

Australians at War Film Archive

Charles Lawrance (Jock and Charlie) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 22nd May 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/178>

Tape 1

00:31 **Thank you for talking to us this afternoon, Charlie.**

That's all right. Pleasure.

Pleased to meet you. Perhaps we could start with a brief summary of your life. Start at the beginning and I may ask you some questions but if you could start with where you were born and when?

I was born in Rotheringham in England. I grew up there and my father had a very bad

01:00 accident on the railways. He worked on the railways, the Halifax railway. Had a very bad accident. Run over by a train. He worked on the railways, apparently and then in a fog, one of those dense fogs they have over there and we... The railways fought him over about how the accident happened as nobody on the trains could find who had done it. But he was left with broken legs and broken

01:30 arms and leg injuries and head injuries and they couldn't find who had done it. Nobody wanted to take the blame for it. Three years to get compensation. Living on the smell of a sweat rag. Paying rent.

Around about what time was this?

In 1921.

When were you born? What year?

1913. I can still remember the

02:00 people coming back, the men coming back from the war. The cripples coming back on the trains with one leg, one arm. All that sort of thing in their blue uniforms. I can still remember the Zeppelin coming up and bombing Sheffield, you know, not far away. That's the first. I still remember the prisoners of war, working in the Sheffield Steel Works. My mother pointed them out when we were on the train.

02:30 Things like that. My parents died and I had to go and live with an aunt.

How old were you when your parents died?

About seventeen.

They both died round about the same time?

Yes. They both died around the same time. My mother died when I was born but this was a second mother. So she was nurse and he married her. This whole thing. And then

03:00 my father died first and then she died. This was in 1928, something about that, and I went to live with my relatives and I went to work on the railways. My father had worked on the railways and they got me a job on the railways, "Main line, ticket in the box. Main line, ticket in the box." A train recorder, recording when the express train was going past to Scotland. "Main line, Scotland to London."

03:30 You had to catch the numbers, book the time it went past, turn and ring up the phone to the control and they'd pass the word along about three minutes later, something like that. Hundred of them and you know Goods and Expresses. Parcel trains and Express Passenger trains and all that sort of thing. Four main lines and I'd learn a big double, like big

04:00 double signal box. Five, six years there. About five years, and I learnt the signal role. The Depression came on and of course the railways, what the railways had previously done was make their signalmen permanent but when I come on they weren't. I, unbeknownst to me, wasn't permanent. When you'd learnt the job then you're good and ready

- 04:30 and then you become a signalman cause you knew the game and you helped the signalmen. Signalman would leave the job and another one would... could, and it was agreed. He depended on you to show him what to do, more or less. Of course I had been responsible at the other year. Anyway, I helped them and when it was my turn to tack on the smaller signal box they said, "Oh, we've got no jobs for you. We're going to put you off." They were doing it all over the railway.
- 05:00 I was put off. But I was living poor. I had no parents. I was paying board out of my pay and that took all my money. I had about two bob left out of me pay. So here was I out of work. The people didn't know how they were going to carry on without my board. I said, "All right I'll go and live with my sister in Manchester and try and find a job in Manchester." They wouldn't even give me my fee fare across to Manchester. I had to get a push bike to get to Manchester, over the
- 05:30 Pennine hills to Manchester. I went from five in the morning to five at night looking for a job. Manchester was really bad. Really bad. They were out of work. The chimneys weren't smoking. It was absolutely, absolutely hell and when there was any work about they'd fill the whole street with young men looking for jobs. Irishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen, Englishmen. And no way I could get a job. So I wrote
- 06:00 out to my uncles in Canada and one in Tasmania and I told them the situation. "Any jobs?" I knew I had a few pounds backing me from selling the home when my parents died. The one in Tasmania said, "We'll give you a roof if you come out," you know? "But things are bad here." I thought about how bad things were here, and well, it couldn't be as bad as that. There they were on the march from Middlesford down to London. All the
- 06:30 First captainWorld] War blokes. All out of work. There was no work for them. Heroes or not, there was no work. So he said that I could. So I looked around for the cheapest boat to get there and there was one for about 35 pound that went around the Cape, you know these Tramp Steamers and I got a passage and went. I had five pound to land with. I had to borrow five pound from my sister who I was living with.
- 07:00 Passed the immigration bloke in Melbourne who wished me best of luck. All that business and then I went on the Narana across to Tasmania and then by rail to Hobart and the rail to Metways and my Aunt met me
- 07:30 with a horse and trap and away we went to the farm. Early in the morning I woke up and it was daylight at 4:30 in the morning. I thought, "That's funny at four o'clock in the morning." I went out, I hadn't seen the place. It was 11 o'clock at night I got in there. I looked out and I thought, "I'm going to have a look around these hills." It was beautiful. There was this stream around the back of the house and I could follow the stream up the mountain. I had no watch.
- 08:00 I couldn't afford a watch. A watch was a luxury. Only rich people could afford watches. I never heard the bell. When I got back it was 10 o'clock in the morning. And they'd got bloody police out and everybody looking for me. Everybody. And they said, "What've you been doing?" And my aunt, she came from England originally, said, "What were you doing up the mountain?" I said, "I was looking for gold." They said, "What?"
- 08:30 I was looking for gold. I didn't think there was anything wrong with that. I'd heard about Australia. There's plenty of gold in Australia. I wasn't that silly. I knew, I wasn't that silly as to think there was gold lining the footpaths but there was a lot of gold in Australia and a lot of gold came from Australia. We learnt that at school. And they started to laugh. They laughed, and laughed, and laughed. Everybody laughed. The police laughed. Everybody laughed. Anyway, we got to church that Sunday - they go
- 09:00 to a Methodist church, a little Methodist church - and we're coming out and shaking the parson's hand and they had to tell the parson that I was up the hill looking for gold after only being out a couple of hours from England. Well, he had to laugh, everybody in the bloody audience, as they're coming out, they laughed. It was very, very funny. But there's an end to that story. During the war, when I joined the navy and I'd retired from all that
- 09:30 I'd married, I married a girl from Bendigo and we'd had a child - a girl - and she married and the reception was at Wilga RSL [Returned and Services League]. We were paying rent at the vet [veterans] house in Hornsby. First we had a flat, then we had a home. When everybody fled from the Japs coming in we said, "Grab the house!" So anyway, we're having
- 10:00 this reception at the Wilga RSL and I'd sent for my aunt to come over for the wedding, and her daughter, my cousin, to come over and they came over. I was dancing with the old aunt and she said, "All right," and she said to me, "Remember when you went up that mountain at the back of our place looking for gold?" She said, "They're finding gold up there." She said, "They're finding it up there and all the tourists are up there panning for gold on the weekend,
- 10:30 from the stream." And they still are today. And do you know why? What I had in mind? When I went to I used to watch and look at the silver mines that the Romans had left behind. I went to school and we used to, it was a great thing to find a piece of Mica with the silver in it, or lead in it and take it back to school. And I'd noticed there
- 11:00 was Mica in the blinking stream. Something in that stream there could be gold. It could be gold or silver

there so I was searching for it. So, I wasn't so silly after all. I used to tell the kids at chats. We used to laugh about that. You know, on the ships, in the action. I used to talk, tell my blokes about it. I was in charge of the Strongholds.

- 11:30 Anything to take their mind off the whir, whir, whir. Tell them about it and that's the last time I enjoyed it. Give them something to take their minds off it.

What did you do after that?

After that? I was on their farm and then, I could see nobody wanted me. I kept saying to my uncle, "I could get a job at a different firm," and he said, "There's only one or two firms in Hobart. There's the Zinc works,

- 12:00 and they're all out of work. There's IXL and they've nearly shut down. I don't know where you'll get a job if you want a job." So I was a city boy. I didn't want to be on a farm all my life cause I didn't know nothing. Didn't know how to milk. Every time I'd try to milk a cow she'd give me a kick with her hind leg and send the milk all over the place. The horses that were trained to do anything, they'd just stand on me foot and lean on me

- 12:30 and they wouldn't get off. Wouldn't get off me foot. I had to learn. The animals never woke up to the fact I was green. All my cousins used to read the Bulletin and all the jokes about Pommies [English] and all the farm blokes, Dad and Dave... They used to give me the horrors. "You people haven't been out here all that long yourselves.

- 13:00 Anyway I couldn't see any fun in that business. I thought I'd try and get back to England as soon as I can. As least there nobody cares if you're Welsh, Irish, Scotch or what you are.

What year did you come to Australia?

1933. Anyway I stuck it. And I wasn't getting no pay or anything like that and my cousin, the same age as myself on the farm. He said

- 13:30 "Oh I'll, when you learn to milk and that, I'll pay you." "Oh, that's so nice. I was the biggest dummy out. I kept saying, "I'll half and half day today," and I'd go and see the Zinc works and see if they wanted anybody. They looked at me. "Oh, we don't want you. We've got enough people here out of work without you." So I'd get that depressed about it. I thought, "I have to do something about this bloody farm."

- 14:00 I was working seven days a week. They used to have a big fun doing the cattle and the timber had to be cut into lengths, certain widths and they have the hardest wood in Australia there. It's very, very hard. The axe had to be sharpened all the time. I had jobs up in the far paddocks with disc ploughs

- 14:30 and you'd come home working on the mild cows and they'd always find me on the wood heap. I was the only one who could do it. I was getting pretty good at it. So eventually I said to them, "You'll have to give me a bit of a break. I'll have to have a weekend off and go into town and see the pictures or something." Cause I'd go crackers [crazy] there. And they allowed me ten bob a week

- 15:00 in the bank. I never saw it. Anyway the first weekend up there, there was a big sign across the Mulga: 'Wanted. Men for the Royal Australian Navy' and the paint was dripping off it. They'd just put it up for the first time since World War I. So I went in there and they were, "Can you do sums?" "Yeah. I can do sums." And they gave me sums and one thing and another and then they said, "Can you go tonight?" And I hadn't thought about that.

- 15:30 "Jeez. Yeah, all right for tonight," and away I went away... away I went. I went to FNB, Flinders Navy Base, joined up. There were so many from Tasmania in each class. So many from each state. Four from Queensland, four from Tasmania, four from Western Australia, four from Sydney.

What did you join up as?

Stoker.

- 16:00 I didn't know what a stoker was.

How long were you in Flinders for?

Oh, I suppose about ten weeks.

Which ship did you first serve on?

[HMAS] Canberra. First of all I went to... First weekend off from Hobart, I met me wife. I met a girl and two girls

- 16:30 and I kept in touch with them when I went away, and eventually, after two years, we got married. But apart from that I was out at sea then. When I was going with that girl, a girl from FNB [Flinders Naval Base] to pick up the [HMAS] Brisbane which was going to get the [HMAS] Sydney, the Brisbane, the coal burner and she was going to get the Sydney so I didn't want to

- 17:00 go back to... by that time I didn't want to go back to England because I'd got a girlfriend see. I was genuinely in love. I was happy in Australia, once I'd met my girl. Then it's all lovely, isn't it? I swapped

with another chap and he got on the Brisbane to Sydney and I went to Canberra.

That was a fateful decision, was it?

Was it ever. So, I went to Canberra and I

17:30 was on the Canberra three years and then I was the leading hand and then, I don't remember. In the meantime I was going back and forwards to Melbourne, to my wife's parents' house in Melbourne and her father was out of work and her brothers were out of work and when we got married I had to buy the brothers' suits, the father's suits, all that business. We lived on the smell of a sweat rag. He'd been

18:00 gassed. They were living on his war pension. He'd been gassed in the war. Eventually I went to, they sent me from the Canberra to the [HMAS] Vendetta. They had V&Ws [class] and destroyers. We'd been given destroyers as a gift when we'd come out and we had to man them with Australian ratings. I went to the Vendetta

What are the VMWs sorry?

18:30 The VMWs and the Stuart. The Stuart was another VMW. The Empire, the Project, the Vendetta, the Stuart, I've forgotten the other one. There were five of them anyway. The [HMAS] Vampire. I was a saloon man and then the next thing I know they send me into FNB to be trained as a

19:00 stoker - PO [Petty Officer].

Sorry, as a what?

Do a course. To be a petty officer. To be a petty officer you do a six week course. Anyway I finished that and we got a choice which section's cruiser we'd go to. There were twelve of us. Four each. I picked the [HMAS] Perth. They hadn't got it yet. We had to go to England to get it. So, I thought, "It's a quick trip to England. All right." So

19:30 I put in for that and the others went to the Sydney, went down in the Sydney and they sent me on the Tibus to England to get the Perth. She was a blue-funnel ship.

What is a blue-funnel ship?

Blue-funnel was the name of the line

That took you back to England?

Yes. Most of the people in the depot at the time went for it.

20:00 Young seamen and young stokers went for this on the Tibus. It was a coal burner. Had to live down a hole and there were three settings at the table, bench table, cut out by the carpenters on the ship and underneath there's apples, from Tasmania and wool from Tasmania. She'd come from Hobart to Melbourne.

20:30 We couldn't slob out. There was a big lift off the top and there was a big wooden ladder up and that was in and out. Cook in facilities on the upper deck. Added to the ship and that sort of thing. Lavatory down the stern. And it was wintertime there. We got about three days out from Melbourne

21:00 and the young kid comes up to me and he said, "Excuse me. I've got some bad news for you." He said, "You're the leading hand down at our mess table." - there are three setting at each table - and he said, "I'm a stowaway and I've got three days out on the boat," and it's going up and down, up and down. Five knot an hour. I said, "Oh my god," and we're having to put this top on because the waves are coming over.

21:30 And I thought, "What am I going to do?" There was a young guy in charge of us and I went up to him and told him, "We've got a stowaway on board." "Where? How come? How'd he get on board? Wasn't he checked out coming on board?" "Yeah, but his mates helped him." He was in the same class as them at the Depot and he wanted to go to England badly and they condemned him because he was coming out in spots, chicken spots. And I said, now you've got them

22:00 as big as twenty-cent pieces, two and six penny pieces all over him. He showed them to me. They were that bad that he got worried and had to give himself up. Otherwise would never have found him. He was a navy man and he wanted to go bad. He was a stowaway. "We'll be on the other side of world. We'll have to see what the navy board says." So they called the navy board on the wireless. We went to Albany on the lines, instead of going direct

22:30 to Durban. They said, "Go to Albany and drop him off." So we went to Albany and a tug came out and picked him up, took him back and away we went. We all had to check ourselves in case we got these chicken pox. I forgot about it. Later on, at the end of the war, on the [HMAS] Hobart, I was a chief stoker then, on the Hobart - and this is reverting again - and the young

23:00 stoker was smiling, came up to me and said, "Do you remember me chief"? I looked at him. "On the Perth?" "No." "On The Vendetta?" "No." "I know your face well but I can't place you." He said, "Remember Curly Sutton"? "I remember that name." He was the bloke with the chicken pox. He'd risen up to stoker PO too

23:30 and he was very good too on the Hobart for a while.

You didn't kick him off the boat?

Pardon?

You didn't kick him off the boat when you found he was a stowaway?

No. I didn't kick him off. I didn't feel, I had enough to put up with, getting kicked off myself without getting other people kicked off. No, I didn't look at it that way. He gave himself up though, so fair enough.

24:00 He cost the country a lot of money. But, it had to be done. But, he paid for it though. He was a fine sort of bloke. You didn't have to pay. I thought they'd kick him out, but they didn't. Of course the war wasn't on then, it was peacetime and we all thought it was going to be peace. Chamberlain had just come back and he'd said, "Peace in our time," and we all believed it

When did you arrive in England to pick up the Perth?

24:30 May or June 1939. War broke out on September 3rd.

How long did you stay in England before you sailed the Perth back?

Oh, we started back before the war broke out. We started back about three weeks before the war started. We went to New York for the World's Fair, to represent Australia at the World's Fair. And the ship was a second-hand ship, it wasn't a brand new ship.

25:00 It's been there for years at Cape Town at South Africa station. She had to be all repainted. When we saw her she was all red lead and all of this. Changing single guns to double guns, getting ready for war, you know?

Was she an oil burner?

Yeah, oil burner. She was like the Sydney, sister ship to the Sydney, and the Hobart. They'd come out

25:30 previously. We go to World's Fair in New York .We had a good time in New York. We had a really good time there. The people in America they, we met business people in the street and they'd give you a ticket in your pocket and it was free to go up to skyscrapers and Madison Square Gardens and all of that. We had a good time,

26:00 get back on board and it's time to go off again. You get back early in the morning. Go to a nightclub, make a, dance all night. We had a great time there and couldn't go enough for us, for war was getting pretty close. People would stop us in the street, "Is there a war on?" "We don't know. We just do what we're told. We don't know."

26:30 We wanted to get back to Australia actually. We were going back to Australia. We had to go across the canal and through Honolulu and then back home, but it didn't turn out that way. The war broke out and the war was on in the canal. And they just gave us the boot to use their landing. We were there twelve months. Landed convoys, looking for the Deutschland.

You were looking for which ship?

The Graf Spee.

27:00 You know, Lebanese. They were six-inch triple, eleven-inch triple. Back and forth and running six-inches on the side. We would chase her up off Greenland, in the fogs. It was like putting a net around them, like that. Kept missing them. Then there was no radar in those days.

27:30 Not on the ship. There was on land, but not on ships. We knew nothing about radar in those days. Your lookouts, that's all you had. Top of the masts. We very near got caught up with the Graf Spee. The Graf Spee was running around South America and the Deutschland was running around Greenland and Labrador and all that. We went up there and then they've changed us around to

28:00 join the squadron to join the Graf Spee. We went through the Panama Canal and down into South America and they would come up and they would come the other way. I knew she was getting victualled and oiled inside those little inlets in Argentina and all that.

What's that word, "Victualled?"

Food and oil and all that. Ammunition even.

28:30 Anyway, they laid all this stuff out ready, before the war. Anyway we were with this ship called The [HMS] Berwick. This eight-inch English cruiser called The Berwick, B-E-R-W-I-C-K. Anyway the other three ran down that way, the [HMS] Achilles, [HMS] Ajax and the HMS Exeter went down that side and we went down this side and then we'd cross and we'd go up

29:00 and then we'd come back down again through Panama. We wasn't supposed to use the Panama canal. It

was neutral. It wasn't supposed to let belligerents through so we'd shut up and nobody was allowed to talk to the people on the wharfs while between. If they said, "Watch, watch it, don't say anything. Act dumb." So you'd come in and go across and down the other end and away you go. All day job going across.

- 29:30 Anyhow, we're coming down one time from the canal and we go past Benjawillow [?] and just off Trinidad, where South America goes out that way - and it's a good oiling place there near Trinidad - and we're just there with the boat turning round in circles and well, the fight's on. They cut across the Graf Spee down there,
- 30:00 down around the bottom side, Patagonia, and working, fighting their way up and they got her into River Plate, play it on the video, and they got her in there, and it's neutral. They'd been in battle all the way up in the fog. The [HMS] Exeter was just
- 30:30 about blown to pieces. She was a cruiser and she got all the damage. She got a few hits onto the Graf Spee, but not many and she got a lot of dead on her and the Ajax had stopped with about 14 killed and the Achilles had a few killed. So in fact the Exeter was just about beached. She was in a really bad way but she never let on to the enemies or the neutrals just how bad it was.
- 31:00 But the British did. They had an American speaker, on the end of the lighthouse, on a plate, giving out that the [HMS] Renown was there, and this was there. You could see them. The Renown wasn't there at all. They weren't there at all. They were giving it out that the Renown was there, but they weren't there at all. They were circling around waiting for the Graf Spee to come out. The Germans believed that and on the way he sank himself
- 31:30 and put his crew on the pay. All that was out there was the Perth, and they've never put this in the history books. I've looked everywhere but no one's ever mentioned it. But the Perth was waiting just off Trinidad waiting for her to come and they were going to get her. The other ships would have been dead.

She was already damaged, the Graf Spee?

She was already damaged.

She scuttled herself? Is that right?

She scuttled herself. Hitler told them

- 32:00 he had to come home and to brave it.

Wow

He said, "There's all of this out there. There's all of this out there waiting for me, and we've got no hope of beating them." Hitler said, "You obey orders. You come home for landing." They might have got away with it. We only had six-inchers, pea shooters and they had eight-inch. But whether

- 32:30 we could have, the way we had with his triples, eleven-inch.

She just sank herself?

She just sank herself. In the mouth of the river. The others on the other side of the ships told us all about it. The captain came and told us all about it. What we will do and what we won't do and it was all for nothing. Not long after that we were sent along to Australia

- 33:00 and we come along through the Panama Canal with our dummy funnel and all that business. We got through to Fiji and then Sydney. While we were in Sydney the ships were getting sunk right, left and centre with mines. There were mines off the coast. We used to do everything by trade, and not by railway. Iron Ore
- 33:30 come round from Newcastle and they were just sinking them left, right and centre. Iron light, iron this, iron that. And he'd shoot out but by the time we got there it was all gone. Anyway we did that. Then we took a convoy, the [HMS] Queen Mary, the [HMS] Queen Elizabeth, Aquitania, with troops, round to Fremantle. We took them out in the middle of the Indian Ocean
- 34:00 And the Canberra met us there and she took it on to Woden and we returned to Fremantle, pick up another big convoy, The Mauritania, Aquitania, all that. Seventh division. And we took them all the way up to the Red Sea and we left them there and we headed to the Mediterranean. Not one of us knew where we were going, none of the captains ever told us what we were going to do.
- 34:30 Policy in the war, never to tell the crew where you were going. We just went there. We got in there by Christmas time 1940. They give us all a bottle of beer each and things like that. We went then to Malta and we leave the Sydney. The Sydney went home. She was out there, she was just taken out there by the British Air Craft carrier, [HMS] Illustrious
- 35:00 And a cruiser called [HMS] Southampton taking them out. The Illustrious was full of planes stuffed full of bags and bags of pamphlets to drop all over Italy telling them to throw it in. This was early stages because they'd only just come in the war. Telling them to throw it in, get rid of Mussolini and all this business. Anyway, unbeknown to us and unbeknown

- 35:30 to the British, the Germans came into the war there and Goering sent a special squadron of yellow-nosed Stukas from France. They put them off Sardinia and based them up there. Of course we're heading up to Sardinia with the aircraft carrier to drop pamphlets, and in come these Stukas and they're coming in and they do nothing to stop it. We thought our guns would stop them but they just came through as if they were
- 36:00 leaves. They came straight through it, straight through it, and bang, just missed you. It got that way that the gunners were running away from the four-inch guns. They were coming in straight at them, like that. Screamers on their wings. And the bombs were that close. Anyway, they got the Southampton, sank her. In front of us and they hit the Illustrious, they hit her right in the stern.
- 36:30 Her steering, she was going round and round in circles. She couldn't straighten up. She was going round and round in circles with a thousand men on it. All these planes hadn't even taken off. They were on fire, the lot. We had to bloody get help from Malta, come along and blaze in the night time into Malta. They pulled alongside like that and her flight deck was in the water. All to one side, in the water, you know?
- 37:00 Like that. They, the other side about as far from here to across the other side of the road, the Perth, like that. We'd dock. Well, at half past eight they came again. Right in to Malta. They were coming like that. And Malta had no, I think three little Hurricanes to stop them. They were coming and diving on, cause this
- 37:30 aircraft carrier, she had her twin six-inch guns in perfect position if she hadn't got a blooming map. They were there on the side and let them have it. And that other ship was full of Stukas and they hadn't come out of their dive, laying around, big Stukas' tails everywhere. They're like those big red Qantas tails. That was all that was left of them after they dived. And all inside were all these burnt out planes
- 38:00 and all these cruisers were dead everywhere. There were all these Maltese coming down the ladders, we were going up, fourteen of us. They said, "Go and have a look at her. See what's doing on. Learn something." The petty officers they work in the damage control business. So we went down and there's Maltese coming down with bags, bags, and bags, hessian bags with the blood oozing out. I said to the Malts, "What's that you've got there?" He said, "Men. These are dead men,
- 38:30 crew off the ship." They were taking the bodies out. There were bloody thousands of them going down the gangplank. There were dead everywhere. You walked around everywhere and it's, "Scotty, what's going on?" In the paymaster's office the paymaster was there writing things out. Half his head was gone, he was dead. He just had a pen in his hand, that's all. Half his head was gone. A piece of shrapnel had gone into the ship
- 39:00 and hit the brass lock on the wooden door, the brass lock and bounced off and hit his head. Still there, sat up. That's the way they'd found his body. The engineer in his white overalls with his torch on, lockers - cause everyone had lockers - leaning on the lockers. The touched him on the arm to ask him something about and he was dead as a nut. Only a young chap. He was six feet three.
- 39:30 This far down, and down the steering a bomb had been dropped down the steering and they'd got water, and they'd drowned about six of their own crew in the steering compartment. This was in Malta. We got back to our ship and they come in again. They kept going away and they'd come in every hour. They got a bomb between us and the wharf,
- 40:00 We were alongside like that . The ship's cigar shaped. They got it down underneath and "boom" and busted all our fuel tanks in on the Perth and we'd only just come in from Australia. Our bloke had never seen anything like this before. They were running away from their guns. They had to be locked in to it, to send them back.

Tape 2

- 00:31 **Sort of knock off the major points rather than going into the details and then we can go back to them**
- Well we got the army at Fort Bardia and Fort Capuzzo and bombarded them.
- This was after Malta?**
- Yes. After Malta, and bombard them. Malta was our first escapade, of meeting the real thing in the war, you know? We'd never met it before.
- 01:00 Meeting the German. The Germans were a lot different. We'd met the Italians, come out in the Red Sea and they kept well away but they dropped their bombs well away and we thought, "Well, if that's all there is in it." But when we met the Germans they really met their match. Their twin four-inches all round. Up on the gun deck, the twin four-inches
- 01:30 and they just drive them straight in. The more daring they become the more they got through. They

knew that. Anyway later on the big thing was 6th Division was sent to Bardia, Greece.

