Australians at War Film Archive

Lionel Given (Mick) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 31st March 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1801

Tape 1

00:43 **It would be great if we could first hear a bit about where you were born, where you grew up, that sort of thing?**

Right, well I was born in Hawthorn in 1924 and then I was taken to Yallourn as a babe in arms, and I grew up in Yallourn,

01:00 which is about 90 miles from Melbourne in the Gippsland, home of the regional SEC [State Electricity Commission]. I was there until I was 17 when I went to the navy. I'd done most of my schooling there, what I went to at the time was called higher elementary school, which was as high as you could go.

01:30 I was in the Cubs, in the Scouts, in the Rovers learning about community living, country living, the values of those things. What else would you like to know from there. Probe away.

Well that's a good summary. I will probe away. Why the move from Hawthorn to Yallourn? That was for work your family?

02:00 My father he came out from the navy, he was in the navy himself. He was working on the overhead lines, became an overhead lines foreman and I think that was in the Depression years that was employment to a lot of people at that stage, because it was in the SEC's formative years, when the electricity generation,

02:30 generating power stations were built in 1920, and it just grew from there. There was work there, there was housing there, schooling, things like that.

What year were you born, sorry?

1924.

What had you parents been doing in Hawthorn, your father left the navy to join SEC?

No, I think my mother was living with her mother at the time.

03:00 Then I think that was his first employment coming out of the navy. So that's what happened there.

What did you know about his experience with the navy?

He was in the navy from about 1910 till about '20, I'm not too sure of that, but somewhere there he served on the HMAS Encounter, he was in the landing at New Guinea with the

03:30 German signal station that was there as part of when they captured that, and served most of the war on Encounter. He was a leading seaman torpedoman; that was his navy description.

Did he talk much about those experiences when you were young?

Yeah, but he always said that

04:00 their navy was tougher than ours and the seas weren't as rough, but you just take that with a grain of salt. I don't think they had the same experiences as what our home navy did, because much of the war, the first war was in Europe, and they were patrolling around the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean. So they didn't have the same sort of contact, enemy contact, other than

04:30 the landing party. That's about all, it was a pretty tough life I think at that stage. Pretty rugged. And then if you follow the development of navy you can see how tough it was in Nelson's time, coming through from there. One marvels at how they used to stay at sea in the conditions.

That was the Royal Navy?

The Royal Australian Navy.

05:00 **Obviously you were just a baby when your family moved to Yallourn, but you've spoken about the sense of community in Yallourn. What are some of the highlights of your childhood? What are some of the things that have stayed with you the most?**

Probably the most outstanding one was when I was about 10 years of age, my mother went into a mental hospital. I think that's the most outstanding thing.

05:30 At that stage a mental illness was sort of a taboo subject. That wasn't very easy but that's an outstanding part of it. But other than that, sort of normal schooling, did reasonably well at school, was sort of Cubs, Scouts, plenty of activity, sporting activity. Sort of a patrol leader

06:00 in the Scouts. They were probably the highlights of growing up there. Nothing outstanding.

How aware were you of your mother's illness as a child?

Well, you didn't discuss those things. It was pretty difficult growing up asking questions why and so on, but the answer was, "You don't need to know about it." Wasn't easy. People might ask,

06:30 "How's you mother?" I was always told to refer them to my father, which I found pretty difficult. We didn't see her very much and I don't know very much what caused it or what the background behind it was. I still don't know to this day, but that was pretty tough to live through. But you just come through it, that's the important thing.

07:00 That's about all I can sort of tell you. She died on VP Day [Victory in the Pacific], which is another story, which I can perhaps relay later. But the actual mental illness I can't tell you about. At one stage I think, one of the most horrific things, when she first went into the hospital at Yallourn, she got out one night and there was quite a panic around the town. Allegedly

07:30 she was trying to get to me and my sister. I still don't know much about that. That was pretty horrific to sort of live through. The emergency whistle and alarm going off in the town. People looking for her and things like that. That still stays with one. That's probably the most I can tell you about it. I don't know what specific mental illness it was,

08:00 and things like that. I still don't know to this day, and there's not much point trying to find out. I don't need to know about it, it's pretty hard to live with.

How big a town was Yallourn?

Probably a population somewhere between 1,000 to 1,200. Number of houses I can't quite tell you, but it was quite small by, a country town. Oh, I suppose the

08:30 nearest towns to it being Morwell and Moe, but Yallourn was the centre of it. It probably had a bigger population than either of those at that time. It was pretty close knit and everybody knew what was going on. Everybody knew everyone else's business, things like that. That's about all I can tell you about that.

Ok, I'll keep probing if that's all right?

You keep going.

09:00 **What about school? What was it like going to school? Do you have any memories of your primary education?**

Yeah, vaguely. I sort of had no worries. One highlight was that one of my friends at that stage and I, we sort of happened to swear, and the punishment then was you had to wash your mouth out with soap and water in front of the whole school. If you could call that a highlight

09:30 but it's something you remember. But it's probably not a bad way to handle it.

What was considered swearing?

Oh, well, you know, "What the fuck are you doing?" or something like that you know, and that's common usage today. But then, oh boy, you know. And the "C" word, you couldn't say things like that. I guess that was a highlight. But

10:00 we had some pretty good times. I think another highlight that I'll always remember, things from primary, we used to have a period of spelling, and mental arithmetic, and reading, and we used to take it in odd turns. I think it was Miss Carol and Miss Curra, I still remember those people. I think one of the highlights, we had a boy Vic Mullins, who was

10:30 a stutterer, and as you know people with a stutter gets a laugh from everybody else. But the teachers handled it very well. The kids I believe handled it pretty well, because gradually they encouraged Vic to keep reading, and he overcame the stutter, which I think is something I remember pretty vividly. And that was a group of kids helping someone out.

11:00 Not ridiculing. Initially it was, but other than that, just the normal primary school. Probably got some cuts a couple of times, for what I can't recall. It wasn't hurting, bashing, it wasn't child bashing it was

just a little “whhss.” But it was good.

Those sorts of values you’re talking about, the sense of community and so on,

11:30 **how were they passed down do you think?**

How were they? I think people trying to take care of each other. I think that happened, whether that’s a natural inclination for individuals to try to help each other. Try to instil a little bit of teamwork was, but I think that still depends on how much you’re prepared to contribute as an individual.

12:00 That way. That’s about the only way I can answer that.

Outside of school, what sort of things did you get up to as a kid, be it sports or just the high jinks of that era?

High jinks? What do you mean, like smoking bark and brown paper and things like that? Sporting activities, I think you’d

12:30 try football, obviously. Often it was a paper football, but I supported the local football side. I played cricket. I played tennis. I had a paper round when I was a boy, I used to get up at a quarter to five, and things like that and deliver the papers. We got a picture theatre in the township. In the early days the pictures used to shown in the

13:00 St John’s Church of England and ultimately we got our own picture theatre and I became the first delivery boy of the leaflets, delivering those around the town. I think the Cubs and Scouts activities, there was a variety of those. We did camping, cooking, visiting other towns maybe. Just to

13:30 sort of get people to a jamboree like setting. Church activities, there was different things like school concerts, that were playing out some of the old farces and things like that. Tennis clubs, church fetes, just a variety of things to keep people occupied. There was a musical society in the town.

14:00 And then today, one thinks about the racist bit, one thing that was pretty popular then was the “Nigger Minstrels” all blackening their faces and singing out carols and things like that. So that’s about it I guess. Oh, the other thing I guess was probably raiding fruit trees,

14:30 even on the way home from cubs and scouts you knew where the favourite lime trees were and trees like that. Got up to some normal things that probably didn’t do any harm. Nothing terrible.

Did you have a rifle?

No. I think the best we had were shanghais. Make our own bow and arrows, and things like that.

15:00 No, not even a Daisy air rifle, which was a popular thing at that stage. A bike, well that was another preferred activity. Apart from delivering the papers with it, it enabled one to sort of drive around, ride around and have a look at the countryside and so on. Probably other activities I can recall some of the

15:30 sporting activities, occasionally you’d play a game of cricket or football at Morwell which is just about five miles away, or Moe, which is a similar distance. In a lot cases you had to walk there, get thumped and then you’d have to walk home again. But they’re good character builders.

You mentioned that job you had, that you were the first delivery boy, did that mean you got free entry to the flicks?

Yep. Yep.

16:00 That was the payment, your reward, let’s put it that way. Probably a highlight of that was that was the time when Gone With the Wind came out, and that ran over two nights, I can recall that, and I was squeezed into one seat reluctantly by the manager, because he was trying to maximise his patronage.

16:30 He still found time to get in. Oh, interestingly too at that stage, at the picture theatre there was what they called a ‘crying room’, for nursing mothers with babes. One doesn’t see that in picture theatres today. However strange it may sound I think that enabled mothers that instead of being home, could go and watch the pictures. It was always well occupied, but it was a good

17:00 innovation at the time which I think could be handy today.

I agree. What other films do you remember from that period? What other films did you like watching?

Some of the Paul Muni films, I can recall some of those. Don’t ask me the titles of some of them. And The Last of the Mohicans, I can remember that one. I remember the Saturday afternoon matinees; they were quite something with all the serials that would run,

17:30 probably get there, watch, miss an episode, like a Spiderman one and things like that. I can’t remember all of those but the serials were my favourite thing, and obviously the cartoons, Laurel and Hardy, so it was quite a hit at that time. That was up to about that time.

How old were you when you got that job?

Oh, now you're pushing. I suppose

18:00 about 14 or 15, something like that, just roughly.

And you did a paper round as well?

Yes, had the paper round. My first initiation into that was probably about 10 or 11, and there used to be an evening paper called The Star that had a very short life, but that was my first initiation, walking around trying to flog The Star

18:30 the evening paper. Then ultimately I got the job in the morning round. We used to drive down to the, or ride down to the railway station, which was about a quarter to five, and carry the papers back to the newsagent, count out our different ones for the different boys and take off. Perhaps one of the

19:00 highlights too at that time was the Herald and the Sporting Globe were quite in thing of a Saturday night. My first Saturday nighter, I can always recall that one, the Saturday papers always used to be picked up from the Moe railway station by the bus company, brought back into the township, and then we would then go

19:30 up at half time and sell the Herald, Sporting Globe. My first night up there, I can always recall this. I think it was a penny ha'penny for the papers at that stage, and I've got my little batch and I'm about to take off. We used to, the newsagents was quite on the other side of the town square and you could see them when they came out at half time, there used to be

20:00 two films on at that time, so we'd see the people come out. Then this particular night I decided to take off in enthusiasm. And just one of the older boys puts his hand on my shoulder and he said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "Well look, they're just out," and he said, "Just wait." So we wait until they go in and the lights dim and he said, "Now we go in." So we were walking around the theatre in the dark,

20:30 but people are fishing for their Globe and that, and he said, "You wait and see." Well often if somebody would buy a paper for a penny halfpenny and give you two pennies, and say keep the change. And this is where you start to learn economics. Occasionally you'd get a two bob and a penny through doing it in the dark. That was the older boy, he had his, he was a true entrepreneur.

21:00 **With that pocket money, what would the money be spent on as a child?**

Well, I used to pay that into my father, and I would get about half of that to do things, that was just your pocket money. Buy things, whatever you want, providing you didn't waste too much on sweets or something like that.

21:30 That's about it.

Can you tell us a bit more about your father, what sort of man he was?

What would you like to know?

Obviously he was very busy with work,

Yeah, there was a fair bit of work there.

So with your mother, that must have been difficult as well. I was wondering how that effected, how much time was able to spend with the kids?

Well, after my

22:00 mum, yeah, OK. It's hard to know how it affected him at the time. It obviously must of. It must have been a shattering experience. I know he told us at one stage, but he didn't tell me this until later in life, at one stage he was thinking of putting my sister and I into a home. But what ultimately happened was

22:30 his niece, who was the eldest daughter of his sister, she came as housekeeper with her two children. And that's the sort of household we grew up in until I joined the navy. So you had sort of like a mixed family thing. We each got housekeeping, and someone being brought up.

23:00 It's pretty hard to remember memories there. At that stage my parents were pretty strict with people, and me being the eldest, I think you're pretty conscious of that. Trying, you have to do the right thing, not get up to mischief and so on. But they supported what activities we had to do. Play cricket with us, play tennis.

23:30 The normal things like that. But he was a product of his lifetime. I suppose there was a degree of you knew who was the boss sort of thing, and you did as you were told or you paid the consequences. I don't know whether I can elaborate much more in that unless you want to ask anything. You might trigger memories.

That's fine.

24:00 **You said there were two of you, you and your sister. How much younger was she?**

She was not quite four years. She was about six at the time Mum went to hospital. I think her memories of Mum would be just a little bit different. It would be more vague probably than what mine would.

So you as the big brother there was obviously

24:30 **some responsibility?**

Oh, yes. I had some responsibilities, and then ultimately when the other two kids came into the house, it was a boy and a girl, and again the boy was about 18 months younger than what I was. The other lass was about my sister's age, roughly. Yes, I had to watch things

25:00 and if anything went wrong you were to blame, you know.

What sort of chores around the house were expected of you?

Ah, feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, cut firewood, collect firewood. We often used to go into the nearby bush, park to do that. If you got bored you could go and dig the garden, if you're still bored after that, well go and give it another go

25:30 over. I think you were encouraged to grow vegetables and things. Did the normal thing; you had to clean your shoes. I think that's basically the normal things like that. And behave yourself, don't cause trouble.

Did you go rabbiting as a child?

Yeah, the guys would go rabbiting. With rabbits,

26:00 yeah, not often but occasionally we'd go rabbiting. Rabbits were a staple part of the diet. We were lucky to get them. I think if you go rabbiting, you'd get about somewhere between sixpence to about a dollar, oh wait a minute, about a shilling and thruppence a pair, something like that, depending on the size of it. One of my other activities was collecting beer

26:30 bottles from the men's camp that was down there. There was a single man's camp, they used to call it West End camp. That was a source of revenue for holidays. Used to go down with a billy cart and collect those and stack them until the bottle-o came around and picked them up.

So there were lots of ways to supplement ones income?

Yeah, you found out how to bandicoot [steal] potatoes.

27:00 **What does that mean?**

Well, if you knew where potatoes were growing, you could sort of dig around and get them out without disturbing the main plant, and no-one would know, other than when they'd say "Jeez, there's not many potatoes on my bush," because the kids had got it. We used to go up and have a camp fire and bake them

27:30 in the ashes that way. Yeah, I s'pose rabbits, we used to blackberrying as well. Occasionally fishing, but the trout river wasn't very plentiful with fish at that stage. Just tiddlers. Very sparse. Blackberrying was another interesting activity. That's about it.

28:00 **OK. You were just a really young kid, just six years old during the Depression years, so I'm assuming you really don't have too many memories of the way that might have affected local communities. Is that fair to say?**

Well, you knew things were tight. Money wasn't plentiful. You knew there were always people worse off than yourself.

28:30 You were lucky if you had a pair of shoes to go to school. You would see some of the children that lived in what's called now 'homes of haunted hells' and some of the kids had to walk in their bare feet. Even in the winter they were in bare foot. I know at one stage we'd come home from school and our shoes had to go off and we used to have to go around with bare feet.

29:00 I think a lot of the clothing was hand me down. I'm probably one to, I can't prove it or, but there was a lot of people that struggled for food. But I think people were generally more helpful. Like I'm saying the blackberrying, the fruits and so on. There was a lot of jam making and there was a lot of charity work done under

29:30 that name by people sharing thing and things like that. If we've got a fruit tree, you would share it with somebody else. Share the produce from it. You'd share eggs too. That was another money-spinner for some people. Run a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and used to sell the eggs. I think too, there was a lot of

30:00 vegetable growing, I think there was a lot of sharing produce. I might have mentioned that before. There was also too a lot of preserving of the produce and I think that's how people survived a lot, growing a lot of their own as much as they could. I always remember the old Fowlers Vacola outfit [fruit preserving kit] that was modern. But people still got to him.

30:30 That's basically it.

On the subject of food, what were the typical meals of the day? What would be a typical dinner?

You'd still have cereal in the morning, cereal or toast, and probably a sandwich or something at lunchtime, fruit. Carrots. I think as kids you eat a lot of raw vegetables

31:00 that you could get hold of. A lot of stews I guess, too. As long as I know, we always had breakfast, that was going back to the old Weetbix stage, or we'd eat biscuits. That was always a part of good living. You must always have something in your stomach at breakfast time, sandwiches at lunchtime and probably a hot meal at nighttime with vegetables,

31:30 meat, whatever, sausages or minced steak stew, rabbit, whatever. One thing I can recall, which is interesting compared to today, poultry then was quite a luxury. It was quite something to have chicken at Christmas dinner, where today it's everywhere. But I think the

32:00 poultry were sort of nurtured for the egg production, rather than the food production.

What sort of role did the church play in that community for you and your family?

I think a much bigger role than what they do today. I think the pastoral – oh, sorry about that – I think

32:30 they were, there was a lot of activity around churches in all sorts of ways. Social wise I think churches and I think the ministries were a little bit better with their pastoral care of the population. Perhaps that's something that gradually, to my way, seems to have disappeared after the war. Prior to that

33:00 I think the churches were pretty well regarded for their pastoral care. One thing I can recall then, which didn't sit too well, was there was Protestant/Catholic rivalry then. I think there was a lot of bias in the community that seemed to be a distinguishing thing. If you were playing with someone whether they were Catholic or Protestant, which I think was pretty poor. I still

33:30 didn't approve of it at that stage of my life. I think we're all people, that was the whole deal. Yeah I think churches played a pretty dominant role in the community.

It's hard to imagine these days the Catholic/Protestant thing you were talking about. How would that be manifested?

Just you know, that they were different. But then see, it was always whatever

34:00 activity, "Well do you know if they're Protestant?" or, "Do you know if they're Catholic?" To me I always said it didn't matter. I couldn't see why it should matter anyway, but it did, that was the thing. I think even in employment at that stage that sort of reared its head. The Freemasons bit that was part of, the Freemasons or Catholics, and this that and the other.

34:30 I think some people are more bigoted than others. I can't say that happened to me anyway. My father was probably more bigoted in that way, but didn't influence me anyway. That bigotry was there.

What denomination was your family?

We used to go to the Methodist church at that stage, which

35:00 my mother was pretty active there and I guess you went there, you went to Sunday school, things like that. That's about it.

You mentioned earlier that you were with the cubs and the scouts. What memories do you have of your involvement with those?

Oh, it was good fun. I think it was, you'd get to know people a bit. You'd learn

35:30 to do things together, if there were different little groups. Particularly in the scouts I suppose, you've got one patrol trying to complete this and the other. Occasionally you'd have bridge building or knot tying, a variety of activities. Go away camping, that was interesting, the group working as a team to look after the tent,

36:00 prepare the meal. One interesting excursion we were at the rear of Yallourn power station, went out on a cooking day, and we built ovens out of the mudstone that was around. Nobody knew at the time, not even the scoutmaster, and as it heated up it just blew all the food and stuff away. They're things

36:30 you learn, learn to come back. Things like cooking damper, flour and water, which is another supplement to bread. Just working together.

Do you recall some of your good chums from that period? Were there a group that used to hang out together?

Well, I can recall, a lot of

37:00 them they've all gone to places different. Yeah that was an interesting experience, because when I

joined the navy, the three or four that I was pretty close with, some joined the services. I think the two that I was closest with are dead, deceased, anyway. There were others when I know when I was overseas and I thought it would be quite good to be back to see them, when I came home they would just talk a different

37:30 language. It was just not to be. I haven't got any close contacts now, up to today, but yeah there was a lot that you can recall. I can't remember, well I can rattle off a few names I guess, but not all of them, and I wouldn't know where they are.

As a boy, what did you want to be when you grew up?

38:00 Originally, a cabinet-maker but I probably couldn't build a box if you gave me everything for it. I don't know it just appealed to me. At one stage everyone hankered to go into the navy, but I didn't know whether I was good enough to apply. When they advertised at one stage on the round for a midshipman I thought, "Oh, yeah, I'd love to have a go at that."

38:30 But I just didn't think I was good enough, and didn't apply. And then from there it graduated to my junior clerical position. That was it, as they say, I was probably not a tradesman, more probably academically that way.

39:00 **How much schooling had you done, prior to that?**

Well, at school the best you could do was go to intermediate level at that stage. Maybe if you wanted to go and do accounting, which is then conducted at night school, by the technical school that was there. That's about the limit to it. Otherwise you were sent away to university or something, I mean there was no possibility at that stage.

39:30 They were just wild dreams. Intermediate level was as high as the school went to.

I guess with the power station there, that was where a lot of fellows were seeking employment. Would that be fair to say?

Yes.

So that seemed to be the path that you would then follow as well?

Yes. When they advertised for junior clerks, that

40:00 was an interesting one too, when I applied for that. Up to the point there were about four of us, were in a class dominated by girls. We were four amongst about 15 girls, and we thought that the girls got more favoured treatment. You know, I guess we mucked around a fair bit at school that way. So much so on my last report was "Attitude in class too frivolous."

