, once when she was here staying with us I said, "You know Mum, you must have been pretty organised you and Dad with the spacing of us as children. What did you do for contraception?" She said, "Ask your father." He'd been dead twenty years.

So you never found out,

34:00 **I guess?**

No. That was her answer to me, "Ask your father." So she wasn't going to communicate. You can imagine what my sex education was like, zero. Find out for yourself. Set your own path.

What did you do for fun as a family?

Well we didn't do a lot in that, we also grew artichokes,

34:30 we grew potatoes in the back yard, and beans. We had a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard. In fact I've got an old photo of us. We had a peach tree. I've got an old photo of the five of us somewhere all under the peach tree and you see a little upturned billy cart. You know, so you did grow your own vegetables and things and if you grew artichokes you'd share next door that might grow

35:00 somebody else. We all had veggie gardens. That was in the winter because we had snow on the ground, it was cold. My fingers used to crack and bleed during the winter on the bread cart. I'd have mittens without fingers because you couldn't, handling the bread. It was a horse and cart too by the way. He used to follow me up the road.

35:30 I'd call him, he'd come up the road. You'd feed him with a bag over his ears and out of a Hessian feeding back whilst we were going round to give him some loosen chaff or something, but fun. As children our fun was climbing up Scotchman's Hill or some of the mountains that surrounded Lithgow like

36:00 Echo Point, I think it was called. Scotchman's Hill I know when I was at high school or secondary school, there was a group of us, girls and boys that were friends and we'd take sausages and a pan and we'd climb Scotchman's Hill. In other words, you made your own fun. It was sort of boy girl reaction but no hanky panky. That just wasn't on

36:30 by fear of anything because I can tell you if a girl was in trouble, if she needed to find someone that did an abortion it'd cost you about fifty pounds. Fifty pounds was like a fortune. So you just didn't indulge in sex. I suppose some did but I think

37:00 it was very minimal. We were all pretty. And I think out of respect for each other too, the girl particularly. Probably the boys had, not necessarily I suppose, but the boys had more drive by nature than the girls did.

So you said you didn't get any sex education at home, what about at school?

Not really, no. Not that I can remember. Do your best.

37:30 **So at what point, you sort of knew about girls getting pregnant.**

When you say I didn't have any sex education. I know at age sixteen we used to have a dance. The only entertainment I recall a dance on a Wednesday night at Hoskins Hall and that was pretty good because you had the Canadian three step, the barn dance, you'd change partners and that, the Pride of Erin. Those old, where they played in a really

38:00 good dance beat music these days they wouldn't know how to play a dance beat, it'd be all separate dancing. I do recall that I had one of my first liaisons and I was with a young school teacher actually when I was about sixteen and she probably was all of eighteen or nineteen, I don't know now, it was that long ago. We had a bit of a fiddle and a fumble.

38:30 **So how much of a fiddle and a fondle?**

I think we went the whole hog somehow. I'm a bit vague, there's been a lot of space in between. I know there was a lass I know I had my first experience with a lass on my fifteenth birthday, let's put it that way.

39:00 That wasn't very satisfactory because it was a stand up deal and it wasn't that good.

You were fifteen, how old was she?

About the same I suppose.

Did you know about possibly getting her pregnant at that stage?

No. We didn't do enough to worry about. I can't even remember the time

39:30 how much penetration there was if any. That was the first. I do recall another funny instance, we had a, the other dance was on a Saturday night at the recreation hall down at the show ground and this in actual fact is probably where I started because of my shyness or what I term

40:00 the lead in to my alcoholism was this inferiority complex which you manifest in your own mind. I think alcoholism is part of three things, that inferiority complex that you manifest in your own head. Two there's a gene you can inherit which alcoholics do

40:30 or druggies which is emotional instability. A normal person's graph on a straight line is like that where a person that is unstable it varies to a degree above the line and depending how bad you are, the degree goes, and the other thing is of course the opportunity or the training, which part of my

41:00 naval life contributed because of the dry ship rule, coming in to port and going on the booze. The first thing you did when you come to port was get on the drink. It was a binge mentality which if you had a preponderance to the first two, which I did, that was a perfect training ground you know, to

41:30 wind up the way I did finish up.

Tape 2

00:34 **Can you remember that amusing story you were going to tell us?**

This was all part of growing up and experimentation and so forth. I think I was recalling to you the Saturday night dances and so forth and how the alcoholism started off. Fortified wines or what I used to term fine wine, Tintarra which was a brand of, see what we'd basically do or some of us, I was anyway,

01:00 you'd have a few of drinks and you'd have a hidden bottle of fortified wine to tide the dance on. You'd have a nip of this to give you courage to go and ask the girls to dance. Strangely enough, I might say to you is what I found in the alcoholism, the key there is that the inferiority complex doesn't come in to play in relation

01:30 to your general familiarity with people, but when it comes down to a one to one basis of a relationship with a woman or anything like that, this is when you're most vulnerable and you build up this inferiority complex as to your worthiness or you know, you don't want knock backs.

02:00 Which I'm sure all young people experience. So the prop was the slug of fortified wine or fine wine, Tintarra. Anyway, the funny story, and I'll finish on that as far as that's concerned. There used to be a bus run from Lithgow to Portland to take the people back because they didn't have a dance floor and I met a girl one night, so

02:30 the bus went at a quarter to twelve or something like that and we had a stand up liaison, actually against the fence not far from the bus and of course she hurried on to the bus and I had to be home by midnight, that was a strict rule. So I'm off down main street Lithgow running. Well I got a half way down, there's a bit of a slant down the hill and my knees

03:00 collapsed from under me. So I can tell you stand up liaisons and then running afterwards was not a good formula for steadiness. So we'll leave it at that. Anyway, one thing I always did promise myself as far as that was concerned was that whilst I was in the navy, shortly after I joined the navy,

03:30 I did leave a very nice girl behind in Lithgow but I more or less gave her a Dear John [letter informing that a relationship is over] because I didn't want her waiting in the wings while I was away spending six years in the navy, and another wish of mine was I didn't ever wish to marry while I was in the navy. I didn't think it was fair, or this is where my upbringing I suppose came into it, I didn't want to be telling lies to a girl back home,

04:00 and I suppose to a certain extent I wanted to leave myself free in my mind to have take advantage of whatever opportunity might come along the way.

How do you think that uncertainty during the Second World War affected you in your decisions or what you wanted to achieve?

Greatly. Even as

04:30 I went through that uncertainty, it manifested itself in me with that inferiority complex or you know, uncertainty of what your direction was. Every young person has to look to make their way in life. My father had always encouraged me, as a young man he spent time in South Africa and traveled himself and he always, the one thing, apart from the

05:00 trade experience, he always said education was the best travel. So that was instilled and he always encouraged us as children that we should travel when we could. So I had attempted to come with another bloke to Queensland at one time but they wouldn't, they barred that. But at seventeen and a half they agreed to me joining the navy because

05:30 your time didn't start 'til you were eighteen so they still had intake. That's how I come to join the navy. Being in that engineering area, a school friend's brother was in an engineering branch and he assured me it was a good branch and so forth.

As a teenager did you travel to Sydney at all?

Once or twice, yes I did.

What was that like at the time and sort of during the war and post-war period?

06:00 A couple of funny experiences. I always seem to get in to these spots. I went to Sydney for a weekend when I was about sixteen. Subsequently I had to go to the Salvation Army in actual fact to renew my train ticket or help me back home, which they did. As a consequence

06:30 I've always been a donator to Salvation Army. I went to Sydney during the war at that time and actually we used to have greyhound dogs in Lithgow at the time, a greyhound track. I went to Howell Park dogs

on this Friday night or Saturday night, I'm not sure which night it was. There was a dog in called Tusk

07:00 and I was earning a bit of money on the bread cart and so forth. I think I was on about eight pounds five a week which is a pretty good wage in 1948, '49. So I had ten shillings on this dog Tusk at twenty five to one and I won. So I had over thirteen pounds. So I subsequently went to a bit of a dive,

07:30 nightclub in King Street. This girl latched on to me and I wound up going home with her for the evening. So that was an out of town liaison that occurred but the other thing about coming to Sydney, I'm not sure if it was that particular time but one other occasion I know I had to seek, I went to

08:00 the Salvation Army which had an office down in Elizabeth Street I think and a doss-in, the People's Palace in Pitt Street in those days where you could get cheap accommodation. The Salvation Army did a wonderful job and they did a wonderful job right through the Second World War, Korean War and are still doing a nice job today.

Just one question more about Lithgow before we go on

08:30 **to your navy experience. What was Lithgow like back then when you were growing up compared with what it is now?**

Pretty dirty industrial type town. They had shanty towns in what they call, whatsaname flat, I can't think. People were living in tents and makeshift humpies during that war time. It was pretty basic stuff. We were in a brick home. It must have been

09:00 terribly cold. Some of the townsfolk of course would have looked down on these people but they were doing their best and trying to live as comfortably as possible and have work. Don't forget here again, the war actually ended the Depression and suddenly there was industry everywhere making all these munitions or whether they were clothing,

09:30 supporting the troops, all the fashion, not that I was in fashion then, but all the clothing houses would have been turned to making felt hats. The naval cap that I wore was a canvas type fabric that you whitened. So all those industries actually turned to the war effort.

10:00 The guys were away, a lot of the women worked both in small arms factories and a lot of factories. It was one big effort by everyone. It was pretty dire times you know.

Going to Sydney, was that a big journey, how did you travel?

Dirty train. We went through the tunnel. I can recall going through, here again

10:30 my aunt played great part of my life. We were able to go, or they paid for our fare for my brother and I to go to Newcastle for a holiday and I think also to give my mother a break from, because my younger sister would have only been three or four and Neville would have been seven say, so Philip and I we went

11:00 to Wrightson Avenue Newcastle which was near the beach. They were happy times. I forget about the train. We'd leave here in beautiful white shirts and by the time we got through the tunnel, with sticking our head out the window and getting dust and dust soot in your eyes and you'd wind up at Newcastle Central Station black as the ace of spades. The other thing, we had to change at Central

11:30 and I know my brother Phillip brought it up later on in life he was bigger, he was six foot four and a half, I was a midget to him. He was bigger as a young man as well, he carried the bags and I did, I said, "You carry the bags," and I did all the organising which is probably the role I've cast myself

12:00 through the years. I was always a good organiser.

So when you were working for the bakery, delivering bread, what was the bakery like? Can you describe that for us?

It was a co-op bakery at that time. I've actually got a booklet on the co-op's history of Lithgow which my sister-in-law sent me not long back. Tiny Chawcross, he was a huge bloke. He was also the SP [starting price] bookie in the town. I've had

12:30 an affinity with horses and so on from working on the bread cart but also backing a horse, backing threepence each way. I remember McCurly's they were had the newsagent where I worked and she used to run a book for us and she'd collect that threepence each way, our bets on the Melbourne Cup.

13:00 That was my early gambling days.

Can you describe that experience of the bread delivery, what your job was because we don't get bread delivered anymore.

Well you basically knew what. Well, I'd kick off at three o'clock in the morning, particularly a Saturday morning but you always started early and with three hundred and twenty customers I worked from Hassans Walls Road right out to the Western Highway and up the pine forest

13:30 area. You got a variety of things. Some of the girls'd come out swinging in the breeze, with a nightie on, just got up. You had a whole lot of experiences from time to time. They would have been getting their husbands off to work. You got various stages of dress. But most of the people, you knew

14:00 what they wanted so when you stacked for your bread run, I knew what people took or they'd leave a note, some would leave money, some had a monthly or weekly account with the co-op. In those days also there were discounts. The co-operative store was put together by people contributing capital and you were a shareholder and you got a dividend which was only

14:30 small time stuff but that's how they ran their co-operative stores. I think my sister worked in a co-op at one stage. There's an interesting time, you asked me about that bakery because I had a fellow worker and his name was Morris and we were in this atrocious weather and we had no wet weather gear so we striked,

15:00 he got me to strike. The manager's name of the co-op store was Pendleberry. Anyway, we struck probably for a day or two, then they said they'd get us wet weather gear which they did and then he sacked. We got the wet weather gear but we lost our jobs. So as a consequence of that I've never, ever joined a union again in my life

15:30 and never wanted to. That was my one union experience. The other thing that was very effective coming back to that where I said the security of a trade, I also realised very early on because of the miners' strike and because of these various strikes and the influence of the unions at the time that yes, you did have security with a trade but also

16:00 your wages were completely governed by what was awarded to you under the various awards. So your efforts, it didn't matter how hard you worked you couldn't improve your income, only with overtime may or may not be given to you where you had certain penalty rates. That was a big influence. So from that point

16:30 on, after navy, my total working life was geared to working for myself which I subsequently mostly did.

So what was your parents' view about you joining the navy?

They were supportive, signed the papers. I think they were apprehensive. They were pretty proud when I was selected, in fact I've got a little cutting from the local Mercury where

17:00 you know, Reg Kerrison's son has been selected for the coronation contingent. There was only fifty five of us and I represented the engineering branch as a, I was a stoker mechanic then at age twenty. I was the youngest naval member of that contingent. There was some pretty, George Cross winners.

17:30 I have a photo of that contingent taken at Pirbright in Surrey which I think would be of interest to you for the archive.

Definitely and we'll talk more about that coronation later. Just beginning, can you tell us about actually signing up and how you joined?

Yes, I signed up at Rushcutters Bay at HMAS Kuttabul having done an entrance exam.

18:00 Subsequently on acceptance you were then sent by train from Central Station to Frankston in Victoria and then you were taken to HMAS Cerberus which was part of the Mornington Peninsula area of Melbourne. You did three months boot training there where they taught you to handle a 303 rifle and drilling.

18:30 There was always strict dress codes in the navy. I'll give you an aside there, I've never owned a pair of jeans in my life because, no aspersions on you, because your number eights, we had numbers for each dress of the day, at the start of the day in the navy or on board ship the dress of the day'd be designated by the

19:00 skipper or the commander and number eights were jeans and a blue shirt which when you're a raw recruit you boiled the hell out of so you didn't look like you'd just joined. Same with your navy collar. You boiled the crap out of it so to speak so you didn't look like the raw recruit that you were. Of course there were plenty of other mannerisms

19:30 that you had that would soon tell you you were pretty raw anyway. That's where you first learnt to handle firearms and also take the initiative. That's what war's about in your initial training you're trained in arms of war of varying degrees so you're taught aggression

20:00 even if it's controlled aggression.

What was it about the navy that attracted you as opposed to other armed forces?

Travel, opportunity to travel, taking the advice of my father and in retrospect or in subsequent that is exactly how it turned out. Apart from the war experiences basically about two thirds of the way through

20:30 my period of signing up for six years, repetition set in as far as I was concerned. Once I could see, I did do an exam to progress in the engineering part but that is the interesting part about that, in that my

natural intelligence took me to a certain level in the engineering department and then in actual fact to be an engineer or to go on my

21:00 aptitude wasn't in that direction.

When you joined the navy things were heating up in Korea, did you have any idea about possibly going to the Korean War?

Only, actually I can recall the details because I think I said to you I spent a couple of months on HMAS Tobruk initially in February '51 just after I turned eighteen and then I joined the Sydney I think about April,

21:30 my papers, my service records would tell you. I clearly recall we were on a reconnaissance trip or flight training, whatever it was and we were in Port Lincoln in the Great Australian Bight in South Australia and we were recalled and I think it was probably about May '51 to come back to Sydney. We had a quick refit and we subsequently

22:00 sailed or committed to the aircraft carrier to the Korean War and we sailed on HMAS Sydney for Korea about July, August '51 and spent 1952 there.

What did you know though when you joined the navy of what was happening in Korea?

Nothing really, no, the purpose of me joining was looking to a career to get out of

22:30 the industrial town of Lithgow, to travel as my father advised. I suppose I was looking for wider opportunities to both express myself mentally and professionally.

To what extent did you have any sense of representing your country?

Yes.

23:00 Not only that but from the time you signed up you didn't have any choices. It was, "Yes sir, no sir, three bags full", that was it so that whatever task you were assigned to, there wasn't a decision. Even as far as my time in Korean waters and in the Korean War I haven't got a lot of knowledge about what took place outside the ships because it was secret.

23:30 Ratings weren't which I was a young recruit at that stage, starting off and then stoker. They didn't confide in you what was happening. You just did your designated job.

Can you tell us what it was like in your first months with the navy and in what way it might have been hard to adjust or what you were doing?

All sorts of things I recall. My first trip

24:00 out of boot camp, so to speak, was to Tasmania on a corvette, which is a pretty small ship. I can't recall the name of that one now but that was more or less your induction into sea. It can get pretty tricky across the Bass Strait as far as weather's concerned. So my first experience was seeing all the green bile going over the side from sea sickness.

24:30 Now I may have been briefly sick once but basically I was able to handle it. I was never seasick in all my years in the navy ever in actual fact. Even when we were in that typhoon off Sasebo which was pretty horrendous.

After the first experience of going to Tasmania and being unwell

25:00 **how did you come to deal with it? You weren't unwell, it was other people?**

Mostly other people. I managed to minimalise my seasickness and subsequently I didn't suffer. Some guys, there was a guy on deck, the poor bloke he'd go to sea and it created asthma. He used to get himself in a terrible state so

25:30 with the variety, because there was a hundred and fifty guys, I'm now talking of my experience on HMAS Sydney where the engineering deck as such we slept in hammocks and we had stow engine, tie your hammock up and stow them away during the day and what you call your mess deck. I've got an old photo there of us all, Christmas '52 with beards and different things.

26:00 I've lost my train there.

That's all right, I think you were talking about people being seasick.

Yeah. The other thing is HMAS Sydney was a much bigger ship of course. Although, when I was on Tobruk, Tobruk and [HMAS] Anzac were the two escort destroyers for HMAS Sydney, they sort of alternated because

26:30 a carrier never travels anywhere basically without an escort destroyer.

Can you tell us a little bit more about boot camp and your first impressions of that?

It's all pretty hazy. It was all basic training and lining up, getting the rudiments of discipline. That's mainly it. Learning to march correctly, do your drills correctly, how to handle a rifle.

27:00 Those sort of things. It was just the very basic training that I think any and all the services had a basic twelve weeks I think it was boot camp sort of thing they call it. I remember actually at that Christmas, one thing I do remember at that boot camp was we were doing Christmas decorations and I put a thumbtack through the wireless electricity cord that

27:30 flipped me back over a two and a half somersault. I've always, always from that experience been very wary of electricity. That's about the most significant. I wasn't wrapped in Melbourne as a city either. We'd go up and have occasional leave. You didn't have much leave. I don't think we had any leave at all in that first twelve weeks, there was no leave.

Where were you actually based?

HMAS Cerberus

28:00 which was the training base. I think it's still there.

Not sure. Had you ever handled a rifle prior to that training?

