

Australians at War Film Archive

Ronald Frasa (Ron) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1884>

Tape 1

00:30 **Okay Ron we will start with that overview of your life, when and where you were born?**

I was born in Sandringham Sydney on the San Souci Peninsula which is on the coast of Botany Bay in 1926. I lived on the peninsula there

01:00 all of the time until I joined the navy. It was either Ramsgate or San Souci or Sandringham. And I attended San Souci Primary School up until grade six, and then I went to Hurstville Central Tech. I spent almost three years at Hurstville Central Tech, then I left the school in

01:30 November 1940 and started work in Sydney down in the Rocks area. I spent about eighteen months in the Rocks area as a junior clerk and then I was apprenticed to the printing trader at John Sands in Sydney as a compositor and I stayed there until I joined the navy on the 2nd of July 1943.

02:00 I spent approximately three and a quarter years in the Royal Australian Navy, serving mainly on HMAS Shropshire from April 1943 until March 46. And then I was transferred to a couple of different ships, HMAS Queenborough

02:30 and then was eventually discharged in 1946. Returned to the printing trade at John Sands and finished my apprenticeship there. After that I went to a couple of what they call trade houses in Sydney and worked there, night shift, while I was renovating a house., I had married in 1947 and my wife Phyllis and I then moved to

03:00 Gympie for the next couple of years, and we renovated a house there. And then we moved to Melbourne for about six years, I spent that time in the printing trade and I built a house in my spare time working as much over time as possible to raise enough to build the house. And then my wife and I

03:30 by then, we had by 1957 we had three daughters and we decided the climate was too cold in Victoria, getting chilblains and hay fever and so we moved up here to the Sunshine coast which was the 3rd of February 1958. Since then we have spent all of our time between

04:00 Maroochydore and Alexander Headland. Having shifted about eleven different houses and renting several of them mostly, but then we built a couple of different houses, renovated another and eventually built a block of offices and shops on the esplanade at Alexander Headland. We lived there until 1997 and we sold out and they pulled the

04:30 building down and built a multistorey building in the place of her. And then we moved to this house here at 72 Topeka Drive Maroochydore, so I have obviously been here six years now.

And just briefly in this overview tell us about your time on the Shropshire and where the Shropshire went into service?

Well within

05:00 a couple of days of joining the Shropshire we left Sydney harbour, which was our base, and we went up to Milne Bay which was our first depot and we operated out of Milne Bay and had a couple of bombardments and landings at Arawe and Cape Gloucester in New Britain and also across to the Solomon Islands.

05:30 And from there on we went up to call the Admiralty Islands and the invasion of the Admiralty Islands and we made Seeadler Harbour in the islands as our base for further northern movements. And all of this time we were attached to the American Seventh Fleet and so we joined in the Seventh Fleet Operations and [US] General MacArthur's idea of

06:00 island hopping; rather than try to defeat the enemy at various places they just island hopped. We did several bombardments covering landings in Dutch New Guinea and Humboldt Bay and another island called Biak, landing at Biak.

- 06:30 Most of them were with American troops, but some of them were assisting the Australians in landings. We went on from there to the island of Morotai and from Morotai we moved back into Admiralty Islands, ready for a vast armada of some four or five hundred ships for the invasion of the Philippines, and
- 07:00 that got us to about the 19th or 20th of October 1944. Then was with General MacArthur for the first landing at Leyte Gulf in the Philippines and a few days after we had a night action with the Japanese Fleet in what they call the Battle of the Surigao Straits where our ship engaged the Japanese battleship
- 07:30 Yamashiro in company with several United States ships and Australian ship [destroyer] Arunta. We were responsible for the sinking of the battleship Yamashiro. We then went back to the Admiralty Islands for a brief spell, for a belated Christmas and we had Christmas about the 1st or 2nd of January. And then we moved in for
- 08:00 a further invasion, a bigger invasion still for the island of Luzon and the battle of, I just forget it now. It was all around the Luzon area. And also the invasion of Corregidor
- 08:30 which was an aerial attack on Corregidor. We did bombardment of Corregidor and then the paratroops actually landed on Corregidor first and then infantry attacked it by land. And we stayed around that area expecting to intercept Japanese ships that were trying to make their way home to Japan
- 09:00 from what was known then as Dutch East Indies. And eventually while we were there in Subic Bay we got word that the [atom] bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I think it was about the 15th or 16th of August. We were advised that the Japanese had capitulated and a few days later we headed off for
- 09:30 Japan via Okinawa. We arrived in Japan in late August /45 and stayed there as occupation forces for a further three months. During that time we were there for the actual official surrender on the 2nd of September when they had the ceremony on the USS Missouri which was an American battleship.
- 10:00 And we stayed there looking around for prisoners of war and rounding up prisoners of war and getting them to hospital ships and getting them fit enough to come back to Australia or various countries to which they belong. Eventually we left Japan late November, on the way back to Sydney
- 10:30 we were asked to call into Wewak to pick up two hundred and fifty time expired soldiers from the 6th Division. By the time we got there there was more than two hundred and fifty, a lot of keen soldiers to get home and there was about six hundred of them paddled out on rafts, barges whatever. And so we ended up taking six hundred soldiers back to Sydney and arrived back there about the 30th
- 11:00 of November 1946. So that was more or less the end of our wartime service. And then we had a series of victory marches during the next couple of months, January, February, through Melbourne and Hobart, showing the flag around various places and eventually back to Crib Point,
- 11:30 Flinders Naval Depot, and eventually back to Sydney where I received my transfer about the 18th of March 1946 and I was transferred to the destroyer HMAS Queenborough. And I stayed on Queenborough for a few months and then drafted back to Flinders Naval Depot and then eventually back to Sydney where I was discharged in
- 12:00 September 1946.

And briefly also what was your role aboard the Shropshire?

Well I was a stoker, down below in the bowels of the ship. You have got a lot of different occupations there. I started off at what I think they called the chief stokers' mess man, just a matter of getting used to the

- 12:30 ship and I was there as the chief stokers and engine room artificers mess man for the first three months. Then after that getting to know the different parts of the ship I was transferred down to duty on the engine rooms and boiler rooms. I had done a course as a ship's bricklayer in Flinders Naval Depot and so eventually I did quite a bit of
- 13:00 brick laying, which sounds unusual on a ship. But inside the boilers is a furnace and that is all bricked with fire brick and they break down and get destroyed. I had to repair the bricks inside the furnaces. Apart from working in the engine room on the boilers,
- 13:30 igniting the boilers or making smoke if they wanted smoke, white smoke or black smoke or they didn't want any smoke, I had to do that sort of thing. And then I was working in the engine room later on. I was working first s what they call a lead engineers' dodger or something, gofer,
- 14:00 just getting used to the thing. I had to answer everyone's request, whatever they wanted, I had to get for them. I was also what they call a telephone dodger, they had a little telephone box in the middle of the engine room which was very hot, as you can understand, it was hot enough being in the engine room without being locked in a telephone box. And when you tried to ring up anyone on the switchboards, we had to plug in switch boards every time, you're sweating that much you got an
- 14:30 electric shock every time you tried to talk to someone, so you had a rather shaky voice while you were

talking to them. And I did various other jobs on there on the turbines, and in the boiler room. Various other jobs around the ship and also when it was action stations, I was

15:00 either in the four inch magazine, setting the four inch projectiles and shooting them up to the four inch gun deck. Or I was near the eight inch magazine doing various jobs there, or what they called damage control. Just in case there was any damage done to the ship you were ready to repair the damage, that was another job. You always had sort of two jobs, one you were on watch eight hours a day

15:30 while you were at sea, and when you were off watch you had a certain action station while you were at sea. And so you had to be around close by that action station in case you were called.

That was a great overview of everything, now we will go back and get details of your service and life and I will start

16:00 **way back with you growing up. Your father, tell us about him and his influences?**

Well my Dad was a soldier from World War I, together with his two brothers, who all went over and served in France and Belgium. And he was wounded a couple of times there and gassed and had a piece of his hand blown off. I guess most of my

16:30 early years I can recall my father going through the depression. He was unemployed for a lot of the time that I can recall from when I was born up until 1935 or 36, when he got a job with the Maritime Services Board in Sydney as a truck driver. But he used to tell me a lot of things when I asked him about the war, it is a good place not to be in. He'd say,

17:00 "It wasn't so heroic as what everybody said, you were usually ducking for cover and in fear most of the time. You had a job to do and that was it."

Was he open to tell you stories?

Well only if I pushed him. I would say, "What did you do in the war Dad?"

17:30 Otherwise he wasn't one of those people who were talking about the war all of the time, at all. His brother went over to France and he met in France with him, he was in a different battalion and his elder brother wanted to claim him but he said no he didn't want him to claim him because he would be worrying about him rather than looking after himself you know. When

18:00 he would come and visit us they would sit down and have a bit of a yarn about the war and I would sit there and listen to it. Generally he didn't just open up about his experiences in the war. He was telling me about his early years that I didn't sort of know about before I was born. How he bought a farm at Horsley an outer suburb of Sydney out of Parramatta and paid

18:30 five pounds for it, but couldn't afford the two shillings and six pence a month and so he had to walk off the land. Things like that. Apparently I was there at one stage but I didn't remember that.

What kind of impression did that leave on you as a kid? Of the services and of war from these stories?

19:00 The bad part of it, it was never talked about very much. Anything I heard about it was sort of the humorous side of it, if he did meet up with any of his mates it was always about some humorous thing that happened in the trenches or on leave in England or when he was wounded and hospitalised, wounded in France and

19:30 transferred over to England. Or when he was on leave and went AWL [absent without leave] and they fined him that much he didn't have any money, they fined him five days' pay or something. As he only had an allowance of a shilling a day and five days pay at six shillings a day ended up for thirty days, so he had to send a wire home to get some money from his

20:00 mother and she had to send some money over that he had been sending home. He had only been allocating himself a shilling a day you know.

Do you think it influenced you, your time in the service?

I was only thirteen years of age when the war started and I joined the Kogarah Bay Sea Scouts which was over the bay from where

20:30 we lived. I was in the Kogarah Bay Sea Scouts from then until I joined the navy in 1943. I was learning all about seamanship, Morse code, semaphore, rule of the road at sea. All things tying knots, and all of that thing, and I had a couple of cousins that were in the navy and they used to

21:00 come and visit me I used to think how terrific they were and the things that they were doing. So I applied to join the navy just a few days after I turned seventeen. Because my Dad was only a day older than seventeen when he joined up. And he said, "Well if you want to go, go." So I went to join up as a seaman having learned all about Morse code and semaphore and

21:30 seamanship and navigation and all of this sort of thing. But when I went for my medical I passed

everything but they told me that my eyesight wasn't up to 20/20. I couldn't be a seaman because I had to be on the lookout for ships, submarines, aircraft or whatever, and so I could either become a stoker, cook or a writer.

22:00 And I said, "Well I didn't come here to cook or write, I came here to be a seaman.," But the closest thing I could see to that was a stoker, so I joined us as a stoker.

How did you feel about not having the choice to be a seaman?

I was pretty disappointed really because I wasn't engineering conscious to be truthful, and all of my thoughts were on the upper

22:30 deck really. When I say upper deck I mean where you can see what's going on, and all of the things I had learnt I thought maybe I would have got a signaller or a gunner, something like that. And so it did take a lot of adjusting to that. So any chance I got to get up to the upper deck I certainly did. One chance

23:00 they had, one man from the four inch magazine was allowed onto the upper deck to the four inch gun deck to handle the projectiles as they came out of the tube. I volunteered to go there so I could get on the upper deck for once. But any spare time I always spent it up top where I could see what was going on.

Tell us about these Sea Scouts, what was the deal with these, you were very young?

23:30 Well it was a bit like the naval cadets really, but instead of wearing sailor's dress, we wore the scouts' uniform but in a blue uniform and we were based on the water at Kogarah Bay. We had our clubhouse and boat shed right on the water and everything revolved around learning

24:00 to row and sail, rule of the road at sea, navigation semaphore, Morse code and all of this sort of thing. As I say it was fairly well divorced from the normal boy scouts, except that we used to go on camps with the land lover scouts as we used to call them. Go and camp with them but apart from that

24:30 our routine was more nautical.

And when would they hold meetings or lessons?

Well we used to have, once a week we had a meeting. And we used to do various exercises there and play some form of sport sometime, and almost every weekend we would go over and do something, if we weren't doing

25:00 repairs to the clubhouse we would be doing some competition or exercises or sporting event that we were entering into. We would be doing our sailing or rowing or something to do with the sea.

What attracted you to the sea scouts in particular over ordinary scouts?

Well I guess it goes back to my grandfather,

25:30 a merchant sailor. He came out from Germany in the 1880s and his brothers family, his three sons were sailors. I found out later on, although I didn't know this until later, but my grandfather had told me about his experiences on the sailing ships. And I had a cousin who was on a ship, I think it was called the Joseph Conrad, and I did meet him a couple of times.

26:00 And you know the stories about the sea and the sailing ships were very nostalgic. And my grandfather used to tell me a few stories about the sea, mainly as I say they were on sailing ships, and what a hard life it was and how much easier it was on steam ships and oil burning ships compared to what he had to

26:30 put up with. My cousin Stan Billington joined the navy in 1938 and he used to come and visit us sometimes, I was just carried away with the navy. I mean there wasn't many people in the army who came to visit us, particularly before the war, it was people that were

27:00 in the navy that I knew that come to see us. Even in the sea scouts, one of our Scout Masters had joined the navy and he started off as a sub lieutenant and he used to come to the sea scouts and tell us all of the various stories about the navy. So it was all navy, navy, navy as far as I was concerned.

27:30 And what kind of feeling would it give you as a kid or a teenager, these stories of the sea and of the navy?

Well I guess they used to give me pins and needles in the head if you get that. I can recall when the HMAS Sydney returned to Sydney after being in the Mediterranean

28:00 and they had been mainly responsible for the sinking on an Italian cruiser, the Bartolomeo Colleoni I think it was. And they had a victory march through Sydney and of course they were all dressed in white uniforms there. And I snuck away from where I was apprenticed at John Sands and went up to town and watched this victory march. I thought, "That's it!", after seeing all of these sailors in their white uniforms

28:30 it really got me in you know?

And was there also something about growing up near the sea?

Well that was it, all of our life, you were either fishing or, my father and his brother had oyster leases in Botany Bay and I used to go over with them and help them dig worms which they sold for fishing. Most of our life was in the water.

29:00 We were either swimming in the water or sailing or doing something around there, in a little old 'put put' launch going across to the oyster leases and spending our time in an old hut on the other side of Botany Bay where the oyster leases were. My father and his brother another one who

29:30 was in the army, they used to bring a rifle over there and let us shoot with a little pea rifle, a 22 calibre, and we used to think that was fantastic. Whether that, or we were fishing in the bay, everything revolved around Kogarah or Botany Bay. Prawning or netting for prawns or whatever. So you know it was always the sea.

30:00 **You were telling us also that your father was unemployed for several years how did you get by as a family during those depression years?**

Well it was fairly tough, I can recall living in at least four different houses up until I was six years of age and most of the people around our area seemed to be unemployed and on the dole. I think my father, because he had four children, he had five and one had died earlier,

30:30 but they had four children and because of that when they brought in relief work, which was probably not until 1932, that he got one week [work] in two or three, I think it was one week in two, because he had four children so he got along well then. Most

31:00 of them were unemployed and very few of them could pay the rent and the landlord said, "Well as long as you look after my house or paint and look after my garden, well you can stay there." But if somebody was ordered out of a house apparently my Dad and his friends would make arrangements to move from one house to another and so they would do what was called the "moonlight flit" or the "midnight flit" and so they would change houses

31:30 while the landlord didn't know. The landlord would come around to collect the rent and so there would be somebody else in the house you know. And I can recall being in four different houses like that by the time we moved to the last home which was 5 Selma Street San Souci or Ramsgate. And my Dad eventually bought that house

32:00 during the late 40s and lived there until he died.

So how did this 'midnight flit' work?

Well all of these unemployed fellows would say, "My landlord is getting onto me because he wants me to pay the rent and I told him I haven't got any money. I can't pay him." Either that or my Dad would say to the land lord, "Well it is your turn this

32:30 week, it is my kids turn the next week?." You know when he got paid. He would say, "Yes, well I will pay you this week's rent." But when he came the next week he said, "It's not your turn, it's my kids turn." And of course some of them didn't like that, they wanted a weekly rent all of the time, which they couldn't afford. So they would just arrange, we had another friend who had a truck, he would shift us and the other families, you know

33:00 would change over houses in the middle of the night. By the time the landlord got there the people who were behind in the rent weren't there any more, we were there. We were very fortunate in respect that most of the area from Ramsgate to Mascot aerodrome, they were all tin shanties there from Ramsgate Beach right through to Brighton le Sands to Mascot, and most of the unemployed used to

33:30 live in bag and tin huts, open up a can of kerosene and make that a roof out of them and chaff bags as walls. They would whitewash them and they lived all along the beach front of Botany Bay there, right along there. Mind you they were all reasonably happy I guess, because everyone was in the same boat you might say, or the same situation. All they had to do was walk

34:00 out the front and catch a few fish, so it was a good arrangement there. But I can never recall my Dad having to do that; my Dad always managed to get a house somehow or other.

And what was your mother like?

Oh she was a terrific my Mum. She was a great lady, she really looked after us.

34:30 We didn't consider we were poor or anything like that. I mean we were on the dole but everyone was much the same. You knew that when you went to school you had either bread and jam or bread and vegemite or bread and peanut paste, or something. So did every other kid in the school. But my Mum always made sure that we were always well fed, she seemed to be pretty good at rustling up food.

35:00 As long as they had flour they would make scones or dumplings. We were always well fed even though we had very little money. We had to have the cheaper meat, I mean you had liver or tripe or something

like that which I can't handle now., but you had to eat it because it was what you could afford, but it kept you healthy.

And what about yourself as a kid, did you have to

35:30 do some work to earn some cash for your family?

Yes I did work on a milk cart. I mean there were very few jobs available. I worked on a milk cart. delivering milk and also on a baker's cart delivering bread. On the milk cart from eleven years of age. I think. You might have got sixpence or a shilling or something

36:00 like that which was still pretty good against nothing, you know. So I worked on a milk cart for a couple of years and then I worked on a baker's cart and I think by then I got to the dizzy heights of four shillings, every Saturday got four shillings, before I ended up working as a junior clerk at the Bond and Free store.

So when did you have to finish up with your schooling?

36:30 Well actually when I was in the sea scouts we had a sporting weekend and I had to do a lot of running and jumping and all of this sort of thing and I didn't feel too well actually I felt quite sick. I was laying down there really and they were going to give me some castor oil, they thought I might have been constipated or something. And my elder

37:00 brother, he is four years older than me, he arrived on his bike and he could see I was sick so he put me on the bar of the bike and pedalled me home, about two mile I suppose and when I got home and my mother said, "You had better go straight up to the doctor." And so I went to the doctor and they found out I had appendicitis. And I was shunted into hospital straight away

37:30 and was operated on and in fact my appendix burst as I was on the table .As it turned out that, was the end of my schooling, which was October 1940. And those times when you had appendicitis for fourteen days and while I was there my father said he had the opportunity to get me a job at this

38:00 Bond and Free store down in the Rocks area of Sydney. As soon as I got out of hospital I went straight to work. It was war time then and I wasn't doing particularly well at school, my own fault I wouldn't do my homework. So I thought it was a good idea to leave, so I left before the final exam, which I probably would have passed. As I say, I thought they should teach me at school.

38:30 I reckoned that school laws interfering with my education, I reckoned I could learn a lot more out of school. Wrong attitude, but that's how I felt about it, and so I was quite happy to leave before the final exam.

And what was your first day at Parburys like?

Parburys Bond and Free store they used to call it. Pretty exciting I guess really. I just forget what the first day was like, but a pretty musty store, because we had a

39:00 wool store on top of there. Down below there was all of the gear that was coming in from various ships of course, had to go into either bondage, with bondage to be paid, or the free store if it was just a matter of being collected. And I just can't recall the first day but I can recall that I did

39:30 at one stage, they had a hydraulic lift there that you just stepped in and pulled the rope, and you went up to which ever floor and you could steady it down with the rope. And I thought I would be a bit smart, the older fellows there they used to half get in as they were pulling the rope, and I half got in but the door dropped down on me as I was getting in and I was caught between the lift and the wire and I was on the

40:00 second floor I think it was and I was caught between the wire cage in front and the lift and fortunately it didn't squash me, the lift went up as I pulled it to go up and I just fell into the bottom of the lift well. And somebody heard a thud and went down wondering what the heck it was, and here I was lying at the bottom of the lift well. Fortunately I didn't break any bones, they carted me off in an ambulance

40:30 to see how I was. As my Dad used to say I was lucky I fell on my head otherwise I could have caused serious damage. I really did fall on my back apparently, winded so I was lying there unconscious. But while I was there it was wartime and I did have occasion to see all of the ships that were coming in again, this was influencing. I was not only a

41:00 junior clerk but I was a messenger for the place and I had to deliver mail all around the city because it got there quicker than putting it in the post. I delivered mail all around the place and so any opportunity I got I went over to the Man o' War steps or Garden Island, somewhere in that area, and had a look at the ships coming in and saw all of the naval ships coming in .

41:30 End of tape

00:34 **What are your memories of the declaration of war?**

Well I guess I was very confused, we only had a radio of course at the time and I can remember my father listening very closely to the war and

01:00 Mr Menzies was the Prime Minister of Australia at the time and he said, "Australia is now in a state of war." And I said to me Dad, "What does that mean Dad? State of war?" And he said, "Well it really means we are at war, just like that other war I was in. And it means that a lot of people are going to go to war and a lot of people are going to get killed and hopefully it will be over soon." But

01:30 then he said, "We thought World War I would be over soon, so you can never really tell." So that was my first impression.

And what did you gauge as your dad's reaction to it?

My dad's reaction was, well, "I am not volunteering again, I will join whatever is needed here in Australia to defend my

02:00 country but I am not going overseas to fight someone else's war. If it comes here well they attack us, well that's a different thing." But that was his impression. My mother's brother just missed out on World War I, he was just not quite old enough, he was born in 1901

02:30 and by the time the war finished he wasn't quite seventeen, and so he was one of the first to join. So my Mum's brother joined up in the 6th Division in November 1939, he was anxious to get to a war because he had missed the first one, he had been in the

03:00 volunteer military or something before the war, as did my mother's other brother. Although he was a cripple from infantile paralysis so he couldn't volunteer, he just volunteered as an ambulance man.

And what ways did you see the early part of the war affect Sydney?

I guess I didn't see it

03:30 affect much at all because the war was being fought over in Europe and there didn't seem to be much difference here, from what I can recall, until the Japanese entered the war in December 1941. Before that it seemed to go

04:00 fairly routinely, I haven't got much recollection of it for the first couple of years. Possibly rationing, but I just can't recall how that affected us. As I say my own work for the first couple of years was very much involved in the sea scouts, so every opportunity I had I was over there training and learning

04:30 whatever I could with the sea scouts and so I guess I didn't put much import on how it was affecting Australia. Until I left school and went to work in Sydney in 1940, which again is only a bit over twelve months after the war, that the impact struck me because I was right in

05:00 Sydney Harbour seeing troops ships arrive and take troops to the Middle East and other war ships coming and going and all of that sort of thing right in Sydney harbour, so suddenly I was awoken to the fact that there really was a war on.

What was the movement of troops like around Sydney Harbour?