40:30 Of course my father said, "Now try and get yourself a job with that" sort of thing, and the headmaster lined the four of us and said, "You are wasting your parents' money sitting for your intermediate certificates" and things like that. But despite that we got through. That was interesting. I think somebody up there must love you. When I went for the position, the normal procedure there was that you were called in for an interview and the staff officer used to come up from Melbourne, and the interview board comprised him, plus the works accountant, and works manager. The usual procedure was you go in, put your school report, "Yes Sir," you pass that across, they look at it, pass it then to the other two people. Of course, you know in a small country town, any misdemeanour and it'd get around like wildfire. You know without me telling you that, about the grapevine. So this particular day, and you go there with trepidation and the staff officer's not there. The assistant staff officer was there. He himself was a bit of a larrikin…

Tape 2

00:31 …particular day the assistant staff officer came up. I didn't know that at that stage: that he was a bit of a rough diamond this guy, and I can relate back to that in my working life. Anyway this stage, "Have you got your book?" and I passed it over, and he sits there

01:00 reading it. By this time, I'm conscious of these other two trying to see what the headmaster said, and things like this, knowing full well that the headmaster's probably told them anyway. They had to sort of see it. So he looks at it and he looks at me, looks at it again, folded it up, and passed it back and said, "A boy after my own heart." So, that was quite

01:30 good. That was a stroke of luck. Anyway, these things happen.

So you got the job, and what did that entail?

Oh, junior clerical duties. I think I did a bit of timekeeping, there was processing time sheets for the blue-collar workers that were out on various activities in the SEC.

02:00 Then I was attached to the resident engineers section. That was involved with all the civil engineering works that were going on in the township, and I was still there until I joined the navy. When I decided that I would like to have a go at the navy, at war time, and my boss said to me, “You won’t be able to go, it’s a reserved occupation.” and I said,

02:30 “No” that I couldn’t quite see this because there had been a number of guys that I had known from the Scouts, that were older than me, who were in the services at this time. I thought it was pretty ludicrous that a junior clerk had to apply for permission to enlist, but that’s what ultimately happened. When they said reserved, I don’t know why, I’m going anyway.

03:00 Anyway, I did the decent thing and applied for permission, but I thought that was a ludicrous thing to say it was a reserved occupation. Because there had been a number of people that had responded pretty well, I think for some of the younger people. Join the services.

What year was it when you started work at the SEC?

1940. I was 16. 1940.

03:30 It was in January or February in 1940 when I started work, and I went into the navy in October 1941.

Just going back a year, ‘39 and the culmination of the war, what memories do you have of that time?

What memories? I suppose the war was there and you’re looking at your age and you’re thinking well you’ve got to do your part. I think knowing that my father

04:00 had been in the First World War, and knowing that were plenty of other ex-servicemen from there, some come home badly wounded and something like this. I think because of the general patriotism that existed at that stage, one felt it was his obligation to be there. Even at 16 you’re starting to think, “Well when can I be a part of it.” And,

04:30 you should be part of it. I guess that’s sort of dependant on the strength of your community attitude, in playing your part in service or whatever it might be. I guess that’s my memory of it, just wondering what age could you go. I think I was about 17 I started to try and find out about it. I knew I couldn’t get in at 16, maybe in the army I

05:00 might have. But at that stage, I was 5ft four and about seven stone something; I wasn’t going to fool anybody that I was older. So, one thing led to another, and I spoke to a retired lieutenant commander up there and I asked him how I’d go about seeing someone. I did it all off my own bat ultimately. I got a bit of a rap over the knuckles why

05:30 I hadn’t gone to my father in the first place, because he was navy, and I thought well, a retired lieutenant commander might know lots more about today.

It wasn’t something you discussed with your father?

No, I just got the papers and took them home and said to sign these and he said, “Well, what if I don’t sign them?” and I said, “I’ll find somebody else that will.” That was it, but he was

06:00 quite pleased I did, and I said to him openly, “Look, you’ve done your part, I think it’s up to us to do it.” So that’s, he was quite happy about it, but initially, “Why did I have to try and do it?” “Because I thought it was my obligation to do it.”

Why the navy? Why not attempt the army or the air force?

I guess the navy just was part of it. There were some of the chaps that had

06:30 been in the Scouts, I knew sort of personally that had gone into the navy. My mother’s brother had been in the navy prior to war starting as well. My father had been in the navy. I guess knowing all about Nelson through history and this that and the other it just appealed to me more than the air force or the

07:00 army. It’s the only way I can, it was the senior service anyway.

Had you spent any time on the water as a kid?

No, only beach holidays. I always loved the ocean, the beach and things like that. No, I’d done no yachting or sailing or things like that. It was just, I don’t

07:30 know any other answer than that, but just the navy appealed to me.

It would be good to get a bit more of a picture of your working life there, 1940 – ‘41.

I don’t think it was the girls lording it over, we just felt because there was more girls than boys in our class, that we always reckoned they got the favoured treatment, but that’s a boy/girl thing. Other than that

08:00 now, what did you want to know about? Whether they lorded it over us? No I don’t think so? They always lord it over you, Colin [interviewer], they still do.

They do don't they? What about boy/girl relationships in general? Was it the done thing, like did you have steady girlfriends at that time?

Oh, no! In fairness, we

08:30 grew up in an attitude that whatever you did or said to a girl, you always remember she's somebody's sister, and maybe a daughter or mother. I guess that stuck with us forever. But certainly, no I was never allowed out or things like that. We never had close girlfriends. No.

Also, I guess because it's such a small community,

09:00 **it's hard to.**

Oh, yes. But there were some that got mysteriously sent away. There was always that sort of, it did happen, but that was the environment you're in. The standards were, the things that happened. I was probably watched, you know a 16, 17 year old getting into trouble, that sort of thing. Those sorts of things weren't discussed as openly as they are today.

09:30 So, I guess it was experimentation if you were game enough. I certainly wasn't game enough. No.

What about smoking and grog, did that play a part at that stage?

Smoking. I guess smoking did. I think you try cane, bark and brown paper. Or if you could nick

10:00 a cigarette from somewhere that you would do it. I think that was the normal boy thing, you know, down behind the shed or something like that. Grog never sort of entered into it, probably because of the church's influence, there was a bit of a link to temperance and you know, "It's evil to drink." Maybe it was more evil to drink than smoke, there was no mention made of that, but like anywhere,

10:30 you always had your group that got into grog early, things like that. I know a couple of young guys like that but they're subsequently dead anyway. I think they were just born alcoholics. Grog didn't play a big part, in my life anyway.

Just finally, on you being a junior clerk there. How much did you find out about the workings of

11:00 **SEC and the power station there?**

Oh, well I think you grew up with it. Often when my father he was working in the overhead lines, which was pretty well conducting power to anything that moved. The coal bridges, the power station and I guess as the young guy, he'd often go to work after hours and tag along with him. So, I think we knew a fair bit about

11:30 the workings of the place. I think it was part and parcel, but there was no sort of initial induction into it. It was probably assumed that learning in an area like that you knew the workings of it. And if you didn't, probably people you grew up with in the town or where you, you'd always know someone from different works. Working stuff. No, I guess it was just growing up with it. Seeing it develop.

12:00 **Was the union much of a force at that time?**

Not really. Unions were there but no, I don't think there was the militancy or aggressiveness, but they were there. It was more a sort of cosy relationship between the unions.

12:30 There wasn't much striking or things like that, but I guess that was part and parcel of the Depression years too. I think that would have had something to do with it. I can always remember probably the biggest union was FEDFA [Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association]. There were a couple of people there that were just ideal guys, and looked after the unions for their

13:00 people, and that's what they seemed to be doing without much untoward unrest. They were just glad to have work.

You mentioned how you used to have holidays on the beach. Was that the standard annual getaway?

Probably in the last two years. Probably in last two or three year of my life anyway, growing

13:30 up obviously, coming down. I can still recall when my Mum was alive, coming down and going to the beach at Brighton or Sandringham, which was a big deal, and things like that. About the last two years we'd come down and take a house. That was most enjoyable, take a week or 10 days, it was pretty good. Occasionally go to Lakes Entrance.

14:00 At one stage my mother's brother lived at Kalimna, this is up to the time she was still alive, still with us, he had a farm at Kalimna, which was about five miles out of Lakes Entrance. We always a couple of enjoyable holidays down there with my uncle and the kids there.

14:30 Of course, Lakes Entrance was about five miles walk, which was nothing. So, you were pretty well on the Bass Strait there. So, we were just wandering around.

You mentioned going to Melbourne and St Kilda and the beaches there. How often would you have actually made it into Melbourne?

Oh, not a lot. Only occasionally. Not a lot.

Do you remember what struck you about the city of Melbourne?

15:00 **What sort of a place it was back then?**

No, nothing spectacular. Nothing outstanding. Other than that knew that it was the capital of Victoria. You just felt probably how could you be part of it at some stage of your life. Probably lacked the education to do that. But no,

15:30 you were just conscious of it as the capitol, anyway.

You explained the process of getting work at the SEC, can you tell us the same sort of thing in terms of getting into the navy? You mentioned having to get your father to sign the papers, what happened from there, what was the next step?

The next step, I got a letter back saying

16:00 "You're being considered" and I think it was in August. September, we came down to see one of the football matches that was on. And the navy recruiting officer was then in Collins Street, the old Fleet building. I think my father did this as a ploy, I've got no way of knowing that, but I suspect he did.

16:30 He said, "Oh, I think I'll go up the old Fleet building" and if I remember correctly the recruiting officer was Lieutenant-Commander Veal. Quite interesting, this. My father said, "Now's your chance to find out if you're dinkum about joining the navy." He said he knew the recruiting officer

17:00 and he said, "Hang on a minute." So he went in and saw him and anyway, then it was my turn to go in. And being to the football, I'll never forget this as long as I live, because at that time you had to take the oath of allegiance and swear on the bible, and he's looking around for the bible, and then he pulled it out and put my hand on it, and you sweared your oath of allegiance and so on.

17:30 I thought to myself, "There's something funny about this." When I turned it over and it wasn't the bible, it was Tegg's Mathematical Tables. That's the highlight of joining up. Anyway, and then I just went from there. I was down at HMAS Cerberus at the end of October.

18:00 I can't tell you any more than that.

Except what happened at Cerberus, which is next.

Oh, well. That's when you start to grow up.

How was it saying goodbye to your mates and your colleagues at Yallourn?

Well, it was a new life. I just, that was it. That was what I was doing.

18:30 I was quite happy about going, and they'd just wish you well, and things like that. No, there was no, I just made up my mind I was going, and there it was. You made new mates then. Talk a different language.

What are you memories of you first experience of being at Cerberus, and you training there?

19:00 Interesting. Very interesting. You're suddenly thrust amongst some of the people that had come back from the Mediterranean; they were running the training classes. They were looking after the recruits. My first memory of that is when we went in as a group, and new entry school

19:30 there was a chap in charge of it, was Allen Saltmarsh, he was a warrant officer at HMAS Cerberus. He had a name as a bit of a tyrant with new entries. So he starts to sing out, "Given," and I said mum [remained silent], I didn't want to know anything about this at this stage because

20:00 you're hearing stories, "Watch yourself, he's a tough man." Anyway the upshot was that Allen Saltmarsh, the warrant officer in charge, he was a shipmate of my father's on the [HMAS] Encounter. At some stage, my father had got him out of a scrape, which allowed him to go on with career, anyway that's my first memory of it. Other than that,

20:30 then I said to all the group, because at my age there were two of us about the same age and the rest of them were well into their 20s, we with much older people. They said, "Pink eye, you know him?" and I said, "No, I don't even know the man." That was that. I think the other interesting thing was that some of the instructors, one of the things that hit me when I was first walking in there was

21:00 seeing the Latin inscription under the Cerberus figurehead, was the three headed dog, and being naïve enough to say, "Chief, what does that mean?" and he said, "My boy, you will remember this for the rest of your days, it simply means 'bullshit baffles brains'." So, those sorts of things stand out.

21:30 Anyway, this particular guy come off the [HMAS] Stuart, he was a petty officer. He was pretty good. I

started to wake up then. That was my first memories of it.

So you mentioned how this Saltmarsh had known your dad, what was it you said, he called out your name and then?

Yeah, he wanted to see me. But he

22:00 had picked the name up from the list of new entries I guess. That was quite something. In the ultimate when we finished our training, they used to have, apart from the ordinary issue of uniform, people used to have their own suits made, which they called 'tiddly suits', and instead of having the full wide square shoulder

22:30 in the main, it would be a little bit narrower, and be a bit finer cut on the front jacket. And Saltmarsh was a bit of a tiger in sort of impounding these sorts of tailor-made suits. He used to occasionally go around and confiscate them, he'd go around and lift up the collar and blokes would lose their

23:00 uniform because he was very old school. The day we did finish our training and the guys there said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "Oh," the idea was that I was going to go down and see Saltmarsh and see how we'd go, if my suit could get through, because I had one that was made that way, we'd probably be OK. And that's what

23:30 happened. So, our group got out and didn't lose any uniforms. I respected him anyway, it was only twice I saw him. Oh, except that one night though, at one stage we were formed into platoons there, that was when the Japanese advance south started rearing its head, and we were involved in army type

24:00 operation, and we had to dig trenches pretty much on the outskirts of Cerberus, and we were working four on and four off, things like that. Two of us were patrolling one night and of course, the usual thing, you had the inspectors going around, the officers, seeing what was happening. You were supposed, if you heard any movement, you were supposed to, "Halt. Who goes there?"

24:30 In other words, challenge. This night two of us were going through and I sing out, "Halt. Who goes there?" and it was my friend Saltmarsh again. I'm holding my torch right alongside myself, and got him and and he said, "That's a silly thing to do. If you struck the enemy this way." He said, "He's too close to you. You should have it further apart.

25:00 You could get shot in the stomach." My friend at the side who Saltmarsh hadn't seen said, "You wouldn't want to try it mate." Did growing up.

What else struck you about naval culture and the discipline and that sort of thing?

I think initially early, the instructors told you, and I think

25:30 it's something that you should always remember, that the navy could do one of two things, that it could make you or break you, and the choice is your own. That's exactly it. Some people would try to push naval regulations to the limit. I think in your initial training and your new entry there's a fair bit of activity in the drill

26:00 area, around the parade ground and things like that. A lot of the punishment was that the people who finished the day's activities away for recreation, the ones that would get what they would call 'jankers' [confined to barracks – extra drill and work] and they'd have to go back after hours. We had one guy in our class who persistently pushed it to point that nearly every day he's had to go back and do extra drills, because

26:30 he couldn't shut his mouth. He was trying to fly in the face of convention. But it did do that. It either made you or break you. You realised the benefit of it all anyway. Discipline, builds your character. I think the physical training people helped that too. I think most people realised that by the time you left there you

27:00 were pretty fit. You could respond to orders pretty spontaneously. I think after all the times there were emergencies that's what it's all about.

What else did that initial training consist of? You mentioned the drills, can you give us a bit more detail on those things?

You'd get seamanship classes. Gunnery drills. You did torpedo

27:30 exercises. Fair bit of marching, a fair bit of physical training. A little bit of swimming. Probably one of the hardest things with the swimming was that you were issued with a canvas suit and one of the tests you had to undergo was to swim 25 yards in it and stay afloat in it. I think the basis for

28:00 that was maybe you could survive any sinking that might occur. I'll never forget when I'm trying to hold the two minutes, I'm gradually sinking because of the weight of the thing and I just made the two minutes, because if your feet touched the bottom you had to go back and do more swimming exercises. I just came under. The petty officer was watching and he said,

28:30 "That was bloody close." That was it. I remember those things. Seamanship training, the whole.

What the seamanship training involve?

How to respond to steering a ship; the right and wrong way to receive instructions, and to answer to them;

29:00 to understand the naval terminology for different parts of the ship. To learn how to handle a sounding device, which was if you talk about swing the lead, that's how they sound for testing the depth when they're going into unknown territory. That's about a seven-pound weight on the end of a line that

29:30 you just have to sing out "By the mark two" or "By the mark three." Things like that. Seamanship, that's about it I guess.

How were most of the recruits coping with that discipline that we were talking about, were there those that couldn't quite hack it? Were there dropouts?

Not in our, in all the classes I, all of our classes got through.

30:00 Occasionally there'd be a muster where somebody was terminated. I can always remember one that was terminated because he didn't maintain his uniform, wouldn't wash, he was pretty dirty and untidy in his habits, and they just dismissed him pretty well in front of the whole parade. I guess that's done as an exercise just to let you know. Occasionally there'd be

30:30 a kit inspection to see how you're maintaining your kit, things like that.

What was in the kit?

Blue uniforms, shirts, underwear, socks, lanyard. Well that's all part of the uniform. There was a seamanship knife,

31:00 your hat, your tie, and x number [service number] of them and so on. All your gear had to be named, or branded. Hammock, and all that goes with it, your bedding. There was a Burberry overcoat

31:30 and a jumper. That's about it, you nearly got me.

That's good to hear, really. You mentioned earlier, you were there in October '41, how long was the recruit training all up?

We finished our training in March, early March, then sent us on leave and then we

32:00 sailed for England in the end on 31st March, it's about the time.

You also mentioned that of course that's when the Japanese threat was becoming more on Pearl Harbor in December, and then on Singapore etc. What effect was that having on the mood and the morale of the crews and the navy in general, as far as you could see?

32:30 I think it was, they realised that they had some stiff opposition ahead of them. I think that sort of tended to bind them as a unit, they were at that time in a depot sort of thing. But even in what activities you were doing, like army type drills and things like that, I think it just made all the groups

33:00 really strengthen teamwork in unit, if one can sort of term it that way. You wanted to be the best, you wanted to be the fittest, you wanted to be in a position to meet whatever came along. I guess, how else can one answer that?

During that time at Cerberus were you able to get weekend leave? What was the situation with that?

33:30 Well, being under 18, I was only allowed out once a month. I think they used to get leave fortnightly, but being underage, you had to get permission, and you could only go ashore if someone was prepared to vouch for you. I had a relative who live out of Balwyn who was prepared to do that. So I got out about once a month.

34:00 I think probably the first time I went on leave was about November and I think at that time HMAS Sydney had been sunk, and we were alerted to that fact and also that we shouldn't discuss it when we were on leave, and it was quite surprising because I know my first to go back home, we got on a

34:30 train at Flinders Street, and I was standing at the end because there was no seating at that stop. There was a chap that said to me, "They tell me the Sydney's been sunk." And that's what I hear the first thing. The first thing I thought was, "How the hell do you know that?" because we were the only ones that know this. I said, "I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about." Yeah, but the leave bit was

35:00 up until I was 18 in the February so that was about the first time I was able to get away other than on monthly.

The Sydney was very early on in your training, wasn't it? That must have had a real impact.

Yes. 19th of November. She was the pride of the fleet. There were three chappies from our hometown on her, and that's the one I was alerted to before some who you knew. Jim Reilly,

35:30 Ross Berwick and Teddy Belcher. And it's unusual when you look at it now, three from the one country town. So it had a big impact on myself, and apart from the navy, personally it had an impact, and it had an impact on the town. Certainly it shattered the navy. I sort of recall

36:00 an incident that we were involved in later on where our skipper said, "We don't want another Sydney." That can come later on, I can tell you about that later.

Things changed a bit when you were 18, you able to get out a bit more. What were the sailors, or the recruits do at that time? What would you do on leave?

I think, you're talking more for me, because I think most people would go home at that time,

36:30 go with their girlfriends, or go just where they were, their normal suburban or country activity. I used to go home, catch the train up to Yallourn, which was, I'd go about six o'clock and get up there about 8 o'clock, so I had about Friday, Saturday night home. Mine was just to go back there and perhaps go to the pictures.

37:00 Then back on the train on Sunday morning, back to Melbourne and then catch the train Sunday afternoon back to Cerberus. I guess the thing then, some go dancing, some would get up to all sorts of lurks I guess, but some would get into the grog. Some would go girling, I guess.

37:30 I'm trying to learn to dance at that time, I still can't dance but those sorts of things.

Was this a dance hall in Yallourn that you'd go to?

No, I'm talking about when you had time down here in the city. I went to a couple of the dance schools but I couldn't relax at that time. It was awkward, stupid.

But it was the done thing, wasn't it?

Yep.

38:00 But yes, it was pretty mundane. Maybe go and see friends or other relatives, occasionally I'd do that. Just keep in touch. I went to see my grandmother. Pretty mundane.

So now that you've been at Cerberus a couple of months, were you able to share things with your father? Did that offer another connection

38:30 **for that relationship at all?**

Such as what, Colin?

Well, the fact that he'd had all that time in the navy, and now you were in a way following in his footsteps.

No, well I think he was interested in what we were doing, and maybe he'd discuss how things were in his day, that would probably be a bit more strict and a bit more rigid I think than our day, which is entirely different again. But

39:00 no, I don't think so, because I knew whatever it was, that I just had to go with whatever it was at that time. Simple. Whether that's answering your question, or what you're looking for…

I'm not looking for anything, I'm just asking questions.