Yes, I swapped a billy cart for a 22 automatic rifle with a guy up the road before I joined the navy. We used to,

28:30 you know the noble price, well the gelignite used to come in noble boxes for the mines wrapped in greaseproof or waterproof paper. So you'd utilise these noble boxes and we'd make billy carts and have little wheels on it and you'd steer it with rope or I can remember having a nice billy cart with a bigger steering wheel and you had guide ropes tied taught to it

29:00 and that way you could steer. My father, being a blacksmith, we didn't have trouble having axles. He'd make an axle and you'd have a split pin to keep your wheels on. So this was a pretty what I call 'Mickey Mouse', or grouse. I believe 'Mickey Mouse' terms means it's not very good or stable but in those days, 'Mickey Mouse' meant grouse or pretty good, so this guy up the road had

29:30 this 22, so we'd go out rabbit shooting with that. It was minimal. The other thing in Lithgow I used to go blackberrying in Coxes River with a big kerosene tin with a handle and get scratched and you'd sell that to the local produce bloke and you got sixpence a pound. I can recall filling up this kerosene tin

30:00 because you utilised everything in those war years. You didn't throw stuff away. Something would be used. Everyone had a bright idea for using something or utilising each piece of basic material. That's the way it was. By the time I got this tin of blackberries that I picked back to the produce bloke of course

30:30 they'd sunk. They'd sat down a bit because blackberries are nice and juicy and you'd wind up with about two thirds. You still had the same weight because what you were out to do was maximise your return. That came to mind.

So after boot camp did you go on to the HMAS Tobruk then?

Yes

So can you tell us about that?

I don't recall a lot about HMAS Tobruk.

31:00 That was a much, destroyers are a lot smaller and a much smaller crew. I think from memory we probably had about two fifty to three hundred guys. I could be wrong there. I was only on there for a short time before I was drafted to the bigger HMAS Sydney.

Had you made many friends during boot camp? Was that a place where people made friends easily?

31:30 The draft that I joined was fairly widespread. There were quite a few Queensland guys, fellows out of Asmer and Burke, came from out Cunnamurra way. They were spread around. I remember another guy, Bruce Marshall, he came from up on the border at Wollongarra. I didn't have anyone else from Lithgow I don't think in that. Although I did have,

32:00 I've got some photos of Ray Morris, a friend of mine in the town had joined a year or so before and he was in the engineering branch too. I was subsequently, funnily enough I hadn't seen Ray for years and years and he when we held the reunion or the dedication of the memorial in Canberra of the Korean memorial which I attended, Ray was there.

32:30 I met another guy, Hoff, from Western Australia that was actually on board Sydney with me all those years ago. One day a fella rang me up, Brian Esler. I remember one time we were on leave and we were in Sydney so it must have been off the Sydney we brought an old Morris utility for sixty pounds, he and I

33:00 and we bet the boys on board twenty pounds that we could get to Melbourne in twenty four hours

because it was gravity fed then, you didn't have a carburetor in a 1928 Morris utility. So loaded up with this fine wine, Tintarra, it was still part of the passenger group, we set off for Melbourne in this. Air conditioning was open back and sides and it was winter as I recall it. We got as far as Albury,

33:30 and he was a better mechanic than I. Anyway we managed to block this feed tank up so we got that cleared. We made Caulfield post office in about twenty three hours, so we collected our wage. He came from Sale in Victoria which was where we were heading. I think we wound up selling the vehicle but it did it's job,

34:00 quite an experience.

In that environment, in that initial training, that sort of boot camp training, was it an environment in which friendships were easily formed?

With a selection of guys. I think to a point I've mostly been a loner. I had a group of friends in I had certain

34:30 buddies but not a wide group of friends. I'll demonstrate that to you later as far as a time when we went to Korea and Japan and where my enterprise was foremost in my mind. Some of those, for instance, John Clease who was a bandsman in the naval contingent with me at Pirbright in Surrey

35:00 is still my friend. I still see him and he's probably apart from Brian Esler who turned up on my doorstep here, he was the guy that drove to Sydney and Melbourne in that car. Brian turned up here briefly about five years ago, stayed for a night or two. We recounted some old times and so forth. And Ray Morris has subsequently and his wife have been here a couple of years, two or three years ago.

So apart from

35:30 **that trip across the Bass Strait and seeing people quite unwell, what were your first impressions of the navy, how were you enjoying it?**

It was exciting. We went to Burnie in Tasmania, we went to the Cadbury chocolate factory. In other words you're a young, see it was only a trip off the base, so that was part of the excitement, travel, to kick off with. I do recall

36:00 one instance I might recall because there's a thread. When we went from Central to Frankston on the train the fine wine, Tintarra, also went on the train and those days they had these big bottles of water with cork stoppers in them, you may have seen them in some memorabilia of railway stations. I do recall we got on the drink naturally for this,

36:30 I think it was a pretty long train trip in those days. Next morning when we woke up with a mouth like the bottom of a bird cage, as I used to describe it, and of course all the water was gone. That fortified wine was not something that you drank in huge quantities, I can tell you. Back during the war, they were called fourpenny darts. They were a five ounce glass

37:00 of port or fine wine, Tintarra, Penfolds and you had little wine bars in those days as well as hotels you see and people that wanted a quicker hit would drink this fortified wine, fourpennies.

So can you recall what your job was on the Tobruk?

I started my training with the machinery and so forth.

37:30 You know with the engine room and various, the utility things like evaporators and the donks, a donk being a separate diesel generator we had in certain sections of the ship that would run if main power went off you could kick off or your steam, you always had

38:00 auxiliary power, as they called them, and they were the diesel generators. Usually in a fairly confined compartment of our own in a section of the ship where you just watched your oil levels and did your four on four off shifts. That's how, with that machinery or the engine room, you mainly did four on and four off.

And while you were with the Tobruk it was actually escorting the Sydney?

Yes.

So where

38:30 **did you go?**

I can't remember too much there. Probably Jervis Bay because at that time also the fleet air arm operated out of Nowra so one of the bases of HMAS Sydney of course was Jervis Bay. The ship did training with the fleet air arm alternating between I think

39:00 the pilots at that time trained, it's extinct now, Nowra, or the fleet air arm but at that time they were trained at Nowra so we would have been undertaking exercises, fly ons or fly on and fly offs, where the pilots used to train to come in to land. You had about six or seven arrestor wires which were strung across the deck and three barriers so if their hook didn't pick up one of the arrestor wires,

39:30 bingo, they'd go into one of the safety barriers and churn up a propeller or spin over. I've got some photos of deck landings and so forth that didn't finish up so well. A few of the guys, a couple of the guys in Korea went over the side, ended up with burst ear drums and I'm not sure what other. I think we lost four or five pilots off HMAS Sydney in '51, '52.

40:00 **So you weren't with the Tobruk very long?**

No.

Tape 3

00:31 **We might just move on to Korea now. How did you come to be in the war?**

Well as part of my service contract with the navy you just went where you went. When HMAS Sydney was recalled from Port Lincoln and had a fairly, as I recall fairly quick refit in Garden Island and stocked up with provisions and all that sort of thing because that was always a major task. I think we had

01:00 a crew of something like twelve hundred and fifty seven, something around about that number. Of course we set sail for Korea, not knowing what was going to befall us. All I do recall is that once we got there all the cold weather started in and for that remainder period of our service, from say August to

01:30 February, it was winter and bitterly cold. We used to have to shovel ice and snow off the flight deck for the planes to take off and land. Sometimes because the weather was too closed in or too bad, the planes couldn't operate. But basically speaking we were there as a support group. There were other

02:00 naval ships that were up closer to some of the river sanctuaries and so forth, I can't recall who they were but have in mind as far as describing what actually took place apart from generalities, like I know the planes went strafing railways and bombings and so forth after they pushed back out of Pusan and were pushing back up the peninsula, I think the other

02:30 thing paramount in my mind was the American rocket ships through the night were hurtling these fast firing rockets. Generally speaking we were in the dark to a certain extent so I suppose our terror or anxiety was because we were in the dark, I didn't have a lot of knowledge.

03:00 From time to time you had magazine alarms going off and you didn't know whether your ammunition was going to blow up. Basically we were and being in the engine room part of that time on that first trip you're down below anyway. It was superheated steam driven, the turbines. I must say both ships, or all those ships in those days had asbestos lagging

03:30 all the way. I recall when we did come in to port from time to time I was down silver frosting water tanks which was pretty confined and breathing in all sorts of fumes. I did suffer a fair bit from heat rash which I was treated for from time to time.

04:00 Probably the most horrendous thing that occurred to us as a ship was when we had to run out of Sasebo Harbour and we were involved in a typhoon where the wind was a hundred and three miles an hour over the flight deck. Usually a ship, when you've got horrendous weather, you steer

04:30 into the storm not away from it because you can be flipped. If you can imagine we had our flight deck was sixty feet off the water line under normal sailing conditions, we had waves breaking over the flight deck and you have a fore and aft house which used to bring the planes up. Both planes, sea furies and subsequently fire flies, had folding wings. Some we carried

05:00 on top of deck lashed down by wire housing. I think we lost four or five planes washed overboard and jumbo cranes that used to do ammunition, bomb work on deck. We wound up with three or four inches of water going from side to side in that inside hanger with subsequent tools rolling around. We were in it for ten hours and

05:30 you couldn't walk, couldn't cook, meals were off. I think the authorities thought we were gone, thought we were lost. They didn't know where we were at that stage. That was the most terrifying experience and with the subsequent bombings and all that sort of thing.

How did you deal with the fear over that ten hours?

As best you could.

What were you doing?

You were trying to do your job,

06:00 whatever it might be at the time. You'd have to walk along holding on to rails. I'll show you a picture of the Sydney afterwards where the outside deck hatches, the waves of course, you'd battened all those down, everything was battened down so you were really in a huge, big sardine tin as far as that outside. The ship

06:30 would go down in the trough of these waves and shudder to come back up out of it. The sea can be, it looks beautiful on a lovely sunny day but the sea can be unbelievable in its ferocity, particularly when you're in typhoons.

How much warning did you get of the typhoon?

I'm not sure. We had to run out of Sasebo Harbour. I might add that we weren't in the centre of it either, we

07:00 were on the fringe so we were probably trying to scout it along with the other Americans ships. I don't think there were too many other naval ships apart from United Kingdom or British. Mainly the naval force was American, Australian and British. I know this, that we held the record as an aircraft carrier for

07:30 the most number of sorties in a day, that's take offs and landings, and that was eighty nine. So we had a pretty full-on day that day. When it came to clearing a flight deck or preparing for the days activities or flying and so forth, it wasn't just the air crew or the aircraft fellas that'd do it, it was we ratings and so forth. All hands on the task

08:00 of swabbing and squeegee'ing off the flight deck to prepare it for the safety as much as possible of the planes. You had Bofors guns on either side, fore and aft, either side of the flight deck.

Going back to the typhoon, what you said, you were pretty much just trying to do your job, what was your job and how did the seas?

I can't remember exactly what task I was assigned at that time. It used

08:30 to vary. Maybe you'd be down in the laundry at once. I know going there, I was on laundry duties. I recall this, I used to press about sixty five shirts an hour on a steam press. That was down right next to a, down in a cubby hole with a steam laundry gear. You can imagine we had to do the laundry, the laundry had to be done for all those officers and men

09:00 and I know the hatch down to it was just a rung ladder and next door to us was an ammunitions bay, I know that. I did various tasks.

Was there a certain amount of panic when the typhoon hit?

Sure was.

Can you describe some of it?

Well, trying to secure things. They were double wire houses in other words

09:30 they had wing and body clips to anchor the aircraft because they used to stack them side by side facing in to the centre of the deck. You can imagine the force that would rip some of those stays would have been ripped out for the planes to go over the side and cranes.

What could you hear?

10:00 Not a lot, the waves and the wind but don't forget here again, we were battened down inside. You couldn't be up on the flight deck. No one would survive. There was the bridge people presumably on the bridge but in the engineering branch you're in the bowels of the ship, if you're an AB, able seaman you would have been up closer to some of the action.

10:30 So here in most of those experiences the terror of it all was that you didn't know what was happening. You didn't know whether you were going to get bombed, you didn't know.

Can you remember some of the stuff that other blokes were saying to you?

Not a lot. Really it was just general fear and trepidation of what lay ahead.

11:00 We didn't know what our position was. We wouldn't have been far off, probably the east coast, I think we operated mostly off the east coast. In other words the Pusan area with planes. We wouldn't have been too far to conserve fuel and so forth for the planes, we wouldn't have been that far off shore to allow them to fly in and strafe positions and bombard

11:30 railway bridges or whatever might be. So I didn't ever land in Korea itself. We were basically at sea in the dark. Even in daylight you'd have the weather'd close in and there was a period where it was mostly winter time for that '51, '52 period because summer time in the northern hemisphere is around May.

12:00 Blossom time in Japan is around May as I recall. Full summer is about June.

The day after the typhoon, can you describe a little bit of the aftermath?

I don't think it was just one day after, it was a case of two or three days getting out of the, you know but it's getting pretty vague these days to describe a lot of

12:30 detail. Also during those different periods of activity off the coast we would have had refueling and victualling trips mainly to two places. There's Sasebo, Sasebo as I understand it was the main dispatch point for the troops of all navies, and I recall

13:00 when I went ashore once or twice. I'll give you that experience later. They had a big sign up, "Through these gates best god damn troops in the world," having in mind there were hundreds of thousands of American troops, there were less thousands of British troops and Canadian and then

13:30 I think we were probably about the fourth number represented as far as troops. I think all the troops went on the troop ships from Sasebo as a dispatch point to Korea because I know subsequently 3RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] was initially formed in '50 in Kure where there was an army base. That British Commonwealth Forces, Korea

14:00 was the domicile army base and we had HMAS Commonwealth there which ran the port of Kure which is in the inland sea on the island of Honshu. You've got four islands of Japan, at the top is Hokkaido, then Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu which was the bottom most island where Sasebo was. I think they

14:30 and Kure was only about fifty miles from Hiroshima, which I did subsequently see in the '55, '56 term I spent in Japan. 77 squadron was the air force base at Eagle Gurney. They were also I don't know what air craft they were flying but they were involved also with our

15:00 planes from the Sydney.

You said there were about twelve hundred crew on the Sydney, can you tell us a bit about the atmosphere of the crew, what the men were like?

Well we all had our different sections. There was the air crew. There was the engineering branch and the ABs, able seamen and we all had our different deck. Within our space which probably from memory wouldn't have been

15:30 much bigger than this combined dining room/kitchen area then there was another separate little room between the outside bulkhead and the inner bulkhead. There was a hundred and fifty of us. Then down below we had like a locker deck where we were all allocated a locker room where our clothes were stowed. Because in the navy you had to be,

16:00 these days I think they've all got beds and bunks and things but we used to criss cross on bars above with the hammocks and they were a palliasse in your hammock plus your blanket. I don't recall too much sheeting. Wasn't five star comfort. You used to, you had a

16:30 spread board at your head to spread your ropes to create the bed for you and then they sat side by side. You'd stow those of a morning. You'd take your bed, put in between your palliasse and do about seven whips of your sling ropes and they were stowed in the corner. So you had to, the main thing about a ship is utilising every piece of space. The other thing is

17:00 when it came to the leather or plastic or whatever it was lounges you'd have people, it was a four on four off deal so sometimes you'd be sleeping on those and you'd alternate with a mate or save a bunk for him coming off when you were going on. So that's the way it worked. Mainly you were together but you were separated

17:30 by your departments. Then the length and breadth of the ship you had these varying duties. You might be down on the boilers, you might be in the engine room. Later on you might have been watch keeping on the evaporators that turned the salt water in to fresh or the main steam operated generators for the electricity.

Which of those jobs did you enjoy the most?

They were all tasks you had to get your certificate.

18:00 As you progressed in rank you had to do a certain amount of time, usually about two months I think on the evaporators and the generators, I've got those certificates and to progress up the ladder of promotion you had to be proficient in those tasks. And you had to do a certain amount of watch keeping on the boilers.

18:30 You had to put a number of hours in. Then you were tested and you were designated proficient. You've got a worksheet that was kept by the engineering department. I know at one time I worked as an engineer's writer. Lieutenant Commander Reid was his name on the Sydney at one time and I was his writer. That was a desk jockey job to keep these records.

19:00 **What did you first think of the Sydney?**

Sydney was the first aircraft carrier that Australia ever had. We had a straight flight deck. I understand both the aircraft carriers HMAS Sydney and [HMAS] Melbourne subsequently they were first laid down or planned in 1938 and they were commissioned or named [HMS] Terror and [HMS] Terrible in the British navy.

19:30 Somewhere along the line Australia agreed to take them over or buy them under some plan. A crew

were sent to be trained on those to England at the time. I think Sydney came out about 1948, ’49. They subsequently held back Melbourne and put an angled flight deck on it so it came maybe ’51, ’52, I’m not sure, maybe even later.

20:00 Sydney seemed a pretty nice ship. You had some space to move around at least. We could play some sports, volleyball and that sort of thing in the hangars. You’d lower the deck. You were able to get some exercise and different things. To and from Korea, well, really probably some of the cancers I’ve got

20:30 today, going through tropics. You didn’t realise the sun was burning because of the wafting breeze of the ship traveling, you didn’t realise you were getting wind burn and all that sort of thing. Another thing I recall, when we came back from Korea in ’52 we went to as part of that process of atomic warfare we went through Montebello and stood off

21:00 Montebello while they set off the atomic bomb there in 1952 and all we had was little cardboard, coloured glasses and we were all standing up on the flight deck watching this horrendous explosion. I think the things took place in Woomera and there were that many people that were exposed and subsequently have died from cancer and the

21:30 exposure to those unknown which they were largely or if they were known they were still exposed unnecessarily and subsequently paid the price as a lot of people did with asbestos.

Going back to the early days of the Sydney, can you give us a little tour of the ship? When you’d go on board, what would you see, just a basic outline?

22:00 Well you’d go up a gangplank to one of the outer, there was boarding points. Then you would subsequently walk along and go down to your deck spaces. You couldn’t move around about two thirds of the ship on these outside gangways but basically you were down below. You lived below.

22:30 There were some portholes off our deck on those outer sections of the bulkheads the outer section you had a small porthole was up high which you’d open for fresh air or whatever in good weather or calm conditions. The main thing I remember there was, we were, the lower deck was a dry deck.

23:00 The officers’ mess had alcohol to a degree, but the rest of the ship was dry in the Australian navy. We didn’t have a rum tot like the New Zealand navy did and so did the British navy had the old rum tot sort of thing tradition that was carried on there but we never did. Although some of the time passing through the tropics

23:30 later on we were issued with a bottle of beer or something. A tempting thirst quencher.

Explain the rum tot a little bit more?