- 02:00 Athens, Piraeus. The New Zealand Division. We took the New Zealand Division from Bardia across to Piraeus. A thousand miles. And back on the ship and put them off and off they went to the frontline. And the Germans came in on Anzac Day 1941 and they bombed everything in the Piraeus Harbour. Hospital ships
- 02:30 two hospital ships. Ammunition ships. The Ammunitions that we'd brought in from Gibraltar. Blew them to smithereens. Up and up all night. About 25 big explosions all night. Our captain put to sea quickly and put to sea and we missed it. He saw it, the reconnaissance plane coming around and he knew they'd be back and there were,
- 03:00 there was no ack-ack [anti-aircraft], only our ships in the harbour. The two hospital ships in the centre. They set them on fire and they came in from Albania, the Greek hospital ships. Anyway, we were in there and the next thing the Germans drilled the British troops and the Australian troops, only about a division of British and a division of Australian and a division of New Zealand
- 03:30 and the rest was the Greek army but once the Greeks threw it in. Once that happened our people just had to come back. The Germans were right behind the back of them. They had to keep coming back. They were out-flanked. The Germans had it. They came in from Yugoslavia. We've only got a part of a division there. Anyway, they come back right to the tips of
- 04:00 Greece.

Where was the Perth at this stage.

Perth was still running troops over there. Still running troops over there. New Zealand troops, British troops, Palestinian troops. She would do the labour for the air field but what happened then, they come back to the tips of Greece and then we had to start taking them to Crete. They decided we'd look after Crete.

- 04:30 So they brought all our ships down, all the ships with us: The Ajax, the Elan, ourselves, the [HMAS] Voyager, the Vendetta, all the little ships. In and out taking these people to Crete. They bombed us in Crete and they bombed us in the Suda Bay, like an inlet, like a fjord and we took them in there and they'd take them out. Anyway
- 05:00 We had a ship there called the [HMS] York, six-inch cruiser like the Exeter. She used to go with us while we weren't evacuation, off the Adriatic, across Albania. You'd bring the troops to Greece from Albania and they were bringing troops across and we used to go and shoot down these troops ships in the night.
- 05:30 Take it in turns. We come back on time and there's the York and she was in the bottom, sunk. And we're three necks across this inlet, like a fjord. Mountains on either side. What had happened was the bottom boards ran up and down these nets. The Italians were smart when the frogmen started coming into the world, they invented it. They lifted up with these nets and pointed the,
- 06:00 pointed, like a motorbike like thing at the York and let them have it. They'd give themselves up and the motorbike would come along. That was the war and they didn't know at all and bang goes The York down below. So they brought divers to get her up and they got divers themselves and we got her six feet out of the water and bomb. Bomb. Bomb. They bombed us again.
- 06:30 Put her in the bottom and she was there til the end of the war I think. Then the Paratroops comes. Well you'd never seen nothing like it. We'd never seen paratroops in the war, the first time. Confetti. All these islands, like a cow's back. You know, islands, and they'd land on these mountains and then come down these mountains. Our blokes'd be waiting for them at the bottom of the mountains and millions
- 07:00 of them, like confetti. All different colours. They all meant different things, the different colours, like ammunition coming down. There were no aeroplanes against them, nothing. They could come in high as your head. Nothing. I don't know why they were letting them down because our people were popping them off as they were coming down. And the Malta residence were, the Queen's welcoming. Well, anyway
- 07:30 they took Crete and when they did they massacred towns. They lined up the entire police force and shot them all.

Can we, on Perth, where were you at this stage? What was Perth doing?

We were putting a barrage over the top of the soldiers, like that with the six-inch guns. Into them. Six-inch guns, over the top into these troops. Then we had to turn around and start evacuating, get them out of it.

- 08:00 Get them back to a thousand miles away to Alexandria, a thousand miles and no aircraft. Those on destroyers had a hell of a job on our hands. Get them out. They were all coming down from Greece. We had to leave about 3,000 behind. All those troops, captured.
- 08:30 I was back there two years ago for the 60th anniversary and saw the graveyards. They, for the Cretans helping our people, they were a very war-like people, the Cretans, not like the Greeks. They were very

war-like and they'd get

09:00 get into it and stab the, they'd get them as they came down in the parachutes and stab them as soon as they hit the ground

How long did you continue doing that job, that evacuation job?

It was a fortnight. And then we had to get them out. We lost more men in the navy than they lost in the army

How's that?

Well, lost the [HMS] Gloucester, six-inch cruiser. We lost the [HMS] Fiji, six-inch cruiser we lost the HMS Naiad, six-inch cruiser,

09:30 quite a lot of destroyers, the [HMS] Kipling , K-class. Do you remember the one Mountbatten was on? We had a hell of a job getting them out of Crete.

How was the Perth fairing?

We took a bomb in the guts. We were evacuated. We thought, "We

10:00 were well and truly away," the captain thought, "We were well and truly away from it," We evacuated through the night. And they come out in motorboats and invasion barges and bringing them on board and soldiers and the, and we had about two to three thousand soldiers on there, mostly wounded. The captain said, "Relax now, we're safe now," and we opened all the bull-gate doors and that. When we'd just opened the bull gate doors,

10:30 the bomb come and hit us like that. I was just going through a door into the smoke-hole and the ship was picking up speed and I was going into A and one of the chaps was going into column B and one of my kids had just joined us from Australia that trip and we used to skylark with them and the sway of the ship, he knocked me and I went arse over head on the floor and he went through.

11:00 and then "Red light" and I had to wait for the green light to get through and for the air to equalise because the pressure from the fire was going up and this bomb got him. Killed him. And we couldn't do nothing about it. We had to seal him in. Nothing we could do. Let all the water in. Killed a few soldiers. Killed about 14 soldiers up top.

11:30 He was one of them. But I it should have been me. I had my hand on the door. I was going in ahead of him, to relieve the bloke in charge. It was ten to twelve and we were due in at twelve, my shift. He, I was the first on my shift and he was the second and pushed me aside to get in first and the ship was keeling over to one side

It was dodging the bombs, the ship?

She was

12:00 probably dodging. I don't know what she was doing, I was down below

Did you hear the bomb coming?

Did I hear the bombing coming? No. We don't know when it happened. It came through 4 ½ inches of armour plating. And the plating over the top of the boiler room and I didn't know until afterwards but the hole was as big as that cup there. It was a big hole like this and the bomb had come

12:30 straight down through the amour piercing and then blown up when she hit the bottom. She covered the ship with our fuel, right through it like a spotted leopard. The blast, just the funnel, the first funnel. Well they decided they'd have to send us back to Australia they couldn't fix there and they made us go up, the Syrian campaign was on with the

13:00 7th Division. Going up the coast-line to Lebanon and they needed ships to come blasting the pillboxes the Foreign Legion had on the Litani River and Rue D'amour. They had mountains in Lebanon that come down to the sea like that. The gullies with the woodland and there's the pillboxes on the edge of these fjords and our people had to get through

13:30 over the fjords and over the pillboxes. So they asked for the ships to come in a blast them with their six-inch guns, which they did. Shit, we were nearly beaching ourselves getting them.

Did Perth do that?

Yep

Even though she was damaged?

Even though she was damaged. Even with those people dead inside her. They had to do it. Sealed off. You could smell them. And the Ajax and the [HMS] Orion that had been with us all through the

14:00 Crete, they had, we'd go in and then they'd push us aside and one of them would go in and have a go. And they'd push aside and the other would go in. They kept at it all day. Destroying those pillboxes, so

our people could get through easy. Our people had tanks going out onto the seashore but they couldn't get past those pillboxes.

They were planing to sort of, you were actually scheduled to go back to Australia? Is that right?

Hmm?

You were,

14:30 **because the ship was damaged they wanted to reduce the number of crew on it and send some crew home?**

Oh no. That was later. Because we finished. That gun plan lasted about a month. They sent us back to Alex [Alexandria] when they surrendered and next thing we know the ship couldn't be fixed there, it would have to go back to Australia. I was ashore buying a doll for my daughter, my baby daughter. Getting it there, in Alex

15:00 and took it up to where the gang was being marked off, "Pack your bag, you're going... Pack your bag, you're going... Pack your bag, you're going... Your name's on the list. Pack your bag you're going," until he got a different ship. The five destroyers, they'd been away a bit longer than us. "But there are people on them that have been sick" or something like that. There are always people that are sick,

15:30 but there's nobody to relieve them, so there's a good chance that they'll get some healthy young blokes off the Perth, she's going home and send those blokes on the ships. 110 of us went off the Perth. Nearly a third of the crew went off. On these boats. I went to the Vendetta. She came in with her nose under the water. She'd hit a wreck in the Tobruk harbour and she came in with under the water.

16:00 And where I was to dry off and where I was to leave me kit was all under water, with seaweed and everything. All had to be cleaned up and everything. And then, at 4 o'clock in the morning we're off to Tobruk for ammunition. Boxes and boxes of shells for the guns. The four-inch guns and the pounders that they had up there, and chain it down. They had it everywhere and then the soldiers sit on top.

16:30 with their Bren guns. As she was going out of Alexandria we'd throw them up tins of bully beef and they'd open it with their bayonets in the dark, and they'd start eating it. And one of my jobs was to go down the steering rod near the boiler, leave one of my men in charge and go down to the steering rod. The steering rod was a very important part of a destroyer. Without the steering rod they're finished. Anyway,

17:00 got down there to check it out and all these blokes all used to get seasick. As soon as they got outside Alex they'd get sick and I used to be starched with it. Oh, it was so dreadful. Oh, the smell. I used to get out and in the smoke-hole I was the one that everyone used to steer clear of. Anyway that went on and on. Anyway we got into Tobruk and

17:30 After checking it all off. First wreck we come up to we go alongside and the army comes up with rafts and they'd captured so much oil there. They'd bring the pipes down and they'd put them arms down into the oil and they'd switch it off. Spill oil everywhere. But it was above decks anyway, so it didn't matter. Except it was slippery when you went to sea.

How long were you on the Tobruk run for?

Oh, I'd say it was,

18:00 I wasn't on it long. I was on it from two or three runs up there

And then what happened, they pulled the run out?

And then she got hit with a near miss and bugged one of her turbines up in the engine. They couldn't fix her. They'd sunk the Vampire then and she couldn't be fixed. She'd had to be sent to Singapore. They were working on her for nothing, do it for the Australian Government. They sent the Voyager

18:30 to Fremantle. They sent all of them on. Except us. We were the last of the lot. We did 39 trips. Up and down with foods.

Into Tobruk?

We lost more men than they lost in Tobruk, on the ships. We lost that many ships, destroyers. We lost the Hereward. They came alongside the Hereward and took her crew off. What was left of it.

That was in Tobruk harbour?

No, that was outside

19:00 That was on the North Atlantic coast. On the way to, back to Alex. We used to go right out in the middle of the Med [Mediterranean Sea] and work our way back around like that. Used to be a three days' ship doing to Tobruk, which would take, if you took it straight, just over a day. At slow speed. We used to spring prisoner of war out. We let prisoners of war out at, they came out. All our wounded had to come out,

- 19:30 lashed them down, on the deck because the water used to come up over the deck while we were at sea. We used to, sometimes we used to take loads and loads of potatoes up top. Had the docks loaded with bags and bags of potatoes and the chaps sitting up on top. Sitting up top like that. They couldn't just walk around, do what they liked. We were doing full speed, 34 knots. If they got off the trip they had no chance.
- 20:00 **Where were you deployed next? Where did the Vendetta go? Where were you deployed with The Vendetta?**
- I stayed with the Vendetta. We got hit with a bomb. We got near miss with a bomb. We didn't actually get hit but one of the darnells wouldn't work. Not darnells, turbines. So they sent us to Singapore. We got to Singapore, worked down the
- 20:30 Red Sea and that, on one screw. Working on one screw, one turbine and there are two screws on there. Bombay, down the Red Sea. Aden, Bombay, Colombo, make for Penang and what was in a few, they were short of ships. They expect war with Japan at any day and they were short of ships.
- 21:00 They made us do it, go outside and see what speed we could get with one screw cause they knew the [HMS] Prince of Wales had four ships coming in. They thought we might be good for it, but we weren't good enough, so the [HMS] Empire was just finishing her refit and she came of the stocks and we went on the stocks and she took our place and she went with those boats.
- Where was this?**
- Singapore.
- What date?**
- 21:30 She, well December the 7th was when the day
- Pearl Harbour?**
- Yep, but they hit Singapore before Pearl Harbour.
- That's right. Just a few hours before.**
- All lights on. It was peace-time
- So you were there when that happened?**
- Yep. We'd only got there a couple of days before.
- Vendetta was dry dock at that stage?**
- We were the first ship to open fire, we hadn't taken our gun off yet. They were just about the strip her to pieces. And our gunners realised
- 22:00 it was Japs and she opened up with our gun, the four-inch gun.
- Were you in that harbour then, or dry dock?**
- I think we were in harbour. We were near the dry dock and waiting to get into it.
- So you'd seen a lot of action. The others probably hadn't seen as much action as you guys.**
- No. They, yeah that's right. That's what happened. Our people were on their nerve all the time and they knew that was
- 22:30 war. But the rest of Singapore was all lights on and everything. It was peacetime, not a gun fired. Anyway, then of course the next day we heard about Pearl Harbour.
- How'd you get out of Singapore?**
- What happened was the captain was still sure that the troops would hold but the army, the place was packed with soldiers from different nations and they never worried about it and the [HMAS] Kanimbla came in
- 23:00 and said to captain, "If you've got any men, do any of your men want to go on leave?" Christmas was coming up and '41 was coming up and we said, "Yeah." He said, "I've got half my crew I can send on leave and half my crew I will keep back," and we had to cut the cards on who would go and who would stay and I was one of the ones
- 23:30 who got the card to go home.
- And the rest stayed in Singapore and got captured?**
- No, they weren't captured. That's a funny story that. They, what happened was we went home on the Kanimbla. We got home on Christmas Eve in Melbourne and we had 28 days
- 24:00 Long service leave. Report to Kuttatubul and in the meantime Singapore fell. Just on the end of that 28

days Singapore fell and where's the Vendetta in the last sticks? What'd they do with her? They thought, "The Japs would have taken her to pieces" because when we left they were taking their engines out and all and putting them on the wharf. The cranes, they had nothing else, no other ship to work on.

24:30 Our blokes, we were listed what was on the wharf and their numbers and that was what they do. Anyway, we report back and we thought they'd send us back to Singapore. But how can they when it's fallen? So they sat down and scratched their heads at Kuttatul. Kuttatul was a ferry, alongside Garden Island.

So that's where you were based?

I was based there. In the meantime there was a lot of ships there in Sydney Harbour,

25:00 the crews were on strike. Wanted more money, danger money to go out.

The Australian crews?

Mmm. Australian crews, Chinese. Yep, they wanted it, they were demanding it.

They wanted danger money in the middle of the war?

They wanted danger money in the middle of the war. When the Japs came into it. And they wanted it and they'd been arrested by the police and put into Long Bay jail

Which crews were these?

A big ship called

25:30 the Taiping. She was full of goods for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] that were in the Middle East.

Oh, these were merchant ships, not navy ships?

No. They weren't army ships. Merchant ships. Taiping. SS Taiping. She was quite a big ship and all the crew was on an we had to go and take her out, take the Taiping out

26:00 and sleep in the beds that the blokes had been living in. And take her out and do various things, swing the callipers we call it and all that sort of thing, get her ready for going away. We took her down to Melbourne for a few days. And when we got to Melbourne we were told to catch a train back to Sydney because they'd decide to come back. So, these blokes came back to their ship. We never met them or anything like that. We left the ship empty and came back on the night train to Sydney.

26:30 Then they found other ships for us to run and things like that. We did that for awhile. I was on the Kuttatul one night and they said, "We've captured the fire ship tug in the harbour." She was a fire ship. She was the ship that used to run around throwing water around in case there was a fire. And it was a civilian crew on

27:00 it during the day time but at night. They went home at 5 o'clock. We had to take hold of her during the night. So I was released from the Kuttatul. I had to go and take over her. Went off and took all the crew and took them home. I looked at the fires, she was a coal boat and fixed the fires, banked the fires. Go back to the ship, there's two or three blokes from the Prince of Wales there. They're not working, their money hasn't caught up with them yet. They've got no tobacco,

27:30 got no mothers or fathers or nothing. Miserable, so I said to one of the blokes that were there, "Look out for me tonight. I've got my wife in Bendigo. Yeah, I've two packets of log cabin mate. I got that from Singapore. Fix you up." I gave him the two packets of log cabin and went up to the officers watch and said, "This bloke's going to look about for me tonight." "Yeah, okay," and I went at night. I lived in a one room flat at Paddington.

28:00 My wife shakes me up, "The landlord wants to see you down below. He's very serious about it." I'm not playing games with these people, lights on the bridge, lights on the harbour lights everywhere. Nothing could happen here. I'm not going to disturb my night's sleep, not for these people. God damn job can wait. I turned off the light and went back to sleep again. The next day I go down and catch the track from Paddington to the quay

28:30 and it was like a beehive. "Did you hear what happened last night?" "Jap broke in and torpedoed the Kuttatul." "Bloke was killed on the Kuttatul." "My mate." "I knew the bloke."

Sunk the boat?

Mmm.

You knew the bloke?

Never met him before in my life.

That's the ship you'd just come off?

Yep. It was just that. It would have been me if I'd stayed on that night, in my hammock. He was in my hammock, the bloke that was killed. It exploded near his head.

- 29:00 All you could see were the tips of the mast of the Kuttatubul. That was that. So then they sent me out to Buen. I had to pick a corvette that was just about to launch and go to sea. I picked the Cairns, a corvette called the [HMAS] Cairns. This was in 1942. I got there, I got there the middle of '42 and I got down as
- 29:30 she was about to go down to sea and the crew had never been out to sea before. The captain and everybody, none of them had been, except me. They were all brought in by manpower. Young tradesmen who wanted to go on board. So anyway, about sixty miles there and she goes down the river to the ocean and I go down to the sick bay and there's a sick bay bloke laying out stretchers all over the place
- 30:00 "What are you doing that for?" "I've heard it's very rough outside and there's going to be a lot of people who want stretchers. You know I'm sure of it. None of them have been to sea before." And I went outside. And here's the first one down. He was seasick. But, they all got seasick. I had a, had a job to relieve the skulkers down below because they were all seasick and laying there and a wave of water would come over all your, see where the bubbles coming through.
- 30:30 I kept waiting to hear, "You can't lay here." And they'd say "I don't care. I want to die. I don't care if I die." Anyway,

How long were you on the Cairns for?

We got on the Cairns and through the heads at Sydney and those blokes were sick. They said to the bloke, "You should have gone through North, North Head and send a shot across our

- 31:00 bows in the night so then they were all seasick." Everybody seasick. Anyway we find out where we are and they get in eventually and they sent ambulances for them. They were bringing look up. They put them in to hospital. Anyway, we got the guns on. We were just like a surfboard. We had no guns and no balance. And she was alike a surfboard in the rough sea. Like that.
- 31:30 Anyway, and they're like a bloody duck anyway because a destroyer goes like that, and like that. And you get used to it. But a corvette's like a duck because it waddles. Then we go around to Fremantle and we get in with a boat made at port stop, The Bengal. Indian name but it was a corvette, made by Australia.
- 32:00 We'd a tanker with us. We had a guy with us and we knew we were going overseas. We hadn't an idea where we were going we just knew it was overseas. We had the shots in our arms for overseas travel and we knew we were going overseas and I'd just come back but all these people were quite anxious to get overseas. They wanted to see what it was like, you know. We leave Fremantle.
- 32:30 About two days after we leave Fremantle our steering engine gives us trouble. So brand new ship so they asked for orders and they said, "Come back to Fremantle" and the Bengal and the tanker, a Dutch tanker called the Ondina, they carry on, making for Diego Garcia, the island in the middle of the ocean. They run, on the same day they run into two Japs AMCs [Armed Merchant Cruisers], six-inch AMCs
- 33:00 **What's an AMC?**
- A merchant cruiser, ordinary ships turned in to navy with guns on board. There's guns on it. Brand new ship with six-inch guns on it. So anyway they get there, up comes the first ones and lets blow into the bridge and kills a few of the officers on the Ondina.
- 33:30 What do you know, they're all dead and there's a total evacuation of the ship and they think for sure that she's going to go down, that they're going to sink her. But, the Bengal's only got a little 12-inch gun, a pounder and she goes in behind the tanker and used the tanker as a shield and lets it go every now and again. And, then she keeps on and the blinking Jap keeps trying to get her but he can't and it goes into the tanker. And, goes through it, the tanker's empty

- 34:00 so he keeps going. It's funny because he hit it right in the magazine and it blew up. They blew the Japs up, the beast of the entire war with a small ship. Blew it up, crew and everything. No survivor and the other Japs behind sees all this so he comes up and this pisses them off, you know, "Blows my mates up" and that sort of thing, and he started peppering at him and anyway they put him on fire and he give it up and goes away
- 34:30 on the Bengal and the Ondina carry on. The next thing we get the Ondina back into Fremantle, she was like a pepper box. She'd had these shells going through her everywhere. You could see the daylight through her everywhere. Anyway we finally got a tanker back and we went to Madagascar and it was French.

This was on the Cairns?

On the Cairns. We went up to

- 35:00 the Persian Gulf. There were ships getting torpedoed up there by the Japs. So when Stalingrad was on the Caucasus, was isolated and the Russians couldn't get anything through so were doing it through Irian and Wewak. They took a railway up through Western Australia. Our troops walked into Iraq and the Germans took it. A battalion took it. Took Iraq

35:30 And then we took a railway from Western Australia and run it up the Caucasus and they were to take it back the port way.

Sorry, Western Australia?

Yep

What weren't you using the corvette?

We didn't do it. We didn't take it back or anything like that. No, it'd taken one of the tankers I suppose.

Right

All our oil at that time in Australia at that time was coming from that Gulf. And all our oil ships.

36:00 Without that oil Australia had nothing, no oil, nothing. So that oil had to come through. And the Japs and the Germans knew about it. Long-range subs [submarines] were sinking our ships in the sub. So our best course was to send the corvettes to stop it. Sink a few of them. Wear them out. We did that. In the end Stalingrad held and you know the story. The Germans retreated.

36:30 And then when we came out of there and went up into the Mediterranean and they sent us, it was the eighth time along that we went along North African. We would go into different parts and that had been booby trapped for mines and we would go in on the shallow rafts and we for mines and we'd acoustic gear for noise and we had magnetics for magnetic mines, and anti-magnetic and all that and you'd louse them.

37:00 All along the coast and then we got to Algiers and Iran then we went to Sicily and then we went to Italy. We went up the Adriatic to a place there called Bari, B-A-R-I. They operated , it was like a big fjord.

37:30 And inside this fjord there were three sinks anchors with big chain across to the anchors and all of their American crews. Black, white, American crews on land sunbaking we passed them and dipped the flag and all that and think nothing of it and we went and did our job on the Adriatic, or across the Adriatic and one time.

38:00 And they... "Don't do it, there's a ship outside waiting for us. Don't go in. Don't go in there at all. Forget it. Go to Gandini." All of us on the crew wondered what happened but it bloody. We never had any idea what happened but no-one was ever allowed to use that bay again. No one was ever allowed to use Bari. After the war we found out. Those three ships had mustard gas. The Germans found them and hit them

They had mustard gas?

38:30 Yep. We had, not German, us. Americans, not us. Not even the British knew what was in those three ships. It was mustard gas. But Hitler, felt that for some reason to keep them there, cause Hitler was in Casino at the time could have, he thought they would use them. When they walked into Rome they'd bloody use them

39:00 mustard gas. So he was keeping it there quietly. He wasn't going to use it until they used it up, the Germans somehow got onto it and planes come over the top. I forgot about that, Hurricane, about five of them were supposed to be over the top night and day. But that was something funny about... but they came and dropped a pop bomb. They're very fast but only one bomb,

39:30 and I think they were a good half of the Italian population in that valley, a few thousand got mustard gas. There was New Zealand hospital at the end of the fjord and they didn't know what it was. I read about it afterward. They were treating it and they didn't know what they were treating. They woke up to that it was mustard gas. Mustard gas? How could they be using mustard gas?

Extraordinary. So you had a lucky call. Where did you go after that?

After that?

40:00 We went to Gibraltar. You used to go out to the middle of the Atlantic and there'd be a convoy of navy ships coming off from America. 90 ships coming in. Like soldiers in the sea, as are as the horizon. All behind the other, all behind the other.

What year was this?

1943. And the first time it had the Liberty ships, the American Liberty ships, they had opened up on us

40:30 with small arms, not passing through them. We went passing through them at dawn and the Americans would be folding back and we would be folding in. Sort of thing, like that. With big ships the little ships would go down the aisles and fall in behind them and around them. We could do more damage with our ships than they could with their small arms. We didn't get anybody but I tell you when that was over.

41:00 **How long were you based out of Gibraltar for?**

It wasn't that long, only about two or three months. There was a round of the boards and came right over the top of it.

Where were you off to next?

That's a funny thing. We were told. When we got into Gibraltar, Gibraltar's very high. It goes straight down into the water. You go, it's only a very tiny island. They had the air craft carriers and the battleships and god knows what.

41:30 And you walk from one end to the other like that to get ashore. We had to go alongside a big battle cruiser and walk, climb up it and walk across it to get to shore. If the Germans go to this and they said, "This is a sitting duck." But we had an order. "Nobody is to open fire. Air raid on, you don't touch your guns." Everybody had it drummed into them as the ship came in. And we thought, "Oh, this is going to be good."

42:00 I said to

Tape 3

00:30 **Okay, so you can pick yourself up from where you cut off again?**

We decided in Gibraltar we'd go for walk up the mountain to see what goes on, we're in short. So we walk up and we get up so far, "Little Tommy" comes out of the ground swell and says, "Where do you think you guys are going?" Just going for exercise and he said, "Oh how much further are you thinking of going up?" "Oh, just a little bit further, not much."

01:00 "Oh well, all right I'll let you chaps on the next one." And so it went on and we got up the top and it was like a razor edge with the Adriatic one side and the Mediterranean on the other and there was some big guns up there. The driver had to sit over the Med to operate these big guns and the guns over the Atlantic but most of it was train lines

01:30 sticking out. And we thought, "There's got to be something. If an air raid comes there's got to be something here to stop 'em and there's all these train lines like that sticking out of the cliff face, like that." Right out. Nobody attending to them, just sticking out. Rusty train lines sticking out in the air, everywhere. We thought, "What the heck are they?" and everybody fades away when you want to ask a question. So we come down and

02:00 we thought, "Well that's funny." We still don't know what it was. Anyway that air raid siren went that night and I thought what they were going to do, so we went down to watch and none of the ships opened up and they ignored the siren, don't you dare open up. And all of sudden up there, there was a just a blaze of light like that. Finished, air raid over. Just like this, one sheet of

02:30 flame and then finished . We woke up to what that was. There were rockets that went on those train lines and they ran out and there was nothing in the world that could get through it. And there was nothing down below and not one bomber got near us. Went in there many times after that. We didn't have to worry about it.