No, no, I realise that.

You were in Cerberus between October through to March, what was the process then,

39:30 **towards the end did you have any idea where you would be posted?**

No, no. We didn't have any ideas until they just. Well, see out of our class there were only a small number of us that were on the draft to the UK [United Kingdom]. And then there was another class as well that were there, so there were two or three classes that were pretty

40:00 close through their training that went over to man the equipment. Nobody knew where they were going. Some of our class they'd gone to other naval stations in Australia, or they'd got postings to ships. They were a bit envious of us going to the UK. We didn't know about it until then,

40:30 we were told not to talk about where you were going other than that your address would be care of the naval liaison officer in London.

How much did you know about what was going on in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean at that period?

Only what you knew from people that were there. There was another chap from home, Yallourn, who was on the HMAS Vampire at that stage.

41:00 He got mentioned in dispatches and things like that but as to the actual conditions you didn't know very much, only what you read in newspapers and things like that. You didn't have TV [television] coverage,

radio coverage was scarce, but you didn't really know what it was like until you got there. I think unless you go through these experiences

41:30 it's very hard to sort of tell people. I don't think a lot people knew what it was like in the Mediterranean, until people came home and talked. Just had to learn by experience.

Was there a passing out ceremony, something of that sort at the end of the time at Cerberus?

No, you just finished your training and then you were sent on a weeks leave

Tape 3

00:31 **The Cerberus?**

Yeah, and now they're trying to resurrect it aren't they? There's a breakwater. Yeah, it's Cerberus, not 'seropus', seropus is the salt.

Why did the base get the name HMAS Cerberus?

Because I think it was named after the original Cerberus, because it was the first ship in the Australian navy.

01:00 Back in 19- Oh, I'm not sure.

I'd like to know a bit more about the training, you've listed a few things that you did, things like the gunnery and the torpedo training and the technical stuff.

How much can one remember? You want me

01:30 to tell you about the mistakes I made? That's what you want. In the seamanship one, there's one that they call 'swinging the lead', not like you do at work, but that's where you sound to test the depth of the water, someone who stands in the chains and swings this lead, seven pound lead. And when it goes

02:00 down it registers on the rope. And you're supposed to swing it with a straight arm, and who was the clown who bent him arm when he was doing it? And down came the lead weight and hit me on the head, that's why I'm so stupid today. The other one was probably, when we were doing our

02:30 ordinary parade drill, it was around the Melbourne Cup time, and our instructor lost a lot of money on the betting. On the Monday morning he told us, "Woe betide anybody who makes a mistake today." So we do our first training drill, walking around with a rifle, and he says, "Halt. Stand at ease."

03:00 And as he said stand at ease he said, "Woe betide anyone that makes a mistake" because you don't want to know who dropped their rifle. And there's some older guys standing behind me saying, "Faint, faint" and I'm saying, "What, what." Anyway he called me a smart arse and he said, "All right, at the double, slope arms." and he said, "You see that flag pole?" which was about 200 yards away,

03:30 "Up and around that 19 times." Of course I had to go up and do that. Whilst I'm in the middle of doing that, the parade officer gets off his bike and he's saying to me, "What happened?" and I said, "I dropped a rifle" and he said, "Yeah, and what's your punishment?" and I said, "I have to do this 19 times." He said, "Can you do it?" I said, "Yes, I think so." Anyway I

04:00 did do it and got another smart arse comment when I got back, because the instructor had seen the parade officer. Anyway the upshot was that the parade officer reckoned that I'd done enough doubling for our class for the rest of the week, and we didn't do any more doubling for that week. That was a pretty good reward. I think other than that, Oh, yes, this one you might be interested in.

04:30 One occasion we were out on our trench drill, out near Somers, and there were duty, a number of us had to come back and get lunch for the rest of them. The lunch at that stage was bully beef. The chef we had, when we cut the bully beef there were maggots on it, and he said,

05:00 "That's all right, just wash them under the water and we'll be right from there. Just wash them off and put them back." It put you off bully beef for a while, but ultimately you have to come back to it anyway. But other than that they're only technical flaws that I can recall at this point.

Had you been over a ship at all at this stage?

No. Not at that point. It was all land-based. The

05:30 seamanship one was steering at sea, even though you've got a wheel mount head, and you've got compasses there as well, the binnacle for the compass for the wheel, so to all intents and purposes it's a mock part of the ship. But no, I hadn't been on any ship, there was no ship at Cerberus at that time.

Did they teach you about the sea, the tides,

06:00 **the different types of sea?**

No, No. There's only two types of sea – rough and smooth.

What about the gunnery training, and the torpedo training?

The gunnery training that teaches you to work in numbers and I think, it's hard to recall now, but it could be six or seven around in a gunnery drill. Say

06:30 4.7 guns and each one's got a particular station at a layer, a trainer, the ones that have got to load, the ammunition ones, so you all know which post it is. So that if anything happened you'd know where it was. So after each drill you'd have to put the cordite and then the shell, then you'd have to go back and put the shell in and then the cordite.

07:00 And then fire, and then they'd say, "Gun crew change round," so by that time everybody's going round like a dance routine. But at least it was sharpening you up to what had to be done and everybody had an idea of what the next guy's job was. And that's pretty crucial in a wartime situation, where something happens, everybody on the gun crew knows what's got to happen.

07:30 I think the torpedo drill was sort of understanding the mechanism of the torpedo. Driven by the gyroscope and things like that. That's different. It just depends on which area you want to go to, gunnery or torpedo.

And at that stage did you have an interest either way?

No, not at that stage. You're open-minded and I think initially to get you trained is what,

08:00 as quickly as they can at that stage, so you could man a ship anyway, then they ran training courses after that. In our case when we finished training we were earmarked to go to the United Kingdom, to man the Q-class destroyers.

How many of there were you there in the class?

In the class? Aren't you a good tester, this one.

08:30 Probably a couple of dozen , I would think from memory. Yeah, about that. I think in our case we had about six Victorians and the rest were New South I think, and the mines. I knew a couple from Queensland. I guess the Victorians were the lucky ones that went to the UK. If you would call it luck, but still.

09:00 **I've forgotten how long you were there training.**

From October to the March. Roughly about five months.

You mentioned something about learning how to take instructions and give instructions. Was there a particular procedure for that? Like a hierarchy?

Yeah, well

09:30 it was whoever's the officer of the watch shouts to the wheelhouse, "Port five," then he replies, "Five degrees at port well along, Sir" things like that. So that you've got to double check that he wants to turn the ship to port, that you've turned your wheel to port, so you've got that understanding that way. And there was a repetition of order,

10:00 I think in a lot of cases to make sure that you're quite clear and understood. Often a lot of naval signals would have something, repeat, and it wouldn't be the same thing. Just to make sure that the message was there. It's so easy to, you know, "It's not your left hand," or "It's not your right hand," it's port and starboard, and things like that. And then obviously you've got your degrees of your compass,

10:30 which was the way, from the bridge that's where the direction and the orders come from. I think that procedure's pretty sound, just from experience.

So, it was through microphone, over the deck, or?

Oh, then it was through a voice port, which was just a tube, a metallic tube with a cover on it at the top.

11:00 Maybe so they couldn't spit down it, or water could come down it. That's what it was. I don't know what it is today, Catherine [interviewer].

It's interesting that that's the way it was. It seems like pretty old technology but it must have worked. That meant you just had one person at the other end of the line taking the instructions, and then passing on the instructions?

Yes, yes.

11:30 **Was there a lot of yelling? Did you have to project your voice and yell instructions around?**

Oh, well, in the initial training. You had to do that in the gunnery. You had to be loud and clear. Yes, I

would say you had to be loud and clear, whatever you were doing. I think that's to make sure that everybody knows what's been said, and that you're receiving it properly. Yes, I'd say loud and clear.

12:00 **So you were trained**

"Loud and clear," yeah. I think so, no whispering baritones.

You knew you were going to be sent to the UK, or you knew you were being prepped for the UK, is that right? But you didn't know exactly where or what?

No, no. I can't be precise about that other than

12:30 that we there were two destroyers that had to be manned and that we were going over there as part of the pool, from which they would draw the ship's company from for the respective turn. So that's all I can tell you. The draft was to UK, London called. That's all I can tell you about that.

13:00 **That must have been fairly momentous in a way, knowing that you were going off to the UK?**

Yeah, quite exciting. You get to sea. You get to a ship. Yeah, a big thing. I think most people looked forward to that, particularly if there was chance to get on to a destroyer. That seemed to be the go.

Why was that so popular, sort after?

13:30 I don't know, they're the doers I guess, the ones that sail at top speed at times, things like that. They were just graceful; I suppose they were in the action more often than not. Things like that, just to be part of the doing. By that time, you're pretty fit, pretty well trained. I know it's pretty condensed training, but there's nothing like

14:00 getting a sea to do it properly. That must have been hard on the permanent officers that are suddenly thrust with groups of near civilians. It's quite something, you're mind boggles about it, but I'm quite sure there was reciprocal training on both sides. I think they learnt a little bit from the civvies [civilians]. We certainly

14:30 learned from them. I think that's about it, it was just the fascination of going to sea.

That's an interesting notion that you think they learned from the civvies. They were open them?

Oh, some of them, some. Not all. It's just an observation from comments that I've heard recently anyway. We can talk about that later.

15:00 **Where did you embark from?**

Melbourne. We went on board a vessel called the Sterling Castle – I'm not sure where she used to ply her trade – and we went unescorted from Melbourne to Liverpool, via Auckland and Panama. That's how we,

15:30 there were about 74 – 80 of us on board I think. She loaded up her foodstuffs in Auckland.

No sea or air escort?

No. Unescorted. We left here about today I think, however many years back it is. Then got there the 17 May I think.

16:00 Yes, unescorted.

Of what, the 31st March 1942? What's that, 62 years ago today?

Roughly 62 years. It took roughly six weeks on the voyage.

Who else was on the ship?

No, just the merchant crew and

16:30 the naval contingent. I think apart from the new entries, we were all new entries on that draft, with the exception of the leading cook and the warrant officer in charge of the draft. That was Warrant Officer Gunn. Not Ben Gunn

17:00 from Treasure Island. But that's how it appeared to us you know. Anyway, yeah.

So Warrant Officer Gunn was…

In charge of the draft.

At getting you to the UK, safe and sound.

Well, I suppose it was a merchant ship that did though. But our first call was Auckland.

17:30 There loaded foodstuffs, and some of our guys who were astute enough to earn a quid or two by

working with the wharfies unloading the ship. They got themselves cash on jobs on the night shifts. That was a pretty astute piece of thinking. Then from Auckland we went down by the Southern Ocean, through the Panama Canal.

18:00 Panama's quite an interesting one to go through. When we hit Colon, on the Atlantic side there, the American police came aboard and said, because we were allowed leave on shore at that time for that night, or for a certain amount of hours, not overnight, they said,

18:30 "Make sure you're travelling in a group." Because he said we had to go through I guess some pretty notorious areas, and I think the interesting thing from that was, we had a little chap on board called Billy Brown. He was part of the crew, came from Queensland. And one of the areas where we

19:00 walked through was a little bit like where tenement houses where the front door opened onto the footpath, and we got to this area and we knew why they said go in a group, because that was where the mobile houses of ill repute were. And just as we got to this door, out comes this big black mama and she grabbed Billy and hugs him into her bosom and said, "Pedro my darling, you have come back."

19:30 Well you know what that bloke's been called from that day to this day, don't you. It was his first time out of Australia, and that was fascinating in itself because there was another chap from his home suburb in Brisbane, and he said to him, "You're a dirty bastard," because Billy had got himself engaged just before he left there, and Billy said, "But I've never left the country," and they said, "Yeah, not much,

20:00 there's this madam coming out and calling you Pedro." But he'd never seen her before. Anyway that was just something. From Colon we had to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to Liverpool and on the night we went through there, maybe I can stand corrected, but because of the U-Boat [Unterseeboot – German submarine] activity, I think 14 ships

20:30 in this particular 24-36 hour period, 14 ships had left there to sail and only two got through, and we were one of the two. One wonders about those sorts of things, because one night, and obviously those ships would sail in pretty strict dark periods.

21:00 There was one of the port lights, one of the port holes open so there was a light flashing, and even the lighting of cigarettes was taboo and banned because that glow can be seen for miles. It's still not known to this day whether there was a plant on there. Certainly it wasn't on our crew, I can assure you of that.

21:30 For that indiscretion the captain of the ship sort of blamed our party for it, but it wasn't us at all. It wasn't until a couple of days out from Liverpool that he found out it was someone in the crew at the port hole, and opened it. So that's why the light was seen for miles.

22:00 Anyway, as pay I think they gave us roast pork, as our last meal on board, so that was a good pay out. I think that was his way of getting out.

You said 14 ships had made this crossing…

14 had left Colon, to go to sail to various, wherever. And only two got through in that period.

22:30 I think you can understand, because there was a fair bit of U-Boat activity there. Occasionally you'd see rafts with lifeboats, life jackets in them, so you just wondered then whether people had jumped overboard or if people had been rescued, or what. Yeah, there was a fair bit of sinking at that time. I can't prove it to you, but

23:00 there's a book out called The Battle of the Atlantic that sort of covers these sorts of things anyway in a bit more detail. We were lucky.

How aware were you of the sinking, or the danger?

At that time, we were aware of the danger, because you had to be pretty careful when you were ashore at Colon, because there were all sorts of people there. It wasn't, it

23:30 could have been anyone, any nationality could have been there, and I dare say there were spy groups, or information links being passed on from all sorts of avenues. That was how it would have been. I can't tell you other than in a general sense, that we were one of two of 14 that got through. One of two, which is lucky.

24:00 **Extremely lucky. So you arrived at Liverpool, and from there, how did you get where you were going?**

Well, from Liverpool we went by night train to London and then ultimately to Portsmouth.

24:30 That's what happened there, that's how we fared.

Was that a troop train or a passenger train?

Passenger train. It was a night train, I'm not sure when it left now, but it travelled through the night. Well aware of that. Two things I think probably about that was when we hit Liverpool and we saw some of the devastation that had gone on. You'd see buildings,

25:00 whole areas flattened. You could see the burn marks on some of the brick walls that were left standing, and so on. It was quite evident that there had been a fair bit of damage. Done by air raiders there. It was interesting when you wake up in the morning and look out the train window and see planes hedge hopping, and then you start to realise you're really

25:30 amongst things. You see red planes hedgehopping, chasing something, you sort of realise something's going on. From there down to Portsmouth.

What about London, arriving in London?

No, we just went straight down from London down to Portsmouth. At that point we didn't have any time in London other than to change train.

26:00 Go from one to the other. Then we hit a place called Stamshore Camp, which was where we billeted, and walking around there. Bag and hammock and then it's dusk and the next thing I hear "Mickey Given, what the hell are you doing here, you

26:30 should still be home selling your papers." It was another bloke from our hometown, Joey Moffat, so I knew I was amongst friends straightaway. It was good.

What was Joey doing there?

He'd been over there prior to that. I'm not sure when he was here, but he was a stoker, and he was, and ultimately we were both on

27:00 HMAS Quickmatch but he was there at that time. He'd been in England for some time prior to that, so he was well conditioned to it. I think he said, "Right, we'll go to the pictures," and when we got settled, after the next night, we go to the pictures, pick up fish and chips for dinner

27:30 and had those on your newspaper wrapped on your lap in the picture theatre. Away goes the air raid siren. Of course mugs stands up, and he says, "What are you standing up for?" and I say, "Well, instructions, the air raid siren, we've got to make our way to the air raid cellar." He said, "Sit down, you silly bastard, you're stopping everybody else from looking at the picture."

28:00 By this time my fish and chips were everywhere, you know. My knees are shaking, and I guess they're all over the floor. Then you stand up and look around and you see most of the people are kids, 9, 10, maybe a bit older with grandparents, or maybe Mum, because their father is probably in the service.

28:30 Then you start to realise, "If they can hack this then so can I." And you just sat down. If you're going to get it, you're going to get it, simple as that. That was my initiation to arriving in England. It was a good lesson in itself, got to see the resilience of the English people at that point. It was quite good.

29:00 **Where had you been trained about air raid sirens?**

Oh, we hadn't been trained about them, you only knew the instructions when you heard them, and you can't help but know when that wail goes off but know what it's all about. You were supposed to then make your way to the nearest air raid shelter.

Where did you learn about that?

You're just told about that sort of when you get there. Told in the depot.

29:30 Or that was part of the routine when you get ashore or wherever you were, the air raid sirens go, you make your way to the nearest shelter. That would be told us in Stamshore Camp. We didn't learn that in Australia, we had to learn that in the camp.

Stamshore Camp, can you tell me a bit about the camp, and how it was set up? What were your barracks like?

30:00 We had bunk in them. There were separate buildings but probably what the construction was I can't tell you now because I can't recall it completely. They were mainly English and the Australians were scattered all over the place. The Australians were notorious

30:30 washers. The Poms [English] were not notorious washers, so there was always plenty of hot water in the showers for the Australians. Because of that standard of cleanliness, I guess, amongst Australians, it wasn't long before, thanks to the manipulation of some Australians in the police office that used to work the accommodation, they gradually shifted around to get more

31:00 and more Australians together. It was very craftily done. The barracks were quite simple in themselves anyway. At that stage you became aware of food shortages, they were growing vegetables between the huts, that was apparent.

31:30 At that time – no I'm not crying, it's only this cold. I think one of the funniest things that happened there, we had a chap named Swifty Chalmers. He was alcoholic, bless him, poor bloke. We then became acquainted with, once you're in the Royal Navy waters,

32:00 you're then eligible for a rum issue, where you get one tot of rum per day. That's going back part of navy tradition. The mess cook's duty was to go and collect the ration for the whole hut, as you were. But this particular day, Swifty was the worst bloke he could have sent out to get the rum. He goes to get

32:30 the rum issue, hours go by and there's no sign of him. He got stuck into the rum and he'd fallen asleep in amongst the potatoes. That's how they found him; he'd really got stuck into the rum. That was the highlight of that place.

What happened to Swifty, did he get it from you fellas?

Oh, no

33:00 the blokes covered it up for him, and things like that. You don't put people in like that, you try to help them. Yes, there were some funny times there. I think another time there was in a wet canteen, where he, there was, yeah I have to tell you.

33:30 Where the guys who'd go around the table, and the English pint there is like a flower vase, not like the ones here. There was a chap, now I can't tell you his name either because his son's a member of parliament over in South Australia, so we'll leave it go at that. Anyway he had just had, after you've had a few beers,

34:00 and you want to go to the loo, he used to dangle his penis in the beer, and somebody would say, "What did you do that for?" and he'd say, "So you bastards won't drink it." So the boys round the table said, "We've got to stop him doing this." So next time he came back and he said, "That's fixed you, nobody touches my beer" and they said, "No, and nobody else will after because

34:30 six others have been in it as well." That's how you had to break him of that habit. He clashed with one of the barmaids, one of the NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] workers. She had been wiping out one of the slop trays and she just got the rag and hit him across the face with it. I dare say he just stood there, and he immediately asked for another pint,

35:00 which she poured, and he just pulled up her skirt and he just poured it between her legs, the whole lot. He was a bit uncouth, but there the sorts of things that you'd sort of come into and your eyes start to widen, you know. You're a greenhorn from a country town, and then you're suddenly finding out how other people live. They're sort of highlights from that place. Oh boy, was he rough.

35:30 He was rough.

Was he English did you say?

No, Australian. I'm not going to tell you his name either, protect his son.

So, that was a great story, all colour and movement by the sound of things.

Oh, Oh, I know. You start to realise what happens in wartime, you know, how conduct was accepted, or

36:00 how conduct goes out the door sometimes, and these other things creeps in through it.

Bu the extremes I guess of the discipline, and then the letting go.

Exactly, exactly. Yep. I guess that's part and parcel of it at wartime for some of them, that's how they can let go, and I mean in wartime they can't tell you how to be. I've said to you, my fish and chips, you know I admit it, my knees were shaking the first time I heard the,

36:30 and of course, fish and chips were all over the place. Pull up and see what others were doing. But how could you say to people, "Are you scared? Are you scared?" There must have been worse situations than that but that's just an illustration. It's so different today. People would handle it differently today.

But every time you hear a siren, I mean you must get that little hit of adrenalin

37:00 **every time you hear the siren?**

Of course. Yeah. Of course. I think the cry was, "Double red, the bastard's overhead." That's, there used to be two lots, and they were the warning sirens. But when you heard the double red, which was a more aggravated wail, that was the catch cry with it. I forget the early part of it, but certainly the end of it was, "Double red

37:30 the bastard's overhead." Then you were supposed to go for cover.

Did that happen much in camp?

Occasionally you'd get air raids. You could be anywhere and that could happen, you know. I can't, I've got no idea the number of air raids. One other time

38:00 when we were out and there was a night attack over Portsmouth Harbour, and the flares were let go. The three of us were up, I think it was near the signal station Laydene or the suburb near it, and we heard the 'whoomf' of the bomb going off. The next thing you can hear this shudder, shudder, shuddering sound. We're standing

38:30 in front of a plate glass window of a shop. Of course you do that, you immediately wake up, you just go flat on the ground. Fortunately the window didn't shatter, but there was just that shuddering sound that it made. I guess there's all sorts of stories like that. Yeah, you live with it.