I might explain that section to you because I had first hand experience of that. If you’d like to go back to

24:00 the end of our, if we go back to the end of our term, that first ’51, ’52 we come to February ’52 and the ship was sailing back to Australia. I’d gone ashore apparently, Ray tells me to get cigarettes. American cigarettes were about a dollar a carton. I got into a beer hall and subsequently

24:30 met a young lass that sang Ave Maria beautifully and that was my father’s favourite thing. Anyway I wound up at her place in the hills and waved the ship goodbye as it was coming back to Australia. Obviously I was intoxicated and enjoying the company of this young girl and I suppose I was eighteen, she would have been

25:00 all of sixteen or seventeen I suppose. Through the haze of my drinking I found her pretty attractive so we had this liaison. Then subsequently I could hear the MPs [military police] running all round the place looking for this Geoffrey Kerrison. The only one to miss the ship going back to Australia. Actually next morning ,when I sobered up

25:30 I naturally went back in to and gave myself up to the MPs or someone. I can’t recall now, I do recall they put me in what they called the American monkey house, the American jail where you shined up a few pots and pans. Anyway at the time we were really under the British navy I think.

26:00 We were junior to the British navy as far as command was concerned and there was a ship, a cruiser called HMS Ladybird. I subsequently had to front that skipper within a couple of days and he said, “Well if we put you on a train to Kure up on Honshu will you do the right thing and stay there.” I said,

26:30 “Of course,” because all I wanted to do was get back and rejoin the ship because of a couple of things. For every hour that you were AWOL [AWL – Absent Without Leave] you could lose a day’s pay. So they put me on the train which went on the inland sea up to Kure and I joined the New Zealand frigate Hawea

27:00 and they had a rum tot. Well that was the worst thing for me as a budding drinker because some of the guys didn’t hold their drink or didn’t bother with the rum tot so that’s where I had my first experience of the rum tot which I think was probably Jamaican keg rum which is a pretty nice rum as rum goes,

27:30 not that it was a big favourite. And the king died. Whilst I was on the Hawea, King George VI died and we were traveling from Kure to Hong Kong where I rejoined the Sydney. The most significant thing

other than the rum tot there was the fact that the king died.

28:00 **How did the people respond to that?**

Here again I don't think they realised how bad the king was, but naturally I think he was King George VI was chief of the navy well, things were at half mast. As far as details are concerned, we observed those sort of things

28:30 but other than that I just recalled just then we had a couple of burials at sea off the Sydney too. Just slipped a canvas into the sea. I just recalled that, I don't know how they died now but I now recall a couple of burials at sea. The

29:00 other thing with that tour of Korea and Japan where we used to revictual as I said and had this shore leave was that we were paid in Australian pounds and the equivalent exchange rate then was eight hundred and nine yen to the pound. You had to go to the pay office to change it.

29:30 On my deck, I became a money changer, I used to sit down and take all the guys' money, list up how much, go to the pay office and change it while they were getting ready to run ashore I'd go down to the pay office and get the different denomination of money, come back and pay them out at eight hundred yen to the pound so I kept nine yen as my trading com [commission].

30:00 I'd walk off two or three hours later, a couple of hours later with three or four thousand yen which was equivalent to about six English pounds. Later on, as we went in and out of Hong Kong I also, the Chinese merchants used to come on board and sell you fabric or make you suits and they'd do things in twenty four hours. We also had what we called

30:30 a 'jenny side' party. A sampanner came along side and they had forty four gallon drums or drums and they would actually scrape off our plates in the mess hall into these drums, take them ashore to boil them up to feed the Chinese, that's jenny side party. The other thing is we had, I befriended a Chinese tailor called

31:00 Chang Ki. I became his representative on the ship. I advised the boys on quality of cloth. I also collected money each pay day from them while we were at sea. This tailor I met, Chang Ki where I became his representative on board and collected deposits and time payments if you like

31:30 for the purchase of suits, jackets or whatever. He was a very nice man and I subsequently, on my second trip, came back with a beautiful wardrobe that he, I had a full length cashmere overcoat and a shark skin tuxedo. I had suits made. I had a magnificent long hair camel haired coat that I

32:00 wound up having for about seventeen years. Funnily enough at the end of, the last time I saw him which was in '54 coming home from the second tour of Korea he wanted me commercially to bring in part made up suits to Australia, this is how far ahead of his time he was. Of course I didn't have any commercial experience but it was interesting, in reflection,

32:30 I've thought about that since and I've thought, what's happening these days, here we are forty years later they're the manufacturing section of the world. He was a nice gentleman, we had a great rapport.

How did you meet him exactly?

Just by coming on board, talking to him. I was always looking for commercial opportunities if you like.

33:00 I suppose this, you know that sort of need to find my way or find a niche and I think it was a natural sales and marketing experience developing. From doing the bread run, my rapport with the housewives and that sort of thing, to selling papers to the men in the hotels to money changing to

33:30 representing the tailor. He was my first experience in fashion. I always had a leaning towards quality of cloth, quality of fashions. In the old days in the movies, if you look at old movies have a look at the magnificent suits and clothing they had in those days. The artisans that were around,

34:00 the tailors and the seamstresses and so forth, they're just not about today. I had once, later on I'll tell you, later on in fashion there was a group here in Brisbane, the Maloufs, they're still the big family in Brisbane, they have night and day chemists and all that. Later on I was their rep in Sydney and they were a bridal manufacturer in the valley. Their

34:30 label was Marsha May. They were magnificent. They did bridal wear and mother of the bride. They didn't deliver ninety nine per cent, they delivered one hundred per cent of every garment that was ordered. Because it was so important being in bridal wear and not letting people down. They never accepted an order they couldn't fill. When you measure that against say other sections of the rag trade

35:00 some may deliver seventy five per cent of what was ordered because if they didn't get enough quantity, they were never made or they couldn't order the cloth. It's just a contrast, something that I recall.

How did the men on the ship respond to you doing business?

No trouble. Selling is the psychology of people. It doesn't matter what the article

35:30 or product is, you sum up a need. That's the training over the years, I can sum up people, both men and women, pretty quickly these days. By asking a few probing questions you can pick up fairly quickly on the direction that they're…

36:00 **How would the deals take place, can you tell us a bit about how you'd deal with those other men on ship?**

Well the guys, you might be in discussion and so forth and they'd bring books on board and say you could have this style or that style so I would basically advise them on the style or type. I could even tell then the quality of the different cloths, fabrics. In those days

36:30 Hong Kong was the marketing place for the east so you had fabric houses like Scott Wilson, the English worsted houses and so forth, they all did business in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a marketing base for the Orient.

So would you take the men aside or would they approach you?

37:00 You'd do it all on the deck or you'd ask a guy if he wanted a suit or maybe he was trying to make up his mind. A lot of people can't make up their minds whether something suits them, the colour suits them, they're indecisive so all you're actually doing is guiding them to a path of choice, it's simple.

How did you communicate

37:30 **with, what was his name, the trader?**

Chang, Chang Ki.

Chang?

He spoke very good English. Something I recall there, we had a thirteen course lunch. He took a group of us which was pretty swish, whizz bang for

38:00 common sailors on board ship to go in this Chinese restaurant with all these courses which were small portions brought to you. It was a pretty good deal.

What was the restaurant like?

Typically Chinese. All the honky tonk around the place, lanterns and things like that. I think the other thing that I recall as far as Hong Kong and Japan is concerned

38:30 is the pachinko parlours, they're everywhere. A bit like the mad poker machines we've got everywhere in Australia these days. That's the main thing I recall.

What was a pachinko parlour like?

Little boxes or on the street, just off the street. They fitted in as many as they could because they were more customers. You ever been to Hong Kong? You've only got to get on the trains,

39:00 there's millions of people going about Kowloon or Hong Kong itself. I was last there in '98.

What was it like back then, how different was it?

Well here again we didn't have a lot of shore leave as such in Hong Kong. I recall at that time I think it was the '54 trip I was motorboat driver for Captain Holden,

39:30 I think he was. Our first skipper on Sydney was Harrington. I remember V.A.T. Smith, VAT Smith they used to call him as a commander. The captain of Melbourne that was eventually vilified in his handling of the horrendous collision,

40:00 Robinson, he was a top skipper and a top commander. I was under him at one time. He was on board HMAS Sydney, probably subsequent to him being appointed a skipper of HMAS Melbourne. Interestingly enough it's my view that that collision should never have occurred because the escort destroyer

40:30 never, ever crosses the front path of an aircraft carrier. An escort destroyer was always about five hundred yards astern of us. If we turned, they turned. So the error would have had to be with the Voyager skipper in that collision. That's just based on, they were doing night manoeuvres and so forth but

41:00 I think the second thing is, it was well known throughout the navy that Drunken Duncan was Drunken Duncan. He had a real problem, he was an alcoholic as well. Probably as bad as I got towards the end. It was a tragedy. I do believe that those people that were involved and the families

41:30 should have been compensated years ago. To drag it on was unfair to everyone I think.

Tape 4

00:32 **So what story were you about to talk about?**

What I was about to speak of, there was the thread. What I'd like to talk about to a certain extent was the thread following on from that Voyager disaster is the thread of the consequences of alcohol on service life in all wars. The guys drowning their thoughts and

01:00 experiences and fears and losses of mates and subsequent demise on alcohol and or drugs.

When did it first start to affect you in the navy?

I think because of that propensity, I said in the first place to those first two things that is the inheritable gene of emotional instability. All

01:30 people suffer from a certain amount of emotional instability and they're not all alcoholics or druggies. The other thing is, that other component is that manifestation of inferiority complex in relation to the one-one relationships that you have in your life either with one person or a number of people.

02:00 I think through my story I want to express to you the thread of the results or experiences of alcohol on my life with that early training in the navy, the war experience, the binge drinking training if you like. Where you go and get as much in to you in a two or three day period

02:30 and then you go and get dry, that's a perfect training ground for you to become a binge drinker. There's two main instances of drink. There was the one waving the ship goodbye which is a pretty silly thing to be doing.

Just finishing on that story, what was the consequence in the end when you got back to the Sydney?

I didn't tell you in the end did I? I wound up, I lost thirty five days

03:00 pay, I think, from memory. It might have been twenty five days pay. It was only for the period of my not giving myself up again to the MPs so I think they penalised me that and stoppage of leave, which was taken up in the trip back to Australia anyway. I want to relate another instance to you when I came back from the second trip in '54.

03:30 We'd landed in Fremantle and we went to they had a dance or something on for us. They usually whenever we visited major cities they had entertainment of some voluntary organisation. I recall going to the RSL [Returned and Services League] in either Perth or Fremantle, I'm not sure now, I think it was Perth and there was a dance hall close by. I thought I'll just go and have a steady drink.

04:00 Anyway I had a steady drink all right, and I got to the dance floor at about eleven o'clock and I ran into one of my deck friends, a fellow. I've always remembered this, his name was Stuart Ramage, he was a Scotsman, you couldn't get a more scotch name, he couldn't find his hat and he had this girl to take home. I said, "Don't worry about it Stuart, I'll go and find your hat, you take mine",

04:30 you know, generous Geoff. Off he went and I think in going from the RSL to this dance hall I had the bottle of fine wine again, Tintarra or whatever the brand was then. So subsequently I couldn't find his hat and I wandered back on board with my Burberry, which is your overcoat, flapping in the breeze, no hat and this bottle of fine wine in my pocket. So as I

05:00 came up the gang plank the officer of the watch said, "Do up your coat", found the bottle of wine, smuggling. For lower ranks to bring alcohol on board was a smuggling charge which was a capital offence. So he made me do up my coat. So I was subsequently charged with smuggling and returning on board improperly dressed, I forget what else.

05:30 I don't think I abused the officer of the watch or anything like that. Anyway I went up fronting the skipper and I think it was Captain Robinson, I'm not sure. I think he might have been skipper at that time. Anyway he gave me two choices, I could have

06:00 seven days forward, which is in the brig picking hemp which would have meant at that time that I'd lost my good conduct which meant a higher pay or I could have sixty days stoppage of leave. So I took the sixty days stoppage of leave. So after nine months away in that '53, '54 trip I sat at Garden Island for another two months without

06:30 going ashore. I know a lot of the time I actually manned the telephone exchange and subsequently met over the telephone one of the telephonists that knitted me a jumper in cable stitch, came on board. I must have had a fairly persuasive manner or whatever. To pass the night hours or

07:00 whatever else you'd have conversations where you wouldn't get many calls but you still had to man the exchange which was on board, you'd chat to these girls at the GPO [General Post Office].

Did that mean there was nine months where you were dry?

No, you would have had shore leave. There was two months when I was dry. Not only that, two months sitting at Woolloomooloo there with the flashing lights of Sydney.

07:30 I missed my good mate's wedding because of that. That's Ray Morris's wedding. He recalled to me later on. Ray wound up doing twenty two years in the navy and became a chief stoker and a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioner].

When do you think the drinking started to really kick in,

08:00 **you said it was an atmosphere in the navy where they trained you in some ways?**

Well the training was these periods of total sobriety and these periods of shore leave where your prime objective when you went ashore was to attend, you know, 'Johnnies' as they used to call it was the naval house in Grosvenor Street had what they called the Bear Pit. It was like a

08:30 drinking pit really. You could also have bunks in naval house there. When you had shore leave you could take a bed or book in for a bed there. That was like a cheaper launching pad for you to go out in the wider world of Sydney city so to speak. You had

09:00 girls that'd dance on the bar for two shillings down at Woolloomooloo in those days. All sorts of little tricks.

Were they stripping?

Yeah, I think one or two of them. I don't know how far, whether they took all their gear off. It wasn't as free and easy as, but then again, what's stripping anyway in the final analysis these days but it was a different world in those days.

09:30 So there were bounds of propriety to a certain extent.

Did you hear of other guys going to the prostitutes?

Oh yeah, there were some. The idea, those days there was hotels like the Tattler which was, you'd go into the lounge bar and there were girls whether they were, whatever they were, would sort of

10:00 prop themselves there to be bought drinks for their companion. That's how you'd meet girls in those days. There were a couple of other hotels and so forth. Whether they were, whether you knew whether they were prostitutes or not. I do recall one occasion where I went to a nightclub in, I'll think of the name of it in a minute, in either York or

10:30 Clarence Street and I took a girl there from one of the hotels and I know I wound up in Clarence Street jail. That was on shore leave. I wound up in Clarence Street jail because my wallet was stolen and I couldn't pay the bill. My money was gone. The woman I'd taken there had actually stolen my wallet, gone

11:00 to the ladies toilet and hid it up in the cistern. Subsequently that wallet was found and wound up at my mother's home, sent back to me and they said it'd been there but on the particular night I was booked for not paying and probably was intoxicated as well, I was. She's done a tealeaf [thief] job on me and I've wound up in Clarence clink

11:30 which is not there anymore. Anyway, and then the naval people who come round, they used to do the rounds of the jails for any naval personnel. The other thing I used to always do, I very rarely, if ever went ashore in naval gear. I'd either take clothes ashore and change at the nearest hotel because I didn't want to be labeled a sailor.

12:00 **Why, what went along with the label?**

You were slotted, you were box slotted. In other words you were a target. You were a target for gays, good looking young sailor, particularly around Woolloomooloo or Kings Cross, the sailors were targeted.

Did you have any gays trying to hit on you?

Oh yeah.

12:30 I knew one or two, one particular guy became a friend that used to have a liaison. I didn't ever have a liaison with any but I let them know that there was no interest. Most of them respected that. A lot of them were business types or own proprietors. One of them was a prominent radio

13:00 personality which I won't mention because of family and friends and so forth. He was molested. I was a pretty good friend of this guy, he was married but he was molested as about a twelve year old boy, sodomised. He subsequently became

13:30 more or less addicted to picking up blokes for that activity.

That must have been pretty surprising for you coming from a strict church upbringing. Did this stuff?

Well you sort of, you heard stories and fellows would tell stories. Another thing that didn't impress me too much during my naval years on

14:00 that mess deck was a lot of the guys for whatever reason used swear words as an expression or adjective all the time in their conversation. Like it was so and so this and that. Their conversations were hardly ever and I think that's why I separated myself to a certain extent because I was never impressed with that sort of expressive language, let's put it that way.

14:30 I think roughly, of that crew we had about, I think roughly twelve gays as I call them, they were called worse, they were called other names in those days which I don't, I'm very tolerant of people, gay people, I worked with a lot in the rag trade, both men and a lot of them very talented people.

What were some of the

15:00 **horrible names that other men were using?**

Poofter, queer, that sort of thing. I think poofter's the one I've always, queer's not a nice descriptive word. I believe to the most part gay people are born with an imbalance, we've all got a balance of male and female hormones and here again like alcoholism, depending on your balance.

15:30 Mind you, I also believe that some of them develop bad habits. We all kick off life, when I say we all, ninety nine point nine per cent of people kick off life masturbating whether you're male or female and then you grow into, girls tend to have female companions early on in their teenage years as guys do and then there's the interaction between

16:00 male and female, heterosexual and so forth and you either outgrow that masturbation stage which is all normal anyway and you go into other relationships and develop those other sexual relationships. Another thing is I think that our sexuality is the driving force in our lives, it gets us doing things.

Speaking about masturbation

16:30 **could you hear other men around you masturbating when you were in such a closed environment, because there's a thousand men in a ship together?**

Hear them? No, I suppose not. I wasn't around checking blokes off. I suppose you'd do it in the confines. I can recall actually masturbating say in the confines of the diesel room on watch,

17:00 a strange malady would overcome you so to speak. The pressures'd get too much. That's the sort of thing. The funny thing is, I was about to say to you, we probably had about seven, no about twelve, I think, that were known gays on board HMAS Sydney and some of the descriptions of some would be they were called phantom dingers. In other words

17:30 there was fellows that'd experienced a hand that would go up over their hammock fondling them or whatever. They were called phantom dingers. There was always a lot of humour involved. In big cities the world over, in ports with thousands of servicemen on shore leave

18:00 or in hotels drinking and so forth naturally that's an atmosphere where, that the liaisons can be formed. You'd go along in life and outgrow that sort of thing. I always fancied the girls.

Did the gay men get persecuted by the other sailors?

Not too much, I

18:30 don't think. Generally speaking I believe if you say to a gay person that you have no interest that you appreciate their friendship that they won't hit on you as you expressed before.

19:00 The same thing with girls. Early on in my life I had more sisters than, I hated that, you're the best friend and you fancy them no end.

Did you have any experiences with prostitutes in the many countries that you visited?

No, not as such. As a matter of fact I can tell you,

19:30 I don't know why, I never had a liaison with a Chinese girl in Hong Kong. I was pretty circumspect in my selection. I did have liaisons but not so much, in Japan in Kure for the visiting ships and so forth they had brothels and so forth you'd visit but if you visited there

20:00 you had to be pretty careful of venereal diseases. Mostly gonorrhoea. That would have been the prevailing. There was streptomycin and drugs like that at the time and they would have been containing, syphilis was not so much of a problem I don't think any more. There were problems with shankers.