Well that was really fantastic. As I say, being a messenger boy I really used to take a lot longer than I was supposed to. I would be making all sorts of excuses as to why I was held up

05:30 as I was watching ships like the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth and a Dutch ship called the Oranje I think it was, I can't remember now if the Oranje was a hospital ship because they used to be quite fantastic to see these hospital ships because they were all so brightly painted and lit up and painted white and green bands around them, red stripes, and lit up. They were really quite amazing to see them.

06:00 They were amazing to see, and to see the troops being loaded onto the ships, it was a very busy time and the place I had to go for the lunches happened to be right down in Circular Quay, either that or there was a place down near the Sydney Harbour Bridge they used to fire the gun from, it was very very high. I used to go down there and watch the harbour from there when the one o'clock gun

06:30 went off and I would have a wonderful view of all of the ships coming and going in the harbour, particularly war ships.

How would you get around Sydney when you were delivering the messages?

By foot. There was a lot of rationing around even then that I can recall. Trucks going around there with giant gas bags on the roof some of them. It sounds unusual, I

07:00 mean you have got a gas bottle in the boot of your car, but a lot of trucks particularly had either, or cars had a great big balloon on the top of the cars filled with gas, hydrogen or something, and they ran on that. Or they had a charcoal burner on the side of the rack and that sort of thing. Petrol was rationed fairly thoroughly,

07:30 whether it was available or not, that's how they got around. I didn't have even a bicycle to get around which I appreciated because I could take more time by, go wherever I wanted you know.

And what were the main sort of messages you were delivering?

Well mainly to various companies that their goods had arrived at the bond store or the free store

08:00 and notifying them when they could pick them up, and times they could pick them up. I was also on the switchboard at the Bond and Free store and so I used to take the messages from the various places for when they were going to arrive or transfer the goods to the various places.

How did the switchboard work?

Oh it was one of those plug in jobs, you know

08:30 where they have little eyeballs, what they call eyeballs, when somebody wanted a line they would lift up the phone and the eyeball would flutter and then you had a plug to plug it in. Similar thing to what we had in the engine room of the ship, but much more pleasant there.

How much communication was done by telephone?

Oh quite a lot because it was a big Bond Store and

09:00 there was several other bonds stores throughout Sydney and we used to communicate them regarding other items. We might have received part of the shipment and they might have received part of the shipment in one of the other stores, so there was a lot of chatter going on between the various bond stores and their clients.

And as a switchboard would you listen in to the conversations?

No I wasn't permitted to do that. I

09:30 was allowed a few seconds to see that they were connected and then I would have to put the phone down.

And so with so many goods coming in what was the unloading and storage procedure like?

Well I didn't see much of that because I was working in the office or out delivering messages, so I didn't see much. But I had to go down to see the various men and get their lunch orders or their lottery tickets, the Sydney Lottery used to be very

10:00 popular, five thousand pounds was a fortune if you won the lottery. There used to always be groups of them buying a lottery ticket between them. So I didn't really see a lot of loading. I did sneak in and watch a destruction of spirits on one occasion.

10:30 If people hadn't paid their bondage on the spirits it was supposed to be destroyed. And rather than giving it to the army or something like that they destroyed it and I happened to be there to see this destroyed and I saw quite a lot of it destroyed down the throats of the workmen. And while each of them had a gladstone bag there, they saw that it disappeared one way or another.

11:00 And they seemed to have a pretty happy time destroying the whiskey or the rum or whatever it was.

And what was the procedure when somebody's goods had arrived and you had notified them with your message, how would they then collect their?

Well they would come up to our office with a bill of lading, what they had loaded onto a particular ship and

11:30 they would have to come up to our office, which was on the first floor, and get it approved before they went down and saw the man who was in charge of the bond of free store and he would then go with them and open up one of the areas and see that they took the right amount of equipment.

And when you took the lunch orders for the men what would they physically want to have for lunch?

12:00 Well it was pretty well all sandwiches, sandwich, meat pie or sausage roll that was the extent of it, either white bread or brown bread. Either pork or something else. My favourite bit used to be the crusts, the lady would save the crusts for me and I would have pork and pickles on the crust. I

12:30 forget just what the other men had, they were either pie or sausage roll or sandwich men. Yeah. One thing I do recall was when the Americans arrived with their ships and they started to bring the first fighter aircraft into Australia through the wharves at Dawes Point, which was the area that I was in, and they couldn't get the planes through the gate and they said, "You will have to take the ship to

13:00 Woolloomooloo or something where they have got a bigger gate." They said, "Oh don't worry about that we will soon fix that." So they brought a bulldozer in to push the whole wall down that was in the gate, the wall adjoining the gate at the dockyard and they just said, "We have got enough room now,

thankyou.” The Americans were great ones on know how and how to solve problems quickly. They weren’t going to shift their load, they said,

- 13:30 “A war is on and we have got to get this out in a hurry.” And so I happened to be there, as I say, when the first lot of Americans arrived in Australia and started to invade Australia, which was quite an interesting spectacle really.

How did people respond to them when they first arrived?

Well I think the general public responded to them very well, and I think a lot of the young ladies

- 14:00 they responded to them very well, because they had about three or four times the pay what the Australian soldier or sailor had. So they were very popular. But I can recall that they weren’t too popular in the hotels around the Rocks area, Argyle Place where the wharf labourers worked. I can
- 14:30 recall seeing a number of fights there between American sailors and wharf labourers, that they didn’t treat them very kindly. The wharfies would knock them out and take their money and leave them lying in the gutter. In fact I even saw a fight one time between the wharf labourers using shovels to fight each other. So it was a pretty rugged area. But I got on well with the wharf labourers around there,
- 15:00 they just said to me, I was only fourteen fifteen years of age at the time, they said to me, “We will look after you you can go anywhere you like, but don’t see anything.” Basically, whatever you see you don’t know about, you know.

Was it hard to not see anything?

Well it was at that stage, as far as these fights are concerned, I never repeated that to anybody at that stage,

- 15:30 I just didn’t see it you know. I saw a lot of fights going on between the wharf labourers and the American servicemen. Even then when the New Zealanders arrived, the Australian soldiers and the New Zealand soldiers they seemed to love to fight up there at Hyde Park, fight at the drop of a hat but the army was trained that way, you had to be tough in the army.
- 16:00 And they were taught to fight and fought hard, so they used to practice on each other.

Was there any kind of hierarchy you observed in the wharf labourers?

Well they had their gangers, again whatever I seen I didn’t know about or remember. But they had their gangers and they had their select teams by the look of it that seemed

- 16:30 to get more work than others. While it is supposed to be everyone equal, it didn’t quite work out that way. But when they weren’t working or called out for a job they used to have enormous two up schools down there around the wharves and they were going on all of the time around there. And I don’t think I ever saw policeman coming
- 17:00 around to break anything up. I think there was too many wharf labourers around there for so few police to worry about breaking up these two up school. Where as if they went on in Hyde Park or anything like that they would soon put an end to it. But it was open season down there for two up games.

And why do you call it a two up school?

Well that’s what they call it I don’t know why. But they say two up school not a game

- 17:30 and I guess it is a school, because some seemed to be more schooled in taking other people’s money than the amateurs, they seemed to be always winning. I did see one occasion apparently when a double header penny must have been rung in and I saw the fellow or two of them, I didn’t know what was happening at the time but I saw
- 18:00 two of them take off in a hurry and several of them chasing him or them, and I didn’t actually see the result of what happened. I said to my Dad after I didn’t know what happened and he said, “Oh they probably had a double header penny and tossed it into the ring and they got found out.”

And with you being quite young in a rough area, were there any sorts of lessons on life that you learnt at this time?

No, only to mind my own business.

- 18:30 If you see anything, just keep on walking, walk away from it, don’t run. Just walk away from it slowly if you see anything at all, don’t get into a panic about it and don’t stop and watch it. So I just learnt to do that. I guess that
- 19:00 was the lesson I learnt there.

Were you ever threatened by anyone?

No I was never ever threatened but when I was walking around Sydney there were people like you get

today, like a dirty old man or something, that's what we called them in those days, I don't know what you call them now., They would make some attempt to molest you or get you away to a toilet

19:30 or something else or con you for a few shillings, tell you a story about how they ran out of money and they had a wife and three children, could I possibly spare two shillings or something?. And I think I was only getting, by the time I took home my pay I think it was one pound and eleven pence and I think my mother used to give me about four shillings a week

20:00 or something. Once or twice I did fall for the trick of these fellows, asking for money and the sob story and later on I thought, "That's strange, he didn't even ask for my phone number or address or where I worked, I don't know how he is ever going to get it back". And then when I told me Dad who used to work in the same area actually. He was working in the garage of the

20:30 Maritime Services Board, and when I told him he said, "You will never get that back, don't fall for that again." I did fall for it, as I say a couple of times a couple of people tried to heist me away, I didn't know what they wanted but as far as the tough area where I was there was no problems in there whatsoever., I was a worker and I was just treated as everybody

21:00 else, as long as I didn't see anything.

What kind of areas would these dirty old men hang around in?

Well they seemed to hang around like they might hang around today, if you needed to go into toilet or somewhere like that. Somewhere around the town, they would be around near a toilet or near a railway station telling you a story. As I say this fellow who tried ended up getting two shillings or two and sixpence from me,

21:30 was standing right near Wynyard Station and he disappeared very quickly into the station with my money, I don't know where he went from there. I suppose he would disappear from sight and then try somebody else.

And would you ever spend much time around Hyde Park?

Not much around Hyde Park because my deliveries, while I was working there didn't

22:00 go as far as Hyde Park, it was a lot of places down near the water front. I don't know whether you're familiar with Sydney but down in Bridge Street, and Loftus Street, York Street and George Street and around that area and down towards Sussex Street, all around where the shipping was mainly, and so it didn't get me down to Hyde Park much.

Were there many troops around Hyde Park?

22:30 Well on occasion when I went to Hyde Park yes there were a lot of troops used to congregate in Hyde Park. It seemed to be a popular area for fights, but then there seemed to be a couple of huts there, Red Cross or Salvation Army huts that used to give the soldiers a meal or writing gear, somewhere they could go and write and so it was

23:00 popular for that. It was also popular for servicemen that went and got themselves a bit drunk and would go and have a sleep off in Hyde Park. The main people that I saw were hobos that slept under the bridge in Sydney, because Argyle Place ran right under the bridge where the steps were to the pylons and I used to wander up there

23:30 and you would see a lot of hobos asleep underneath the bridge there, so I saw more of that than Hyde Park.

And what do you remember hearing about the Japanese coming into the war?

I can't quite recollect that. It was 1942.

24:00 I was still there in that place, I can't recollect any reaction at all except that everything was suddenly blacked out. Vehicles had to have no lights showing or they had a couple of little slots they used to put on their headlights, had a couple of little slots showing little beams of light through.

24:30 Things like that and all places being blacked out and I can recall joining the civil service or something like that learning about fire drill and putting out incendiary fires and things like that. I just forget what they called it,

25:00 NES, National Emergency Service or something like that, and I become a member of that and was taught form down there. But I just can't recall anything definite at that time when it broke out. Again as I say when that happened I was only fifteen or something like that, fifteen when it first broke out.

25:30 **And over the time when the Japanese had come into the war, were there any more dramatic changes in the way Sydney was operating, aside from the blackouts and things like this?**

Well there were so many more ships that were coming in there, particularly Dutch ships and French ships, mainly Dutch warships and French warships that were

26:00 combined with the Australian and American fleets, joined up with them. I mean there is lots of precautions there as far as search lights and things like that going on of a night time, that we hadn't seen before. I suppose a lot of them were not only for practice but if they thought

26:30 they heard an aircraft or something like that too.

How about with so many Australian men going to war, did you notice any changes with women in the workforce?

Yes well that's true because even my mother went to work. Most women, well they couldn't have got a job until the war started and

27:00 my mother started work with a factory making some sort of clothing for the troops, only a street away from where we lived. And my sister working in the city, well I guess and my aunty, I remember my aunty working but before

27:30 very few married women worked before the Japanese came into the war. So there was a big change that way. And girls joining the services before that they were mainly only nurses that were in uniform. Very few AWAS's [Australian Women's Army Service] or WRANs [Womens Royal Australian Navy] , army, navy or

28:00 WAAFs [Women's Australian Air Force] until the Japanese came into the war that I can recall but it did seem to introduce those into the war, the women's services, that's army, navy, air force.

And tell me about the lead up to when you actually decided to join?

Well just prior to that I was down at a place called Era,

28:30 we used to go camping down the coast from Sydney and we used to get out near Lilydale somewhere and we used to hike over to Era about six or seven miles and we had a little life saving club down there and my brother had a bit of an interest in a tin shack down there and we used to go and camp down there. On this particular

29:00 occasion, I think it was May 1942, I was there with several other sea scouts and we were junior members of the Era lifesaving club also and we happened to see a submarine surface out at sea. And we knew that Australia

29:30 didn't have any submarines, we had a fair idea what Australia had, being involved in the sea scouts we were very involved about it and we knew that if it was an American ship it would have flown a flag and this submarine just surfaced out off the coast which I suppose it was very uninhabited. We were lying under the life saving club and there was only about four of us there lying underneath the lifesaving club and

30:00 we were probably the only people on the beach and they probably couldn't see us. And they surfaced probably a mile, maybe half a mile out to sea, and apparently were recharging the batteries. And it happened to be the Japanese submarine I presume that shelled Bondi and Waverly that following night. We left

30:30 when we saw this submarine we thought it was suspicious, as I say, because it didn't have a flag flying on it. And we hiked the six or seven miles to, I think it was Lilydale Station, reported it to the station master, station master apparently rang some place in Sydney and they sent planes out to look for it but they didn't sight anything. And that night when we were at home

31:00 in Sydney a report came over the radio that Bondi and Waverly were being shelled. And apparently it was the submarine that we had sighted that day.

And how clearly could you see it from under the club?

Oh very clearly, you can see from sea level, you can see something like three miles out to sea.

31:30 And I would say it was only a half a mile or something out to sea, so we could see it very very clearly. We could see people coming up on deck and see someone standing up on there looking through binoculars. At the time we thought we were the only ones on the beach and no one was moving, we were just lying underneath near the lifesaving club,

32:00 sunbathing so we weren't moving. And we just crawled up around behind the huts and waited to see what was going to happen and they were still there for some time, so we thought they must be charging their batteries so we snuck up behind the huts and got our packs and got away. So we don't know, not long after we started walking up, it is quite a mountainous place, we did see the

32:30 Japanese submarine disappear, now I don't know if they sighted us and thought they may have been reported and took off. But it does take several hours usually to charge their batteries.

And after Bondi was shelled, did anyone ever follow up on your report?

We never ever heard anything about it, never any thanks or that was

- 33:00 it or anything like that. I can't recall whether that was May, I know the [Japanese] midget submarines came into Sydney Harbour around about May 1942, but I can't remember the exact dates. But that was the one that shelled Sydney harbour, not the mother, there was a mother ship to the three or four midget submarines that actually entered, or tried to enter Sydney Harbour. That was another occasion, I think that was around about May
- 33:30 1942, and I would have left the Bond and Free store by then. I think around about March 1942 I left Parbury's Bond and Free store and moved to John Sands the printers where I started my apprenticeship, so I didn't have as much
- 34:00 occasion to go out and see exactly what was going on there, so I couldn't quite investigate what happened when the midget submarines came into the harbour. But to some degree I was still a messenger boy for the first part of my apprenticeship with John Sands, so I did manage to get out and see the troops marching through Sydney on various occasions.
- 34:30 **And seeing the submarine and then the shelling of Bondi, what sort of reaction did you have about potentially how close the war could come to home?**
- I guess it came in very suddenly. Chronologically I think that happened shortly before the midget submarines came into
- 35:00 the harbour and I can remember my mother telling us that they might be shelling this place soon, so you had better get under the bed. I think my brother and I said, "Oh Mum we're not going to get under the bed, we're going to stay in bed." And I can recall my father digging a trench in the backyard at the time. A lot of people in Sydney did dig trenches.
- 35:30 Around about that time I guess that was the first warning they were so close when Bondi and Waverly were shelled and people started to dig trenches. Suddenly they realised that war had arrived at Sydney.
- And what was the decision for you to leave the apprenticeship and join the navy?**
- Well I turned seventeen and that was enough. I wanted to get into
- 36:00 the navy, so I think two days after I turned seventeen, whichever was a working day I took the day off and went down to put my name in. I turned seventeen on the 26th of February 1943. And I had to wait until May or June before they actually did a medical and then on the 2nd of July
- 36:30 they called me up and sent me down to Flinders Naval Depot to do my training. But for me there was never any question of doing anything else. All of us sea scouts, three mates, we were all going to join the navy, but as it turned out I joined the navy and one joined the water transport in the army
- 37:00 and another joined the air sea rescue in the air force, so they all joined to do something with the sea and we all got into something associated with the sea.
- And your apprenticeship, what was the situation with leaving that?**
- Well I had to get permission to leave and they released me providing I came back and finished my apprenticeship at the end of the war, or my discharge.
- 37:30 We signed up for I think the words were "three years or the duration of the war, whichever is the greater or at the King's pleasure" or something like that. And when I finished my service in the navy I had to go back to finish my apprenticeship, much to my regret, I didn't like the idea much at all, in hindsight I should have just disappeared
- 38:00 and started an apprenticeship in the building industry, but that's what I would have liked to do. Going inside after being out in the open for so long, it just about destroyed me working inside in the confined spaces. But I had to go back. I was doing a five year apprenticeship, so I had to go back and do three and three quarter years, where as several ex-servicemen
- 38:30 decided to go into the printing trade to become compositors as I was. They had to only do three years and were fully qualified tradesmen, whereas I had to go back and do three and three quarter years to finish my apprenticeship. They completed theirs in three, which was a bit of a blow to me, knowing I had done the same service that these fellows had done but
- 39:00 they only had to do three years.
- And what did you have to do to put your name down after you turned seventeen?**
- I think I just went down there, and as I say a couple of days after I turned seventeen my Dad said, "Well if you really want to go, it probably will be over soon and you might miss out. I did it
- 39:30 so you might as well do it too." I just recall going down to Loftus Street in Sydney to Navy House and asking how I would apply for the navy. They said, well something to the respect that they weren't taking them then at that time, they had enough but they would write my name down and "we will let you know when we need you" or "when or if we'll need you."

- 40:00 I had to get permission from the firm to get a clearance because it was actually a protected industry at that time because we were doing printing for the services, particularly American Army and Navy, we were doing a lot of printing for them and I had to get a special release.
- 40:27 End of tape

Tape 3

00:30 **Tell us about the call up, that they wanted you in the navy?**

I guess it would have come by mail, but I can't recall actually receiving it. But I remember being very excited going down there in Loftus Street in Sydney

- 01:00 to Navy House doing a medical, and I can recall unfortunately the part when they tested my eyesight. I wasn't colour blind or anything like that, I passed that all right, but apparently it wasn't up to twenty twenty which I never ever realised. I don't think I had ever had an eye test in my life before that. Suddenly they said, "I am afraid we can't take you." And I said, "Why?"

- 01:30 And he said, "Well your eye sight is not twenty twenty." And I said, "That means that you can't take me at all?" He said, "No it means we can't take you as a seaman, but you can, as I mentioned before, you could be a stoker or a writer or a cook. I said well, stoker sounds a bit better to me. I was doing a medical test with a fellow who ended up becoming a great mate of mine, we ended up going to the Shropshire

- 02:00 together. I said to him, 'What are you doing?' And he said, "Well I want to be a stoker. I am a boilermaker's apprentice, I want to be a stoker." And I said, "Okay I will go for a stoker."

Do you remember the test for your eyes, how they determined that your eyes weren't ok?

I think it was just a reading test you know, reading down through the lines, apart from what they call a confetti book to see whether you're

- 02:30 colour blind or not, where you can see the numbers. I can remember one particular incident: Arthur Curry a little friend I had there with me, he had some of the flattest feet you have ever seen in your life, and I thought he wasn't going to get through. And the doctor testing us asked us to lift ourselves up on a

- 03:00 thingo to see how much strength we had and then you lift yourself up and as we lifted up the phone rang, and we were left there hanging and I looked down at this fellow's feet and I thought he will never make it. And the doctor just said, "Okay get down." And apparently he didn't notice my friend's feet who was like 'yeti the abominable snowman', and he said, "You're okay" and he passed us.

- 03:30 My friend got discharged the same day that I did, and as they were discharging the doctor said to him, "My God those feet, how did you get in the navy with those feet?" And he said, "They weren't like that when I joined the navy, that's from standing on the hot boiler plates in the boiler room." And he said, "You're straight up for a pension for you." So Arthur Curry got himself a pension

- 04:00 for these flat feet that he went into the navy with. That's the part that I really remember about my medical. And so I just forget the actual date, but it must have been within a month that we were called up. And they called us up and swore us in and they said, "You will be going on a train in two days' time, there is an authority

- 04:30 for a train pass. Meet at Central Station in Sydney and you will be going down by train with the rest of your engineering course." And fortunately it turned out that most of our engineering course who went down to Flinders and did the training were

- 05:00 almost to the man transferred to the HMAS Shropshire on the same day.

Well tell us about that first day at Flinders, what was it like the first day in the navy?

I remember it was fairly cold down at Flinders because it was the 2nd of July. it was very cold. The first day is a bit hard to remember,

- 05:30 except that you had to go and have a lot of medicals and checks and issued with clothing and wooden stamp for your name, and getting all of your equipment, and all of that sort of thing. Parcelling up all of your civilian clothes to be sent home, and getting fitted for all of the various things, shoes, overcoat, hat and everything else. It was

- 06:00 very exciting getting all new clothes and uniforms. We didn't realise when we put it on how laughable we looked compared to the sailors later on. Sailors have a great habit of changing their clothes form issue. In the army and the air force they wore basically what they were issued with, but in the navy

- 06:30 you had to change what you were issued with, a jacket that came straight up and down like that, but

sailors liked to show their chests, so they had their uniform cut out and up here, so you could show what you called a dickie front and your chest out, and hopefully you had a few hairs sticking out the top. And they made them in various widths. After, we got this one that went straight up like

07:00 this. Of course we were very obvious down at Flinders Naval Depot, the new entries. The way they looked with their hats very straight and not bent or anything else. And you were classified as a macca or a macaroon when you first joined because all you were allowed to eat was lollies, you were allowed to go into the canteen and

07:30 drink beer or spirits or anything like that regardless of age. So you were called a macca or a macaroon, the ship's company as they say, the ones that were actually down there training referred to you as a macca or a macaroon.

What was a macaroon?

Macaroon was a bit like a Cherry Ripe, you know these days you have a Cherry Ripe? Well that was one of the favourite

08:00 dishes of the new entries, was a macaroon which is very much like a cherry ripe, hence the name of 'macca'. And then it was a matter of learning immediately how to pitch a hammock, how you sling a hammock, and you had to learn how to pull a rope through the hammock and how to get into it without falling out of it.

08:30 And how to pull it tight so you didn't have too much of a loop in it, otherwise your bladder would be filling up and you would want to get out and go to the toilet several times a night, so you had to tighten up your hammock so there wasn't so much of a bend in it, you had to learn all of those sorts of things. Of course there were plenty of people falling out of their hammock, the first night or two. That was one of the main impressions, trying to

09:00 sleep in a hammock after sleeping in a bed.

And how was the first few days with the officers there, how did they instil navy life and discipline?

They were fairly quiet the first couple of days, but then they usually had a leading seaman or a leading stoker that gave you your basic training,,as far as marching and rifle drill is concerned.