39:00 **In the camp, this is the first time you've mixed with the British. How was that for you? For the other able seamen?**

Mixing with the British? Interesting, because you'd get some that were OK, you'd get some that would assume that they've got a superior attitude, because we were only colonials

39:30 and because of that, because of the convict heritage, each and everybody who comes from Australia is in that class. That's how they tended to treat you. You'd get a mixture. I think the first time we went to London, it was the illustration, this one.

40:00 It's where you grow up and learn. We got off at Waterloo Station to try to find our way to Australia House, which is in Aldwych in Fleet Street I think so the three of us were quite well dressed, on our best behaviour and this lady was coming with (UNCLEAR).

40:30 We said "Excuse us, madam, can you tell us the way to Aldridge?" and she started to tell us, and she saw the Australian flashes on the side of the shoulders, put her head in the air and she said, "Huh, colonials!" and took off. That's, when you hear that story in wartime, you think what the hell's going on here? But you soon get used to that. Within the Royal Navy too, the Australians were looked on as a little bit different. And certainly that colonial thing, but I still think too, that deep down it's because of the Australian heritage, you know. Anyway, I know an English friend of mine, whenever we sling off about Poms, he'd always come back with, "You've just got to remember that Australians are second-hand Poms, anyway." I think that's worth thinking about. You get that colonial thing. Some of them get that superior side to them. But despite that they're a resilient nation, what they went through. I've got a lot of respect for that, the courage that they showed at that time because they took a pasting.

Tape 4

00:31 **The British/Australian relationships, firstly in the camps, because that was your meeting point, your first impressions.**

You've still got the same sort of thing, you've got the 'fors' and 'againsts' and the 'couldn't care less'. I think that's about how it is, still is today I think.

Were there any fights?

Oh, there was often fights, you know. I

01:00 don't think so many in the camp. I remember one happened in Trincomalee I think it was, or Mombasa it might have been, I forget. But it was one of the chaps off the ship that got into the wet canteen and he had a few under his table, and he stood up under the table and he said "All Kippers can hop out," which was the term if you want to fight 'let's hop out'. Of course the kippers did hop out

01:30 in numbers, really thrashed him. Yeah, I guess you could pick a fight pretty easily, you know, because maybe it's the Australian casual way, maybe it's brawn. I mean I've seen plenty of times where situations been shelved or somebody's been sat down in their chair pretty quickly, shut up, you know, because others were taking interest. Either

02:00 because they're out-numbered or just know that you just can't keep going on like that. Yeah it happened.

What kind of background did the Poms have? Was it a real cross section from your working class lads right through to…?

Yep, pretty much. I think that's pretty typical of any service in wartime. I think in wartime anyway, it was all in together. That's

02:30 what had struck me anyway. I think it would be just a cross section. But I know some of the English officers certainly looked down their nose at Australians. I think brooks a typical illustration of some of them. Oh no, but as a general principal, I think they're drawn from all walks of life the same as we were.

What were you doing at the camp?

03:00 What was I doing? Well, we got broken up. Some went to gunnery courses, some went to torpedo courses at the establishments there. Because I had been silly enough to volunteer on the Sterling Castle to help out on the office part, with all the paperwork that went on, help Mr Gunn, Ben Gunn,

03:30 I finished up at the Australian Liaison Office down at Portsmouth barracks, which was then sort of

getting involved on the clerical side of things. So that's where I finished up, where I did most of my time in there, so I didn't get to do gunnery or torpedo because I was in that liaison, looking after pay, drafting procedures and

04:00 things like that.

So everyone were sent off to do further training?

For whatever courses, yep. That was quite interesting.

Was that a training position for you, or was it like a job?

Well, you sort of, I don't know, it was a bit of both. It's a little bit of both, probably because you know, "He knows about it, let's pull him."

04:30 So you just went where you were told, weren't you. You don't tell authority what to do. Just melt in with it and that was liaising with the navy people in relation to what our party's requirements were. Pay procedures and other things that went with it. Getting ready

05:00 to draft a ship, people to the different ships and things like that. Get their service certificates right and all that sort of thing. That was my lot.

Was that interesting?

Oh yeah, of course.

You must have known what was going on at the base, the comings and goings?

Yeah, and I had to shut up, because 'Wagging tongues sink ships'. [More usually 'Loose lips sink ships']

05:30 You soon had to know what you could talk about and what you couldn't talk about. Yeah it was interesting. But let me add too, that whilst we were in there, we formed an Australian cricket team round there and we had some pretty enjoyable matches. Played at the Hampshire ground and various other places,

06:00 and because of this superior attitude I was telling you about, we were playing Fleet Airarm down at Lee-on-Solent. Their opening batsman was the commander of the depot and the umpire was the chief steward. Of course, mug bowls the ball

06:30 and it was the most blatant catch behind that I've ever seen in my life. Of course up we appeal, and not out. And I just burnt my stack. I said, "You bloody rotten cheat!" Had to sort of get calmed down a little bit, but that's the way they would do it, and I always harked back to my

07:00 time, that's funny, I harked back to an English history teacher I had back at Yallourn, which was teaching us British history, European history. And years ago France, Germany, Spain and all these referred to England as 'perfidious Albion' – 'treacherous England' – and if you look at the history, that's sort of what goes on.

07:30 I just sort of looked down, and I said to Anne Hooper, I never forgot her name, that teacher, "You're so true." That was the classic case of it. That's quite a joke with me, sometimes when you run across them out here in Australia, and I just say "P.A.," because we had another bloke that had been in the navy quite a few years. We were ashore one time

08:00 set with a very good English family, and he said to me, "What did I hear you say?" and I told him. He said, "Next time you meet a good Pom, shoot the bastard before he goes bad." So you can understand the Australian/England attitude. That shows through in test matches and things like that doesn't it, with the way the crowds react. I guess that'll

08:30 always be there. The convicts can get up. They taught us how to play all those things, but now we can really show them how to play the game.

We're fast learners.

Oh, it's only in fun.

So, how long were you land-based

09:00 **and stuck in an office before you got to go on a ship?**

Well we were there in May and we commissioned a ship in September 1942.

Tell me the story about the commissioning of equipment, or commissioning the crew with the equipment.

Yeah that was interesting, because I think it's quite a moment to commission a ship in your first commission. It's quite something. I always was

09:30 allocated to be the captain's messenger. When we went over by tug from Portsmouth Harbour over to

the Isle of Wight, that's where the ship was built on commission, I first heard the call, "Ordinary Seaman Given, report to the first lieutenant" and I thought, "What the hell have I done now?"

10:00 So he said to me, "Your job is the captain" he said, "You are responsible." He said, "You just look after that. If you go down, you make sure he's second last off the ship." And I'm thinking, "Oh my God. How can I manhandle officers who would do things like this?' But that was my

10:30 initiation into it anyway. Yeah it was quite an exciting time, you know, to commission it, built it up to scratch and get it there. And it was interesting being captain's messenger.

Was it an all Australian crew?

No, we had, oh, I guess the leadership crew who I've got the utmost respect for, forever,

11:00 the skipper he came from the HMAS Vendetta, which had been, and in fact he held the record number of runs from the Tobruk ferry, running between Alexandria, Tobruk and Malta. And he got a DSC [Distinguished Service Cross]. Our first lieutenant, he got DSC off the

11:30 HMAS Nestor, which was sunk about three or four months prior to our commission. And our commanding officer, he got the DSC through saving a cruiser on the HMAS Mermaid's convoy run. And we had a number of petty officers and that who had served on the N-class ships and scrap iron that had come through on the Greece-

12:00 Crete evacuation and in the Mediterranean as a whole so that they were fairly experienced. They fought some, you know, pretty rough campaigns at that time, and so that they were sort of able to lead the way, mould the crew and they were supplemented by other ratings that had come off some of the

12:30 N-class ships or the scrap iron, and supplemented it by Royal Navy people for whom we didn't have enough qualified, or didn't have people to man the ship, so we had to draw from the Royal Navy. So it was a genuine mix, oh obviously Australians in greater number. I mean I couldn't quite tell you the precise mix, but there would probably be at least

13:00 a dozen petty officers and ratings from the Royal Navy mixed in with that Australian thing, and includes that gunner, that chap that I was telling you about. He was a bit reluctant to come, but gradually it worked out. So we had a lot of experience. And our medical officer, he'd been in the Dieppe Raid,

13:30 he rode the command raid to Dieppe in 1942, which the Germans knew they were coming and it was just an absolute slaughter. He was there and one other able seaman, who subsequently committed suicide. He was in that Dieppe Raid as well. So, look we had some pretty experienced and long serving veterans that formed the

14:00 nucleus of this ship. That's where our first lieutenant said, "What the hell have we got here?" you know, "this smattering of, or this group of raw recruits, and now we've got to make them into sailors and man a destroyer" at this time. And it's only recently, he's still alive by the way, and he said, "We taught you things, and you

14:30 taught us too" so I think their terms of teamwork, how quickly they adapted to the situation, and OK, you had your rigid disciplines and so on but gradually it made a big difference to the whole thing. But it is alleged that the good name of a ship is set in it's first commission,

15:00 and our first lieutenant always says that. I think Quickmatch always had a reputation as a very efficient and happy ship, but I still think it was because of the leadership crew that we had. So the commissioning went well, it settled down pretty well, and we were attached to the Royal Navy, obviously.

Tell me about Rodney Rhoades,

15:30 **he was the captain, wasn't he?**

Well, he came from Vendetta. And I think he had the record number of Tobruk ferry runs and also he used to navigate Vendetta, and it's quite strange when you visualise the

16:00 old captain standing up right at his bridge. They were under constant German Stuka dive-bomber attack. He used to navigate by laying flat on his back so, rather than standing up, he could sort of see things, and at one stage he complained on that Tobruk ferry run, I think Cunningham

16:30 he complained about the way they were sending one destroyer only, that they should be accompanied for different things. And Rodney, or affectionately known as 'Dusty' Rhoades, he was complaining to the flag officer about his suggestion about where they should be, how they should change the routine for the escort.

17:00 And Cunningham heard him and he was in the outer office and Rodney didn't know that Cunningham was there, and Cunningham just put his head round the corner and said, "Come in. I'd like to hear more about what you're talking about." He got a pretty good reputation for that. He was the youngest, I think I could stand corrected, but I think at the time he was on the

17:30 Vendetta, I think you had to be a lieutenant-commander to be in charge, in command of the vessel. He was only a lieutenant at that stage and they, their discussion or whatever about a replacement, I think our navy went to put on a lieutenant commander.

18:00 So, Cunningham intervened and said, "I want him." So, he had that reputation and the record for the Tobruk runs. The youngest ever to command a destroyer in wartime. And he was a very, I think his basic tenet with Quickmatch was always to establish a feeling of

18:30 goodwill and loyalty. He never undermined any of the crew, he dealt out things that had to be dealt out in terms of tradition and so on, but he never sort of, he made sure every man's dignity was kept intact. He was pretty good that way, and had a good reputation. And he was a good sailor, a good navigator.

19:00 I think gradually because of that he moulded the ship into sync. Because of my role, at one stage I went into the commission and we'd done one exercise, and he said he wanted to give the first lieutenant a drink. "Yep, OK." Said to first lieutenant, "Well done in the exercise."

19:30 The first lieutenant said, "Thank you, Sir, that's the first kind word you've said to me since we commissioned." and all the skipper said to him, "It's the first bloody time you've deserved it." But it was built up. They're very loyal too, and that's pretty important. A good leader.

So would Dusty Rhoades have been responsible

20:00 **for selecting and commissioning that crew?**

No, I don't know. Hey. I can't answer that, how that was all chose. Maybe was, I think the navy just drafted a selection of people. And that's where they go. I think really, there was a shortage of manpower anyway. We had to draw on the Royal Navy. I think it was a question of you make do with what you've got.

20:30 And you've got to train them to meet your requirements. I think that's what would have happened in wartime. I would think he would have no say in him saying, "Hey I've got this bunch of recruits." "That's all there is mate, this is all we got." And that at that time I think that was right, because the Australians had lost a few destroyers in the Mediterranean in the period leading up the '42. I think that's how we got the

21:00 new equipment in the Quickmatch, to supplement our navy, because the Quickmatch was originally built for the Royal Navy.

How many men on board?

About 220 roughly. See, Quickmatch, yeah that was, I'll just give you a bit of a background to that. That was built from money raised from the people of St Pancras Borough;

21:30 about 150,000 pounds; that's a fair bit of money at that time. It was originally built and was launched as the HMS Quickmatch, but it was then transferred to the Australian navy to be manned by an all-Australian crew, well supplemented or whatever. So that's how

22:00 come that plaque, that we had that plaque, the Borough of St. Pancras adopted Quickmatch, and that plaque was on her for the whole of the commission. That's why we presented it to the War Memorial in Canberra. What else do you want to know?

I want to know how you came to be the messenger boy for the captain.

Oh, who knows how that was picked?

22:30 How do I know? I can't tell you. I think the officer in charge of Portsmouth, I think he's probably charged with that. It's like his cabin messenger. I was his, you know, his batman or whatever you want to call it, his cabin hand.

It's a pretty important job.

Yep.

23:00 I know. I walked a tightrope too. Yeah. It was good. Now I know why I was told that the captain was the only one I have to worry about and when he turned 80 in '89, I felt at that time it

23:30 was a milestone in his life. And bearing in mind the relationships between officers and ratings were back in 1940 so different to work situations anyway. You know, "Mr" and "Mrs" and all this. I wrote him a letter acknowledging that milestone,

24:00 more importantly telling him the lessons that I learnt about responsibility of command and loneliness of command, integrity, instilling loyalty, things like that that formed the cornerstone of my behaviour from that time. He acknowledged

24:30 that on the same day, that he valued that more than any commendation that he got from his senior officer. Just to illustrate it, he said, that's the whole point. That he tried to instil it, aspects of good will

and loyalty in the Quickmatch, which was a happy ship to be remembered. The only thing that, they read that letter out at his funeral

25:00 which I wasn't too impressed about but still, he treasured that, so.

Well you're an example of him succeeding at his goal. I hope over the course of the interview some of that comes out, as to how he was influential and how he shaped you. I guess that happened through incidents and events.

Oh, yes, I

25:30 guess through seeing things that happened. I mean he talked to me about things you couldn't talk on the lower deck about. [UNCLEAR] living on the lower deck, I didn't carry tales back either. So you're walking a tightrope. You get the trust and respect I guess from both crew and the skipper.

Did you feel that he was training you to be trustworthy?

26:00 No, that's implying I wasn't trustworthy!

No, I'm not meaning to imply that, but I'm just wondering understanding the degree of trustworthiness in a position like that.

Oh, I think so. I think it's a complete learning process in itself, that. You see, you've got to understand that till you're really and truly in that position you don't

26:30 realise how lonely, sort of, command is. It is, it's really isolating, and the responsibility that goes with it. He's responsible for 200-odd lives plus the ship. And there were times where he had to make decisions away from orders, that aren't captain's orders, and I think it's only been reinforced recently where

27:00 medical officer, he's still alive too by the way. He was the coding officer and he was able to say there were a couple of situations where he had to sail under his own discretion, but if he hasn't we could have finished up in all sorts of trouble. And that reflects back on his integrity as the captain, and he's acknowledgement of responsibility.

27:30 And I think all that weighs through. I think when you see that you realise what it's all about. There were times where I'd gone ashore, I think one time in Gibraltar, a couple of the younger ones my own age they wanted to go their own way, and we were in the hotel or canteen or wherever it was. They'd say, "You coming Mick?" and I'd say, "Yeah, hang on, I'll be there in a minute." This time I went to get up and I couldn't get

28:00 up off the chair, I couldn't move because somebody's pushing me down, because there was a group standing behind me. So I got a bit stroppy at that age, a big 18 year old and stroppy. I said, "Let go of my chair, I want to get up." So, they said, "OK" and when he moved I went to get up, and next time there's two hands, somebody else had moved there too.

28:30 A couple of this older leadership group I was telling you about. The older blokes said, "You sit still boy. Your responsibility is to the captain. You look after him. Those two are trouble." You know, situations like that it starts to go into the computer, you start to tie it all together, it builds.

29:00 You realise your own responsibility and things like that. They're just little incidents, it's a little combination of things. One time we'd left Norfolk and we had to go down to the West Indies down to Curacao and at that time we had been

29:30 on hard rations, a lot of dehydrated vegetables and rubbish like that. We were moored alongside a Yank [American] supply ship and we had got, through devious means we finished up with fresh salads, and cut, it was the first time I had ever seen sliced bread. That was then, and things like that.

30:00 So that we were enjoying our salad and we're in the tropics, pretty well over the equator, and I had to take the skipper's lunch up to him. It was an English petty officer steward, and our officers used to supplement the rations with contributing a bit when he hit port, he'd go and buy a few things for them.

30:30 This particular day, he knew we'd had salad because he heard the talk around the bridge. I go to give his lunch and he said to me, "I'm looking forward to this salad." and I said, "You're not going to enjoy this." He said, "Why?" and I said, "You're just not going to enjoy it" I said, "You've got hot herrings." and he said, "You're bloody

31:00 joking!" I undo the thing and say, "There's your lunch, it's three hot herrings." He said to me, "You can go back and tell that petty officer steward to stick this right up his arse" and I said, "I can't do that, he's a petty officer." He said, "That's an order." I couldn't move quick enough, I said, "Thank you" and did it. I've the first lieutenant following me down there, and he said,

31:30 "You can't do it." I said, "You heard him, it's an order." and he said, "Don't do it." "I've got to do it" I said, "If I don't do it, I'll be in trouble; if I do do it, I'll be in trouble." But they're just sort of things about humanity, and learning, growing, things like that. Yeah, it's good.

What would be good to know is

32:00 **more about you duties to him, and perhaps let's go back to earlier on when the ship was crewed up. For example were you briefed or were you instructed on what you would be doing before you actually got aboard ship? Was there a preparation stage?**

No, no. It's all done on board. It's all done skipper to thing. So you had two cabins. You had a day cabin, which was

32:30 in the out part of the ship, and you had his sea cabin, which was directly under the bridge. So that when we were going to sea or whatever we were doing, it was my job to ensure that he had what he needed up in his sea cabin, and when he needed his things in the day cabin to make sure all was there and looked after. Whatever, it was just generally to make sure he had

33:00 what he wanted at the time, and then get his meals. Things like that.

Where did you sleep?

I slept with the ratings in the ordinary part of the mess, part of fore mess. They were there.

Were you on call twenty-four hours a day?

Yep. Yep. Whatever he wanted. He'd come to port sometimes,

33:30 it might be, you'd stay there because of what he needed or something like that. Just, that's it.

So you had to know his routine?

Yep, be there for him. Make sure that when we sailed I was on board or what have you. Always check with him before I would go ashore, and things like that.

34:00 Just to give him support. I dare say anybody could, but.

Were you nervous about doing the job?

No, not nervous, but sort of apprehensive to make sure you did the right thing all the time. I tried hard to do that. He regarded me as

34:30 thoroughly dependable, so that's the only way I can answer you. If I weren't thoroughly dependable in every way, I never broke confidence, I never was aware of committing any misdemeanours to his disadvantage. There you go. Times, yeah, no. But, it was just on the job training, I guess,

35:00 between two people. Had to make a way to make sure he was all right.

Was there a ceremony that launched the commission?

I think that was done prior to the actual commissioning day. That was done earlier. She was commissioned as Quickmatch but then the HMAS Quickmatch. But then that was done,

35:30 I'm not sure, sometime prior. I think she was commissioned in June. I had better check my magazine or something.

So everyone just had to get to, it was the Isle of Wight, that's where she was wasn't it?

Yep. Well they were transported by ferry from Portsmouth.

So when did you go out

36:00 **on the first operation? What was the first work?**

First work was convoy up the English Channel. And then prior to going up Scapa Flow, we joined the Royal Navy and sort of did training exercises there, make sure she's fit, do all the exercises needed to make sure the ship's ready to be attached to part of the

36:30 fleet, her convoy duty. That was firing exercises, torpedo exercises, general control, things like that duty, and Scapa Flow and what have you. That was there, and ultimately after that, we were then on the convoy to North Africa, take the reinforcements down to Algiers

37:00 and Oran. That was it.

So that first stage of training, it would be good to know about, I mean you've mentioned torpedo practice and gun practice, but your role as right there beside the captain, what did you have to do as part

37:30 **of all that training?**

Be there. Make sure whatever he wanted was there. Messages to different parts, it might be I sometimes I'd have to go down to the engineer officer or, just general dogsbody. That's the best way to sort of describe it.

Yeah, I can see that. I guess I'm just trying to…

No, no, that's just general dogsbody.

38:00 Then if he wanted to talk, you had to be there, didn't you, if he wanted to talk; he was no different to anybody else, he had to talk sometimes.