20:30 You know what a shanker is? Shanker is actually a description of a hole in the foreskin of a male. I've always believed that the male penis for cleanliness purposes anyway if there's going to be any, particularly in the services that you were less vulnerable with a circumcised male penis

21:00 than a non-circumcised because of the sensitivity of the area or the cover. If anyone wasn't too clean in

their washing themselves either with dirt and grime but the other thing is as you, as a woman, would know, there's a

21:30 toughness when areas of your genitals are exposed as opposed to a protected area.

So how would you get the shankers?

From an infection then if it wasn't treated, some guys were foolish enough not to get treatment straight away. I've seen them develop in to

22:00 basically a hole. About the only other thing I did suffer in six and a half years in the navy I did suffer and have it treated, non-specific uritheritis, NSU as it's called. Do you know what that is? It's a strain.

22:30 In other words it's a continual drip from your penis caused by drinking and too much sex in a session. I can recall the night and who with and so forth. I was treated in St Peter and Paul's clinic of urology in London which they used a dry up powder, it's actually I think to do with the sphincter valve of your…

23:00 **Was that in Australia?**

No, England. That was at the coronation.

Does it happen straight away after the sex?

Yeah, well I think we had sex six times or something and I was full of ink, overnight, so it was a pretty good start.

Painful?

Can't remember now. The sex or? Don't recall it as being painful.

23:30 It might have seemed better than it was because of the drink that was inside me. Another thing actually at the time, at the coronation time that was we used to go up to London. I met a girl. I had a flat. Some of the coronation contingent went under tents in Kensington Gardens, not Geoffrey, I had a flat with this bird,

24:00 young lady.

Accommodation sorted.

Yes. When the ship arrived in England for the coronation in '53 we left, the coronation contingent of New Zealand and Australia and that was army navy and air force, they all traveled by ship. We went via Fremantle. It was a great trip actually.

24:30 We went to Colombo in Ceylon, Sri Lanka was then Ceylon. We went to Port Said, through the Panama Canal to Tobruk. We held a service there. Then on to Malta, Gibraltar. That was an experience, Malta. Then when we arrived at Portsmouth the coronation contingent went on to Pirbright in Surrey which is a

25:00 barracks near Aldershot which is south west I think of London, about twenty five miles up, not far from Windsor castle. We trained there. We had free passes up to London each night. I remember seeing such shows as, I saw the Seven Year Itch. I was fairly in to music and I had a

25:30 appreciation of music and so forth and theatre in those days. I always loved the ballet. I went to the premiere of a thing that was called Brown On Resolutions whilst I was in London. Princess Margaret attended. I thought she was a real doll. We were presented with our coronation medal on the lawns of Buckingham Palace the day after the coronation by the queen and royal family

26:00 which was all the coronation contingents of the British Commonwealth were lined up on the lawn. The lawn's quite huge at the back of Buckingham Palace there.

How were you chosen as the coronation contingent?

Well I was on board Sydney. In actual fact they called for volunteers. The first thing you don't do in the

26:30 army, navy or air force was volunteer for anything. Geoffrey thought to himself, "Hang on, this could be a good experience." So I put my name down. So I was subsequently chosen from the engineering, I was stoker mechanic then, that was my level I think.

27:00 You go recruit stoker, stoker, stoker mechanic and there was LME, leading mechanic (engineering) which was the highest that I went to. I was selected along with fifty four others and seconded from that time of selection I was then seconded from the ship's company to the coronation contingent for the total of

27:30 that trip and as I said we went via the Suez Canal and then after the coronation we had the spithead review where the queen reviewed all the ships of the commonwealth and nations and we went to Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada down to Baltimore and funnily enough Ethel living in Baltimore, my wife now was in Baltimore, that's where she grew up and

28:00 there was a big naval base in Baltimore. Then we went down to Colón, to Panama, to Jamaica, Kingston Jamaica through the Panama Canal to Honolulu and we were entertained. I will always remember we were entertained there by the Ulunui ladies swimming club which was right next door to the Royal Hawaiian

28:30 so it was a pretty swish beach and club. These ladies entertained we young bucks. It was just a kindness. Then we came down to New Zealand, we had a reception. The New Zealand contingent disembarked. We had a reception in the town hall and marched through the streets of Auckland, and as I recall the town hall was

29:00 at the junction of two streets and the official reception was held. Then we came back to Sydney and I think we had a parade through Sydney somehow, yes we did. I think I've got a picture of that somewhere too.

What was the service in Tobruk for?

The fall, pretty significant part of

29:30 history of the Second World War. There's war graves there. Very moving and very solemn as all our ceremonies are for our past and fallen comrades.

What did they do at the service?

I held the band. That's where John Clease was part of that band. We held a service

30:00 and played appropriate hymn music and of course the ceremonies were carried out which in detail is a bit vague to me these days. Straight through to Malta, Gibraltar, the castanets and swirling skirts and so forth were pretty spectacular. Straight Street in Malta was a,

30:30 tea girls giving you drinks and all that sort of thing.

How long were you there for?

A day, a night or overnight. You'd take on victualling or some sort or refueling.

Did you get homesick when you were doing all this travel?

Sometimes yeah. Yes, you do.

31:00 It was new. Certain trips. I've got a little thing I sent my mother and a card and I said to her, it'll cost her two shillings or something to send me a letter. There was those sort of things. I remember getting her some mikimoto pearls at one stage. That yellow

31:30 vase that I'll show you after and explain. I don't know what it's worth, they're pretty expensive. It's over fifty years old. It's a beautiful piece of work. Let me say this, as far as cloissone is concerned, the Japanese government give them out as gifts because I know subsequently I'm a member of the Australian Jockey Club, I've seen in the board room there,

32:00 cloissone vases and so forth that were given as trophies and as presents from the Japan Racing Association. It's sentimental value to me. Some of them are a lot more sombre in colour than this one. Its detail, gold work and leaf work and the

32:30 subsequent glazing, I think there's twelve processes. The inside of it is copper.

How often did you get home in those years?

To Lithgow?

Yeah.

Not too often. I did have brief leave I think before we went to Korea but I didn't get home that often.

33:00 I spent most of those first four years mostly at sea. It was only later on when I left Sydney in '54 I went to HMAS Penguin which was at Balmoral and spent ten months there. That's when I was on the harbour with picking up the commodore, medical commodore from Rose Bay and generally

33:30 carrying out whatever duties were needed by boat on the harbour. That was pretty nice too. Flitting around Sydney harbour is not a nice job, so to speak. From there I actually flew to Japan on a Qantas consolation. It was a three hop. We went from Sydney to Darwin to Manila to

34:00 Osaka.

Was it hard to adjust to land when you've been at sea for so long?

Not too bad. On a big ship you see, unless you're on really rough sea, you're not, no. Perhaps some of the smaller ships but most of my naval years were on the HMAS Sydney. I only actually experienced that corvette and the

34:30 Tobruk and the New Zealand frigate Hawea which was smaller than the Tobruk. So I only had experience on four ships in actual fact in that time. I don't think we had. We didn't have a cruiser you see,

35:00 the main flagship was HMAS Sydney and considered the main flagship. I think it probably was. There was a move from cruisers. HMAS Australia I think was pensioned off late in the forties. I don't know whether Canberra was sunk or what but HMAS Sydney the aircraft carrier was the third HMAS Sydney. There was one earlier, I think

35:30 it was the third. Second or third anyway.

What did you know of what you would be doing when you got to Korea?

Not a lot. I knew the pilots, the planes were strafing. As far as any other armoury, we only had anti-aircraft armoury on board HMAS Sydney. Plus Tobruk had what they had which was fairly minimal anyway.

36:00 Mainly anti-aircraft stuff.

And did the anti-aircraft stuff get used much while you were there?

No I don't think so. Only in practice because we were never attacked. As I said it wasn't a naval war per se where you were opposing another navy or in threat from other ships it was more,

36:30 I didn't know what the navies were.

It's kind of interesting that it wasn't a target because it was doing significant amount of sorties.

Put it this way. If we were a target, I didn't know about it. I wasn't aware because everything is secretive and unless there was a need to know, you didn't need to know. That's how

37:00 armies, navies and air forces work. Unless you're in the, so to speak. A bit like anywhere these days whether you be on a committee or in a company the executive is the driving force and you're the troops. You are allocated your various tasks and you fulfill those to the best of your ability and that's that. When you go up the chain of command you're

37:30 not taken into anyone's confidence.

Did you see any other ships sink?

No.

What was your biggest concern heading off to Korea?

The not knowing and that horrendous typhoon. The loss of pilots. The danger that the aircraft and the air crew

38:00 experienced, because they were in danger too. They always had to wear fire fighting equipment and capes. I did spend a small amount of time up on that flight deck. I know I hurt my knee at one stage jumping down from the flight deck or getting off the flight deck in a particular, because you know if a plane, you're inside, the air crews, support crews

38:30 are on the side catchment off the flight deck when the planes are coming in. So you know, if a plane doesn't pick up or you've got stuff flicking off if he couldn't discharge all his bombs in some stage or whatever, there'd be a. We didn't have any major explosions

39:00 that I can remember in relation to that but it's always pretty dicey landing. They had to pick up on an arrestor wire or they'd hit one of those three barriers and wreck the plane too, certainly a propeller and engine cowlings and so forth, or their wings. I'll show you some photos that I've taken at the time. They were personal shots.

39:30 **What were those photos of, because it might be good to hear some of those descriptions?**

Photos of planes on board. Planes mangled on the barrier in various stages of crash positions. I've got photos of us cleaning off the flight deck prior to take off. To demonstrate the snow on the plane propellers I've got a photo of HMAS Sydney scrawled

40:00 in the snow or ice on a propeller. You only have to look at the surrounds of the photograph to see how much the weather's closed in. Like I said, even in the day time in that heavy at sea weather of that winter of '51, '52. That's why we all grew beards, or a lot of us. In the navy you had to request permission to grow a beard.

40:30 and you had to request permission to cut it off of the skipper. Because in standing orders you had to shave daily. There was strict, you couldn't go round with the stubble. So if you were growing a beard you had to have permission and if you were taking it off you had to have permission.

Was there a strict code of how to keep the beard?

Yes.

41:00 You couldn't grow real long hair or anything like that because you'd get it caught in machinery or different things. Strict codes right throughout the navy. In fact that early naval training always remains with you. The other thing that remains with you, never forget your number. 38979 was my official number. As far as the soldiers

41:30 were concerned they had a dog tag with that on it. I don't know what, the only dog tag I have is this medical brief that says I suffer ischemic heart disease and got a defibrillator and a few numbers to contact doctors and things.

Tape 5

00:33 **Geoff I just want to talk to you a little bit more about the HMAS Sydney and what the conditions were like on the aircraft carrier and what was happening on a daily basis in terms of the sorties. Can you describe to us what was going on on a typical day?**

It depends where you were traveling.

While you were in Korea actually.

We were all preparing for whatever was the agenda

01:00 for the day. You know, whether the planes were, whether they could fly, whether they had visibility, here again not being privy to all the decisions being made and just being part of a little cog, we all did the jobs that were assigned to us at that particular time whether they be in the engine room, whether they be on the auxiliary machinery, whether they were in

01:30 the cooking galley, whatever you have to do. There's all sorts of cleaning tasks which you don't have a bunch of cleaners. Everyone is assigned to do different tasks and you all had, were assigned these tasks depending on what you were training, in which section of the ship. As far as the engineering branch, which I was in, we tended to the boiler rooms, the engine

02:00 and all the associated auxiliary equipment.

So just so I can get an idea of what was going on, I mean this is a big ship, it must have been.

Not huge, not like they are today.

No? But you had for somebody who's never experienced that sort of thing, an aircraft carrier has to be big enough for, these planes, what sort of planes were involved?

Sea furies and fireflies. Sea furies were as I said, a fold in, they were a single pilot

02:30 job and the fireflies had an observer and a pilot and, as I recall, carried bombs. The sea furies were more or less, I think they were manned with rockets as well.

Do you know what kind of bombs the other planes carried?

No. Here again, you had an armoury department that looked after that section. I've got

03:00 a couple of pamphlets in there that have got different things.

That's all right. I'm sort of really interested in what you were doing and where you were. While you were in Korea and say you were working in the engine room, can you describe what you did there and what was it like, can you describe it for us if you can?

You'd have your chief stoker and he might have a petty officer, or a petty officer might be up on the engine deck.

03:30 You've actually got, we had two boilers in the boiler room which is down more or less deeper than the engines. The engine room section which controlled the speed of the ship and the turbines because, as I said I think to you before, the Sydney was a turbine driven ship as opposed to a reciprocal engine as used to be the case and

04:00 it had two propellers and they were, either depending whether you were turning or whatever they could be reversed. One might be going forward and the other reversing depending where you were manoeuvering. So what the boilers' function was to create the superheated steam that drove the turbine engines and you had offshoots of steam also feeding the evaporators

04:30 which were turning, these were all situated adjacent to the boiler, up a long ladder were the turbo generators or the generators for the ship's power. Basically that's what you had the double boilers, two

boiler rooms, you had the engine room for driving the ship and auxiliary machinery down there was evaporators

05:00 and generators for electricity.

What were conditions like down there?

Hot, steamy. Let's put it this way, there was no air conditioning. It was pretty hot stuff.

What about in the laundry, you worked in the laundry?

That was hot as hell. Very hot.

Can you describe what it was like to be working there?

05:30 **You said you ironed something.**

Ever seen a commercial laundry? Well it was basically a commercial laundry within a confined space of the ship. So the clothes were actually washed in tumble washing machines. They were tumble dried to a certain extent and you had steam presses just like they do in a dry cleaners shop pressing the gear. Most of the gear as I remember would have been cotton

06:00 and you'd do starching. And you had officers' collared shirts. You did all sorts. We had our square necks.

When you say it was hot, how uncomfortable was it?

Mostly it'd be up thirty nine degrees, could have been hotter. I'm trying to recall. It was very hot. If you were over a steam press doing a shirt about every, what did

06:30 I say before, thirty five shirts an hour, that might have been a bit ... I think I used to do a shirt every three minutes or something. I probably exaggerated a bit there before, I got off track. It would depend on the complicity of the shirt. When I talked about sixty five, they would have been square neck, bang down with the press twice or something. The magazine bay

07:00 was right next door to there so when that alarm went off you didn't muck around, you got out of that laundry pretty fast. You had action stations at varying times and that sort of thing and things were secured for varying reasons or checked out.

Tell us about the alarm going off and what would happen.

You'd boot it for your life or you'd carry on

07:30 depending on what the circumstances exactly were, what you could determine what the circumstances. You were in the hands of the philistines. If you were in that section of the ship you didn't know what was happening down somewhere else. I can tell you this, there's not too much functioning when we were in that typhoon. That was all hands on deck to secure all the equipment because we had a sixty five degree roll.

08:00 That means sixty five through the arc. Seventy five degrees you're over and you don't come up again.

So that was a really close call.

I told you, if you go back through the records of the powers that be, they lost contact with us, they thought we'd gone down. They thought we'd sunk.

08:30 If you can picture the, I suppose it's like a modern day ship, the old sailing ships rounding the horn with sails tearing and masts breaking and all that sort of thing. If you can imagine what actually, the inside hangars were pretty large, they housed quite a few planes, if

09:00 you can imagine three or four inches of salt water running back and forth across there. In other words the four inches across there becomes whatever over here as the ship rolls. Then there would have been spanners and tool kits and so forth and all this stuff banging from side to side. Don't forget you're probably going. I can tell you this, when we went down into the troughs of these waves they were smashing over the flight deck so they were higher than the ship.

09:30 So you didn't know whether you were going to come up or not. The ship would shudder. Some of the dips were bigger than others. You could go down, down and down and think, "Oh Christ," then suddenly she'd, it's amazing how, and the other thing is that a ship at sea has to be controlled

10:00 with ballast you see. There's two ways you control ballast on a ship the size of the Sydney and it's the disposition of the oil and disposition of water plus whatever freight or cargo in the form of ammunition and spares and all that sort of thing. Basically speaking it's like a small town operating in the confines of the, I'm not

10:30 sure what the overall dimensions of the ship were. I think we were about ninety metres wide but I'm not sure.

How many men would have been on board the Sydney during that typhoon?

Full complement of about four hundred and fifty or sixty.

Can you possibly, if you can recall, tell me what you were doing, going and where you were and what you did

11:00 **during that time, you personally when things actually began.**

In the typhoon?

In the typhoon, yeah, from the beginning.

I can't recall details. I can remember getting from forward, going aft. In other words I was running around, allocated a section to secure but as far as details during that ten

11:30 hours. We didn't sleep and we didn't eat; you couldn't, so the main task we were doing was maintaining the safety of our ship and therefore ourselves. If you can imagine all hell breaking loose up top with planes dropping over the side or getting washed over the side and this water coming down in to the hangars. I think I was in the hangars at one stage so. But gee,

12:00 it's over fifty years now. It is over fifty years, fifty two.

When you look back on that ten hours though, what's your over riding impression of how you were feeling and what you were thinking?

Shit scared, in a nutshell. Horrendous really. I should imagine,

12:30 a dangerous sea can engulf you totally. I suppose you'd liken that experience to a horrendous battle on land where you don't know what's over the next hill or how some of the soldiers... When I think of, when I start comparing our experiences, or my experience,

13:00 to what some of those soldiers went through in the conditions they had to operate in, that ice and cold and so forth, they were much more deprived I think than we were. Both from that aspect I'm sure those army guys always did a lot tougher than what we did. It's a bit like

13:30 how do you measure what you don't know's going to happen? Say you're flying a plane as a pilot, you don't know whether bullets are going to come out of there or bullets going to come out of there. In other words, you're not thinking about that all the time, what you're actually concentrating on is doing the job that's allocated to you because you're all a team. This is where the camaraderie comes through

14:00 with servicemen is that you're trying to look after your mates, you're looking after one another. That's where individual acts of heroism in particular with army and air force guys, I suppose naval guys too in action in the Second World War I don't think for a moment that

14:30 we went through as tough as they did in the Second World War in the navy. I was never in the drink with oil lapping round me or fires and things. It's all sort of relevant to a certain extent because basically I didn't have a teenage.

15:00 I went from seven years of Depression to five years with the Second World War to three or four years of the cold war, communism. The United Nations, it was the first time in Korea where the United Nations charter which I believe was formed in '46 where those different countries and there were twenty two of them altogether, fought together

15:30 to uphold the charter of the United Nations and I feel proud to be part of that and I was part of it because I signed for the navy to represent queen and country or king and country at the time and so that was it. In other words the Korean experience and as I said, even in '71 now I would

16:00 have been one of the youngest participants in the Korean War.