Gibraltar was a pretty safe house?

Yeah. Safe house

How long, were,

03:00 **where did you go to after Gibraltar?**

After Gibraltar they sent us down the Persian Gulf for a little while. And, then they sent us. Oh. No, no. We took part in... some of the islands in the Adriatic Sea had been occupied by Italians and then Italy threw it in. They surrendered and the Brit soldiers

03:30 and commandos and that went on board those islands but they put them in prisoner of war camps on top of those mountains and all of sudden Hitler said, "We want those islands. Put my paratroops in them. I want those islands." The paratroops came down again like they did in Crete in 1941 and they just

You saw this?

I saw a bit of it. And they come down and they parachuted down into

04:00 the prisoner of war camps and armed the Italians, took the islands back again.

And where was the Cairns at that stage?

Well, going around waiting to see what they're going to do with it. The [HMAS] Ipswich, Cairns and two or three other corvettes there, other Australian corvettes. The RAF [Royal Air Force] had an aircraft carrier called The [HMS] Carlisle. It was C-grade and they filled it full of guns and put faith in it and thought that would hold the Germans but they sank her.

04:30 The British were a bit scared of putting anyone in after that. They just had to let the island go and the

commandos became prisoners of war. Took it off the Italians and the Germans took it off the British and they then put us in the Red Sea. Talking about that when we went up to the Mediterranean we went up to what they called the Bitter Lake in the Suez Canal

- 05:00 It's what they call a Bitter Lake. El Kantara. There was a big battle ship there in the lake, in the Bitter Lake and there was a battle ship. A great, big ship, all. It was a, was great, big cardboard ship. A dummy ship, all that. It was three-ply and made to look like it a brand new battle ship coming into stock. And they brought her in and they filled her
- 05:30 in the bottom with the old Centaur they'd done the bottom with concert and they'd put guns all along and they brought her in the Med and used her as a common weal. The Germans had better wake up, they'd put a few bombs in it. It wasn't a bloody battleship. But, the tricks they played. We saw that. And, we laughed about that.

- 06:00 The Germans tried to get it. They sank the [HMAS] Barwon there. The battleship. She was bombarding some place, Tobruk I think. The Germans attacked Tobruk and she was bombarding it and she had a string of destroyers around, including two of our Napiers and all that. But, a blinking German got through and they torpedoed that battleship.

- 06:30 And, she turned over like that and she went down with a thousand men and then she went up she went up like the Harbour Bridge.

I've seen newsreel footage of that explosion. It was a mighty thing. Where were you at that stage?

I was in Alexandria when that happened. Have you ever heard the story of the three battleships? They got the limpet mines on them. The frogmen got them, Italian frogmen.

- 07:00 **Where was that?**

Alexandria.

When you were there?

No we were in another part of the Med at the time

Gosh. Maybe it's a story we might have to leave, and stick with your story I think?

They come in underneath one of the ships, they came in and they were dropping death charges every ten minutes outside the harbour but when the ship came in that had to stop it and take the door off and open the chain door let them through. They used to hold

- 07:30 the limpet mines underneath and coming in and got onto a battleship far back in the strand and snake their way up and find a battleship and attach the limpet mines to them, and they got caught. They'd given themselves up, "Prisoner of war!" "Where's your limpet mines?" They wouldn't talk. So they put them in the bottom of the ship and they screamed, "No, no." They knew there was something wrong. Anyway they got their troops off but they let them settle
- 08:00 on the bottom. They would fight free to settle on the bottom. And, they settled on the bottom and they never tried to balance them. They never led anybody on shore from those ships. They had the lights on and everything just as if nothing had happened. They were on the bottom and nobody knew. The enemy didn't know and neither did we. Men never got ashore to talk to anybody, to tell them what had happened. The drink was, they'd drink and they'd tell
- 08:30 somebody. Three of them and they landed on the bottom.

How long did you stay in the Med?

Oh, I don't know how long I stayed in the Med. Quite a long while, about two and half years. Came back to Colombo and the convoy and they said, "Could you make a save, if you were given the chance

- 09:00 to go back to Australia, take a convoy back to Australia? Could you direct without having guides? Could you make it? Would you have the fuel to do it?" So I loaded 100% - which you're not supposed to do - with our fuel and all we could carry and filled it up and we said, "Yeah, yeah we could do it" and we took the convoy from Colombo to Fremantle direct

And you'd been away for two and a half years on the Cairns at that stage from Australia?

Mmm.

- 09:30 **You must have been happy to get back to Australia at that stage?**

Oh, very happy. You've no idea what it's like to be out there. Even the smells. You can even smell Australia. You can smell the bushfires from 60 miles away. You could smell the smoke from land while you were at sea. The breeze would bring it out from the land. From bushfires and that and you could smell eucalyptus. We all know that in the navy.

- 10:00 It's, everybody looks forward to it, on a hot summer's night.

It must be a wonderful smell?

It sure is. It sure is. I knew I was home when I could smell that breeze.

When did you arrive back in Australia, in Fremantle?

I don't know. I don't actually know

Before the end of the war?

10:30 '44. Sometime in '44. Early part of '44, I think, or the middle of '44. Then they sent me to the, I was out on the Hobart for a while

What class of ship was that?

6-inch cruiser, same as the Perth. I met Curly Sutton there and then they took me off that. The war ended.

11:00 **Where did you go in The Hobart?**

Well, she'd been damaged, she'd been blown up by a torpedo. They were fixing her up at Cockatoo dock. And she was doing her tiles after.

You stayed on the Hobart until the end of the war?

Nearly the end of the war, yeah. They took me to Morotai, up in

11:30 the Celebes island, near the Philippines. Morotai.

Yeah, I know it, yeah.

And we go there and we bring the [HMAS] Platypus down. The Platypus was there. She'd been a mother ship. She was a submarine ship.

How did you get up there?

Flown up to Thursday Island and then to Morotai.

12:00 Brought her down, she was a coaler, and an oiler, half coal and half oil. We brought her down to Melbourne. They wanted to pay her off. The war had ended.

Where were you when the war ended?

Where was I when the war ended? I was on the Hobart in Sydney I think the day it ended. Yeah. All the celebrations in Martin Place. Yeah.

12:30 Damn glad to see it end too. I thought we'd have tough job taking that bloody Japan.

That's

It's hard to sit here.

You must have been happy the war was ended?

I was happy, yeah.

Did you leave the navy at that stage?

No, they wanted me to take over the Royal Installation at Chowder Bay, not to go out and take that

13:00 cause I was permanent navy, see but I'd come in before the war and my wife had said she'd had it. So she said, "That's it. I've had it. No more going away business," and I said to the navy, "Could I be sure that I'd stay there?" And they said, "No. We couldn't give you a guarantee. You'd have to take a chance on that." The wife wouldn't have it so I came out and

13:30 we built this house.

Gosh, that's

That's my exciting life.

It certainly is. We might just have a break here for a minute. I want to just move away from your war experiences and move back to your childhood cause I think that's a very interesting time to have lived in, in England. Can you tell me a little bit about growing up in Rotheringham? What can you remember of your early years?

14:00 I remember holes in my shoes. The kids all had holes in their shoes in those days. You don't see kids today running around today with holes in their shoes. But, we had holes in our shoes. And no socks, I don't think. We'd go to school with holes in our shoes and we used to try mending them ourselves.

How many people in your family?

Now?

No, when you were

14:30 **growing up . Did you have brothers and sisters?**

I had a step-mother and my sister was living alone in Manchester.

She was older than you?

Yeah, about ten years older than me. My mother died when I was born.

And your father worked for the railways?

He worked for the railways.

And what did he do?

He was a, what they call a plate-layer. For the lines. Fixes up the main

15:00 way. They go around checking the, they were timber in those days, they were checking the timber, checking the lines.

Your mother died in childbirth with you?

Childbirth, yeah.

15:30 **And did your father marry shortly after?**

Yeah. He got a nurse and he married the nurse. I was the...

As you said, she was your second mother?

Yes, which means I didn't, she wasn't my mother until I was about ten. Somebody told me about it

You said you had holes in your shoes. Was it tough growing up? Did you have enough money in your family?

No. We had a job to find the 10

16:00 bob. Because he had a dispute with the railways over the accident in 1921. The railways didn't want to pay compensation. They didn't know what hit him. They couldn't find what hit him. He was laid down between the tracks. They found him unconscious. Something must have hit him.

16:30 **How old were you when he had this accident?**

Oh, about six or seven I suppose.

And could he work after that?

No, he couldn't work after that. No.

So how did your family get by?

Well, eventually we got passed through to the area of the railway called "Contributory" things like that. They helped us pay the rent and

17:00 get a bit of bread and margarine. No butter.

Did you have to start work yourself?

Fifteen, I started work

That was on the railways as well?

They gave me a job in the railways and said it looked like I'd have a good career - I was going to be a signalman.

Before that you went to school in Rotherham?

Mmm, Hmm

17:30 **Were you a good student?**

Not a very good one.

Did you enjoy school?

I threw a blackboard at the teacher one time. He come back from World War I and he'd hid behind this blackboard and he chased me behind the blackboard with this cane and I threw the blackboard at him and they nearly put me out of school. Another time he was giving us a lecture about how we should get round with a smile on our face all the time.

18:00 And I had a good idea. I was a bit of troublemaker. So anyway I thought about and I went home and everybody thought I'd gone mad, I was going around with a smile on my face. I went back to school the next day and the teacher that was giving us arithmetic, algebra and he saw me in the back row with a smile on my face. "Get out Lawrence!"

18:30 I come out and he nearly caned me and I put my head back to check the lights were all right and he gave me five strokes with the cane. He told me that "From that this getting around with a smile on my face is stupid" and I never did that any more.

Did you have anything that you enjoyed doing outside of school when you were young?

Outside school? No I don't think I had any

Sports, or?

19:00 No. No sports. No pastimes. The only sport I had was a playtime with the other boys.

What did you play?

Fighting.

Fighting? Was it rough?

Just fists, you know. My side against your side. Didn't do anybody any harm, a black eye every now and again, that's all.

Did you follow the football when you were young?

Couldn't afford a football. We used to kick tins.

19:30 Tin cans. Play football with cans, empty cans in the street. Couldn't play cricket, couldn't afford stumps and all that. Used to play football with tin cans, that's all we did

Did you have any friends in the area?

Yes. I had friends.

Do you remember any of them? Can you talk about any of them?

Yes.

20:00 A couple of them wrote out to me here trying to get jobs when the Depression was on. I didn't know any jobs. I told them it was just as bad out here and it was there. In fact it was worse. You'd have the racial business here. You didn't have that over there. They'd say, "You're a Pom," and they wouldn't give you a job. You open your mouth and you couldn't get a job. How could I bring people out like that?

20:30 **You mentioned before, you rode your bike to Manchester? Were you looking for work at the time?**

Yeah, five in the morning, five in the afternoon. Enquire at the clerks and the different people that did the job. That employed people everywhere. Cotton mills, everywhere. Aeroplanes works. I was out there a long time. I was living alongside and I'd see the aeroplanes.

21:00 Asked them for a place and everything. Nobody wanted to hire me. Everything was shutting down. Tried the navy, army, air force. Couldn't get in there. They wouldn't take anybody on. But, I did get in later. It was a bugger to join the forces. Nobody thought there'd be a war though. Nobody ever dreamt there'd be a world war.

21:30 Not with the idea of it. There'd never be another war. That was the last World War.

Was there still lots of echoes of that First World War in that area where you were growing up?

Well, we got bombed in that area. We made the iron for Sheffield. We had the coal. We had the water, we had the weather, we had the don. And the water's peculiarities were good.

22:00 And then we'd sell it to Sheffield and they'd make it into steel. They'd used it for battleships and everything

How much bombing did the area suffer?

Quite a lot. It suffered quite a lot. Even in the Second World War it was just about obliterated.

When you were growing up as a boy do you remember seeing much of the effects of the bombing still around?

22:30 No, I can't remember anything like that. But, to see those big blimps in the night and people firing at them, that was terrible. Quite a serious message, that worried the women

You must have been very young?

Yes. I was a three year old when that went on.

23:00 Yeah, three years old

You mentioned your teacher was back from the war.

He was a captain in the war, yeah.

Were there lots and lots of veterans?

Oh yeah.

Can you talk about some of them?

They had conscription over there. They all had to go. Even fifteen year old boys had to go. I knew of a fifteen year old who went and never came back. He used to show me his push bike. I remember him showing me

23:30 his push bike when he was on leave and he left and he never came back. It was one of those big pushes on the Somme, or something like that. They'd been a broken down bullet. I used to know of another woman, who years and years after the war used to go down to meet the train, the train that comes from the South. The people used to come from the war on that train and she would still

24:00 wait for that train everyday, years after the war. Now that's got to be. Her boy had gone into somewhere...

Your father had been working on the railways. Is that how he escaped the war?

Yes. That's how he escaped the war. They couldn't call him up once you're on the railroads.

Were there any other men that you knew as a child who had come back from the war?

24:30 Oh yeah.

Uncles, relatives, who?

I knew them all out of work too in the Depression. They'd come back from the war but they were all out of work in the Depression.

Did they ever talk to you about the experience?

Very seldom, very seldom. You don't get it out of them. They didn't want to talk about it. Not to us kids anyway. There'll never be another war like that.

25:00 You couldn't talk war any more, wearing a uniform was out of the question. They used to just tell you, "Don't ever join the army or anything." Even when I was out of work they used to say, "Don't join the army, don't join the navy," and when I got out to Australia what did I do?

But you looked for a job in the army and navy, anyway?

I did in Manchester. I was at my wits end. I didn't want to live off my sister.

25:30 There was no dole [unemployment assistance] in those days.

What did your sister and her husband do?

He worked at the post office in Manchester. It was a god job. Not a big job, but big enough to live off for the two of them. They paid rent for the house and I could have stayed there. She would have broke up when I left for Australia. And, him and her came down to Liverpool to see me off on the ship and those big foggy...

26:00 soon as I went up the gangway I never saw them again for the fog. And, then I went down the RFC [?], it was fog all the way. We got off Lands End and all that fog went straight away. And, we saw the blue sky. The blue sky from horizon to horizon. Not a cloud in it. Never seen that before in my life and we got to Tenerife and I'd never seen nothing like it.

26:30 And when I got in to Fremantle, all the different food shops. I'd never seen apricots or peaches or pumpkins in my life. Don't grow over there in the North. Never seen them. Here they are cheap as cheap but I had no money.

How did you gather that money for the fare?

The most was from the things I sold in the house.

27:00 After we'd broke it up I put it in the bank. And, I had very big visions about going to Canada. I thought I'd like to go to Canada one day.

How did you end up choosing to come to Australia?

Because when things got bad I wrote to, I had an uncle in Canada and an uncle in Australia, so I wrote

to both of them. The one in Canada said, "I've gone broke. I've gone broke. All my money I invested

27:30 in Wall Street is gone. I'm out of work and the people are all in the soup lines here. It's winter. Montreal, whoever thought, it's not working. Forget it." The one in Tasmania said, "Yeah. You can come if you like. We'll give you a roof." That's all I wanted.

What did you know about Australia and Tasmania before you came here?

I went to the library and quizzed my knowledge about Australia. I knew a lot about it. I knew you grew grapes and wine,

28:00 things you couldn't grow in England and I knew they had things out there that we'd never seen. I knew it was a new country with only three million people in it. I knew there was plenty of room for expansion. I thought, "Surely I can get a job out there." But, what I didn't realise, all the jobs were English firms and were shutting down and nobody would give you a job because you were English

When you decided to board that ship,

28:30 **did you have any regrets?**

Which ship? The ship to come out to Australia? Was that a difficult decision to make? No. I don't think it was difficult, I'd burnt all my boats. I had nothing to go back to. I'd been going around Manchester for six months and I couldn't get a job. There was no jobs in Rodwell and there were no jobs. The railway hadn't sent for me to go back and I had no trade.

29:00 What did England owe me? Nothing. I went back to the Perth and I went up to get the Perth and I went up to my sister's place in Manchester. The first thing she told me was, "You'd just been on that boat two or three days and the railway sent for you to come back. They offered you a job, in the signal box."

Your life would have been completely different.

Completely different. But I still

29:30 joined up though, I think, of the war.

Can I ask a little bit about that voyage out to Australia. You mentioned Tenerife. Was that exciting?

It's a beautiful place. Yeah. Everybody's sunburnt. It struck me the way everybody gets around dark brown, you know, sunburnt. Swimming in the ocean. Diving for money from people from the passenger ships and things like that. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. The water was so clear

30:00 and it's so blue. I'd never seen blue sea before in my life. The only sea I'd ever seen was grey.

Was this the first time you'd been aboard a ship?

Yep. Oh, no, no, no. I think I'd been to Canada when I was young. Didn't put that in. I went to Canada just before my father's accident in 1921. In 1920 my step-mother and that took me to Canada. Just to visit their daughter.

30:30 This was at Saskatchewan. Trying to think of the place. Just spent a holiday there and came back. I loved it and I made up my mind. I was going to go to Canada. Turns out I was wrong. I could've got a job in Canada. There were plenty of jobs in Canada, even when I was a kid.

31:00 Now there, right, left and centre they were hand out jobs.

What else do you remember about the trip out to Australia?

I remember we called at Cape Town. It's a beautiful place except for the black people. You could see they weren't doing too well. But, the white people, they were millionaires.

Did you stop and go ashore at Cape Town?

Yep. Wandered around and saw

31:30 all the beautiful botanical gardens. Things I'd never seen before. Flowers. You can't grow beautiful flowers.

Were you on your own at this point?

Yep

Or did you meet anyone?

Oh, I wandered around on my own. I was on my own. On the ship I was on there was only three passengers.

Was it a passenger ship?

No. It was a

32:00 merchant ship. Tramp. It had taken troops, Australian troops to Gallipoli.

Were you interested in the ship?

Yeah I went all around the ship. But, I never thought I would work on a ship

You had no ambitions at all?

No, I thought I was going to work on a farm. I thought

32:30 they were going to offer me a piece of land. There's that many open spaces in Australia and Tasmania for the population on they don't occupy that much of the country. There must be a piece of land that they'll let me pay off. But, no, nothing to do it.

Did you get seasick at all?

No. I don't think I got seasick. No, I don't think so. I was that pleased we were going out to a new land. I'd have put up with anything.

33:00 **Where did the ship land when it arrived in Australia?**

Landed at Fremantle, Adelaide and Melbourne. I got off in Melbourne and I went across the channel, across the south of there, to, place there, starts with L?

Launceston?

Launceston. Then train from there to Aldarn.

33:30 All day journey in those days.

So when you were in Fremantle you mentioned the fruit shops, what else did you notice when you arrived? What was your first impression of Australia when you came into port?

I could see a bloke sitting out there on the barges on the water catching fish. Catching fish and the fruit shops and then I couldn't afford to go on the train at all to Perth.

34:00 But I had a good look around Fremantle. I had no money to spend all the way through. I got to Melbourne. I had to have five pounds to land with and that's all I had. I borrowed that from my sister. Once I showed them that five pound I could do what I like with it. I sent it back to my sister.

You borrowed it from her?

Yep. When I got back to Tasmania, in the first mail.

34:30 **Australia was in a Depression too?**

Oh, it was in a very bad Depression.

Did it look better than England?

People were living on rabbit and I didn't know that. There are all sorts of sides. During the war I mixed a lot with the 6th Division chaps, I'd talk to them. "What are you all doing here on post?" They were all the same as me, they were all out of work.

35:00 But they called it susso [sustenance], living on the dole. All country people, all countrymen. The 6th Division were all out of work.

With the, what was the susso?

Susso was the allowance they give you. They give them something like a dole. Out here in Australia.

You never investigated this yourself?

No, I didn't know anything about it. But, the soldiers told me about it.

35:30 6th Divisions chaps. They all had a bad time and they were telling me what they used to do to make a living. Little trick they used to play and all that, on the farmers and that. Shearing and all that business. I had a great time listening to them. Like some blokes that did some gold mining

36:00 It was very interesting. Very interesting to listen to. I even talked to a German prisoner of war coming out of Tobruk. I remember getting through a hatch, the boilermaker hatch and there was a bloke sitting on it and he apologised when I got out, and it was a German prisoner of war. And he said, "Sorry." He said, "You speak English?" And I said, "Yeah." Anyway I talked to him about

36:30 Germany. What was Germany like in the Great Depression? He sat there and talked to me for quite a long time about it. I told him what it was like in England. He didn't know it was like that in England and I didn't know it was like that in Germany. He said all the Germans had stopped runs and all the chimneys stopped and there's no work. Nothing. Am I talking too long?

No. It was the same

37:00 **in Manchester exactly?**

It was. Nothing working in Germany. Hitler came along and "Oh look at this shipping. Everybody's working. Big drums are beating. You want money in your pocket? Follow somebody." That's what he said. I said to him, "Hitler? Have you heard the news this morning that Hitler went into Russia this morning?" That was the morning

37:30 he said, "How do you think you're going to go?" "Well he took Holland in five days he did, he took Norway in ten days. He did. He said he would take France in three weeks, it took about three weeks. He said he'd take Moscow in six weeks. That's what he said. Watch it." I tell you, I watched it very carefully.

38:00 I'll tell you what. The train stops at Moscow in six weeks exactly. They just didn't have enough. If they just hadn't played around with him, invasion of Greece. He held it up, six weeks to be fighting the Greeks in Greece. If he hadn't put his muscle in that. Mussolini started that battle on his own without asking Hitler. If he hadn't have started that war with the Greeks, he'd have won. He'd have taken Moscow. Moscow was gone, then Russia was finished.

38:30 **Got there before the winter in Moscow.**

Yeah. The wind had dropped for a bit and in then go. They had to freeze everything. Oil even.

Going back to when you arrived in Tasmania, this is after your gold mining expedition. Did you like Australia? Did you think it was much chop?

Well I could see it was beautiful,

39:00 I could see the beauty in it but I didn't like the trees. I missed those trees with the broad leaf. Those narrow leaf trees, they didn't look like trees to me. Sycamore trees and things like that. I mean fig trees with their big fig leaves. I mean the trees didn't even stop the sun from getting on you. I didn't go much on the trees. I didn't go much on the eucalyptus trees. It took me a while to get used to the Australian bush.

39:30 **But then later on you would speak of smelling the Eucalyptus?**

Oh, and everywhere you go, there's bloody birds' nests. No birds' nests in Australia. You never see birds' nests in Australia. Never see birds' nests in the bush. Oh, I bet they're there. But in England, whether it's London or anywhere there are birds' nests in the park.

Tape 4

00:30 **We were talking about when you joined up with the navy they said they wanted stokers. Did you have any idea what a stoker did?**

No. I had no idea at all, or any navy name. What they did or what they called them.

At Flinders, how did they teach you about what you were going to do? What was the training that you entered into?

Well, you got through Engineering School and learnt all about lines and boilers,

01:00 and main thing is, what's behind it all is discipline is what they're after. You do as so you're told. If you can't put up with the discipline then you're out.

How did you take to navy discipline?

I found it very hard. I used to run around. Cooks, stewards and the RAs [Rear Admirals] all wore square rig.

01:30 I couldn't tell the difference between them and the officers. I ran into an officer one day and didn't salute him because I thought he was a cook. And he blew the ice out of me and he blew at me running round with a full pack. Which was a pain in the neck when you had to get up at five or six in the morning to get on with your routine work. So I,

02:00 from then on, what exactly a cook was and a steward was and all that. But, before that I had no idea what the difference was. I found out later on that he was a captain on one of the N-class destroyers. They all worshipped him. They thought he was a great bloke. "How do you get on with that bloke?" "Oh, he's a good bloke." I was astounded. I thought, "He'd be a real cow to work under."

02:30 He was all right.

Was there a very distinct hierarchy between the officers and the men?

There was. But it came down during the war. There was. It was like the Prussian army before the war. They did come down and they did become human being when things were bad. They'd come and mix with us and sympathise and talk and all that.

03:00 Understood how difficult it is. Yeah. Which they weren't prepared to do after the war. And they still got it now. They're still a lot better now than they were to us.

You're first ship was the Canberra. What kind of ship was that?

Eight-inch cruiser. Ten thousand tons.

Was it a coal ship or an oil?

Oil.

Can you explain to me what you did on

03:30 **the first time you went aboard, what your duties were aboard the Canberra?**

Well the first thing I had to learn on the Canberra was which was the front and which was the back. I went to run around and I couldn't tell which was the front end and which was the back end. That's the first lessons I had to learn. Which was the front and the back. Which was the bow and which was the stern, all the navy language. You learn a lot, and where the doors were to go down. There were that many doors

04:00 to go places. I had to find the right ones to go down to the stokeholds. I used to get lost in the big ships.

You worked in the stokeholds? Can you explain what the stokeholds are?

Oh, the furnaces. The furnaces made of bricks, fire bricks and the intense heat from the oil squirting in is atomised. You've got to have the right amount.

04:30 The right amount of oil to get it right and then you light it and "Whoof" she goes into explosion and stays there like a blowtorch and you put half a dozen of them on and the steam starts to rise inside the boilers.

And, so do you have to apply this light regularly, or only once to light it up?

Sometimes you do it three or four times, depends how cold the oil is. You do better if your oil's hot, or warm.

After you've blown them up, what do you have to do

05:00 **once you've lit them up?**

Once you've lit them up? Leave them on and adjust the air pressure. Make sure the oxygen comes into it just right. Oxygen burns. There's no use churning out black smoke because you're wasting your oil and your money by doing that. When you've got perfect combustion, that's the best you can do and we've got periscopes there

05:30 that tell you what going up the funnel.

So can you explain to me what your workstation looks like? Well, the place that you work, you've got a periscope, what do you have in front of you?

Well, you've got pumps, pumps and pumps. Oil pumps that standby in case they don't go. You've got this application that works on steam and water in case they don't go and electric ones and the same with the water. If you need them you've got to have the oil.