09:30 We referred to everybody as 'Chief'. You should refer to an officer as 'Sir', but we very rarely met up with an officer, we met up with an able seaman or leading seaman or a stoker, we called them all 'chief'. But in fact the only one that deserved the title of 'chief' was a petty officer or a chief petty officer, generally a chief petty officer

10:00 is called chief. But we got into the habit, they said, "Well call everyone chief and you can't go wrong." And they call you 'macca' or 'stoker' rather than your name and that's how it started off. We got on quite well but if you didn't do something right in doing rifle drill you would have

10:30 to hold your rifle up over your head and run around the flagpole, and if you didn't do it right the first time you had to go and run around again and do it. They were fairly good to us really.

And what were you learning during these first few weeks?

Well the first few weeks you had to learn to march in line and do your rifle drill and hold your rifle on the right angle and how to slope arms and present arms and

11:00 particularly in the navy it is called trail arm. You can't carry a rifle like you carry it in the army and the air force, way up in the air, because the decks aren't high enough. You have got to learn how to carry it trailing it down by the side there. How to fix bayonets and all of that sort of thing. And then we had to go to the

11:30 rifle range and learn how to shoot at the rifle range and do a commando course; climbing over all sorts of obstacles. And then learning about boilers and how they operated and how engines operated, various engines. You might be sent to a coal burner and learn how to shovel coal. Or you might be sent to an oil burner and how to work what they call a Yarro Water Tube Boiler, which is

12:00 a big boiler up top and two down below and two on the side, what they call super heater headers, and you had to learn how to fire a Yarro Water tube boiler or a Babcock Wilcox boiler. And then some others went to a motor ship which actually had diesel engines in them, they didn't have a boiler as such except

12:30 to heat the water, they had diesel engines in them so you had to learn a little bit about a lot of things, and in my particular case I was the only one in my class who was sent off to do a ship's bricklaying class, and hence I ended up being the ship's bricklayer latter on.

Why did they send you to do the course?

13:00 I don't know. I think I must have had broad shoulders and a little head to get it, because it was a very hard job, you had to carry all of these bricks down to the boiler room and all of the bricks and the fire

clay and the brick dust down to the boiler room, down the steps and down quite acute ladders with these big heavy buckets that were quite heavy enough without having bricks in them. And then when you got rid of all of them

- 13:30 that were broken in the boiler room, you then had to cart them up the ladder, one hand on the ladder and struggle up the ladder with them and tipped them over the side. As I say, I was broad shoulders, little head, to do it.

Tell us, were you learning on ships at all at this time?

No not at all

- 14:00 about the closest we got to a ship was a rowboat, where you had to learn to row, which I already knew. So we had to work in a rowboat. We had simulated boiler rooms and engine rooms and things like that to give us an idea of what they were like. But it was still a bit of a shock when you got to the ship and realised they were much bigger than the one that they

- 14:30 had there, that only had a single boiler in it. When you got on the ship and found out that the boiler room had four of those in it, it was quite a shock really.

And at this stage, was the navy what you had expected?

Well I guess it was. It was always in my mind I guess a disappointment that I didn't go there as a seaman, I mean I would see these fellows going through their

- 15:00 signal course or their gunnery course. Quite frankly in the first instance I was wishing I was over there rather than shovelling coal and that sort of thing. But once I got in with my mates and you get a close relationship with them, you forget about that sort of thing, I mean it is not to be so.

- 15:30 **And tell us about the close mateship you were developing during training?**

There was about three I suppose that I got really close to and fortunately they were drafted to the Shropshire at the same time as myself. Funnily enough two of them were small, well I say smaller and shorter than I am,

- 16:00 but older. I was only seventeen and four or five months, but they were eighteen, and because of that you were allowed to drink if you were in the services, but you weren't if you were seventeen. But fortunately for myself I didn't drink alcohol, that came later when I was in the navy. My little friend John Collins, who had the same name as the captain of our ship, which caused a few

- 16:30 complications later on. When we were allowed up the lines from Flinders Naval Depot to Melbourne, they could go into a hotel and drink, but I couldn't. It didn't worry me, but a couple of times I went into a hotel with them and they wouldn't serve them because they reckoned they were underage, when in fact they weren't. They said, "We will serve you but not them." So I had to buy their drinks

- 17:00 for them and a lemonade for my friend over here, who was myself. So I had to buy their beer for them while I drank lemonade. So that was two little mates, and another fellow was an ex-army man. He was a big boy and somehow or other he got into the army when he was fifteen and he was up in Darwin, even when the air raids

- 17:30 were on in Darwin, the first air raids and eventually he looked like not getting anywhere else but Australia, so he said, "Blow this." He was under age actually, he was still only seventeen after about two years in the army, and so he went and confessed that he was under age to be in the army. So they discharged him and another fellow. That was Vince Highland, and Bruce Anderson,

- 18:00 and Bruce was also a fellow who had been in the army and didn't look like he would get anywhere apart from Charters Towers in Queensland. So he went and told them he was underage also and got out, and they went and got into the navy because the navy was taking them at seventeen you see? And even sending you overseas at seventeen. whereas the army was theoretically taking them at eighteen but not sending them anywhere until they were nineteen, and that was Vince Highland's problem -

- 18:30 that he wasn't going to get anywhere until he was nineteen. And so they both got out of the army and got into our class in the navy and we all became firm friends.

Well tell us about these leaves, what did you get up to apart from go to the bar?

Well I think the first thing you did when you got your leave, they didn't allow you to go on leave until

- 19:00 it was a month into your training before you were allowed to go on leave. You had to be able to at least wear your uniform correctly and salute an officer correctly and behave reasonably well, when you went up there. The first thing you do, there is a place called the Powerhouse out near Albert Park Lake, and they used to have a dance and a cheap meal out there and a photograph thing.

- 19:30 So we all went out there and got our photograph taken for a shilling or sixpence or something, so you got your first photograph taken, looking very macaroonish in this straight uniform that we had. So we got our first photograph taken in the navy at the Powerhouse, that was usually the first thing to do. Normally we would go to places where there was a

20:00 cheap meal and entertainment, or go to the movies, or go to a free dance. One of our favourite dances was out at Moonee Ponds. Pretty well every dance that was on was free for servicemen. If it wasn't free it was very close. The places that we had to stay overnight, they were only sixpence or a shilling a night to stay there, and they often provided breakfast included in

20:30 that shilling, or one shilling and threepence or something.

Were you meeting any girls?

Yes I did meet a few girls down there, funnily enough one was a red head like my wife but I didn't meet my wife until many years later. Met a girl from Sunshine, a red haired girl by the name of Shirley and a girl called

21:00 Marjory from out at Moonee Ponds, and one took me home to meet her parents there, and one didn't. The one at Moonee Ponds took me home to meet her family and I used to go out to Moonee Ponds where they had dances when they had leave and meet Marjory out there, strangely enough my wife was born in Moonee Ponds and I met her

21:30 several years later, after the war.

And did you keep in contact with these girls?

Yes I did I wrote to them. I think I wrote to about seven different girls at that time, five of them in Sydney and two from Melbourne. And I do recall a

22:00 girl Shirley, I can't even think of her name now. In 1944, Valentines Day, she actually sent me a proposal for marriage. I was only eighteen. And I think I said, "Thanks but no thanks." But I don't know how politely I put it, I

22:30 think I said I was far too young to be getting engaged. I did meet Shirley again when we were on our victory march there in January or February 1946 and she was on the standing in the street and waved to me and sung out my name and I said, "I will meet you on that corner after the victory march."

23:00 Which I did. I only saw her that one time after the victory march. I never seen her again as it turned out. Yes that was a great, it was one of our main pastimes was writing to girls on the ship and I used to write to a number of them in Melbourne and Sydney, particularly Sydney.

And did they know

23:30 **you would write to different girls?**

I don't know about that. I guess my main girlfriend was a girl by the name of Dorothy from Sydney I was very keen on. But I did write to a couple of girls. When I was in the sea scouts we used to go camping sometimes with the girl guides and I had a couple of girl guides that I used to write to and a

24:00 couple of other girls that I met through my various friends in Sydney. They would write to me, there is my address, write to me, often it was nothing more than a friendly letter to some of them but I guess I did write to at least seven of them.

And would you share the letters with your mates?

Sometimes if

24:30 someone didn't get any mail you would share your letters around and that, yeah. But it was fairly scarce on getting mail because moving around so much you often didn't get mail until it was two or three months old. So you often didn't wait until you got a letter before you wrote a letter, one of your main pastimes

25:00 when you were relaxing, you were either doing some form of exercise or playing cards. Playing cards or writing letters.

What happened to Dorothy?

Well I just forget exactly how it happened now but she had a

25:30 number of fellows who were very keen on her too, she was a very attractive young lady and she had a couple of sailors and a couple of airmen that used to also be keen on her and write to her. I think that, when I say fairly poor circumstances as far as finances were concerned, and I think that one of the fellows, his mother had a furniture

26:00 business in one of the suburbs, better not to quote the suburb now I suppose. But his mother had a furniture business and he inherited the furniture business and I think between her and her mother and father they thought she could do better marrying this guy than me, you know.

26:30 I met my wife Phyllis after the victory march and one of my mates came from Melbourne, he came back and got married in December 46 just after we came back from Japan and his wife's sister said, "Can you bring me home a sailor." So I happened to be the one. He said, "How about coming home to a party I ma

having and meet some of the family?" so I

- 27:00 went home and met my future wife there, that was in February 1946. As my wife says at the time, she quite forgot all about it because I was only in Melbourne a few days and it was only when I got transferred back to Flinders Naval Depot
- 27:30 after I had been on the Queenborough I got transferred back to Flinders about June 1946. I renewed my acquaintances with my old shipmate Bruce Anderson and his wife. Bruce's wife's sister who was Phyllis Hodgeson and I ended up going out and staying with my future brother-in-law and his wife's place first, and then
- 28:00 my wife's family invited me to stay at their place on weekends, and I ended up being very much in love with Phyllis. I got transferred again
- 28:30 up to Sydney for discharge and when I got back to Sydney this other girl, Dorothy, had apparently had a change of plans and she contacted me and wanted to get engaged. I said to her, "Well it is a bit late for that I have already met this other girl and I am very much in love with her rather than you now. You more or less gave me
- 29:00 the shaft. I am not committed as far as a ring is concerned but I am more in love with this girl than I am with you, and thank you very much. "And that was the end of that story and she ended up going and marrying this other fellow whose mother had a furniture business.

How had Dorothy given you the news when she gave you the shaft before?

Oh I don't know

- 29:30 I forget now exactly how. I think she said something like, "I don't think we're quite suited for each other." Something like that and it was hard at the time but life goes on.

Had she told you that when you had returned?

Yeah she told me that before I was transferred to Flinders Naval

- 30:00 Depot, I just forget the actual period that she told me., I think it was when I actually came back from this victory cruise and we came back to Sydney around about March and after I was transferred from the Shropshire to the destroyer Queenborough around about that
- 30:30 period I think. It is very hard, I didn't write all of those things down, what happened when and where.

And just quickly on girls again what happened with that girl you saw after the victory march?

Well I think how it happened as I say it was so soon immediately after victory march we had a photo taken which I still have to this day of Bruce Anderson who later become my brother-in-law and

- 31:00 Johnny Collins and I think that was immediately after this march and I think it was at that stage that Bruce said, "How about coming home and coming to a party?" I said, "I can't come today because I have made arrangements with this girl here waiting on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Street or something. I can come out the next day or
- 31:30 next time I get leave." So I saw her that afternoon and the next leave I had was probably two or three days' time and he said, "How about coming home?" and I met his wife and his wife's sister
- 32:00 that became my wife. I think I took a liking to her more than the other redhead and I never ever phoned her. In fact I don't know whether she had a phone or I had to go to an address. Very few people had the phone, we didn't have the phone on, and my future brother-in-law he didn't have the phone on. It was always a matter of mail,
- 32:30 you always had to write to someone and say "I will meet you in a few days time" or something like that. So that's the way it happened.

And you mentioned that Phyllis had said she wanted a sailor, so had your uniform and service helped?

Well her father was also a navy man, he was a petty officer in the navy, he was a stoker petty officer and he had been in the

- 33:00 navy since 1919 and he got out in 1926 the year that Phyllis was born. He was in the fleet reserve between the wars which some of us used to call 'Saturday afternooners', they used to go down on Saturday afternoons or every second Saturday afternoon and do a bit of training and then go down to Flinders Naval Depot for four
- 33:30 weeks' training every year. So he was in what they called the fleet reserve. And he was called up the first day the war started. They sent him a telegram on the first day and he went back into the navy around about 6th of September 1939. The family was navy oriented, my future brother-in-law, his brother, was navy too and so sort of everything

34:00 revolved around that I guess. She had lived navy all of her life because her father's friends were ex-navy men also, so I guess that's the way it went.

Where were you posted after basic training, what was the next step?

34:30 Well immediately after, you have three months basic training and then you have a fortnight's leave, I went back to Sydney for a fortnight's leave. As did all of my engineering class, who all came from Sydney or New South Wales. As soon as we went back to Flinders Naval Depot we were immediately drafted to HMAS Shropshire

35:00 which had just arrived from England and was tied up to Garden Island in Sydney Harbour. And so we immediately got on the train to Sydney, overnight train and went straight onto the Shropshire. The navy has a habit of doing things the hard way and instead of landing us on Garden Island and walking us up the

35:30 ramp that was ship that was tied up on Garden Island, they took us out on Man o' War steps which is basically where the Opera House is now, out on a motor launch and we had to then climb a ladder on the side of Shropshire. Once up the ladder with our hammock, and the next time up the ladder with our kit bag.

36:00 And gasmask and helmet and whatever else you had. As I say they always made it difficult for you to do things. They could have just as easily driven us to Garden Island and walked up the gangway, but that's not the navy way. So that was our introduction to the Shropshire.

Why did they make you do that do you think?

Well the navy just likes doing things the hard way I suppose, I mean you have got to learn that at some stage you have got to

36:30 climb the ladder, and not only climb it but climb it with a kit bag on your back. And of course you had one hand on the ladder and you crawled up there one step at a time. I suppose we were on a quarterdeck which is at the back of the ship where the officers congregate and I think it is a matter of their amusement to see the sailors doing it the hard way.

37:00 Not only that, when you got up there with your kit bag or your hammock you then had to salute the flag or the quarterdeck, as well as have your kit bag or hammock, and then wander off to wherever you were allocated.

Was this the first ship you were ever on?

Yes apart from the Manly ferry it was the first ship that I can recall.

What was the feeling like being on there?

37:30 Awesome really because it had a draft of about twenty-two feet and height to what they call the upper deck, it must have been around about thirty feet to go from the water line up there. So it was quite awesome to see the size of it. It was something like six hundred and sixty feet long, or say two hundred

38:00 metres long, and twenty metres wide and about four decks down from the upper deck down to the bottom of the ship and so it was pretty overwhelming experience. Instead of going up steps suddenly ladders and ladders aren't anything like steps, I mean the nearest thing to a

38:30 step was a ladder that went at that angle. They were ladders and they had a chain on the side for you to hang on if you had a hand to hang on. And you had to get used to negotiating ladders that steep or pretty well that steep. Pretty well vertical. And you went from being a land lover you

39:00 might say, to being a seagoing or seafaring person, rather than seafaring, in one great step.

And what was the feeling as you looked at it and went on the launch out to the Shropshire?

I never quite realised how big it was, I had seen them all in the distance in my earlier experience wandering around Sydney as a junior clerk, but to get

39:30 close to them and get inside them, they were quite enormous. I think about the first thing they said about your hammock, we had to pitch our hammock there for a couple of days because it was only four days I suppose before we had to leave to go up into the tropics. We pitched our hammocks for about four days and then after

40:00 that we were told to put our hammocks into what they call sea stowage, and just keep our spare hammock cover out and that was our bed for the next two and a half years. The hammocks were too hot in the tropics and not only that we didn't have enough room for them because the ship was designed for something like seven hundred men and our wartime complement reached something like twelve hundred and twenty men at one stage.

40:30 There wasn't enough room to pitch hammocks. And they were put away in sea stowage and from there on you just slept on the deck wherever you could find a place.

Tape 4

00:30 **What sort of orientation did they give you on your first day on the Shropshire?**

The first day that I can recall was to do with oiling the ship. Not that they were from what I can recall

01:00 oiling it, but they were showing us how they oiled the ship. There was a man on the ship, he was a first class stoker and his name incidentally was Joe Virgin, and he later changed his name when he got married to Vergon, maybe for obvious reasons when you think of it. However Joe Virgin was the first man that I met on the ship

01:30 and he introduced himself and we had a bit of a giggle and I said, "Hello, Chief." And he said, "Don't call me chief!" That's when, as I say, at Flinders Naval Depot call everyone Chief and you can't go wrong. And he said, "Don't call me chief, call me Joe." And we thought, "He is a nice fellow letting us call him Joe rather than chief because we just had to soon get out of the habit", because they said, "Call them chief unless they tell you to call

02:00 them something else," So that was my first insight into the ship that I can recall.

And what sort of things did they get you to do on the first day?

They show you around, we had what they call a 'cafeteria messing system' which is the only ship in the Australian navy that had it. All other ships had what they call a mess deck messing system where

02:30 the stokers lived on this mess deck, might have had two mess decks depending on the size of the ship and the seamen had several mess decks where they lived, slept, wrote their letters, ate, the whole thing. But we had a cafeteria messing system so we all ate in one big room. It went from one side of the ship to the other, it was probably fifty metres long

03:00 and twenty metres wide or something like that. And so everybody ate in this one place and we had a tray that had six different holes in it and stainless steel tray and you went up and got your meals in that. So they showed us how the cafeteria system worked. And where the lockers were, they had what they called locker flats and you only had a small locker, probably

03:30 I have to speak in feet, about a foot wide and about a foot deep and maybe three feet wide and five feet high, or something like that. There was probably two in that space; one for you and one for somebody else, and that was your wardrobe if you like, and your living space. Showed us where that was, I think

04:00 We had to wait a few days before we were actually allocated a locker and I think it was some months before we were allocated a locker in what they called the 'stokers mess deck'. We really thought we had graduated when we had a locker down where the big boys were. And so they gave us a run around the ship and showed us the engine room and the boiler room and

04:30 where they make ice, and how they had dynamos to make electricity, and how they made freshwater out of salt water. A ship couldn't carry very much fresh water and so you have to make your own water out of salt water. Where not to go, and where to go.

Where were you not to go?

Well the in the main and the aft end of the ship, the back end or the blunt end where the officers lived and you

05:00 weren't allowed down to that end unless you had a duty down in that particular end, and you weren't allowed to cross a brass strip. They had a brass strip where the quarterdeck started or finished and you weren't allowed to go past there. Only officers, or if you were invited down there probably for some disciplinary action. You weren't allowed to go down there or where the officers' quarters were, unless

05:30 it was your job. It was my job at one time to wake up the officers so that they had to go on watch. You had to learn you were never allowed to touch an officer, you could touch someone, shake one of your mates but you weren't allowed to touch one of the officers. You had to sing out or shine a torch in his face until he woke up. But it was an assault to put a hand on an officer to wake him up.

06:00 So they taught you all of these things and they taught you in a hurry.

And how long did it take before you managed to find your way around the ship?

I guess I had to find out pretty quickly because within four days we were at sea, and I was a chief stokers' mess man. They had an

06:30 experienced first class stoker in there as well as myself, I was a third class stoker, seventeen and getting three and sixpence a day. And they put me in there as the chief stokers' mess man. And Don Vernon was the other stoker and Don had to tell me all of the protocol: how to serve up the chief

stokers' meals, we had to go and get their meal

- 07:00 from the galley. When I said about the cafeteria system, all of the ratings, like leading stokers and below, ate in the cafeteria, but the petty officers, the chief petty officers, ate in their own mess room. And so we had to serve the chief petty officers up and we actually had to eat in the chief petty officers mess also for the first part rather
- 07:30 than the cafeteria. And as soon as it was dusk on the first night, straight to 'action stations'. Well my action station was in a four inch shell magazine which I found quite a frightening experience, for the first day, to go down into a four inch shell magazine, and they lock you in. They let you down there but then they lock everything for safety. See dawn and dusk is the
- 08:00 most dangerous time for being attacked by a submarine, particularly, or even a ship or an aircraft, because in the half light it is difficult to see and you may not have sighted this particular craft. And so you had dawn and dusk action station pretty much the entire time you were at sea. And so while you were down there
- 08:30 they showed us the four inch projectiles and how they worked and how you had to put them into a shoot up to the four inch gun deck, which is several decks up.

Well tell me about this procedure, what did you have to do?

Well as far as handling the shells we sometimes just had to do it for practice, send them up and get them back again. But there were various types.

- 09:00 There were semi armour piercing shells that were harder shells that can penetrate steel. And they had other shells that were barrage shells again anti-aircraft, and they were explosive shells, and then they had star shells so that they could illuminate the sky with them. They showed us all of the various shells. To set them we had a little gauge, you had to set
- 09:30 them so that they would explode or the star shell would ignite at a certain number of thousands of feet. And how to distinguish between the colours, so you didn't send up a semi armour piercing shell instead of a star shell or a high angle high explosive high angle shell, you had to differentiate between the various shells and put them up
- 10:00 through the shoot and then bring them back down again, because it was just a practice. It was a pretty frightening experience because you're so far down, you're below the water line and they are worried about submarines, and you think how do you get out and somebody says, "You don't." well if you got hit you wouldn't be getting out of there so it was quite a
- 10:30 frightening experience the first few days you know. It took us about a week I think to get to Milne Bay up in New Guinea because we pulled into Moreton Bay Brisbane area to do some gunnery training over there, put a couple of ships over there for a couple of days before we left for
- 11:00 New Guinea. We used to have this dawn and dusk action stations until we got into Milne Bay and then we didn't have them so frequently unless you were called to action stations. If there was an enemy aircraft sighted or some strange aircraft or land craft or sea craft sighted, we went to action station, but you didn't do it as
- 11:30 thoroughly like you did when you were at sea. So that was our introduction to the ship.

And how did this mechanism work that sent the shells up?

Well it was a hydraulic system, I don't know whether you remember, you are probably too young to remember years ago in department stores they used to put your money and change in a

- 12:00 chute and shoot it through to a cashier. Well it was a similar thing, but it was a closed chute and it just went straight up instead of around corners. And it went up about four decks and then they had somebody up on the top deck, where I had the pleasure of having a short period up on the top deck receiving the shell up there, and then you
- 12:30 handed it to the seamen and the gunners who did their job. In other words our job was to supply them with shells.

And at what kind of intervals would you send them up, if you were going into action?

Well if you were in action it was a matter of how fast they needed them. I would only be guessing but they would probably fire ten rounds a minute

- 13:00 or something like that, for the four inch shells. The eight inch shells they could fire four or five shells a minute you know. So it depended on what sort of action it was. If it was a bombardment and you're just firing at the shore establishment, I mean you might only fire one every minute or one every two or three minutes, depending on what they were
- 13:30 calling on. They would be in touch with somebody in a spotting aircraft telling you where the shells had landed or where they wanted you to land them, and changing the direction. And so it depended on what was happening. If it happened to be when the suicide planes or the kamikaze planes started attacking

us, it could be as fast as they could shoot them and it could be

- 14:00 five or ten rounds a minute that they could be firing from the four inch shells. Some of the smaller armoury would be firing like a typewriter or a machine gun, very fast, one per second or something like that.

And how did the communication work between the top deck and where you were?