Talking about camaraderie, can you describe that camaraderie on board the HMAS Sydney?

Yes. That was sort of general camaraderie because you didn't bludge on someone else in that respect. I think the camaraderie

16:30 with the army guys where there was more back up needed or where you had to be pulled out wounded or that sort of thing was a lot more participating than say the camaraderie. But servicemen create a mateship between one another. We all respect each other's tasks and because someone didn't have to do as much or weren't exposed

17:00 as much to as many dangers as others didn't make them less a contributor. That's the way I feel anyway because if I'd have been called upon to do more or do more dangerous things no doubt I would have carried out those tasks as they were assigned me as all the other people did and some that lost their lives or were critically injured or tragically injured did.

17:30 **You have photographs of some of the planes that crashed, can you tell us about any of those incidents in terms of what you observed of these planes that actually crashed?**

You get away pretty quickly I tell you because you don't know where it's going to wind up. If they've

flipped forward nose toward the deck they can actually flip over a barrier as well.

18:00 If they were more level as they came in and missed an arrestor wire and I think there was seven arrestor wires which were stretched across the deck and they had a hook so the plane, the pilot would drop his tail and pick up one of these and if he missed that well he'd hit the first barrier. If he missed, if the first barrier didn't get him maybe the second one would or he might hit the first at a bad angle or he skewed it across the deck going for the side

18:30 where you were, you'd be ducking for cover because don't forget there's fuel involved and all that sort of thing too.

So what caused those accidents?

Weather, the conditions. I suppose to a certain extent misjudgment of the pilot. The signals, the batman, as the pilot would come in he'd take up his position above the ship at a certain deck then the

19:00 batman, he had the batman guiding him in, bringing him down and of course you've go the, they've got to judge it. Actually they drop the plane on the deck as the ship's going down. If you actually dropped on the deck as the ship's going, it'd be bang like that and that might bounce the plane,

19:30 you don't pick up the arrestor wire, next thing you're flipped or skewed to the side. You've only got two wheels and the joy stick's not directing the wheels, the slide is. It's not like driving a car, you're heading for a post, you steer away from it. I think, I've never been a pilot, but watching them from time to time

20:00 and then all those pilots had to be debriefed. They were only young blokes too, probably only a couple, two or three years older than I, in most cases.

You lost some pilots off the Sydney, in what circumstances did they?

I can't remember. I can't recall exactly. I know we had to pick them up out of the drink. I know one pilot went over the side and the ship went over the top of him. We got him,

20:30 he bobbed up. I think he did in his ear drums and things like that. That's where the escort destroyer would come in. I'm not sure. See you've got to be careful if you go over the side and the ship goes over the top of you, you've got the twirling propellers behind. With speed and water and weather you're not necessarily, you haven't got a pair of fins and a guiding light.

21:00 Generally I think that was, I'm not sure exactly how many pilots we lost, you'd need to look up the records.

Did you observe any fatalities?

No. I observed that pilot, the ship going over the top of him, yes.

But he survived?

Yes, to my knowledge. I forget his name now but I know he had burst ear drums.

21:30 The planes were catapulted off the ship by the way.

What do you mean by that?

Well they were hooked up on the front, port side and they had a ninety foot or ninety metre catapult. So they were more or less slung shot off the ship. That's how planes took off. Nowadays they've got

22:00 angled flight decks where they have, so jet shields looking at some of them taking off and they sort of zoom off and they've got these whip up flight decks that sort of send them up. You always take off or land in to a breeze as you know so if your planes are landing you've actually got, you turn it into the breeze so that's coming over the flight deck and that helps them

22:30 keep the planes up or down. You come in to the breeze to slow your speed or you take off in to the breeze to make your plane rise quicker.

When planes were lost what was the mood on board?

Planes were lost mainly in that typhoon. When I say lost planes I mean lost from combat, meant they hit the arrestor wires or were chewed up. I'll show you some of the chew ups

23:00 or you might have seen them. I can show you some small photos of different accidents that happened on board.

Were there any planes lost in combat in Korea off the Sydney?

I'm not sure.

So not that you're aware of?

I think there was one or two pilots must have crashed. I'm actually vague on that one because here again I was only a young raw, I was

23:30 less than a year in the navy, well I was exactly a year when we arrived in Korea. I was eighteen and a half. I didn't know what was going on, really.

What did you understand if anything of what those pilots were actually doing in Korea?

I knew we did strafing of rail heads and communications and tunnels I think were their main task because they, as I said,

24:00 I think they carried rockets. I'm not sure actually of the armament because that wasn't my division.

At that time did you have an understanding of what was actually going on in Korea, what the war was involving?

Yes. The Russian built MiG fighters were engaged against the air force and our planes. But exactly where those battles were over

24:30 Korea and what they were doing. Our task on Sydney was actually, because they weren't fast enough for aerial combat as such. These were doing the damage either behind the enemy lines or protect the land forces or cut off supply of the opposing army.

So did you have a clear picture of what was actually happening on land in Korea?

No.

Not at all?

25:00 No. I knew it was very cold.

How did those cold conditions effect, if at all, the operations on board the Sydney?

The weather was a very restricting impact as far as our operational things because our operational efforts were our planes. That was our task was our planes' operation. That was our function.

25:30 Other than that we didn't engage in the bombarding. We didn't have the armament for that sort of thing. Our armament was the planes. So that was away from the ship so basically that wasn't witnessed but as I said to you earlier those rockets through the night were involved amongst those naval bombardments that were taking place but we as such didn't have rocket ships.

26:00 Other sections of the navy like the [HMAS] Condamine and [HMAS] Arunta and a few of the others, they were up rivers and so forth and were actually engaged in firepower off their ships but they weren't flying any planes.

Were you close enough to actually hear any of those bombardments?

Yes.

What could you hear from there?

The incessant action of guns

26:30 and you know.

What was that like, can you describe it for us?

Incessant. It was through the night and day from time to time. All that sort of explosions and that sort of thing, you wind up with crook ear drums, tinnitus, ringing in your ears, all sorts of things.

27:00 A lot of guys, my son in law that's married, he's got hearing problems and I've got hearing problems from the din caused by the activities of the bombardments and the general war noise.

How did it affect your mood to hear all that noise?

Here again was

27:30 the unknown. You didn't know whether you were going to get hit, how far you were at sea. I'm sorry if I'm vague there, I just don't know because as I said –

While you were hearing this incessant bombing and stuff, what were you thinking?

Well the main fear or trepidation that you felt was really the unknown, the

28:00 nervousness of not knowing, being kept in the dark. You were always in the dark if you haven't got information or you don't know what you're doing. It doesn't matter what your situation is.

Did you express your fear to other people around you?

Yes. From time to time.

What would you and your mates actually discuss? How did you express that?

28:30 Most as I recall in a sort of blasphemous way. With the machinations of war or combat, you're probably unaware of it to a certain extent because carrying out your duties or tasks that are assigned to you and

29:00 and you're not scared to take a step forward all the time or like that but it's just the, well war is a terrible thing, why we have to fight wars, the damage that it's caused to people, people's relationships, people's personalities. A lot of people react in different ways.

29:30 I believe these days, I know one counsellor guy that I went to because I'm a hundred per cent disability pension for various illnesses attributed to my service, one officer that I said there's people working in the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] office in Brisbane that get trauma leave

30:00 off a desk. I don't know whether they were subject to war experiences or not but I think he was talking about someone pushing a pen. So what degree of what? What about RSI [repetitive strain injury]? If you get RSI off a typewriter, how do you measure

30:30 how trauma affects your life? It's only in retrospect that a lot of these things you come back to. I know even now if something's bothering me I won't sleep too well. I have dreams at times of past experiences and so forth.

War experiences?

Some.

What sort of dreams?

Mainly those

31:00 attached to the, that was pretty horrendous, that cyclone experience. As I said, we were nearly lost, they thought we were lost.

When all that bombing and all those guns were going off and so forth, how did you sleep through that.

You were that tired usually, but don't forget,

31:30 when you're four on and four off, you're sleeping during the day or at odd hours so you sleep when you can.

It didn't disturb your sleep?

It's not like you get in to bed like we do here and have seven or eight hours nice long sleep, or nine, you slept as and when you could and depending on the circumstances.

And no difficulty sleeping because of the noise?

Can't remember any,

32:00 not really. You didn't sleep in heavy seas and all that. Well, the hammocks swung.

So I'm just curious to know how did the navy guys relate to the pilots, did you have a relationship with them?

No, not so much, no. We didn't in the engineering department because we were separated. I suppose the fleet air arm guys would have because they'd be their back up crew for their main

32:30 task of flying or piloting. So they would have had certain relationships but I'm not aware of those.

So who was your commander, your senior officer if you like?

I think Commander Reid was primarily my engineering officer. He had a commander rank or lieutenant commander I think.

And what sort of relationship did you have with him?

I had a good relationship with him

33:00 because I was his writer. In other words I worked alongside him in the office, in his office. That was sort of later on. After a while I was assigned to that task.

What did that involve?

Keeping records of different things.

So what sort of relationship if you like, during the Korean War, during the actual war time while you were on the Sydney, was the friendships that were formed in any way

33:30 **different from other times when you weren't at war?**

No, I don't think so. You were all comrades whether it was, you know as I explained I don't think they were as strongly formed as the one on one and or groups where the army relied on one another more in

an actual combat zone. We formed our relationships as you do

34:00 in life with similar interests if you like. Some of the guys were married, a lot of them were married and some weren't. Some you didn't have any rapport with as such.

What sort of news did you have from home while you were on board the Sydney?

Not much. Used to get our letters and mail when you went

34:30 ashore I don't know I think they probably, I can't remember if they were flying in mail too much, mainly you'd pick up mail when you came near a port to revettal and resupply.

So how significant would you say the Sydney's role was in the Korean War?

Well I think as far as the participation of the navy was concerned

35:00 I think it was very significant in that it was a much bigger ship than the other ones, but as I said most of the action was carried out by the pilots or the fleet air arm section of HMAS Sydney but I think as far as the Australian participation in the Korean War naval wise it was quite significant. For starters we held the biggest number of sorties in a day

35:30 or the record for a number of sorties in a day which is a pretty good achievement, eighty nine take offs and landings.

Do you remember that day?

Yes. That was announced. I think we set out to achieve that. I think the fleet air arm actually and probably the weather was good enough to achieve that result.

What do you remember about that day, what was going on?

Nothing too much.

36:00 I can't even remember what I was doing. Your jobs were varied and as to specific times, I can't pinpoint them now.

That's fine, I just wondered if you were aware of all these take offs and landings, that's what I was getting at.

Oh, I was on that particular day, yeah.

Can you tell us what it was like, the activity on board?

Hell of a lot of activity

36:30 and of course they weren't just flying off and coming back and landing, they were flying off and doing all their strafing and attack work or whatever their assigned job was with those aircraft, coming back, landing and refueling. I'm not sure the number of aircraft we carried but it was probably a turnover of two to three landings each plane but I'm not sure.

37:00 Some statistics might be around that had recorded that.

It must have been a pretty interesting atmosphere. What was the atmosphere like that day?

Probably cold as it was every day. You know I believe when you hit the water in the middle of winter that you only had about eighteen seconds of exposure. We're talking about freezing water.

37:30 **I guess I was really getting at the mood among the, on board the ship that day with all the activity that was going on.**

I can't sort of recall as far as individual mood or periods, the most significant really is that day and other days, the general days when they were flying, that was our task so it was all hands to.

38:00 **I guess I was just trying to really get a picture of how a ship, an aircraft carrier would manage to get so many planes coming and going all day. How busy was it?**

Flat chat. It would have been very busy. It was a great achievement for the pilots, all the hands that drove the ship or steered the ship so to speak so it was a combination of teamwork to achieve that record of all on board and

38:30 of course we as steaming engineers would have had to do our part or make our contribution by way of the speed of the ship, the variation of the engines and the boilers, everything, in other words all the functions that need to go in to doing a successful exercise like that or a combination of tasks like that would have

39:00 involved at least half the ship's company some of the time or most of the time.

What was the reputation of the Sydney after breaking that record?

I think it was pretty, it was a significant achievement anyway, I think that's the way it was held. Exactly

what, some of our

39:30 awards are, we've got a star or something else there for, or a bar, I'm not sure specifically what. It was awarded for the contribution we made to that section of the war.

After Korea do you remember actually leaving? When the Sydney left Korea the first time what the situation was when you left in terms of the actual war?

40:00 The first time? No, it's more clouded by us going in to Sasebo Harbour I suppose. That was prior to the ship leaving for Hong Kong for our return journey home or relieving of Sydney. Perhaps at that stage the functions of Sydney, aircraft and so forth may have been

40:30 exhausted at that point of time so it was an opportunity and maybe the ship needed refitting or maintenance which only can be carried out in a dry dock such as dry dock in Sydney, that's where we returned to.

Tape 6

00:31 **Can you tell us some of the things you did on your leave in Japan?**

Yes. There's a couple of photos around. We went to bars. Usually you might have a few hours off at a time. We didn't have overnight leave as such. There were curfews so you'd go ashore for x number of hours and have a drink in the bars, and remember a particular

01:00 bar, a Chinese gentleman, usually they were, and you had girls in there that would sort of join you and their job was to keep you entertained and keep you buying drinks. They'd join you for drinks or buy tea or whatever. Now I can't recall, they were more or less entertainment girls rather than anything

01:30 else but I can't talk for anybody else. There's a couple of things about Japan even as early as that. Firstly the Japanese girls or people that fraternised with occupation forces were tended to be looked down upon by the other population of Japanese. That's one thing. The other thing is that I found the Japanese to be very clean

02:00 and basically very honest people. They were governed by their religion of Shintoism which is basically that you wouldn't do anything to dishonour your ancestor. That's basically the thing. Later on when I joined HMAS Commonwealth in the period '55, '56 I had a lot more to do with, but we only had brief visits

02:30 during the Korean War. We weren't in port for one or two weeks or any of that sort of stuff. We sort of went and revictualled or had shore breaks. You had established brothels and things like that as such that you could go to. Apart from that there was only just the

03:00 entertainment of the bars and so forth.

What was the bar like inside?

Just a bit like a normal bar that you have around here where you have bench seating either side and a table. They'd play music.

The drink of choice in there?

Must be beer. There's the Asahi beer from memory. Japanese beer was Asahi. Tiger beer was in, I wasn't a beer drinker as such, I more

03:30 drank spirits, not necessarily then but later on anyway. I would just have gone ashore with mates and that sort of thing.

Who were your best mates on the ship?

Just one or two of the guys. I didn't have any best mates as such. Brian Esler, the one I mentioned before. There were a couple of guys

04:00 that I probably fraternised with a bit more than others but as I said to you I was more a loner, not that I went off alone, just might be with a couple of the guys one minute and then you move on or go about whatever you wanted to go about doing.

Was there a bigger group that hung around each other on the ship?

Not that I was aware of. The main thing there was they had these tricycles

04:30 which were motorbikes with a four seater little cabin thing, pretty dicey cabin thing. These were like kamikaze riders these blokes. I remember you'd get in to one of these little tri things and say, "Ima dozo hyaku ne," which means "Go, straight away as fast as you can." You'd be hurtling down, I mean unmade roads.

05:00 Another thing there at that time it wasn't unusual to see women, elderly too, carrying a bar with a basket and carrying rocks remaking roads and so forth. That's when I first saw Japanese toys made where they were utilising the, turning say a Budweiser aluminium can inside

05:30 out and using that to construct these little mechanical toys.

Where did you see that?

You could buy them. They were pretty clever, the Japanese with those sort of things. Later on when I went to basically live there for a year after about two months there I met one of the girls in Charlie's bar.

06:00 I went up, we had a house together, I could go off on shore and for the twelve months I was there I basically lived, when I say house it was only a small tatami mat, you bathed, we had a copper where you actually pannikined the water over you, soaped off and then you got into the copper with a fire underneath it which

06:30 you could control the water by adding cold to it or so it wasn't as if you were being cooked up in a pot but that's how you bathed. Kayiko. Kayiko was about twelve when Hiroshima, she was on the outskirts of Hiroshima. She was a very nice girl and I was very taken with her. She was very attractive.

07:00 At the time I was a bit distraught having to leave her but what was prevailing at the time in Australia, if I'd have brought back a Japanese bride, my family would have ostracised me and the assimilation wouldn't have been good either. I don't know how history's gone with, a couple of guys, another guy married a Japanese girl and lived in Victoria or Melbourne. I don't know subsequently

07:30 how it all turned out. I was only twenty three anyway, going on twenty four. When I left Japan rather suddenly Kay was left behind. I don't know what transpired afterwards. I've often wondered. Anyway, I lost contact with her afterwards.

How did you meet her?

In this bar, by talking with her.

08:00 She spoke English pretty good. I haven't even got a photo of her these days. She was a significant female in my life.

Why do you say that for a shortish relationship?

Well circumstances cut it off in actual fact. Because of the closeness of our relationships.

08:30 I was probably in love with her, in love for the first time in my life as in a commitment to her. In that period of my life I injured my leg and spent time in hospital when I was there too. At that time I was, the base at HMAS Commonwealth we ran the port of Kure,

09:00 in the engineering branch I controlled the diesel barge for the refueling of ships. I was in charge of the transport. That's jeeps and the mechanical workshop and the fire chief. At the same time I also, here's where my, I ran the ratings bar. So I went on trips to replace

09:30 cigarette purchases and grog purchases. Interestingly a bottle of scotch in those days, Johnny Walker was a dollar fifty, Gordons gin was a dollar twenty five and you could get Jamaican keg rum for fifty cents.

A litre?

Yeah, whatever it was, twenty six ounces or a litre bottle. That was the cost factor. You could,

10:00 in the brothel areas you could purchase an all night in, in other words a complete night with a female for a thousand yen or the equivalent of twenty five cents. When we were there '51, '52 earlier cakes of soap and chocolates were pretty, those sort of commodities were in pretty short supply

10:30 but at HMAS Commonwealth we had squash courts. We had our outings aquaplaning on the inland sea. In that area they had an island called Mihara I think where they used to hold the ceremonies for the kamikaze pilots I think at one stage prior to their thing.

11:00 In that '55, '56 period I got interested more in music. I used to go to concerts in the school of art sort of thing because Japanese love music and so forth and they were developing very good musical, gramophones and that sort of thing. I actually brought back a nice big bass

11:30 speaker and player to Australia from there. The coffee shops played nice, there was a coffee shop particularly that played nice classical music. So good music, whether it be ballet or whatever.

What was the sentiment towards the occupation forces like at that point?