So if there was a gun training exercise, would he be involved in that?

Oh, yes. He would be up on the bridge. Oh yes. And he'd be in complete command. The gunnery officer was probably the second lieutenant I think, was usually there.

38:30 And his first lieutenant had the general running of the ship so he had the hardest job on the ship. The captain just says, "This is what I want, do this, number one." Number one had to carry it out.

And where would you be?

I was often on the bridge, close by. Just normal routine, maybe down in the mess,

39:00 or maybe down doing something else, down in the ward room, or whatever.

But you were kind of a liaison between captain and…

Yeah, you could say that, but down on the main, I mean. Liaison, I guess you sort of liaison, but you could go to anybody, or

39:30 just whatever he wants; this, that and the other. But in the main, he was pretty good. Most things were done through his hierarchy, through his first lieutenant, or occasionally his first lieutenant "Yes Sir."

So when did Quickmatch fire its guns for the first time?

Oh, the first time up at Scapa Flow. And then everything was down,

40:00 the cork was down. But that was, she fired, that was gunnery practice.

What did you say, "the cork was down"?

The cork on the ceiling was, and the asbestos used to float down like a fog, you know, everything would shake that was loose, and shake like shaking a vacuum cleaner bag.

40:30 Everything shook.

Was that an exciting moment?

Oh, yeah, of course. Yeah. You realise the power that you've got on board, and you also realise your vulnerability, things like that.

Tape 5

00:32 **Before lunch, you were telling us about Scapa Flow and those first test shots that you had and the asbestos falling from the ceiling. How long were you based up there and what sort of work was going on at Scapa Flow?**

Oh, just running the ship in, getting it fit for ocean-going duty. Give the newly trained gun operators, torpedo men, let them try out what

01:00 they'd learned in theory. Get all the practical skills so you had an efficient fighting unit. That's basically what the idea of it was. Pretty well it gave those trials and running in, testing the ship out, also tested out the ship's company. There's a range of exercises to do just that. If you don't meet specific targets you go out and do them again. So, there you go.

01:30 For example, anti-aircraft fighters, and they'd trail a drogue behind a plane, one of our blokes would say, "Goodie, cut the wire with a bullet" you know, so in come the drogue. But those sorts of things, and it gives them pride in what they're doing, make themselves efficient, and then you can rely on each other, you learn about the interdependence of people. You know there's

02:00 blokes looking after you when you're asleep.

I guess that's really important, because it's just been commissioned, so it's all new crew and you had to get to know each other.

We had to train the Poms too.

Yeah, I read that article. But he had a lot of good things to say.

I know. Did you see the transition? That's all when Catherine asked me before, that's what it's about. We're not all bad, we're not all villains, and we're not all larrikins. When it comes to

02:30 do the job, we can do it. And he said it. He found that out, he's a good guy.

Who was it that wrote that, actually?

'Poop Deck Pappy', what was his name? I'll have to check the magazine after. 'Poop Deck' he was known as, 'Poop Deck Pappy' from Popeye.

How well did you get to know them? You said there were something like 200, 220-odd men.

03:00 **Who were you sort of closest to on board?**

Well, I was in and out, here and there. I'm a people person, I just can't help it. One of the chaps I commissioned with, Wally Butler, he's president of our Quickmatch association and I'm second to him. We go back 60 years to that day of commissioning. We were part of that cricket team I was telling you about.

03:30 A lot of other guys that were in that mix have since departed. So, in our association now we've got about ten or twelve of the original commissioning, which is pretty good. Our first lieutenant is still alive, we're pretty close with him. Our navigator is still alive, he comes every year. Our medical officer comes. So, it says something about who I was friendly with, I guess all of them.

04:00 Some, like everywhere, some usually you befriend, others aren't. There's just that mix. The close ones, Wally and I are pretty close. If I'm in trouble I've only got to ring him and he's here. That's the best way I can sum it up.

What was the ratio of Aussies to Poms on the Quickmatch?

Well in about the 220 I suppose we had about, I can tell you after,

04:30 close to it, but 20 to 30 out of that 220 would be Poms. But they fit in pretty well. Like similar to that article you've read, some of them have been back and seen some of the other people there. They all enjoyed their time on an Australian ship. A couple of them have been out from England since.

05:00 There you go.

Can you tell us about the first convoys or operations that the Quickmatch conducted?

Yep. First convoy was down to North Africa. That was an operation that was taking reinforcements down to the North African campaign down to Algiers and Oran. The interesting thing about that was about a couple of days out of Gibraltar we

05:30 intercepted a blockade runner. It was an Italian vessel called Cortelazzo. She was allegedly going to Japan with a lot of machinery parts. We think a lot of aircraft equipment or a lot of aircraft machinery. And two of us were dispatched and the Quickmatch were dispatched from the convoy

06:00 to go and intercept it, which we duly did, and ultimately sank it. They were considering taking it into Gibraltar as a prize ship, but it didn't happen. There were six of the crew of the Cortelazzo who came up on board our ship, and the other forty-odd went to [HMS] Redoubt, and they were sort of looked on pretty humanely.

06:30 They wanted to stay with us, serve us again, because they were doing mess duties and things like that. Here again I've got to commend our skipper for that, when the Royal Marines came on at Gibraltar to escort the six prisoners off, a couple of them were pretty rough in their handling of them. And the old man dressed them down and said, "When I come back from where we're going, I shall check in on their

07:00 welfare," and that's exactly what he did. So there's a photo of that in the magazine, too, of that blowing up of the torpedo.

Can you tell us a bit more about what you remember about that? The events leading up to the procedure with getting the Italian crew off and the actual sinking of it?

Yep, well it was intercepted initially by bomber and then they naturally radioed the convoy and

07:30 like I'm saying, we were dispatched to it, and initially it didn't want to heave to. Anyway we were the challenging vessel, and like again, you'll understand now converting civvies to service people. When we were probably within a hundred metres of it, some of the guys that were on duty couldn't help themselves and went to the handrails to have a

08:00 good gawk [look]. The skipper went berserk and he said, "We do not want another Sydney." That's what we think happened to Sydney, she got too close to Kormoran at one stage. But anyway from there, she was flying initially, when we challenged her, she tried to keep going, and we had to chase her. Then ultimately she flew a Swedish flag,

08:30 reckoned she was going to Buenos Aires, but down came that and up came a white sheet. A couple of the signalmen didn't know what a white sheet was. There was nothing in the book about it, but someone knew it was surrender and away we went from there. Then ultimately they were told to row across to our vessel and identify themselves, which they did. The purser came across,

09:00 he had a suitcase full of money. I had nothing to do with it, I haven't got enough to buy this place here, but he had a lot of money in the suitcase plus the papers. That's how it all happened. After that Redoubt was directed to sink it. They missed with its first torpedo and had to have another go. But that happens. That's about the upshot of it I think.

09:30 From what you can ascertain some of those Italians were just plucked off farms by some of the German SS [Schutzstaffel]. I think there were nine Germans on board of that forty-odd, but we had six Italians. Then we had the, there's always humour isn't there, we had to fend off a complaint from one of them, he reckoned his cigarette lighter

10:00 had been pinched whilst he was on board us. Somebody's got that as a souvenir I guess, but it was never found. I don't know. That's about the lead up to it.

Where were you stationed during that incident?

On the bridge, with the skipper, because I remember him barking, "We do not want another Sydney, this is action stations." I was up there,

10:30 birds-eye view of it. It's quite interesting. And when they were offloaded in Gibraltar, we went on up to Algiers and Oran. Whilst we're in Algiers, which is a fairly open port, I thought I'd open a port hole down the back out through his day cabin and have a look out, just as I did that the old motor started to go again and the gunner who I was telling

11:00 you about said, "Shut that bloody port hole," and the water was about that far from it. It was quite interesting. I might have been the first bloke court marshalled for sinking it stern first. And then when we came back from Algiers, we were given a task of conveying a dipsomaniac [alcoholic], an RN [Royal Navy] commander

11:30 from there back to the UK. He should never have been let go in the condition that he was, and the only place we could have him quartered was in the skipper's day cabin. He made such a mess; he'd butt out all his cigarettes on the bulkhead and this, that and the other. That was a fair job to sort of clean that up.

12:00 He was walking around with a pistol, just a little hand pistol. They didn't wake up to that because he was complaining that he had to shoot the ones outside that were coming for him. Then they disarmed him with the pistol, they put an armed guard on there. Everybody thought that was it. Next day

12:30 when, the only other thing that was in there was a dirk [dagger], you know, the dirk that the Scotsmen carry, like that. I discovered that and I souvenired it. That was the only incident for me; that was what happened with the Cortelazzo.

So what was it actually like to stand on the bridge and watch this massive ship?

13:00 Well I think at that time it reaches home to you the responsibility that the skipper's got. Whatever he does, he was quite sure he was not going to lose his ship. I think that's the thing that hit me the most at that point, whatever you do now, it sort of hinges, and because a lot of this is going on when they're

13:30 changing flag from a Swedish flag to putting up a white flag to surrender. When you see one come down, you're never sure what's going to go up. I suppose, yeah, it was a good message for me that way, about responsibility and command. It was, you know, you see something that's gaudily painted as distinct from the battleship grey colour that you're under. Yeah, I was conscious of his

14:00 concern. You just made sure you stayed where you were, simple. You have to be ready for whatever might come.

It sounds like you were learning a lot, you know, like the port hole, as you say...

Oh, I know, yeah, exactly. I became more conscious of that loneliness, you know, he's got to make the decision, nobody else. But he's got

14:30 two hundred-odd lives in his hands. It was a big thing. And the worst thing that can happen is you lose your ship.

Who were his confidantes on the ship?

In relation to what? I guess there were naval matters and that his first and second lieutenant. I guess sometimes in the mind, sometimes he would chat personally to me about his family, things like that, and that stayed and that's where it will always stay.

15:00 I think his first lieutenant was as loyal as he could be, I've no doubt they discussed matters that I was not aware either. But he got pretty loyal support from there too. Other than that he could have chatted to the doctor, he could have chatted to the others. Yeah, I think that's about it. It's a fairly lonely job. People tend to treat the skipper

15:30 aloofly. But there are others that probably could have helped him in different ways. I would not necessarily know all of them, or what he discussed, but in essence what I've told you is the truth.

Obviously, you were clearly very, very loyal, but was the relationship always a formal one, in that he would only approach you, or were you ever able to

16:00 **approach him and bring up subjects?**

Yep. I could do that on a man-to-man basis and that's where it stayed. No, no. I could do that. That's quite something. He was very approachable that way, anybody that had problems could approach him that way, or if they wished to discuss something to get an idea, very approachable.

16:30 Very good. Human relations aspect was excellent.

With the strength of that relationship, what bearing did that have on your relationship with the other, with the ratings and the men in the mess and so on? Did they see you as a means of you having a word in his ear?

No, I was never manipulated that way. I think perhaps

17:00 I can illustrate it this way. When we went to Curacao, which was a little bit later, there was some of the ratings, a couple of the leading seamen, got into, cooked up some hooch [homemade alcoholic spirits] and got into a right old mess. They were drunk as skunks and sort of lights out in harbour was supposed to be 10 o'clock. A lot of the to-do was under my hammock.

17:30 I think you know, there's two ways always, but I think whoever was on duty he might have had no alternative by what they saw to go and tell somebody. And I conveyed that to the other officers on the watch

18:00 who in turn must have had to tell the skipper. So when I go down in the morning to him to check that he's awake and everything's OK, he's already dressed, waiting and he's there with the first lieutenant and there's a chair between them. "Come and sit down and talk to us, what happened up in the mess last night?" "Nothing, Sir. I don't know." "But you must have, it was in your mess."

18:30 "No, lights out. I was in my hammock, went to sleep." So, you had to be fairly careful what happened that way. I didn't sort of go one way or the other, you know, you walk that thin line and there's not much to hang on to. They knew that I

19:00 knew, I've got no doubt, but I think also it's a pretty fair test whether I might have been going the other way too, and you can't quite do that. Ultimately the ship's company knew who it was that did it, and then there was that quandary whether they should have done it or whether they shouldn't have done it because a couple of people lost their rating over what happened. But you don't take much notice of things like that until

19:30 like when we were presenting that plaque in Canberra, we still had the skipper, first and second lieutenant there, and the photographer of the War Memorial was trying to organise where we ought to be standing for the photo, and the first lieutenant said, "Uh ah, he stands between Rodney and I" he said, "He was always the meat in the sandwich."

So, in that way it was a test, in testing your loyalty to the ratings, it was also

20:00 **testing your loyalty in general, really wasn't it?**

I think so. It's the way I viewed it. It's the way I played. You've sort of got to draw the line somewhere.

But still as you say, it's a tightrope, an invidious situation at the end.

Of course.

Did anybody even try to make it difficult, even if it was just chiacking [teasing]

20:30 **to push you a little bit?**

No, I think we had enough respect with the power players and the crew, I think, or whether they talk to you in different ways. You would never know if you were tested that way, you just sort of had to concentrate on what you're doing. Anyway, I didn't get chucked over, so that must have meant something.

21:00 Anyway, where were we? We were at that, taking the dipsomaniac on that trip back to the UK, I got washed overboard; one of those freak occurrences. I knew when I was outside the ship, it all happened so quickly. You get

21:30 one of those freak occurrences sometimes at sea when she's going this way and that way. Occasionally she goes twice one way, and I got washed pretty well back the other way. I was battered and bruised but you know. But I think the guy that it affected more is still alive in Yarrawonga. He was coming up of, the last thing I could see was his face, he went deathly white

22:00 and sang out, "Christ, he's gone!" But he came back. Of course, the only comments you get when you come back are, "He's right, he wouldn't drown, the poof floats." So, you know, that in itself is I reckon that was my lucky turn. I've never forgotten it.

Was there anything you could do to help, or was it just a matter of, you couldn't evade it?

Couldn't do a thing, I mean the sea was too rough anyway and by the time they were in a position to move

22:30 it, manoeuvre, I would have been miles away. Nothing you could do about that. It was just one of those freak occurrences, just caught up and you just realise the power of the water; the power and might of it. Just a stroke of good luck, good fortune.

What sort of damage was done to you?

To me? Pride I guess. A few bruises I guess and what have you.

23:00 When we got back to Greenock in Scotland, you went and got drunk and who do you reckon slept on the floor of a public telephone booth with the door closed, can you imagine that? I walked around like 'the Hunchback of Notre Dame' [character from French novel of the same name] for about six weeks. But other than that, just get on with it. It was a scary spurt,

23:30 but you just get on. Get through. When we were on convoy, I think at one stage the Racehorse she lost a bloke overboard in a dead calm sea. You're lucky you're back. Not good enough for the ocean; that tells you something doesn't it.

Was that your first big night on the turps [alcohol]?

Yeah.

24:00 You just get rid of it. Oh yeah, a big night on the turps. Did two of them before. What we did then, we drank depth chargers. Do you know what a depth charge is?

Yes, but I didn't know you could drink them.

Do you good. Well imagine this. A pint of beer, you know the English pints, they're like flower vases,

24:30 have you seen them? You have that and you get a tot of rum as well. You drink enough out of the glass pick up the tot, in she goes, and you skol it [drink it in one go]. By the time you've had five or six of them and you'll know what a depth charge is all about. This is December and now walk out into the cold air in Scotland, and 'whooom'.

25:00 All right, but I've never been like that since. I think, I don't know if it was right or wrong, it was just getting it out of the system. Get on with it. Yeah, I was a bit bruised and that but, apart from the ego, I think the guy that had more impact on it was Ken Nixon who saw it happen. I hadn't seen him for a few years until I was

25:30 at a gathering one night, and I heard this voice, he was talking to the bloke near him, but it was audible to me. He said, "Christ, he shouldn't be here." Like that, so it's still. And a couple of times he's seen me he's broken down. Just big bear hug.

So that split second he thought 'he's gone', but did you have time to contemplate that?

Oh, no, not at all. I knew

26:00 that I had enough common sense to know that they weren't going to get me, simple as that. I'm here and the ship's there, and I thought, "How am I going to get to it?" I had no hope of getting there. It was just the movement of the ship, the movement of the water coincided, so how you going to win Lotto [Australian lottery]?

Where exactly was that, do you know?

Yeah,

26:30 Bay of Biscay. Notorious for rough weather.

How did the Quickmatch cope with the rough seas?

Under the circumstances, fairly well. After we went back from there we had to go across to America, take an aircraft carrier, [HMS] Victorious, across to Norfolk. That trip, you're

27:00 probably looking at an average of four days, something like that. It took us nearly ten days to do the trip. We struck about seven storms in one, or something like that, and we were literally just hanging on for life. She copped a bit of a battering on that, but they're probably some of the

27:30 roughest seas I've seen that way. Some of the structural damage didn't appear until, I think we cracked a plate somewhere up in the forecastle, or fo'c's'le if you want the correct term, which they didn't pick up until we reached South Africa about two months later. Yeah, that was the roughest crossing that she had, but the Atlantic is notorious for it.

28:00 We were lucky, some of the American liberty ships that went out that they built at that time, get one like that and it just turned turtle down they go. Yeah, it was rough, it was pretty rough. It was rough to

survive. Yeah, it took ten days to do a normal four-day trip.

What about the simple things like eating and sleeping during a time like that?

Oh, the deck's awash.

28:30 No, you just have to do what you could. You just have to hang on. You were just on survival, you couldn't cook because of the dangers and things like that in the galleys, you were literally hanging on to whatever you could get a hold of. Sleep where you could, and eating bully beef and ships biscuits and things like that. Oh, yeah, that was a good Christmas. That was Christmas '43. It was interesting.

29:00 '42 coming into '43. It was an interesting experience.

Was there much seasickness? Did you suffer from seasickness?

No. I think a lot of people were seasick on some; I wasn't seasick on that one, even as rough as it was. But I think where some of the seasickness happened shortly after we commissioned, going out the English Channel up through the Irish Sea.

29:30 A lot of, I think the best part of, the ship's company were seasick. We had one chap on board he was seasick every day he was on the ship. So, even on flat calm, poor old Don. He lives in South Australia. Yeah, that was an interesting thing, we had more seasickness than you could poke a stick at, I think on the initial voyage. Going up to

30:00 Scapa Flow. It was pretty rugged there. The cure for that, that old man that I told you about, the one when you meet a good Pom, he just says to me, "Eat, eat, eat when you're trying to overcome seasickness," and people are talking about stew for dinner, you can imagine what happens. So what you do you keep nibbling something like sea biscuits,

30:30 they're a little bit like Uneeda [cracker biscuits], square ones. Just keep eating until she rights itself. And then OK, away you go. It was a question of getting used to it. Some people do, some people don't. But eating's the secret, so you've got something in your stomach.

How many runs did you do down to…

31:00 Just the one down to Algiers and Oran, just did that, and then back to Greenock and then we did the run from there across to America. And then we went from America down to Curacao.

Which is the Caribbean?

Yep.

What were you doing down there? What was the purpose?

Well, we had to go down and get oil tankers,

31:30 which I think there were about five that we had to bring back for the North African campaign. You know, they were feeding all the army units things like that there, and while we were there Lord Haw Haw was broadcasting on the radio saying he knew the destroyers were in. They knew where they were because there was a lot of U-Boat activity around at that time,

32:00 and a couple of times we set sail and then went back again because the Wolf Pack [U-Boats] had started to build up again. There was some pretty good intelligence coming in, but at one stage too, the skipper was ordered to sail under his own discretion as distinct from Admiralty instruction. This is one of the occasions I'm saying the medical officer

32:30 until a couple of years ago, he said he had the capacity, our skipper, to think a little bit like how the U-Boat pack might be thinking. He had apparently two courses of action to take, two courses to go, and he chose the right one, otherwise we could have been bang right in the middle of it. That happened a couple of times. Incidentally there's

33:00 still at that time, we were coming, I better go back to when we were just off Gibraltar, after we got the Cortelazzo. There's still a story that a torpedo went under our stern at that time. The officer of the watch and the main signalman saw that. But, don't know, who knows. It's rumoured it's pretty true.

33:30 **Were there other occasions where you might have been close to U-Boat presence that you know of?**

I guess I knew when it run down in the way to Gibraltar and also the one down in Curacao. Others, I don't know. I think it interesting, I refer to a book called The Battle of the Atlantic, I haven't got it, I've only read it once, but it's

34:00 written by two former Royal Navy officers who access to a lot of intelligence there. I think, and with what they've got after the war, they've been able to trace movements of U-Boats. And when you look at it and you think you're pretty lucky to get through. But, anyhow, that's it.

34:30 **On those escorts or convoys, was there any presence in the air, like the Catalina, Sunderland, that sort of thing?**

Occasionally, we saw the Catalina once, and I can't remember, look I couldn't quite recall but it wasn't that frequent. We didn't see it frequent. I know they could only go out a certain way from England at that time. But, the bomber, I'm not sure, I don't ever recall

35:00 seeing that either when we intercepted that blockade runner, I can't recall whether that was. I can't recall anyone sighting the bombers that picked that up. So I don't know, can't really answer that.