06:00 You've got to have that water in the right time and right place. You've got to have everything, you know where it is.

What other tools do you have? You've got the pumps in front of you?

Sometimes they're going up and down, reciprocating. Sometimes they're going round and round the turbines and you've got automatic feeders on the boilers to,

06:30 these days they are really good automatics on the modern ones but I don't think they have steam boilers any more but in our days they didn't work. I never saw a ship where they all worked properly. They were all hand-feed. When you're on a Tobruk run and you're doing 34 knots you didn't know where anything was. The water, you couldn't tell where it was on the gauges. I had to

07:00 have a man posted to check them and tell me when they were getting too low, when he thought they were getting too low. I had to go by what he said. I had to have him posted there. We must have water when you're doing 34 knots. You'll blow the boiler up if you don't.

Where does the water come from?

The water comes from the condensers, from the turbines. All your steams goes into the turbines,

condenses in the condensers into water and the water has more water added to it, and more water added to it and

07:30 that water comes into the boiler.

Is there a big storage tank?

There's a big storage tank inside.

Did you have to take on water at every new port?

Yes. Always got to take on water. At some places you don't take water on. If the water's got lime in it you don't take it. You have it tested. You'd have the water tested. The only place that we used to take on water without any worry was Garden Island. This water, Sydney water was

08:00 the best water for the boilers anywhere. Australia, England, anywhere.

Who would test the water?

Oh. Our blokes would test the water. Engineers would test the water.

I'm just going to keep asking you about this for a little while. Because these don't exist any more it's really important that the Archive keep a memory of how this works, so I'm going to make you imagine, in that you're standing in the middle of the stokehold, can you explain to me what's in front of you?

08:30 **What's beside you? There are the pumps in front of you?**

Pumps at the side of you as a rule.

At the side of you? You're in the middle of the pump?

You're in the middle so you could hear the engine stop. That's an old fashioned idea, I don't know what they do today. They had gas turbines today. We have to beware because sometimes the reciprocating pumps would go up and they wouldn't come down and I'd have to jump up quickly and uncover it and move the valve across and then

09:00 rip it all together again and let go.

What would happen if the pump stops?

The pump stops and the water becomes low and you stop it. Stop the ship. That has to be done sometimes, on a corvette anyway. You stopped the ship. No good going on with the oil belting in and the water too low. You could blow the tubes. The tubes

09:30 are only like your fingers. The tubes are only the width of your fingers. There were hundreds of them, thousands of them. A big drum there and a big drum there. Held together by tubes

So you've got one person looking after the pumps. What else? How many people are in this room?

On The Vendetta we used to have to have sometimes five

10:00 blokes on the filter, on the oil filter, before it got to the boiler. Chasing the filters around every ten minutes. They used to give us Italian oil in Tobruk. The army used to come out to us on rafts and give it to us on flexible tubes, sixty diameter and down underneath. But, it used to fill with sand, they'd sabotaged it, the Italians, before they left

10:30 and we used to get halfway back to Alex, the prisoners of war and that on board, and it used to just about stop because the oil couldn't get through the filters. We'd had to, which filters over quickly. Whip out those other ones and clean them with kerosene and put them back again and we had five blokes contacted doing that. As soon as you'd finished one, start the other one because you had to keep the ship constantly moving.

What do those

11:00 **filters look like?**

Filters. Well they're made of iron and they're round metal filters and you pull them out, you see the oil has to go through them and they leave the sane behind, very messy. They're something like a petrol filter, they're that fine because the oil's hot. But the sand won't go through. The sand has to

11:30 be taken out.

How many did they have on the Vendetta?

We had two batches, about eight in a batch.

And how would you get access to them?

Oh, they were just on the foot there for that special reason. When the lines started, when Tobruk just started everybody knew that they'd sabotaged that oil. It was good oil, except it was sabotaged.

12:00 And full of sand. We used to put it up, pull the sand out, ditch the sand over the side and we had to get to, because you were at full speed and the speed was all you had to get away from the subs. The subs were outside, like sharks, waiting for you coming out. Subs.

When you weren't using this sabotage oil, did you need to have people working on the oil filters anyway?

We had

12:30 to have a clean set of filter all the time. It was essential because you never knew when you'd have to jump out. You'd get in and you'd just be relaxing and they'd say "Go. Go back, a ship's sunk. Go." And you'd have to go back. So you always had to have a clean set of filters.

So I'm getting a clear picture now. You've got pumps, you've got filters, what else was in that area?

Heaters

What do the heaters do?

Steam heaters. They heat the oil before it goes

13:00 to the filters. You'd take the stuff out and they, it goes to the sprayers. The sprayers shoot it out in an arch. That's inside that furnace. The furnace is like a blank wall, a room with a blank wall and the sprayers go to the back before it hits them but the back bricks, which are red hot and it vaporises and if you don't

13:30 you make smoke, you're making smoke. The enemy planes. You're running along the North African coast and they've all got aerodromes along here, the Germans. You've got to run along here and they'll spot you from a hundred mile.

So how did you monitor the smoke?

By periscope inside the boiler. We had a periscope and we could see how it was coming out the funnel and we had to keep that clean.

14:00 It had to be wiped all the time to keep that clean, to keep the smoke off it.

On the top of it?

The top of it and all the way through

Whose job was it to go up and clean the periscope?

Oh, they'd send anybody up there to clean it if it was blocked.

All right so we've got the pumps and the heater and the periscope. What other tools did you have?

We have water gauges. Water gauges and we had to know the little trick of how to tell where the water level was.

14:30 **How would you do that?**

With your fingers, like that. The water gauge would be about two of them together on this boiler. You'd put your fingers behind and felt, and if there's water they'd go the opposite ways to your fingers. The water cause you, when you see in the glass it's going the opposite way to you fingers, but when there's no water it's just the same as your fingers.

15:00 Same time, but if the slants in the glass are looking like that, even though you know very well that they're like that you know they've got water. But if the slant's going the same way as that, you've got no water.

How often were you monitoring these water gauges?

All the time

All the time?

All the time, because it was hand-feed. It was guessing, by God.

And so when you say by hand-feed, can you explain that?

15:30 Hand-feeders, because the automatics didn't work. The automatic were out of date wand wouldn't work.

So a hand-feeder is feeding water?

Yes, you're just as liable to flood as be empty. You've just got to be careful. They do more damage if you

flood your boilers. The suctions take over to the turbines in the next room, the turbine room and if you get water into your turbines you bugger your turbines up.

16:00 **There's a lot to concentrate on.**

Yep

Very difficult work?

Very difficult work, yep. If you don't do your job properly, there goes your rank.

Just explain to me the automatic feeders, what ships were you on that had automatic feeders?

Well, they all had automatic feeders, but they didn't work

Didn't work? Never?

Never. I never saw them work. They might work for five minutes and then away they go,

16:30 you couldn't trust them.

How did an automatic feeder work? What was it supposed to do?

It was supposed to open up or shut down to let water in like a lavatory feeder. But they don't work.

Was it run by steam as well?

It was open to steam and it was open to oil but the water, same pressure and that as in the boiler and wherever the water was at in the boiler, so it would be in there.

17:00 And the glass and in the feeder?

Okay. So let me keep creating this picture. So you've got the pumps and the heater and the feeders and the periscope and the gauges, what else?

Well, you've got your men working down there but you can't talk to them because you can't hear them for the fans. You've got short funnels and your fans are bolted and your fires up and your fans

17:30 have got a belt in and if they don't then the fire comes back. There are flips and flaps that are suppose to stop that but it doesn't matter. They come back

So what are these men doing? How do they stop that happening?

How do they stop that happening? Well the one way is to keep those fans going. I'll tell you a funny story.

18:00 When I was on the Vendetta I went from the Perth.

Here you go?

He probably thinks it's. Hello? Well from the Perth I went to The Vendetta and a couple of blokes said, "We'll show you a couple of tricks. We're off to Tobruk in the morning and there's a couple of tricks you need to learn." So I go down to the boiler room

18:30 with him and he said, "You see that hatch up there," and there was an iron hatch that you could just get your body through and a ladder coming down. Oh, a hell of height. Right from the upper deck it comes straight down to the boiler room and it's just a runger here and a runger there and there's a cord hanging beside it, a sailor's cod line hanging down it, and a knife

19:00 hanging by it and I thought, "That's strange What's that for?" And he said, "I'll show you" and he got the knife and he cut the cords and that bloody hatch sprung up, like that. Spring loaded. He said, "We get new recruits from Australia and we tell them that we're going to Tobruk and it's a suicide run and they see other ships going down, but we have a trick here that nobody's thought of."

19:30 And they said, "Oh yeah," and they cut that cord with that knife. And they shave themselves with that knife, it's that sharp. It's all sharp like a razor. Big knife. And they said, "Do you see that? That's how easy it is" And they take them up there and they show them the door, hatch-side, on deck, and it's bolted, with big locks and chains on the outside, so no-one

20:00 can, in fair time that's locked up and no-one's allowed to use it. What the boys have done is they've made it look like they've fixed the lock so everything looks right, even the engineer doesn't know anything about it. The boss. And the kid had seen that by cutting that, the spring loads it up. There's not supposed to be a spring in there at all.

20:30 It's supposed to be locked up so no-one can get at it. But if something happens, if a torpedo hits, we've got a way out. A way out of it. Actually, if a torpedo hits they've got no hope, but it makes them feel safe. So when you're at sea and all the fires are on and you're doing all those knots, they all hang on that ladder. They're thinking to themselves "If this goes tough we're up that ladder." And you're out there amongst the pumps and that and you know

21:00 what they're thinking and they feel safe, so you let them feel safe. There's no talking at all. It's all signals saying that you want another one up, or take that one down and the bloke on the bridge is telling you what to do.

How did the bridge communicate with you?

He has a thing he moves around and counter-balancing down below that shows up speed, down speed, up revs

21:30 or down revs on the indicator. I have to bring up more power.

Can you communicate with the bridge?

No. Oh, only by telephone. You can't hear him, and he can't hear me.

With the people in the furnace room, you could only communicate with signals?

Hand signals. What the water level was, they'd know what I mean.

So, was it simple hand signals, or what?

22:00 **Can you remember some of the hand signals?**

If I do that, they want another spray up. And turn this boiler up and I watch whether he's happy up on the bridge. He's got to increase his revs in the engine room.

Now, that whole time you were down there it was too noisy to hear any one speaking to you?

Oh, yeah, it is too noisy.

22:30 The only time you can talk is when you're in a slow speed, or a slow convoy. That would bring that noise down, bring those fans down to a slow speed just, then you can talk to each other but if you go to full speed then you can't hear anything. But it had to be done.

How long were your shifts?

Eight hour shifts. Oh, four hour shifts, that's right. Four hour shifts.

23:00 **So you'd have four hours on?**

Four hours on, four hours off, then four hours on then four hours off.

Around 24 hour clock?

Seven days a week

And your shift would end at 12 you mentioned. Were they always at the same time? What time would you start and what time would you finish your shift?

Twelve to four, four to eight, eight to twelve, like that. We had names for them, dogs. After four o'clock in the afternoon,

23:30 it was first dog, second dog, third dog, like that.

Where did that name come from?

British? I don't know where that name came from. We'd say, "I'm on second dog, what dog are you on?" "I'm on second dog, or third dog and so on."

How many soldiers were you working with on one shift, say on the Vendetta?

They'd be doing the same in the engine room and the boiler room

24:00 And there were quite a lot.

How many of them did you have?

We had two engine rooms and two boiler rooms on the Perth and on the Vendetta, one engine room and two boiler rooms on the Vendetta, on the destroyer.

Fascinating. This is part of the ship's life that you don't hear about very often.

No.

When you came

24:30 **off shift, where would you go?**

Your mess deck.

Can you describe your mess deck for us?

Mess deck would be forms, two forms and a wooden table with no decoration, solid wood, that's all. Which was scrubbed every day. Day shift scrubbed every day. If you were on day shift you scrubbed it every day.

And would you be able to get a meal when you came off shift?

25:00 There's certain times you can get a meal, and certain times you can't. Your mates would put one away for you, your mates on the other shift. The shift before you or after you. Your mates on the other shift, you'd tell them, "Put my dinner away for me," and they'd put it in the heater in the galley.

Okay. Did you sleep on the mess deck? Where were your?

Well, most of them did

25:30 but, I used to sleep up top. I liked to sleep in the open, in the fresh air, in a hammock. I used to put up with the cold and the noise of the fans. You used to get the noise of the fans up there.

Well, what's it like sleeping in a hammock at sea?

I'd prefer a hammock to a bed any time. It was hard at first but I prefer it.

26:00 You get used to them and they're comfortable, and you keep your equilibrium. The ship might go this side, the ship might go that side. It goes with the ship all the way, like a clock and you often see all the hammocks swinging this way, swinging that way, and the blokes inside fast asleep.

Did you even encounter such a rough sea that you fell out of your hammock?

I don't think I've ever seen

26:30 anybody fall out but they always talked about it. But, I've never seen anybody fall out, no. I've never fallen out. If I was falling out I'd grab the rope and hold it, the strings attached to it at either end.

Was it difficult to come off shift, to come out of that noisy environment, to come out of that? Did it take you a little while to adjust?

Yeah, you could say that, yeah.

How would you do that?

27:00 You'd come out, you'd go and have a bath in the shower, a quick bath. That would probably get you out of it. A salt bath. On the Vendetta all our baths were salt water. No fresh water.

Could you have a decent bath in salt water?

Well, you could get all the sweat off you, that's all we were interested in. I mean the dirt, the sweat. We'd always get the oil off with kerosene.

27:30 **So what did you look like when you came off shift?**

When you're wet through with sweat. You're wet through to your bones. Ringing wet through. Used to be 135 down there.

What about the grease and kerosene?

Grease and kerosene you get used to,

28:00 you don't notice it. You don't smell it on other people, you don't smell it on yourself.

Tape 5

00:51 **Before you tell us that story, tell us where you were?**

In Alexandria, on the Vendetta. End of the Tobruk run, loading the ship,

01:00 ready to go back to Tobruk and half the crew would stay on board and the other half would go down to the Fleet Club to have a few beers.

Okay, sorry. Could you just start that story again?

Yes. We were in Alexandria on the Vendetta at the end of the Tobruk run, loading up to go back to Tobruk in the morning. The captain and half our crew left to go to the Fleet Club to have a few beers and they'd have trucks there

01:30 at four o'clock in the morning to bring us back to the ship and we'd relieve the crowd that had been working all night loading on the wharf, the ammunition wharf, the ammunition going to Tobruk. Sometimes it was potatoes going to Tobruk. I went one night to the Fleet Club like that and had a few

beers. Not many, there was only very, very, very little beers to be had and I slept

- 02:00 in the Church of Scotland building next door, which was six or seven storey high, where they allowed us to have army beds, you know four inches off the ground and we got French windows, bougainvilleas on the outside and I booked a bed on the top floor.
- 02:30 I went to sleep and halfway through the night I felt something having a go at one of me fingers. I was sleeping like this on the stretcher like I would on a hammock, cause I was used to sleeping in a hammock. I was stretched across, like this, on my stomach, and something was having a go at my fingers. I thought, "Ah, rat" and we treated rats with great respect on the Vendetta. If we were going to Tobruk and somebody said, "We won't go down this trip.
- 03:00 We saw a rat up the lines onto the ship," or something like that. Rats don't come on a sinking ship. Now if you see a rat going down, that ship will go down. Generally they have two ships together, they leave, two ships together out of central and somebody comes along and say, "We saw a rat coming down that line," and we know that the ship's going to go before the trip's over. And they go.
- 03:30 When new ships came, we used to think they'd go for us, but they'd always go for that new ship and try and sink it. Anyway, here's this rat having a go at me, so I thought, "Just for a bit of fun I'll catch it. And, see what it's like." And I'd let it go for my finger and every time I'd get into position to have a go at it, and everyone's snoring all round me, there's a blackout on, you know.
- 04:00 And this thing's having a go, one finger to another and every time I'd move, he'd stop and then I hear drip, drip, drip, drip on the parquet floor. And I thought, "That's my blood, oh my hell, that's no bloody rat." So anyway I just let him go and I thought, "I've got to get him and see what it is" and I sprung him and it
- 04:30 fought me and flapped me around the ears and everywhere, and I thought, "What sort of rat's this?" and he was flapping around me ears and I heard a squeal and it flew straight like a bird, straight out like a seagull, straight out through the French windows. Straight out. Everybody jumps out of their beds and said, "What happened?" And I said, "Look at this floor, look at this great big pool of my blood." And the
- 05:00 nurse came along with a torch and said, "Doctor, see Doctor." That's all he could say in English. We hadn't got a doctor, we'd sent him off to Australia on the Stuart. I thought, "Oh my God, that was bloody terrible." That wasn't a rat, what the bloody hell could that have been? A bird? A seagull?" It had the body of seagull. "What the bloody hell was that?" And I was in white and I was covered in blood.
- 05:30 And I thought, "Oh blow it, I'll sleep it off," but my fingers wouldn't stop bleeding. So I wrapped my handkerchief around them and went to sleep. In the morning my stretcher was full of blood from my fingers. So anyway by 4 o'clock he had to go back to the ship and take over from the other crowd that's been working all night. So I went on board and out of the blackout and went into the lights, like this, inside of the ship and they all
- 06:00 saw me, and said, "What have you been doing? Did you get in to a fight?" And I said, "No, nothing." They said, "You must have. Look at the mess you're in." All the blokes standing around there. I had to get changed because I just felt awful, but my fingers wouldn't stop bleeding. I wrapped them up and held onto them and they said, "Are you sure you're all right?" "Yes." " You can go back to your bed." They were on hammocks, the other crew and they sleep on as we full steam ahead out.
- 06:30 It still kept bleeding, bleeding, bleeding and there was nobody I could talk to about it. We couldn't hear one another talk when we were full steam. I was worried about it all the time, instead of worrying about the job. Anyway we got there and we got back, we do another trip up and we go back and after that they sent us to Singapore and when I got to Singapore
- 07:00 my fingers were still bleeding. Still bleeding. One day I was in the Union Jack club there and there was Reader's Digest there and you could put your time in reading or writing to people and I read in the Readers Digest, "Anyone operating in the Middle East would want to be very careful, there's a lot of Vampire Bats around." Oh, I'd never thought of that. Vampire Bats? Vampire Bats.
- 07:30 "You'd better watch anyone who's been bitten by one, you won't be allowed back into your country for another two years. They'd be put in padded cells and they won't be allowed back for two years and they'd get rabies. They're all rotten with it, there's none of them that isn't." Oh my god. I was reading this in American Digest. They're feeding on the dead bodies in the desert. The dead bodies and the dead animals in the desert.
- 08:00 Oh jeez, here I am in Singapore and how am I going to get back to Australia? They're going to lock me in a padded cell and I'll never be able to get back. So I never mentioned anything about it and I went on and only my conscience was nagging me. I had to get something done, something or another and I was in a hospital at Concord and I told a doctor a couple of years later and he said, "You were very, very lucky."
- 08:30 He said they're all down with rabies and he probably was too that one. They said, "You were very, very lucky. They wouldn't have let you back into Australia if they'd known about it." I said, "Oh, my god. What would they do? Keep me a bloody prisoner or what?" "No. They'd isolate you." " Jeez." He said, "They're absolutely on with it and there have been cases of it and people have been held back.

09:00 You should have been held back. But you know what would have saved you? All those bloody needles you take on the way, before you go.

Can you just talk a bit about the rats, on the superstition on the Vendetta at that stage?

Oh, they often just used to eat our toenails. They loved our toenails for some reason. I don't know why and we'd be lying there in our hammocks and they'd run around. Our blokes would talk to them.

09:30 Bloody rats. They were quite tame on the ship. Not many but there were a few there.

Were there many rats on the Vendetta?

Yeah, quite a few. Nobody ever talked about disease or anything about that. If there's a rat on the ship it won't go down and they used to tell everybody, "I saw a rat on my -what we called a rat line - rat line last night."

10:00 It was a big, big belief in those days. We didn't have them on the cruiser but on the old destroyers that came out from England. Of course there were a lot of English sailors on there, but they were mostly our chaps and they'd inherited it. One of the myths that they'd inherited from the old RN army, I'm sure of it.

Can you talk about doing that Tobruk run from Alexandria into Tobruk?

10:30 **Can you tell us about your trip in from your experience down in the engine room?**

It was very, very thrilling. Down below us, if there was a tuft of smoke the captain would have us up onto the bridge to explain why there was a tuft of smoke coming up. Do it too often and you got into trouble, they'd strip your rank.

Can you talk about pulling out of Alexandria?

11:00 **Can you remember that trip when you first went in?**

Well, Alexandria is like an oyster and you pass out through what they call a Rassatin, a lighthouse. It's a bit like an oyster, something like Sydney harbour. A big harbour and we had the harbour and the French ships went in there and when we went in there Christmas Day 1940.

11:30 The navy was having a bit of trouble with French ships. The French had gone and they were having a bit of trouble trying to decide whether they would go this way or that way. The people didn't want to go with the French, but they wanted us to go with the French, so they had a vote on it and some voted to go home and some voted to stay. And, later they let some go but before

12:00 they made up their minds, the night they made up their minds, the British Naval Office in charge, named Cunningham gave them 24 hours to make up their minds and every ship pointed their guns at the French ship to let them think they were going to get blown up, and they probably would get blown up if they didn't make up their mind.

Whether they go to the Vichy French, or whether they stay with the Allies?

Yep. Yep.

And

12:30 **did the Vendetta form a part of that, pointing the guns at them?**

I was on The Perth then when that happened. I'd just come in from Australia on the Perth and we didn't know what it was all about. Anyway, at the end of this 24 hours they'd made up their mind that some of them would go and some of them would stay. The ship was to be illuminated, so the German bombers would leave them alone. They put French flags on top of their guns and painted French colours

13:00 on top of their guns to illuminate it. So, that was all right. The Brits, when the 24 hours were up, about half a dozen submarines came up and they would have blown them up. They were ready to blow those French ships up.

If they'd gone across to the Vichy French?

Yep. They weren't going to let them go. When someone would sink the ships when they got to France, which they were ordered to do.

So what did they decide to do? Did they decide to stay?

The ships stayed there,

13:30 the men that wanted to go home were sent home. They stayed there until the end of the war and then they changed their mind and they offered to use their ships in the Mediterranean, but the Mediterranean was clear then.

Do you just remember your first run into Tobruk?

Yeah, I often remember it, yeah. In the night, always going in the night and you have to be out of there

before daylight. You run in along the

14:00 wreck and the army comes out on rafts. They would come out all the way, sometimes two miles from where they'd come from and you're in the middle of Tobruk Harbour and you haven't got any fiddling about to do, you just have a bloke with his hand down the hole, filling her up with oil and then he passes it along to the next one. And all like that. All the breather tops are off and the men have their hands down. No measuring or any of that business.

14:30 It's all done by feel. While that's going on the men on board the ship, from the captain on, are unloading. They're unloading onto a raft on the other side. Ammunition, food and no one's allowed to talk loud, all whispers because you don't want the Germans to hear you and come in and they'd illuminate you and then they'd bomb you. Sitting ducks. Because the wreck there, the other ships

15:00 were caught. And all the time there's bombing going on. Going on all the time and while that's going you make a space on the ship and they'd lay their wounded out and we'd tie them down onto the deck. Wherever they can on the ship, on stretchers. The prisoners would walk them or carry them onboard and then

15:30 once we get them okay and the hoses are out of the way and the deck's clear of oil. We keep steam up all the time in case we have to shift.

So you've got the boiler going full pelt?

All the time, they were on the whole time. Then away we go, travelling south and we're using their oil and Italian oil's

16:00 full of sand, as I told you. You've got the five men down below changing those filters all the time, constantly. Never stop. All the way back to Alex, three days back to Alex. It was good oil but dirty. But, the sand in it was a pain in the neck, you know. The

16:30 prisoners of war could wander about the ship as they liked.

Did you ever meet any of the prisoners of war?

Oh, yes, quite a lot of them.

Can you tell us about it?

We used to take out wounded coming back, whoever they were, Poles, British. Yep we had quite a nice time with them. We ate the same as them. We didn't have meals or anything onboard the way we would if we were in harbour. You

17:00 lived on tin bully beef. Galleys were not allowed to cook because they'd put smoke out. Cooking galleys were not allowed to cook. We had a galley for us and a galley for the officers. We had to be on top during the trip. No one was allowed to put any smoke out.

Were you ever attacked from the air?

Oh, yeah, quite a lot. All the way, all the way. They were coming and going all the time. They knew what we were doing.

17:30 **Down in the engine room, did you know that you were under attack at time?**

Oh, yes. You got, the bomb went down and lifted the whole ship up and you'd come down in a trough.

Were you able to go out on deck and watch the air attacks?

Oh, yes. I was on the gun. I often got time off.

Can you talk about that?

18:00 You're in the chair and you've got 365 rounds per minute shells, like that. They going to automatic... Oh, I'll tell you a story. Coming back from Tobruk and for some reason and we have a captured Breeder gun, an Ack-Ack gun. Some of their guns were pretty good. Breeder guns. They're about twelve in a patch

18:30 and you know they go on twelve at a time. One's an explosive, you know, in the batch, different weapons. Illuminate and all that sort of thing and anyway one of our chaps followed that plane down and he followed that plane down and he hit one of our depth chargers. You see on the back end of the ship you've got depth charges all around the stern.

19:00 With subs in it and one of them was about here, nearly halfway across and he hit the charge.

Sorry, can you just describe how that happened?

He just followed the plane down, you know, to the water.

What happened then?

He hit the depth charge with his gun and everybody round looked around to see

- 19:30 what was going on. They were still firing up on top, you know, it was still going on, but he'd jumped off his breeder gun and he didn't know what to do. And the thing started to burn. The charge started to burn that sets off the depth charge. And it was fastened to the ship and if this was done probably, when the charge is done properly it fires off the ship and goes down and fires up as far as the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We, no-one would ever know what
- 20:00 happened if it was fastened to the ship when it went off. You could imagine, it would blow the ship in two. So everybody down that air they cleared forward. Everybody thought the back end of the ship was going to blow up. Of course everybody on the bridge was right up upwards and they're firing the guns. Nobody saw it, but I saw it. I was a bit further up. They came back, and nobody
- 20:30 knew what to do. And nobody had the will to say, "What happened?" The firing charge that sets off the big boom, it was fastened and couldn't get away. We all wondered what was going to happen to it. The only thing it could do, was burn inwards. So one of our blokes he had the presence of mind, he got a big pile of, what they call a boat pole, a bit longer than this room,
- 21:00 with a hook on the end that ran down to it and we got underneath it and he pulled it. Anyway he pushed the thing off the ship and then jumped off, then "Whoosh" and it lifted the back of the ship right up and we all went up to him and pat him on the back and he said, "Oh well,
- 21:30 something had to be done," and we all went about our jobs and said nothing. Years later at Anzac Day and I saw him there, I think he was from Casino or somewhere, and I said to him, "Did you get a medal for that?" and he said, "No. Nobody ever said anything about it." They never heard from the bridge and we never told them.

22:00 He should have got a medal for that.

So he saved the ship?

Saved the ship all right. She was full of ammunition. She would have gone like the Sydney went.

This was going into Tobruk, was it?

Coming out, well we were coming out and we were about halfway along. Going full speed

Did you ever attack any submarines?

Oh, yes. You often got attacked by subs. Yes, you often got attacked.

22:30 Torpedo never went off.

Hit the Vendetta?

Yeah, but never went off. A lot hear it. I didn't hear it. But they told me it hit the ship but didn't explode. But they had a go at it. They often streaked past us. Very hard to hit a destroyer going full speed. Anything going at speed, they can't hit it very well.

23:00 Look at the Queen Mary. They couldn't hit the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth. All through the war they crossed the Atlantic about 40 times but they couldn't hit them.

Do you think the Vendetta was a lucky ship?

She was a lucky ship to get back. They went out there to sink her between the heads when the war was over. Very lucky ship.

Any other stories from that Tobruk run?

Oh we used to

23:30 take the Ghurkhas up and down and our guys used to get them to take out their cookers, their knives and every time they took them out they had cut themselves. They had to show blood for them, for bringing them out. We used to love seeing them do it. Just to see them do it. The Ghurkhas would laugh. They liked doing it too. Now, there's not really much I can say

24:00 about that. We used to have a lot of fun with the soldiers. We used to laugh and joke with them, you know.

What sort of spirits were they in when you brought them off Tobruk? They must have been pretty happy to get off Tobruk?

They were always happy, whether they went up or down. The wounded were always quiet. They were quiet, thinking of their future when they got back to Australia or something like that.

Did you ever speak to them?

Yeah, we used to talk to them. There was nothing to stop us talking to them.

24:30 **Any blokes in particular that you remember?**

No, I couldn't think of any by name. I used to lie down there. They just wanted to know what was going on. How far along were we? How far did we have to go? What speed are we doing? All that sort of thing, you know. Did we get attacked often? All that sort of thing.

Did you lose a lot of your own men on the, were any of the crew injured

25:00 **or killed on the Tobruk run?**

I think we lost one, that's about all. We had a prisoner of war fall in the water in Tobruk and one our blokes dived in and got him out.

What happened there?

It was night time, coming up the gangplank in rough boots. It was just a plank now for them to come up.

25:30 If they missed that plank they went in.

What did Tobruk look like? What did Tobruk Harbour look like?

I never saw it in day light. We were only there at night. If we weren't gone by daylight you were a sitting duck for the German's bomber 57's. You had to be out by daylight. You had to be out by 4am at least.

What could you see at night time?

What could we see? We could only see the blokes on the rafts, and what they had

26:00 You'd speak in whispers, "And the oil they gave us and how are things going in Alex? And what's happening in Alex?," and all that sort of thing. "Have we got any mail?"

How many months did you do on the Vendetta into Tobruk?

How many what?

How many times did you do the run to Tobruk?

Oh, I think it's about

26:30 two or three times, that's all. I was only there in the latter part of it.

When you were in Alex, did you have much time off?

No. We didn't have a great deal. We didn't have a whole night, you very seldom got a whole night's leave, unless you went to that Church of Scotland place and booked in there. That's the only place they'd let you have all night leave there, and the rest of them

27:00 you had to be by 10 o'clock if you didn't have to work, you know. But we had picture shows there on Sunday at Fleet Club. We could have a beer if there was beer on. If there was no beer on you just had to put up with it.

What pictures did you see?

The night I had the vampire bat business I saw Robin Hood. Errol Flynn in Robin Hood.

27:30 I remember that well. Very, very well. I'd never seen many pictures, so I remembered the ones I've seen.

Was this about when the [HMAS] Waterhen was sunk?

Just after.

Can you tell us about that?

I wasn't on there when the Waterhen was sunk. They went alongside and picked up the crew. She was sinking slow and one of the crew wanted to go back and get their bank books and they wouldn't let them.

28:00 I heard about that.

Why weren't you on the Vendetta at that stage?

I was on The Perth. I was up in Beirut, up in Lebanon.

Can we talk a bit more about the Perth and your time in the Mediterranean there? Can you tell us a bit about going into Crete and Greece in a few more details? You first time in there?

Well I went in quite a few times, Crete and Greece, Crete especially.

28:30 We sank, one time there where the Germans tried to do an invasions fleet they captured all the Greek kikes, the Greek fishing boats. Like trawlers and used them to bring them to the mountain division in the dark and we were tipped off and the three cruisers got stuck into them on the north side of Crete.

Crete's an island like that.

29:00 We got stuck in to them here. They came up from Greece. We got stuck into sinking them. We hit them point-blank with the four-inch guns. They wanted to surrender, but we couldn't be bothered. We couldn't take them. We couldn't stop. To stop we'd get a torpedo from a sub.

Were you up top or down below at this stage?

Down below.

Where was your action station at this stage?

29:30 My action station when I was at Crete was damage control. Checking to see if anything went wrong. The pipelines, re-divert if anything gets blown away.

Did you have to do any damage control?

No. We never got severely. The time that we...

30:00 The young lad got killed. Yeah, we had to isolate that boiler.

Where was that?

At Crete.

Can you describe what you did? How you dealt with that damage on the boat at that time?

We couldn't get into it. The steam can kill at three feet. That heat, the steam is deadly. That kid got in there and he had no

30:30 hope. Then this bomb hit the boiler and busted it, steam everywhere. About 250 pounds per square inch and the bomb had gone right down it, the bowels of the ship and the oil tanks in the ship and blew it right up.

How many men were killed at that point?

There were only about four of our men killed and

31:00 there was about 14 soldiers killed then.

What did you do immediately after that happened?

Isolated that room.

How did you do that?

Shut off the valves. We had valves outside for that purpose. We had to get a ladder up and shut off those valves.

Can you create the scene for us, the noise?

The noise from in there was absolutely deafening.

31:30 The noise of the steam escaping from the boilers and also up top, the safety valves were blowing on the funnels and things like that. Very, very noisy. When the bomb hits it lift the whole ship up about ten feet and drops her back down.

Did you know what had happened?

32:00 We knew what happened. We knew a torpedo had hit us or something. We were in here and it come down next door. I could see my way into there and you had to shut it down on one side to get through. And you'd go down a passage, about as wide as that there, and you'd got through another door, isolation door. And then I have to wait for the green light before I can open this door again.

32:30 It's all interlocked

Why's that?

That's because in the boiler room you have the big fans pushing the fires up the chimneys. You open the doors and the fire comes out. And you can't have that. You've got to get those fires going up those flues.

So you've got to have some sort of air-lock system?

Right. Ordinary air outside and the other air in there. You can't talk for the belt fans belting air around down there. Fans

33:00 as big as this, as big as this wall. Steam fans and they're blowing air down. Blowing the air down into the boiler room.

So he pushed you out of the way, what happened then?

Yeah, I was laying on the door and the chap that was going down wanted to beat me. We were laughing and joking, relaxed because the tension was over. The captain

- 33:30 said, "We're out of reach now of the planes, we should be all right now. Let's return to our cruising stations." Opened the bulkhead doors, which lets the water through. If anything happens we can walk through the passageways without having to open and shut doors. All of sudden - it was a very cloudy day - and the bomb came through the cloud and phfftt.
- 34:00 Special armour-piercing bomb for the job and it comes with special four or five inch armour-plating over the top of it, and boom. Blew up.

Can you describe that moment and what you did after that?

Well, what happened in a time like that, you're petrified and you don't know what to do, nobody does. You're petrified. You're frightened more than anything cause you're

- 34:30 doing the wrong thing. In a few seconds you're totally bewildered about what to do. You don't know what to do. You think, "Oh, what do I do now? What do I do now?" And you're waiting for the next bomb to hit. "Where's the next bomb going to hit from?" Then a few seconds, then a few minutes, then everybody
- 35:00 in the same position as you are all around and then you realise, "Oh those valves." Otherwise all the steam from all the other boiler rooms will blow out through there. We can't have that cause they're feeding the turbines. "I'd better shut those valves." Big valves, like that so it takes two men to get them.

What about the boiler room? You said you had to isolate the boiler room?

- 35:30 I had to isolate the boiler rooms. She was like that.

How did you isolate the boiler room?

Those doors were locked, of course. They were still locked after the kid went through he locks the door after him. He doesn't leave them open, they have to be airtight, he leaves them locked.

And you couldn't open it to get in?

Oh, they're like a dead man's handle. They stay there.

- 36:00 **Once he was in there he could never make it out?**

He's got a handle in there but he couldn't vent, he never attempted to, so we knew he'd gone. There's ladders down below. You go down the ladders, down the ladders, into the bottom of the ship. To work on the foot place, down there. The fires and everything are down there. You had to go up the ladders to get to the air lock doors.

- 36:30 He'd gone across the doors and started to go down the ladders when the bombs dropped. He'd have been on the rungs, you know. The crowd we were going to relieve, they were on the other side of the boiler room and they were hanging on the ladders on the other side. You've got air-lock doors on their side, and air-lock doors on our side and they would come down and take over from those blokes on the footplates down below. That was my shift to take over
- 37:00 at twelve o'clock. And they'd be going up the ladder and they'd be hanging round the ladders and as soon as they could see me coming down the ladder, they were up the ladder. Throughout that, they were on their way up the ladders, so they were safe, they got out of it. It just blew him to bits with steam. But they were a fair way away from it, from here to the road away from it from here.

- 37:30 **Were you okay?**

I was outside. I was outside. The kid had saved my life. I had to get up off the ground and wondered what had happened and I had to wait to open the door until the green light to say that he was safely through with the other door shut before I could open this door.

You were in the air-lock?

No. I was outside

- 38:00 in the passage and there's the air-lock. I was in H passage. I came down the passage from the stoker's mess deck and I came down and me hand on the door like that.

Whoa. You've got to stay in front of the camera.

Oh, I forget where I am. I had me hand on the door like that you see. The handles were as thick as that, see, and you had to, like that.

- 38:30 It puts all the position all round on so nothing can get through from the pressure. I had my hand on the pressure like that and I had it half undone and this kid knocks me and the ship's picking up speed and he knocked me behind me legs and I had all me weight on one leg and he just went "Nuh-Nuh"

39:00 like that to me and passed through, laughing as he went through. So I had to wait there for the green light. It didn't come on so we know he'd gone.

That little incident saved your life I guess?

Mmm. Yeah, he saved my life. My wife's relative in Melbourne told them about it and seen his mother putting it in the paper

39:30 for years, but she hasn't lately, she must have died. It was a memorial to her son. Telling what happened to him, and that's what happened to him, killed on HMAS Perth. Yeah. He was only a young lad, just joined us from Australia. Hall, Harry Hall his name was.

Tape 6

00:30 **Did you ever try and contact the family of Harry Hall or tell them what you did?**

No. No, I didn't. I didn't contact them at all. I had another experience on the Perth. As I said before I was in charge of the damage control there for a while

01:00 in the centre of the ship. Down below just over the boiler rooms and we were doing a night trip from Malta to Piraeus, Piraeus is the port for Athens. We had a, another cruiser with us and we were leaving a phosphorous wake behind. It was a very fast trip with aeroplane parts for the air force in Crete.

01:30 We were getting bombed. They were bombing the phosphorous. They were using the phosphorus as a way to get us and sometimes they were quite close. We couldn't see the planes and anyway one of my blokes came to me and he said,

02:00 "There's a chap here who's a chief petty officer and he wants to see you." And I thought, "Yeah right. Bring him in," so he had said, "You're the bloke in charge here?" And I said, "Yeah." "I want to get on the upper deck, the ship's full steam here." "I want to get on the upper deck." We were zigzagging "I've got a special message for the captain."

02:30 I said, "Where do you come from?" "I come from the transmitting station" Oh, transmitting station, oh that sounds like the corps." So I said, "I'm sorry but I've got orders. I can't let anybody on the upper deck." The orders were not to let anyone on the upper deck because the seas were going right across. Also we were zigzagging, a very steep zigzagging.

03:00 He went red in the face and he said, "I'm telling you now that I have to go and I've got to go." "Oh, that's just too bad. If I've got orders not to let anyone through then I can't let you through. I'm just obeying my orders" and he threw a bit temper tantrum and went on a great deal. He wouldn't let up, he was still going on about it, "I've got to get up, I've got this very important message. It concerns the ship."

03:30 "It concerns the ship? Very well, it might be something important, transmitting stations." So I said, "Well, if we open up that door, will you go through quick?" So I sent to the kids "Open that door and let him through and then shut it as quick as you can before the sea comes in"

04:00 And up he went, straight up that ladder like a rocket and shook the door down and I thought no more about it. We came to Piraeus and in the morning I got in me hammock. And I'd just got in me hammock when a voice came over the PA [Public Address] system of the ship, my name was given out "You're wanted on the bridge. The captain wants to see you." So I jump out of me hammock and get into me clean overalls

04:30 and up the bridge. I'm thinking, "What the heck?" And here's the master at arms waiting for me. "You're in big trouble mate." "What for?" "You let that bloke out up on the upper deck." "He was begging me." "Doesn't matter mate. You were under orders not to let anybody up on deck," He said, "You were the last one to see him alive and the captain wants to see you." So I saw the captain

05:00 and I told him "He was going to pull rank on me. He came from the transmitting station and I thought he must have had some kind of order or something. He said it concerned the ship." And the captain said, "I gave you direct orders not to let anyone up on deck and you were the last one to see that man alive." He said, "We don't know whether he got washed off, or

05:30 what happened, suicide or not. He was a married man with children and now he's gone and there's no way we can stop. We've got our orders to flash through to Piraeus." You can't stop if anybody goes over the side. So that was that. The Master at Arms said, "Any charge?" And he said, "Nup. Let him go" They let me off.

06:00 The nearest thing I ever got to being disrated.

Was he captain at this stage, Captain Wollar?

No, Wollar wasn't on there until she came back to Australia.

Who was the captain at this time?

A chap by the name of Bower-Smith. He was a cousin to Queen Elizabeth, the other Queen Elizabeth, to the old one. He was a Scottish count.

Was he a good captain?

Very good captain,

06:30 very good.

Can you explain a little bit about him?

Oh, I don't know that's the only time I ever met him but other than that he had a very good name on the ship. Everyone liked him and when I went to the Vendetta there were a hundred of us crew that went off the destroyers, some went back to Australia and a hundred came out to take our place on the Perth.

07:00 He came up and apologised to us and said, "It's not my doing." But just when we were going home to Australia. He said, "Not my doing. I wouldn't have done this." This is from Navy Board in Melbourne. So, later on I found on that that was true. He was very nice captain.

Who was your superior officer?

07:30 **You didn't deal with the captain all the time obviously.**

No, I had to deal with a chap named Graham. We used to call him Gully Gray. Very nice chap too.

What was the chain of command there? He reported to the bridge? Oh, he was chief engineer?

Yep.

What rank was he?

He was a commander.

Did you have much to do with him?

Yeah.

08:00 A fair bit to do with him. He got killed, he went down with the ship. Very nice chap. Very clever man. Very thorough.

Can we just go back? You mentioned that when you let this man up on deck that you were dodging bombing because of the phosphorus, for someone who's never seen phosphorus aboard a ship can you explain to us what that is, and what it looks like?

08:30 Well, you've seen these bottles and things with the bubbles going up all the time. You've seen lemonade with the bubbles coming up, well it does that. Only the water's black and you've got these white bubbles coming up. That's the phosphorus.

Is it particularly dangerous when you have phosphorous on the ship?

It's not dangerous,

09:00 as far as we're concerned. It's just, the colour of any oyster shell you know, against black. If an oyster shell is chopped up into small bits and put up against a black background, that's phosphorus. Phosphorus is made from shells I believe, something like that. When I mentioned that it was dangerous, I meant that it was dangerous.

09:30 **Because it made the ship visible?**

Yeah, made the ship visible at night. Even on the ship you could see it yourself. It led a trail right, especially on a moonlit night. You could set the trail all the way to the horizon. It was dead give away.

Was it beautiful to look out over the ocean while this was happening?

Oh yes. I always enjoyed looking over the ocean, night or day. The ocean was beautiful, especially when

10:00 it's not rough. When it's rough it's not much for looking at. You know. I love the sea. You get to grow to like it. It's a beautiful thing, the sea. The air's clear and there's no muck or dust.

10:30 It's beautiful. We all like to get to land though. We all liked to get to the end of the trip to get to land again though.

Did it take you a long time in the navy to learn to love the sea?

Well, I'd had a lot of sea, coming out to Australia and all that. I'd had a lot of sea and that's part of why I joined the navy, a bit you know

11:00 and I'd lived in Tasmania and seen a bit of the sea before I joined up and I think most Australians had. A

lot of them had seen it more than me. The blokes from the tropical places, they were all good swimmers and all that. In Tassie [Tasmania] the water's too cold.

Can we go back, when somebody died aboard the ship,

11:30 **was there any kind of service for them?**

Oh yes

Can you tell us about those?

They'd have the service on the ship and they'd fix up the oars that were sticking out the side and they'd put the bodies in canvas and weight them down and they go along there and drop into the sea. They have a service before they do it. All those chaps on the Perth that we lost at sea.

That chap in the boiler room?

Oh, that chap, No.

No?

12:00 Not 'til he got back to Sydney. They probably had one in Sydney, there was nothing left of him. I don't know.

Can you recall one occasion where someone had died specifically?

All of the blokes killed, the army blokes killed up top on the Perth. Their bodies were put into bags and slipped down the slipway. This was made for them slipping over the side. The padre gave a service and the bugler, the last service.

12:30 **Do crew come on deck during that time?**

Not all the crew, anyone who wanted to. We were all a bit tired out, standing by our action stations night and day. They didn't make it compulsory, but if you wanted to, you could do it.

Did you go up and watch it?

Yeah, I watched it. I'd never seen it before and I wanted to see it. Well you can't take

13:00 bodies around with you, you've got to get rid of them. The navy was all, they buried everybody at sea, the navy.

Was it a very moving ceremony?

It was moving, yes. We were all thinking about the bloke who was locked down below and couldn't get out.

13:30 **Did you have to go back to work in that boiler room on the way back to Australia?**

That boiler room?

Not that boiler room, but the other one?

Straight away. Straight away I went down to the other boiler room.

What was the atmosphere like with this bloke trapped in the other boiler room?

Well, one chap, the boiler room with me, he panicked and wouldn't go down. He got through the doors on the big boiler room,

14:00 I was in A, and he panicked and, he was a mate of the bloke who'd gone down. He'd just arrived from Australia for us and he heard it was unlucky being with me, he went down below with me and he screamed and yelled and put on a panic and wouldn't go down with me. We had to get a couple of blokes to come down and pick him up and take him away and relieve him

14:30 but he come out of it with no retaliation was taken on him, or anything like that. He was sick. He was a friend of his.

Did that happen on occasion at sea, that men just went a bit berserk?

Oh, yeah, there was a few of those cases,

15:00 I knew of a bloke, when I was on the Perth and it was the first time we were landing. I knew of a stoker petty officer too, he went crackers [crazy]. I was young leading stoker, down in B - B boiler - and the chief stoker said to me, "I want this, I want that, and the other from the storage room, go and get it for us," and it was night and there was a storm,

15:30 we were in the tropics, up the Great Barrier Reef in the Perth, in the Atlantic. "Go up and get them from the storm and the storm," and the passageway that I was telling you about, the passageway there was, like a door

- 16:00 to a shop in the passageway. Just the passageway that swept right through the ship. There was a shop with spare gear, for if you want anything, nuts and bolts and things like that, this stoker PO was on tap all the time for if you wanted anything like that, whatever you wanted, spare parts or anteing like that. So I went up to him, it was in the night, it was dark outside but the passageway was illuminated with electric lights, like this, you know.
- 16:30 His name was MacSweeney I said, "I want this, this and the other thanks Mac." "Who sent you up?" and I told him "Oh, so you've got have this and that" and he gets them and puts them in front of me on this table, bench above the doorway. He said, "Who was that looking over your head? Over your shoulders? That bloke?"
- 17:00 The bloody passage is empty, with a big door at this end and a big door at that end and it's all clapped up and everything. Nobody could get though without a lot of noise. They can get through but they have to undo all these clips all the way around. So anyway "Nobody's there mate, nobody's there" "I just told you there's a bloke looking over your shoulder then" "But there's nobody here, there's nobody in the passage"
- 17:30 "What are you talking about? There's nobody in the passage" "Are you saying I'm a liar?" He was a lot older than me, I was only a young thing then. "I'm not saying that. I would not say a thing like that, but there's nobody in this passage." He looked around "There was a minute ago, he must have gone through the door," but nobody had gone through the door, so he was red in the face over it.
- 18:00 and I thought I'd better get away from so I got the stuff and I went back down to my mated in the boiler room "Something's wrong with that MacSweeney, he's going off his nut." I told them down below, they just laughed, never took any notice. A couple of days later, we where just steaming along - it was peacetime - and it's just a slow, steady speed and it was a Sunday and officers in the war drill were having
- 18:30 their dinner and MacSweeney walks in there with a gun and holds them up and says "Turn the ship around and head back to Australia." We were under British order and were working under the British army. "Turn the ship around and head it back to Australia." He got the, see on this passageway you've got racks of guns, rifles and guns and they're all bolted but he in that office, he's got the key
- 19:00 to it, cause he helped himself to a gun and he went in there and held them up. A loaded gun. Anyway, someone got behind him and jumped him, collared him and they put him in a straight jacket and he was put in the brig, the ship's prison and when we got back to port they detailed two blokes off, two seaman
- 19:30 with rifles to take him across to a British ship that was heading back to Australia and send him home in their brig and as they passed he was on the bridge, looking over, and as we passed I hear him "You all think I'm mad, but you're the one's who're mad, not me. It's you blokes, not me. I'm not mad. I'm going home." We just laughed "Yeah, yeah, mate. Tell us another one."
- 20:00 He was a funny sort of a bloke. He'd been in the navy for 22 year or something like that. Anyway, another twelve months over there in the Atlantic and we were heading back to Australia and we went alongside Garden Island and I had to get some stores, I had to get some stores for something. So anyway, two or three blokes under me had to go and get some stores
- 20:30 from the store place, from the store shop in Garden Island and I get in there and who's in there but MacSweeney sitting up, "Hey everybody, what're you doing? He was a big shot. He was and as soon as he saw me coming he said, "Oh, what're you doing here? Are you still on the Perth?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "What're you doing here? How'd you get here?"
- 21:00 I thought you went home to the mad house." "Yeah, they said I was mad, I told them I wasn't." He had the gift of the gab. He said, "And I finally convinced them that I wasn't, so they finally sent me here and now I'm in charge. Look," he said, "I need an assistant, do you want to get off the ships and the war and all that? Be my Assistant 'til the end of the war. Good job, all that." I said, "Yeah, it's a good job."
- 21:30 but I said, "No thanks mate." I didn't want to spend the rest of the war with a mad man. Later on, after the war ended I had to go back there and he was still there. He saw the war out. He wasn't so bad after all.

Maybe he wasn't mad?

What?

Maybe he wasn't. Maybe he was right.

MacSweeney,

- 22:00 they sent him out to Callan Park [Psychiatric hospital] and brought him back on the ship

Can you tell us, did you ever see the brig when you were on the?

No, I never saw the brig, but I'll tell you another story, before the war, about three weeks before the war broke out.

On the Perth?

On the Perth, yeah. I was in England and we were getting the Perth ready to leave for New York. We were going to represent Australia at the World's Fair in New York and this is August, July/August the next

- 22:30 1939, the war was December [September] the 3rd and the captain knew very well that the war was very close and he was very anxious, very nervous and so we'd all been pestering him for a weekends leave, so we could go and travel around and see Paris, or whatever it was you wanted, a lot of the young ones were, but it didn't worry me, but it was mainly England I wanted to see, my sister in Manchester I wanted to see.
- 23:00 He said, "Well, what I'll do, the last weekend you can all have the weekend leave only you'll have to back on the Monday cause we're leaving port on the Monday. We're leaving Monday for New York. I want you to all promise you'll be back on time. If you're not then you'll be listed as deserters cause you've been warned and told. This is only a little island and you've got plenty of time. You can catch the train to London and then down the coast to Portsea, there's plenty to see
- 23:30 so there's no excuse. So I will treat you very badly if you don't do it. War could break out before you get back to Australia and I want to get to the other side of the Panama Canal before war breaks out, so we can go to Australia, so we can go home." We went over to New York, we were in New York
- 24:00 and somebody said, I was a leading hand then, not a petty officer. "There's your name up on the notice board to take a squad up, to take the chaps up to the Queen Mary to pick up those prisoners when she comes in." We'd left 53 behind, 53 didn't make it and the captain told us, he said, "Oh blow these holes, I'll do this, I'll do that. I'll do extra work.
- 24:30 I'll kill them when I get them. I warned them and I told them," and he said, "53. I never dreamt we'd be that many short." The ship was full of red lead, and she had to be painted to look good for New York. They'd paint her as we went across the Atlantic. During the daylight hours we were painting, early morning, evening, everybody was painting, along the side of ship and she looked immaculate when she got to
- 25:00 New York. I've got a photo there, I'll show you. Anyway we got past the Statue of Liberty and all that and we got into New York and we'd been there two or three days and there was this notice on the notice board "That I had to take a tack... team and go and pick up these survivors, these blokes, retrogrades. 53 that had been on the Renegade. Blokes that had been to Paris and all over the place, Berlin. So
- 25:30 she was due in that day. She come in about 11 o'clock in the morning and they're finger wharves, finger wharves like that and they come in. We're down here, like this and she comes into one like that, see? And I have to go and across, down this main road here and down on the Queen Mary to pick them up. They gave us rifles and a bloody bayonet, and
- 26:00 gaiter belt and all that sort of thing. Four of them and one of me and away we go. We march along and when we go to see if the Queen Mary was in or not, she'd come in a bit early. She'd come in about 8 o'clock and it was full of these bloody refugees from Europe, bloody Jews from France and Germany and all their relatives
- 26:30 in New York were there. Half of New York were there on the jetty. There was no way we could get through. They were all excited, waving to somebody up on the deck of the Queen Mary. It was hopeless, how could we march through them. We were six bandits, how could we do it? So, I allowed around for the New York cops [police] and I saw a cop sitting there in a little alcove and I said to him, "I've got a problem, I've got to get on board that ship to pick up some prisoners and I've got
- 27:00 no hope of getting through this crowd. There's millions here." There were so many people there, crowds of them. "Oh, we'll soon fix that," he said and next thing the squad of bloody New York police on high-powered motorbikes with screamers on and everybody falls back like the bloody Jewish crossing the Red Sea, you know? They all gave them a passage and they knew they'd cut them down if they
- 27:30 didn't. They took us on the back of the seats and they took us down to the end of the gangplank and the gangplank and the ladder was a rope, like an escalator, like this and we get up there and there's a bloody waiter, with a bloody great big thing of drinks waiting for us, courtesy of the captain. So we said, "Oh, thank you very much, that's just what we could do with, after
- 28:00 this slot." So we thought, "This is all right, getting the prisoners and getting pissed at the same time," so he said, "Now, I've got orders to take you round the ship. The blokes aren't ready yet." I said, "It's bloody 11 o'clock in the morning." "They're not ready, the captain said to take you round and show you the ship, boiler room, venting rooms, all around, whatever you want to see."
- 28:30 "Oh, all right" So around the boiler room, viewing room. Oh geez, they must be ready by now. We're wandering round the ship, and it's on my mind, "What's this all about?" Finally we get up to the bloody different, this is where they had the dinners, and this was this, and this was that, and we got to the state room and when we get to the state room here's our blokes having their, I don't know whether it was their dinner or their breakfast and they've got their bloody

- 29:00 captain there from the bloody, he's an artist from Hollywood there, Actors. Tallulah Bankhead was one, British actors and actresses, Deborah Kerr
- 29:30 with somebody else and bloody David Niven, all sitting in amongst them, around the bloody table, filling their guts and "What do you blokes want"? They said to us, they've seen us all coming in the doorway, "What are you blokes after?" and I said, "We're after you. The captain, bloody hell. He's gonna skin you blokes alive.
- 30:00 He's bloody told you that you had to be there on time, and you weren't." "We're having a marvellous time, we've had a good trip across the Atlantic, we've been treated like royalty." I said, "Well, you won't get it when you get on the Perth. It's time to stop it now, your blokes" "Ah," they said, "You would come along and spoil it while we're having a bloody good time." And the captain said, "They've been well behaved, they've been really good," and he said
- 30:30 "I had orders to put them in the brig but I wouldn't even dream of it. They're such gentlemen," and I said, "Well, that's not what our captain thinks." Anyway, this went on. Anyway what happened is I got up and marched them down and took them back to the ship and got out of our boots and spurs and rifles and all the rigmarole and the captain, did he blow them up in front of all the ship's company
- 31:00 and made them look about that big and he said, "If you'd had such a marvellous time on the ship, you're not going to get it here. They've got to work hard, they've got to do this, they've got to do that. So we just left New York and not long after that, a couple of days after that war broke out, so it was all forgotten. All forgiven and forgotten. He was fine and he later became an admiral then.
- You mentioned, you talked before about being in the Panama Canal, after the war had broken out,**
- 31:30 **the ship put up false funnels?**
- One funnel. We had one funnel either side, you know like that
- How did that work, can you explain?**
- We put one up in the middle, cardboard one, it was three-ply.
- And did that disguise you as a different ship?**
- Oh, yes. It made it look like a Russian ship as a matter of fact.
- Did it fool everybody?**
- It fooled a lot of those people on the trains
- 32:00 and the sticky-beaks on bloody wharf, on the canal. They had spies. Could have been spies, they were all bloody shouting "What ship? What ship?" We took the bloody nameplates off. No one was allowed on the upper deck.
- How do you get a fake plywood funnel? Where did the fake plywood funnel come from? The fake funnel?**
- Oh, there was always artistic blokes somewhere, there's always
- 32:30 someone who could do it. Some of the officer could do it. Someone had the brain wave to do it anyway.
- Amazing?**
- Yeah, we went through there three times with that, we put the funnel up each time. We didn't want to, they said, "The Panama Canal was out of use for belligerence," what belligerence was he wouldn't say but he let us through, he wouldn't let the Germans through, this is early in the piece,
- 33:00 so we knew America was a bit favourable our way, to let us through. To let the Queen Mary through too, which came to Australia.
- The Americans helped you in the end. They helped you in the end when you were chasing The Graf Spee.**
- Oh, they did help us there, yes, yeah. There was a bloke giving out, the Renown was there and this was there and that was there and they were actually in Cape Town. They'd taken five days to get
- 33:30 there and they could only do 22 knot and we were the ones who were either... We were just there .We were out of sight but I was in the boat, The [HMS] Cumberland and they were waiting for him and the captain told us on the speaker what was going on and what we were going to do. Of course when it all fizzled out
- 34:00 it was all forgotten and it's never been mentioned in the history books or anything and I thought it was well worth mentioning. He said, "We're going to do big things like the Sydney did in the First World War," and all that bullshit.
- Can you tell me a little bit more about the World Fair in New York?**

Welfare?

The World Fair, in New York?

I'll tell you something about it, yeah. I'll tell you one thing about it, this was interesting.

- 34:30 I went, I was working shift work. The boilers, somebody had to keep the steam going in one boiler in case of anything happening, and to put the heat through the ship and that. There was another chap, I can't remember what his name is, but we decided we'd go off and have a look at New York, we had 24 on and 24 off, you know, and we had 24 off and we'd go and wander around New York on our own.
- 35:00 While we were off a big businessman stopped us in Times Square "Are you chaps off that big cruiser down there?" "Yeah." He said, "Well how would you like to go to Madison Square Gardens to see a baseball match?" "Oh," I said, "We'd love it." "It's on today." My mate was a good athlete, a good cricketer and all that so we took the tickets and we went in and it was packed, absolutely packed.
- 35:30 Packed out and we'd just a couple of seat at the very top. Way out, right up at the very top. Way out. Like going to a football match and we got our seats and we sat down. It wasn't a seat, it was a bloody plank and we sat here and watched the match and the boys came out and played baseball. I don't know anything about baseball. Anyway, at quarter time
- 36:00 and they'd bring out the clowns, all dressed up as clown coming out to act the fool with the balls and someone spots us in the white uniforms, right up the back amongst all the crowds of people and they said on the loud speaker "Boys and girls - cause there were boys and girls - boys and girls, we have visitors here to the World's Fair here in New York, off the cruiser, HMAS Perth, in port. Let's all give them a
- 36:30 good - this is before the war broke out, about a week before the war broke out - let's give them a good hoy." So they all gave us a standing ovation. They all gave us a cheer. It was very touching, you know we thought, "That they would do that for us," you know. Then they sat down, then he said, "Would one of you like to come down and come play with the clowns?" Now I can't play cricket, I can't play baseball
- 37:00 but my mate is an ace of spade. He was beating the British migrants that came out to Western Australia to a farm, and the farm went bung during the Depression and they went to live in Perth and his sisters became school teachers and he joined the Australian army and he was younger than me and he,
- 37:30 he didn't want to go, he didn't volunteer, he wouldn't. So I said to the people all around me, "My mate's a good baseball player, get him out," whispered to them and they grabbed him and lifted him up and he had to go out, you know, bellbottom pants, as they were in those days, blue collar and all that, white hat and big tall, six foot two and he looked well to me and he went out. He went
- 38:00 right down and then out in the paddock and he picked up the baseball bat. I didn't know if he'd ever played baseball before, I knew he could play cricket and gets there in front of the bloody wicket and they send him a beauty, a very fast one down and he swipes at it like a real Don Bradman [Australian cricketer], you know, really swiped at it, and he missed it and collar flew out his hat, flew off and he looked a bit like
- 38:30 Donald Duck out there and they laughed, they thought it was funny and it was funny the way he swiped at it. If he'd have hit it, it would have been out of there. Anyway, the bloke took the ball and he laughed and he bounced the ball up and down and he threw it again and Bluey hit it this time and it went outside Madison Square Gardens, there is that big park, Central Park with those big pines
- 39:00 and it soared right out of Madison Square Gardens, right out over those bloody pines, right out over there. They all laughed and got on their feet and gave him a bloody good cheer. They all laughed about it and when Bluey sat down and a bellboy came along with a card, "The head of Sand oil company would like to see him after the game, would it be all right?" We said, "Yeah,
- 39:30 why not." So we met him and he took us out to dinner out to some posh place and we're sitting there eating our dinner with him and he was Australian and he'd stopped over there and worked himself top of Sand Oil. We're sitting down there and all of a sudden a tramp comes in, a bloody tramp comes in, a ragged tramp with
- 40:00 bloody holes in his legs and everything. He was hell of mess and he was dirty, filthy and he came and sat at our table, pulled a chair up and sat at our table, no welcome and he said to the bloke... they swapped words about something or another and anyway a waiter comes along and says to the tramp "What can I do for you?" Anyway the tramp orders wines, biscuits,
- 40:30 big meal for himself, all for himself. Sits down and eats it all, like that and then he pisses off, just goes away and we said to the Australia bloke, "What was that all about? You don't know that bloke?" "No, never saw him before in me life" "What'd you do that for? You paid the bloody bill and everything." He said, "Do you know who that bloke is? He's a vet." "What's a bloody vet?" We'd never heard that expression in Australia.
- 41:00 "What's a vet?" He said, "He comes from the First World War. He was only a private. I was a captain in the Australian Forces, but that bloke, if he comes to your table, you provide the meal. It's a known thing

in America. He said that if a bloke, if a Vet comes and sits at your table, you provide the meal. It doesn't matter who goes there, if a tramp like that, if you go there and you've got the badge, you're provided a meal

41:30 **Ever got a meal out of coming back and saying you're a Vet?**

No.

Tape 7

00:30 **You were 12 months on the Perth, on the Atlantic. Can you describe some of the stories from that time? What's your most vivid memory?**

I remember going through the Bermuda Triangle in very rough weather and different things being washed off the ship. We passed a shadow, there was no radar in those days. It was very rough and it was night time

01:00 and we thought we'd passed The Deutschland in the Bermuda Triangle. We just thought, if you look at the records somebody's come back with the idea that we passed the Deutschland.

What was The Deutschland?

A battleship like The Graf Spee. Exactly

Were you aware of the reputation of the Bermuda Triangle at the time?

Oh, yeah. We'd heard all about that.

01:30 We used to joke about it but after that storm we never did again. We just about upended ourselves in the storm.

Can you talk about that storm?

Well I was down below in the stokehold and that's all I know about it. We weren't allowed up onto the upper deck

What was like down in that storm?

Storm? No one was allowed to go and look at it. You were inside the ship and you never went out. No one was allowed on to the upper deck, you'd get washed off the ship.

02:00 **Was it very rough down in stokehold?**

Hard to stand on your feet. Hard to maintain your balance. You are always standing up, there's no sitting down or anything like that. When the floors up hill and down hill, really big time

02:30 and the screws come out of the water, occasionally at the back, they're whizzing in the fresh air instead of whizzing in the water. It worries you, that does.

Does that over speed the engines?

It does over speed the engines, just at that time. It cuts back for a while.

Can you describe that moment that you joined that big convoy? I think that's the time they shot at you, with small arms, is that right?

Yeah, they opened up at Buen.

03:00 We treated it as a joke. I was on The Cairns then, it was a corvette.

Right, so that wasn't the Perth then?

Not at that time, no. But somebody did open up to us. They came up, like that, and we came down, like that. 18 corvettes in here, they go back, we go in like that and we turn around and go with the convoy to the Med,

03:30 to get to Gibraltar.

That first time on the Perth in the Atlantic, you were doing convoy duty, is that right?

Yeah. Nearly all the time, except for when we were chasing the Graf Spee.

Can you talk about what was specifically involved in doing convoy duty for the Perth at that time?

Well, when the convoy, you can only go as fast as the slowest ship in the convoy. That's the big trouble with convoys.

04:00 You can't, you might be able to do 34 knots or something like that but you can't do like that in a convoy, you've got to go the speed of the slowest ship. If that's too slow she's got to be thrown off. So the others can go faster. The slower you go the bigger target you before for submarines. They can go under you very quickly with their torpedoes. At that speed. They're never at that,

04:30 they never hit the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth and they crossed The Atlantic forty or fifty times. The food had to be got into Britain you see. From the Argentine, from South American and the West Indies, sugar from the West Indies, Argentine, had to be gotten in to the British Isles somehow. And the only way to get it in was up around the North

05:00 of Ireland into Scotland, through Grennock, a place called Grennock. That was the end of the River Clyde.

How was the morale on the ship at that time, while you were doing the tour of the Atlantic on the Perth?

Well, morale on the ships was always very good on the Australian ships. British ships too. It was always very good.

How were you cooperating with the British Royal Navy? How did you

05:30 **get on with them, the Australian ships?**

Oh, very well. There was no trouble at all. A lot of our officer has been trained in the golden time in Plymouth, or somewhere.

Were you the only rating who was from England who was on an Australian ship?

No, no. There were lots of them. Not a great deal, but there was sprinkling of them. Some of them had even come out when the gift ships were given to

06:00 Australia. They sent crews out there and a lot of them stayed out there and joined the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] and server.

Did the Perth ever attack submarine on that convoy?

Oh, yeah, a lot of times.

How many did you hit?

We don't know. You never know. You never see any of them. You don't know. We gave them a good hammering but we don't know whether we got them or not.

Can you tell, when you're in the engine room, can you tell

06:30 **if the ship is attacking a submarine?**

You get the, when they're dropping the death charges you get the blast coming up underneath, in the boiler room. You get that. And also when the guns are firing they come in through your fans. They bring it in to you.

What do they bring into you?

It brings in the noise of the guns, as if you're right on the guns,

07:00 you really get it from down below. It's very noisy. You can't possibly talk to each other down there either when the guns are firing. The blasts from submarines. It's all very noisy.

Did you ever have to stop and pick up survivors from the ships?

We're not allowed to do that. You're sitting ducks for submarines like that. The Queen Mary hit the Korasawa during the war,

07:30 got her in two and she had 10,000 American soldiers on her, the first lot of American soldiers going to England and they were not allowed to stop and pick them up in the night. The one thing they could do was throw life jackets and belts off the ship and hope that somehow they'd get to them. They had destroyers with them and they were left to pick them up.

Was Perth there at that time?

No, we weren't there that time.

08:00 **When you left the Perth you returned to Australia. Can you talk a bit about that time coming back to Australia?**

I left the Perth and I went to the Vendetta and the Vendetta went to Tobruk. So you've

Speaking specifically about your trip back to Australia after that?

We went back to Australia on Monscrew [?], through the Red Sea, through the Canal, past the [HMS]

George, it was a big liner, lying on its side in the canal.

- 08:30 They'd bombed it and the Germans had bombed it and tipped it over, a troop ship. It was laying on its side when we passed it. And we went through there to Bombay, Bombay to Colombo, Colombo to Penang, Penang to Singapore. This is on the Perth?

This was on the Vendetta.

The Vendetta? Oh, that's right. On the Vendetta

- 09:00 they made us do a speed trial outside, the next day, to see if we were good enough to go with Prince of Wales. It was coming but hadn't come in yet and we wasn't good enough, so then they gave the word for the [HMS] Empire to come off the stocks and we went on. They started pulling it to pieces.

What was your job at that stage, going into Singapore?

Still on the boilers.

- 09:30 **There any particular incident on that trip back that you can remember?**

No, I can't remember anything outstanding, just a slow old trip on one 'screw. Oiling different places, Aden, Bombay, Colombo, Penang. You have to oil every place that you go, you don't carry much oil.

- 10:00 **There was one particular thing I wanted to ask you, there was a ship called "Red Lead?"**

Oh, that was on the Perth

Do you remember that cat at all?

I remember the cat, yes, although I never played with it or anything but I remember it scampering around different places.

It was famous on the ship?

It was famous. They all thought the world of it. They thought as much of it as we did on the Vendetta of the rats. We thought of the rats like that on the Vendetta.

- 10:30 The rats were as tame as that on the Vendetta. We didn't mind the rats because they gave us a feeling that we'd get back after the next trip. Because we thought the ship was expendable, being a World War I ship and a gift ship to Australia. She'd had her time. We couldn't see any future for The Vendetta, except for - get sunk. All the times we went off to Tobruk she lost her,

- 11:00 the ship that went with her. They went for her but they hit her.

You enjoyed your time on the Vendetta?

I enjoyed my time on the Vendetta. My favourite time was when we went to Alex and they said, "No more trips from next Monday or Tuesday." Then we used to get into some cooking. We could light up the galley and get in there and cook. Some of our blokes were terrifically good cooks. They used to make a good stew

- 11:30 and we used to eat like royal. They cut all bloody red tape and routines and red carpet and ship. All that business. It was put away. And round and captain going round and all that. The captain used to come around and offer stews and that himself.

They all used to eat together on the Vendetta?

Everybody, it was Tom, Dick and Harry

What do you mean by that?

- 12:00 Well there was no higher sergeant business. We just dropped all that. Everyone was just Tom, Dick or Harry.

Who was the personality on the ship, on the Vendetta, do you think?

Our captain was the biggest personality. We had great trust in him. Dusty Rhodes, his name was. "Dusty" Rhodes, we used to call him. Anybody called Rhodes is called "Dusty" Rhodes in the navy, anybody

- 12:30 called Miller was "Dusty" Miller. Things like that with your name.

Now that you mention it, did you have a nickname?

"Jock," when I first joined because they couldn't understand me. I'm from Yorkshire and they could never understand me.

Did you ever meet Dusty, Dusty Rhodes?

Oh, yeah, yeah. Meet him? We used to rub shoulders with him.

13:00 Nearly fell over him a couple of times. Unloading the ship in Samuka Harbour, unloading the ship in the dark and I bumped my backside into him. I didn't know who it was, it was the captain. I apologised and he apologised. We were too busy.

Did you have any other superstitions, personal superstitions

13:30 **like the rats, but for yourself?**

No, I didn't have any superstitions. I knew that was a navy superstition and I would worry about it. We all had to have something to cling to.

What did you cling to?

Well, knowing we were all good swimmers. That was one good thing. We all used to swim in Alexandria Harbour, dive over the side and swim.

So you figure you could escape if you went down?

We thought

14:00 "We could beat the bombs there." So if we get torpedoed, "Oh that didn't happen to me, that happened to someone else."

In what other way did you keep your morale up on the Vendetta?

Jokes amongst ourselves.

Can you remember any specific jokes? Did you used to tell any jokes about the senior officers?

Oh, yes. I'd joined from

14:30 a farm and I used to have a couple of blokes on my ship who were farmers, joined from farms themselves. Young lads, come from farms. Anyway, it was quite moment, I used to discuss farming problems to take their mind off the war on the Vendetta.

Did you feel any particular responsibility for the younger troops, because you were quite experienced at this stage?

I was quite experienced. I'd been in the navy since 1934.

Did you feel responsibility toward the younger recruits, to look after them?

Well, I know, I,

15:00 you have to if you're in charge. If anything happens you're the last man out. They're all out before you. I told you about the hole we had up top, the secret hole and we used to spring load it.

Yep, yep.

The last trip from Tobruk it did happen, a near miss, it jolted the engine room. They put one of the dynabolts off, one of the turbines off,

15:30 all of us, and fires come out, the first came out of the wall.

What do you mean the fire came out of the wall?

It came out, it came out of the airlocks and it didn't come out the chimney. They were still pouring oil in, we were going full speed. This ship slowed down but here's this bloody horrible hole and I look round and all me stokers are gone, up the hole, got the

16:00 wire, gone. Gone through that hole and the air goes up there instead of going in the fire so the fires would come out and it's sitting there packing oil on my own. I thought, "I'd better get out of it. I'd get burnt to death from the oil or something." And I can't move across to stop it, stop the oil and if I did I'd stop the ship. I thought, "The other boiler might keep her going" but I always

16:30 have going through you mind, "What to do?," and you're getting orders for the bridge Blackout. No lights, no nothing. You can't see a thing, and that bloody hole's there. Right up, right up like that, like that big chimney. Like that big chimney there. Luckily some of my mates were on the guns nearby, stoker PO's of the ship behind guns nearby, saw the situation, saw the kids come out and run out and shut that door down

17:00 and the fire went up. All the boiler blast had broken. Steam was gushing out of them. Steam everywhere. I don't know where me water is for the boilers and the captain wanted more speed. And the fires of course, once they go back they start churning out black smoke. Black smoke everywhere. Everywhere, right to the horizon. Anyway, it turned out a good thing in the finish, it hid us from the,

17:30 they could bomb us through the smoke. It was a really good thing to have happened. And the kids came back sheepishly and I never said nothing, they never said nothing. I never told anybody, they never told

anybody and my mates never told anybody. Just passed it like that.

The captain never asked about why there was so much black smoke?

No, he never asked about the black smoke or anything. So we got away with it.

18:00 It saved the ship, the black ship. I had to get hose fires working properly, those furnaces working properly. They'd cooled down with the cool oil going in.

Is that the time when the Vendetta got one of her engines damaged?

Yeah, that's when she was damaged, on the last trip. When she came back, that was her last trip, she couldn't do any more.

So the bombs that hit, that disrupted the, what, it knocked the?

Underneath, like that,

18:30 they shut off one of the turbines.

Did you feel like running out too with recruits?

I was petrified. I was bloody, I know I couldn't. I'd trained my left to be the last one out if anything happened and these kids had been hanging round these escape ladder, they always did, the whole trip and they were always kidding themselves that if they,

19:00 anything happens. It's on their minds, you see and when that bomb hit the engine rooms they thought, "This is it" and boom. Up they went. No, they we all like our friend and wouldn't dream of putting them in and they would do anything for us. You could always depend on them. If anything happened to me they'd probably try and get me out. So you wouldn't put them in for punishment, to punish them.

19:30 No, I wouldn't. Unthinkable, wouldn't even give it a thought

Did you get any time off in Singapore, when you were?

Yeah. Yeah, we were in Singapore two or three weeks before we came over. Singapore was full of troops and over at the air base, a chap named Cameron was running tours.

20:00 They didn't look like warrior to us, like in the Middle East. The soldier in the Middle East brought in half the desert with them. They were tanned and they were wearing shorts and they had sand on their knees and all that. Still. I'll tell you a funny thing that happened when we first got to Alex, our first trip there, in the Perth. I'll tell you a funny thing, this is a good story.

20:30 We got in there and the captain gave leave. Gave leave and of course you have a Fleet Club. So we went up to Fleet Club and there was no beer. It was two or three days before Christmas, Christmas, 1940. Now we'd just brought a bit convoy of troops in when we knew there must be beer somewhere.

21:00 So we made some enquiries and they told us about a place just outside Alex, an army camp and they had a big beer garden. They have a big issue of beer, the blokes that came in from Australia. So there were only two of us and we thought we'd sneak in and have a couple of beers with the army blokes. So anyway

21:30 we're in white uniform, we got a Garry, what they called a "Garry" to take us to the army base. And there's the beer garden all right, beautiful beer garden. Palm trees and tables and so on and things we didn't have in Australia in those days. But the soldiers were all lying down underneath, all underneath the tables and palms everywhere and we saw there were British soldiers amongst them, everywhere. And there was blood oozing from their eyes and their nose

22:00 and their ears and their mouths and their head. The place was red with blood and half a dozen Provos [Provosts. Military Police] standing at the empty bar, smoking. So I went down to the Provs and said, "What's all this about? Isn't there any beer?" "No beer, mate, no beer. They drank it all" "Oh, god" I said

22:30 "We went up the floor club and there was none there." "Oh, there's none here." So we said, "What's this all about?" "This?" he said. "Do you remember the cricket in 1938?" "Yeah? What about it?" "Bodyline" "Yeah, what about it?" "He said this is what it's all about." "But," I said, "This is 1940." That's what this is all about. They nearly killed each other

23:00 over a tank or a tanstra land, they've seen a little bit of action and they'd come in for a bit of a breather, but the rest. The guy in charge of the Pommies, he was the bloke, he was the bloke on the cricket team that called the bodyline and they worshipped him and of course the Australians hated him. And, somebody says something about "How bad England is" and it's on for young and old. And they were all,

23:30 just about killed themselves. We couldn't interfere with them, we just had to let them go. The Pommies were up that end and we were down this end. I said, "That's a good bloody cricket story, that is." "So much for the cricket but that's what it's all about. But there's no more beer left." "Oh thanks" So we wandered back to our ships.

- 24:00 When I was the Vendetta we came in to a place called the Mersa Matruh on the front line, it was on the front line but it comes right down the sea. There were still troops there. Anyway, I was on shore yakking [talking] to the blokes and a bloke says to me, "Do you want a motorbike?" I couldn't even drive a motorbike. I'd never had a motorbike
- 24:30 "Why, you've got a motorbike to give away?" "Yep, a bloody good GKW German motorbike." He was dispatch rider. I said, "Yeah, how do I get it on board. With our blokes there, how am I going to get it on board?" "Oh, easy, easy" and the gangplanks down, you know, nobody took notice at a place like Philip Island, nobody put their head up, there's no guards
- 25:00 just blokes wandering around the ship, doing their job, that's all. I says "How do you reckon I'd get it on board?" "We can get it on board easy, we'll help you." "How am I going to get it off?" "Oh, we're going back to Sydney. All the boats, The Voyager, are going back to Sydney. The Empire. We'll go back to Sydney eventually." I took it up the gangplank and we took it to pieces in our spare time, when nobody was looking
- 25:30 and big parts of it hidden in the bilges down below and in the boiler room but that's where it was still, that's where it was still when we sent it over on its side. It must have had the motorbike still in it. I never took it out, never got a chance. When they were towing it down to Sydney, it must have still had the motorbike inside it.

Where were you at that stage?

In Sydney, on leave

- 26:00 when I told you when we got to Sydney and we'd been there a while and the war started with the Japs, not Sydney, in Singapore, the captain said, "The Kanimbla wants to take any of our chaps that want to go back to Sydney. Half of you go and half of you stay but you've got to cut the cards to go." So I cut the cards and I was one of the ones who went to Sydney and I was on 28 days' leave and
- 26:30 they said, just at the end of my 28 days, Singapore fell. What happened to the Vendetta? Nobody knew. Nobody had seen her. So that's when they used me to take on ships that people had gone into jail for. The wharfies wouldn't work, wouldn't load ships, they wanted danger money. At Blunron Powerhouse they wanted
- 27:00 in 1939 staff had exposed the enemy. All this happened while I was on me 28 days' leave.

You had a little baby at this time?

Yeah, I had a little girl. She was born before the war. A little girl.

Was is good to see your family again after coming back?

Oh, yes. Very good, oh yes, my word, naturally. That was all the family I had.

27:30 **Was this the time that you?**

I went back to Tasmania two or three times since but you got a lukewarm welcome there. They never, never said nothing about me running away to the navy. They never mentioned it. They took me round in my uniform to all the surrounding farms. I met Dame Enid Lyons and all her family.

Whereabouts was that?

Tassie.

- 28:00 She had a farm nearby. My aunt and uncle knew them well. My aunt was a big shot in the Country Association and so was Edie Lyons.

At the end of the 28 days' leave, where were you sent back?

At the end of the 28 days' leave? On board the Kuttabal

Can you talk a little more about that incident, you were aboard the?

Kuttabal. Well I used to

- 28:30 run around, all of the, some of Vendetta people were with me, we were sent to different ships to take over. When I wasn't doing that I was on the Waratah, take over the Waratah, take her over at night. They were on her until 5 o'clock, then we'd take over at 5, she was a fire-ship
- 29:00 in case of fire, bombs all of that.

What did you do on The Kuttabal?

On the Kuttabal? There was nothing to do on there, except sleep. There was no room. It was not much bigger than this room. Sling a hammock, that was about all you could do. Register in and register out. You were there until they wanted somebody to fly out to somewhere and then they came and got you and a taxi took you to the airport

29:30 or something like that, or fly you in a biscuit bomber up to Thursday Island or somewhere like that. You never knew where you were going to go. You went in and you never knew when you were going to get home. They'd nab us and they'd say "Well they need men to go up to Townsville" and they needed men on this ship, on that ship, things like that

This is around the time of midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour?

Yeah

Can you just talk about that? I know you talked a little about this before.

30:00 **Can you take us through that again and I'd like to ask?**

Midget Submarine, hmmm.

You were on shore leave at the time, were you?

I got a chap to look after them that night. I was on duty that night. I was on duty one night of three, I had to stay back on the ship, on what they call "Blue duty." Red, white and blue, you see, and blue was duty that night, and my shift, I was on

30:30 I was in that fire float that night. So I went in the, and took over at 5 o'clock and banked the fires and things like that, ready for an emergency start-up. I made sure I was familiar with everything they had done and everything that was left behind and they told me anything that was untoward and off they went. I went back to me hammock I thought, "Nothing could happen in Sydney. There wouldn't be anything that'd happen here."

31:00 The lights on the bridge. The lights on the ferries. The races on, the footy's on, how could anything happen here? Nothing had happened here so far. All my leave nothing had happened, quiet time. I'd been to the races myself on my quiet time, someone had took me to the races. I knew at Randwick Races, and even though the war's on with the Japs,

31:30 "They'll never get this far." So anyway I went out bed and the wife shakes me and says "Something's happened, something's happened. The lights are on, the roosters are crowing, the air raid boys want you down in the air raid shelter in the yard. I said, "Tell him to go and jump in the lake. I'm not playing games with him. These people are playing games, how could anything happen here?"

32:00 She said, "He'll report you." "Let him report" and I went down to the quay and there's like a beehive "Did you hear what happened last night. The Japs broke in and they got caught and they torpedoed, I think it was the [USS] Chicago and the Canberra.

32:30 in the harbour. I'm not sure about the Chicago but the Canberra was swimming along on the other side of the harbour and they had aimed at the Chicago and missed her and got the Kuttabul. Anyway, I went down and there was 15, 14 or 18 or something like that killed on the Kuttabul. They were in their hammocks, asleep.

33:00 This poor chap was in it. Just one of those things.

Did you know him very well?

Never saw him before in my life until I asked him to do my shift. He was the same rank as myself, so I asked him to look after me shift tonight, as long as I gave him me log cabin. I gave him two packets of log cabin that I got from Singapore. It was all we smoked in those days. He was very happy. He got

33:30 no money, his money hadn't caught up with him from the British ships. They wouldn't give him any money, I don't know why but they were awaiting for pay and all that, you know. So he got two packets of log cabin and he went to bed and he was happy, killed in his bed.

And you were on duty that night, and he took your place. Is that right?

He took my place.

34:00 That was a close call, but that's the way it goes.

Did you ever think about that incident?

What?

Do you ever think about that time?

No, except to think that "It could have been me instead of him. Could have been me if I'd done it in reverse. Could have been me that died." It's just fate, can't do much about it. All of us never knew when we were going to get it, through the war

34:30 in those days. We were all of us thinking that was going to be our fate. That's what my wife thought when I was away two and half years, "I wouldn't come back this time."

What was the scene on the harbour at that time, when you came down?

The lights were on the ferries. Sydney Harbour was like a fairy land, lights on the bridge.

Did they know what had happened?

Well, they did when it happened.

35:00 They didn't know before it happened. They had three chained nets across the harbour. They thought, "That was enough." They never thought they could cut their way through them. They didn't know about that. They had bolts on the chains. They hit the German ship and sunk it. They did a good job, a very good job. I thought it was brilliant the way they

35:30 never been in action before in the harbour, the way they faced up to it.

They were pretty brave men.

Oh, I think they were. There were plenty of other places where they attempted the same thing and it worked. Look at Alexandria when they put bombs on the battleships. They got in on the bottom of the destroyers coming in.

36:00 **After that, the Kuttabul, where were you posted at that time?**

The Cairns, to the Cairns, Narraburra.

And you flew up there?

No went by train up there

Were you happy to be going back to sea?

I suppose I was. I was getting a bit bored. Yeah, I was happy to get settled.

It must have been quite difficult

36:30 **for you at the time to leave your family?**

You're better off settling rather than playing around like that, never knowing when the axe is going to fall and you end up in the sand. The corvettes looked to me like a very comfortable little ship, you know. They were. They were a nice little ship.

Did you feel it was a bit of a come down after being on a big ship like the Perth?

Oh, I don't know that being on the Perth was any great advantage, as far as we were concerned

37:00 To us, to me as a stoker PO it was a big advantage being on a corvette. You could get ice water, you couldn't get it on the Perth. There was no ice water down there on the Perth, even in the tropics, even on the equator, there was no ice water. You just broke out in sores all over from the bloody heat rash.

Had the Sydney been sunk at this time?

Sydney was sunk

37:30 just before the Japs come in

Had you heard the sinking of Sydney at this time?

Yes, I think we had. It came out months after.

Did that affect you in any way?

I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. But I was in Singapore when it happened, November 19th was the day

38:00 she went down. I think we were on our way to Singapore. I think when we got in there the blokes on the Vampire told me that she had gone down. That something had gone down and that all the D Class ships, Dunedin and all that, were in there, were posted across the Makassar Strait with their listening gear in case it was a Jap sub running for home, but there was nothing,

38:30 nothing came though. They thought, "It might have been a Jap done it." Japan wasn't in the war but we expected it any day. She wasn't at war. Singapore in peace time.

Did you have any mates on the Sydney?

Oh yes, a lot of mates on the Sydney. A lot of mates I joined up with were on the Sydney, in my class. The young ones I didn't know, the ones that'd just joined up.

39:00 I didn't know. There was a majority of them. But the bulk and different things I knew all them. They were all young kids when I was a young kid. I remember I was about 26, something like that.

Did that affect your morale?

No, we always knew we were going to win. We never wondered about that. There was a time when

39:30 I was a bit shaky about the morale when they started block the Suez Canal with sunken ships. When I was in the Med on the Perth and the Vendetta and they were sinking ships in the canal. That big George was lying there, in the canal. We had to bypass here to get out the canal.

How did you cope with things? How did you cope with that?

Well, once America came in we

40:00 knew we were going to win. We had a feeling that America and we believe all the films that America was pretty bloody good, which she turned out to be, so that was pretty good.

When you were posted...?

We knew that England was just in her last throws. I think if America hadn't come in, England would have had to come to terms with Hitler. And Churchill would have been shot or something. I think it would have had to come to that. England had no more go in her.

40:30 The land, the end of treaty, they made a treaty with Roosevelt for land in the Colonies, in West Indies in exchange for arms and things like that.

We might just stop the tape there.

I don't think she had any more money.

Tape 8

00:30 **The Perth was bombed and the man was trapped in the furnace, said his friend would go down with him, because he said that you were unlucky. His friend went a little bit berserk.**

Yeah.

Did you feel like you were unlucky? It must have been very difficult for you to go back down to work.

Well, I could see his point. I could see his point of view and I didn't really blame him for thinking that but I knew it wasn't really my

01:00 unlucky, I didn't really think that I was unlucky or not. My orders were to go down and that's all. Take over the ship and I didn't question him. I couldn't understand him though I knew very well that his nerves weren't well and that there was no point arguing with him. I just had to get somebody down from sick bay to take him away. There was no point arguing with him, to see the doctor.

Did it make you, were you very frightened

01:30 **after that event, about being bombed?**

Yeah, there's times when you're all frightened. There's times when you all pray to god, to save you, you're that close. Everybody lays down on the flat plates and you know very well that if anything comes in, you're gone. You're just a little splatter on the wall and you want to live. You've got guys praying, promising, "God,

02:00 I'll go to church" and as soon as it was over, they forget. They never said nothing of the sort.

Did you have those times on all ships that you served with?

Yeah. You get those times with all ships. As soon as the panic's over they think they're superman and it couldn't happen to me again, and they realise that it could happen and they get worried,

02:30 get scared stiff, very scared. I've seen blokes in an air raid get panicked in the passageway and come up to ball room. Two stewards one time on the Perth, in the passageway, went berserk.

What did they do?

They take them away and calm them down, give them an injection

03:00 or something, I don't know.

If someone goes a bit crazy at sea, what was the procedure?

I don't know. I only ever saw them take them away. They must give them an injection of something, calm them down, up in the sick bay.

Did you go in the sick bay much?

No, I kept right away. I should have gone more. I kept right away. They pay sick

03:30 leave. It pays you to go as often as you can. Then when you get out of the war you can quote that you went to the sick bay and all that sort of thing.

Did you get sick?

No, I don't think so. I did too much time at sea before I joined the navy to get sick.

Do you mean how you came down through the tropics, did the men get sick? Were there many diseases on board the ship or was it pretty much clean?

04:00 When we came home from the Atlantic on the Perth we came through the Panama Canal and instead of doing what we were supposed to, go to Honolulu, we went to Tahiti. When we got into Tahiti, Papeete, the capital city, we adjourned there and we got the most beautiful surprise there that anybody ever got, the sheilas there had nothing on them, only bikinis

04:30 and they were all over the ship, up the rigging and everything. They didn't come up the gangplank, they went up the ropes and they took over the ship and our blokes were all standing there with their mouths open. Never seen nothing like it, they didn't know what to make of it. Couldn't tell them to do anything. Big blong blong, all these Polynesian girls, laughing their heads off. The captain never said nothing up until that time

05:00 and did that to every ship that went in there, merchant ship and everything. From Captain Bligh's time. I believe they've stopped doing that, but that was what they did to us, on a war ship, at war time. The captain was flabbergasted, so was the crew, "Get these girls off the ship." and we had to wheel them off the ship, get them off. And anyway, and we went to shore and they were rude to them right, left and centre.

05:30 Everywhere you went there were a couple in the centre. I didn't go because I'd been in the navy a long time and I knew all about VD [Venereal Disease] and how it was very bad. Syphilis and all that. That crowd that they left behind there. And one of our boys got what they called the black pox, he was a West Australian chap, very nice chap, and he got it and he was isolated on the ship

06:00 all the way from Tahiti, and then we had to go to Fiji and all the way to Australia. He was, he asked for his wife to come from West Australia with the brand new baby to meet him at Garden Island, and when we go into Garden Island, he wasn't allowed to go ashore to meet her. She was on the wharf. But he talked to her across the water and he wallowed to,

06:30 the ship's a cigar shape and he used to talk to her like that, here, there, where there's a big space and he had to tell her the story, tell her the truth and she broke down and she had to go back to West Australia and get a divorce and he was thrown out of the army. You get the "Black Pox" or anything like that you get thrown out the navy straight away, cause you can't mix with people.

07:00 So we lost a very good man, very good. And he went

Do you feel a lot of sympathy for his situation?

Oh, of course I felt sympathy for him, everybody. It's something they, everybody thinks, "Can't happen to me." It's like getting shot. Everybody thinks "It can't happen to me. It happens to others, but not to me."

07:30 **How did you deal with the absence of your women when you were out at sea, and at port?**

Well, I was a married man so it didn't worry me a great deal. I knew I had a wife waiting for me so it didn't worry me so much, but the young people. They'd no sooner get out of Sydney and they'd be looking for brothels, as soon as Adelaide, or bloody Fremantle.

08:00 Young kids from Sydney and Brisbane, they'd go overseas to the black countries, like Mombassa, or Kilididi, they'd go mad. They go in the brothels, that's all there is. Nothing else in Aden.

08:30 And they want high prices of course. India, India's worse. Bombay. India, they had a whole street of them with barred windows. You picked which one you want.

You were a married man, but you were a young man with normal urges. Did you ever get tempted by this kind of thing?

Nup. I never did. I used to warn the blokes and I couldn't very well turn around and be seen in a brothel with one

09:00 when I'd been telling them not to go. So I didn't bother about it. By that time I was nearly 30 and I was almost past that early lust business and all that. They were, the young ones were full of it. That's all they thought about, "What're we gonna root? What're we gonna root?" one thing or another. When I was a married man I could see past it. I knew very well it was

09:30 just like having a good shit. No different.

This was after the war?

No, this was during... This was 1940. Now, what next?

With all this activity, men

10:00 **going to the brothels and stuff, how did the navy control VD [Venereal Disease]?**

Easy. You get VD, out.

How did they know if you had it?

Well, you'd got to doctor and report blue light or something like that, they'd report you straight away if you've got it.

Asked for?

What they call Blue Light. You can't hold it to yourself,

10:30 it only gets worse. Hold it to yourself, you're going to kill yourself. Your mates are going to find out. We all bathe together. We all bathe and use the lav together. You've got no secrets.

Did they have medical inspections?

They do have them, occasionally, yes.

11:00 **What did they involve?**

Oh, seeing if you had piles, seeing if you had VD or anything like that. Seeing if you get spots of any kind that you shouldn't have and things like that. Oh, they have to do that occasionally. Sprung on, you never know when that's going to come.

11:30 You just, you're names on the board, you go and have it.

Did you, all the young men on the boat, all a little bit obsessed with women, was that one of the main conversation topics in the navy?

Yeah, probably. Well, you can't turn around and talk about the people that are on board, you've got to talk about the people that are not on board

12:00 so you have to [talk about] women. It's a subject that everybody's interested in

Did you miss your wife terribly?

Yes, you always missed them for the first few days when you left home. That's when you missed them. When you missed them, when you left home. That's when you were grumpy, everybody knew it. Everybody was grumpy when you

12:30 left home, when they first sailed off. Then they come round after couple of days.

How did the unmarried men treat you when you were grumpy?

Well, they all knew what the trouble was and they didn't, they all just accepted it. When I say grumpy I don't mean that they caused trouble, they just keep silent, things like that.

13:00 **When you left on the Cairns after being on shore leave with your wife and daughter, was that more difficult? Was that more difficult than usual leaving them behind?**

Yeah, I didn't... I never exactly wanted to go on the Cairns or anything like that. If they'd said, "Stay another month" I'd have stayed another month. But I knew sooner or later I'd have to get a

13:30 to go to something and I was everyday expecting to go somewhere and it could be something that I didn't want to go to. So at least I knew what I was going to when I joined the Cairns. I accepted, I had to accept it. I couldn't say, "I can't go, I won't go," I'd have to have a doctor's certificate saying "I've got VD" or something if I didn't want to go. You can't get out of it, you had to go.

14:00 **Were there methods of cheating your way out of, you talk about that one man?**

Well, all the smarties that said they had this, that or the other, well they tried. There was lot of people that didn't succeed but there's no harm in trying.

You never gave it a try?

No. I don't know why. I just did me job and me duty,

14:30 plus I was permanent navy, why should I be a coward, when all these people came into the war? I couldn't let the navy down by being a coward in front of them.

Can you talk about that distinction between the permanent navy and those who came in for the war?

Well you, most of them came in for the war and in the navy it didn't do us any

15:00 harm, it meant promotion for us. Before the war to be petty officer was absolutely hopeless. But when the war started and they were buying more ships and they had more men coming in and they needed blokes to show them what to do. That meant promotion for us permanent navy people. So why should we groan about that. Our wages went up and that, and people before the

15:30 war, you were lucky to be a leading hand, like a corporal, before you went out, twelve years. We could see our chance of becoming chief stoker. As far as you could go. You couldn't go any higher in those days.

What did you think of all the new people coming in?

I didn't, I never knew what to expect, the army was doing the same thing, they were all wartime people

16:00 they were coming out of army, they were all doing a good job. There was no reason a navy bloke couldn't too. I didn't feel anything about that. I knew that peacetime had finished and we'll get promoted if we were any good. Anybody that didn't get promoted from peacetime, that was their own fault, cause they weren't willing to take any courses, they didn't want to get on top of his job.

Were there any old navy people

16:30 **who found it difficult?**

Oh, yeah, there were quite a few old navy guys who didn't want to go any higher than what they were. They didn't want the responsibilities?

Were there any that resented the new crew?

No, I don't think so. What did bring on resentment, a lot of people had reserves, what they called reserves, Rushcutters Bay and all that and

17:00 they were Saturday night sailors. Well, when war broke out they were immediately brought into the service and they got the rating that they had. If they were a stoker petty officer in the reserves then they'd come to the ships as a fully blown, same rate of pay, and a lot of people didn't think that was right cause you had to show them what to do and one stage

17:30 and once they got the gist they had to turn around and tell the wartime guys what to do.

What about mateship between the old navy and the other forces. Was there a little bit of rivalry there?

No, I don't think so. No, the navy wouldn't allow it.

But, unofficially

18:00 **were the air force and army the butt of some naval jokes?**

Well, there were no very big air force before the war, there was no big army before the war, but there was a big navy before the war, so there was little bit of friction there if you'd been a stoker before the war and guys came in and they were petty officers as Saturday night sailors and they were over the top of you and you had to show them what to do and tell them what to do,

18:30 well we thought, "That was pretty bloody wrong." There was bit of that about it. Only with the reserve but now with the people in the war. Everybody came in at the war in the bottom level and they had to work their way up, except the reserves, they were already up. They came in on the level they were in the reserves, which was a promise the navy gave them when they signed up, "If war breaks out, you keep your rank."

19:00 But they know the ships that they belonged to. The people on the ships knew the ship and they had to pass on their knowledge and they had to learn it quick, and fast.

In the army they called the army reserve, "Chocolate Soldiers." Did you have any names for the naval reserve?

"Rockies"

What did that mean?

Reservers

Rocky?

A rocky is a reserve.

And is that an insult term?

Insult term.

19:30 Yep. Rocky. You'd say "Oh, he's a rocky" and "Here's a rocky" and so on. "Don't listen to him, he's only a rocky," you know? You'd say that to them but eventually that wore out. As the war went on you got used to the rockies and the rockies learnt their job and you didn't differentiate between them.

Was there

20:00 **a nickname for the permanent navy as well?**

No, I don't think so.

Let's talk about the Cairns. You spoke about this being a better experience for you, they had ice water and that. Was there any other differences being on a corvette?

It was better living conditions.

Can you tell me about that?

Food was better. They baked their bread on there. They had plenty of room. The mess was about as big as this and there was about a dozen of you to the whole mess

20:30 as big as this. Yeah, better sleeping conditions.

What were the sleeping conditions on the Cairns?

Still in hammocks. A lot of you could sleep on deck and that. The officers were generally rocky officers but they'd been in merchant ships but they really knew their jobs. But they didn't know too much about navy conditions and navy orders and we sometimes had to tell them,

21:00 give them a tip "You can't do that in navy" and "You're in the wrong there" and they used to like that. We used to tip them when they went wrong. For instance, I had a blue. On the Cairns, we used to, before I got my chief stoker on the Cairns I had a chief stoker on there who had come in as a fleet reservist.

21:30 He'd been in the army since about 1932, Polish bloke and he'd come back in for the war. He came back as chief stoker and he was chief stoker of our ship and he knew nothing about and used to depend on us POs [Petty Officers] to show him how to oil and all different things. But he had a bad habit of getting drunk on shore and coming back and breaking the galley open and cooking meals,

22:00 which the captain didn't like. He was a reserve from the officers' merchant navy and he used to blow his top about it, "I'll stop him in his tracks, I'll stop him." and say he's dip one day and he dipped him down to a stoker. If he won't stop doing that "I'll fix you, I'll dip him down to a stoker..."

22:30 to this fleet reservist chief stoker, so I told the bloody captain, "You've done the wrong thing there. That guy, he came in a fleet reservist when he came in the navy, he can't be dipped below the rank he comes in. Be careful." But he said, "No, he's going to dip down. I'm going to dip him down. He's bloody breaking

23:00 up the morale of the ship and all this business. Everyone can see what he's doing and they think, if he can do that, I can do that too. And the cooks are complaining." Anyway, it went to shore, went to a big court martial to shore and the fleet reservist won the case. The captain wasn't very bright. I said to him before he went in, "He's got you by

23:30 your, he'll bring up fleet force and show you he's in the right." Which he did. But anyway he got rid of him anyway, sent him to somewhere else.

What could they do, if they couldn't dip you below your rank, what could a captain do?

He did the only, sent him off the ship, sent him somewhere else. Got him drafted to another ship.

24:00 **The best decision always.**

The captain didn't care what happened to him, as long as he got rid of him. He wanted to dip him down to a stoker to humiliate him in front of the crew. Well the crowd sure didn't care what he did with him, but he couldn't do that. Couldn't in front of all the rest of them. So he had to get rid him from, off the ship.

Let's talk a little bit about your time on the Cairns,

24:30 **of all the two years, two and a half years that you spent on the Cairns, what was the most difficult time the Cairns had to face?**

Oh, invasion of Sicily, we were getting bombed by the Germans in Sicily. We had to go in there the night before and clear the beach of mines, that was a risky job.

Can you tell us about that operation

25:00 **in a bit more detail?**

Well, our ship could operate on sound mines, some mines operate on sound. Some ships go over, the next goes up in the air. Sound mines and the other one is magnetic mines. We had stuff capable for both of them. So when the invasion barges come up to the beach they can let the doors down

25:30 and everybody run out on the beach.

You were laying these mines?

No, delousing them.

Delousing them?

Making them go off.

How do you do that? How do you delouse a mine?

By sound. You did it by sound. You put the ultra sound on them and they blow up. Same with magnetic mines, they can put them, I don't know how,

26:00 anything about mines at all, I've just seen it done, but I can't do it.

Well, just talk about what you saw. Were there explosions all round the ship? From your point of view?

They blow up, you've got to get them out of the way. They're under the water. They're not above the water, they're under the water. But you could tell where they were with the ultra sound and the radar and god knows what, you could pick it out.

26:30 That gear you can pick it out. Also we have paravanes, what they called paravanes on the front that cuts the wires. If you cut one or two they contact the wires and cut it.

This is very dangerous work, delousing mines?

It was very dangerous work. It was. We lost a corvette just after the war

27:00 We lost corvette during the war with mines.

What would the atmosphere on board the ship be like during one of the dangerous operations?

Well, most of people on our ship had never been away before and was all full of "Oh, that can't happen to us" and then seeing the tragedies that can occur. They were sure

27:30 it couldn't happen to us. They couldn't make mistakes. Of course people did make mistakes on other ships, but we got away with it.

You know better. Did you tell them so?

Nah, waste of time. I couldn't go around telling everybody, "You mustn't do this, you mustn't do that" or nothing would get done. You had to let them go, you had to let them go.

28:00 **Did you lose anyone on board the Cairns?**

No, we never lost any, except with VD and they were sent home. In the Middle East they got VD. They were told about it, but you can't tell young people to leave the brothels alone. Cause the army was there and they lined up six deep to get into brothels and our blokes

28:30 trying to be brave, "If they can do it, we can do it."

Did you get much leave in the Middle East?

Oh, you'd get half a day here or half a day there. We didn't get any leave in, nor anywhere there in North Africa. We got to, in Alexandria, where they had the Fleet Club and then we were told "To go to the Fleet Club only, don't go anywhere else."

What were you doing in North Africa? What was

29:00 **the corvette's actions in North Africa?**

North Africa, well, when the Germans got bottled in at Cape Bon, when the 8th Army came in one way and the Americans came in the other way they put the lid on the cape, they were trying to get away by tow boats to try and get to Sicily. They had all corvettes around it, they were picking them up.

29:30 There was about 210,000 surrendered there, Germans. Nearly as big as the one in Stalingrad. There was 300,000 in Stalingrad. We got nearly as many Germans in Cape Bon.

How did you deal with these prisoners of war?

The prisoner of war? We didn't do anything with them. We just caught the odd ones and treated them well on board and then handed them over.

30:00 **Who did you hand them over to?**

The army

And the 210,000 surrender. It must have been chaos.

It was chaos because the two armies met to surround them. And later on, when we were going on we went in to Aden to oil up, you go into the bores, you know the bores to oil up. The only

30:30 place in the oil where the oil had to boil. For some reason the oil had to boil. You don't go alongside, the oil had to boil. And we go into the harbour where the boiler are and there's a convoy of ships either side of us, big liners, nearly as big as the Queen Mary, deck after deck after deck, all full of this 210,000. And of course we're little tiny ships and we go in there and we have to salute the flag

31:00 on their ship and they salute back, you know, and different things. All the way through. Even one of those ships, they all go "Ra, ra, ra, ra." They're all watching us. Millions of eyes like a football match. You go through there, this little tiny ship and feel eyes just bore into us and we look around and here's all these bloody eyes looking at you

31:30 and they were all prisoners of war and they all gave us a "Heil" Salute, it was a sight, believe me.

What did you do? Did you wave at them?

Oh, we just did that to them, that's all. No, we didn't hold back or anything like that. We just waved back cause some of them were probably brought in by our ship

32:00 **Did you serve in Malta in the Cairns?**

I never went ashore in Malta. Yeah, we went into Malta, for the [HMS] Illustrious, when she got hit.

That was earlier. Was that on the Cairns?

No, that was on the Perth.

We talked about that yesterday. There were three aircraft called Faith, Hope and

32:30 **Charity. Where was that?**

Three what?

The aircraft you mentioned called Faith, Hope and Charity?

Oh, that was Malta. Hurricanes.

Was that on the Perth?

That was on the Perth.

Can you talk about because that's one thing I'd like to go over again? That time in Malta when you were on the Perth, that time when you came in with the Illustrious, was that the first time you'd been to Malta?

We'd just come in from Australia and we'd just relieved the Sydney. We took her place and we went away with the Illustrious and the Southampton,

33:00 Southampton got sunk and the Illustrious got hit down the stern and she was running round in circles and we had to get a couple of tugs from Malta to tug her into Valetta. We followed behind her and put her hat, her barge, over her head, so they could see in the dark and she got in along side and it was dead-end dock and we had to come along the other side, like that and she had a

33:30 deck over into the water, like that, into the dock, like that.

They may not be able to see this on camera.

With her two ends sticking up like that, see?

It was listing on its side, going over to...

Yeah. Its side guns, pillbox guns, six-inch, same as ours they didn't have to elevate

34:00 them, they were in the right position and when the Germans come they were right there on the dock, in perfect position and they'd come down and they couldn't get out of their dives and they'd skid down this deck and onward and all round them was swastikas everywhere. From, the come down with their screamers like that, whoosh, vertical.

34:30 **Were you up on deck during any of this, did you see any of this?**

I did see a lot of it, yes.

What was your role at this time?

I was, I had a job in the damage control, what they call damage control at that time and I had to check the damage on the Illustrious. Fourteen of us were sent over there to go up and have a look at it and see as they were doing with it, see how they were managing it. She had dozens of bombs into her

35:00 and they'd spread out through her, like that. As I said I saw the paymaster up to his table like that and piece of the shrapnel from one of the bombs had come out and hit the door and it had a brass lock and it came off and took half his head away. He was laying dead. He wasn't laying, he was sat up with a pen in his hand, dead. Engineer leaning over the lockers in the dark with his torch on

35:30 and I was trying to find my way, I was lost inside her and I touched him on the arm and he was dead.

You were...

He was in white overalls. Big, six three or four, he was.

You were on this ship to take note of the damage?

Yes.

What did you have to do, what were your orders?

Those were my orders, just to learn all I could. We'd see death. We'd just got in from Australia.

You had to leave those dead men where they were?

36:00 **Oh, yes. We couldn't touch them. We weren't allowed to touch anything. We were just sticky-beaks. They had to go down there themselves. They had a thousand men on their crew. We were going up one gangplank and they were going down the other with sacks on their backs. Maltese workmen. We said to them, "What've you got there?" "Bodies. Men"**

Was that a bit of an awakening for you?

Hmm?

36:30 **Was that a bit of a rude awakening for you? Seeing all this death for the first time?**

Yeah. It woke me up. We hadn't seen a dead body or anything. We hadn't seen a dead body before. I'll never forget the smell of it. It had a peculiar smell.

Did it have any effect on you in the period after that?

No. I didn't have any effect on me. We were invincible, we knew very well, "It couldn't happen to us."

Those images of the

37:00 **paymaster and the dead engineer, quite horrific images, did they ever come back to you later on. You remember that quite clearly.**

Well, I didn't do it, I didn't kill them.

No. But you saw them dead.

I saw them dead but that's nothing. We all die eventually. That's nothing. We accept that. We were all there in the war. It could happen to any of us. It's just bad luck for them.

37:30 It's just bad luck, that's all. They never expected it, or they wouldn't be sitting there. He thought that [would] never happen, but it did.

Tape 9

00:30 I was on leave I think. I was either on leave or something. I was home anyway.

Where were you when you heard the Perth had been sunk?

Well we didn't know about it for quite a while after she had been sunk. It was a mystery. I think I was on the Cairns I think. I was in Melbourne. I was in

01:00 on the Cairns with a convoy going round to Fremantle and I was at my wife's mother's place and I had a brother-in-law on the Perth and his wife was there and she got the message while I was there in Melbourne. She got the message and went into hysterics. That's right. She didn't know what had happened

01:30 to the Perth. No one knew what has happened to the Perth until there. The relatives were the first to know. The government didn't know. They just said, "The HMAS Perth went down, your husband, we don't know. We presume him lost but we don't know."

You must have formed an attachment to the Perth?

02:00 Oh, I did yeah. I did feel, yeah. We all did. Even the ones that weren't on the Perth with me. Some of them still belong to the Perth Association with me. There's only about five of us left.

Did anyone you know that was on the Perth survive?

I didn't know anybody on the

02:30 Perth that survived the prisoners of war.

Frank?

I didn't know Frank because he joined her in Sydney. He was a young lad just joined her in Sydney. That was his first trip to sea.

Did you come together after you heard about the Perth going down? Did you come together with your mates from the Perth to talk about the Perth?

Oh, yeah. I wanted to, very much.

03:00 I couldn't very well do that because I was at sea on the Cairns but I had one or two blokes come that had been on the Perth with me and (UNCLEAR). We talked about the Sydney and the Perth and the Canberra. We lost them all about that time, within twelve months I think.

How does it affect the crew when you hear about a sister ship

03:30 **or a ship that you're close to going down?**

Oh, you were down a bit but you had to get on with the job. "It can't happen to us" you know. Look at the Canberra. The Hobart got a hit in the back with a torpedo about that time too. She lost about 18-20 officers

04:00 killed in the war drill. Hit her in house you know, blew her up.

Can you tell us a bit more about the Cairns in the Mediterranean and your significance in that?

Well we used to stop out from Alexandria with convoys and we used to go out with convoys and we used to go out in the Atlantic from Gibraltar and we used to operate in Italy when

04:30 we used to operate up the Adriatic and we used to operate about the island when the Germans took the islands back from the Italians and the British. They kept us in the distance there. They thought, "They might use us" but they kept us out of sight of the bombers. We had no air support, see.

05:00 **What was the most significant action you were involved in the Cairns in the Med?**

I think the evacuation Crete was the most significant.

That was the Perth, wasn't it?

Yep.

What about on the Cairns?

Oh, the invasion of Sicily.

How did you support the invasion of Sicily on the Cairns?

Well there was millions of ships took part there. It was

05:30 bit like Normandy. The invasion barges and all this escort thing, our job was mines. We didn't know what to expect. We thought it would be mines and mine and mines. Mussolini was always (UNCLEAR) they couldn't take Italy, they didn't know what was out there.

06:00 But he, I don't know what had happened to the mines were very sloppily laid, they were very easily knocked off.

Who was your captain at that time on the Cairns?

A chap by the name of Roberts, he came from the Kanimbla. He was the captain, or the secondary man in peace time. Kanimbla was a merchant ship.

Was it a happy ship?

Yeah, quite happy, very nice. Yes, there,

06:30 very happy.

Did you miss the Vendetta?

Yes, I did miss the Vendetta. I felt safer on the Vendetta than any ship I was on. The men were so good

on the guns, nothing would knock the Vendetta off.

Did you feel the same atmosphere?

Well, most of them were all kids that had just come in for the war. They weren't used to it.

07:00 Playing with toys. They hadn't got the experience that the blokes on the Vendetta had got.

Were you getting a bit sick of the war at this stage?

Yeah, I was getting a bit sick of it. It felt like it was going to go forever. I was getting a bit sick of it. At this part of the war I didn't think we were going to win the war. Look at it. Norway, Dunkirk

07:30 Crete, Singapore. God, that was up 'til 1941.

The navy's was quite different.

We had to have our evacuations. We had our big losses and the Germans knew it. That's when they were picking up people

08:00 to evacuate. That's when we were (UNCLEAR).

On the Cairns, did you have any sort of lucky charms, like the rats?

Oh no. We had a lemur.

08:30 **What's that?**

It's a kind of monkey. We got it in Madagascar. It used to run around. They're supposed to be in between a monkey and a human being, a lemur.

What was his name?

Oh, I forget now. I forget his name but a chap brought him aboard and we used to feed him and all that. They finally killed the poor thing, you know.

09:00 It died of the food it was giving him. Too much food, I think. But he was a lemur and we picked him up in Madagascar.

When was that?

That was before. That was when the Cairns first went overseas. First to Killen, then Madagascar. Up top. But we had to come and Madagascar campaign was on.

09:30 The Amelies was torpedoed then, a big battleship.

Was that while you were there?

The Governor wouldn't accept surrender and we had to put commandos into the capital. They moved into the main street. People coming into the main street got shot.

Were you there at that time?

No, just after. We were on our way to the south part of the island at the time.

10:00 **What were you doing there?**

We took the surrender at Toliara. Southern part of the island. It's a big island like New Guinea.

Can you tell us about that?

Oh, just that the captain went to shore and the French surrendered and that's it. They just surrendered, the people themselves weren't French, they were black and they couldn't give a damn who was in there, they were just happy as Larry that it was all over.

10:30 It was only French soldiers that were fighting us, it wasn't the black people. That's why Madagascar has its independence today.

Did the Cairns go into action at that time at all?

No. I don't think we fired an angry shot in Madagascar. Just went to the southern part. Once the north had gone the south just surrendered. Us and the [HMAS] Wollongong, another corvette and we had to just take the surrenders.

11:00 **What were you going to say? Did you sink any ships or fire any ship in the Cairns?**

Sink any ships? No, I don't think we sank any ships at all. We convoyed quite a bit. I think we might have sunk subs, it's hard to know

11:30 under the water.

How long would you keep chasing a sub?

Sometimes you'd spend an afternoon doing it, four or five hours. If you just dropped a bomb that wasn't good enough. You had to drop a cluster of them. You had to keep dropping them until you shake it to pieces down below, until its lights went out.

12:00 His battery started to play. You've to keep at it.

Is that typical, just to keep them down there?

Keep them down there and keep them rattled. Keep them from coming up top. Once they come up they can't go down.

Did you ever see any subs surface?

Yeah, I quite a lot. I even boarded a few of them.

German ones?

British ones,

12:30 I saw a couple of battalions once.

What was the convoy duty like on the Cairns on the Atlantic?

Slow Convoys. Through the Med. See a lot of the stuff, once we got to Italy. Once we got Sicily freed up that meant we could bring things in from America or England right through the Med down the canal and into Burma. Burma was starving.

13:00 You couldn't, nothing to it. You had to go round the Cape and the Germans were having a go at you one side and the Japanese the other. You were too banged up before you got her. When you could go through canal and down through round Colombo and up to, you could let a lot off.

You were based at Gibraltar at that time?

Yeah, we had a base

13:30 at Gibraltar, with the convoys, in case of mines. Because they were dropping mines, the Germans were dropping mines. We had what we called "Double L" sweep the (UNCLEAR) used for acoustic

Can you describe what that is?

It's a sound mine, a sound mine. They'd drop them in submarines.

14:00 Something goes over it, just might go over, the next one would go over it and go. One time at Alex we came in and went and laid out in the sun up top and one of the French ships near us, the cruisers, out in the bay in Alexandria, one of the fittest with about a hundred men on it and they were all standing up, came by and

14:30 they were looking at us, you know. They would look at the side and see whether, oh they've got bullets there. Canon from planes there. They were looking because they were always looking at what damage you got. All of a sudden they went up like the Sydney Harbour Bridge. And I was sitting here watching them... Whoosh. There wasn't that much of them left. Nothing, not a hat, not a thing.

15:00 Liquefied them. I had to later on go ashore, go as a witness to it cause I was the only bloke there sunbaking. I don't know what the other blokes were doing, they must have been on the other side of the ship of something but I was on this side and I was the only bloke that saw it.

You were on the Perth?

I was on the Perth.

15:30 There was nothing left of them, nothing. There was nothing but here was nothing there. That was '41 when we come in from Crete. We'd evacuated to Alexandria and dropped all the people off and we were waiting on further orders, whether we were going back or what was going to happen.

16:00 And we'd get a bomb in our (UNCLEAR) and they couldn't make up their minds whether they were going to send us back or send the [HMS] Calcutta back, and old C class cruiser from World War I, made into an ack-ack ship. So eventually they gave our people leave for a few hours to the Fleet Club, the Calcutta the same. We weren't allowed out. The was all rails around,

16:30 armed commandos all round but we (UNCLEAR). And I was sitting with a couple of the Calcutta crew. My brother-in-law that went down in the Perth was with me and a couple of others and we were all wondering who was going to be next. And they're making their minds up which ship was going to make the last trip to Crete. We were reducing speed from Burma and we were out of action

17:00 and the Calcutta has got all her boiler rooms but she hadn't got the same speed. We were about the same speed with one of boiler rooms out. We were a pretty modern ship and they were a World War I ship. And then we heard over the loudspeaker, "Men from The Calcutta, return to your ship" and they

said, "Well, that's the last time you'll see us alive, mate."

17:30 We said, "Oh, you'll come back" So they went and we got on drinking and forgot about it. We thought, "They'll be back." We had a drink about an hour later. About an hour later we head "Are you there? The Calcutta's just gone down, all hands." She went straight into the... Steamed straight

18:00 under. Stuka got into her from Crete. She went down all hands. No chance of survivors. That made you think when that happened, "God, that could have been us."

Do you remember those blokes from the Calcutta?

Yeah, I remember them well.

What were their names?

I don't know. We never knew,

18:30 exchanged names, we just chatted and that's all. But that happened. Calcutta steamed under and she... That was it.

That was just coming out of Alex, was it?

No, that was halfway to Crete. They got her before she got there. They knew somebody would come back. There were army blokes waiting to lift it.

19:00 They'd got the message to go down and see if they'd send a ship up. The ship was sent but it went under. They didn't send any more. There were prisoners of war [they] got about 3,000 Australians, I think. You get to the end of my story.

No, there's a couple of other questions

19:30 **I want to ask, sorry can you just start that one again?**

I was on

Sorry, Charlie, can you just start that one again?

I was on the Hobart for a few weeks then they decide to send me up to Morotai to bring the Platypus down, the Platypus was an old coal burner that used to be beside Garden Island. Do you remember the penguins? On the deck of their ship?

20:00 She was a coal burner and she'd been, during the war they took her up. They changed her half oil, half coal and they sent her up past Morotai to the Celebes islands, right up near the Philippines and they used her as a sub ship and the subs used to operate with her. It was full of lathes and things like that. It was a workshop

20:30 but she had to be brought back to be scrapped, I got the job of going up there to organise the stokeholds and bringing her back. So they flew me up to GI [New Guinea], the Fremantle took on from there. Anyway I got to Morotai and took her over and took her down to Melbourne, through the Barrier

21:00 Reef, down though the Barrier Reef to Melbourne. Didn't go to Sydney or Brisbane, we only had enough oil. The coal only stand two hours in the boilers, two hours. They couldn't do any more.

Why was that?

The coal fire furnaces. They couldn't, so that's what we had to do. Anyway, we get to Melbourne and I was walking along

21:30 Swanston Street in the traffic and I was in uniform, big heavy coat on, it was winter time, with big heavy coat on, after the tropics you know and all of a sudden a hatch, and a bloke came out from subterranean chamber, all dressed up in his overalls

22:00 and I recognised him. He was one of the blokes missing from the Perth. At this stage we didn't know much about what had happened to the Perth. Who was on her or what and who survived and who didn't, won't say his name. Anyway I said to him, "What are you doing here? I thought

22:30 I saw your name on the list as going down on the Perth."

He just appeared out of a hole in the ground?

He just appeared and he said, "Do I look like a hero?" Giggling you know. "Do I look like a hero?" I didn't know what to say. "You're certainly not a hero mate if you're here, alive. How did you come to be back in Australia?"

23:00 I thought you were a prisoner of war or something." "Not me mate." "What happened was she went around to go up north and when she got into Fremantle they had a job to do on the shore and I just got dressed up in me good clothes with me overalls on... they had the wharfs all, so we couldn't get off the ship, so none of us could shoot through.

- 23:30 Army blokes all around and I was in me overalls with me cap on and I went past one of them and he never said nothing, so I just went past them and took me cap off and put me overalls in me bag and went to the airport, went to Melbourne and give meself up, as a deserter. They punished me and they put me in cells and they put me outside, and here I am, working for the bloody gas company.
- 24:00 I said, "So you're a deserter." "Yeah, why shouldn't I be? I'm alive." Everybody knew on the ship that she wasn't coming back up against the Jap army. There was no way she was going to do it. That's why they blocked everybody from going ashore. As soon as they did that, I knew that there was only one thing to do, and that's escape."

- 24:30 He said, "I'm quite happy with what I did. I gave meself up in Melbourne and in the meantime the bloody Perth had gone. So here I am."

What did you think of him?

Later on I was in Melbourne for a Perth reunion. All the Sydney blokes went over there and the bloke in charge of the Perth reunion

- 25:00 in Melbourne, that bloke's name was in it, so I go to one of the blokes too and I told him about it "That bloke's a deserter," so he scratched his name off. I was in later on, a couple of years ago, the corvettes I was on, I was on the Cairns
- 25:30 in Adelaide, I went to that in Adelaide and the reunion's in Adelaide, big meeting all the big heads, the governors and all that. I noticed one of our blokes in a white hat on with no tally. I took a close look at him and it was this bloke, from Melbourne
- 26:00 this deserter. I saw him before he saw me. I thought, "What do I do about that?" He's probably looking around for somebody that he knew in the navy and these young bucks on the corvettes, they didn't know him at all. I was probably only one there that knew him. So I waltzed right up and stood in front of him and he looked at me like a scared little
- 26:30 rabbit. I just looked at him and he went to come along and put his hand out and I just nodded to him like that and told him "To get out." I don't know whether I did the right thing, I made him feel about that big. He had his wife with him. I suppose it was his wife. Anyway, that's the way
- 27:00 I was thinking about me brother-in-law, a very fine chap and all the other blokes I knew that went down on the Perth. I knew a lot of them and he was a deserter I thought, "Scum of the earth," you know. So that was that.

Can you talk about the time you came back from the Cairns to

- 27:30 **your personal life in Sydney?**

Ah, I came home and my wife was living with a man. Had been for two years while I'd been overseas. He was taking pictures and all that sort of thing. And he was living at the house, all his clothes there and that sort of thing. I brought presents home for her and the baby and everything. I never saw it coming, it was the biggest blow I ever got during the war.

- 28:00 I felt like being sick. I'd seen this thing happening while I'd been away, the neighbours had written to somebody and all that. I used to feel sorry for them and sympathise with them and here was I, got the same trouble. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming home?," she said. I said, "I tried to,
- 28:30 I tried to. Never dreamt this was going on. I did try and they probably held it up for some reason." Most of it was probably cut out by the censors. We weren't allowed to tell people what we were doing." "Oh, I wish I'd known you were coming home," I said, "What difference would it make? You still would have been home. What difference would it have made?
- 29:00 I just had to find out. You couldn't have got away with it. Not with him living here," I said. "What are you going to do about it?" I said, "I don't know. I have to have time to think about it. I haven't got any money. I've given you every penny that I could afford to while I was away." I was only giving meself
- 29:30 fifteen bob a fortnight which is scarcely what I could live on. "No," I said, "Something's got to alter now. You've been living with this bloke on my money," I said. "Well, this is wrong." She said, "Well, everybody was doing it, all throughout Australia." They were all with Yanks or somebody. We just had to live and what a life to live.
- 30:00 Like you know when you're young .We had to enjoy ourselves. I thought to meself, "Well I haven't got any money and I can't afford to get divorced" and I said, "Well you have to chop it off with him and you'll have to come with me and I'll forgive you." So I forgave her and forgot about it, never mentioned it again.
- 30:30 That's about it, but she still kept seeing him when I was still going away, I was still going away with the navy. I still had twelve months to go in the navy. So I had to put up with it. He had to go. He went that night but he still kept seeing her. He wouldn't leave her alone. He was deadly in love with her.

31:00 I made a mistake, I should have had a divorce. I didn't, I could never love her the same. I never thought much of him. I'd known her before the war, I married her in 1936 and I was used to going away and coming back and I completely trusted her and I didn't expect this. I could understand the young blokes coming in from the war and getting married

31:30 and their wives playing up while they were away. I couldn't quite understand it. It was sad and all that, but it couldn't happen to me. But it didn't happen to, worse than what happened to theirs. Well in the navy, she knew the price she was taking. But I was thinking about that baby girl, yeah. She came

32:00 home from school. The baby comes home from school and she said to her mother, "Who's that?" and she said, "That's your Daddy." "That's not my Daddy" and kicked me on the shins. Kicked me on the shins, you know "That's not my Daddy" and kicked me on the shins. Very embarrassing.

A tough homecoming?

It was a tough homecoming. I felt like throwing everything in,

32:30 pissing off, leave the money, leave everything. I thought me wife understood the navy and got used to the navy before the war started. She was with her mother, I'd come back and forth to Sydney from New Zealand. We'd do refills in New Zealand, go around Australia and then come into Sydney. I'd ring me wife,

33:00 we had a flat in Sydney, in Paddington, we'd been used to that. She never been used to two years of course.

It must have taken you a while to get to know your little daughter again, too?

Yeah, quite a while.

You spent another twelve months in the navy after that time?

Yeah, another twelve months. And then navy wanted me to stay in, they wanted me

33:30 to go to Chowder Bay Oil Installation and I said, "Can you guarantee that I'll stay there?" They said, "No, we can't. We're not allowed to give you that guarantee" So I went outside and shut the door.

Can you remember that time that you walked out the gates of the navy as a civilian?

Mmm.

Can you describe that feeling?

34:00 I knew I'd miss it. I knew I'd miss the navy. I knew I'd miss it terribly. I got a job as a labourer on Garden Island. It was about the only thing I could do. I was only used to the navy but what use was that to you on shore? Nothing. I had to start again. I got a job as a fitter's mate on Garden Island. For the time being, you know.

34:30 **Difficulty adjusting?**

Oh yeah, very much so. Going home at 5 o'clock in those days. You were paid 5 pound a week in those days. 10 pound a week was bank manager's money. 5 pound a week at Garden Island.

35:00 **Do you remember what was the thing that drew you back most into civilian life at that time?**

Just that - my wife's infidelity. That absolutely shocked me. I could see that life in the navy was not going to be, there was the Korean War starting, you see. I thought, "Oh God, they're right up near Japan. That'll be another two year bloody issue for somebody."

35:30 I wasn't going to put up with that again, not knowing what was going on here.

Looking back on your experience now, how'd you feel about the war in general?

Well, looking back at Mussolini and Hitler, it had to come. They'd have gone on, they'd have been like little Caesars. They were really

36:00 going to rock the world. That Hitler just about got Europe when the war started. The was it. Norway, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Austria, everywhere bar Spain. Yugoslavia, Greece. Where would it end? He'd have had a united Europe behind him. He'd had tackled the world. The first thing he wanted was his coal at his back and

36:30 he wanted everything else as well. If America hadn't have been pushed into the war by Japan, if they'd kept out of the war, Churchill would have had to give in.

Did you eventually...you had adjusted to civilian life. How long did that take?

Oh, yes. When I sort of got settled

37:00 in this house, yeah. I was paying rent. When I got settled in this house I enjoyed civilian life.

And you resurrected your relationship with your wife and your little baby?

She was all right while we were here. She was all right here. We got rid of the bloke. That was another big reason. I wanted a fresh start.

37:30 What was your main job that you took up?

I was an engine driver at the Sydney Cold Stores, under refrigeration. Freezing peas and frozen peas and all that was just coming in. Frozen food was just coming in, there was no such thing before that. Frozen peas, quick freezing meat and exporting meat by quick freezing.

38:00 Things like that, we were doing that.

That was your main job, until you retired?

That was my main job, yeah.

Railways, was it?

No, Sydney Cold Stores, in Harris Street. That was my job, working the machinery and all that. That's the job I retired from. Just running it, cleaning up.

38:30 It was shift work, two shifts, day and afternoon and your offside on the other shift.

We're coming towards the end of the interview. There's a few sort of things that I'd like to give you the opportunity to talk about. As this will be kept for some time, it there is any particular message you'd like to say to people that might be watching this in the future?

39:00 Particular message? No, just I don't like wars, but I know you'll never have to be without them. There's never been a chance when there's been no war, that's why the Second World War.

39:30 There's always wars somewhere, just like there'll always be arguments in a town with people. You can't do without them. The world would, I think, be bored without wars. I just wish we could be without them but there's no way because human beings themselves are not perfect, you can't have a perfect world with human beings as they are. Human beings are far from perfect. They argue

40:00 and they fight and they brawl and they kill. Nations are just the same. I think the world had progressed a tremendous lot since I was a kid. I don't see any children running around with holes in their shoes any more, or stockings, They've all got stockings and shoes, which is a good thing. And trousers, the kids are well set up these days.

40:30 And the rest of rain, and all that. We used to get wet through. Covered in snow, not these days. I think people are better off but they don't value it. Washing machines, god. What did women do before they had these washing machines? I don't see women around the stoves cooking any more. People are better off, people

41:00 are definitely better off. You can't go back to olden days. People paying rent and all that. If you didn't have your rent then you got kicked out.

Do you think they're happier?

No. I think people were just as happy in those days, in their own little ways. There was more laughing. You walk around Sydney today and they've all got long faces.

41:30 Look around the Junction on a Saturday morning and they've all got long faces. None of them are happy, none of them smile. Remember the story I told you about the story when I was at school and the captain came back from the First World War and told us to have a smile and I tried it out, didn't work. It didn't work. I tried that out. I thought that was a great idea.

INTERVIEW ENDS