As I said, basically the Japanese population in general

12:00 didn't fraternise with you. They looked down upon the ones that did. The people that were traders in the

town either had a trading reputation with you and or something closer if that was the case. Don't forget, as I understand it, from the end of the Second World War, British forces had a ten year occupation and the American forces had a twenty year

12:30 occupation. Basically that '55, '56 period that I was there was the last year of that occupation. What went on after I left…

You said you visited Hiroshima?

Yes.

What was that like?

Flattened, absolute devastation. The only thing standing was a couple,

13:00 mind you at that time in Japan when I was talking about having a little house, it was a bamboo frame with two inch thick adobe red mud walls mixed with straw. They were baked hard to constitute the walls and they weren't huge places. Probably the little house I had which was about five pounds a month, the equivalent, twenty five shillings, a thousand yen

13:30 a week, was not much bigger than my kitchen and that pantry there. You slept on a tatami matt on the floor. You had a little kitchen and this little bath and probably a bit more space and that was it. That's what constituted a little... The other thing they had there, they had communal baths.

14:00 They also had massage parlours and that sort of thing. Actually at that period in my life, I've always enjoyed a full body massage, and I became very enamoured with that because a blind man used to do me, he had very sensitive hands.

14:30 That's where I was first introduced to massage.

How did the job with the bar affect you?

It was during the day mostly which, I remember once I fell asleep in there at one stage and ran into some trouble with one of the officers, but here

15:00 again there were times as far as the drink is concerned, I was more or less, that was fairly contained during that period. I had other interests and other, at the end of the day I went home to Kay or I might have been off playing tennis. I used to play tennis and squash. I may have been off participating in some sport.

15:30 That was like a small community of American, English and Australian forces and there was interaction through sport and that sort of thing. It was like an occupation force community activity. Then I came back to Australia in June '56.

Did Kay talk much about the experience she had as a little girl?

16:00 Not much. She told me about being on the outskirts of Hiroshima when it went off which sort of saved her but the injuries from, I've seen photos of the burn injuries and so forth. She was saved by being about twelve miles away in a school building apparently. We didn't discuss that a lot. She just told me that much.

16:30 If she was twelve at the end of the war, we were about the same age.

Did she see anything of it?

Oh yeah, she saw the aftermath of the explosion.

Did she lose family?

I'm not sure. She had an aunt that she related to in Kure, I remember that but I didn't ever meet her mother.

17:00 She had an aunt. Whether she was a real aunt or whether she was calling her that or had that sort of relationship.

Was it difficult for you to communicate?

No, not with her. We had Japanese girls used to come on the base and they'd do cleaning and do our washing and ironing and they had a little English

17:30 but that was a job for them and they were pleasant.

But Kay could speak English?

Yes. She could speak English from being in the bars.

And culturally as a couple in that era of unrest around the world, how did you connect culturally?

With her? Well I'd come home at the end of the day and she'd either be working, sometimes she'd work

18:00 later and I might join her and just hang about for a while while she finished work or I might do other things and meet her later on back at the house. I had the use of a little jeep, being the transport bloke. That was a left hand drive.

I mean being an Aussie coming from a completely different lifestyle, did you both have big cultural differences?

18:30 I suppose so but we didn't participate in a lot of the cultural things. Our relationship was more on a personal basis and we were attracted sexually and the relationship was more like a couple.

19:00 She got pregnant a couple of times. Although I've never had any children of my own I had to lose a child later on in my first marriage.

She got pregnant to you a couple of times?

Yes.

How did you deal with that?

She dealt with it. They'd go to a hospital and they'd curette or deal with it. I didn't know what they did. She went off.

19:30 If you're asking culturally, she didn't worry about contraception or anything like that. If she fell pregnant, which she did, she just went and had, curette or whatever. That was her department.

So did she tell you she was pregnant?

Yeah.

20:00 During the couple of times that happened when she had treatment, naturally we didn't copulate or anything during that time, there was an abatement of that sexual relationship. We had social reaction in that they were allowed on the base too for a dance or a meal and so forth which we had every now and again.

20:30 There was some co-fraternisation. The people on the base including the skipper, they all knew that Kay was my girlfriend and I think she'd had a relationship with a lieutenant prior to me on the base. Pretty certain of that but I didn't go into detail.

Did you want to have children with her?

No.

21:00 **So in some ways it sounds like abortion was much more acceptable in Japan.**

Well I didn't ask, put it this way, that was her way of managing or whatever but as far as discussing that aspect, I didn't. She just went off and made arrangements herself.

21:30 So they must have, that must have been freely done. In actual fact it's probably better that it was handled in a proper. She went off to a hospital or whatever so it was probably handled in a proper medical manner. If that's done, all hygiene and other things are handled properly. It's only when you get

22:00 things like needle tricks and all that sort of thing and sterilised instruments I suppose and things that you run in to strife.

How was the relationship with her different to relationships with other women that you had had up until that time?

There weren't any long term relationships with any women, she was the first. I didn't,

22:30 as I said at the start of the interview, I was never married while I was in the navy and I didn't have a girl waiting behind and I didn't have a girl in every port as is sometimes described for sailors, have a girl in every port, no, that wasn't my style.

Do you think that the relationship was slightly different

23:00 **to what you would have had with a western woman at that time?**

The relationship was, this is what I found, the relationship with Kay was, oriental women are out to please their man, that was their attitude. They do anything to sort of please you. It was a pleasure for them to please you way, that's about the best way to describe it. So that was a new experience

23:30 for me rather than any repartee or play on play that maybe was practiced to a certain extent at that time with western women. The culture of Japan is that the man's the boss. That part of the world the man was the boss and the woman was subjugated to his role.

24:00 It was a very pleasant and important part of my life. I've often wondered over the years what happened

to her. I thought at various times that I would have liked to have gone back to see if I, you know. In other words I look on that relationship as a loving relationship and fondly.

24:30 **You said that the interior of the place you were staying was very simple and small. What did you like about that?**

The intimacy of it. They were rice paper walls. You had small wooden frames, the timber was only about an inch and it was soft wood and light and it was rice paper. So you know, if you were here and you had someone

25:00 next door in the houses you could hear any and all conversation and noises from room to room in a Japanese house like that at that time. The floors were tatami mats, you took your shoes off, you didn't walk on with hard shoes or anything. The walls were rice paper framed timber of a lightweight nature. Not as light as balsa wood.

25:30 So it was more or less just a privacy screen if you like.

And freezing?

No, you had little heating fires. We enjoyed cooking meals together. We kept house like any couple would given the circumstances. I know she had a favourite name for me which was Tomanigihachamaki

26:00 which was tight as an onion. In other words she reckoned I was very careful with a quid. Her description was Tomanigihachamaki. I subsequently to my current wife's amusement when I related the story to her, I called a female horse after Kayiko. Won about five races too. I had a horse

26:30 called Kayiko.

When you left her how did she respond to you leaving?

We didn't have a lot of chance because in actual fact I had an altercation with a lieutenant there. I don't know whether I should relate that story.

People have told us a lot of stories that they weren't sure whether they would relate,

27:00 **you can feel free to talk about it.**

I don't mind talking about it but I don't want to implicate people unnecessarily.

You don't have to use names.

There was an English lieutenant commander there that had one rule for one and another rule for another. There was falsification in some instances

27:30 of transport documents. He charged me with falling asleep or some misdemeanor thing and it got out of hand to a certain extent. I believe that he was being vindictive towards me and so forth. I sought the advice of the army separate to, because if you put a complaint in in the navy you had to go through

28:00 all the people that you're complaining about, even to the skipper. Let's say in the end there was trouble, there were people charged, officers, officers moved, I was shuffled out of the country fairly quickly because there was

28:30 some involvement with selling of items and cigarettes which was illegal.

A black market?

Certain, yeah. Kayiko was friendly with, this all apparently all happened after I was shuffled because she was, through I suppose her contact with the bar, she had

29:00 contact with the police. After I was shuffled she created a, there was an inquiry. People were moved and I think the skipper was even moved.

Was it an awful experience for you?

29:30 No, I suppose I was a bit tongue in cheek. I didn't like the idea of one rule. I think it was vindictive of him. It could have all been avoided and I wasn't the perpetrator and actually Kayiko caused a lot of things. She kicked up a lot of fuss with the

30:00 Japanese authorities that created the trouble. All this other stuff happened after I went. I did hear of some of the aftermath of it and so forth. Anyway, we'll leave it at that because you know it wouldn't be hard to track down who was there and all that sort of thing at that particular time, it's only a small complement of people.

30:30 It's too long ago to worry about now anyway.

What happened after that, was that when you went to the atomic testing?

No, Montebello was back in '52.

We didn't explore that, do you mind telling us a bit about that?

Well at that time they were doing the testing at Maralinga and all those things. The British had some arrangement with the Australian government where all those things and atomic weapons, but Montebello

31:00 was an island off the West Australian coast which was set up to let off atomic explosions, pretty barren and we were one of the, I don't know what part, here again the secrecy involved, I didn't know the details. All I know is we were fifty or sixty mile away but depending which way the wind blew and all that sort of thing and we were standing on the flight deck to witness this ballooning of

31:30 the smoke cloud and so forth. Whether we were affected by fallout, I don't know at this stage. It's too long ago to worry about but I do know in some of those testing situations there was damage done to people subsequently or that suffered cancers and different things.

What did you see, was it an amazing experience for you to see that?

32:00 Yes, it was a mushrooming cloud that went up and spread. It went in the air and spread out, mushroomed and so forth. How still the day was all that, that's a bit vague here again it's 19 something.

Was that on the Sydney?

Yeah, I didn't leave the Sydney except for that sojourn. I didn't leave the Sydney from '51 to '54 except for the sojourn in

32:30 Pirbright in Surrey where I went to train for the coronation.

Why did the Sydney decide to stop there for the atomic testing.

They were sent there, obviously. Sent as part of the test. I don't know whether we carried any material or what. I just don't know because it was secret.

So what happened, you went to the island itself?

33:00 We went to that area, witnessed the atomic explosion. Whether they wanted to use the ship to a certain extent at a particular distance or what reason to get any reactions, I don't know. Couldn't tell you.

At the time it went off, where was everybody?

On the flight deck watching it. We had these little 3D cellophane glasses to look through.

33:30 That was presumably to block our eyes from the blast. Not worth a pinch of salt so to speak.

Did you see the aftermath of it?

No, we didn't move close enough to see the aftermath. Not that I recall anyway.

34:00 The second trip to Korea was after the coronation. I'm not sure of the actual timing of that Montebello explosion we participated in. After my twelve months, a year in Japan

34:30 that completed basically all my, I came back to Australia and I'd accumulated six weeks or two months of leave and then rejoined the Sydney and went to the Olympic games in Melbourne which I watched. Television had just started then. I think channel nine got on the air. I didn't go to the Olympics as such, I was in Melbourne harbour or somewhere then subsequently I transferred in January

35:00 or February '57 to Penguin and was discharged on my twenty fourth birthday. As I said I signed on for five years reserve which you know, you got extra pay from it. I think the total pay out was about two hundred and thirty pounds, that was your long service leave or whatever you like to call it.

35:30 The discharge amount you got for that. Then I went to pretty soon after that I went to and did rehab course in hotel management. In my travels round the world I could see the advent of the big hotels coming to Australia. At that time the biggest hotel in Sydney was the Australia Hotel in Castlereagh Street.

36:00 You had another one, Metropole, Hotel Sydney down but the Australia was the social centre of Sydney in those days, which was nothing like some of the major hotels in America for instance and other parts of the world. When I put in for a northern draft about halfway through my service, the six years, I was thinking of being sent to Manus Island where I could save my money

36:30 because I wanted to go to school, to the hotel management school in Lucerne in Switzerland. The idea was to save my money and go there. That's what I was looking towards at that time as a career future for myself. But of course I got sent to Japan and I blew all my money so the next best thing was East Sydney

37:00 Tech College and Rex Hotels which was then owned by L.J. Hooker. I have a photo of myself there, I think I started in about February or March, Christmas '57, I'm in a chef's outfit and done a complete

display of things. I learnt pretty quickly and I think I came second or third in the class at the tech college.

37:30 So then about the following Easter in ’58 I met my first wife.

Up to that point was it hard for you to adjust to Australian life again and indeed civilian life?

Yes it was but you were feeling your way because I had no commercial experience before but I used to live in, it’s just come back to me, Montpellier Hotel

38:00 in Elizabeth Street, Kings Cross was a little tiny roomed private hotel like they had in Sydney in those times. It was four guineas a week, four pounds, four shillings. I got the job under rehab with Rex Hotels doing cookery. So I subsequently, that private

38:30 hotel eventually became Mother’s Cellar which was a pancake place. I only got ten pounds a week at the Rex and I used to work from ten to two and then five to ten or eleven at night, fall in to bed and then to supplement that income I wound up doing breakfast seven days a week at this private hotel, Montepellier Hotel for two pounds a morning.

39:00 A pound a morning it would have been, not two pounds, that’s too much, would have been a pound a morning. So that’s how I started off in the commercial world here. I didn’t complete that, I did commercial cookery for a year at East Sydney Tech College. I worked under Marcel Clay, a French chef. He was the first chef on Australian television.

39:30 He was subsequently chef of the Carlton Rex Hotel. I used to see him afterwards. After I met my first wife and married her in November ’58 with three children that were eleven, nine and seven at the time, I thought the hotel industry wasn’t so good. She was a fashion buyer at Mark Foist and come down from Newcastle after her marriage

40:00 had broken down. Two girls were at St Gayworths at Waverley that was running at the time and Michael was still back in Newcastle. I rented a house in Yenko Avenue, Bronte and brought the kids home and we kicked off. Joanne fell pregnant about December

40:30 and she had an appointment with a doctor, anyway she had cancer so she couldn’t carry the child. We lost that child. Those three children, whilst I was married to Joanne I couldn’t have any children so I accepted that fact. Those three children, their

41:00 father signed adoption papers which subsequently never ever went through but let him off the hook for maintenance and so forth. So they’re now fifty six, fifty four and fifty two and still around. My son has my name. One of the grandchildren down here in Syke Way. We’ve just been to Melbourne a couple of weeks ago to the wedding

41:30 of my grandson. Joanne unfortunately died of cancer a couple of years ago. She’s passed on.

Tape 7

00:40 **Can you tell us your own personal involvement in the coronation contingent and what it involved for you and how you felt about that?**

I felt very honoured to be chosen with that very distinguished group

01:00 of ex-servicemen. As I said, the leaders or the front row of the officers were George medal winners and highly decorated. They did limpet mine recovery stuff and all that sort of thing. To be chosen amongst that sort of company and to represent the navy at twenty years of age was a real thrill and I’m very proud of achieving that after my

01:30 few altercations early on, of behaviour.

How was it that you actually came to be chosen? I know you volunteered but then after that?

I was chosen and then seconded from the ship’s company as I said of HMAS Sydney to the coronation contingent. What we then did as a group was trained on the flight deck on the way to the coronation in marching manoeuvers. We marched in total

02:00 ninety three miles in training for the coronation contingent. On the day I think our total route was seven miles there and back. We were housed the night before the coronation in Wembley Stadium on palliasses. We lined up in Birdcage Walk which is adjacent to and alongside the horse guard’s parade, where the queen,

02:30 they hold the birthday, changing of the guards thing for the queen’s birthday in June. The pomp and circumstance and the parade itself, the Mall, Admiralty Arch, Buckingham Palace. It was a wonderful experience and I was very proud to take part. Being so young too.

How many people were involved in that contingent?

03:00 Fifty five in the navy I don't know how many army or air force but I was one of fifty five in the navy. I have a photograph here taken of that whole naval contingent in Pirbright in Surrey which if you wish you can have a copy of.

What did it mean for your family back here?

Mum and Dad were very proud. At that stage,

03:30 in contrast to that, I might add that this is just an aside, but in contrast to my mother being so proud at that time and me being selected, there was an occasion later on in 1987 where I was breath tested in Moore Park in Sydney on my way to work one morning,

04:00 George Pattulo was the police minister and they bagged me as the five millionth breath tested person in New South Wales. Well, I made channel two, ten, nine and seven news that night and I still have a record which you can have a copy of about a third or half of the third page of the

04:30 Sydney Morning Herald and my mother was to remark to someone or other, a relation or one of my sisters or brothers in the pert manner, she used to purse her lips "Well, nobody in Lithgow knew Geoffrey was an alcoholic." She went from, at that time I'd been nine years sober, '78 to '87. The headlines were

05:00 "Reformed alcoholic," so that was nine years into my sobriety which was a big sigh of relief. It was big news, I don't think they expected to find an alcy, a reformed alcoholic and bag him. I've also got a plaque that was presented to me and I don't know why, along with a bagging machine and five hundred blowing tubes. I've since

05:30 got rid of those but I still have the plaque from the minister acknowledging my blow in the bag.

So you got breath tested?

Five millionth breath tested person in New South Wales so they're probably up to fifteen or twenty million by now.

But you passed the test that day?

I passed the test with flying colours.

So going back to the coronation

06:00 **and what it meant to your family, was there a bit of a celebration back here in Lithgow?**

I don't know what they did. I made the local paper and that sort of thing and I've still got that clipping here and I've got a clipping of us on our return I think marching past Mitchell Library. A return celebration as far as Sydney was concerned. That was all pretty gun-ho for,

06:30 and Princess Elizabeth as she was then, and Queen Elizabeth now, I think she's been a shining example of a tremendous lady in her lifetime and as queen too.

At that young age, what did it mean to you, the royal family and so forth?

Well I was pretty impressed with it all because as I've

07:00 related to people if they questioned me since I've said, "Look, at the age of twenty I was on the lawns of Buckingham Palace getting a medal from the queen and it's been all downhill since." Tongue in cheek. When you've experienced that height, that's what I'm saying, when you've experienced that high, of being a twenty year old receiving a medal from the queen

07:30 on the lawns of Buckingham Palace, any other experiences start to pale into insignificance. It's a good joke anyway.

How much of a highlight was that of your career in the navy?

That probably was, yeah, the highlight. I was very proud of the fact being chosen to represent the navy and in actual fact I think I did so

08:00 with great aplomb.

Can you tell us a little bit more about what it was like that day in London and what the atmosphere was like?

It was light raining. One thing, we used to have whitener on our hats so if the rain hit that too heavily, drip , drip. So you whitened your hat with

08:30 with the applicator. That was a bit of a worry but it was only light. That was probably our main concern. It was a long day but I was only young. Some of the older returned and injured people at that time would have found it a lot tougher.