So you were escorting five oil tankers back from the Caribbean back to…

Back to North Africa. Back to North Africa and Gibraltar.

35:30 Some went through into the Mediterranean; we dropped two off at Dakar, Casablanca, and then proceeded down into the South Atlantic.

Were you able to get ashore at any of those places? Casablanca and Algiers and so on?

Not at Algiers, I told you I tried to have a peep through the porthole there. Nearly took on water. Gibraltar, yeah. Curacao we were ashore,

36:00 and that's, you'll love this one. Have you heard of the 'magic carpet'? It's rumoured that, you remember the Andrews Sisters' song Rum and Coca Cola? That song? She's started to think about that. Well, in Curacao, the ladies of the night allegedly were all Venezuelan.

36:30 And most of them were as well, and we understand that they had to earn their own wedding dowry, and because of lack of employment that was the only way to do it. You can imagine Curacao, American dollars, work it out yourself. One of the blokes came ashore, one of the early ones, he came back and he said to the blokes, "Are you going to have a ride on the magic carpet in Curacao?"

37:00 And what was happening, they had no sandy beaches around where they were, and the ladies of the night used to work in conjunction with the taxi drivers, and they used to have the carpet in the boot and take them out on the waterfront somewhere, and out would come the carpet, hence the 'ride on the magic carpet'. But that's quite a joke with the ten or twelve of us that still know. So if you want to make a point sometime, you just say, "What about that ride

37:30 on the magic carpet?" And everybody looks stupid at you, but they know what's going on. It was quite hilarious, you know. Yeah, they're things that stick in your mind, some of those exciting shores. I wonder how they survive today. Anyway, there you go.

When you finally did get ashore, you got some leave, what was some…?

38:00 Oh, it wasn't overnight leave, it was just sort of midnight or something like that. Duty watch would be on board, off duty, OK, they go ashore. There were a lot of them that would want to be in the dives or the bars or the hotels, just had to watch yourself, things like that. Then just take in the sights that you could. Just had to sort of be

38:30 a bit wary about where you were going, things like that, because servicemen like that loaded with money, there were many a bloke murdered in wartime for money, not necessarily by their own people, but knowing which way to get around. Anyway, it was interesting.

Do you recall any dicey moments?

Can I? No, not really.

39:00 I was a bit circumspect, I told you, because the blokes watch your job. You don't compromise, you don't try to. You could go so far, no, no. Terrible.

But a bit of sight seeing was OK?

Oh, yeah. Try the food if you could (UNCLEAR) sometimes.

39:30 Interestingly there, you might recall I was telling you about the colonial attitude in London. When we were at Norfolk, how naïve can you be when you're 18? We walked in Norfolk: deep South, slave trade, racism. We walked into this café without knowing at the time. All we wanted was a good feed.

40:00 So we ordered Chicken Maryland. Nice charming waitress, she said, "Excuse me, Sir, I have to get the manager." So out comes the manager and he's a big African-American Negro and he said, "Yeah boys, can I help you?" and we said, "Well we just want a feed, Chicken Maryland." He said, "Do you realise you're in an all Negro café?" We said,

40:30 "Well, so what?" You know, just like that. "Oh, not here. If I serve you, I'm in trouble, you're in trouble." We said, "All we want's a feed." So there was one of those, like the shop up the way, plate glass window and one doorway, and he turned his sign around from 'Open' to 'Closed', pulled the blind down, and they served us magnificently.

41:00 Very good. Then we had to get out, so we come out and he keeps nit when we get out, and the bus stop was just outside there, so we were going up the Norfolk proper, and you get on the bus and what's the

first thing that hits you? “Blacks – rear seats only” and you sit and think, ‘Christ, what’s this war all about?’

41:30 That’s always stayed, like the colonial attitude in London and that incident there, the different cultures, and it goes ‘bang’. I’ve never forgotten that. Then you start to think of the futility of the war, you know. I still can’t get over that, “Blacks – rear seats only.” But they’re just things, you know. We had a good feed anyway.

Tape 6

00:31 In the commissioning crew, a chap named McLeod, he was drafted from Quickmatch to [HMAS] Australia so by the time we came around to Sydney, they took off our after torpedo tube and put a new gun turret on it and went straight up to Espiritu Santo to Australia to transfer across, and McLeod was one of the blokes who got killed

01:00 when the gun turret got hit. From there I come back, from there.

Ok, that’s a good summary of what we’ll discuss in the next couple of tapes. When you weren’t, I guess you were working most of the time, when there was down time on the ship, what would the fellas get up to if the seas weren’t too rough?

01:30 Well, you got to write home, you could play cards, or read, listen to music, talk, get to know each other, write letters. For those that wanted to read and study you could try to do it. It would have been pretty hard to do much, but that’s in essence what it was, because at sea sometimes it can be boring as a bellyache. But, yeah, you’ve got to learn to mix with the group.

02:00 You’ve got some on, some off. You’ve got your duties as a mess cook, looking after the mess, getting your meals in for your team; somebody else’s turn to clean up afterwards, something like that. Yeah, I guess that about sums it up.

What were the card games of choice back then?

Some played 500, some would play pontoon, poker,

02:30 fraz, couple of games like that. One thing the skipper, the original skipper, would never allow on board was Crown and Anchor. He barred that in the interest of the ship’s company. Probably should of told you, at the time he addressed the ships company he said he wouldn’t tolerate Crown and Anchor or homosexuality. He just told them straight, you know.

03:00 That was probably more rife in the Royal Navy than what it was in our navy. I guess most card games were there. Sometimes they’d have a decent pot, or something like that. It was how you felt, I guess whatever mood you were in, how far you were behind with your correspondence, or washing, and I think personal cleanliness and hygiene was pretty important on board a ship.

03:30 I think you can understand that. And woe betide anybody that didn’t keep themselves pretty clean and their clothing. They had the trap and the scrubbing brush in the, you know, by the few other guys scrubbing them with a scrubbing brush and soap. We had one of the English blokes that didn’t want to go to the trap and so after that he was the cleanest bloke on board.

04:00 That’s only in essence how you could occupy your time.

What about in terms of keeping fit, in terms of physical activity, what could you get up to?

Well, you were pretty restricted on a destroyer. If you wanted to go for a run you couldn’t just jump over the side. Occasionally they arranged sports games. I think they played a couple of games of cricket, just after I went off anyway. The

04:30 whole time I was on we didn’t have access to any sport like that. When we were on, and probably the Aden convoy, the Indian convoy, they had more time and it was a, but we had an easier mission. They played a handful of games that way. The first lieutenant was a rugby expert, he arranged for rugby games. You’ve heard of ‘white-line fever’, that’s

05:00 once you’ve crossed the white line there’s no rank, you realise that. As he often said, it sometimes gave him the opportunity to settle scores, same as others wanted to settle a score with him. Yeah, all that sort of thing. Pretty good. I think a lot depends on yourself and adapting to it, and talking. Yeah, interestingly, a couple of blokes have suicided

05:30 after the war. So you wonder why, you know. Good guys, it’s hard to put it all together. You think that they’re pretty stable people, some of them.

How tense would it be on some of those crossings where you know there’s the threat of U-Boat activity or threat from the sky? Are you always on your toes? What’s it like?

Yeah, You’ve got to be on the alert all the time.

06:00 I think one of the instances of that, I'll go back a bit, in one of the Atlantic trips, one of our guys went to sleep on watch, and it's pretty easy to do under those conditions, just drop off and it's cold and the water's in your face. Unfortunately the skipper was the bloke that discovered him

06:30 asleep on watch. Now, under Royal Naval conditions, this is interesting, this is in early part of the commission, the punishment for that was death under Royal Navy regulations. I doubt that would have happened but it's there. So anyway, he said to Pat, "You can either take my punishment or I'll have to refer

07:00 the matter to Captain D [Destroyers], that was the captain in charge of the whole destroyer flotilla. You've got twenty-four hours to make up your mind." And you realise what was going on then, Pat was talking to you or Catherine or me, then he's from one mess into the other mess and all it's doing is tying everybody together until you got the general consensus in the ship, "Take the old man's punishment," which I thought was pretty clever.

07:30 That was another pretty fair way, he was a pretty fair-minded bloke, and didn't sort of shift his dignity and gave him every opportunity to think it through clearly. I reckon that was an incident that tied the crew.

So what was the punishment ultimately for Pat?

Stoppage of Leave, which he controlled. He

08:00 gained respect out of that. It's untold, it's hard to know how many knew about that anyway. To me it was just well handled, united the crew.

Was there any need for stricter action to be taken?

On that case?

Or any other instances?

No. I think he was very fair. I mean there were certain things

08:30 that, a lot of misdemeanours like that. There's a code of discipline that used to be listed for certain things, this is that and this is for the other thing. But no, I think ours was very good. I mean to the extent, I think our first lieutenant was apt to be a little more lenient than the skipper. At one stage, we were due in port to paint ship and the skipper, ah, the

09:00 first lieutenant who was responsible for organising all the maintenance party, he said to the crew that if they finished painting by a certain time they could have leave from lunch time. Well you've never seen such a busy hive of bees, have you? The skipper queried that, whether, "Do you think that's right?" and he said, "Yeah, I've given them my word." and the skipper backed him up that way. So, you know,

09:30 it was six of one, a half dozen of the other. It's the way they melded the authority and how it welds itself to the crew; the respect between them. It's, "I give you my word, if you do this" and away you go. No arguing.

I was looking through the book on the ship, there's a chapter devoted to, about six pages, to beards. What was the story there?

Oh, yeah, well,

10:00 the beards. George Brock, who was the guy that initiated that magazine, and he was the longest serving crew member on thing. He had a beautiful black beard, like you see presented, like old Blue Beard the pirate, things like that. And the skipper, when we commissioned, he had his beard anyway, and there was just a bit of banter one day,

10:30 "I'll have a better beard than what you have." and of course that's what it sort started to go through the thing. But you had to get permission not to shave because some people are all scraggly like my lawn out there. It just grows in patches. So they just had a beard growing, to see who could grow the best beard. George was black, lieutenant was black and Dusty's was more a sandy colour.

11:00 I think Brocky had the best beard on the ship. He kept it immaculate, you know. It was quite a, but they're the little things that lift the morale.

You mentioned how Crown and Anchor was banned, what about two-up?

Well you didn't have the same facility on board, I mean, you've only got low deck heads, you don't get your pennies too high, do you?

11:30 No. I think that all sorts of gambling went on at odd times.

What sort of things would they have bets on?

Oh, well what do Australians bet on? I think you name it, just there. No, I think it was just a wide range of what the average Australian bets on. If there's a chance to bet, "OK, I'll do it." They used to

12:00 run a lottery at one stage on where the ship was going on the next voyage, until they woke up that someone was in a position to know, I think one of the communications petty officers had a link to another petty officer and they won a couple of pools on the trot, and it started to smell a bit fishy, because obviously the guy getting the signal in, he'd know, wouldn't he.

12:30 Like that time we were going to Curacao; there was only one person that knew about it. It smelt a bit. Anyway, they stopped that, no more. He fleeced the blokes once, no more.

Ok, so you got us back to that trip to North Africa, what was next? Was that when you were posted to Mombasa or were there more in between?

13:00 No, no, after we came back from Curacao and then we went to Mombasa from, we went to Durban and Cape Town, and then I went off to Mombasa then.

So what can you tell us about those, were they again convoys, escorts to South Africa?

Yeah. It was just plain convoy duty, that's during my period, at that time. It was pretty plain sailing at that time.

13:30 Except when we went to Madagascar and all the bumboats come out and, the ladies were flashing their…trying to get the blokes to buy stuff off the ships and things like that. Fruit, vegetables, it was a bit of a trade. That was just a minor thing. We were there and gone before you even knew where you were. Somebody bought a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken], but they had to chuck it back overboard.

14:00 That's what sailors do.

I guess it just livens up proceedings after.

Oh, of course it does.

Did you see much of South Africa? Did you get ashore in Durban?

Yeah. Durban, that's again where you saw the racism there. It was similar, and it was probably apartheid at that time. But the rickshaw people there

14:30 they were the Negroes, which we used to tend to look after and tend to pay them a little bit more than the Poms did, and they'd look after you. You say, "Go that way" and they'd say, "No mate, that's too dangerous," so it payed dividends. They knew because you get people in a rickshaw and some of them are in cahoots with the local rough element. It's pretty easy to let their arms go, and they'd just swoop on them.

15:00 It was, I saw a bit of Durban, which was interesting.

In your travels did you have much to do with the Americans? Did you come across American crews?

When we went to Norfolk, there was an interesting episode when we were going up the Elizabeth River, the Victorious, and we were the last ship in

15:30 because we were junior officer. We were the junior of the captains and that's how they used to do it in the Royal Navy. Whilst we're going up the river, all the Yanks go past saying, "Go home, Limey [British sailor]. We don't want Limeys over here." And we, oh Christ, how do you equate all this to war? Anyway, after a while, old man got a bit

16:00 sick of this. He said to the communications people, our theme song at that time was Peter Dawson singing Is he an Aussie, is he Lizzie?" I don't know if you know that song at all? It never made the hit parade. Anyway he just played that out at full volume, you know like they do, like we're talking about high point now, almost as loud as that, and you could here it all over

16:30 bloody Norfolk. It was driving us mad in the finish, but the message was getting clear, "Hey, these are Aussies." Well, our initial berthing place was to be way at the remotest part of the port, and we finished up with probably the best port, alongside the American supply ship. But even then, George walked ashore,

17:00 walked down our gangway and one of the Yanks off the supply ship said, "What's the time?" and when George went to look at his watch, he king hit him. Nearly went blind, oh God, it was the worst shiner I've seen. But other than that I don't think there was a lot of, no we didn't have any problems other than that incident. But I think when they found out we were Australians that was right. The

17:30 skipper had a good night that night. His friend had come down, a naval attaché had come down from Washington, and they had been good buddies from way back. He was a DSC and bar, the other guy, and they had a good night on the plonk, and I'd wondered what hit me when I walked down there, and the skipper's half awake

18:00 and his visitor's out like a light. I sort of had to rouse him and cook up a concoction to get him sober

back to Washington. But that's telling tales out of school. Other than that.

So they had a problem with the Poms, not so much the Australians?

I think so, from my observation. It was more that way than it was with the Australians. That's my interpretation, what I've seen of it.

18:30 **Like you say, it's crazy, there's a war going on, you're all on the same side.**

Oh, like I'm saying. You come from an innocent country background, greenhorn, don't know a thing. "Colonials there?" "Yeah, what's this war about?" You see it down there. You see it in South Africa, see how the Poms treat some of the Indians, the Sri Lankans, and then you've got black and white in America. Pretty hard to line up, huh?

19:00 And every year since, there's been turmoil in the world. What are the wars all about? Futile.

But at the time was there a sense of achievement, that you were doing something that was…

Oh, yeah, you were convinced that you were doing it right, but there's these little things, "What's this, I thought we were all fighting for democracy?" which is what you're led to believe, that you're going to have a nice

19:30 democratic world after this. "Huh, what's this? What's the colour of his skin got to do with it?" But you sort of, it's similar to what we were talking about earlier. It's about people, the effect on people. But they're things that stick in your mind, well they did at that time. I just couldn't sort of reconcile in my outlook,

20:00 trying to get rid of all this tyranny that's going on, and then we're worried about who's from what side of the colour. I still can't give you a right answer for it, other than how we thought, or how I thought about it.

So the South African convoy, how long did that last?

20:30 Well, no, I just went from March, well from January round South Africa, March. Between January and March.

So what happened after that? Is that when you went to Mombasa?

Then I was in Mombasa.

How did that come about?

Because I was seconded to the accountant there, the accountant office. They were behind with everything and skipper

21:00 knew the pay bob [paymaster] they were cadets together, so there you go. I finished in hospital anyway with dysentery, so that was part and parcel. And that's when I went off at that time.

How did you feel about having to leave the ship behind, and being based on…?

I cried on the night I left the ship because it was like a home,

21:30 and it was just that togetherness that was there. Just to get on with it, just to do what you've to. Just to get on with it. Deep breath, get on with it. Simple. You know, blokes have got slaughtered, maimed and everything in Greece, Crete, Tobruk. You're aware of all this so, "Come on buddy, what's all this, just get on with it, That's your luck, wear it."

22:00 **What did they have you doing? Can you explain the sort of work you were required to do there?**

Yeah, what did I have to do? I had to write up two years of records that they hadn't done, which was as boring as can possibly be, but it had to be done, so I had to write up a third copy of things that had been neglected. They were that far behind, and they

22:30 just had to get done.

For example what records?

Accounting, pay sheets from way back. Copying from other ledgers and things like that. Pretty boring.

So this was through the skipper who…?

He didn't engineer it. I'm saying all I know, well this there, so there you go.

23:00 **How long before was it, you said you came down with some dysentery?**

Oh, it was within two days.

Was that just a result of the hygiene situation there?

I think so. I suspect so. It was pretty primitive. The only dangers there were the green and black mamba snakes,

23:30 which are pretty deadly. I think the green mamba – the first time I saw that was where we were working you had to walk under a trellis that had rose bushes. And we were walking under there and this native's coming at us, got a great garden rake, rushing at us saying, "No, Masters!" and we're thinking "Oh, Christ, what have we got here? We've got a demented nut we have to contend with." But

24:00 he'd spotted a mamba that was in the rose bush, that he said if we had of gone under, it just would of gone 'zonk' and got one of you. So he just pulled it out that way. The next day back in the dormitory where it was, which was pretty primitive, very primitive. You only had a canvas stretcher there and your windows were just like a hole in the wall with a covering, and if

24:30 it rained you just pulled it down. And one of the boys looked under the bed and there's a black mamba, and I still swear to this day he went from the bed, out through the window backwards. I still don't know how he worked it out but it must have been sheer terror. That was the only danger round there plus the poor hygiene. Things like that you had to pretty careful.

How long were you out

25:00 **of action for?**

About ten days. I'm told I was lucky to survive from the doctor. But anyway, I told you I don't need good luck.

Sounds like it. Do you remember the hospital itself? Was it English?

Yep, it was RN. I remember struggling to it, and I got there outside their normal time, which was nine o'clock,

25:30 the surgery hours are. And they had this there, and it must have been, and I can stand corrected, but it was five or ten past nine when I got there. I just knocked anyway to get this RN sick booth attendant screaming in my ear, "There's no way you're going to get treatment outside hours" and the last thing I remember the doctor saying is, "Can't you see he's sick?"

26:00 And I just went out to it. I was out for it, I was unconscious for about thirty-six to forty-eight hours. I came to at three o'clock in the morning with that guy that was screaming in my ear, which turned out ultimately he had something wrong in his stomach. And I'm sort of lying there

26:30 and hearing this, "Shut up, shut up! Because the bloke in the next bed's dying," and I was conscious to know that there was one other bed in there and, "Beg your pardon?" Anyway, he looked over and he said, "Oh, you're back with us?" That's a bit scary. I told you though, it flows out back out the ocean. Lucky.

27:00 **They weren't ready for you upstairs, it seems?**

No room.

Out of the hospital and back into, how long were you in Mombasa then?

I'd say from about the March to September, about six months.

What was Mombasa itself like?

Pretty primitive, what I can recall of it. Just very primitive. Not much

27:30 activity outside the normal canteen or picture theatre. You had to be pretty careful where you were. I guess most of your time is in the barracks or in the services canteen. But other than that, you had to be pretty careful. Pretty primitive. That's about the best way I can sum it up.

28:00 **Would you have had guards with you if you went out?**

No, no. You could get leave to go where you wanted to go, but all I'm saying is you had to be pretty careful. Just don't go walking around villages and this without knowing where you are. You just tried to cultivate those natives that you do know and try and learn a little bit, as much as you can. But in essence

28:30 I think we spent more time in the barrack area than out of it.

How often were ships coming in to dock in Mombasa?

Oh, whenever convoy duty is, you can't be precise, say every this or every that. You just sort of have to be there to liaise with them. Every time it was the Quickmatch you knew who was on board, didn't you.

29:00 **How many times did the Quickmatch dock there?**

Twice I think. There you go.

Did you catch up with the skipper?

Oh, I'd catch up with the skipper and the fellas and whoever was is the mess where I was. The guys that I still know now, others that, since a lot of them have died,

29:30 if we end up ten or twelve, the place varies, just catch up with crew members.

Are you saying that ten or twelve are still alive? Is that including the English, the Pommy contingent, or is it the Aussies?

It's the Aussie one, like here. No, I wouldn't know about them. I think there's one, Choc Livingston. I think

30:00 he's about maybe one or two that we're aware of, but they're about the only two that keep contact with some of them. I can't answer for them.

Because you're the only person we've spoken to that was in Mombasa for any length of time, you might well be the only person we speak to. Is it possible for you to explain to us in a little more detail what the set-up there with the office?

I can't. With the office?

Well, where you were doing your work.

30:30 It would be very vague, Colin. I mean as far as I was concerned it was just a room. Just there, just put it at the back of your head. All I know we used to walk down, it was just an isolated building, that was all, where the Australians were. We were away from all the rest of them. It was just a building that was probably rented for our purposes.