Mainly we had a sort of a whistle.

- 14:30 Like a voice pipe with a whistle and so when someone wanted to contact you from the top they would blow this whistle and you would be able to talk into this voice pipe. Most of the departments were like that rather than telephones, but the important departments had telephones. Mainly it was through whistle voice pipe or an indicator, an indicator that said
- 15:00 something or other, they could change an indicator up top to tell you what they required, but that was mainly in the boiler room or the engine room, where they used an indicator to tell you that they wanted more steam or less steam, or they wanted you to make white smoke or black smoke or no smoke. They had indicators like that in the boiler room, but mainly by whistle in the shell room. The main reason for
- 15:30 that is that they don't want anything electrical. It was hydraulic rather than electrical and if you have something electrical down there chances are it might cause an explosion, so you didn't have anything electrical in the eight inch magazine or the four inch magazine. Especially so in the eight inch magazine because they had great big packets of what they call gun wads or explosives.
- 16:00 And so even the people down there had to have special boots on, like made out of blanket that they wore on their feet, nothing that could create a spark.

And how big was the space in the four-inch magazine?

Pretty crowded from what I recall. I think it was probably the size of a large

- 16:30 bathroom, you might say a small motel room, or something like that. There wasn't much room in there really, mainly all shells and I think there was around about six of us, about six of us pretty well shoulder to shoulder in the room.

And why did it require six of you?

- 17:00 Well they had people to do various things : they had someone to get the shell out of the position and another to probably check it to see if it was the right shell, and then another one to set it and another person to send it up top. But you have got to realise that they had eight four inch guns up top, so I
- 17:30 think they had one four inch shell room on either side. I was only in the port shell room and I think it had one either side, so we had to supply shells for four gun barrels and so you had to do it in a hurry and you had to make sure no one made a mistake. So I think we had two chutes and we had three men on each chute.
- 18:00 One chute would be supplying, they were in turrets of two, one chute would be supplying one turret with the two four inch gun, and the other would be supplying the other turret.

It was dawn and dusk, how long would you spend in there each time?

It would depend, usually around about an hour.

- 18:30 And particularly I suppose in the morning because you had to go in there well before dawn until it was clear daylight where the seamen could actually see the distance to the horizon from where they were stationed up on the bridge, so they could see right to the horizon in case there was any firstly, any
- 19:00 submarines or mines, which could have been close by: also so that they could see right out to the horizon, so they could see the mast of a ship, preferably the mast not a whole ship if it happened to be an enemy ship. Or a mast or even that they could see smoke, if they could see smoke, that was something they would have to investigate.

- 19:30 **Sometimes you would send shells up to practice, what would you do if there was nothing going on?**

Well mostly just be there, just talking. We certainly weren't allowed to smoke. All you could do was talk or smoke or have as happy a time as you possibly could.

What was the temperature like in there?

Very hot, there was no air conditioning on the ship.

- 20:00 There was a control I must say in the shell room, so that it didn't get too hot. But you were still a lather of sweat down there but they made sure that it didn't get above a certain temperature. Funnily enough, one of the coolest places on the ship was what they called a fan flat, which was above the boiler room. You have to have a

- 20:30 lot of air in the boiler room, you can't burn something without oxygen, and so above it you had what they called a fan flat and forced air down into the boiler rooms, not into the engine rooms, the boiler rooms. And so there were a couple of places in the boiler room that were the coolest places on the ship. Strangely enough even though you're making super heated steam, which was several hundred degrees of heat and
- 21:00 it was pretty hot all over the boiler room, there were a couple of places where these big wind chutes came down and there was a cool breeze, but usually there was a stoker petty officer standing underneath, that was his spot. And they had two of those and there was a stoker petty officer and we had to stand, sometimes we would snuggle up to the stoker petty officer so we could get a bit of cool air.
- 21:30 We were usually out in front of the furnace, turning on what they called sprayers or taps if you like, each one had about nine taps on it and we had to turn these sprayers on and off and clean around the cones and that sort of thing. It is pretty hot there, sometimes you had dark glasses, but
- 22:00 usually you just had ordinary eyesight, no protection.

And where about were you allowed to smoke on the ship?

At sea you can never smoke up on deck. It was always pipes out or lamps out, as they call it. During wartime the ship didn't even carry navigation lights. You had to be in touch with each

- 22:30 other by signal or the seaman looking out with binoculars would see where the other ships were, but quite often they didn't even have navigation lights on deck. The only thing alight would be a hospital ship, if you saw something coming bright and shiny, it would be a hospital ship. Even merchant ships, sometimes they would carry their port and
- 23:00 starboard lights and their mast headlights, but generally speaking they would be blacked out completely. So your lookouts or the radar as you call it, fortunately we had the best radar in the Pacific Ocean, I can tell you about that later, but we had the best radar and so we could detect planes or ships or surface craft or
- 23:30 aircraft for anything up to a hundred miles away, which was quite an advantage.

And were you at night allowed up on deck?

Yes there was certain restrictions. I just forget at this stage but on the upper deck we had what was called a

- 24:00 canteen where you could buy goffers we called them, lolly water, but that's all that was served on the ship. Like soda water if you like, red and green port and starboard lolly water, and they had a canteen where perhaps you could buy cigarettes or lollies or potato chips or something like that. That was on the upper deck, but it was
- 24:30 closed off, it had a dark cloth like you might have here, so no light was showing. You usually had a double cloth, things like that wherever they were, double doors so wherever you opened one door you closed that and went to another door, things like that so no light shone through the door. You were allowed on deck quite a bit but I just forget what the restrictions were about when. It just depends on the situation.
- 25:00 Whether you were in a more dangerous area, you had what they called certain degrees of readiness and if you had a third degree of readiness then you were probably allowed up on the upper deck somewhere. But there was only a certain amount allowed at a time, so that you were reasonably close to your action stations.
- 25:30 **And with the ship being blacked out, what sort of things could you see of the ocean at night?**
- The main thing was porpoises. Fortunately the Pacific Ocean lives up to its name of being very pacific, very blue and calm most of the time. But when it gets angry it gets very angry, like when you get a typhoon or something like that. But on a clear night you can see millions of stars
- 26:00 and flying fish and even though we were about thirty feet above the water sometimes the flying fish would land on the deck. And one of the most interesting things were porpoises that would actually get right near the bows of the ship and go past the ship. Usually not so much at sea but as you get out of harbour or in a harbour.
- 26:30 Sometimes quite a distance out at sea the porpoises will be there. All you can see is their iridescent wake or another ship in the distance, they tried to stay that far apart that you didn't run into each other. You were nearly always in some sort of a convoy or a naval group and you had to stay a
- 27:00 certain distance apart for safety, and we had to zig zag all of the time when you were at sea because of submarines, something like every eight or ten minutes you changed course. A submarine needed a certain time to get a bead on you, so you were zig zagging all of the time, so you had to make sure the other ships there they usually signal
- 27:30 them by radio or something like that to change course, or make some arrangement for changing course

they would say, "Change course to a certain degree." And they all had to change course at the same time as you can imagine, otherwise they would be heading for each other and collision. It wasn't much of a change

28:00 of scenery at night time because although you could see a ship in the distance, a silhouette, that's all. And see stars, millions of stars and the bow wave of the ship and that's about it.

And what does it feel like to be out in the middle of the ocean?

Well it is quite terrific most of the time. If you ever want proof that the world is round I mean out there everything is completely round, everywhere you look

28:30 is an exactly circle where you look out at sea, you look at the ocean and you see it has got a slight curve in it, when you're out at sea it is perfectly round. Depending on what height you are above the water gives just how far you can see but it was still perfectly round whatever you saw. All you saw in the day time was the other ships that were with you in what was called your task force, that's all you would see.

29:00 **And aside from dawn and dusk, can you take me through a typical day, the division of time?**

Well generally you had eight hours of duty per day and you had

29:30 four hours on duty and eight hours off duty. Let's say I was in the boiler room looking after the boilers. I would be on for four hours and then off for eight hours, but I would probably have some other duty while I am off in that time, it might be even sweeping or cleaning a mess deck or a locker flat

30:00 or something like that. Or cleaning a bathroom or something like that. You had some other duty that probably took you about an hour somewhere along the line, so it wasn't always easy to get some sleep, but usually those duties were when you were on day shifts rather than night shifts. Say you were on the afternoon shift from four o'clock and eight o'clock,

30:30 then you had the opportunity to sleep between eight o'clock or ten o'clock. Quite often the ship was lit up down below until ten o'clock, and then they doused enough light just so that you could see vaguely and then people could sleep and from about ten o'clock until dawn stand to, it

31:00 would be pretty dark down there. And you usually had to go and sleep fairly close to your action stations. I mean we didn't have to go down and sleep in the magazine, but we had to sleep close to it in case they called action stations. Most of the time you were in third degree of readiness or second degree of readiness, and so you are close to your action station not actually in your action station.

31:30 So you would have four hours on eight hours off, that was your day's duty and in the meantime you had to eat, sleep, write letters and probably a one hour duty of something else. That was generally a day's routine. The awkward day was to speak in nautical terms

32:00 was when the split the dogs. Dog watches are between four o'clock and eight o'clock of an evening, and the reason for that is so that you're not doing the same duty all of the time. Once a week they split the dogs. So if you were on the dog watch, normally from four o'clock to eight o'clock the afternoon watch, you

32:30 would be on watch from four o'clock, and then you would come off and someone else would go one from six to eight and then someone else would go on the watch from eight to midnight. So if you had have been on the dog watch from four till six you would then take over the midnight

33:00 shift instead of the morning shift. So in that time one person would end up doing ten hours for the day, one of the watches and the other watches would do six hours for the day, so that was awkward when you split the dogs because you would do a pretty rough ten hours for the day.

So this was once a week?

Once a week they would do that.

33:30 That was so you weren't doing the same watch all of the time.

What was it like getting used to the sleeping pattern?

Well I don't think it took very long. When you're tired you end up sleeping anywhere. We either had wooden decks or steel, the only wooden deck was the upper deck and that had wood over so many inches of steel, and that was a luxury to sleep on the upper

34:00 deck because you're sleeping on wood. When you slept on the main deck and the lower decks were steel and all you had between you and the steel which was pretty hot really was, in the tropics, was what they called a spare mattress cover, just a piece of canvas which was about six foot long and three foot wide and you used to have to fold it over so it was eighteen inches wide. If

34:30 you were lucky enough to find a spot somewhere to lie down you just had to lie on your back because it was pretty hard lying sideways on a wooden or a steel deck, so you just had to learn to sleep on your back and you usually blew up your life jacket, you blew it up and that was your pillow. You usually had

to sleep with your gas mask and your steel helmet or tin hat as we called it, and your

35:00 life jacket with you when you were at sea. And you blew it up to sleep on it but you let it down straight away because if you ever had to abandon ship you never tried to abandon ship with your life jacket blown up or you would break your neck. You jump in the water with it deflated and

35:30 then you let it up when you got in there you had to learn those things, otherwise you would break your neck very quickly.

And what if you had to sleep during the day?

Well you just got used to it.

Would other people respect?

Not much, they didn't respect it much unless you could find a quiet corner somewhere which was pretty hard because you had a lot of fellows who had different duties on the

36:00 ship that didn't constitute necessarily the watches that some of us were keeping. They would have a different routine and they were either playing cards and playing some illegal games like crown and anchor or poker for money, or something else that they weren't supposed to be doing. Or chatting or writing letters, skylarking, signing

36:30 or fighting, have a disagreement about something and even coming to blows. So they didn't give you much respect of a daytime. They reckoned you had night time for sleeping. Even if you had the midnight watch which was from midnight to four am at least they reckoned you had a bit of time before and after to sleep. It was probably the quietest time, from midnight to four am was probably the quietest time when people did give you a

37:00 certain amount of respect. As I said before I had the duty of having to wake up the watch sometimes and so people would have to tell you where they were sleeping, so you had a fairly permanent position to say well I would be sleeping within fifty feet of that place. So

37:30 you would have to go and look where the fellows were sleeping and I had to wake up the watch. Then I could get permission to go down to the officers' quarters because I had to wake up one or two officers. They would sleep in Cabins Officer and I would have to go into the cabins and start talking before I got in there, say, "Lieutenant so and so are you awake?" and generally speaking they would say, "Yes, I am awake thankyou." And away you would go.

38:00 Either that or you have to go close, not within a certain distance, and sing out and shine your torch, "Hey!" And wake up the officer.

How many people would you have to wake up for a watch?

It depended, around about a dozen. And they could be sleeping anywhere, any spot close to their actions stations.

And when would they let you know where they were sleeping?

38:30 They would have to let you know the night before. We would have the same watch for a week so they would let us know where they would sleep for the next week, unless they had a change of plans, of which they would advise you. So you had a list of

39:00 where they were sleeping, I mean to say a ship that is two hundred metres long, there is quite a few places they could sleep and various decks where they were sleeping, you know. And they would get into trouble if they weren't sleeping where they said, usually you had to go and wake them up half an hour before their watch came on. A lot of them had the habit of coming down before their watch was due, maybe a quarter of an hour. You were always expected to

39:30 be there at least five minutes before your watch began, maybe a quarter of an hour sometimes, so the other fellow could tell you what the situation was at the time, what you had to look out for. As I say, usually about half an hour before your watch was finished. But that only happened between

40:00 the evening watch and four am in the morning, at other times they would be awake so they were the only times.

Tape 5

00:30 **Once you got posted to the Shropshire and you were on board for those few days, tell us about where you first went to from Sydney?**

Well I was only on there for about four days and then we went to New Guinea. But we called into

01:00 Moreton Bay and did a bit of gunnery practice with a couple of other ships there; and then we headed straight off for Milne Bay in New Guinea.

And did you know where you were heading?

Very rarely do you know where you're heading until you're almost there, and that happens on nearly every occasion. There is always secrecy in wartime and you just don't know.

01:30 **Tell us about that first journey, what was it like for you first time out at sea?**

Well it was pretty exciting really. Just settling into the routine of not sleeping in a bed or a hammock but sleeping on a steel deck or a wooden deck. You can't really roll over onto your side because you are sleeping on a board or a steel plate, you know it

02:00 took a little bit of getting used to. And you couldn't turn the lights on or off, whenever you felt like it. It was just a matter of getting into a routine really. The commanding officer or the officer of the day just said turn the lights on or off and you just did it. It was fairly regimented.

And what did you think of the life out at sea, getting used to this?

02:30 It was very good. In the first place you're just sitting out in the sunshine and everything was calm on the way up there, beautiful. Trip up there was magnificent and blue ocean and clear skies at night and some of the flying fish as I said, landing on our decks and things like that. Amazing how high and far they can travel, we were about

03:00 thirty feet up the main deck and they were flying up and landing up there.

And what did you think when you arrived at Milne Bay, what did it look like?

It is a long approach to it, it is what they call the China Straits going in, there is a lot of islands going in there and our Australian General,

03:30 Thomas Blamey had his headquarters just near the mouth of it. Samarai I think was the name of the island. He had his headquarters there, it took sometimes a couple of hours to go through the straits and that's where the porpoises started frolicking in front of the ships coming in there. That was my first impression, it seemed to be jungle all

04:00 over the place, mangroves and jungle. We never saw any civilisation. We were always anchored out too far from the base there, we were too far out to see any civilisation there. Unless you had the opportunity to look through the large binoculars they had up on the bridge, but usually it was taboo to go up there and have a look.

04:30 Sometimes you used to go up to the searchlights and they had a telescope you could look through there, there was very little as far as civilisation was concerned.

So would you get ashore?

Never went ashore. Two and a half years that I was on Shropshire apart from going on leave in Sydney on two occasions

05:00 and then the third time we came back I sometimes didn't go ashore for three months, six months nine months. There was no where much to go, nothing much in the place we were in, not like we were in cities. And there was very little opportunity to go ashore in any case unless there was the mailman or somebody allocated to bring stores from

05:30 ashore or movies, movies on the fo'c's'le but nobody ever got an opportunity to go ashore. I think at one stage we spent nine months on the ship without going ashore. Sometimes you hear now that they are over in Iraq and they have been there for three months. I am not belittling them but it does seem rather small when we used to

06:00 do three months, six months, nine months and never go ashore, that seemed to be pretty routine.

What affect does not going ashore for that long have on you?

I guess we looked at it and thought there was not much for us to have a look at ashore in any case, apart from a bit of a coral beach and stunted trees and not

06:30 only that there was a lot of mosquitoes ashore. That's one good thing on a ship once you're a mile or two off shore there is no concerns about mosquitoes or flies, if you didn't go ashore you didn't have to worry about malaria. If you went ashore you had to wear long sleeved shirts which generally speaking we didn't have, so near sundown you had to roll the sleeves down to keep the mosquitoes off

07:00 to make sure you didn't get malaria. On board ship all we wore all of the time was just a pair of shorts usually. A pair of shorts and a pair of sandals usually because of the heat of the hot plates, you just wore a pair of sandals and shorts and that was the full

07:30 rig of the day in the tropics. But one did have the tendency to get too much sunshine and too much sun tan and sometimes with all of the steam heat was prone to get what they call prickly heat, which is like

getting little prickle pimply things all over your body. If you were down between decks too long

08:00 sweating it out and then going up and getting some sunshine you would end up scratching yourself away and the more you scratched the worse it got.

Were there any jokes about this condition?

Yes there have been but I just forget what they were now, in the first place somebody would say, "Oh you have been ashore with bad company",

08:30 but just about everyone was breaking out with it at some time.

And I guess with everybody's shirt off, did you see some interesting tattoos?

Yes I did see a couple of very interesting tattoos, not only went around with only your shorts but when we went to the bathroom everybody was completely naked and there might have been twenty or thirty people in the bathroom

09:00 at the one time and you would see a few tattoos and that. And I recall one fellow he had a dotted line around his neck there. And apparently he told us that his wife used to threaten to cut his throat so he had this dotted line he put around and put 'cut' along dotted line on there. Another one with a pair of eyes on his bottom, with "bare off".

09:30 if something was getting too close it said, "bare off, nothing doing". And another one with a big mosquito right around his stomach here with his penis as the sting for the mosquito. You ask me about funny. And then we had another poor fellow he had a number of tattoos,

10:00 I don't think there was anything spectacular about them but he broke out in boils and the poor fellow was most upset because the boils were ruining a lot of tattoos and all of the boils broke out and were bursting out through his tattoos and ruining his tattoos.

Did you get a tattoo?

No never. I would imagine it would only be about ten percent, I

10:30 imagine there were less people getting tattoos in the navy then there are today with even women. It would have been unheard of for a woman to get a tattoo, but now I think one out of two, you walk down the street and they all seem to have a tattoo.

You mentioned the one with the eyes on his bottom, he was making reference to?

Somebody not getting too close and attacking him.

11:00 **Were there any blokes to watch on board with homosexuality?**

Well I heard there was. For all of the strange stories they tell about these sorts of things, I didn't see and certainly wasn't involved in anything like that. But I know, when I say know from a friend's acquaintance of mine that told me, that there was one particular fellow on board

11:30 that was a bit of a fairy, but I never ever seen any activity but I heard some amusing stories.

Well did you know this man?

I seen this fellow but I didn't know him personally.

Well what sort of jokes did they make about him?

12:00 Well I couldn't repeat them really but he was known as Blossom. Without mentioning any names. He was quite, notorious or well known for apparently playing leapfrog or something.

Was he tolerated?

12:30 Well apparently, they said he had a few lovers.

So we were talking earlier about arriving in Milne Bay what role was the Shropshire playing in the war just after you got there?

Well mainly doing exercises with two American cruisers, and I think about four of their destroyers and Australian

13:00 ships, another cruiser HMAS Australia and two destroyers Warramunga and Arunta. And we formed what was called a task force. I think we were originally called 74, and later on 78 times three. 7 referred to the Seventh Fleet. We were actually attached to the US Seventh Fleet and we basically did whatever the American Seventh Fleet commanders told us to do.

13:30 **And how was this command structure organised?**

I don't know about the command structure, they never confided in me about what they were going to do, I was only a third class stoker and that was left to the captains and commodores and so forth.

Well speaking of the captain, what was your impression of him?

Well we had three captains, I mentioned earlier I had a

- 14:00 stoker mate by the name of John Collins and when we first went on board we had Captain John Collins who was a very famous captain, he was the captain of the HMAS Sydney that sunk an Italian or played a major part in the sinking of an Italian cruiser called the Bartolomeo Colleoni in the Mediterranean. And he was quite a
- 14:30 well known captain and later on he was promoted to commodore which means he is above captaining the ship, he is a flag officer and we got another captain. We had three captains, Captain John Collins, Captain Showers, and Captain Nichols. The first two were both Australians and Captain Nichols was an Englishman,
- 15:00 Royal Navy. I found them all to be very good. In fact Captain Collins was only on the ship a couple of weeks and I mentioned before about our very strict 'pusa' [standard issue] uniform it is very navy like, otherwise it is called 'tiddly' gear when you get it all jazzed up and I was wearing my pusa gear ashore just a few days after I went on the ship and
- 15:30 strangely enough the captain said, "Stoker. Haven't you a better suit to wear than that? Haven't you got a tiddly suit?" And I said, "Yes captain." And he said, "Well next time you go ashore stoker, you go ashore in your tiddly suit." So I mean he was all for looking smart, and looked like experienced sailors, not like they just joined the navy.

16:00 So what did you think of him as a man, from your occasions of running into him?

- I didn't run into him often at all. If you ran into the captain you were probably in trouble. They had something called 'commander's defaulters' or 'captain's defaulters' if you did something wrong they would call you, "Off cap!" and up before the captain or the commander. The only other experience
- 16:30 I can ever recall him talking to me, we had a Sunday parade and he had came back as Commodore, as Flag Officer at the time. But I was wearing the tiddly suit that he had told me to wear and I had it made ashore at a naval tailor's called
- 17:00 Vic Truman's in Pitt Street Sydney. And the tailor at the time said, "Look I have got a very nice piece of navy serge here, it is not enough to make an officer's suit but it is enough to make round rig, so I will make you up a suit out of that." And at the time I looked at it and didn't realise it wasn't navy blue it was black.
- 17:30 Rather than navy blue which was the actual colour and I happened to stand out a bit in this uniform because it was a very smartly cut uniform and he was going along and he stopped right in front of me and I thought "I am gone". And he said, "Stoker where did you get your suit made?" "Vic Truman, naval tailor, Pitt Street Sydney sir." "Very neat, very tiddly, carry on."
- 18:00 And I just about collapsed. I thought I was going to be in trouble, apart from just seeing him wandering around the ship, he would go around having a chat to the fellows; but he never spoke personally to me apart from those two occasions. But I thought he was very good, I thought they were all very good actually. Captain Nichols was
- 18:30 perhaps the most revered captain, you might say, of the three that we had. Because we went through much heavier action with Captain Nichols in command. Personally I often thought to myself I would have loved to have had an Australian captain on board during these heavier actions, rather than an English captain getting more or less the glory from the other ones who had been on the ship and gone
- 19:00 through rough times, but nowhere near as rough as we were going to go through. But by the time Captain Nichols became the skipper around about August 1944 the ship's company had been together eighteen months from the time they started in England. In fact it goes right back to December 1942
- 19:30 when the first Australian crew went over to take over the Shropshire and they were a very experienced crew by the time Captain Nichols took over. I mean he himself quoted at times, "I am only the captain of the ship and you fellows are all very experienced, and I don't have to tell you what to do, you know."
- 20:00 And so he got on famously with the crew and the other officers because he took the attitude that they all knew their job and he didn't have to tell them.