Can you describe the mood

09:00 **and the atmosphere in terms of the crowds and so forth that must have been there that day?**

Huge. The coverage was unprecedented. In ’53 they did have television I’m sure in both America and England and Europe. We didn’t have it here in Australia. The coverage was unprecedented as far as the pomp and circumstance. Also following the Second World War

09:30 and the celebration following a queen for the first time since Queen Victoria, only daughter of King George, probably also the celebration of the coronation because of the circumstances back in ’36 when Edward abdicated and King George, the Duke of York became king and subsequently pulled Elizabeth and

10:00 Margaret into the role of being first and second in line to the throne. Subsequently of course because of the lack of communications I think the whole of the empire sort of held the queen and the monarchy in very high regard. Don’t forget most of the Australian

10:30 population at that time was ex-British. I’m a product, I’m a third generation Australian. In actual fact my great grandfather was sent out here in 1872. He got seven years for stealing a piece of canvas in Norfolk. He was sentenced in Norfolk Court. Ethel and I did a search back in ’92.

11:00 I was a lord for a day because there’s a very famous Sir Edward Kerrison was a general in the Battle of Waterloo and there’s been these stories over the years that there’s a lot of money in Chancery. So we went to Oakley Park where they had a couple of estates. His son was also a member of parliament and had a statue in the centre of the little town of Vye. So people we were

11:30 traveling with, they were calling me Lord Geoffrey just for the day. When we got to Norfolk I, we found in the archives in the council chambers, we actually found the newspaper, Ethel did, reporting the sentencing of my great grandfather in 1831, it was 1832

12:00 before he got here. I quickly lost the title see. I still don’t know whether there’s money in Chancery or not and I’m not chasing it anymore anyway.

Just going back to that amazing day at the coronation, do you think you could, if you can, walk through with us what you did that day, how you began the day and what you had to do personally?

The day before I moved out of my co-habitation in the flat with the woman

12:30 instead of going from Kensington Gardens where the rest of the boys were housed under tents we went in to Wembley Stadium and as I said spent the night preparing our gear and that sort of thing and sleeping on, the palliasses were straw. I don’t know whether you know it’s a straw bedding, pretty minimal and it was summer time, we’re talking June.

13:00 So we slept the night there and went back from, got up early that morning, marched to our designated areas of formation, formed up.

What were you wearing, special clothes?

Bell bottom trousers and our standard dress uniform. I’m not sure what number it was

13:30 now but anyway your main dress uniform. I was in the round hat and sailor’s bib and collar, lanyard, full button flap pants and the inverted seven creases. Actually later on in the fashion game I got Ruth to, we made a bell bottom slacks based on the bell bottom pants in the navy

14:00 for women which was quite good.

So you dressed and you went and you marched to?

We formed up in Birdcage Walk which is near Hyde Park. I think we came through the gates and went. I’m not sure of the exact route we took to arrive at that point but I do know we marched seven or eight miles which

14:30 is what we’d been training for anyway.

On that march what was going on around you, what could you see?

People forming up behind the barriers. We had the other ship’s complements and other people, the naval ship complements formed up street lining parties. There were a lot of the other crew members of the Sydney formed up as street lining parties but they didn’t

15:00 get a medal. I think there were some handed out a medal but others, most of them didn’t, just the coronation contingent.

What was the actual medal that you received?

I can show you.

Can you describe it for us, what it was?

Yes, it's a purple ribbon. It has a picture of Queen Elizabeth on the front. I've actually got

15:30 a scroll, a piece of paper in there that I can show you or you can photograph which was given to me with the medal.

And what does that say, more or less what does the scroll say?

I'll show you, I can't remember.

It's okay, although we can look at it later, sometimes if we can explain what things are for the camera

16:00 **that puts it on record.**

That's done on Buckingham Palace letterhead. For years I actually had it framed and I kept the medal in there. After I left the navy I didn't participate a lot in, once I left the service I put that part of my life behind me. I didn't participate a lot in,

16:30 I registered my injured leg and for years I got about ten dollars a fortnight or something, ten per cent, but an old colleague said whatever you do make sure you register early so it's all documented for any claims or worries you may have later on.

What was it like for you as a young man to be, I assume, cheered by the crowd as you

17:00 **marched by?**

Thrilling, you were thrilled. We all threw our chest out and marched. There's a tape of the march somewhere. I haven't got one but John Clease has. It's a bit scratchy.

For you personally?

For me personally, I was really proud and thrilled. To actually be selected and to participate in that very

17:30 significant, because let's face it, it's the only coronation in England's been held for fifty one years. Who knows how long the queen's going to go on before either Charles or William is crowned and a further coronation takes place. It was probably, what, only the first British

18:00 one in the second half of the twentieth century anyway.

How was the actual medal ceremony carried out?

They had a cushion and the medals were on a cushion. They walked through. The queen walked through. She didn't pin it on us individually but she walked through and did what they call the inspection of the and all the royal family, there's balconies out the back

18:30 overlooking. The royal family came down and mingled. The band played and all that.

It must have been a bit mind boggling for a boy from Lithgow?

Young man if you don't mind, I was twenty by then.

You had been a boy.

I was still a boy. I didn't start to mature until I was about forty five.

It must have been pretty impressive.

Yes it was.

19:00 Not only that, you know, when I left home in Lithgow as a seventeen and a half year old to go and take my father's advice and travel the world, to think at age twenty I had circumnavigated and been to all those America, India, Ceylon, you know. Is it any wonder? Crater city I went to before we went through the canal.

19:30 No running water, living in Arab land was very, very basic in that, the stench. A lot of and I think what my father was trying to tell me all those years ago was that you grow up in your own world here in Australia whether it be a country town or whatever and you think

20:00 more or less the world is the same as yours but it's not so. Poverty, the conditions that other people live or non-conditions that they live in. Their rules and their laws aren't the same as yours. Some are much stricter and some are much more lax but they're certainly not. Going to England wasn't that different because it's English speaking.

20:30 America was a little bit different, the roads were bigger and wider, the cars were bigger. I've since been to New York and a lot of other places because I subsequently traveled in the fashion game plus the foaling alarm.

Just talking about London, that day that you marched through, what were people saying?

Just cheering

21:00 and celebrating. They were hanging out of windows and doors and buildings. Have you ever seen some of the crowds?

Yeah, but I wasn't there, you were. I want you to tell me what it was like.

Well the main thing you're concentrating on is doing the performance. You were there as part of the empire to do your bit. So our concentration apart from hearing the cheers and the crowd

21:30 and that sort of thing and the excitement and the bands. I love band music, I love marching bands so that was all pretty impressive. We actually subsequently went to the changing of the guard in horse guards parade. I think I said to you earlier I went and saw a play called the Seven Year Itch.

22:00 I went to Piccadilly and places like that. It was a pretty awesome experience for a young naval mechanic.

How did you end that day, were there celebrations?

Can't remember now, all too much happened that day. I think we were all exhausted. I think

22:30 we had a meal. I'm not sure what time we kicked off, about midday. It was a fairly long day by the time we left Wembley and formed up and the march took place. I'm not sure how long it took but it was a fair hop and a jump. We marched down the Mall through round in front of the palace

23:00 and so forth.

What were your thoughts about the queen when you saw her?

I thought she was very charming and a very attractive young woman. She was at that time. She's about seventy seven, about six years older than I am. I thought she was very charming. I think, I don't

23:30 necessarily hold all the royal family or the circumstances of that, I think history has demonstrated that they're just like any of us really, they've got their problems. They've got their broken marriages, dissention within the family and different things. There's a few of them suffered alcoholism.

24:00 There's a governor general here I understand, I think Gloucester had a problem with alcohol.

Speaking of that, you spoke earlier about the whole if you like the culture.

Menzies loved a scotch, I know that.

How would you describe the culture of drinking in the navy?

Spasmodic. I think in retrospect probably

24:30 you couldn't carry oodles of drink. I think there would have been less confrontation if the whole ship had been dry like the American navy. The American navy is totally dry or was then. English as I said had the rum tot and that was for all and sundry. I suppose the mentality of the British navy and so forth and

25:00 ships was that they were officers and gentlemen and therefore could hold their drink. Subsequent things, there's been occasions where that wasn't upheld viz a viz the Voyager thing.

At what point do you think you come to realise that you had a problem?

25:30 Much later than my navy years. That was the early training as I said. I can't honestly blame and I don't attribute my war service to making me an alcoholic. I'd say there was a contributing factor there, a significant contributing factor but I can't subsequently blame

26:00 my war service.

To what extent did you observe the same problem in other men in the navy?

I wasn't looking, I wasn't analytical at that stage. These days having gone through and hit my rock bottom in '77

26:30 after having struggled through varying alcoholic clinics I look back and think I've lost the track there for a minute.

You were talking about, I asked you about observing other men in the navy with a problem.

Yes, now I've got it. I wasn't that observant then but since in a crowd or in a party

27:00 I can virtually pick anyone that's got a drink problem by the way they drink, the frequency of their drinks. Later on in life I always positioned myself near the bar where I had access to what I wanted, the strength of what I wanted. So in other words I was cunning enough

27:30 to make sure I got what I needed as far as alcohol intake. The other thing, once I did stop drinking,

became a graduate of Langton Clinic, it's in Moore Park Road overlooking Moore Park. I don't know whether it still operates but that's where it was in those days. I think it's still there. I didn't

28:00 have to take alcohol out of my house. I don't look upon other people, my wife loves a drink. I've got whatever you like here. You can have scotch, brandy, gin. Once I finally accepted the fact, that first step of AA and that is that you admit you're powerless over alcohol and your life has become unmanageable. If all alcoholics undertake a program of AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] and it's been

28:30 proven as the most successful. The only way to overcome alcoholism or drugism is total abstinence. If the only thing you ever do in your life is admit and keep to that first step, that is you don't pick up a drink again, you're on your way. What the AA program in those

29:00 twelve steps is actually a training for a new way of thinking and living. You get rid of the agent that got you there. When I talk about alcoholics I mean any mind-changing drugs, cigarettes are still a drug but they're not a mind-changing drug. Unfortunately and I did see earlier on in Japan

29:30 I saw a girl in a massage parlour that was on heroin I found out later and the difference in one year to what she was to what she became was absolutely horrendous. So although, I drank for the effect,

30:00 this goes back to that, I drank to blank certain section of my mind out and so forth. The effect of alcohol did. This bravado, I can remember sitting overlooking the harbour later on just before I finally capitulated and I was in a unit at Neutral Bay that I had with my second wife, Anita I married

30:30 in '83 I was forty one and she was twenty two. Joanne was six years older, my first wife and Anita was twenty two years younger. That only lasted about five years. She got me to the end, I was getting sicker and sicker by then and my quantities,

31:00 I got up to drinking over a bottle of scotch a day at one time and I'd finish at two and start at six. Pretty bad. I've got pictures in there a month before I gave up drinking I rolled a Rover at the bottom of Moombi Mountains at ten thirty on a Sunday morning and I was bagged at point two oh five. I was going on holidays. I kicked off the day with a bottle of champagne

31:30 at six o'clock, went along the road, I was in Kurri Kurri. Some guy, I fell asleep in his van. In those days I used to have a little, I was cleaning out the back there, I had a soft esky I used to carry behind me, I carried champagne and white burgundy, I carried drinks in that propped behind my seat. Here again, so I wouldn't run short. When I woke up that morning

32:00 I had a heart starter, that bottle of champagne. I remember between Muswellbrook and Scone, around Aberdeen I picked up an unfortunate guy that slept on the side of the road, he was trying to get north and he was ensconced beside me. We drove to Murrarundi, there's a Shell service station, I needed fuel and that was about eight o'clock.

32:30 I took him in and bought him breakfast and we had a bottle of white burgundy for breakfast with ham and eggs. These are insane things that you do when you're in the depths. Then I rolled in to Tamworth about two minutes to ten just as the workman's club was opening up and slipped in there and had a couple of double gin and oranges. So is it any wonder,

33:00 I've had a bottle of this, half a bottle of white burgundy plus, I could have killed people. It was just insane behaviour but that's the sort of thing that can happen. Anyway I only got twenty two kilometers up the highway further on, he stayed in the car. I got caught in some loose gravel, I had V8 English Rover which had a roll bar in the roof which saved us, but I put my hand and my arm on the steering wheel and one on

33:30 the dash board as we rolled three times. You could still open the windows of that car and I crawled out. He got a broken nose or a gash over his nose I think because the roof and the windscreen went. The car was a write off. Pretty expensive. You couldn't claim insurance.

So you were really lucky to survive that.

I was lucky to survive that. I had one more experience, basically

34:00 I wound up catching up with an old friend in Armidale where I was heading and she looked after me. I managed to dry out in about three days and I came to Anzac Day, returned to Sydney and it was Anzac Day '78. Then I had one more binge session and tried to book myself back in to McKinnon Ward at Callan Park which was an alcoholics ward.

34:30 That was named after a chap called McKinnon who was the first, he was a male nurse, he wasn't an alcoholic and he used to run a session at the old jail at Darlinghurst and was more or less one of the, helped form AA in Australia here as I understand it just after the Second World War.

35:00 Well, I'd been in there once before so they wouldn't take me. So I went over Neutral Bay and I sat in a bar there deciding whether I'd go down the road to an AA meeting. Probably about six or six thirty at this stage and sipping away at a drink and deciding because before going to McKinnon Ward I was

35:30 drinking pernot on the rocks with a dash of water. I kept the balance of that bottle for years too. I sat and luckily for me I made the decision to go to that meeting which I'd been to before. I met a guy that I used to drink with ten years before who was actually there. When I had my office in Pitt Street he was in the armoured corps club across the road. I told him

36:00 where I was at and he said, "Well, don't do anything. I'll take you home tonight with me." He had a little pad in Senea Avenue Kings Cross or Potts point. He took me home and got me through the night. We went down to Woolworths the next morning along Darlinghurst Road. He said don't go home, he wanted to hang on to me. He said, "I'll ring the hospital in the morning," so we bought some pyjamas and he rang Langton Clinic,

36:30 got me booked in there, here I am twenty six years later, never had a drink since and never wanted to and wondered why I did before, wondered why I wasted so much time. I haven't analysed that too much.

Although you were obviously very young while you were back in the navy,

37:00 **looking back now in hind sight did you have a problem then do you think?**

In the navy? Oh, sure. I had a problem from the start. I had a problem when I was having to have a drink to go and ask the girls to dance. It's just that my naval career helped me along the track with abstinence periods and then the binge drinking in between. It was a training ground.

37:30 Here again part of the drinking in the services was to blank out certain sections of your experiences and that sort of thing. You didn't know what was going to happen in the future, so you know, when you're in uncertain circumstances like that you tend to celebrate when you can and say, "Okay

38:00 whatever happens, happens." And with a group of people you tend to, I've got photos of us, I've got a before photo celebrating Ray Morris's twenty first and an after photo where we're all fallen asleep, weren't posed for. That sort of thing. I suppose you may have done it yourself.

38:30 **What things were you trying to blank out with alcohol?**

I don't know now. What I do know these days my greatest enjoyment is knowing what I do all the time, being totally in charge of my own destiny and have been for those circumstances

39:00 that govern. There's a lot of things, there's times in your life when you have to be game enough. The AA prayer which you probably know is, 'God, grant us the serenity to accept the things you cannot change, the courage to change the things you can and the trick is the wisdom to know the difference'. So

39:30 in life there's times where you can accept the status quo where you can't change the circumstances but there's other times when you've either got to be aggressive enough to make the changes, you've got to be aggressive, or not necessarily aggressive but you've got to be able to be willing to take chances that are put before you. Unfortunately I think a lot of life people get caught in ruts and they're not game to change, the challenge

40:00 is too much for them. You imagine Ethel, it's now nineteen years since I met Ethel, no it's twenty one years, nineteen years since we married and for her to give up her country and to come here to live with me leaving her children there, it's a pretty courageous thing to do. That's why I love her so much and that's

40:30 why we look after one another. The other thing is I wouldn't have got back on my feet. I haven't gone in to my fashion career, but I was pretty successful and made a lot of money and then subsequently lost it, probably that's enough of that section anyway, to the point in '77 where I was my rock bottom in actual fact in '77,

41:00 having split and divorced from Anita, my second wife and she and I owned a unit in Neutral Bay so she was going to sign it over to me and we were splitting the difference between what we purchased it for and what we sold it for. I went back into what I term –

Tape 8

00:31 **In to the big house?**

In '77, when I was divorced from my second wife and basically had to sell the unit to split with Anita, I went round to my aunt who was living on her own at 26 Milson Road, Cremorne, a beautiful address opposite the Opera House on the water. It was there that I finally after the six trips in to the different hospitals that

01:00 I still hadn't become sober then, you see. I hit a rock bottom and that was about April '77 and I'd gone from owning businesses and manufacturing companies to losing the lot and I was about ten thousand dollars down. I'd signed personal guarantees for the company. So that I

01:30 was struggling with that and paying it back at the rate of twenty five dollars a week after tax. I had to capitulate in ’72 on that one. Anyway I wound up, I can still remember my rock bottom was I was on the dole sitting in this lovely big home with my aunt and it was forty three dollars a fortnight and I was on it for six weeks then I managed to get a job at a company called Anne Macquarie Tiles

02:00 which was a tile company in Hornsby as their sales manager. That was very successful. I bought in to that company and owned five per cent of it at one stage as it built. We owned six branches round Sydney and is still going today. The chap that owned it at the time wouldn’t issue the shares so I got my money back

02:30 and some cash, forced him to pay me out in other words. That’s when I went in to, I purchased some brood mares. I started in my career in breeding, the thoroughbred business. In that period from ’78, I walked out of there in ’80, so ’78, having got sober I used to study the breeding books thirty forty hours a week,

03:00 just getting healthy and going to AA meetings trying to repair the damage of the past years. That’s when I was visiting a stud in Tamworth and struck me John Parker who invented the brood mare monitor, Magic Breed which I subsequently named and trademarked. That’s where I took that after we won the

03:30 inventor’s program in 1980 I took that to Geneva to get world credence for the product. I wound up having a heart attack in November ’82 having established that in about ten countries. Then I lost control and subsequently sold out of it. I had the trademark in electrical goods and living animals for the people

04:00 to carry on with the foaling monitor I passed over the trademark in electrical goods which covered it and I retained the living animals or the breeding. So today my breeding partnership with my wife is GK Magic Breed thoroughbreds, which I’ve had.

You said that your aunty was really supportive in those times, what do you mean by that, how did she cope with your?

04:30 Gave me a bed, was non-critical. I think gave me the support because that’s, we’d had a relationship for a long time, my aunt and I from when I was back in the navy, they lived there from ’52 on, so when I was at Penguin in’54 on the harbour I used to spend a lot of time there having meals but I also

05:00 I think I mentioned going to Bar Beach in Newcastle during the war, that was her home. We had the affiliation, she had a shop in Maitland for sixty years that was quite famous and she was quite famous, Missy Phillips. She clothed the Hunter Valley people for years. In those fifties and sixties, she had the shop from the thirties but wool was king.