31:00 There was nothing salubrious about it, just a bare room, everybody in together.

How many Australians would have been there?

About four, five, or six at the most. Five or six, no more.

What would have been the other roles that they were fulfilling there?

Well

31:30 they were just responsible for all the administrative things for all the Australian ships that were attached to the fleet. That was N-class destroyers, Quickmatch, and any corvettes that were in the area at the time too. Napier was the designated base name for that because it was a senior officer

32:00 of the Australian ships was on the Napier.

So were the ships being restocked, resupplied in Mombasa as well?

Yeah, whatever supplies were there. There were stores or whatever, but I'm not sure of the extent of that either, because your stores was different, still under the paymaster there, but there was probably only one stores officer there anyway. But he was

32:30 responsible for all the loading of supplies and things.

Would they have employed local people to the work?

Oh, yes, I assume it would have been through the Royal Navy and local contractors and things like that. But I can't verify that.

Sure. You said that they were two years behind in the bookwork there, did you have any idea why they had been so slack?

It was they didn't want to do it probably.

33:00 How else? My first thought was, "How could you let this get this far behind?" that was my reaction. But how do you tell anyone at eighteen years of age and you're a lowly able seaman.

Did you meet the person whose place you were taking?

No, because I wasn't taking anybody else's place, because I suspect because the others that were there thought it

33:30 was below their dignity to do that. You understand; does that make sense to you?

Yeah, you're explaining it pretty well.

Yeah well, anyway, I had to it. Just get with it. So there you go.

It was about six months or so in Mombasa, and then you moved again?

34:00 We went to Colombo. That unit was then transferred to Colombo because that eastern fleet was then based at Trincomalee, and Colombo was the base for, they had two bases at the Royal Navy, one at Lanka, which was essentially Colombo, and the other one around at Trincomalee. And we were situated at Colombo servicing the Australian ships, but still housed

34:30 under the Royal Navy. Still with the Poms, always be with them. The Quickmatch was with the Royal Navy right from Islington to the end of the war.

The Quickmatch was the Q-class destroyer?

One of two at that time. There were other Qs but they were still with the Royal Navy, and subsequently some of them were transferred

35:00 to the navy after the war. But in wartime it was there.

What ship did you go to Ceylon on, do you recall?

I can't remember the name of it, a passenger thing.

And that would have been under escort as well would it?

Yep.

35:30 Just a mundane trip. Boring.

Tell us about Colombo, what were your first impressions of that place, and again where you were based?

Colombo's interesting isn't it? Yeah, well we were based in the naval depot, which was the Royal Naval Depot. Once again the Australians were

36:00 thrown in, what Australians that were there. They served for drafting pools that were coming from Australia to change crews on any of the Australian ships wherever they were drafted to, because the central drafting was done in Australia. It was all done by signal and things like that. There was like a housing place for drafters coming in or people

36:30 coming from ships drafted back to Australia or to other vessels. We were again thrown in with the accommodation with all these navy people. Just in ordinary barracks

This was the same team that you had in Mombasa was it?

Yeah, but then they were changed and supplemented by ones, and

37:00 they were probably increased to about ten or twelve, I would think. So, and that's at that time I was reclassified as a 'writer' [clerical trade in the navy] by that time, a very distinctive writer.

I saw that in the notes, what does that mean? You sit around writing poetry all day?

Bloody no. John E Clerk [clerk]. That's it,

37:30 you're doing clerical work in essence. Looking after the scale of pay and all their records and things like that. But I used to suit more as liaising with the ships, as best you could. I think probably had the best of both worlds, because I can understand the guys' needs and that's what you tried to dispense.

38:00 If they want to know anything, they'd ring you up; contact you by letter even.

So what sort of problems would you…?

Oh, no just to do with their service history or things like that. Personal problems were always handled by their commanding officer. I didn't get into that at that point.

What was the situation if sailors were short and they wanted

38:30 **to collect pay, would they come to the depot?**

Sailors didn't get paid at sea, they usually get paid, and the pay they'd have people come ashore and pick up the money and take it back to them. It would probably be the officer of the watch or if they had a paymaster on board in which it would have to be a cruiser. In the main, it would be one of the officers on watch or something. Come with an escort,

39:00 armed escort. Occasionally they'd get to the pub and get full. I know one occasion where the escort, the pay bob and the escort got full, and they were missing for the best part of the day and no one knew where they were. They were just enjoying themselves. I knew where too. But that's human nature isn't it?

So they're the sorts of people you're liaising with in general?

39:30 Yep.

Who else might you have to be in touch with from the ships and so on?

No, no. Just whoever was there, or people that you knew, or knew somebody. Say Jack Smith said to me, “You’d know how to handle this or go through it, got any advice?” You’d do it if you could without treading on toes.

40:00 I was there to help them. They need help when they’re out there.

So you got to know Colombo itself pretty well?

Oh, yeah I suppose so. I knew the township and the snake charmers, and I finished up there with dengue fever too. But that doesn’t worry me too much. Yeah, the local trades,

40:30 picture theatre, played a bit of cricket there when opportunity arose. That was it.

If you were playing cricket, would you normally be playing, trying to arrange it so it was Aussies v Poms?

Well when I was there I had no alternative than to play with the Poms. There was no Australia versus England that way. If you could get into an activity, get into it.

41:00 That was all, you had to keep trying to do something. Occasionally you play tennis, if there was a local tournament you could get into. Had to find something to do, because it was boring.

As boring or mundane as it may have been, it’s good for us to get a picture of how you fit into, so can you give us an idea of the routine, what a typical day was like for you there.

A typical day you just get driven from your accommodation place by bus into where the office was in Colombo. I don’t know the street now either, but that was just a bare building as well. We got chastised there for fraternising with the natives. Naughty boy, because one bus driver…

Tape 7

00:31 Martin Likoni Perriera that’s his name, he was a bus driver, he used to drive us from the depot to our work place, and we sort of used to give him 7 O’clock razor blades [brand name], which we got from the comforts fund parcels. It used to be 7 O’clock razor blades and Blue Captain cigarettes

01:00 you wouldn’t give a brown dog. But anyway the razor blades, the locals would give their right arm to get those razor blades so they could have a nice close shave. We got sprung doing that. Naughty boys for fraternising with the locals. And there was no payola [corrupt payment], it was just a sense of sharing a little bit, with what we had. We couldn’t use them all, why not somebody else, but you don’t know them.

What were

01:30 **the rules about not fraternising? What did that mean?**

Well you weren’t supposed to fraternise with the locals, that’s the general principle. You interpret fraternising by talking, to you; that’s simple fraternising, don’t do it. Whereas to me they’re sort of people that are part and parcel of your job, I mean you can’t operate there without their input. It’s the way you see it. How can I put it?

02:00 Fraternise without fraternising, that’s the only way I can tell you. But there was no, other than just a sense of together, we’re in this together. And probably the other interesting thing was learning how to pull a rickshaw, that in itself was quite interesting. Our regular rickshaw drivers taught us how to pull

02:30 them. And on Friday evenings when we go around to the canteen, around the back of the lake where we couldn’t be seen, and we would race so they could delight in standing outside and saying “Run faster, you white bastards!” We got sprung doing that didn’t we, another slap on the wrist for fraternising with the locals. But it was quite interesting anyway.

What do you mean by a slap on the wrist? What would that be?

03:00 Just a severe reprimand. It doesn’t show up in your record, but you get dressed down, “You mustn’t do this.” Invariably it wasn’t an Australian officer that was doing it, it was the Royal Navy people that controlled discipline and regulations for the area.

So you’d been seen by somebody and taken up before them?

Sometimes, with the rickshaws it was done

03:30 on the side of the road. The duty officer driving past stopped and sang out, “Those ratings,” that’s what happened. “If you’re seen again, you’ll get severe punishment,” so you change your route don’t you.

What would happen if you continued to defy?

Oh, I don't know. We never sort of, it never happened, we didn't try to find out.

04:00 We just tried to live a bit. Give a little bit, a little bit in return. Simple, it's about the only way I can describe that.

How did they treat the locals?

Same way as some of the Londoners treated the colonial Australians much the same way, though to me, not unlike, what did they call themselves today.

04:30 That's not my bag, sorry. But that's the way they come across, that they were a lower form of life. That's to me. Whenever I saw it, I'm not saying they all did it, but it was just that colonial air. It was in existence.

05:00 **Did that non-fraternisation apply when you went to out of hours or when you had leave?**

Yeah. They'd never stop that.

It seems like an absurd thing to try and control.

Exactly, however.

What sort of places did you go to when you were on leave,

05:30 **or you had some time off from the job?**

Well, we went to a tea plantation once that was at a place called Eheliyagoda, which is in the highlands in Sri Lanka. Probably maybe do that about twice in a twelve-month period I suppose,

06:00 other than that it was just within Colombo itself, swimming in a pool or down at their local beach. But that's about it. The canteen.

What other military was there?

There was some army there too, marines. Air force I can't argue about that. I think about the only other thing I wasn't aware of was

06:30 the potential air attack there one night. The chap in the bed next to me, we were then supposed to go to the air raid shelter, there was no protection, it was just they were bamboo huts. This chap he'd been in the N-class in the Mediterranean that we were talking about earlier and he was being repatriated back to Australia via Colombo. As soon as the air raid went, he was a

07:00 man about six foot. His name was John Twaddle and came from Fremantle. He was just a shivering mess, just couldn't not move off the bunk. He was just shaking uncontrollably. It was obvious you couldn't move him so, "OK I'll stay with him." And I did stay with him till it was clear. There was no

07:30 attack anyway, but apparently there was a plane there, the alert went, but as soon as the alert went off it just triggered him. That was a bit sad to see though, that a big guy like that. I was conscious of my own earlier baptism to that sort of thing, so you have to have an understanding for it. Some people are different. But, yeah,

08:00 I don't know whether he's still alive, but he was a mess, I know that. And that's no doubt from the dive-bombing in the Mediterranean that he was subjected to. But other than that, not much other interest from there.

Did any of the boys on the Quickmatch break down in that way?

Not that I'm aware of.

08:30 I think there was a pretty good bond all the time, but I never ever saw any of that. There was plenty of support for each other on board that ship. I think that's, in my opinion, if people have got support like that they don't shatter quite so much. You can usually reason with someone, I think that's just my opinion.

09:00 But I didn't see any of our people.

What about homesickness?

Oh, yeah, I think everybody occasionally has pangs of that. Yeah, I think we've all had a pang of that. But, you just, what do you do? Sit down and write a letter, or go and get occupied, do something else. Maybe talk to someone else, I mean his problem is bigger than what a touch

09:30 of homesickness is. Try a bit of empathy for somebody else, instead of bogging down on how you are yourself all the time because you're all in it together.

Did you have a chaplain on board?

No. Not big enough for that. Probably only on the bigger ships, the cruisers and above,

10:00 but certainly not on a destroyer. No. I think you had to be your own chaplain.

But what about that, the religious men that wanted to attend a service or be able to go to mass?

Well, maybe, in depots they used to do that.

10:30 And, see there's another thing, perhaps I'm going to jump back a little bit. You're talking about the religious bit, that was something I could never understand, right back at the time when I was at Cerberus, when the Sunday divisions was on, as they used to call it then, before they had that. They'd say, "Roman Catholics fall out" and I could never, OK , that's probably something that's between the religions, but to me

11:00 I'm looking and saying, "Hey, what we now term discrimination, why should you fall out and stand there as a group to be seen as something different from everybody else?" But you understand their religious beliefs are that way. No, I think at sea you just have to cope your own way. It may be that if you want to go to church at shore you could do that. I think some people had done that.

11:30 I think in a base it's a little bit different, where they probably run divisions that way. But at sea, no I think you just got to provide your own counselling and your own way of handling your religious belief.

Did you keep a journal?

No because we were supposed not to. I suppose then that I was such a good boy that you don't do those

12:00 things. No, I didn't do it. In many ways I wish I had now, but still. Yeah, it would have been interesting.

And anyone else?

Oh yes. I think yeah, there were a couple that I know. It wasn't easy probably to do it, but still. No, I

12:30 didn't do it.

Were there any artists on board? Anyone who liked to sketch?

No, we didn't have artists on board. We had, I'm aware of artists that came around from time to time, that did that sort of activity, but no we didn't have one straight out.

So they came on board?

Yeah. It's pretty vague what I'm thinking about now.

13:00 Look, it was too vague, truly. But it wasn't a frequent occurrence anyway. But I'm aware of that there were more artists at the time.

What about photographers?

Well some people had cameras. A lot of us didn't. Our ship's medical officer he had the

13:30 first movie camera. He took aboard one at one stage, which was quite interesting, and he still runs it occasionally now. You know, like running like riding a bike, that sort of antique one. But, anyway. No that's about it. We had no official photographers that I can recall.

What did he film on board?

Oh, just general activity.

14:00 People walking around the deck, on watch or manning their stations, whatever it might have been, yeah.

Did you have entertainment on the ship?

No, it was made. I think the magazine shows they ran a concert at one stage, on board there. Although I wasn't on board when they ran that concert. I wished I had of been, but still.

14:30 I mean, I think a lot of the guys at one stage were musically inclined, they'd be poncing around dancing and always singing from time to time, so there was always people that were that way inclined. Medical officer had a hankering to play the violin – that was like, terrible to listen to but it was his outlet too, and I can understand that. He used to get a fair bit of rubbish for that, but

15:00 it was still his outlet, you know. He was like a cat, standing on a cat's tail. But, anyway, that's it.

What about music?

Oh, yeah, there was recorded music on board. The Andrews Sisters I told you about that, Anne Shelton, Vera Lynn. Of course, when we used to get the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] on the ship's radio, it was broadcast through the mess,

15:30 so that you had, you could still get music background. Occasionally you could have access to it and play

records that we had on board as well. Yeah.

Was that very controlled, the times when you could use it?

Oh, yes. Sure, I mean when you're at sea or in duty or whatever, no

16:00 you couldn't be playing the music whilst you're at sea like that. Because you've got be on radio contact, make the least noise you can and things like that. No that was essentially when you're at port. I'm just trying to think of other things, more details here and there

No, that's fine.

to help fill in that picture.

16:30 **Moving forward to Colombo again, how long were you there for?**

About twelve months.

That's quite a long period of time.

Yeah, I know.

So that was '43, November '43?

From September '43 till about probably October the next year, when I come home on the Quickmatch.

17:00 **What was going on in the region over that twelve months?**

Primarily our ships were involved in convoy duty between there, Aden, Trincomalee. The Quickmatch was involved in the bombardment of Sebang Harbour, and also Surabaya, and that was to about the middle of 1944. About July, she was at Sebang.

17:30 I think the then commanding officer got the DSC and there were a number of other awards as well.

So you were able to keep track of what the Quickmatch was doing?

Yeah.

How?

Well through when I see them in port or what I heard around Colombo.

18:00 As soon as I knew they were in port I knew I was going off.

So they would come into port?

Oh, occasionally, yeah, in odd times when they were in Colombo, bang, straight out there. Yep.

That must have been a great reunion.

Always.

Did you catch up with your captain?

18:30 Oh, no he left about mid '43. Oh, wait on, yeah it must have been early '44 he left. Yeah. All right? Yeah, he was then, so there was another one

19:00 Otto Beecher he then took over, he was on that, I think that was July probably. Yeah about July I think. He took over then.

What did you do when they came into port? Did you go aboard?

Yeah a couple of times. Other times it was ashore at the canteen. Just whatever was convenient. Yeah a couple of times I went aboard.

19:30 Yep. Just good to see them, maintain that contact, which we still do.

What else, I read something in the notes about the HMAS Australia, needing some repairs or something?

Australia? When we came home, when the Quickmatch came home at the end of '44, we came straight to Sydney and everybody

20:00 expected to be off for leave, but we were then, Australia had been involved in action at Leyte Gulf and she'd taken a direct hit on one of the gun turrets. So the Quickmatch had to unload the torpedos and take a replacement gun turret up to

20:30 Australia, who was then in a place called Espiritu Santo, which is what happened. That's when we found out that McLeod who was in the commission was killed. He was in that gun turret when it went off.

What was the reason for you winding up on Colombo?

21:00 Just transfer across from Mombasa.

Yeah, but when you finished at Colombo why did they, do you know why?

Because the Quickmatch was going home, and when the Quickmatch was coming home, I was coming home. That was what the pay master said to me, he said, "I think you should be on that." I said, "Thank you."

21:30 So that's what happened. I got then drafted back down to Cerberus.

Why did he think you should be on it?

Because the Quickmatch was coming home and I'd been away since '42, and he said, "It's only fitting that you be on Quickmatch when she comes home."

He was qualified for him to arrange that?

22:00 Yep. Well, whether he's done it through drafting or what, I don't know, but yeah that's how it worked out. I came home with a good recommendation from him, so that's no.

So Quickmatch was coming home to do what?

Oh, a refit, change crew.

22:30 See some of the boys had been away nearly three years, and so that was an opportunity, she was due for a refit, maintenance and that's the time they change crews around too. Because some of the sea people had been there that long, so they take them home, give them a month at home and then probably relocate them somewhere else.

23:00 That's all good new training coming in, they're keeping their people trained. You've got experience going to other ships and things like that.

In Mombasa and Colombo, I'm just trying to get an idea who actually was there, who you were working with, because they weren't all people

23:30 **from Quickmatch were they?**

No. I was working with the writer group, or the paymaster group that was there at that time, and they were responsible for all the pay was getting to the Australian ships that were attached to the area, maintaining service records, assessments and things like that. Generally looking after the administrative

24:00 side of each rating.

So your co-workers had been there for some time? Or were they like you?

No, some had come recently, and some had come after I got there as well. A couple that had been there, there were two there that had been there originally in Colombo, well then they were sent back to Australia, and our people plus new ones coming

24:30 from Australia to replace them. So gradually they're changing those people over at the same time as well.

How do you think the big military presence in those places affected the economy? For example we know prostitution became a big money earner for people, and all sorts of other kinds of trading?

25:00 Yeah, I think it would have to boost it. Obviously the prostitution industry is going to benefit from it. But I think their local economy would too. I've got no doubt about that because most people when they go to those areas the first thing they're after is souvenirs, so your souvenir trade is doing well for a start. I think it just

25:30 has an obvious flow on affect because, to some extent, you've got a continuous tourist trade, a little bit like today, where people go. But in those days they probably had larger numbers more frequently. That's about the best way that I could say it. See there were a lot of primitive industries, like cottage industries, all things like that, but the souvenir people would do pretty well.

26:00 I think some of the jewellery people would do pretty well. Yeah, I guess general tradespeople, most would benefit. It's because of the inflow of money and people. But I don't think their general economy has grown that much, by comparison, but anyway.

26:30 **You mentioned before the 7 O'clock razors, and how they made a good gratuity to your local friends, were there other deals that went on using supplies from the navy?**

I don't know, I can't answer. I don't know. I mean ours was paid out of the comforts fund parcel. It was no big deal as far as

27:00 we were concerned. But you know, twenty packets of razor blades, my God. Just shows you how valuable it is to some people. Everything's got different values to everyone.

What about clothing?

In what way?

Well, did men sell their clothing or give it away?

Oh, no. I'm unaware of that.

27:30 I don't think you could do that too easily with your uniform because once it's issued it's got to be accounted for. OK, sure you've got to replace things but when the bottom line is, if you've been issued with a kit, that's the kit you've got to account for, and I think, I've no doubt, there's black market activities went on

28:00 but I was unaware of it. And I wouldn't have been a party to it anyway. I don't believe you should be trying to do that sort of thing in a wartime basis. That's 'goody-goody two-shoes' isn't it, but it's my belief.

Oh no, fair enough. I've certainly come across people who did know about it.

Well I'm not aware of it, I know people that have done it too, but

28:30 no, thank you. I don't see that because in some cases, apart from exploiting the local people, they're exploiting their own ship's company, or their own troop. And that's a pretty low act in my book.

Were there local forces based there?

Oh, yeah, there'd be local people, but the extent I don't know what they were.

29:00 It would only be probably minor and I wasn't aware of any navy or army that they'd be able to muster at that point. No I can't, I'm not privy to that, but yeah there were locals there, but how they were operating I can't answer.

Well, your

29:30 **trip back on Quickmatch, can you talk about that? What that was like getting back on the ship?**

Oh magnificent, I tried to get back on at Cerberus too, after I went back there, but they wouldn't let me, they wanted me there. I made a special plea to go back but couldn't do it. It sounds interesting doesn't it, but it's not. Just one if those things that happened. It was magnificent.

Where did you get on the ship?

30:00 At Colombo. No special place, I was just taken out by launch, bonk I'm back on her. Well done.

Did you have a job to do?

Yeah, keep watch, look after the ships log, which is recording our movements. Because there's a log on board

30:30 that automatically records your ships movement and draws that automatically on the thing and you just pinpoint it at certain times, so there's always a register of our movement.