Why did they include a British captain?

I don't know. Somewhere along because he did say, when he was farewelling the ship, "I thank the Australian Navy board for appointing me to the Shropshire." So somewhere

- 20:30 along the line they must have asked for him but the war at sea was fairly well winding down by August 1944. Although Victory in Europe didn't come until May 1945, the naval part of it was winding down and they were sending
- 21:00 ships over to the Pacific to assist with war in the Pacific. I feel that they may have thought, even the English would have thought, "Well it might have been nice to have an English captain on this ship, the

only ship that was named after a place or a town or a shire in England". Originally it was going to be changed to Canberra to replace the

- 21:30 HMAS Canberra which was sunk at Savo Island in the Battle of Savo in the Solomon Islands, but when Captain Collins was being interviewed by the King and making him CBE [Commander of the British Empire] he asked Captain Collins whether he wanted the ship's name
- 22:00 changed and Captain Collins said, "No I don't want it changed, I think it is bad luck and after all of the money the people of Shropshire spent helping to reequip the ship, I think it would be discourteous to change the name." So the King said, "I shall go back on my word to name it Canberra and I shall ask for it to remain Shropshire."
- 22:30 Now as I say I think the fact that it was an English named ship and the English navy would have thought it would be nice to have an English captain on there. I couldn't see any other reason because the other captains were outstanding captains that had served on other Australian ships with distinction. Like Captain Showers was on there
- 23:00 about five months and they took him off, well they promoted him as far as his actual station was concerned but not to an actual ship at that stage. Captain Showers funnily enough did come back and as captain of the ship when Captain Nichols was relieved of command, when I say relieved, willingly, just before the Shropshire sailed for
- 23:30 England in April 1946 with the victory contingent. The HMAS Shropshire took the victory contingent of four hundred personnel over to England for the victory march. And Captain Showers took over the command of the Shropshire again which I thought was most unusual. As I say I feel rather sorry for Captain Showers that he missed out on

- 24:00 what our gunnery officer used to call as Tiger Country.

One question, when you did the impression of John Collins, you had a bit of a British accent there?

Well he was very correct in his speech; but then most naval officers were Oxford accent at that particular time.

- 24:30 **So all of the officers on board had a bit of that?**

They were taught to speak very correctly. I mean they go in as mid shipmen at thirteen years of age and they are taught to speak rather correctly, so they all did have this rather Oxford accent.

What about the stokers and the seamen, would they have this accent any of them?

- 25:00 No they all spoke Australian as she spoke. We did have a few Englishmen on board, but very few, or people who were educated in England. Or a Cockney accent. We had one stoker on board, although he was Australian he had spent a while in England and he was in the British Royal Navy originally and he had a bit of a cockney accent, or
- 25:30 I think sometimes he used to imitate them. Like you just said, I changed my voice when I was imitating Captain Collins.

And how did you find life on board as a young bloke?

Well it was pretty good, pretty easy. My father used to work at the Maritime Services board not far from where I worked in Sydney in the Rocks area and

- 26:00 oddly enough, he was a truck driver at MSB and there was another driver at MSB who also had a son on the Shropshire and he had been in the navy several years. He was what they called permanent navy, we were just reservists for wartime. And he told my father to tell me to get in touch with 'Spanky' Hearst, I don't know what his real name was, Ron I think. And he said get in touch with 'Spanky' Hearst
- 26:30 and he will look after your kid. Well within a day or two I did presented myself to 'Spanky' Hearst who was a leading stoker and first thing I think 'Spanky' said, "What are you doing with your beer ration, Ron?" And I said, "I don't drink." And he said, "Well what are you going to do with your beer ration?." And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "Well you give it to me, allocate it to me and I will look after you." And not that the beer ration came around very often but
- 27:00 when it did come around I handed my bottle of beer to 'Spanky' Hearst who saw that I was looked after and not bullied or bossed around by anybody, and go and have a words to somebody if they did. But I had very little occasion to get him to look after me. It was quite comforting to think that there was somebody there because there was a few odd
- 27:30 blokes on board that would try you out.

What would they do to try you out?

Because you were let's say seventeen and young and reasonably attractive and slim, and that they

would tell you what they would like to do to you.

And what would they like to do to you?

They would like to screw you or something.

28:00 But I would say, 'Spanky' said to me, "Ask them where do they sleep?" And they would say, "I sleep over there". And you say, "Well good, if you ever have a go at me I have got a wheel spanner I will be parting your head with this wheel spanner, if you ever lay a hand on me." So he sort of set me straight right from go of what to do with them.

28:30 So I didn't have any trouble. You know these fellows, I have often wondered how fair dinkum they were and I guess some of them were, but I didn't have any problems.

Would any of them get sorted out by some of the older fellows like 'Spanky'?

Oh yes that quite often happened and also we had boxing on board, boxing contests, and

29:00 often there would be grudge matches, some reason or other why some other fellow wanted to sort someone out. Some of them weren't boxers at all, but they were street fighters, and it was more like a street fight than a boxing match when they got in the ring.

And where was the ring exactly?

It was in what they called the midship. We had a big area called the torpedo space, and we had eight torpedoes there and it was right on either side of the ship and there was a big area in the centre.

29:30 And it was usually rigged up in the torpedo space.

And how many people would turn up to one of these matches?

Well as many people as could fit around there I guess, particularly if it happened to be a grudge match or something. A temporary ring, and in some cases it wasn't even a ring, but there was some grudge match going on so there would be plenty of onlookers.

And how was this tolerated by the officers?

Well the officers would shut their eyes to a lot of these things. We had what we called gunnery officers or gunnery chief petty officers and they usually

30:00 ran the discipline on the ship and they would organise it if somebody said they had a bit of a grudge and wanted to punch one another, they would organise it. And apparently say to the officers, "Well there is going to be a bit of a grudge match going on," and the officers would probably stay down on the quarter deck while it was

30:30 going on.

Was there much bullying going on?

Yes there were occasions but nearly all bullies got themselves sorted out fairly quickly. In fact one of the fellows who had joined the ship with me, he was a very pretty young fellow, blond curly hair and slim, very attractive young fellow and this particular fellow that was

31:00 bullying him was broad shouldered, about that big and muscles on him, and he was bullying this fellow and this mate of mine was Len Coolie who died just a year or so ago, and something happened to Len Coolie and he said something to the effect of, "You had better get down on your knees and ask for an apology." And Len said something to the effect that

31:30 "I only get on my knees for two things, to pray or if I have been knocked down." And he said, "Well I will soon sort that out." And what he didn't know, and we didn't know at the time that Len was a particular good dancer, and also he was a particularly good boxer. So he gave this fellow quite a good lesson, he just danced him around for quite a while without knocking him out and

32:00 just busted his eyes and nose and said, "Well have you had enough?" he was never bullied again. Things like that went on. As I say you never knew who was full of surprises and I can't recall that fellow ever bullying any of the new fellows that came on the ship after that, you know.

32:30 HE used to hide away quite a bit after that, I mean the older fellows on it would say, "Hey Bluey tell them about the time you gave Coolie a hiding. " you know. Which of course he didn't.

Well did you have to learn to defend yourself in a way, did you have to learn to box?

No not really. I had Len Coolie actually teaching me to box although I wasn't much of a boxer.

33:00 . Generally speaking people could get out of trouble without having to have a fistfight. It is one of those things where when you run out of words you start fighting. In his case, being a bully type he didn't run out of words he just thought he was so good, apparently he had a fight along the line, a

33:30 street fight and thought he was pretty good and thought he was going to pick this little pretty boy and show him up. And things like that usually happened with the bullies, and some of the smarter fellows on ship if they knew that a fellow was a bully and they knew that some fellow could really look after himself, they would say, "Why don't you go and pick this fellow, he can't fight, he is a bit of a girl."

34:00 And they would goad the bully onto picking on some fellow that they would wish they shouldn't have.

We were talking about being in Milne Bay what was some of the first operation the Shropshire was in, you said there was exercises?

Well gunnery exercises or shoot offs, an aeroplane with a drogue [a towed target] on it or a ship

34:30 dragging something like a pontoon behind it and firing at that. Firing at aircraft carrying a drogue behind it, or firing torpedoes or putting out what they called paravanes, things like torpedoes but they are things that come out of the side of the ship to do mine sweeping practice and things like that. We didn't stay at Milne

35:00 Bay long, we went from there over to the Solomon Island, back to the scene where the Canberra was sunk and stayed there for a while and thought there may have been some action over there apparently. We weren't told why we went there we were just sent. We went wherever you were told and and did the job to the best of your ability. And you didn't ask why and you certainly weren't told.

And what job where you doing in the Solomon Islands?

35:30 Well we were only over there for about seven days and apparently they were expecting some Japanese task force to come over that way because we went over there with half of our task force while the other half stayed in Milne Bay. But we used Milne Bay for a base only for a couple of months until we moved onto New Britain and did

36:00 bombardments of Arawe and Cape Gloucester in New Britain to soften up the landing area for a couple of American landings there. That was one of our assignments. And as it turned out I think one of them happened on Christmas Day, and we were there for about a week after Christmas Day firing at

36:30 selected targets. They would contact us by radio and say, they are finding some resistance somewhere and they would give us a grid and say, "It is in four X or something or other, can you do something about that?" and the spotting plane would see how our shots were firing. So we were there for about another week and we had Christmas Day about the 2nd or 3rd of January

37:00 or something like that. But that was no great shake about that, it was just how it is, when something has got to be done it doesn't matter if it is Christmas Day or Good Friday and sometimes I think they did it because just my own assumption, they would say, "Well those Christians would not attack us on Christmas Day, they would be too busy having cake and Christianity on Christmas Day.

37:30 So they won't do that." You often had a feeling that that's why they picked Christmas Day or Good Friday or something like that.

Well how was your Christmas a week later?

Well it was very good in that we had a bottle of beer which I gave to my protector and we ate pretty well on the ship compared to soldiers. Our food was there with us all of

38:00 the time. Sometimes it was in short supply and got fairly monotonous. We had a lot of English food left over from when it was a provision ship in England and we had a lot of English sausages and their tomato juice which we used to call sawdust and red lead because that's what it tasted like and it didn't seem to be very nutritious.

38:30 But come Christmas Day fortunately our ammunition supply ship came and I think we had turkey and what we call pussas duck, plum duck or something for Christmas Day on the 2nd or 3rd or 4th of January. On Christmas Day the officers wait on the men, if you're in harbour or traditionally or whatever

39:00 day your meal actually falls on, the officers serve all of the meal and they actually pick up all of the scraps and the offal and they take it and tip it over the side and they also wash the dishes. The Captain, commander is excluded but the other ranks wait on the men.

Do you give them a bit of cheek?

39:30 Not that I can recall because I mean some of the older men knew where they stood, but I certainly wouldn't have, I had only been on there a couple of months by then, two or three months and I certainly wasn't going to try my luck. I think the first officer I ever met on the ship because I was told everyone is chief, I was calling him chief and he said,

40:00 "Don't call me Chief!" I said, "Sorry Chief." "Don't call me Chief!" "Okay mate, what am I supposed to call you?" He said, "Sir! I am an officer." I said, "Sorry Chief, oh, Sir." That was my first introduction to an officer, first time I had ever met an officer face to face.

40:25 End of tape

Tape 6

00:30 **I am just going to ask a bit more about your job as a stoker, so tell me about the boiler room, what was your job there?**

There is four boilers in each boiler room on the ship I was on, so they had two boiler rooms and so eight boilers and

01:00 four stokers, each looking after one boiler. And the idea that each boiler inside it is a furnace and it is bricked in. The furnace, it is a bit like a little house the way it is set, and it has nine burners on the front of it with a couple of flaps to let the air in. Now if you close those flaps and you still left the sprayer on it would smoke because all of that air that they are forcing down into the

01:30 boiler room has actually got enough air to feed the furnace and the burners that are on. So each time you turn on a boiler to get more steam and obviously to get more power, or more speed on a ship or whatever was being required to be made, you turned on another sprayer and

02:00 you had to watch a gauge. On that boiler it had a gauge so many pounds, let's say that it was two hundred and fifty pounds and you had to see that it didn't go more than five pounds either way. If they started to use more speed without telling us or turning on another, they had four propellers and so those eight boilers were driving four turbines

02:30 who were in turn driving four propellers. So you had to watch that gauge and suddenly it might take a dip and you had to race over and light up a couple of sprayers and undo the flaps so that the air could get in to make more steam.

When you said light up a sprayer?

Well you know when you turn a hose onto a spray?

03:00 You have got a sprinkler or a shower, well it is something like a sharp shower all going out in a spray. That's when you say sprayer, it is like turning on a tap, a hose, but instead of putting water in it you are putting oil through it. That's what a sprayer does. If you saw a signal that suddenly said "Half ahead", if you are only going slow and you see "Half

03:30 ahead" well you know they are going to use more steam to do it, so as soon as you seen that you anticipate the fact that they were going to need more steam, so you walk over and turn on your sprayer to see that it was okay. If they just done it gradually that might have been enough, otherwise you might have done more. Sometimes you were only travelling on two to four sprayers, other

04:00 times if you were full speed ahead you would have all nine sprayers on. And then if they wanted to form a smoke screen, they would put a sign up to say black smoke or white smoke. and then you would have to close the flaps. Then the oil is going in but there is no air going in, so it will not burn properly and so it will produce black smoke. And that is to hide the ship, say if there is an aerial attack or

04:30 submarine attack or even attack by ships or suicide boat and things like that. It would block them out from seeing you from a certain distance, it would also block you out from seeing other ships too. So you had to rely on the ship's radar to tell you where the other ships were too. And then if you wanted to make white smoke you put water in with it there,

05:00 water in as well as the oil. Why they wanted white smoke I don't know. Usually you got punished if you made any smoke, I mean we didn't make any smoke at all, that was perfection so that an enemy ship couldn't see you over the horizon making smoke over the horizon, so all you can see coming out the funnel there is like a vapour, like a mirage or something. So that's all you can see out of the funnel

05:30 is like a vapour, like you see a mirage on the road or something like that. So that's all you can see if we make it properly. It is nothing like, I mean you see pictures of a ship with smoke running out of the funnels, that was taboo to do that on a war ship in particular.

And what sort of oil were you using?

What you call crude oil, straight out of the ground, straight out of the ground for that particular boiler.

06:00 And I think they used two and a half tonnes per nautical mile or whether it was one tonne per two and a half mile, I just forget but you chewed it up pretty fast. Let's say a tonne a mile,

06:30 but then you're using a big ship for the tonne so if you worked it out next to a motor car it was probably fairly economical. And we had enough oil to travel I think all up I think it was about four thousand miles, I am not sure now. But they always kept it topped up where possible because you never knew where an oil tanker might not be available

07:00 or an oil tanker might be sunk or whatever so you couldn't get oil. And then we used to often supply the

destroyers with oil. Again we kept it topped up as far as possible so if a destroyer was running short they would come over and we would oil ship while at sea. You would put a big hose over, a four or six inch hose over and you would just

07:30 travel along together as far as possible, except you get some rough seas and the thing could break. We would oil the destroyers or a tanker would come along at sea and we would oil at sea while we were moving. You wouldn't stop because we were a target, you were moving and you were also zig zagging as well while you were doing it.

08:00 **When the oil from on what would it burn with?**

Well see it was ignited first. See when it first goes in there the oil is made fairly hot and you put in like a fire stick, like a poker, a long stick with a cloth wad end and you poke that in with oil

08:30 or diesel on it and a flame, set alight. And you put that inside where the flaps are, and in the first instance where you turn the first sprayer on that will light up your first sprayer. And so you have got a fire inside your furnace, not just oil, you have got a big fire in there, and so after the first sprayer is lit each sprayer is lit by the

09:00 fire that is already inside.

And the fire inside what is it actually burning all of the time, is it just oil?

Just burning the oil completely.

And what's the inside of the furnace like?

Well you look in there and it is just red or white hot. I just forget the degree of the heat but it was several

09:30 hundred degrees hot. See they had on the front of the boiler they had what they call super heater headers and these three boilers connect, a big boiler up top and two down below and they in turn fed the steam into these super heater headers which made it hotter still. So that when it went through the turbines you wouldn't even see it,

10:00 it was so hot and refined, going through the turbines it was terribly hot. I don't know what degrees it was, might be four or five hundred degrees going through there, and if it wasn't hot enough it would be likely to strip the turbines in the engine room.

And what would the oil in the furnace gather in to be burnt, would it gather in a pool or?

Oh no it burnt straight away, it was almost as big as

10:30 that room behind us, that furnace itself is just about as big as that wall to that wall there and about the area that is inside there and coming up to a peak where the top boiler is, and as soon as that goes in within a fraction of a second it is turned into fire. It is not like oil laying on the base, it is fired straight away.

11:00 **And how is it controlled, so that the fire doesn't follow the oil into the sprayer and go into the oil storage?**

Well I couldn't answer you that one, but I guess it's mainly because of the fineness of the spray coming out of there, that it just probably ignited that it so far, a couple of inches or something from the sprayer

11:30 that it is actually turned into fire. That's a good question but I couldn't answer it.

And is there a way to regulate how the steam is released from that boiler above the furnaces? So if you have got the sprayers on so creating a lot of steam can you store it in a sense?

No you can't store it, that's the idea as soon as they want more

12:00 steam you make more steam, as soon as they want less well you cut it down. You cannot store steam, I mean they can run it through the boilers to make the water hot in the bathroom or something like that. They can make it hot but they can't store it. It has got to go out straight away. And for that reason, you can control it for anything from one sprayer to nine sprayers and while you're in harbour

12:30 you might close down one boiler room completely and have maybe only two boilers in the other boiler room operating. Now that's when myself as the ship's bricklayer had to get inside the boilers when they cooled down enough and check the brickwork to see that the brickwork was not destroyed or broken down or powderish and I had to go in there and replace the bricks inside it.

13:00 And sometimes you couldn't wait until it was nice and cool, you had to get in there when it was pretty hot. And if you did, I mean it wasn't that hot but sometimes we had to put asbestos boots on and things like that, the hottest part was the floor, but not that hot really.

And what's the inside of a furnace like?

Well it is like inside

13:30 a large doll's house if you like. As I say, it is about the size of that room and then shaped from the top down like that and then sides down and then it is all brick down the back and at the sides. This fire brick which is a couple of inches thick, and that stops the steel outside of it getting too hot and it keeps all of the heat inside the furnace of the boiler.

14:00 And then the top boiler has actually got hundreds of little tubes about the thickness of a normal hose, about an inch thick or something like that. Hundreds of little tubes running down into the bottom tube so the heat is being circulated from one to the other through these tubes and that's what makes it so hot so quickly, it is running through all of these little tubes that are exposed to

14:30 the heat in the furnace.

What was your assessment of the bricks how would you tell if they were up to...?

Well sometimes they would be crumbling and on occasion one might fall out for some reason. On a couple of occasions because we had a couple of near misses by suicide planes and their bombs went off right beside the ship or very close,

15:00 and also with at time the big guns even firing it might loosen a brick or have a few brick collapse in the furnace. And you could see that in the furnace and you could see that inside. And what we would do we would take out these sprayers, they all had nine there and they would take that box out from one of them and we would crawl inside the furnace and then they would put that

15:30 thing back in there again, not alight, but they would put that thing back in there so you were locked in there, because there would be too much air driving in there if they left that open. And you couldn't work in there because there would be dust and things flying around, so they would have to close down the air as much as possible, and so all of the flap would be closed in there. It would be very hot in there.

16:00 Claustrophobic?

It wasn't so claustrophobic as hot, damned hot, and we had to carry all of the bricks down to the furnace from a couple of floors up, where we had our own little bricklayers, 'brickies' caboose' as we called it and we would have to climb up these almost vertical steps with brick dust, fire clay and water, whatever we needed.

16:30 And mix it up and get the broken bricks and take them further up to the top deck to tip them over the side. It was pretty hard work. Originally I wasn't the ships bricklayer, I was the bricklayer's assistant. I had a leading stoker was the bricklayer and I was assisting, but the leading stoker was promoted to a petty officer and they made me a bricklayer one time and they didn't give me an assistant. So I had to do

17:00 the whole thing on my own. And then an officer came down one time and said to me, "Leading stoker so and so." And I said, "I am not a leading stoker sir." And he said, "What are you?" I said, "I am a second class stoker, not even a first close" and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I am the ship's bricklayer sir." And he said, "You're the ships bricklayer? And you're not a leading? That will never do it has got to be a

17:30 hand." And so then he appointed a leading hand to be the ship's bricklayer who didn't know anything about it but he was a leading hand and so I had to teach him and become his assistant. So I still had to carry the bricks. We did have one frightening experience when we were in there when somebody played a joke on us, see the word to light up the boiler was flash up the boiler. And as I say they used to put this little

18:00 poker in there with a wad of cloth on the end of it and light it and they would just put that in there and then turn on the sprayer and it would turn on the sprayer. And some joker at the time said, "Flash up boiler number three." Which we were in. And the first thing, he just put a torch in there with a light on it and of course they didn't have any oil but we thought they

18:30 were going to light it up and so both of us went for a little hole about that big and not only that, it is not that big, inside it is a brick cone which is only about that big and both of us were trying to climb out of here together thinking they were going to light up the furnace. In fact I was fortunate then because I had the leading stoker with me that they had

19:00 appointed to the job and so he went out and severely punched the fellow who did it, even though it was a petty officer who did it for a joke. I think it was a petty officer from memory. He deserved it. Fortunately I had a person of a higher rating that could go out and do it.

and what sort of tools would you use to replace the bricks?

19:30 Just like a big heavy hammer and a trowel and a couple of little instruments for making little shapes. Like with a couple of bricks where you had to bolt them onto the wall and you had to put fire clay in front of the hole and you used the

20:00 tool which you made it nice and neat and made it look like a little plum or something, a mushroom sitting out in front of it. And then you had a little scotch comb hammer to cut the bricks and a bolster to

cut them to certain shapes. As they were on the side of the boiler they had to be certain shapes. Or if they were in this cone which had to be a certain shape too, they had various shape

20:30 bricks for around that cone and sometimes they didn't fit and you had to cut them off with what they call a scotch comb, a steel comb on the end of a hammer, didn't have any modern equipment like saws and that like they have these days. Today if they want to cut a brick they have a diamond tipped saw and they cut it with that. We had all hand tools.

21:00 **And how would you bolt the brick to the steel?**

Well again they already had holes, when I say holes they had these bolts that were already welded to the furnace or poked in from the outside, the brick had like a hole in it and two different thicknesses, and there was a small hole where it went through the bolt and then a bigger hole where you screwed the nut onto it

21:30 and the you put the fire clay and brick dust inside that so that the steel itself didn't get hot and that's how you sealed it off.

And what was the fire clay?

Well fire clay is just a mixture, like say cement, if you wanted to make concrete or mortar, you would use sand cement and water,

22:00 well in a brick furnace, because that would break down, you use fireclay and brick dust. Fire clay is heat resistant and brick dust is a bit like aggregate that you put in to make a path, a bit harder and a bit lumpier and so you mix the two together with water and you made your mortar which fits in between the bricks because they had gaps

22:30 in between the bricks, like you would have in a course of bricks around here.

What sort of form would you take the fire clay down in?

In a bucket, see it's dust, fire clay is dust, it is not like plasticine or play doh, it is just like powder like cement and you take it down in a big steel bucket.

Already mixed up?

23:00 No you take the fire clay down in one and brick dust in another and the water would be down there and you would mix the two together down there.

And does cement have to keep on being moved so that it doesn't set?

Yes well you would only make up a little bit at a time. Generally speaking it wasn't a big job, it wasn't a complete job.

23:30 I recall one instance where we did have a near miss on the ship and two of us had to spend about eight hours inside a furnace re-bricking the furnace. Usually it would be a couple of hours or something like that. But I think at the time we spent over eight hours in the furnace doing it. And it was fairly hot because we didn't have time to do much at that stage.

24:00 From memory I think they had to keep other furnaces in the boiler room going while we were doing this. I can't recall for sure, but I know it was damn hot in there.

24:30 **You mentioned the steam could be used to heat the water for the bathroom, and also used for other things,, so how was the steam allocated?**

Well that was done through the engine room. It nearly all went through the engine room and the propellers or the propeller shafts took priority to everything else. And if there was a bit left over well you got some hot water or there was other steam evaporators for turning sea water into fresh water

25:00 and that would be the second priority because you cannot make steam without water, and so it was important that you made water and it was pretty good water. Because if you didn't make good water the officer would make you drink it, "Try this and see what it is like." "Well it's terrible." "The boiler doesn't like it either."

Why can't you use seawater?

Well it would rust it out very

25:30 very quickly. The salt would probably ruin the turbines too.

And so when all of the steam was created by the boiler and it goes through the engine room what sort of equipment do they have in the engine room to split up the steam?

Well they have a series of big wheels, you might see a wheel on one of those Brisbane Sydney Hobart races where you have got a big steel wheel?

26:00 Well again in each engine room they had two either leading stokers or engine room artificers and they

were there more or less like they were steering a ship but they were controlling the speed of the turbines, and the turbines that drove the shaft and in turn drove the propellers, and so they would be feeding the steam into the turbines

26:30 that turn the shafts and propellers with that. And then they had other lines that allocated a second preference; would be to the condensers to turn the salt water into fresh water and then the others would be certain priorities down the track .The bathroom would certainly be last on the line. Generally speaking you bathed in just straight seawater,

27:00 not fresh water, when we were at sea you quite often got sea water to bathe with not fresh water, because your water had to be topped up to maximum for the boilers and evaporators and that. And the last priority was hot water for tea or for bathing in.

27:30 **And how did the evaporator work?**

Well I never worked on an evaporator but it works on a process a bit like if they were making whiskey or gin they get these things and they

28:00 got through evaporators and coils and the steam that comes out the other end, it is purely steam, it comes out as fresh water. The rest is separated inside these evaporators and the salt part is drained out of there and the steam as it goes through instead of making whiskey or brandy or something, it makes pure water that's the simple answer.

28:30 **Did you spend most of your time in the engine or boiler room?**

Well I spent most of my time in the boiler room. Because I was a bricklayer, bricklayer's assistant I think they thought it would be better that I was kept in there where I could keep an eye on the brickwork in the boiler. But I did spend I suppose about six months

29:00 in the engine room looking after what they called the dynamos. Again steam turned the dynamos that made the electricity, so it had a fairly high priority too. They in turn drove the machines to make ice and things like that so we had the ice works up the other end to make ice. And later on a laundry,

29:30 We didn't have a laundry originally and it made hot water for the laundry. And I was working on what you call the steam turbines there for electricity, and in my first time I was there I was what they call engine room dodger, and so I had to serve your engine room apprenticeship

30:00 sweeping the floor in a shop when you first go there, you know you have to sweep the floor and go on from there? Well I had to more or less be a runner for everyone else. Whatever they wanted I had to get , and if anything was required from upper decks, if anyone wanted fresh water for drinking. The only way you got fresh water was from a tank, which was up on the main deck,

30:30 not the upper deck but the main deck, you had to go and draw fresh water from the tank and try and catch a bit of ice to put in it to get call. But I was the telephone dodger as they call it too. And they had a box in the middle of the room about the same size as an ordinary telephone box. But the engine room was probably the hottest room of the ship and the telephone box

31:00 in the middle of it was a little bit like going to hell. It was very hot there and you would be sweating from the engine room but when you got in there the sweat would be pouring out of you and you would be using one of those eyeball telephone exchanges with the plugs, and every time you put a plug in the water would pour out, sweat would pour down your hand and give you an electric shock every time you plugged in somebody.

31:30 And so you talked with rather a staccato voice while you were getting shocked.

What sort of communications were coming through?

Do you mean what sort of orders? Well I couldn't tell you off hand what they were now. I mean it is so long ago I am afraid I just don't know what they were. Usually calling for

32:00 conversation with one of these people that were down there, either that or wanting to pass a message onto them. But I was always relieved when they said, "Can you get the chief engineer artificer or the officer of the watch to come and talk to the chief engineer" or whatever it was, because it was going to be his turn in the phone box while I might have been able to dash out and climb under one of his little air shoots or something.

32:30 **How was most of the communication to the engine room from the bridge done?**

Well it was either done by telephone, there was three methods, just in case one breaks down they had another. They had one with indicators, an indicator would tell you that they wanted more steam. It might not be more steam, they don't make smoke there but they would say they want more steam

33:00 or half ahead or full ahead or full astern or things like that. To go astern they had to reverse the propellers from one way to the other, and there was quite a lot of steam used up doing that. So they had that system. They also had a voice pipe system and that usually came from up on the bridge or something like that down to the engine room. And so they had this

- 33:30 voice pipe system, the indicators and also the telephone. And sometimes the voice pipe system was much clearer than the telephone if there was a lot of static or if you happened to have a lot of gun fire or something like that going on up top you couldn't hear them, pretty hard to hear them in any case, sometimes the voice pipe was clear and the indicator,
- 34:00 it just spelt things out in black and white, it couldn't tell you everything. But when you were in the engine room they would lock you in, they have got grates they drop down. Well in action stations they do. They have got these great big grates down and they close off the hatches and everything else so you can't get out and they have somebody stationed
- 34:30 up there with a pistol or something in case you tried to get out.

Why?

Well if you were hit in a particular place on a ship they may have to flood that particular place, be it a boiler room, an engine room, a magazine, and they might have to sacrifice that boiler room or engine room and everybody in it for the sake of saving the ship. So they had these hatches all over

- 35:00 the place. About two metres by one meters and in the middle of that they had a little round open doorway that just one person could fit through and that was just in case of emergency, they could let somebody out and they would just have that one opening there. And the chances are if you did have to get out in an emergency they might only have
- 35:30 this little hole for one person at a time to get out.

How did you feel about this?

Well it was one of those things that in the first place you were a bit concerned about it, but after a while people said well there is nothing much you can do about it. And fortunately if they happened to hit a steam pipe or something like that you would be dead that quick you wouldn't have to worry about drowning, you would be roast turkey.

- 36:00 Or boiled turkey. So there wasn't much worrying about what you were going to do, what steps you would take. I remember asking one fellow what steps he would take if a torpedo came through the boiler room and he just said, "Very large ones, straight up that ladder." He wouldn't have had time to do anything with the
- 36:30 heat of the steam.

And in the engine room is the dynamos?

Dynamos yeah.

How did they work?

Well again, they have got all sorts of little things inside them. Just like an aeroplane jet engine, they have got all flukes or something inside there and they turn around very fast

- 37:00 and they are geared down to turn the shaft so that it is not directly onto, it is just like a series of gears and a weight. Like your motor in your motor car your engine is turning at a certain speed, but your wheels are turning at a different speed. It is all geared down to turn the
- 37:30 big shafts.

And what was your job regarding these?

I didn't have very much to do in the engine room except as I say to work on the dynamos for the power, electricity and as an engine room dodger. Otherwise you had auxiliary watch keepers, and that was one form of watch keeping. Doing dynamos, another one was the evaporators and you would rotate

- 38:00 from one to the other generally speaking. After you had spent three months on one you would graduate to another you know. And I just graduated from the dodger onto the dynamos, after three months as a dodger I went onto the dynamos and the fellow on the dynamos probably went onto the evaporator or something like that. And then perhaps
- 38:30 to the CO2 making ice, go down to the ice room. Things like that. Or the diesel dynamos, they had diesel dynamos for emergency in case the other electric lighting broke down, from the steam they had diesel dynamos on there which again the auxiliary watch keepers they went from one to the other to learn the various things.

And when you said you worked on the dynamos what did this require?

- 39:00 Well mainly taking temperatures, there wasn't much else to do on the dynamos. They were often controlled by the EROs or what they called the engine room officers and you just had to go around taking the temperature, they had thermometers all around to check that they weren't overheating. The various bearings all around that they weren't over heating.
- 39:30 End of tape

Tape 7

00:30 **What it was like on board when you were bombarding a target?**

Well I was almost always down below and so all you could hear was the guns going off. By the same token they

01:00 might tell us there was an air attack or they had sighted some zombies, an air attack, enemy aircraft bogies or zombies they would call them. They had sighted some bogies or something like that and your imagination would go a bit with you because when you heard the guns going off you didn't really know whether it was the guns going off or whether perhaps you were

01:30 being hit. Because apart from not actually hitting your actual compartment you thought well it might have been happening, and very rarely did. They do a commentary while they were doing a bombardment so you thought well you just never know. And if you heard smaller close range weapons going off you knew that you were in a bit of trouble then.

02:00 In the first place they only had a range of about a thousand metres, the close range weapons and later on because we found that they wouldn't stop the suicide planes, we had to have the small taken off and put on much bigger rapid firing guns to take their place. So we went from twenty millimetre guns which wouldn't

02:30 stop the suicide planes to forty millimetre guns. So as I say when we heard any of those close range guns going off we knew something was within the thousand metres or five thousand metres, or within that range. Where as the big guns, whether it was a bombardment or not, we didn't know whether we were bombarding or perhaps maybe sometimes getting hit by a shore battery.

03:00 They could fire something like, I just forget the distance, twenty miles, twenty miles an eight inch could fire and a four inch could fire six or eight miles. And so we knew that we were a fair distance from our target and we knew

03:30 that there wasn't somebody that we knew that was firing back at us, if we heard these close range weapons going off.

So what is the feeling in the boiler room or engine room hearing these noises?

Well you hear them and just have to get on with it. There is nothing you can do about it and are wondering or hoping that they will tell you what is going on. But then again sometimes you

04:00 hope they don't tell you the bad news. Like a couple of times they told us that we had torpedoes heading towards the ship and that we were taking evasive action. Another time we had a mine caught in our paravanes but we couldn't release it because we were going into a particular place at dawn and if we released it it might run into another ship

04:30 and if they exploded it it would defeat the surprise by exploding it, so we would have to carry it. And we knew that if there was a mine there it was only about fifteen feet off the side of the ship. Things like that. Well if they told you that sometimes you wish they hadn't. Things like that worried you more than just hearing the guns going. At least you know that of you

05:00 were firing or somebody was firing back at you they hadn't hit your compartment. You were pleased about that. Mind you we were on a very lucky ship and we hardly got hit by enemy fire at all. We got hit by pieces of suicide planes that broke up just before they hit our ship or broke up and parts landed on our deck

05:30 or their bombs exploded close beside the ship, but no bomb ever hit our ship, we were very fortunate. There were many ships around us being hit by them.

Did it have a reputation of being a lucky ship?

Yes well it certainly did have a reputation for that. Out of, in the battle of Lingayen Gulf the

06:00 American Seventh Fleet, we were only, we called them a mighty small navy, not just mighty but mighty small. And they had their mighty navy with us thankfully and on one occasion every capital ship down, from a battleship to a battle cruiser or a cruiser, every ship

06:30 except three out of something like thirty capital ships were hit. Either by kamikaze [suicide] planes or bombs or something. One was an American battleship and the other was an American cruiser and our own ship and so while we thought ourselves very fortunate. Our gunnery officer used to say, a saying which is much used these days,

07:00 "The harder you train the luckier you get." Which I suppose all of our practice helped us to be a lucky ship. We made our own luck to a certain extent, but you can only make it to a certain degree.

Unfortunately the HMAS Australia the other Country class cruiser with us it was hit by the first

- 07:30 suicide plane ever to hit an allied ship. And that was about I think the 20th of October 1944, and they had to leave the scene along with an American cruiser that was also hit. And they were sent back to what they called New Hebrides then, Vanuatu it is now, New Hebrides it was then. They were sent back
- 08:00 there for repairs. Along with the Australian destroyer Warramunga for escort and they were sent back with another American cruiser and American destroyer to get repairs. While we went on up to Lingayen Gulf which was the Battle of Luzon up there.

08:30 **When it was hit did you see it at all?**

I didn't see the Australia being hit, but I have a picture of it there in colour that was actually taken by an American on a landing ship. And it shows the Australia with the Shropshire not very far away, and we actually hit the plane a couple of times and it landed on the Australia. And the captain was killed

- 09:00 and about twenty odd sailors and some forty sailors were wounded. The captain was killed, Captain Dechaineux. And Commodore Collins who was then the flag officer of the squadron he was badly wounded. And so they had to take all of them back and put them in hospital, and some they buried at sea.

- 09:30 Usually if you got killed at sea you got buried at sea. Usually they just put you in your spare hammock cover and put a projectile or some weighted object on your feet and dropped it over the side. They didn't take it home for burial.

How did you hear the news yourself about this?

Well I came up on deck before the Australia left us, it left late that

- 10:00 afternoon I think it was, it had actually hit the Australia on the bridge and knocked their tripod fore mast over the top part, part of it knocked over, apart from other damage, and most of the plane fell back over the side of the Australia. That was only the first instance. The Australia later on after they were repaired they came

- 10:30 up to the Battle of Lingayen Gulf and they were in very close proximity to us and they were hit by five suicide planes on that particular occasion and they seemed to think that we shot at least a couple, at least damaged a couple of those planes apart from others that were destroyed. But we damaged some that hit the Australia.

- 11:00 But the Australia at the time had Admiral Bruce Fraser. He had come out from the Battle of the Atlantic. He had come to the Pacific and he was the flag officer on the Australia at the time and he was flying his admiral's pennant on the Australia. And it was thought and it may have been reported to the Japanese that there was an admiral on board, and it probably was the flag ship and to concentrate on it.

- 11:30 Whether that is fact or fiction we will never know. But it did seem strange that we were a ship that looked exactly the same as the Australia and yet we didn't have one suicide plane land on us. We managed to destroy several before they hit our ship.

I know that you were often down in the boiler room but did you ever see...?

I did have occasion to see

- 12:00 one when it hit the Australia and on another occasion we were able to elevate. Shropshire had a complete refit, it was built in 1928 but it had a complete refit in 1942, early 43. And they had the most modern equipment that they could provide, and apart from having

- 12:30 the radar to tell where the aircraft were coming in, we reported, something like ninety percent of the air raids we reported in the area, but they also made our eight inch guns so that they could elevate to something like seventy or seventy-five degrees. And we used to load them with what they call high explosive shells which were calibrated to explode at five thousand and ten thousand

- 13:00 feet. So we were using our eight inch guns which were surface guns, we were using them actually as anti-aircraft guns. And they were either blowing planes off or blowing them off course. And I was actually on deck one time when the alarm sounded and there were a couple of these planes coming towards us and they swung the eight inch guns to fire a barrage and

- 13:30 again they had these hatches all closed off and only one hatch in the middle where one person can get through. Well we are all trying to get through there at the one time. And fortunately one of the other gun turrets further aft fired at them. I was right near A turret which is first turret in the front. Fortunately one of the rear

- 14:00 turrets fired first at these planes and put them off course, and I just laid down on the deck, because I couldn't get through the hatch, laid down and pulled my shirt over my head. Fortunately one of the gunnery officers was telling us to get down below, but they wouldn't open the hatch, because we might have been hit. They have got all of these sections of the ship closed off with the hatch you see.

14:30 And so they could only get through one at a time and sometimes two would try and get through and it was like driving two wedges in there, nobody could get through you know. And fortunately I got through before the eight inch guns on A turret opened up you know. But I saw them coming in. And when I was on the four inch gun deck as a handler to handle the shells, the projectiles, to the gunners I was there for a

15:00 brief time when one of the planes hit Australia.

What did that look like, describe it for us?

Oh just a great explosion and bits and pieces, couldn't really tell if it was bits and pieces of bodies. We weren't that far away, far enough to see it hit. We were probably a couple of kilometres away if we were that far away. I mean sat sea

15:30 you can see a long distance. There was a lot of smoke and that around it at the time. You see a great explosions and I think that particular one hit one of the four-inch gun crews, they were in multiples of two the guns usually. They had their guns different to ours, ours was more modernised. We had them all together on one deck where they had theirs spread all over the ship.

16:00 In a way it might have been fortunate that they were that way because if they had have hit the gun deck with eight guns out of it they might have put them all out of action, but the way they had them spread all over the ship they only wiped out one set of guns.

And what is a sight like that like to witness?

It was pretty horrific particularly when you see one of your own ships it is like

16:30 one of your own relatives dying, it is much more impact if it is a relative or a close friend or relative than somebody you don't know so well. I mean we saw a number of American ships being hit or on fire, aircraft carriers, being abandoned and great fires on the aircraft carrier that we did

17:00 see because they were in the distance. We were allowed to have a look at them because they were further away, they might have been five or ten mile away when we seen them. Another American destroyer that was hit. I am not sure now whether they had eight or sixteen torpedoes on this particular class of destroyer

17:30 and they just made an announcement in plain English over the radio, "We're about to fire our torpedoes." So that they wouldn't explode. And they just out with their eight or sixteen torpedoes and fired the lot and we had ships all around the place. And they again they just said, "We are just trying to take evasive action." Again I just happened to be on deck at the time,

18:00 but they had torpedoes flying everywhere and ships all taking evasive action.

Why would they do that?

So that the ship wouldn't blow up. They had a fire right near the torpedo space, they had been hit by a suicide plane. I don't know now whether they were hit by a second suicide plane, but they had a lot of fire, the plane actually hit down behind the bridge near the torpedo space and they had an extensive fire

18:30 there and so rather have the torpedoes blow up and kill everyone they just fired them. Now whether they would have gone off or not, you have to often set a war head on a torpedo but of course you don't ask questions, whether they had already set them or something, they might have been ready to fire them you don't know. You wouldn't know whether they were already primed or not. Even so they probably could still hit you and explode.

19:00 Some of them were primed and didn't go off and some of them were un-primed and did go off, so you never ever knew. Nobody was going to take any chances.

And describe to us what it is like to be in this situation with kamikaze planes coming at you?

Well unfortunately as I say I spent most of time down on deck and I only heard people describe it. Some of the planes came so close, one fellow mentioned that they

19:30 came so close they were firing what they called Bofors or thirty-five millimetre cannons and it had about three or four men working it and he said that it came so close if the shell handling men had have been standing up he thought he would have had his head cut off. But I think there is a certain amount of imagination

20:00 there, they were so close. I mean in circumstances like that your imagination can run riot. But those fellows up on deck really saw the action of and firing what they call multiple pompoms which was a bracket of eight barrels all

20:30 together in forty millimetres all firing at a suicide plane and fortunately chopping it to bits before it hit the ship. That would be a pretty frightening experience to have to see it coming towards you while you were doing it. You wouldn't have a tendency to run or duck, you would be too busy destroying it.

But what about you could you hear what was going on?

- 21:00 Well that was the unfortunate part, if you weren't in the boiler room or the engine room we were on what was called damage control below, and it was almost always between the decks and you were at some location where you could hear it and when you heard those close range weapons going off, you knew that it was more attack by suicide plane or boats. And you knew they were very close and the longer
- 21:30 they went on the closer you knew they got. In fact I can recall climbing inside what they call a wind chute one time, just a metal chute, and when you opened the port hole you put it out to get a bit of a breeze and I remember seeing one next time and I stood up and slid it over himself for extra protection. I don't know what it would have done. At the time you would even pull your shirt over your head for protection you know.
- 22:00 **You mentioned the commentary, would they comment on planes coming at them?**
- Usually not, they were too busy. The captain and the people in the bridge were trying to see what evasive action they could take. And you were restricted then by the number of ships that were around you and what evasive action they could take and they were relying on their gunners and various turrets were told to fire individually at targets too.
- 22:30 I mean they could be controlled all together to fire or they could fire them individually, and so they could use their own discretion about that. Whether a plane was coming in from aft and firing a gun there or ones waiting up front for them to come past. They took the opportunity when they could. I would have preferred to been up on deck.
- 23:00 They used to often say they pitied us downstairs because we didn't know what was going on, but they said well maybe if we didn't know what was going on maybe we would have been much happier to be downstairs, so one would never know.
- So describe for us the atmosphere on board during these chaotic hot times?**
- I think it was rather fatalistic.
- 23:30 I mean if something happens it happens. You all put faith in everybody else. If they told the boiler room they wanted more steam and to go faster or the fellow on the helm to go to starboard or port or the man on the guns to fire at something, you were a team and you're all relying on the other people in the team to do their job. And you think well if they are doing their
- 24:00 job that's all that they can do so.
- Would you describe the atmosphere as being scared?**
- You would describe it as tense and if anybody wasn't scared there was something the matter with them, particularly if they told you that the actual firing was a suicide coming in, or a torpedo coming at you, or a mine close by,
- 24:30 and they are about to explode it or something else. Some of those things were more terrifying than wondering what was going on. So as I say sometimes they told you the good news of what was going on, and sometimes they told you the bad news and you think well I would have been better without knowing that because I can't do anything about it you know.
- When you hear a torpedo is on the way, how long until you can relax?**
- 25:00 Well it would probably be a matter of minutes sometimes if they could sight them, Japanese torpedoes were harder to detect, they had a different form of hydrogen gas inside them or something and they were harder to detect. So if they did sight one it was closer to you , they could fire them from a further distance too, further and longer
- 25:30 and they were more silent and actually more effective than the American, British or Australian ones. And so if they sighted them, unless some other ship sighted them first and told you about it, they were pretty close. And so if something didn't happen in a minute the chances were that nothing was going to happen. Then again it depended on how many of them,
- 26:00 I mean it didn't happen very often as far as torpedoes, but when it did it was a gut wrenching feeling, how long is this going to take? You know. And if it is you would be looking at the ladder thinking I am going to get straight up that ladder which wouldn't have done you any good if they had have put a blister on you, you wouldn't have had a chance.
- 26:30 **And so how long in relative times, for example that first one in the Philippines, Leyte Gulf, how long would they go for?**
- Well it was hard to tell because as I mentioned before our radar system was so excellent that we did detect something like ninety-nine percent of incoming aircraft, from singles to ten, fifty, a hundred, but by the time they got to us the
- 27:00 fighter planes that we had, we had American Lightnings and Black Widows and Hellcats and they usually dispersed quite a few of them before they got to us, I have lost my plot there.

We were talking about the lengths of battles?

- 27:30 You never knew because it might be over, usually the alert went on for something like half an hour or something like that and so by the time another alert came along it might be overlapping with that or coinciding so it sometimes it went on for days. I think at one stage we were at our action stations for something like three days without leaving our action stations unless you had to
- 28:00 go to the heads [toilets] or something like that as they called the toilet. Something like three days we were at action stations. It didn't mean you were always being attacked, but somebody was being attacked around that period and it went on for weeks spasmodically, particularly in the battle of the Lingayen Gulf.
- 28:30 And one of our major battles, which was the last great sea battles of all time was the Battle of Surigao Straits where the US Seventh Fleet and Third Fleet and the two Australian ships Shropshire and the Arunta which was a destroyer, and we were involved in the actual sea
- 29:00 battle of what they call the sea battles of Leyte, but it was divided into four different battles that went on over four or five days or a week, and it involved battleships and cruisers and destroyers and motor torpedo boats and aircraft carriers and submarines and goodness knows what. And we were in what was called the Battle of Surigao Strait, that was one of the four battles
- 29:30 . It was fought at night time in the early hours of the 25th of October 1944. And it went on for several hours, but our actual firing only went on for something like twenty or twenty-five minutes, in which time we fired thirty-two broadsides and the Japanese battle ship Yamashiro which had fourteen inch guns and we only had eight inch guns. Fortunately they didn't get our
- 30:00 range and their projectiles were whistling overhead and we were credited with hitting them with sixteen of our thirty-two broadsides. We had two American cruisers firing at them at the same time and later on some battle ships, but the battleships didn't fire very many shells, I think one battleship told our captain they only fired six shells where we fired
- 30:30 thirty-two broadsides of anything up to eight inch shells, whatever was ready at the time. Sometimes they would say "Fire!" and some of the other guns weren't ready so they would fire anything they could. With anything from five guns to eight guns they fired thirty-two broadsides. In fact I think it lasted even less than fifteen minutes, the actual firing,
- 31:00 but we ended up taking part, you can't say, "We sank the Yamashiro" because you don't know really. I mean we took part and we assisted in the sinking of that ship. During that battle there was two battleships sunk, the Yamashiro and the Fuso and the two cruisers and about three or four destroyers in that particular battle. Overall there was
- 31:30 some of the most modern Japanese battleships the world has ever seen, they had eighteen inch guns and fortunately they didn't get the chance to fire an angry shot against another ship, the two Japanese big berthas [guns]. One was sunk by American aircraft and during that battle of the Leyte Gulf as they call it over all, or the Battle of Leyte Island,
- 32:00 and the other was sunk by planes from an aircraft carrier later on, without them ever firing an angry shot at another warship or so I am told. We were supposed to be going out after them, we got orders, but they had turned around and gone another direction. We were rather
- 32:30 fearful of meeting up with them.

And so when you sank that ship or were part of it, did you see it go down?

No I didn't see it go down. It sunk quickly and the action actually started about two, I think, in the morning and within two hours it was down, sunk.

- 33:00 There was a destroyer later on in the morning and it was being fired upon by Japanese destroyers and unfortunately it was being fired on by American ships as well, and it actually blew up and they lost a few lives. I didn't actually see that, as I say down below most of the time. But there were hundreds and
- 33:30 hundreds of Japanese in the water from these ships that were sunk but they were mainly making out for the islands, they didn't want to be rescued. There were three of them rescued by one of the ships. Strangely enough they all spoke perfect English, and three of them were educated at
- 34:00 Oxford University. Spoke perfect Oxford English. I don't know what ships it was now that actually picked them up. Some of the ships were ordered to reverse to turn the screws on them if they didn't surrender. I mean if they were going to elect to swim to an island rather than be rescued, well that was their
- 34:30 problem if they didn't do that so some of them were annihilated in the water, if they didn't accept a rescue they were still enemy and you had to dispose of them.

And so tell us what was the atmosphere like on board when you would have a sinking of the ship?

I don't know. I suppose you think

35:00 it's wonderful. It was particularly wonderful for the fellows who were on our ship who were survivors of the Canberra that was sunk by the Japanese at the battle of Savo Island. They were getting some revenge from that because in that particular action the Japanese sank three American cruisers and an Australian cruiser, and in that actual night action the Japanese didn't lose a ship.

35:30 So it was a bit of rough justice that we had a victory there and we felt very happy for all of the ships that were in there and very appreciative for the motor torpedo boats that got stuck into them early too, there was quite a lot of American torpedo boats. Everybody played their part.

36:00 **And I know you were below the deck but did you get above and see the sight of these great battles?**

Not those, I saw other battles in the distance, where planes were being attacked by suicide planes. It was nearly always suicide planes rather than other ships, about the only action that was involved around there with other ships and it ended up pretty well the annihilation of the Japanese Fleet.

36:30 They sank aircraft carriers and I think about five battle ships and many cruisers and destroyers, and it was just about the end of the Japanese Navy at the time in terms of a big force. Actually they were coming up there to trap us at the time in Leyte Gulf and they were coming in there to annihilate the landing, to sink all of the transports and

37:00 they thought they were going to sneak up there and destroy the transports and kill the troops when they got ashore.

Describe for us what the sight looked like when you did get a chance to go up on deck?

Mainly what we saw was bodies in the water, the ship had been sunk and there was bodies in the water and

37:30 wreckage floating around, that sort of thing. Most of them I saw were the American aircraft carriers being hit or a destroyer being hit in the distance, or something like that.

What about when you weren't actually being attacked, the sight of so many ships describe that?

Enormous, as I say when we went to the convoy to Leyte

38:00 Gulf, I just forget the figures, but there was well over three hundred, probably four or five hundred ships in the armada you would call it, rather than a convoy, various sizes. And there was something like six or seven hundred during the Battle of Luzon, the armada for the battle of Lingayen Gulf.

38:30 And they were just enormous, wall to wall, of a day time. Of a night time you couldn't see much, you could see a few of them, it was just incredible, six or seven hundred ships together, it was enormous. It was probably a bigger sight than the landing at Normandy because they were all there at one time, the battle of Normandy they

39:00 went there over several days, where as they all arrived over one day you know.

What is it like as a young man to get up and see?

Rather proud to think you're amongst them there. To be involved in a thing like that I mean you feel ten foot tall. We did have one little Australian ship there, you could hardly call it a ship it was called

39:30 HDML, harbour defence motor launch. And it was actually in the convoy, it came up from Sydney to Milne Bay and then onto Hollandia up in Dutch New Guinea, in fact they were part of the advance force before us, see they had to send the mine sweepers in first.

40:00 And they had to lay a channel of marker buoys and they thought some of these channels might have been shallow and so they had to send the HDML 1074, I think it was up there with a crew of fourteen or eighteen men and they went up there with a couple of Australian frigates and a corvette doing mine sweeping in Leyte Gulf before the armada arrived. And

40:30 in fact at one stage the little HDML was actually rammed by an American ship, because it was so small he thought it was some Japanese barge, and they rammed it, but fortunately they didn't do a good job of it and they caused a bit of damage to the bow of the ship and it was having a lot of trouble keeping up with the convoy and an

41:00 American escort destroyer actually took it in tow to speed it up.

41:07 End of tape

Tape 8

00:30 **What was the Shropshire doing between Christmas and the Philippines?**

Well we were doing a number of bombardments with invasions. I think we did something like

01:00 fourteen invasions and sixteen or eighteen bombardments of various places. We were kept fairly busy. You not only bombarded a place for a several hours but you stayed around these places for maybe a week, how long the troops wanted you ashore. They wanted you to

01:30 attack selected targets, they might be trying to get further in from the beach and they were striking opposition and they would give us a grid where they wanted us to bombard. A lot of those troops, they didn't go in with field guns, they went in with trench mortars, field guns in a lot of those places would have bogged down ,they did bog down and some places there, they took tanks in there and they got bogged. So it was usually light

02:00 equipment, they went in with trench mortars and light machine guns and that sort of thing and if they struck any heavy opposition they called on the ships to attack a position which might be two, four, five miles inland. But we usually stood off shore about five or six miles so that we couldn't be hit by some of the shore batteries.

02:30 We stood a reasonably safe distance but so that we could still fire a projectile five or ten miles inland. We would be shooting these selected targets for them and we did a number of those right up Dutch New Guinea, right up past Dutch New Guinea. They were island hopping you see? They wouldn't bombard every place, they would

03:00 bombard a place and go up a couple of hundred miles and take a beachhead there or maybe only hold a beach head and contain them. They didn't want to put a real lot of troops in there, they just wanted to control it so that they couldn't bring supplies into the Japanese, they controlled the beachhead and a couple of miles inland. Later on they would bring in some heavier guns in to protect themselves. From there we went to an island called Biak

03:30 which was part of what they call the then Dutch East Indies, it is now all Indonesia. We went to this place called Biak and they made an airfield at Biak and then we went another several hundred miles onto Morotai which is quite a well known airbase, that they captured.

04:00 We also went over to Borneo. We had been all through the Philippines before we came back to Borneo and did some landings with the Australian servicemen there, I think it was the 7th and 9th Division at Balikpapan in Borneo on the east coast and then we were over on the west coast at a place

04:30 called Brunei, you have heard of the Sultan of Brunei? Well we had to recapture that place and Labuan Island. Again we had to bombard the Japanese headquarters over there that was giving our troops a lot of trouble and we had to bombard it, which was some five or six miles inland I am told. And we were told that

05:00 we killed some four or five hundred Japanese troops there in that bombardment and allowed the Australians to get in and take their headquarters. That was the sort of thing we were doing. Of course when you weren't doing something that didn't mean the enemy weren't attacking you as far as sending over a few bombers or a few fighters or something in between. Had the occasional air raids and things like that, you know.

05:30 **And during a bombardments, would you be in the four inch magazine?**

It varied, I was either in the four inch magazine, or I was on watch, or I was in a position very close to the eight inch magazine, or I was on what they call damage control position. Which meant to say you were just in a position where you were

06:00 waiting for damage to your ship, or your part of the ship, the section you either had to close up all of the doors to close off that compartment, or contain a fire or possibly if there happened to be a shell blast and a hole put into your particular section of the ship, that we could block up that somehow. They used to use the hammocks

06:30 and things like that if they had a big hole in the ship, they would poke all of the hammocks against it and then put wood against them to block them up. Things like that you know. Fortunately that didn't happen but that's what you were there to do. So you had various jobs in various parts. Sometimes I was in the forward section, other times I was in the after section. Just going around even in harbour patrolling the magazines

07:00 and I used to have to go down into the eight inch magazines to see that there was any over heating or possible fires or even any sabotage I used to have to go around and do that, that was part of the damage control . When you weren't in action stations you had to go around to see that they were all right, there was no fires or sabotage or something like that.

07:30 **How many people would be on damage control at a time?**

Well depending. If we weren't at action station probably a dozen people would be on damage control just going around the ship looking around. But when we were at action stations there could have been two hundred people out of the twelve hundred that were on there if you were

- 08:00 off duty in the boiler room, engine room or wherever your watch was, you would be in the damage control area and that could be anything up to two hundred men just waiting for the possibility of damage. We ended up with something like twelve hundred and twenty eight men, when we were a flag ship, when the Australia was hit, our captain become the Flag Officer so the flag
- 08:30 officer's crew, some staff of fifty, sixty people, they were drafted off the Australia onto our ship and we became the flag ship and we had to accommodate them. And if the admiral had have come on board although he was wounded, the captain would have had to move out of his cabin and give it to the flag officer, they went down the line like that you know.
- 09:00 So as I say we ended up with about twelve hundred and twenty and the ship was only built to accommodate seven hundred you know. But when they start putting all of these extra guns on and needing more men to keep watches, they increased it from seven hundred to twelve hundred.

And you mentioned bombardments and invasions what was the difference?

Well let's say the invasion

- 09:30 was where the actual troops went ashore, you might bombard some place and after the event you might have to come back and bombard a place and it wasn't an invasion, the troops were already landed ashore and you might have been called back later on, a month or a couple of weeks later to bombard certain places. By the invasions, we used to bombard the place first
- 10:00 and soften up the place as much as possible. Particularly when you were with the American fleet they would really paste it. The Australians unfortunately when they landed they didn't generally have the support the Americans had had. They would go ashore and sometimes very little bombardment had happened before them.
- 10:30 Where as when the Americans went ashore they had a very heavy bombardment and we had rockets and things like that fitted to the ship, we had extra rockets and things like that. We used to fire them in groups of ten and twenty ashore to knock out the oil tanks and actually when we bombarded Balikpapan in Borneo for the Australian troops fortunately we had a lot of American
- 11:00 or several American cruisers and destroyers with us as well as the Australian. So the Australians had a bigger support there than when they were landing in New Guinea. And we actually had to knock out the oil tanks up on the hill because they were fearful that the Japanese would release the oil out of the oil tanks and let it all run down and set it alight.
- 11:30 So we had to sort of blow them up before they could do that.

And you took part in landings as well, how were these different or linked to invasion landings?

The bombardment and then a landing, they were combined. In some cases there was a bombardment of some area

- 12:00 where they either had already landed or it would be a premature thing for a diversion, you know they would bombard some place there to make them think they were going to land somewhere when in fact they were going somewhere else. Usually a bombardment followed an invasion.,
- 12:30 When we are talking about invasion of the Philippines, because the Philippines had not been invaded since General MacArthur and his crew left them around February or March 1942 and it wasn't until October 1944 that they were actually attacked, you see? New Guinea and New Britain and New Ireland and Solomon Islands they had already been re-invaded.
- 13:00 That's why they talk about the bombardment and invasion of the Philippines because there were two major attacks and invasions in the Philippines, one was in Leyte Gulf and the other was Lingayen Gulf in Luzon Island so they were the great armadas that I mentioned before,
- 13:30 one of four or five and the other about six or seven hundred ships, all at the one time.

And with these landings, what did you observe about how they were carried out?

We would try and pace the place as far as possible with the spotter aircraft. If they knew where there were gun emplacements. We would blitz the first mile

- 14:00 of the beach or something, flatten it completely and then the spotter aircraft would be there to see that if they were likely to be moving guns back there, and they would locate naval guns that were probably up on the hill that were probably six inch guns or something like that. The spotter aircraft would locate them and get us to fire on them then.
- 14:30 They could be firing on us and also perhaps firing on our troops on the beach.

And how about how the troops actually got ashore?

Well they got ashore on what was called LSI [landing ship infantry] and we had three major Australian ships, HMAS Kanimbla, Minoura and Westralia and they played a major part in nearly all of the landings. They were in pretty well all of the landings

- 15:00 we were in, they were in too. And they used to have on them what they called LCIs, [landing craft infantry] or landing craft tanks whatever, and they would carry
- 15:30 fifteen or twenty LCIs and the troops would be loaded onto those landing craft infantries and they would go ashore on those landing barges. Either that or they would take, in the case of Balikpapan Borneo, they would take tanks ashore for some of them. I don't know how far they brought
- 16:00 them. might have even brought them all of the way from Morotai. And they went on these LSTs, landing ship tanks and they were bigger ones to take the tanks ashore, some of them would take one tank and a few crew and infantry ashore or they would have something like fifty men on these LCIs, landing craft infantry and they would come off the big ship onto them. And they would be on there for
- 16:30 probably three or four miles out to shore and they would go ashore in those and the front would drop down and the infantry would run ashore. Fortunately in Balikpapan's case it was fairly dry and they could land right up on the beach where as in Tarakan, where they landed in Tarakan Island, they landed in mud and some of them had to swim ashore
- 17:00 or scramble ashore any way they could through mud. Fortunately at Balikpapan they could land on the beaches. Unfortunately the advance guard on some of those places didn't do their homework right you know and they found out even the island of Tarakan, when the 9th Division I think landed in Tarakan, that it really wasn't suitable for an airstrip.
- 17:30 It was pretty well a mud flat and that was why a few months later they did the landing at Tarakan so they had a really good air base there. And again around the other side of the island at Brunei and Labuan Island. We did that in between while we were going back up to the Philippines and Subic Bay which was north of Manila, the
- 18:00 capital of Manila, and we were there actually for the last month or so before peace was declared. We were there to try and intercept Japanese war ships trying to break through from Java and Jakarta and around that area. Mainly around about that area trying to break through to get
- 18:30 back to the mainland to Japan. Japan was preparing for a really big invasion. And the invasion was set for I think the 1st of September that we were going to invade Japan. And then it was deferred some months or so before the Japanese surrendered, it was deferred to the 1st of October or November
- 19:00 because they found the Japanese had really prepared for an invasion. They were really prepared to sacrifice a lot of people and they found out they had a lot more planes and suicide boats, and particularly suicide planes and boats than they had anticipated in the
- 19:30 first place, and so they deferred it. But by the time they got around to this invasion, which we were all ready to bombard to invade, they surrendered after they got the two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

What was the main base you were using in the area to refuel and things like this before the invasion of the Philippines?

- 20:00 Well we were using Subic Bay which is north of Manila. This was just after we had this bombardment and invasion of island of Corregidor which was an airborne attack. I was allowed on deck on that particular occasion because after we had bombarded the island for an hour or two all of the ships ceased firing and
- 20:30 hundreds of bombers flew over Corregidor and dropped paratroopers which the Japanese weren't expecting; they were expecting a landing from the sea. And they had most of their guns emplaced to stop an attack by sea to the shore
- 21:00 but instead they dropped paratroopers. Unfortunately a lot of those fellows were shot in the air or fell down the side of a cliff. We did see a few of them there, a few landed in trees or fell down the side and were killed or shot in the air. But just north of there was Subic Bay which was our main bay or Lingayen Gulf,
- 21:30 that's where we were stationed most of the time for the last, pretty well the last six to nine months of the war we were up in that area.

How about previous to the invasion of the Philippines, what was used as a base then?

We used Seeadler Harbour and then we used Morotai, they were our main bases and we stepped from one place to another.

- 22:00 **And did you go ashore at any of these places?**

No never went ashore. We used to swim over the side occasionally. I won't say we never went ashore. America had a recreation island in the Admiralty Islands and they had this island I think it was Peleliu. They used to look after their fellows fairly well

22:30 and they had this recreation island where you could go and play baseball or sort of wall tennis, and they had a big canteen there which they would supply them with a case of beer between two or four men, whichever it was. And you would go ashore there for about six hours. We went ashore there for about six hours I think. As I said I tell a lie when I said we didn't go

23:00 ashore for nine months, we went ashore for six hours there. So that's all we could do. They had a band there and they played a bit of music or we played wall tennis or tried to play a bit of baseball or something like that, you know.

And what was it like being ashore even for such a short time?

Well it is strange in the first place because you're not moving at all. I mean a

23:30 ship's even a slight motion, even when it is at anchor it is swaying a little bit. It seems rather funny when you get onto land the first place and it is not even moving. It is going up and down and rolling sideways and when you get onto land and it is stationary and it is quite an unusual feeling at first. And so we were there in

24:00 that area until the [atom] bombs were dropped on Japan and they surrendered and we headed straight for Japan. And We went up to Japanese Okinawa spent a few days in Okinawa and we were up in Japan by late in August in Tokyo Bay.

24:30 **Just going back you mentioned seeing the paratroopers, can you just describe the general set up of what was happening in this battle?**

General set up, well I know that they were coming down, these planes as I say there seemed to be hundreds of planes. They were landing artillery there, guns and things like that. They had their different colours and you seen all of these parachutes coming down and we didn't know why they were

25:00 red white green or blue. But let's say red was the paratroopers, and white might have been mortars, and red was heavy artillery and pieces to be put together when they hit the ground and heavy machine guns. Most of the troops, they had automatic weapons by that time. All arriving with

25:30 automatic weapons, so it was quite a colourful experience to see them all coming down like that but it was a rather pathetic to see. While we all ceased fire the Japanese were opening up what guns they had on the island, they were opening up their guns on the paratroopers and the aircraft flying over. They didn't seem to have a lot of success with the aircraft, but they did have a fair

26:00 success against the paratroopers and the equipment that was in the parachutes because they were closer as they came down, obviously coming right down to ground level and landing there. So some of them were sitting ducks, you know. Fortunately most of them seemed to get down because we had given them [the Japanese] a thorough pasting, it seemed to be mainly machine gun fire that was there, we

26:30 had knocked out most of their heavy artillery fortunately.

What was it like watching some of these paratroopers as sitting ducks?

Well I guess the other side of it you really didn't know whether they were being killed or not because from the distance we were standing off we could see some coming down, but there

27:00 wasn't much different between a live soldier and a dead soldier you know. You just heard that they were killed. I mean there is a man coming down and he is just coming down like this and he still looks the same whether he is alive or dead, you really can't tell much difference you know. From our distance you can't see the

27:30 blood popping out, it wasn't, you know, that way.

And around the Philippines, were you able to go ashore into Manila at all?

We did go into Manilla later on but it was fairly late, it must have been after the Japanese

28:00 surrender, but I can't recall the actual time, but we did go ashore there. I think the Japanese had surrendered in Manila in that area before they surrendered officially and we had quite a big perimeter around Manila and the Bataan Peninsula, and we went ashore there.

28:30 I only went ashore one day, but it was a fairly restricted area in which we could go to there, there was a perimeter around there. We didn't have any transport, we were just put ashore and we walked where we went. I suppose there wasn't much there to look at. Most of it was fairly heavily shelled, even Manila itself.

29:00 I think the place most of the boys went to was a bar to have a couple of whiskeys, good time whiskey or something there. Terrible stuff. Some of our fellows ended up in hospital it was so bad. Some of our

fellows lost their eyesight, at least temporarily and went crazy on the stuff and ended up in hospital.

And what did you recall about the state Manila was in?

- 29:30 Everyone seemed so happy, you think why were they so happy, but they were happy that the war was more or less over for them and they could get on with living their life rather than under Japanese rule. And they were very happy to see us. As a matter of fact, sort of harking back
- 30:00 from that, I can recall people coming out in canoes and catamarans while the fighting was still going on. Coming out and so happy to see us and wanting to trade with us on the ship to get some food for exchange for a knife or some ornament that they had made. We were saying you have got to get back the war is still on. And they said, "Oh no the
- 30:30 Americans have moved inland past where we live and we have come out to get some food or something." You know. That was while the fighting was still going on. That was pretty exciting stuff to see them coming out like that. What the heck are they doing coming out like that, you know? But as far as they were concerned the war was over when they were cleared out of their village.

31:00 And during this time did the ship get a refit at all?

No during the two and a half years we went down to Sydney twice, we had to change the barrels in our guns they were worn out and we had to get new barrels and I think both the four inch and the eight inch guns and I am not quite sure, but I know they had to renew some of the

- 31:30 barrels of the bigger guns, because they fired quite a lot of shells.

And how long did you get to spend in Sydney?

I think it was two or three weeks on one occasion, and on another occasion we had this fairly extensive refit after we had been to the Philippines. We went back there around about

- 32:00 April '45 and we had an extensive, this is when they replaced the barrels and did quite a lot of work on the ship. We had quite a lot of trouble with the wharf labourers. They wouldn't work on the ship unless we unloaded the ammunition, which was a ridiculous situation, because if we had have been attacked in Sydney Harbour we wouldn't have had the ammunition.
- 32:30 So we had to unload the ammunition and put it ashore on the docks which still seemed rather stupid because the ammunition would have been blown up there easier than it would have in the ship. Unbeknown to them we didn't unload all of the ammunition; we weren't going to be that silly, but we did unload a lot of it and put in on dockside which was positively stupid to us
- 33:00 because it could be blown up just as easy. They still wanted danger money for going on. That did delay us in Sydney and I know that we were there in Sydney when peace was declared, Victory Europe, we were there in May so we were there for around about two months. A lot of the trouble was with the dockies and we had to do a lot of the work ourselves.
- 33:30 And then we had to leave because there was still a war on in the Pacific. We had to leave there in May and go back up to the Philippines and back to Borneo for a short while too.

What sort of things did you get to do in Sydney in terms of free time or social?

Mainly going to dances, that was the main thing. And when we had

- 34:00 our own ship's party, we had two ship's parties that I can recall, we invited a lot of girls to our own ship's dance. Other times there were dances on at various places around Sydney, either that or going to the pub with the boys, that was the main thing or going out with your girlfriend to the beach. Something like that. But it seemed to be
- 34:30 around Sydney itself. They built up such a camaraderie between themselves that they went ashore and went to parties. In fact I on that particular occasion I was invited to this leading stoker's 'Spanky' Hearst's wedding, and I was one of the few sailors that went to his wedding. And I know that on that occasion,
- 35:00 I think there were about four of us invited to his wedding. And I got into trouble because there was a young lady there and they were drinking beer there and they didn't have any soft drinks or anything and I invited a young lady just over the road to the milk bar to just have a milkshake.
- 35:30 And apparently she didn't tell her parents and I didn't realise this and I don't know how old she was, seventeen or eighteen, and I might have been nineteen or something. And apparently she didn't tell her parents and somebody said, "Oh she went off with a sailor." So it was panic stations and I was only over the road with her having a milkshake. And I got into trouble and she got into trouble,
- 36:00 she probably got into more trouble than me, going off with a sailor at her age. As I say she was only seventeen or something. As I say they were mainly concerned with a few beers there, and they didn't have much for them at all, and I wasn't drinking much at the time and so I thought it would be a good idea to go over the road for a milkshake. As I say I got into trouble for that.

And had Sydney changed at all in the years you had been away?

- 36:30 No I don't think so. Put it this way, at that stage the British Fleet had arrived so there were more British sailors taking out our girls, then there were American sailors. The Americans had moved on to further bases, north Queensland or the Philippines and like that. And the British Fleet were using Sydney
- 37:00 as our base, so it was a change of accent from American to British and they were running most of the show because they had their aircraft carriers in there and their battleships and cruisers and they were in Sydney Harbour and we didn't think it was much of a joke to think they were in our home town.
- 37:30 We were up there fighting a war and they were back home taking our girls out. So that's as far as our differences, had Sydney changed. But I suppose on the good side of it we were allowed into the British, what they call NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] canteens. We were allowed into their canteens to have a bit of English or Australian beer, whatever was offering.
- 38:00 **And from dances or the radio are there any songs that remind you of that time?**
- Well there is one particular time and I couldn't even tell you the actual words now but when we were in harbour up north we had a record on there, it was a girl by the name of Betty Wardrop and I think she came from South Australia. And Betty Wardrop
- 38:30 used to sing this song Goodnight Wherever you Are. And we used to call her Betty Wardrobe and we were all of her little lowboys. You know what a lowboy is? Instead of a wardrobe, a small wardrobe was a lowboy. So we used to call her Betty Wardrobe and all of her little lowboys. But she used to sing this song Goodnight Wherever you Are, may your dreams be pleasant wherever you are. And we used to all howl like
- 39:00 wolves while Betty was singing this song to us. As I say I can't even think of the words to it. They escape me now. May your dreams be pleasant dreams and I will be thinking of you wherever you are. It is the song that stuck in my mind out of any of them. There were a lot, I will put it this way,
- 39:30 there were dirty ditties and things that sailors sang that one wouldn't broadcast. I mean they weren't just ordinary sea shanties you know they were very rude sea shanties that they used to sing on board ship. And unfortunately the swearing that went on board ship was dreadful that it just become common usage, and when you went ashore you had to be very
- 40:00 careful when you went ashore because for the first few days these swear words would slip out because they were common conversation, and every sentence there was a couple of swear words. And it was just normal and you had to be careful about that.
- 40:23 End of tape

Tape 9

- 00:30 **Okay we were just talking about ditties' do you want to sing us a ditty?**

No I am afraid not they were too rude to put on tape I am afraid.

Did you have a nickname?

Yes I started off as Firstlight Frasa. There was a radio serial on at times,

- 01:00 no television of course, there was a radio show on called Firstlight Frasa and he was a detective and he would be up at first light, and I said before one of my first jobs was to wake up the watch and I had to have a torch and go around with this and wake up the watch. And from Firstlight Frasa
- 01:30 I got the name of Flashlight Frasa, and then because everything was abbreviated I got the name of Flash. "Hey Flash" they called me, everyone got some unusual name for some reason or another. I can recall one fellow who was a very good close friend, Vince Highland, he got named Moose Highland because we had our
- 02:00 dead meat tags [ID tags] we called them. And on the dead meat tags you had your name, religion and blood group and they used to O4 positive was called MOS O4 but they spelt it wrong, instead of putting MOOS they put MOOS O4 so we used to say he had moose's blood in him. So various reasons.
- 02:30 **Towards the end of the last tape we were talking about the end of the war, tell us how you received the news of the atomic bombs?**

Well I we received it with jubilation and mixed feelings because we were waiting to have another go at the Japanese Fleet and we weren't going to get it. It was an anti-climax

- 03:00 to some degree. We were thinking well, what's going to happen here? We joined up for the duration or twelve months after or at the King's pleasure, whichever was the greater, and so you were thinking to yourself what is going to happen here? And fortunately we got word almost straight away that we were going to Japan, and we thought well that's great, that's what we are here for you know, to go all of the way.
- 03:30 And in a way it was far better than going home. As I say we had been there six or seven months already and it looked like we were going to Japan. We thought we were going there for the surrender, we had been invited there by the Seventh Fleet and when we got there we became part of the Third Fleet.
- 04:00 US Third Fleet, 7th when we arrived there and they said, "The Seventh Fleet is going home but you're staying." The Hobart went up there with us and a couple of others, I think the Warramunga they said, "Well they're going home, but you are transferred to the Third Fleet and you are the flagship off the Australian Navy and your commodore is going ashore as the
- 04:30 ambassador for Australia. He is taking over a certain house in Tokyo and you are here as the flag ship and will be staying." So we ended up staying for three months which was quite good in one way, I am glad it happened now. But they started demobilising quite a lot of the
- 05:00 sailors that were what we called wartime sailors, we were sort of what they call RANR Royal Australian Naval Reserves, wartime ones that just joined up for wartime. They started demobilising a lot of them and sending them home. We were reasonably new, just been two and a half years in the navy by then, and we were well down the priority so we stayed. And they sent a lot of the others home by
- 05:30 various ships and some of our crew had the privilege going looking for the prisoners of war of the Japanese, the Japanese had taken prisoners of war and sent a lot of them to Japan to work in their munitions factories and things like that. And they were sent to locate them and get them over to hospital ships and
- 06:00 get them fit enough by the time they got home. A lot of them were skeletons by then, and very very sick . And so they got them back onto hospital ships and troop ships to send them home. And our job was to round up people and get them on their way home to their various countries, while we stayed around. Of course we were there for the amazing signing of the surrender on the 2nd of September,
- 06:30 again a great fleet , armada of aeroplanes flew across. There seemed to be thousands of them. Completely covered the sky on that particular day. One wondered what the Japanese thought. "Gee, they have a lot of planes, just as well we did surrender," I guess they might have thought.
- 07:00 We were based at what they call Yokohama, it was a big naval base twenty or thirty miles from Tokyo. The place was flattened completely from Yokohama right through to Tokyo with mainly the main shopping centre, the Ginza and the Imperial Palace, intact. When I say flattened I mean
- 07:30 absolutely flattened. My impression when I did go ashore the first time. There was hundreds of security safes all sitting around. Everything else was flattened and these big security safes were still sitting around and they were the only things that survived the bomb blast. The Japanese were using them as stoves, some of them they managed to get open somehow
- 08:00 and they were using them to put fires inside, to cook their meals on top of the safes.

What were the Japanese using for shelters?

Oh that's a good question, they were living anywhere, any piece of iron or anything they could find they were living in primitive conditions. When the Americans arrived they supplied a lot of them with tents. But before that they were

- 08:30 living in the open or under a piece of galvanised iron or something. It was very pathetic. People that lets so weren't soldiers but were living in such bad conditions, short on food and everything there.

What was it like to see this after battling with them?

It was rather pathetic. You get from a stage of hating the enemy

- 09:00 to feeling sorry for them because you see their poor circumstances. Even with the atomic bombs we thought well it is better than us and it did save probably millions of lives of the Japanese and the Allies. So you had mixed feelings about them. But you felt rather sorry for them. And we were told right from the start we had to
- 09:30 behave not like conquering heroes but we were there to assist them and we weren't there to knock them around or anything like that. And we had mixed feelings because we didn't know whether Hirohito's
- 10:00 orders to ceasefire, whether they were going to completely ceasefire like you would get in Iraq at the present time, or whether they were going to take notice of what he was. He was God as far as they were concerned. And fortunately they took notice to the man except for some suicide pilots, they had been to their own funeral, not so much in Japan but still in the Philippines and Okinawa and Iwo Jima,

- 10:30 and as soon as they had been to their own funeral a few days after they were still active. But people almost to the man you know honoured the agreement and as I say we didn't know what they were going to do and they didn't know what we were going to do. In fact I have a couple of epaulets and a belt buckle over there,
- 11:00 we went ashore at one stage where there weren't any troops and we went either sailing or rowing or an accommodation of both and we went ashore, we weren't supposed to go ashore but we did and we just wanted to have a look at their houses which were very very small. When I say primitive by our standards, their house was about as big as this room. And when we indicated to the people that we wanted to have a look at their house and they were
- 11:30 rather fearful what we were going to do, whether we were going to ransack their house or rape their women or what we were going to do. We just wanted to go in and have a look what their house looked like. And it had very little furniture and a table, because they sat on the floor for their meals, they had a couple of katami mats and a bed
- 12:00 cover or something that they slept on. A katami mat and maybe one cover under and one cover over them. And then we just said, "Thankyou." And gave them a couple of packets or cigarettes and on the way out a Japanese, I don't know whether they were his I guess they were, he gave me a couple of epaulets of a naval junior officer and a belt buckle.
- 12:30 I guess it was in appreciation that we weren't going to do anything to them. So as I say on both sides we didn't really know how the enemy was going to react, they with us or we with them. So it was a rather touchy for the first month over there. After a month I think we realised they weren't going to carry on
- 13:00 the fight and we weren't going to do anything to them. We had been told terrible things about what they did and they had obviously been told horrible things of what we would do to them. But we were on strict orders that we would be on charge [in trouble] if we did anything. It didn't stop some people from looting which some of them did. Even some of our own sailors looted the British Embassy of some
- 13:30 things when they were sent there to raise the flag in the British embassy. They went over there and when they had an opportunity to take a few souvenirs from the British Embassy, they souvenired even from the British Embassy.

Do you remember what they got?

I wasn't there, funnily enough we had khaki uniforms

- 14:00 because we were in the tropics and they had to go over to the British ship and receive white uniforms and shorts and the English used to wear what we used to call 'Bombay Bloomers' where we wore shorts like this. They were our official regulation and they wore these Bombay Bloomers and they were issued with Bombay Bloomers and black socks, rather than khaki socks and white navy shirt and
- 14:30 a naval shirt with a blue band on it rather than a khaki one. They were issued with all of this with what they thought dreadful gear, and as soon as they got back to our ship, they went to the tailor and got him to move the legs up about six inches, we used to call them 'British Parachutes' or 'Bombay Bloomers'. And they got the uniform changed to fit them, we used to like it a bit tight, and so they went ashore
- 15:00 and while they had the flag raising at the British Embassy they put the Australian sailors at the back and I don't know for what reason, but I think it was because we had changed our uniform. They thought we weren't going to show off these fellows. So while they were having a party there the Australians were saying to the British, "There are plenty of sandwiches down there you want to get into them."
- 15:30 And while they were there the Australians were stealing the beer at the other end and going through the embassy because all of the top brass were outside and some of our sailors inside the embassy were souveniring, Japanese operatic tapes and some of the ambassadors gold engraved visiting cards. Anything. An inkwell and a few things
- 16:00 that they could get their hands on. By the time they got back to the ship they realised that the alarm might have been sounded and that the operatic records the Japanese opera and that would have been a dead giveaway so after souveniring they threw them over the side before they got back to the ship and about the only thing that got
- 16:30 back was the ambassador's personal little cards that he sent out invitations to people in .That was quite a souvenir and all of the boys signed the thing for them.

And did you have any particular role that you had to play ashore?

Only as shore patrol. That was about the only thing I had to do and

- 17:00 it was just seeing that our boys mainly our own men kept out of mischief or if they did get into mischief to try and keep them out of gaol, get them to some place where they could sober themselves up or straighten themselves up, before they got arrested. That was our instructions, to look after them not to bully or push them around. Unless they were doing something really stupid, but to get them out of trouble rather than into trouble.

17:30 **Did you have to do this much?**

A couple of times fellows were drunk and they were being a bit boisterous and we just had to get them away and settle them down, but we never had much trouble with them. Well I didn't at the time. Sometimes you thought to yourself just as well because some of them were pretty big boys compared to me. I was only ten stone or

18:00 something at the time because we had been on pretty light rations for some time and sweating down in our action stations, most of us lost quite a bit of weight you know. So I was only about ten and a half stone or less at the time. So I was glad that I didn't have to be a bit rough with any of the big boys.

You told us a bit about the

18:30 **victory ceremony. Describe the scene of the harbour on that day?**

Well it seemed to be full of hundreds of warships and hospital ships and transport, but mainly hospital ships and warships at that stage rather than transports, they came a few days later. Lots of battleships, cruisers all of the way down to

19:00 corvettes, we had a few Australian corvettes there and it was just chock a block [full up] It was like the armada that attacked the Philippines, they were all warships rather than transports there. They came a few days later with the troops ashore. Commodore Collins and our captain,

19:30 Captain Nichols, both went aboard the Missouri for the surrender. Commodore Collins was actually the Australian Naval representative at the signing of the surrender but General Blamey is the one that signed the surrender document on behalf of Australia. Field Marshal Blamey I think he was at that stage.

20:00 We could see it in the distance. Tokyo Bay is a big bay, something like fifty miles from the mouth of the bay right up to Tokyo, so we were a fair distance from it but we had a lot of our own frivolity on that ship. We had a special postage that day printed with " 2nd of September signing of the surrender" and we got as many of our mates

20:30 as we could to sign them and we addressed them home to mother or whoever it was and got as many of the ship's company as we could get on the envelope to sign it. The stamping of the signing of the surrender Tokyo 2nd of September is very faint you can hardly read it, but it still means something to me.

What was the feeling like being a part of all of this?

21:00 Oh it was wonderful, really wonderful to do that with much celebration all around. I think we got a double ration of beer at that time. My leading stoker 'Spanky' Hearst he wasn't getting it because I was drinking it by that time, and he had already been sent home because he was a long service man at the time, he had pretty

21:30 well done six years by then, and he was on his way back. A lot of the fellows didn't stay, they might have been there for the surrender ceremony but within the next few days or couple of weeks, a lot of the long serving men were sent home and left the young fellows there.

Tell us about winding up your service in Japan?

22:00 Well we weren't there, as I say mainly gathering up troops, men and sending them home and we were there until about the 18th of October, 18th or 20th and we then got word to go home to Australia. And happily we got a signal

22:30 pretty well at the same time that we were to call into Wewak on the way home and pick up something like two hundred or two hundred and fifty, they asked us how many soldiers we could take home and the captain said, "Look we can handle about two hundred of these time expired soldiers maybe two hundred and fifty." So they asked us to call into Wewak and pick up there two hundred and fifty soldiers. Well when we got to Wewak on the way home

23:00 they were in canoes and rafts and goodness knows what and there was more or less another armada of Australian 6th Divvy sailors coming out to the ship to come aboard. Instead of 200 or 250 we ended up with just on 600 and of course we weren't going to ask any questions about whether they were entitled or not. If they climbed up that scrambling net we were picking up their gear for them,

23:30 and bringing it on board for them so they didn't have as difficult a time as we had. And we were just getting them on board as many as possible and not asking questions. Captain wasn't asking questions and so we ended up about 600 of them and so we took them back, we had a fast passage back and they probably had come up on a slow boat from Australia and so we went home at about twenty-four knots which was pretty good then

24:00 and we got home in about three days. And we had a lot of ammunition that was told to be expended at the time and so we gave them a bit of a fireworks display on the way home and fired off all of our guns for them. They thought that was quite electric. Of course they were pretty clumsy on board

24:30 ship as we would have been ashore. But they found it very difficult with their boots and their steel horseshoes and what have you on the heels on their boots, and to try and climb our ladders and things. But we gave them all of the best places to sleep preferably on the upper deck after being in the tropics and sweating and malaria and all of that. So we gave them

25:00 all of the key possies [positions] while we slept below and let them sleep on the upper deck and we arrived in Sydney on the 30th of November 1945 with these 600 troops all standing around on the upper deck.

What was the feeling like?

That was fantastic. Just fantastic to see them getting home, that was great.

25:30 And that was the end of my time as far as going up into the northern area. I mean the rest of my time on Shropshire until mid March was spent going on more or less a victory cruise, Jervis Bay and Melbourne and Hobart and back to Sydney and

26:00 where I was transferred then from the Shropshire to one of the Q class destroyers, HMAS Queenborough, and then eventually from Queenborough to Flinders Naval Depot and then back to Balmoral Depot and discharged from HMAS Platypus, which was a depot ship there. And I was discharged there in September 1946.

26:30 **What was it like to return to civilian life?**

Very hard. And particularly being out in the open I found it hard to acclimatise myself to being indoors, I just hated being indoors a very musty printing business. It is a musty place to be and I just hated that. I got out of it as soon as I could but it took me

27:00 ten years I suppose to get out of it. By the time I got out of the printing trade out into the open air and came to Queensland. And I spent most of my time in the open air from there. Funnily enough at one time I bought a dry cleaning business which had a boiler in it and steam and got back into the steam of the tropics

27:30 in Maroochydore for a couple of years while I was finding out what I could do to stay here. There was very little employment that one had you more or less had to buy a business or work in the printing trade and I didn't want to work in the printing trade anymore, so I bought a dry cleaning business and got back into steam and sweat for a couple of years before I got out of that and got into real estate.

28:00 **Did that bring back some memories being in the steam?**

It sure did. I thought what am I doing here? I thought at least I am used to it.

And how did you adapt to being outside of that team environment that was part of the navy?

It was very hard to get used to that. I guess one fortunate

28:30 thing was when I went back to the printing trade, there was several ex-service and ex-sailors and soldiers and airmen that were also back there and we had something in common. So we built up quite a friendship between the fellows who had come back and had been overseas to the war. And we built up quite a nice little friendship between about six of us

29:00 there army, navy, air force and that sort of softened the thing a bit. I never really did enjoy being back inside. It was a matter of when I say convenience and a matter of money. When my wife and I were married in 1947, we were married in Melbourne but

29:30 came straight up to Sydney, and we left there in early 1952 but it was a matter of buying a cheap house and doing it up and I knew the printing trade and there was plenty of work around at the time and I was doing plenty of overtime, so I was making money to buy a house and renovate a house. Then we moved to Melbourne, same thing happened down there, plenty of overtime

30:00 because there was plenty of work going on. We were building a house from scratch in Melbourne from 1952 to 57 while I was working and doing overtime I would go home and work weekends building the house. So I built a house from scratch but it took me about five years to build it in spare time with the money that was coming in. But fortunately I ended up

30:30 hardly owing any money on the house by the time I sold it in late 1957.

And so tell us looking back at your service time in the navy, what do you think is one of the most important thing you learnt from that time?

One of the most important things I think was to get out in the open.

31:00 I have always wanted to be a cabinetmaker or a carpenter but my father said, "Oh no machinery is taking it over, it is going to be no good. Better off to get into something permanent like the printing trade. There is always going to be printing pound notes", he said, "People buy a newspaper today and throw it away tomorrow so there is always plenty of work there."

31:30 But it was always get outside in the open air. That's what I did as much as possible apart from the dry cleaning and got into the real estate after that. Real estate and auctioneering and developing some small subdivision. Developing and building but being out in the open air.

And how had you changed from the seventeen year old that had joined up?

Well

32:00 I think I missed growing up as people from lets say seventeen to twenty-one years of age, they are playing football and going surfing, body surfing and hiking and camping with your mates, and all of this sort of thing. I missed growing up in

32:30 those teenage years. You were a boy one day and a man the next you know, in the respect that in three months basic training you were growing up from a boy into a man, and of anything I look back at that and think I missed all of that.

What do you think looking back were the best moments in the navy?

33:00 Looking at it overall it was going on leave I guess. It was few and far between and you never knew how long it was going to last and when you were going to get another one so you lived for the day really. If you got leave, you made the most of it.

33:30 I remember one stage coming home on leave in Sydney and not even going home to see my parents, for about four or five days before I got home.

What would be the worst memories?

Dear oh dear. Being shot at and that

34:00 sort of thing and knowing that you were shot at. Possible mines and torpedoes was nowhere near as bad I think as getting prickly itch. That was a painful experience, I was quite brown when I joined the navy because I spent a lot of time near the sea and I was quite brown and sunburnt, but it was a different type of sun as we all know, now,

34:30 the infra-red rays the closer you get to the tropics the worse they are. We just lay out in the sun and got ourselves sunburnt further and even though I was brown I overlooked the fact that I had just spent three months in winter in Melbourne fully clothed. I had lost a lot of my tan and I got sunburnt and prickly itch fairly early, and that was one of the most painful things

35:00 apart from, oh I got scalded on both arms at one time by boiling hot gravy, of all things. And they had silly systems in the navy, instead of putting it in a billy can they put it in a big open tray for you to carry down the ladder. And that happened fairly early in my career on the ship when I was a mess

35:30 man in the chief petty officers mess, walking down the ladder and slipped and splashed, and the fellow had said "Careful with this, it is boiling hot". I burnt my arms up there. Another time I had my hand crushed with a steam pipe and I squashed my hand. It was pretty painful and as you can see it is a bit bent now.

36:00 Not an enjoyable thing. I did unfortunately abuse a commander at the time when he said, "I say, did it get you?" in their best Oxford English and I said, "Of course it did, you stupid old bastard!" I wasn't caring that he had three rings on his arm at the time. That was a rather painful experience. Only briefly but I suppose I had

36:30 light duty for a couple of weeks for that. But even when they put you on light duty they probably put you in cleaning the bathroom. One of the hottest places on a ship was the bathroom so you would probably end up with a sore hand and prickly itch.

How do you think it has affected your life your navy service?

Well I think it is one of those things where you don't

37:00 want it to affect your life but it does. You never forget it. I mean my father during the war sometimes they used to say when we were kids right up until 39 and they would be talking the old fellows, during the war. Well even now we have still got our HMAS Canberra/Shropshire Association, which we got and meet our mates once a month and that still goes on

37:30 in every state in Australia. We had got a memorial park in a place called Ulverstone in Victoria they have got a HMAS Shropshire Park which is quite a big important naval park, although it is named after Shropshire it is a park for every ship in Australia and they have all got plaques or memorials in this particular park.

38:00 And that is a permanent memento the fact that it is HMAS Shropshire park there in Tasmania and every sailor that goes to Tasmania goes there, and a lot of them go there especially to what they call all ship's reunion in Shropshire park or in that area. But you never forget it and you never forget the fellows you know, and you keep in contact with a certain number of them and

38:30 there was a certain camaraderie as I say I never had the mateship you grew up with, kids from

seventeen to twenty-one that would be in the football or cricket teams, that you have today, the navy was our family and mates so it does affect your life that way and I suppose it does come into conversation quite a lot

39:00 whether you mean to or not. It is a memorable occasion. Thinking back you had a chance of being killed but you have got a chance of being killed crossing the road. You had a much bigger chance, but still and all it was an unforgettable experience.

We have come close to the end do you have any final words?

39:30 I suppose in hindsight I told you about my girlfriend in Sydney that got me the chop [dropped me] she probably did me a great favour in doing that.

40:00 Fifty-seven years ago I married my wife and we are still together, so she did me a good turn.

Excellent well thankyou very much for today that was a terrific interview.

40:13 **INTERVIEW ENDS**