05:30 Wool was pound a pound and the country people would get their wool cheque intermittently so she’d carry them for their garments and so forth. We had that rapport of both being in the rag trade. My first wife was a buyer at Mark Foist and my second wife Anita was a buyer at Farmers, Myers.

06:00 That was the affiliation there. The other thing was my grandmother had nine children and we used to call them the golden girls or the iron ladies because they had such steely resolve about things. They were all just about living to their nineties, grandma was ninety four. She’s got a twin sister still going, Joyce. I saw her yesterday. She was a back stop

06:30 in the shop. They’re both ninety four on the 3rd March. The last of the sisters is five years younger, Mavis. She’s still going.

Did your aunty drink?

Not really, no. Her husband died of alcoholism. Uncle Geoff died in ’74 not admitting to a problem so then she was rattling

07:00 around in the big house and we finally moved up to Cremorne and she sold that house. We moved up into a unit. I stayed with her until I rolled that car then I moved in to sharing a flat in Double Bay with a mate who I’d got a job at Anne so he could drive me back. I lost my license so I had to either go on the train, I’d either walk or run

07:30 from Double Bay to Town Hall and catch a train to Hornsby where I was working or Richard would drive me and I’d come home on the train. That was good therapy really because the North Shore is very pretty and traveling on a train gave me time to look at, assess the birds and the bees and the lovely trees and the spring.

08:00 It was a good part of therapy so close to having given up the drink. It was actually for the first time appreciating the loveliness of nature.

What was it about that particular clinic, the last one you went to that connected with you?

I did an examination. Part of that ten days I spent there they did

08:30 puzzles and so forth. When I went in there they actually put you in a cubicle and they give you what

they call crystallised footballs, they're little yellow in the shape of a football. The idea plus they knock you out, give you a massive dose of Vitamin B and then knock you out with sleeping pills and you spent the first twenty four hours in a cubicle sleeping. The idea of the crystallised football is so

09:00 as you're coming out of your, you don't go into the DTs or suffer seizure subsequently examination by psychs or what there, I realised I'd done brain damage. They demonstrated it to me knowing I couldn't figure some of the puzzles. Demonstrated my reaction to that was I'd done some brain damage.

How old were you

09:30 **at that point?**

Forty five. I can clearly remember. So twenty six years takes me to seventy one. So having done that then I was successful at that and then I had the heart attack and was treated at St Vincent's. I didn't have a lot of problems. I took it easy. I gave up smoking all together in '87.

10:00 I haven't smoked now for nearly seventeen years, nearly twenty years. So in actual fact doing those two things and I've been married to Ethel since '85. We met by the pool at Chevron when she was out visiting her sister, just by chance. I came up to Sydney, my horse had won

10:30 and we were sitting by the pool and it rained and she went inside and then I took her umbrella because they're usually just showers. She went inside and then came back out and I said, "I believe I've got your chair," and I said, "Would you like to have a glass of champagne with me"

11:00 because she was attractive and we were sort of looking at one another. So she said, "Yes," and I said, "Well, I can't join you because I'm in AA," well it just so happens that one of her daughters had just joined AA after ten years on the drink and drugs, two months before. So we sat talking for four hours and the rapport

11:30 was because of the alcoholism. Just a chance meeting. She was staying with her sister back in Gosford, from Wyoming. I said, "If I ring you up would you like to come in to Sydney and I'll take you to dinner and show you a bit of the town." So I made arrangements, I flew out, in those days there was no plane out on Saturday nights in '83, so I flew out on

12:00 the Sunday night having just held all this conversation with her. I rang her on the Tuesday as I said I would and said, "Would you like to come in and join me for dinner and you might bring a toothbrush." She apparently turned to her sister and said, "I think I've had my first Aussie proposition," but I was more or less saying to her, "Don't expect me to drive you back to Gosford," I think was part of it. So anyway

12:30 she came to town and we met on the Wednesday at three o'clock. She parked her toothbrush in the Hilton, she booked in there. We had a nice night. We ended up booking out the next day and came to my, I'd taken her to where I lived and given her a champagne and a nip of Grand Marnier. We had a nice day and she went back

13:00 to join her sister because she was going back to America on the Monday. So I said to her, "We've met and we've had a nice time together, it's up to us really whether we progress it or not. It's up to each one of us. You can go back to America and do what you like or we can stay in touch." So we stayed in touch by telephone then she

13:30 invited me to America in the January and I went over for fourteen days in '74 She came back for a month in April and we had a sort of party time because it was Easter and all that sort of thing. We more or less were committing to each other in the form of engagement although I didn't give her an engagement ring. Then she went back and I could sense that she was having second thoughts and I said, "Well hang on.

14:00 I don't want to keep you to anything. I don't want to have any more losses. So I relinquish you from any commitments that you may have had, but why don't you come out." She had circumstances where she had money, she wasn't struggling. I said, "Why don't you come out for a couple of months under normal circumstances and see how we go." We wound up going back to the Gold Coast in August

14:30 and we were walking down Orchid Avenue one day and there was a jewelers shop there and I said I'd never had a wedding ring from my previous marriages, haven't got it on today. We bought matching wedding rings in this jewelers shop in August. So we were subsequently married. I went back over in December because we figured we had a bit of a ceremony there. Ethel always wanted to get married in Honolulu or in Hawaii.

15:00 She'd been to a marriage in a natural cave. We actually were married on the island of Hawaii up the Wailua River with a trio playing the Hawaiian wedding song and got married in a natural cave. I've got some photos there if you're interested just for interests sake. So

15:30 we've been together ever since. We're actually, on her next birthday which is in May, I've got a cruise booked. We're flying to Tahiti on the 3rd May to Papeete and joining the Pacific Princess for twelve days and cruising back and doing the four islands and we're going to go back up the Wailua River and then

16:00 have five days on Waikiki. Interestingly enough, Ethel's brother who was a serviceman with the American army in the Second World War, he died last year and he willed his body to the university for the medical school. They're having a ceremony, having used that body for whatever, in

16:30 April, which we can't attend, but we're getting the remains held back and we're going to have a ceremony for him. He wanted to be put in to, I forget the memorial centre there. That's another task we're doing. Then we're flying back to Australia. So we're going to be away for about three weeks.

How different was it having a relationship with someone and getting to know them

17:00 **having spent that time sober?**

Ethel used to write me letters. She couldn't express it so she'd leave me a letter. We've always communicated, been totally honest with one another. What happened before to either one of us doesn't matter, that's why she doesn't care about me talking about, she doesn't seem to, she says,

17:30 "Oh what about this one." That's where we're at. We've been here. We built and put this place together which we lovingly did together having bought the land.

Does it feel like you've had a second chance in that way?

Oh yes. And the fact that Ethel had some capital too helped. Strangely enough

18:00 we've turned full circle because what we put in small capital has turned in to big capital. You can imagine what this place is worth, eight and a quarter acres. The other thing is we've got a good horse called Amex and we won the Magic Millions Cup in January having run third in the million dollar race the year before which we bred and we race with friends.

18:30 He's won over half a million dollars. He'll probably get in the field for the Doncaster Handicap at Easter in Sydney. All the involvement with the horses is starting to, many years ago when we built this house I bred a horse from my studies subsequently was called Cool Credit. We sold him for five thousand dollars he won six hundred and eighteen thousand. So we've never sold a horse outright since.

19:00 That was '89 so some fifteen years later our efforts and capital that we've put in is coming back in the prize money. Funnily enough just before that race I had a stroke on January 1, and I'm back in

19:30 with Ross Sharp who's a stint man. I've got ninety per cent closure of a carotid artery that has to have a stint in it. We're going to Sydney for Easter to see our horse run then I've got to get off the Warfarin and we'll come back and I'll go in and hopefully that'll be successful. I had a defibrillator put in about three years ago and suffer ventricular tachycardia which is a rapid heart beat.

20:00 Apart from the power of pills and a few things, we're hoping to see a few more birthdays and a bit more success with the horses. I want to stay on the property as long as we can. We're both starting to suffer, I call it, we're in maintenance mode health wise.

20:30 **We can do some general questioning going back to the idea of alcohol in the navy. I know that you don't attribute an entire problem to that. Can you tell us your opinion on how it's fostered with those young guys?**

At that time? I don't now what's changed now.

Yeah, that's fine.

I think the grounding was

21:00 the actual abstinence of being totally dry but at the same time to try and stock enough booze on a ship to satisfy twelve hundred and fifty seven soldiers is a bit horrendous too. You'd be throwing some ammunition overboard. I don't think that's on either but I think there could be a happy medium such as occasions like when we went through the topics at one stage later on and

21:30 were issued with a bottle of beer of an afternoon I think it was, in those thirsty areas. I can't, it's now fifty years since.

What would happen, when you'd get on land, why was it so important for you all to go and get wasted?

What else did you do? You didn't have a radio, you didn't have

22:00 TV until '56. I mean you were all young. First thing you wanted to do was go and party, find a bird. The guys that were married of course in their home port, they'd sort of head home. All the single young fellow had to do, you always knew you had a bed and a meal back on board so you

22:30 could waste yourself and your pay having a good time or what you thought having a good time. The relationship I'd place there is the training of binge drinking. Later on I'd drink Friday to Sunday and get sober either to do my business or do my work. So a pattern

23:00 emerged during my naval career that I followed through which often happens. People get in to habits of doing certain things and quite often to break the cycle you've got to break those habits.

You told us two significant binge drinking experiences that lead to charges, there must have been a number of those happening if there was a culture of binge drinking.

In the navy?

Yes.

No,

23:30 there was only those two.

Not for you personally, I mean for all.

I can't speak for others and I wouldn't wish to. When I told you the story about the nightclub and being put in there when the naval people came round and said, "Any servicemen?" I was in civvies [civilian clothing] I didn't own up. I fronted up in court at ten o'clock then skipped back to base. All you got was admonished and discharged for two dollars

24:00 or pounds then. You just got fined a quid and away you went.

So it was a kind of strange conundrum because on the one hand there was a culture of binge drinking but there was also charges.

Well there was a culture of binge drinking as far as I was concerned and of course it must have been shipmates too because they were dry the same but perhaps the others, because they weren't,

24:30 they didn't have those other two factors, that is the hereditary factor of emotional stability they were controlling their intake better than I was but if you'd been a drinker at all and the reason why total abstinence is the only thing because of your emotions at a particular time, you never know whether

25:00 one drink or two drinks or six drinks is going to be too much or too little. That's the, you know there's a point where your mind kicks in and you say, "Oh bugger it, I'll go on, I'll keep at this. It tastes all right, I'm feeling good", so you've gone past the period of non-return and you don't know whether it's going to be one, two, three drinks or whatever else. It's the same thing as I suppose

25:30 what's happening unfortunately apparently in some of these nightclubs or places today where guys are spiking girls drinks. Of course they don't know, they're spaced. Half the time they don't even know what took place. There's an analogy there. So you don't know when you tip over reality into

26:00 unreality, if you like.

What was the response from blokes around on the ship? Was it generally accepted that you'd race off the ship and the first thing you'd do was go out and get drunk?

Go drinking, yeah. That's what you did in Japan. That's what you did in Hong Kong. That's what you did in any port usually. You'd move

26:30 from the ship to where you'd party on having a drink. Let's put it this way, what's the big relaxation day or what do most people do at the end of the week, come Friday: relax, go and have a drink. Saturday morning they do whatever they needed to do but really at the end of the working week the biggest celebration day for most young people,

27:00 it's what they can find for the weekend or what they're going to do with the weekend.

And you're sort of saying that it was exacerbated by the fact you'd be nine months or however long you'd be at sea?

No, you wouldn't be that long, well you would in total time. We were as far as, we were seven months in that first trip to Japan but you weren't at sea for seven months total. You had a month at sea and you might be in port for two or three days. You'd have your binge then

27:30 then you'd go back to sea or back to war and so the pattern was formed.

What did the blokes say when you turned back up at the ship after having your AWOL session?

When I turned back AWOL?

Yeah.

I think I got a round of applause. I'm not sure now. I know they weren't too happy I didn't bring the cigarettes back. Ray reminded me years later.

28:00 **So some of those binge drinking experiences were applauded?**

Only, it was a half so to speak. No, I don't think. You know when a misdemeanour happens to you, you get a speeding ticket or something like that, some people think, "Well, serve you right," and

28:30 others will say, you know. So instead of having six drinks you have twelve and space yourself. Generally speaking if you had to meet deadlines as far as getting back on board, this is where the mateship would come in, they'd make sure you got back on board. It was just the time I waved the ship goodbye I'd ducked off with a young girl into the hills and no

29:00 mates would know where I was anyway to actually take me back to the ship or say, "Hey Geoff, don't be bloody stupid."

When you look back at your navy experience now, what do you feel about it?

I feel mixed feelings about it.

29:30 I feel my experiences of war, of joining the navy, that I missed a part of life as a normal teenager having been trained for war, participated in the war. I look back now and think I didn't have a teenage year and I basically didn't. I had that short period where we did the little things like the barbecues on the hill in Lithgow and that sort of thing but as opposed to these days

30:00 people my age at eighteen, nineteen when I'd been to Korea and back are still finishing twelfth year. We've got a grandson twenty one, twenty two and just going on to college, university. In that respect. When I was going to school you had five years of tertiary education. Three years to

30:30 intermediate and two years two graduate at university. Now they have six, four and two. Plus they then have postgraduate studies or whatever else. So in some cases you've been in school for the first twenty five years of your life depending on what profession you take on. The other part of it was I think the navy by virtue of the money changing, the representing of the tailor,

31:00 those sort of things also trained me or put me back on track because essentially since I've been very successful prior to the drink and then I collapsed but after the drink I've been very successful in most things I've set out to do which have been marketing. I overcame,

31:30 when I got out of the rag trade when more or less my reputation for being a drunk and so forth was firmly established and subsequently in my years of surviving I've got my dignity back. I've achieved other things. Currently I'm Queensland president of the Korean South East Asian Forces Association and have been for couple of years where I was trying

32:00 to contribute. I'm a life member of the Australian Horse Industry Council. I've just retired off the Gold Coast Turf Club board having spent the last six years one of eleven running the Gold Coast. So I've forged particularly over the last twenty five years and these are all voluntary positions that I've been trying to give back to the community

32:30 and do some recompense if you like for my own personal benefit as well as the communities benefit.

If your grandchildren came to you and said they wanted to go to war, what would you.

I don't think any grandchildren would come to you and say they wanted to go to war. They might come to you – as a matter of fact one of my relations, one of her sons

33:00 is training to be a helicopter pilot in the army. Apparently now the helicopter section of the air force is really concentrated in the army rather than the air force. He didn't attend the funeral yesterday because he's about two weeks off becoming a, so life goes on. Vietnam was much more horrendous, or just as horrendous as

33:30 Korea was. The drugs that were involved in that, we didn't have the drugs that were involved in Vietnam. In actual fact Kings Cross, I can remember because I was working there and around there, the troubles with drugs in Australia really started with the R&R [Rest & Recreation] from Vietnam in the late sixties

34:00 coming in to Kings Cross. It all went downhill. It used to be a nice place, Potts Point and Macleay Street was a lovely dignified area of Kings Cross and Elizabeth Bay and now the laneways are littered with syringes and crikey knows what. That started with the drugs that came in on the planes brining R&R, not necessarily with

34:30 the authorities' knowledge. You wouldn't remember but they came, R&R came in from about '68, '69 as I recall.

What's your role on the board of the Korean Services Board that you mentioned before?

I'm state president of Queensland.

What happens in that?

35:00 We're a small band of Korean and Malaysian, KASEAFAA stands for Korea and South East Asia Forces Association of Australia. It's a national body and I'm as I said the Queensland president. We're a small band of people that previous president was a 3RAR, Matt Renning.

35:30 I actually joined really, I only found out about the organisation back in '99 when the emphasis was on the memorial going in to the Korean memorial on fifty years of the cessation, the armistice being signed

on 27th July 1953. I thought it was time that I put back

36:00 because most of those Korean returned people are seventy five and older. So being a bit younger I felt that but now I've had the stroke in actual fact I won't be, we'll have an annual meeting in May and I've already sent a letter to the members saying I won't be seeking any future office.

Is it a general feeling that it's a forgotten war?

Yes.

36:30 Has been. I think up to the emphasis of the memorial. Yes, it was overridden. We didn't have any bands playing when we came back. There were Vietnam fellows, all that trouble and the Vietnam fellows had and subsequently they've been recognised. A lot of them were younger and caused

37:00 a lot more noise so they're getting the recognition they probably should have got way back. A lot of them are suffering badly from the chemicals that were used in the jungles of Vietnam. A bit like post World War II, those Korea and the atomic testing and exposure. The guys in Vietnam were exposed to agent orange and all sorts

37:30 plus drugs. A lot of that war was financed through drugs.

Do you have a final comment on your war experiences or your life experiences?

Yeah, skip it if you can. I'd like to see peace throughout the world. I'd like to see negotiations. I think to a certain extent

38:00 the history of the United Nations, I think without it we'd – but you see, when you've got you know, the cold war went on for too long. I think they should get rid of all atomic weapons. People don't realise the destruction that can be caused, it's horrendous. They only flew a couple of Boeing

38:30 707s into those two towers in New York, imagine if they dropped an atomic bomb in there. We're talking H bombs now. What was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were peanuts, you're talking two, three, five hundred times more. They'd wipe the world out. The point is, recently I was watching these

39:00 B52s that were going on reconnaissance flights carrying atomic weapons, they weren't particularly loaded but they've had accidents with them where they didn't have the atomic warhead in there, they've gone down in the sea. Chernobyl should tell people what uranium plants can do, the contamination from that

39:30 will go on for years. If the emperor hadn't said stop to the Japanese people I think it probably saved a lot of lives when they did detonate those two atomic explosions. I hate to think how many allied lives would have been lost. The Japanese because of their religion

40:00 and because of their beliefs would have probably fought to the death so it would have been a total decimation of Japan and horrendous casualties from the allied forces. I think similarly in Korea. I hope North Korea, I'd like to see the unification of North and South Korea if it can be achieved.

40:30 The communism in China has sort of gone a full circle, they're sort of now bringing themselves into the world and realised that they can be a participant. The trouble is you've got these demigods of dictators that run some of these countries and people get indoctrinated.

Are you hopeful?

Yes I am. I don't think

41:00 it'll happen in my lifetime because I probably haven't got long to go although the medical marvels they can do these days. Even now when I had my last check up for incidences with my defibrillator I only had thirty five. When it kicked off three years ago I had three hundred. So the tablets are a bit right or I'm doing something right. I know I've

41:30 used up half the battery strength so they've got to go in there and change that battery in the next three years. As far as this carotid artery ninety per cent closure, that's going to be a bit dicey but I believe in the doctors. I believe in preventative medicine. Another thing I might say is I thank the Department of Veterans Affairs program for ex-servicemen

42:00 and the support they get.

INTERVIEW ENDS