You mean like a version of…

It was under the bridge and it was like a big etch-a-sketch of where you are and then you pinpoint at a given time the location

31:00 and that sort of tied the longitude and latitude. So that's what you're recording.

Was she heading straight for home or was she going via…?

We were heading for Sydney. On the way through the Bass Strait, we got the call we had to go from Sydney to load up the gun turret to go to the HMAS Australia.

31:30 **So what does that mean, you go to Sydney…**

And the torpedos came off and a new gun turret was put on and we carried that on the ship up to the Australia, which was at Espiritu Santo. Then that was taken off and put on board the Australia. Then we came back to Sydney and the bulk of the crew was changed at that point,

32:00 and most of us went off on a months leave.

How big is a gun turret?

Ah, annoying girl! Pretty big. It houses a, what are the size of their guns? It would probably be a six-inch gun I would think, because we had 4.7s, so that would be about six inches. Yeah, it's pretty big, you

know. Well

32:30 not quite, but just the same. Yeah, they'd have trouble fitting it in here, with the length of the barrel and plus the turret and all the stuff that goes with it. Yeah, you might squeeze it. You might have to knock a bit out of the wall. But I don't know the dimension.

Was that loaded on to the hold? Where did you load it?

We took our torpedo tubes off the deck.

33:00 Our hold wouldn't, we didn't have a hold – that was where we slept. No, torpedo tubes, which were on the deck, upper deck, were lifted off, and the gun turret was put in its place. So that then became deck cargo to be carried away, to get winched off on to the Australia.

33:30 **Was it unusual to have deck cargo on the ship?**

Yeah. But that was an emergency wasn't it. I mean nobody worried, leave was forgotten. You had to get up to the Australia. We knew somebody on there, McLeod, but he was killed.

When did you learn he was killed?

As soon as we got alongside the Australia,

34:00 we went looking for him. He was in the turret. Nice guy.

Did he have a sea burial?

Oh, I presume so, that would have been attended to before we got there. I can't answer that, I don't know. I don't know what they did with their dead at that time,

34:30 whether he would have gone to the nearest war cemetery or whether he was transported home, or whether it was at sea. I can't answer really.

Was the Australia in dock? Had it gone into dock?

Well she was moored at a buoy at Espiritu Santo.

35:00 Yeah. We pulled alongside and the gun mounting was lifted onto the Australia. That's all I can tell you.

I hope you don't mind me asking, it's just that these details really tell the story.

No, no. Fire away. What

35:30 I'm missing, keep probing. I realise what you're trying…

Well, I'm just imagining something that size on deck and having to try and be secured.

The other ship was in distress and they needed help didn't they? I think that's bingo; you've got to get up there. I think that's how most would view it.

So that was an unexpected

36:00 **thing for you, you thought you were just going to have to get off in Sydney, you had this cruise home, but suddenly you were back in an active situation.**

That's right, yeah. The first thing you think of is someone else who was on the original commission.

36:30 So that was good. And I think about two or three years, or it might have been a bit longer than that, the HMAS Australia had a religious dedication ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral, with a plaque there for the ones who were killed on the Australia in that, and our association contributed to that, as a mark of respect.

37:00 So, that's how it works. You still retain that link, even if it's memory in some way. Well that's how we viewed it as the current committee.

Did anyone else who was in that first commission move on like you did and like Mick did?

Oh, yes.

37:30 Yeah, they changed, the first change of crew was when we first got to Durban and there was – how many please don't ask me – but there were a lot of the crew, which I think I indicated the earlier commission, that had come from N-class and ships in the Mediterranean and so on at that time; then they were drafted off at Durban and come back to Australia.

38:00 And at that time, some of the people that were on [HMAS] Quiberon, which was commissioned about three months before Quickmatch, they were transferred to Quickmatch as were some replacements that had been, sailed across from Australia, were there. So that you had a new crew, sort of mixed in again, and weld.

38:30 **When you finally got back to Sydney was that when you said goodbye to the ship?**

Yeah. I reckoned I'd be back, as soon as I could request it, but it didn't happen. Others more worthy probably, or things like that see.

39:00 **What did she go on to do?**

Well she was part of the British Pacific Fleet at that point; she was up at the Tokyo Bay shortly after the surrender bit. She was involved with the American fleet, or was part of the British fleet, the American fleet,

39:30 that campaigned at Okinawa and around there, which was about before probably July – August of '45.

So you had a month's leave when you got back?

Yeah, it was good.

40:00 **What did you do?**

What did I do? Went out and bought a pair of sports pants and sports shirt so I could just get a bit free and easy. By that time, my family were living down here in Footscray and about the third night after I was home, got my sports pants and that, I walked into the local hotel

40:30 and I was sitting there having a quiet beer, because my father wanted to take me down to the local RSL [Returned and Services League] and introduce me to his friends. Whilst I'm in there having my quiet beer, alone, because my friend had gone, the friend I wanted to see had gone away himself. So whilst I'm having a quiet beer, there's a loudmouth gentleman

41:00 alongside talking to two others saying, "Wouldn't you think more of these young fellas would of joined the forces at this point?" I thought, "I'm on my own here, I've got not support, I have to be a bit judicious about this." So anyway I had my beer and walked out, he said a couple of other things, which I forget now. Anyway I went home, had tea and my father said, "It would be nice if you put your uniform on tonight." "Yes Sir." "Come down to the RSL, I'd like you to meet a couple of guys" You wouldn't want to know the first bloke he tried to introduce me to, would you? And he said, "This is so and so" and I said, "Either you tell him to get stuffed or I will because there's no way I'm going to drink with him now." Of course by this time he's apologised. I said, "Next time be careful before you use your mouth. No, I don't want to drink with you, thank you." I would have probably handled it differently now, but then I didn't. Yeah, "Get stuffed."

Tape 8

00:30 It's a very good lesson in the interdependence of people. I firmly believe that. But the bottom line is to me, war is so futile, for the reasons being that I said before. Primarily, you're supposedly part of an activity that is going to end, finish war forever, so soon after

01:00 the Great War, the First World War. OK, fine, now in the sixty years since then, I'd be very interested if you could tell me somewhere in the world there hasn't been sort of hostile turmoil within or between different nations. And the older I become, the more I see the futility of it. I think, probably,

01:30 with your character, I start to realise succeeding generations shouldn't be blind to what happened to us. I think, during war years, there's a certain amount of deceit. Misleading people. And I think there's some horrendous mistakes made

02:00 that are fairly costly in human life, and I think that's only underlining the futility of things. I think mankind's sort of got to get its act together a bit more. One time that I get a little bit concerned this day and age, I think common things that we took for decency, law and order, respect

02:30 for people. What have we got now, apart from having hostile aggressive acts against us at present, we got more people being killed on the roads, we got drug problems, road rage, people like Christine, you can't walk around after hours unprotected. You just can't do that this day and age,

03:00 and I think that's tragic. If you want to be able to walk around at eight o'clock, nine o'clock at night to see somebody, or just to walk away a problem or something, you can't do that. Now, to me that means that we've got bigger problems within people than we had trying to fight all the considered wars. They're the things

03:30 that I've sort of learned from it. I think the things that I've touched on about colonialism, racism and discrimination, I think they've got to be more widely addressed than what they are. I think our intolerances between races, between

04:00 religions happenings, economic activity, manipulations between countries, I think got to get back to people. I don't quite know how to answer it. I'm not intelligent enough to know how to answer it, to stop wars and to stop people killing each other because we've got a bigger problem now with this terrorism,

and I think that probably we're not

04:30 going to solve it fairly easily. I think that what we've got to address more is as these multicultural tribes, countries, races, you've got to sort of work out a way we can live together, and I don't think we can do that. That's the lesson that I've learnt.

05:00 I don't know how you get this through, how you value human life, but let's not waste it fighting wars. Let's find ways you can do it. Say you've got some cherry; you've probably got doubts now, whether you want to go to another country. You probably think twice about it and you shouldn't have to do that. I know. These are the things that

05:30 I've sort of learnt. But there are a lot of values that I've gained and I think I've said to you because of the needs of people in wartime and so on, the lessons that I learnt. Standards, they've sort of stood me in good stead really. I think that's about all I want, unless you want to keep asking questions.

Well I'd like to round off

06:00 **those war years, your time with the navy, you haven't really completed that story. So, you got back to Sydney and you had a month's leave, and then you were posted to HMAS Cerberus?**

Yep, into the drafting office, and then ultimately after that I was working in introducing the demobilisation procedure, for getting people out,

06:30 and at that time I was employed on petty officers duties, still as a lowly writer, but still was literally in charge of that demobilisation procedure at that time. And then I was doing that until I was discharged in May '46. That's about the only way I can round it off.

But what was involved in doing the demobilisation?

Oh, there was a point

07:00 system worked out, dependant on a person's length of service, their particular classification, and that you had to be pretty sure that that procedure was right. So that every rating was sort of under the reserve umbrella at a points category, and then you had to be pretty sure that that was observed and that people were getting

07:30 discharged in proper order. Certain ratings had certain higher points or lower points, it just depended the more experienced and specialised ones were the last to go.

Was this for the whole navy?

Yeah, on the ratings side, not on the officers side, but on the ratings.

08:00 And that's the one that I was on, in that area, doing that. And that's basically the activity I was doing.

When were they entitled to be discharged? From what date? Was it at the end of the war, was that the official…?

Yeah, pretty well after August '45.

Because the ships were needed weren't they? They were still

08:30 **very much in use.**

Yes, then there were some, that's right, but then August, September on they were gradually getting out, dependant on which ships had to be manned. But there was some that could go and then you had to look at those that were in depots and things like that. You're stretching it a bit now to get all the details, because I can't quite recall it. But there was

09:00 a regulated system based on length of service, specialist activity and things like that, and to the best of my ability, it was pretty well adhered to.

Were there special needs cases?

Special needs cases? Oh yeah, but look I can't answer all those things now because if there were too difficult ones somebody else

09:30 higher up the barge pole had to look after that. No, but in the main I think it was done pretty judiciously to the best of my ability.

Yeah. It's good that you can remember as much as you have. Do you remember what else was going on at Cerberus at that time?

Such as what, dear?

10:00 Well there was still training of people that were coming in for the permanent navy as distinct from, so that the training was on going there. So you still had all that activity, and the people whose points system, and I guess they were working on this as reserves are needed to sort of gradually release people from ships. So that those in depots could go and take their place for a

10:30 particular time. I guess it was it was done that way. And after all my, I finished in May ’46 and some still came out after me. So, I’m only talking about the period that I had anything to do with it.

So once you were discharged, did you know what you wanted to do?

Well I resumed my work with the SEC at that time. You see, I mean I got leave

11:00 of absence to join in the first place. Well, I immediately went back and resumed duties. Not in Yallourn but I finished up at Newport power station and then I did first year commerce. Then I finished in the personnel or human resources area and

11:30 from about 1949 until I retired in 1984, I was employed on personal services activity, which is all the welfare things you can think about. I found that pretty rewarding with the experience, and that included migration, people coming out to settle in Australia from England.

12:00 The SEC nominated them and brought out quite a few qualified tradespeople, engineers. We were responsible for coordinating their reception, to get them through customs, with accommodation at Kiewa, some in Melbourne and a lot in the Latrobe Valley. Got employed with other activities including disability placement. In

12:30 other words what they talk about now, finding employment for people who have suffered injury at work or some debilitating illness, try to keep them occupied that way, counselling services, you name it. Ran through a whole gamut of that. That included visiting people in jail, all sorts of places.

13:00 We introduced retirement training for blue-collar workers. Tried very hard to get superannuation for blue-collar workers who now place in their 50s a couple of us, and to our dismay the unions opposed it on the basis that it would tie people to one employer. It’s quite horrific when you think about forty years later they’re making a song and dance about superannuation for blue-collar people.

13:30 It was part and parcel with the introduction of the alcohol and drug foundation in the SEC, like a policy for the people with those problems.

That’s extremely innovative. It sounds like it would have been at the time. That was to assist workers that had drug and alcohol problems?

Yes.

14:00 They had a program to give people who’ve got, but that didn’t come into the late 70s, early 80s, and each department then was supposed to, we had a particular program worked out in conjunction with the foundation, to help people to recover from that. Help them re-establish themselves. We had hospital

14:30 visitation for people in all sorts of hospitals, particularly Heidelberg and Caulfield Repat [Repatriation hospital] at that stage. So, liaising with ex-service organizations, veteran affairs, social security, coordinating recreation activities in Sydney as you see, looking after catering

15:00 and the needs in the place, looking after amenities for construction camps, putting up overhead lines throughout the state and then coordinating recreational activities for about eighty-four social clubs who were affiliated with the social league that was in the place, arranging

15:30 interstate activities between our counterpart in NSW. SEC and perhaps other, oh yeah, and ultimately towards the finish being responsible for security, that’s patrol people, and things like that. So, let’s summarise it this way, that it was a grab-bag of services for the people, by people for people.

16:00 I had a few seminars during that time, learning about empathy and insight and training and things like this, so various sort of courses and so on. So I’ve had a varied and pretty interesting life. And the services background helped immensely in that, as you can probably gather, running right through it.

16:30 My point, compared to poor other people, as I said earlier, Greece, Crete, Tobruk, Kokoda Track, prisoners of war – piece of cake. Compared to those people, I think you realise, one chap that worked there with us, working French polishing, had one arm, one and

17:00 a bit legs. Lost the arm, how did he lose it? He dived under a grenade to save his platoon. In the Middle East, they’re the guys that had it tough. So, yes, we still sort of run right through it. It’s been a pretty interesting life since then, and a lot of it is I guess put down to what I learned in the services, understanding, working on interdependence

17:30 and so on. At a period where I was on special projects attached to the head of the personnel department, that was pretty good too.

Was there a big number of men that came back to work at that the SEC, either to return to jobs there or became employees? Returned servicemen?

Oh, yes. From the SEC? Yes, quite a large number. Look ask

18:00 me a number and I couldn’t tell you a number.

But hence the program for people with disabilities? Because they came back with disabilities, some of them?

Yeah. And then you had to make sure too, because often they had the attitudes of people that weren't in services, were reluctant to see some people come back. "Why should they come back and get their job?" and things like that, so

18:30 those attitudes were there, always there. I mean I know people from the Vietnam War who've sort of expressed this, but some people from the Second World War still experienced that sort of attitude as well. And when I said to you the special projects, interestingly, when I first went in to do that, the acting head of the personnel department there was the guy that interviewed me

19:00 when I got the junior clerks job, back in 1940, and he remembered the vultures that were trying to look at my report. He said, "Do you remember that?" and I said, "Yeah I do." "Good, so do I. Best appointment I ever made." So, that's the round circle. Now what else would you like to know?

I want to know about the Quickmatch Association.

That's been in existence since

19:30 1947. George Brock, who I mentioned earlier, was the longest serving crew member on the Quickmatch. He was a marketing director of the Herald Sun in his working life. He started the annual reunion and then I went in as secretary in the early 70s, and I

20:00 still am. George, when he was retiring from work about '87, he wanted out, and that was on, not a formalised basis. You had a committee as such, but in name, and anyway, after he wanted out, couple of guys said, "Well what are you going to do about it?" and I said, "What am I going to do about it? What are we going to about it?" So we then got ourselves incorporated in 1990.

20:30 We're still in existence today. We've got ninety-five members across Australia. I had a phone call from one the other night, from a guy that was on it in '46, and he'd just suddenly seen this in mufti, it's on. And in this latter period, in '95 we put a plaque in at Cerberus, arranged that. There's another

21:00 plaque we supported in Adelaide for the group that's there. There's a combined plaque for HMAS Quiberon and HMAS Quickmatch that was installed at Garden Island. Then there's a stained glass window that was put into Garden Island which we're part of that depicts the fifteen destroyers that served in the navy in World War II. And our most recent effort was in 1999,

21:30 we got through my involvement at Probus, introducing Dacre-Smythe there, who is a guy that gets involved in this, we got a stained glass window now installed at St Marks's Chapel down at Cerberus. So we've left our mark in the last few years. Pretty good. We concentrate

22:00 roughly on an annual dinner at which we have wives and so on. A few years back that was taboo, but we've said that it's time we had a bit of decorum and this, that and the other thing. We had a hundred and ten there last year. Oh, yeah, and within the last two years, Quickmatch after she came home was converted in the 50s

22:30 to a frigate. And OK, the guys on there, their conflict was maybe Vietnam, maybe Korea or Malaysia, as part of the Far Eastern Strategic Reserve. So, we put out feelers for them if they'd like to join the association in case some of them were thinking that the association was just for

23:00 WW2. We're doing this with the view to perhaps giving the association a little bit more life into the future. We said last year, "Look, if you want to, it's about time you put your hands up and come in and take over the reins, and we'll support you" and things like that. So it will be interesting to see what happens this September. That's what we're working on. I think

23:30 membership's about five dollars, the reason for getting incorporated, because unlike a lot of associations there's no, I wanted accountability, to be able to show people where they are. You give everyone as a member the right to have a say in the running of the place. Oh yes, I'm sorry, the last thing we did

24:00 was about eighteen months ago, we got a plaque, again the Quiberon and Quickmatch, that we put in the gardens at the War Memorial at Canberra. That's what we've been doing in the last few years. So, we've been leaving our mark bit by bit.

What's Anzac Day like for you?

It's pretty quiet. Our pennant's there, we've redesigned the banner, that

24:30 now incorporates if you happen to look this Anzac Day, we've incorporated the service of her as a frigate, to acknowledge the service of the guys who were involved in her that way. That'll be displayed this year. We just, for those that want to we just have a quiet gathering maybe out at Waverly, that's it. It's nothing highly organised

25:00 but there's usually about fifteen at the most at a march on Anzac Day. Some of them get involved in

local activities or other things. But that's about the Quickmatch Association unless you want to ask me something else on that?

No, you've given a pretty good summary on what the association is doing.

25:30 **That's probably everything. Oh, I did want to ask you about coming home and getting married. Where did you meet your wife?**

She was in the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Navy Service]. I met her in Flinders when I come home

26:00 and we married in May '46. She died in '95 from lung cancer. She had a series, she had a little bit of illness anyway through her life, you know, she had a sort of a suspect chest complaint when she came out of the navy, then she was under the care of Palmerton Health for suspected TB [tuberculosis] or something.

26:30 We don't know what triggered that, but she died of lung cancer, and that's smoking, so we've got no doubt that was contributory, but what the earlier was I don't know. Our son was born in '47, about twelve months after we married, and he developed

27:00 epilepsy when he was about ten. At that time, the way they used to treat that was drug them to the point of insensibility. That was all they knew then, anyway. We had to survive that as well, when the wrong grandparents survived at that time, when we sort of told her mother

27:30 and my father, all the comment was, "It's not on our side of the family," you know the usual sort of thing, because epilepsy used to, you hide those sorts of things. She blamed herself, but I said, "No, it takes two to make a baby" so we just decided there that we'd fight this the way through. He's now married, because he

28:00 went through treatments and at one stage he had toxic poisoning through long medication that they'd given him for too long, so they had to get another opinion on that, which luckily we did and gradually he was able to lead a more controlled and normal life. He's now married; they've got their own home, got two kids.

28:30 They're on their way to being well educated, so that's about it, right, from that side. My wife was very supportive of my career.

Did you know her before you got back to Cerberus or just when you…?

No, just when I came home. Her first love she lost on the HMAS Sydney, so that was quite remarkable isn't it, that she, so

29:00 there you go.

What was she doing at Cerberus?

Oh she was in the drafting office when I came home, so there you go. Yeah, we had a battle, but you know, family came first and that was it. The only thing I think, the week she died, she said,

29:30 "Why did you stay, other blokes would have walked out on what we've gone through?" and I said, "It's a contract. It's a commitment. That's what it's all about." So then I had to try and find out things that she wanted done in respect to the grandkids, and she said, "Get the pen and pencil" so I got the pen and pencil. I said, "Before we do it, how about I run through what you think."

30:00 So I told her and put it away and that's all I've been doing, trying to do what she wants done for the kids. Does that make sense?

Yep. What did she want done?

To get them educated, which we did do. I'm making sure that the uni fees get paid so they've got no HECS [Higher Education Contributions Scheme] to worry about; give them a start that way. When they're

30:30 two years of age, we set up an insurance bond for each one of them, which they'll get when they're twenty-one, so that will give them just a bit of a start, and courage to perhaps build their own life that way. What else? I think just basically look after their well-being, which we do pretty well I think.

31:00 But they keep me cool, so that's the important thing.

It sounds like the association keeps you very busy, is that right?

Oh, it keeps me active, yeah. I do do other things; I'm tied up in favours. Yeah, I've been busy. I'm a life member of the Footscray Cricket Club, that district there. I'm a life member of the Footscray Bowlers Club, up at the

31:30 bowlers club. I'm still involved in Neighbourhood Watch, our local thing, our local program. I have been right from the start. Yeah, try to commit a little bit. It gives you something constructive to do, and like I said earlier on we were talking, I'm coaching the bowling.

32:00 Now I’ve got to train a Japanese lady before she goes home. That’s my latest challenge.

OK, thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS