

Australians at War Film Archive

Laurence Biggs (Laurie) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1885>

Tape 1

00:44 **So let's go back to where you were born. You were born in the UK?**

Yes, in London. North London. In 1923.

What hospital?

That's a funny story.

01:00 My mother was taken ill in the street and she was taken to the nearest place there was and it happened to be a Salvation Army place, so I started my life with the Salvation Army. Then there was a hospital after that and I can't tell you which one. But only three months after that we moved to South London to a place called Norbury.

01:30 And we stayed there for many a year. We lived in three different houses. My young time there...my father used to work in the city and he used to come home. We were a close knit family.

02:00 He was very conscious of me because they had lost my elder brother before I was born. So I was a very much wanted replacement. I had the feeling even though I wasn't allowed to say this, but I was quite a disappointment for a lot of them. Apparently he was a glamorous looking young fellow and they named him after...although his name was Ralph, everyone called him Bubbles because there was an advertisement for some

02:30 soap and there was a curly headed boy and he looked exactly like him. So I always felt I was under pressure from the very early days.

How old was he when he died?

Five years of age.

And did your parents have any more children after you?

No, I was the last one. I have an older sister, still alive, eighty three years of age.

03:00 A charming lady. Looks like the Queen, sounds like the Queen and I know she will forgive me if ever she sees part of this, she also sometimes behaves like the Queen. But she is a wonderful person. And again, she was a great success in everything she did.

So can you tell me about your earliest memories in London?

Of London

03:30 itself? Well as I say, we lived in South West suburbia but we were often taken to see some of the museums and I was introduced to music at a very young age. I was taken to the Royal Albert Hall and as a young fellow I had a bit of a treble voice and I sang quite a lot. Not solo or

04:00 anything like that. Yes I can remember London quite well. I was impressed by all the traffic. Being surprised at the varying buses. I can even remember the varying companies...The General Omnibus Company. They were all red. And there was another one. I don't know what its name was but it was a green bus.

04:30 I used to like being an observer and see what was going on and I think...it might come out in our talk today, I think I went through the war as an observer. I was very much a part of it. I got lost in the things around me and in a way I don't know if I've ever grown up. I was always a sticky beak. I didn't know that work in those days.

05:00 Yes. I was sent away to a little private school and I remember years later and people would ask why it was that my father sent me to a paid school. And my dear Dad, who was a charming man...I never knew him to lose his temper...yes I did once when a policeman was standing watching someone about to cross

the road

05:30 and was going to go in front of a car, and my father shouted out, "Help the people, don't wait for an accident." So apart from that...and the policeman jumped. When father spoke everyone jumped. The school was known as Norbury College for Sons of Gentlemen. Can you imagine that term these days?

06:00 Most of us came from houses where there was probably a maid or someone came every day. I can remember one lovely lady, her name was Kerry and she was influential in bringing me up. She died just before my mother, who went on to be ninety eight years old. We remained friends all our lives.

06:30 I've looked at the map where she used to come down to our house every day. She used to walk miles to get there and miles back. Anyway that was a long time ago.

What did your father do?

He worked for a non ferrous metal company.

07:00 That is, lead and solder and those kinds of things. He was a brilliant salesman. He became a sales executive and as far as I know he was a company director. I managed the same title myself before I entered the church, only I was with a company that was making atom bombs, atomic ships, atomic aircraft...Vickers Limited.

07:30 I was on the board of one of the companies. But the church got me and I think there was a great different between what I was going to set out to do to help people, and I hope I still do today....from making weapons of destruction.

08:00 I had a fairly tough time in the war...so I got turned off war. It's rather frightening and nobody wins.

So what was your home life like? You had Kerry coming to care for you?

That was when I was younger. Later I was to go to this big school

08:30 and I had to pass an entrance exam. It was a very tranquil type of life. One got up early in the morning. Even though the school was a boarding school, I lived sufficiently close to not have to be a boarder. Nowadays I think it's only got about a dozen boarders and they're

09:00 usually the top students from Europe. They come and join in and stay there for two or three years. Apart from the routine of going to school, I had a particular friend...not at the senior school but the junior school, and he came from a very Irish background.

09:30 He and I remained great friends all our lives. He married an Irish girl and I was his best man in Dublin. And even to this day, his son now in his fifties...I think they had eight children, three cheers for the Pope in Ireland...

10:00 Yes, we still correspond to this very day. He reckons that his father and I got on so well together that... he lost both his parents, and I was kind to him etc etc. I've got a piece of paper somewhere that says I'm an honorary Irishman. So from this day forward, I'm allowed to put an apostrophe O in front of my name.

10:30 I've never done it. O'Biggs wouldn't sound good. And I'm wearing a watch that bears on the back the date that the Irish Free State became the Republic of Ireland. I was with all the honoured guests and I would have been the only English person there I should think. They were all the real Irish people and two of them became proper

11:00 IRA [Irish Republican Army] people. But I would have been alright when I was there because I was one of them. I still have very happy memories of that place. Unfortunately all of them seemed to have died off at a young age.

So he was going to the same school as you?

Yes, at primary school and then he went away to another school. He went to Malvern College as a boarder.

11:30 Then the war came along and he went in the army and his father who was a World War I captain, his father was very disappointed because he had gone to this very posh school...my friend couldn't give a damn about it, and he became a sergeant. It was glorious. He wasn't commissioned.

12:00 Yes, I remember meeting his Irish wife to be. And she served in the Royal Navy.

Let's go back to the schooling. The school for the sons of gentlemen was the primary school, is that right?

Yes it was the primary school.

You didn't board there?

Well as a matter of fact, I did have a short

12:30 time when my father had to go off somewhere or other. They left me behind and I boarded there for a very short time. I would never do that to a kid. I think I was seven years of age. See I went to school there in 1928, which is a long time ago. But it's like yesterday.

Was it a strict school? A very disciplined school?

13:00 I don't think it was really. I was very fond of cricket and football...the football being the rugby football. In this country of the AFL [Australian Football League] I have to be very careful of what I say. I was brought up on rugby union. There's a funny story. When I came to Australia, somebody said, "Oh you've got to barrack for a team."

13:30 When I worked out what all that meant and so I said, "You must tell me the names of the teams." Well they came out with this name and the other name and the others. Those names didn't mean much to me and then someone said, St Kilda. And I thought well that's a saint, so I had better have St Kilda. This being 2003 and I think

14:00 this is the first time St Kilda has won any games since we've been here.

So you had to board at this school for a while? Can you give me a picture of what the school was like?

There was a big house which had a big dog

14:30 where the headmaster and his wife lived. I think the staff all came in and there were several classrooms built out the back and there was a big playground but the playing fields were somewhere else. We were all marched along in what they called the crocodile.

15:00 We had to behave very, very well and so yes in that way I suppose it was strict. Yes, the classes...we were all put into houses and when we were little, very young people, the houses were named after railway engines.

15:30 I found myself...I always managed to be captain of everything. I wasn't all that bright. I mean I did eventually make university and got some degrees and things like that, but it was always hard going. Yes,

16:00 I've never forgotten these railway engines. I was made the captain of a certain train and it was a castle class locomotive. There's she is on the wall. So things in your young days really stay in your mind.

16:30 Some of the teachers were wonderful, particularly when you were small, particularly those in the boarding school. There would be little accidents and they would look after the people so very well. I don't know what it cost. It must have cost the family quite a bit, but not so much as the bigger school later on.

17:00 So what subjects were you taught there?

Well the reading, writing, arithmetic. Believe it or not, by the time I was about six I was being taught French and Latin. And years later I did Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

17:30 And I still know some of it. Funny thing...Hebrew always stuck with me and I always wonder with my fair sized nose whether I have some Hebrew blood in me. I did love Hebrew studies. So oh yes. They were all the various subjects. They probably tried to cram too much into us.

18:00 I can remember being taught a thing called etiquette. We were taught how a table was laid and how you ate from the outside and all the rest of it. Sometimes when I see my own grandchildren, who are very well behaved and awfully nice people, tucking into their food...I think things are different these days and probably

18:30 far freer. I think that's why I enjoy Australia. My next school, the big school, they were really strict and we wore military uniforms most of the time. We marched about everywhere. If a master came down the corridor you had to stand to attention

19:00 and face inward. I believe it's still like that there. They've got photographs in the room next door with them still in military uniforms and you look at them....they're for some reason or other allowed to wear the old bear hat. They just look like the Brigade of Guards.

19:30 And someone sent me a film a little while ago because the rugby countries had gone to Britain to train....remember that was the thing that Britain happened to win in Australia. They interviewed some of the boys and I often happened to wonder about the language that I had grown up with,

20:00 ...if you watch television with such programmes as The Bill and everything else, that sort of...I was almost going to say, half educated voice. I don't know. It's something that has come along that they all talk these days. And there was a shot from the training grounds at my school and someone was saying,

20:30 "Oh yes, I'm enjoying it very very much." So that's still the same. So it must be one of those exclusive schools. I felt like saying, 'OK mate.' There you are. Perhaps I've been re-educated in Australia.

I suspect you have. What was the name of the school again, what did you call it?

Whitgift. He was Archbishop to Queen Elizabeth the First. I think probably he was the second or third archbishop she had. He kept his head on.

21:00 He was terribly well known for persecuting those who opposed him. It certainly wasn't Rome and the Church of England break. No, it was the Anabaptists. The poor Anabaptists suffered under him I believe.

21:30 **So he established this school?**

Yes he established the school. He established eventually two schools and arms houses. One eventually became the school for people who are going to do higher education and things.

22:00 And then there was another school which is still going called Trinity School of John Whitgift. That is a very renowned and respectable school, a private school. But it had to pay second fiddle to Whitgift. But they always played them in cricket and didn't they love it when they upset the bigger school.

22:30 **So was it established as a military college?**

No, not at all. Except that it still has a large section...many people went into the forces from it. It was another big supplier of people into the church. Most of them ended up being bishops and I would be what you called a failure. I went in much later.

23:00 The Deputy Commander on D-Day was Air Chief Marshal Tedder and he was an old boy of the school. A war time fighter ace, Group Captain Cunningham who incidentally died just two years ago...

23:30 and people like that. And there were streams of them. The number of people who became admirals, generals and all the rest of it. So it supplied a large number to the military forces. Enormous number of people went into law, judges by the dozen. A

24:00 few years ago they wrote to all the old Whitgiftians they were in touch with...they won't let you know. You get a big magazine every year, telling you all the things that are going on. So they wrote to everybody and they said they were going to ask everybody to contribute something.

24:30 Just write anything, and some people will be chosen. I saw a draft form of it...so and so PhD, master of this, letters after names, and I thought now they want to know about those of us serving overseas, so I wrote a letter and said, "From my house I can see five types of parrot. In the garden we have just had a beautiful crop of lemons ..."

25:00 And I was the only one from Australia they printed. So that rather pleased me. And now, I'm going to tell them about this and get it into the magazine.

How many years were you at Whitgift?

25:30 From 1934 to 1940, and that's to December 1940. I left too early, really. If you go onto the top grades you could actually take your inter-degree there.

26:00 So I was perhaps not quite in that group. I was passing alright. I left in 1940 and for a few months....having volunteered for the Royal Navy, I was told that I couldn't volunteer unless I wanted to be a regular sailor...but we can get any deferment done away with and speeded up, and get you into the forces.

26:30 So I actually went into a factory. My dear father thought it would be wonderful for me to go into a factory. So I went into a factory where they were making things for industry. Lots of things to do with rubber. It was hydraulic engineering. So I was putting on the overalls and mixing with the people which my

27:00 father would have thought was a very good thing. I don't think it did me any harm at all.

Can you tell me a bit more about your father? You obviously have a lot of respect for him? Did he influence you?

Well I think he did in a way. He was a man who had quite a lot of disappointments. A great man was my

27:30 grandfather. As far as I know he was a freeman of the City of London. So he must have been on the council. He was a mayor of the burrough for some time where he lived, and his wife's brother

28:00 had a title. He was Sir Arthur, so there was always this rather stuffy background. One had to behave when you went to see these people. Can I tell a story about when I ran away from my grandfather? Well grandfather was a very churchy man

28:30 but certainly not Anglicanism like me. He was very much....non conformist. Anyway there was this big church in the City of London where they used to go and grandfather was like a lay preacher. So I got taken along and I hated all thing. I hated Sunday School.

- 29:00 We'd go and visit my grandparents fairly regularly... and I thought it quite unusual that from 1923 onwards our family always had a little car, and when there was a bigger one wanted, it was supplied by the company. I probably grew up thinking that everyone had cars.
- 29:30 I used to like to go with my grandfather because he used to catch the tram which would take him to the church. And I noticed he used to take me by his hand and we used to walk along this road in which is really the east end of London now. ..and not far away from where the present Prime Minister of England lives.
- 30:00 He lives in the same road. As we worked along the main road, we used to go passed a big church. And at one spot my grandfather always used to take me by the hand and walk on the other side of the road. Now I'm talking Christmas 1928, and at the age I was saying to myself, what's wrong with that church?
- 30:30 My grandfather's attitude. So I thought, right. The next time we went by, two weeks before Christmas, I slipped his hand and ran into the church and in there was a big cassocked figure and he lifted me up in his arms and said, "Have you come to see Jesus?"
- 31:00 I must have said yes. My poor grandfather standing at the door and the church was beautifully lit. There was this big thing....you know all the animals around the manger (It's couldn't have been two weeks before Christmas because you don't have them out until Christmas). So there was all the nativity scene,
- 31:30 he showed me to all the people and something said to me, "All this is absolutely wonderful." There was somebody singing, and the choir and everything else and it just went into me and I thought, this is it. And I never forgot it. I think at that moment, although I wasn't to be ordained until yeas and years later, and it was a very high church, and the name of the priest was
- 32:00 Father Wilson. He became the Head of the Sacred Society of the Holy Cross, and I've been a member of the Sacred Society of the Holy Cross in Australia for years and years and years. So what happens to you when you're young does have an effect on you.
- A real epiphany. But tell me, why did your grandfather always cross the street when you came to the church?**
- 32:30 Well outside there was a big crucifix and all the rest of it. He was a very evangelical type of person. My grandfather and that priest became great friends until I think the priest died first at about the age of ninety. I still have a letter somewhere or other when he found out I was going to be ordained
- 33:00 all those years later, and it was, "Dear Priest... I always thought that nobody from this part of the world ever did this that and the other...and you have." It was a wonderful letter to have and this man lived for years....all that area was bombed out during the war and he lived with years just in one room attached to his bombed out house.
- 33:30 He ministered to the people. He never married or anything like that.
- Was it an Anglican church?**
- Yes. They proudly called themselves Anglo-Catholic.
- Really? Anglo-Catholic?**
- Yes. Anglo-Catholic. It's not known to many. I'm an Anglo-Catholic of the Anglican Church. But don't tell the Bishop. I don't think he would be too pleased.
- 34:00 **But what is an Anglo-Catholic?**
- We believe in and behave and do everything that the Roman Catholic Church does, or nearly. In 1833 the leader of the movement made a speech that really, the Church of England was a continuation of old church
- 34:30 and it had its origins in the Celtic Church and it was the same church going on. It was the body of people who completely revolutionised the church and saw that choirs were again robed in white and everything else. It became very very Catholic in the mid '30s.
- 35:00 There were all sorts of doctrinal things which wouldn't interest you as to what the sacrament is etc. But we're mainly people who encompass everybody. I always found those lower down, you had to see it their way. I think some people see it all sorts of ways and lots of people don't see it at all.
- 35:30 **So you were taken to church every Sunday as a child?**
- I was sent to a Baptist Mission, yes. And when I could get away from it I did. Eventually I came home one day and said to my mother that I wanted to change my church. And dear old Mum said she wasn't surprised and asked me where I wanted to go to, St Phillips? And I said, yes.
- 36:00 So I chose my own church when I was about...1937 anyway. So I went up there. There was an awfully pretty girl there and whether that had anything to do with it. Unfortunately she was to die later on at her own hand, but that's another thing. So I became a member there and then from 1937, except when

war

36:30 war duties and other things got in the way, I don't think I've ever missed since.

Were your parents Baptists?

No, Congregationalists. I was struggling for the name earlier on. And Congregationalists went in with the Presbyterians and the Methodists eventually.

37:00 At least the did out in Australia.

So why were you being sent to the Baptist Mission?

Oh it was the place to go. To evangelical people...the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church were two of a kind. They were separated in a way. They believe that we believe that we thought we were right and everybody else was wrong.

37:30 **That's very Catholic.**

That's why I'm an Anglo-Catholic and not a Roman one. All my children went to the local Catholic School and then went on to Marist. My grandchildren, I've still got two at Marist. The oldest one has left and she's off to England

38:00 to ride her horses next week. She's a great horse woman. There we are. And the Romans have been wonderful. I've even had permission to explain my idea of ordination. This was years ago and I was speaking to a whole school. The headmaster

38:30 afterwards said, "I'm sure if I had asked Father (so and so) he would never have been able to explain it any better." So sometimes I don't think it does any harm.

Maybe we can talk a bit more about that later on, your work. I'm still very curious though why you didn't like the Baptist Mission and you wanted to go to St Phillips.

39:00 Well I think I perhaps wanted ritual and something positive. I mean, can I be theological? At a very young age it struck me...one lot were saying, Jesus loves you and you must love Him, and love people and all the rest of it, and the other one was saying,

39:30 if you receive Him to yourself in the sacrament, He becomes part of you and you become part of Him and therefore everything else you do you are doing it for Him for the rest of your life. And that was the message that got through to me.

So you were obviously thinking quite deeply at that age?

Yes, I think I reckoned I wanted to be like that man who lifted me up, from about the age of five.

40:00 But I didn't become ordained until I was forty. But then there was this thing called the war that got in the way of a lot of us.

At secondary school, was that a very religious school?

This was the one founded by an Archbishop of Canterbury. Yes and no.

40:30 But we were always reminded. We had a chaplain on staff etc etc. And he started the days with prayers and all the rest of it. That was a bit of a laugh. If you turned up at the big school...in those days the school only had eight hundred and fifty, now I believe it has twelve hundred and fifty and you pay through the nose

41:00 to have your sons there. Still a boys' school. There is a girls' school to which my sister went too. It was known as the Old Palace and that's there somewhere. So yes, we had to bring in the hymn book to sing out of. The Public School Hymn Book. You know in England, the top schools, with their noses up in the air, were always public schools. I don't know if they use the term any more. I got hauled over the coals and had to write out so many lines because I went to assembly without my hymn book.

Tape 2

00:34 **We were talking about a scam?**

Yes, I worked out that I would write the other boys lines for them. So I would have a big set-up there and write lines and lines and lines and sell them for a penny a piece. I was a bit of a rogue underneath.

01:00 I think you have to go through this world being a bit of a rogue in a way. You mustn't be dishonest or hurtful to people, but you can get up to all sorts of things, otherwise there's no fun in life.

And what else did you get up to at that school?

Well I played a lot of sport. I certainly wasn't a star in anything but I managed to be in a school 15

01:30 or school 11 and do those kinds of things. I took up fencing for awhile and was hopeless at it. With my friend who went to the other school, he and I spent an enormous amount of time in the mechanical side of railway engines again.

02:00 We got over going to museums but we used to write and get permission to go to the workshops of the main line railways, and we went on the footplates of many a locomotive. Not when they were being driven. But we were shown how they worked and everything else. Actually I have

02:30 a certificate in steam engineering. And I've lost a thing with permission that I have, British Transport thing to drive a locomotive. Not a locomotive on the track but a steam roller or steam wagon.

So you learnt how to drive a locomotive?

Yes. I was very interested in the boilers

03:00 and the boiler door joints. They were all made of asbestos and stuff. Deadly stuff. Good thing I didn't have a full time job in it. Funny thing is, never had any interest in girls. I could always see a pretty face but I never had any interest in them. And when the war came along all my friends were breaking their hearts over their girlfriends who were letting them down or they reckoned they were.

03:30 They would keep on marrying RAF [Royal Air Force] pilots who got shot down. I can remember that. I never had....oh there were one or two that I thought were rather nice, but no. I had to wait until the war was over, or nearly over, and I came home on leave, and the vicar of the church who had been a chaplain

04:00 in the army...I had known him since 1937 when I joined his church. He went in the army when the war came and was evacuated at Dunkirk. So he went through all sorts of things. He was more invalided out but he appeared to be alright. He wore First World War medals, so he must have been getting a bit on in age.

04:30 Yes, he came to me one day and said, "I hear you're coming out of the forces. Wouldn't you like to run the Sunday school class and look after the youth?" And I said, "No!" Don't let my wife see this will you. And there were some little girls there you see. And there was one there

05:00 I remember....oh yes, that's the young sister of Raymond. And something said to me, "You're going to break a few hearts before you're done." And funny thing about these three girls: one was to marry a multi millionaire and live happily in

05:30 America over parts of Europe and Britain, and used to talk about Margaret. Princess Margaret was her personal friend and that type of thing. She used to sometimes have a wonderful Cockney voice... "Oh hello, it's Margaret here." "Oh, it's only you." But she was a lovely girl. Still alive.

06:00 Her husband died and she is remarried to a wonderful fellow. He met her out here a few years ago. Married a solicitor, but he was from Australia. So she went to New South Wales and he became judge of the Supreme Court, so she's up the top there. And the other one of those three girls

06:30 married what was to be a poor parson. The others were millionaires and I'm the other one. And contact has remained. So it's an interesting life. I never had anything to do with girls bar for that one. And oh boy, did I fall. I didn't marry her for ten years after that.

07:00 I can still remember that face. Still looks very similar today actually. There we are.

Did your father go to the First World War?

Oh yes. He volunteered, I think...he was actually married in 1914 and the consequences of this I don't know, but I think it was because everyone was volunteering for the army

07:30 and he and his brothers...amazing, a large family and only one was lost. He was lost at sea. But my father joined the army and was sent out to the trenches and was in the trenches at the front line with very, very little training. An officer came down and said, "Is there anyone

08:00 here who can write a good letter?" And my father said he could. And everyone laughed and said he's have him cleaning out the latrines or something. The officer said just the man we want and he took him out from the front, back a bit,

08:30 gave him a test and said you're just the fellow we want, we want you to be in charge of ammunition trains. So you're out of the trenches but you'll be up there every night unloading the ammunition, or your people will. I think they made him a corporal straight away. In the very beginning...there were one or two hard things. There's a story of

09:00 someone being bayoneted when my father was around. So it was all very nasty and I believe it was a friendly bayonet and not the enemy. Someone in the night mistook who they were. My father was very disappointed that he wasn't commissioned, but he then became a sergeant and then a staff sergeant which is one below sergeant, below. For years he was looking after these trains

- 09:30 and my father was a very good cricketer and got in the army cricket team. When the war ended he went all over Germany and everywhere else playing cricket. My father absolutely hated the army and he came home and I remember my mother saying he came home, took off his uniform and burned it and said, "I don't want to hear the word 'war' again!"
- 10:00 When the invasion...I was going to say invasion, but the invasion of Britain didn't actually happen, but when we were being bombed and the home guard started, he was the first to volunteer. So Father volunteered
- 10:30 but they decided he would be more useful, knowing his way about the city, to do fire fighting and that type of thing. So my father spent a lot of the time in the city. He would go up there and come back and say he was in the last building that wasn't bombed and goodness knows what. My sister was only telling me on the phone when I told her of this strange thing that was going to happen,
- 11:00 that you people were coming and she said, "Did you know Dad said, 'What happened to Laurie?'. He knew I was in the First World War, but he never spoke about it. He never confided in me. And the time when he was instructing people and Mum used to say, "He's not instructing anybody. Look at his clothing. Smell it.
- 11:30 It smells of sea and goodness only knows what," and she'd do my washing for me and send me back because I was in covert operations then and under the Secrecy Act, and dear old Mum had had a scare when listening to the radio, heard...and she knew I was on the HMAS [HMS] Scylla....it said, "HMAS [HMS] Scylla has been in action
- 12:00 against a German raider. There's no details of the battle yet but the enemy raider was sunk." And my mother phoned up everybody. Tell me something. And I didn't know anything about it. I was an ordinary seaman, so they didn't bother too much about ordinary seamen in those days. So she had a scare.

So your father wondered why you didn't confide in him?

- 12:30 He was a man seemed to have a difficulty in expressing great concern. I never remember him putting his arm around me or anything like that. But then, 'stiff upper lip old man', you know. Fellows didn't do that. Not blokes. That's when you're Australian, when you're a bloke.
- 13:00 Fellows didn't do that. It just wasn't the thing was it. So in a way he was a bit distant. He was a most loving and kind father. He gave so much for us. He simply loved the girl that I chose. Mother was a bit suspicious. She said, "Who is that girl?"
- 13:30 Who is that Patricia Cocks? I know, I'll ask Mrs Browning," because Mrs Browning was honorary organist at the church. And she said, "Oh the most lovely girl." So Pat was in from there onwards. See I was...my mother must have been forty odd when I was born.
- 14:00 **You said she had a health scare?**
- Yes, I don't know what it was. I think she had a hysterectomy and that wasn't too good in those days and she was in hospital. And of course only the best hospitals, private hospitals in London. Even I contracted...
- 14:30 what's that horrible disease...it gets hold of all your breathing apparatus. Worse than pneumonia. Anyway it was an illness and my father managed to get the King's doctor. Lord Dawson of Penn to have a look at me.
- 15:00 So he came down and stuck a needle in my arm which was very rare in those days. I remember when it was because the radio was talking about the launch of the Queen Mary, the big ship. So it was sometimes in the middle of the 30s. Of course I recovered fairly quickly after that. They still inoculate kids for this thing today. I remember telling some nurses recently when I had to have a rejab.
- 15:30 I told them and they were quite amused that I had had this all those years ago.

So how aware were you of the impending war?

Very. One of the places I used to like to walk which in modern distance

- 16:00 would have been about four kilometres from our home, was a common known as Mitcham Common, and between 1937 and 1938, they set up an anti aircraft gun sight there. As far as I can remember I took one look at it and said, "They're not anti aircraft guns, they've got no barrels. They're wooden." But there it was.
- 16:30 They had searchlights and by 1938 searchlights were playing the skies at night and practicing with aircraft that used to fly over. Little civvy planes, De Havilland Moths would fly over and be picked up and it was said that they were getting a bit serious over in Germany. When Hitler sees what we're up to it will turn him off.
- 17:00 And of course at school we were told and I can remember our parents signing that we could carry live

ammunition. It was only two two, but we were always in the rifle ranges. That school had everything. We were shooting

- 17:30 and I remember taking an exam in about 1939, just before the war. It was known as Certificate A and I was made a lance corporal in the school cadets. It was known as an OTC, officer training corps but that was dropped later on and became a combined cadet force or something.
- 18:00 When the actual war started, the school didn't go back because the air raid shelters hadn't been built. So all of those in the military section were taken back to school, given shovels and we dug
- 18:30 slit trenches. I think the grounds were sixty five acres. Pretty big grounds around the school. So we dug these slit trenches for the boys to go in, and of course it wasn't very long before the bombing and all that started, and the feeling of invasion. And we were given rifles without bolts.
- 19:00 You know you put the bullet in and turn the bolt. But the bolts were at school. And there was your ammunition. And we were trained that when the enemy came we would be added to the military and would go out and fight the enemy. So at sixteen coming on seventeen years of age...and you've got to remember, a lot of kids were leaving school at fourteen years of age at those times.
- 19:30 So we were pretty young people. We were fully trained militarily. We went on manoeuvres with the army and we were all ready to go out and fight. So from about 1937 onwards we were very conscious of war or the oncoming war. The boys I was with...the Sea Cadets as such didn't exist then.
- 20:00 But a lot of them were Sea Scouts. So those boys were taken and they went over to Dunkirk. One was lost. That stirs me a little bit. I can remember those boys. And being so annoyed that I couldn't go, because I was in the military section and it had to be on the patrol ready. We went out at
- 20:30 night and everything to fight. And you don't sort of hear of that these days. LDV, local defence volunteers, they became the home guard and they were school boys from all over the place were in that. Of course you had to be eighteen years of age. There wasn't one who was eighteen. Nobody asked us our ages.
- 21:00 I know that because I was in the school military thing. Of course the night bombing was terribly intense and we had a bit of fun with that. We would wait until the air raid wardens stopped blowing their whistles and then we would stop and go and climb one of the high hills and see what was going on. We would see the whole of London in front of us, burning.
- 21:30 I remember another fellow, they've both passed away through old age now, one was younger than me. We looked at each other...one was actually the curate of our church. It's always church with me, isn't it? But
- 22:00 he turned around and said, "I'm going to volunteer in the morning." And they other fellow said, "I'm going to volunteer in the morning." So I said, "Well I think I'll join you. But my father won't let me." "Well don't tell him!" So we all went to volunteer and I was told, yes, I could be called up for the navy.
- 22:30 So that was it and that's how we got into the navy. I remember doing the medical. The medical for the navy was quite fun. You'll have to put an R rating on this thing. When we went for our medical...well first of all, there were dear men, dear old doctors most of them and they'd whisper, "Can you tell me your name?"
- 23:00 So you'd give them your name and they would say, "Yes, he can hear." The other thing was, he's warm, so he's in. It was nearly like that. One of the things was, they would say, "Can you give me a sample?" And I could never do this on demand. And I remember saying to a chappie there, "I'm going to have difficulty with that." And he said, "Well I know I'm alright because I've just had a medical." So he filled up
- 23:30 my pot for me and I never heard anything more about it. I got into the navy. I remember one time I had something and the doctor said to me, "There's something wrong with you, your sugar level is much too high." Well I never saw that man again and when I came out of the navy
- 24:00 and circumstances were slightly different and they said, "I say old boy, do you mind..." said the doctor. And I had already been telling the story to another one of my colleagues and he said, "Don't worry old boy." So I came out on his. So I went in on someone else's and came out on someone else's. I've been a diabetic ever since. Well perhaps that's a bit of an exaggeration, but I am a confirmed diabetic.
- 24:30 The navy had someone they shouldn't have had.

Well let's go back a bit. Sticking with those years, say '37 when you were still at school, and the preparations for war were happening. So you went out on manoeuvres with the army. Can you tell me what you did?

We went out

- 25:00 in the day time and occasionally at night time. So we would put on our military uniform and be taken out in the country. We were taught map reading of course and everything else. Another group, probably

not our own people would be the enemy and of course the army would turn up with a Bren gun carrier. It was about the only thing they had which was mechanical. The joke of it was there was Germany

- 25:30 with millions of tanks. So we would do a proper manoeuvre to capture a post and all the rest of it. I don't know if it was then or not but we were taught what was called the Bar Group Movement. Bar was the code name for Bren gun something or other. It's where the rifles give covering fire and the Bren gun and the machine gun moves up to there and so on.
- 26:00 They didn't take into consideration dive-bombers and all that sort of thing. But yes, we really practiced. And I tell you what, we would have been a horrible lot to meet out in the forces, in the night, had the enemy come. Every farmer had a shotgun and they were loaded. If the Germans had turned up at night there
- 26:30 I think every man jack of us would have gone down fighting. It was absolutely like that. And as for the women they would have clubbed anyone over the head if they were on the wrong side. The attitude in Britain...that was actually when the war had started, but back in the 30s we were really getting prepared, and every now and again we would see a fast fighter go over head.
- 27:00 There were quite a number of Hurricanes. They had wooden propellers in those days. We used to go up to Kinley Aerodrome where the RAF was. Of course you weren't allowed anywhere near it but of course if we put on our school military uniform you could walk all over the place.
- 27:30 Then someone would say, "That's a Spitfire. The fastest plane in the world." So we became very interested. We did those roguish things. The school never knew about that, neither did my parents. I think they all joined the air force and I think three were killed in fighter command and I can think of five that were killed in bomber command.
- 28:00 I can't think of anyone who survived.

So the civilian population was preparing as well?

Yes.

What other signs of that were there?

Well first of all, by 1938 everyone was being issued with a gas mask and the air raid wardens were appointed to every street. They used to come round with their black steel helmets on. There were little

- 28:30 pumps to put out bombs, incendiary bombs, which when you come to think of it, it was quite ludicrous. But there was a bucket of water and a bag of sand, and if someone dropped a bomb you would throw the bag of sand over the bomb and then skirted it with water. And of course thousands of people did that.
- 29:00 Dear old London which lost 30,000 people killed, and 100,000 wounded. You don't often see those figures but I know they are official figures. Civilians. They used to go around...there was a Jewish gentleman who lived next door to us at the time and he had a lovely Polish accent and he got
- 29:30 quite excited when down in the garden there were some of these incendiary bombs. They came right the way across the house and hit the house next door and set it on fire. So we went down the garden...I went over the fence because there was some in his and he was calling out, "That is my bomb." And they were fighting over whose bomb it was.
- 30:00 But everybody...those who were visitors to the country as it was. Later on, his son joined the air force and survived. And his eldest son stayed on in France and worked underground. Never did hear the story about that but he was fluent in French and English. There must be a wonderful story there.
- 30:30 He worked with the people all the way through.

So what was the job of the air raid warden in the street?

When the air raid started they would come out...see there were sirens at odd places and even when the fire thing goes off you still get a shudder. You had about five minutes warning.

- 31:00 It was less than ten minutes across the channel for the planes. It was the night ones...in the day you could see them and our boys were having a go at them. But at night...the German bombers...their twin engines were quite synchronised.
- 31:30 And there they were going round and round overhead and we were only in the suburbs. So a bomber would come and let one bomb go in the suburbs and check every thing was working and then go on into the city. Every night you knew you were going to cop one locally.
- 32:00 The casualty rates became terrific. And then in the morning, as youngsters you'd walk around the streets to see which houses had disappeared. We had the stairs underneath the...or the room underneath the stairs of our house, being two story, we had that strengthened and the next door neighbours used to come in. He was a British Gallipoli man.

- 32:30 And he tells a very different story to the stories we have out here. "The Australians, they wouldn't wait for the world go. They went in by themselves and got slaughtered." It's probably not true, but that's how he saw it. He used to work for the government. He put his age back about twenty years.
- 33:00 It must have been a lie because it's escaping my mind. So yes, under the stairs and then you'd suddenly hear something go whoosh and boom. And occasionally tinkle tinkle tinkle and it would be another one of your windows gone. Every house in London...there was far more high rise than say Melbourne.
- 33:30 In Melbourne people mainly have like this house, single stories separated. I mean we lived in a house attached to another one next door and that was considered quite good living. So they would go around and see what had been smashed.
- 34:00 And the air raid wardens of course would patrol the streets. There was no radio but there was telephone to bring in the fire brigade or the police or who ever it was. There was an absolute code. If a house was bombed, there was no thought of looting.
- 34:30 There was a film on the other night, on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] in Britain and someone pinches something, and of course if you got charged in the war time for looting you were hung and that was it. No questions asked. But people were absolutely wonderful. And it was a wonderful thing for - let's admit it. There was definitely a class distinction.
- 35:00 This man worked with his hands. That man worked with his brain. That was the doctor...social class and we didn't really mix all that much. But everyone was mixing and helping out. I remember someone coming around to our house and knocking on the door and saying, "I'm Mrs (so and so), are you alright love?" to my mother.
- 35:30 "Do you want anyone to help you?" This was all volunteer stuff. Food would come round. Food rationing was dreadful then because all the ships were being sunk in Atlantic.
- 36:00 It was a bit of a relief when Hitler attacked Russia and he dropped it on someone else. Dear Russians. Jumping from one thing to another. I proudly have a Russian medal from those days and if it hadn't been for those blighters, whether we liked them or not...I mean twenty five million in the forces died.
- 36:30 We would never have made it. And five million German forces fighting them. I've heard all sorts of funny stories about the Russians. We had funny things that happened to us when we were in Russia, and yet they were absolutely wonderful to us. I've got a lovely citation
- 37:00 from Russia. It's in broken English. The medal was due to be issued in round about 1941, soon after they were attacked. And I was on one of the very first convoys and we were virtually wiped out, except our ship. Didn't even get a chip on the paint.
- 37:30 With the anti aircraft guns we had....I'd have to live it again to tell you. We bought down dozens of enemy aircraft. We bought down so many and we suddenly realised it was so cold they were freezing up on their way down. So we probably weren't shooting them all down. The Jerry [Germans] was crashing into the sea.
- 38:00 So they were wonderful to us in a way. In this citation it says, "You fought to the same degree that our men fought and therefore we award you..." And it's great fun wearing my decorations on Anzac Day. It's still on my suit in case you want to have a look. I've got ten of the blighters
- 38:30 I look like a silly thing. One of them, on the back is a lovely hammer and sickle. I always make sure I'm wearing my clerical collar and a hammer and sickle. The two don't go together, or do they? Or do they?
- 39:00 **Who do you march with on Anzac Day?**
- The Duran RSL [Returned and Services League]. We had about three hundred in the march. We had the schools and they joined in. It was wonderful because some of us are getting older and older. You walk with your companions and you say, "I'll be 80 next week." And you think well I can't be doing all that badly.
- 39:30 The Salvation Army Band are out there at the front. Well, some of them would be in the teenage or 20s and they march off and we all stagger along behind slowly. But you've got to smile. And there was a dear gentleman in front of me who I know very well. A veteran of World War II, the Aussie forces,
- 40:00 and he had his two grandchildren, so they were marching with us. The one on that side must have been intrigued by something I had here, so I would wave at him. And all the youngsters and the school children and all the rest of them. It's happened before. We go to the memorial in the centre of Duran, where wreaths are laid.
- 40:30 I had done all my stuff for the dawn service and taken prayers there. In the middle of the first one a voice was saying, "That's enough, that's enough." So anyway, all these youngsters and then we march off to go into the church hall, and I was quite surprised how many went in. And a lot of the youngsters. The youngsters are taking enormous interest.

Tape 3

00:31 **Ok Laurie, you sort of had us jumping back and forward in time, and had us at the early period, the blitz [London Blitz] period. One thing we haven't heard is about the actual day itself that war was declared. Have you memories of that time?**

Very much so. I was at home alone because my sister who was in nursing was being evacuated.

01:00 She was still training. She was evacuated down into Hampshire. My father decided to take her in the car with my mother and away they went. So I was listening to the radio. I had a fairly good knowledge of morse code and things and I had a radio

01:30 with all sorts of wave bands. It was quite surprising what you were able to pick up. I was waiting to hear whether Britain's challenge...you get out of Poland or we will declare war. And I always remember listening on a wave length, who to I don't know. 'War situation' came up. 'No change.'

02:00 Now to me that meant we were going to be in it. It was quite a funny feeling. I was just on sixteen years of age and then the air raid sirens went off. Straight away and....that feeling. I can still feel it now almost. I remember going to the

02:30 back window and looking up and in those days there were barrage balloon to stop low dive bombing. And I was watching those and one must have broken adrift and it went up and up and up. I went to the people next door and they said for me to come in, not to be by myself.

03:00 Fortunately nothing did happen. Whether that was a roost to get everybody going, but I believe it's been said that an unidentified plane was seen going up the Thames or something like that. But that to me... that was the way the war began. And then of course nothing happened. Nothing happened for days and days and days.

03:30 I used to listen intently to the radio, and the dear old Jewish gentleman next door spoke fluent German, so he used to key in and listen to the Germans and tell us anything he knew. But it was all about hearing about the success of Poland being utterly destroyed, and he was a Pole. So we

04:00 got an emotional side of it. So that was the beginning of the war as far as I was concerned.

Do you recall the very first air raid?

Oh yes. It was 1940 and we'd heard this aeroplane flying over at night

04:30 and there were no guns or anything because at that stage Britain didn't seem to have any anti aircraft guns. We were listening to all these things. And school boys knew what they were. That's a BMW engine. That's a Mercedes Benz engine, and nobody knew of course.

05:00 But we were definitely being flown over. And then I think it was about June 1940, there had been the evacuation in April, May of the British forces from Europe and we were called out by an air raid siren, and me being me went outside to have a look and there were all the search lights in the sky and there was

05:30 a Heinkel 111 in the searchlights. It didn't attempt to move or anything. It just went round and round, as much as to say, you can't touch me can you. Trying to sleep, or get some sleep sitting in an armchair didn't seem to work.

06:00 Then the plane went away and the all clear came through. A few days later I was out on a hill at a place called Pollard's Hill which overlooked...you could see Croydon Airport in one direction, almost as far as...that was London's main airport or had been.

06:30 I knew there were several squadrons of Hurricanes there. And a little further over there were some Spitfires. And looking up in the sky....I was always pretty good at aircraft identification, I looked up and there was a Messerschmitt ME109, followed by a Messerschmitt 110.

07:00 They flew over, turned upside down over Croydon Airport and dived down. The single engine 109 was the first. And I watched the bombs come out from underneath and crash into the ground at Croydon Airport. Then another one came and did the same thing. Then a third. The twin engine planes were there, and then suddenly there was this terrific tatter-tatter-tatter

07:30 of machine guns and the Hurricanes were on the tail of the Me 110s and they went off chasing the Me 110s and everybody else disappeared. The official report that day was that Stuka dive bombers, which I said they weren't, had dive bombed an airport south of London, and had only hit a factory.

08:00 And that three enemy Dorniers had been brought down. I said, they were Dorniers. Years later reading an official report in a book that my son has, I was right. They were ME 109s and 110s. And they actually brought down five of them.

08:30 They were patrolling over Dover and got the call that Kenley Airport was being attacked, but the

Germans lost their way and found it was the Croydon Airport and that was the one they had actually bombed. So that was an official report. That stirred us up quite a lot because several houses near the airport had been hit as well and some

- 09:00 people had been killed, and within a couple of nights a plane flew over at night and...this is reflected in the film that Britain made called The Battle of Britain in 1968 or 69, when a German chap jettisoned his bombs
- 09:30 That was the German story anyway, and they crashed on Croydon. Well we were less than five kilometres away and bombs in the middle of the night, crashing down one thousand pounders. I can remember my father saying, "They're going to bomb us." Of course the RAF replied the next night by
- 10:00 bombing Berlin after Göring had said that nobody would ever bomb Berlin, and it was on. Then they came over night after night. As I say the in day light overhead all the time were fighters. And being a naughty boy, instead of taking cover I would stand out there and watch most of it. I can well remember seeing
- 10:30 three old Fleet Air Arm dive bombers. They can only do about two hundred and twenty five miles an hour. Someone had got them up there and they were being used as fighters. But it was very scary. I remember an old lady coming down our road and we opened the door and let her in because she was frightened. Gradually the houses began to...or one or two in the
- 11:00 local district would get hit. We obviously weren't a target area, but bombs were being thrown out. We often noticed that bombs fell fairly close to us, just before we got the all clear. I think they were damaged planes going back to Germany. I remember one gorgeous night, going outside and looking and seeing what to us was
- 11:30 gorgeous then, seeing this plane...you could see the whole of the shape of it and I thought, you're quite low. And then I suddenly realised why I could see it. It was on fire from end to end. And that again was a Heinkel 111. It crashed on Wimbledon Common. In those days not many came down at night.
- 12:00 During the day I've seen as many as five coming down, from my perch up on the hill. The school was closed of course, so I had plenty of spare time. Nobody else was looking to see who was out there. Air raid wardens or police. So you could just sit up there and watch. I remember watching anti aircraft gun fire going up into the air.
- 12:30 And suddenly a fighter flying along much lower, and one of these shells on the way up hit it, and it went up in the air, turned over and as it went over I saw the German cross on it. They must have thought it was a wonderful shot, but I can tell you it was an absolute accident. The pilot came out. His parachute opened
- 13:00 and it was on fire. And I even felt quite sad for the poor fellow. He went faster and faster and faster and he actually crashed into a place called Shirley's Cemetery. He was dead on arrival. And his plane crashed quite a few miles further on. So that's what it was like day after day after day. Sometimes we would have as many as half a dozen warnings,
- 13:30 air raid warnings in a day.

Were there any pilots who did bail out and land alive where you were?

No I don't remember any actually near, but you would hear from other people. This again is an absolute true story of a poor German who bailed out and he landed at the famous Kinnington Oval, the Test Match place which was being

- 14:00 prepared as a prisoner of war camp. And he was a prisoner of war. And that's where he finished up. But a large number of Germans did get away. We were being told at the time that we were shooting down two hundred a day, but it was more like fifty or sixty. I don't really
- 14:30 know the numbers but it was still pretty good going. Again...it's suddenly made me think of it, looking up from my hill and seeing a whole lot of planes going round and round in a circle and I couldn't make out whether they were friend or foe, and then suddenly some planes, again I recognised them as Hurricanes, came right the way down the centre of that cone
- 15:00 and as the bombers were flying underneath, picked off a bomber and disappeared. So the fighters all broke up but they were too late. And that was the way the fighting went on. The courage of those fighter pilots and of course they came from all sorts of countries. The principal country of course being Britain. But before the Battle of Britain was over
- 15:30 the Poles and the Czechs and that had done sufficient training to be allowed to be thrown in, and I'm told they were quite naughty boys. They would turn their plane towards an enemy and went for them. You'd never forget it. And of course the crashing of the anti aircraft guns which had been placed by then on the ground,
- 16:00 it was tremendous at night. And you could hear the shells. You'd hear boom boom boom and then whoosh and then a little boom boom boom up in the sky. That's quite a feeling of hopelessness. Years

later on board a ship, when your ship was doing that, you were the punch behind it, but when you're just sitting there

16:30 as a civilian. Something suddenly made me think of my mother. This is out of context, but...I spoke earlier on of my mother being upset because of the ship I was on, and again later on she heard of a unit that I was in,

17:00 and again her frustrated feeling, not knowing whether I was alive or not. That leads onto another story.

Staying at that period, how was the civilian population coping? How was morale?

Morale was terrific. We're going to beat the devils and if they come over here we'll take one with it. Take one with you.

17:30 Everybody was terribly proud. Britain isn't a particular proud country. You ask them, "Are you proud of Britain?" "Yeah, it's Manchester United, isn't it." That's the sort of attitude today. But they were terribly proud and I said once before, you mixed with all types of people.

18:00 Or at least me as a young fellow. I can remember the old chappie who used to come round with green groceries. He would bring it to your door. He had an old horse pulling it. He could hardly speak English. "I've got some lovely 'taties [potatoes] today, miss." But meeting him out there, and

18:30 he was chopping up wood and seeing that the people got fires. Yes morale was as high as I think it's ever been.

How important was the Prime Minister in encouraging people?

Well once we got rid of...what was his name... 'no war in our time'. Chamberlain. Once he'd gone

19:00 and we started hearing voices... "Never...before...in the field of human conflict...has so much been owed...by so many...to so few" But he became the voice of the people. We felt if Winnie [Winston Churchill] is there...but they soon dropped him after the war but that was when all the chaps came out of the forces and they were all strongly socialist by then.

19:30 The next man lasted about three years I think. But Winnie was terribly important and yet it was a coalition government so you had people in charge from all over. Aneurin Bevan who was one of the leading Labour people. He would go around anywhere meeting people. And then there was the unusual thing...I wouldn't say I was a particular Royalist,

20:00 I just never think about it. But the Queen Mother who lived until she was 102, wasn't it? Died a couple of years ago. She was absolutely marvellous, and though she had all her people with her, she walked in the shopping cues, and walked with the people. And so did the

20:30 old King. She was done up in a dress but he was done up like the Admiral of the Fleet, and once you see that type of thing, to me it's a bit of a turn off you know. Well not a bit of a turn off. I suppose you expected it then. But he again was wonderful. When Buckingham Palace was hit for the first time, it was hit several times. Someone cried out,

21:00 "Good on you!" to the Queen and she turned around and said, "And my house was bombed last night." That was the feeling. And it was wonderful in the underground too. I got stuck in the underground at the height of the bombing. I was

21:30 not yet seventeen years of age. I got on this train and they said, it's not going beyond Bank. That's immediately under St Paul's. Well St Paul's was the only thing left standing in the City of London. Who defended that, I don't know. But it didn't get hit. Well, it did get hit. An enormous bomb came in and hit the altar and flew out.

22:00 In that extension the air was putrid because it was always aerated by the trains moving in and out. I soon got myself a job of dishing out tea to people, and there was a train there and then one train moved out and another came in with more people. And everyone had got their own little plot,

22:30 and I can remember an old lady coming to me and saying "Ain't you got nowhere love, come and share our place." And I said, "I might go back up." And she said, "Oh no, don't go up there love, that's where they're fighting." And yet all that way down you couldn't feel or hear anything. And again the spirit was absolutely wonderful.

23:00 And when it was work time everyone was packing up their goods, unshaven men and goodness knows what. All trying to make themselves look respectable and get on the train. Again, thinking of Australia, I remember there was a squadron that had apparently done quite well because they mentioned and they mentioned...

23:30 I think one's name was Paddy Finucane, but he was a New Zealander but nobody seemed to know the difference between Australia and New Zealand. He shot down twenty three German planes I believe, and then did a victory role and never turned out of it. Killed himself. But talking about

24:00 that. The Aussies were there, New Zealanders, Canadians, the Poles. And so you suddenly began to feel

like the world was turning. They were all on your side. The only people who annoyed you and I don't mind saying it on a public thing were the Yanks. The attitude of the American Ambassador who was Kennedy, the father of the

- 24:30 president, was terribly anti-British. I discovered later on he was a friend of the previous King, the one who was never crowned. Edward VIII. And if anyone was a traitor, he was. I'll say that publicly. And the people I think began to realise these things too.
- 25:00 I remember my school...away from my home. Once we got going, one area had a whole lot of bombs dropped on it and the boys who used to deliver papers, newspapers...see life went on just the same, and a whole lot of our boys took over the paper rounds
- 25:30 for the people and the money we got paid we gave to them so they could get a rest out in the country. The war was going on and it really was a levelling of people and things. And yet when we joined the forces we were soon to realise that we weren't all equal.

What do you remember

- 26:00 **about that same period of men joining up, and the evacuation of Dunkirk and that kind of thing?**

Well you didn't have to sign up because every man woman and child had to register. Incidentally they found ten thousand people they didn't know they had. They had never been registered at birth.

- 26:30 I think that number is right. So you were going to be called up anyway. You might work in a factory, a coal mine...that was a little later on, the coal mine. The beving boys they called them, or to go in the forces, and some people slowed their call up down because they wanted to do various education... additional education. Idiots like me
- 27:00 Just turned the opposite way and went in. Lots of people were volunteering. It wasn't quite the same as Australia where every man was volunteered and was going out to fight for the old country. They must have been mad. But there we go. It was terribly appreciated and of course this is why, as a telephone call told me only yesterday,
- 27:30 Britain showed all the marching for Anzac Day on television and all the rest of it, and the meeting of Anzacs in London at the new Anzac Memorial, but for its own people, did nothing because people are no longer interested. I think it's probably
- 28:00 because so many people have come from so many different parts, and I don't want to get mixed up with racial stuff because it's never been my worry, but I'm told that certain towns are now beginning to be entire from the West Indies, entirely from Pakistan and entirely this that and the other, and it is self imposed apartheid.
- 28:30 But the French are totally different. For some unknown reason I managed to get the Diploma of Honour, and the D-Day Medal from France and I have a wonderful citation in there from France. It says for bravery and we honour you and it's signed by the President of France.
- 29:00 I suppose ten million others got that, but anyway it looks good. They still worry about you till this day. And I only have to say that my mother's maiden name was Emily Mechand, and I'm on the right side. She was born in London.
- 29:30 **You've discussed briefly your signing up and the medical and giving the sample, what was your motivation for joining the navy when you had gone through that army like training before?**
- I just wanted life on the ocean waves. I don't know. I've been attracted by the sea. I remember being taken during the Coronation in 1936,
- 30:00 King George VI to the inspection of the fleet, and that was an amazing thing. How we got there I don't know but I remember going there with my father. I don't seem to remember my mother on that trip. We were standing on this ship and going around with the fleet. I was just terribly impressed and then they paid for me to go on a paddle steamer down the Thames.
- 30:30 We got taken on board one of the...I can still remember it, it was HMAS Queen Elizabeth, battle ship. I was taken all over that. I rather liked it but I can remember thinking to myself, I don't really like this big things, I would like a small one, which I finally made.
- 31:00 So I just loved the sea and there was always the proud memory of Uncle Percy as he would have been who disappeared in the South Atlantic on board an armed merchant cruiser sometime during the war. My father scouring the war memorial in Plymouth and
- 31:30 disappointed that he couldn't find his name, he asked someone and was told he wasn't Plymouth, he was Portsmouth. So we took a train and went to Portsmouth and found his name on the War Memorial. So yes, I was steeped in navy a bit. My father was dead scared of the sea though.

So when you did go to sign up was it on your own or did you have mates with you?

No, entirely on my own.

- 32:00 Our here you went with your [(UNCLEAR)] and so on and so forth. There you just signed up and again I observed this, more than being part of it. I had a letter saying, "You are to report to the Royal Naval something or other, and you will be met at Paddington Station and taken
- 32:30 to your destination." So I didn't know where I was going. I went with my father ...he was always there... always there for me, and my mother. And she remembers when I first went and they took away my clothes and sent them home, and she burst out in tears. She said it was like getting the dead person's gear.
- 33:00 So anyway I got on this train, and I just sat there. She pulls out and we're going to chug all the way up to Wales. You look after there and there's another young fellow looking. "Where are you going?" "HMAS Glen Dower" "Oh is that what it means? I got the word Glen Dower." "It's a secret navy training station." He knew, I didn't know.
- 33:30 And then you're stuck on this train and it pulls up in another Midlands town and another half dozen got on. I had had my hair cut and they all had long hair. So the train went on and we had to change at a place called Ruabon. Long since gone, in fact it's been restored now.
- 34:00 Someone with a private railway and I believe they're doing very well. It goes right the way through Wales. You think of Wales as a small country but we had been half a day on this journey. I remember going over a bridge at a place called Barmouth. One of the
- 34:30 most beautiful place. Mountains up on one side and the water, and by which time everyone in our carriage was going to the same place. I think we were all pretty nervous. No one was crying or miserable but the journey was too far, and then suddenly we pulled up at a place which looked like Penny Wirechain.
- 35:00 We were in Wales and don't ask me to pronounce it. So we got out there and there was the oldest looking lieutenant commander I had ever seen. Now he was probably far younger than I am now, but I thought he was a hundred and five. "Come on my lads, we're going to look after you. Bring your bags and everything with you. Now
- 35:30 all line up. We'll pretend you're in the navy, because you're not in yet until you get up there. This is Chief Petty Officer Vissy." Chief Petty Office Vissy was smiling. "Stand in threes like that and I'll say left turn. You with the crossed eyes, you won't get in." And that actually happened.
- 36:00 He became a stoker by the way. We went up the road and as we went up the road there was a great big gate and there was a buoy, you know, the things you tie ships to, and there was a big anchor and things. Suddenly,
- 36:30 now, "Halt. My name is Chief Petty Officer Vissy. In a few moments you'll be in the Royal Navy. You will hear the gates clang behind you and there is no way out, except for one bloke who we called up a day too early. And if he wants to go home he can, but he'll be called up for the army."
- 37:00 So obviously the navy thought the army was worse than the navy. I was soon to find out that I was the boy. One day early. In we went

What do you mean one day early? Do you mean age wise?

Yes I was seventeen and eighteen the next day. They called me up on the 17th of October. They should have called me up on the 18th of October, my birthday.

- 37:30 So that was how I greeted being eighteen. My mother's word: "I turned from being a school boy to an old man overnight." She wasn't to see me for some time. She never got over it maybe. So we went in, got lined up,
- 38:00 given this and given that, given towels, shaving gear. Some people had nothing and I had enough stuff for the whole camp. Then we got fed. Tinned mugs, tinned plates. To me it was a culture shock. I had had a few months in a factory. Wise man, my father was. It was a culture shock.
- 38:30 There were a whole lot of Londoners speaking really good London Cockney. There seemed like a whole lot of Londoners had been called up together and I was one of those. It didn't matter where you had gone since. There was one chap. His name was Ralton. Isn't it funny how you can remember the names. He had Port Line written across his jersey. "I've been a merchant seaman. I'll tell you all about it."
- 39:00 We were then told there is ninety three of you here. We're going to call you out. The first thirty will stand there. The next thirty will stand there, the next thirty will stand there and three of you are here for special duties. So anyway they started calling out the names and I always remember Ralton was out there. And they had
- 39:30 been told there would be a class leader who would be in charge of you. Old Ralton... "I've been in the merchant navy..." I got him of course. I'm jumping ahead, aren't I. When they called out ninety names, I

was one of the three and Chief Petty Officer Vissy came forward, "Now, I don't believe in class distinction but

- 40:00 I understand you three gentleman have had military training at school. We haven't got any instructors, they're all out fighting a war. Biggs, you're in charge of this lot. So and so, you're in charge of that lot." He came around put a band around there with an anchor on my arm,
- 40:30 so I started whereas in peace time it took you seven years. Fortunately after about three days we were told we were going to get someone who knew something about the sea, a naval instructor. He was a disappointment. He broke down and went away. I met him years later still as a leading seaman. But he nearly cried on my shoulder when I had gone a little higher than that. He told me all his troubles. How he had lost his wife and all the rest of it. But I kept up with him for quite a long time. Anyway, after three days....I remember the first night. The people were still shouting and making a bit of a noise over a loud hailer. It wasn't just to us. It was to the whole camp but we didn't know. "Pipe down. Lights out" and that was the end of it. The next day we were dishd out with some uniforms.

Tape 4

- 00:32 Well culture shock was the thing in the first few days. One was getting your meals. You had to appoint people to go and get the stuff, and everything seemed to be so rough and crude. But it was quite good food. People seemed to be so rough and ready.
- 01:00 So many of them. But I had two fellows who sat very very quietly. One you know was a civil servant for the government and the other chap worked in the bank. They became failed officer cadets. They were quite nice chaps. The thing that I well remember
- 01:30 was on the second day. We were given life jackets and told how to blow them up, and the next thing is, they take you up and throw you in to what is a diving bell thing for people in submarines. It was full up with water, very cold. We asked, how do we get into them? "Take your clothes off. No women here."
- 02:00 So naked as the day we were born. Today, we wouldn't worry so much. But you go back to 1941 and it was quite peculiar. And of course people started with the invariable jokes which we won't say here with the lady present....about those who were better endowed than other people.
- 02:30 Anyway your turn comes and you put your life jacket on and the shock is, they throw you in the water, or you jump into the water. Nobody asks you whether you can swim. And then blow it up. So you're in the water drowning. Gee we certainly learned quickly. Mine wasn't all that bad. I blew mine up and you sort of
- 03:00 struck out with your hands and a bit with your feet and it was quite a way to the other side, and a voice said, "Come on get on with it." Then you'd come out and of course there weren't any towels or anything. So we were naked, wet men. But we were in the navy now. The actual training was terribly intensive. Of course
- 03:30 on the marching side the drill with rifles and all the rest of it, I was going to say I was nearly supreme with the training we had had. And there was a very nice... warrant officers in the navy in those days wore a thin gold ring and were entitled to a salute. I remember his name, Warrant Officer Chapman. He said he wanted to see me.
- 04:00 He said I was well trained in this and he noted I went to a Morse code class when I was a volunteer. "You can read morse code, good. I'm only a Warrant Officer but I'm recommending to the officer that you be recommended for a commission which means you won't finish your course if you're accepted, with us here. They will throw you in at the deep end.
- 04:30 After eight weeks you'll be on the high seas, and it's never a picnic as an officer cadet." Nobody knows except you've got to wear a bit of white here. You're on the mess deck with all the other people. If you don't wish to go through with it, it's alright. You've got to do studies, training and this is only to get selected.
- 05:00 You'll be away for several months at sea. It seemed rather a daunting and frightening thing. All the other guys wanted to know where our leader had gone. One chap said, (I'll always remember that, he was the cross eyed one), he said, "They want me for the engine room because I can't see colours." He couldn't see anything.
- 05:30 And one chap was very interested in this or that and he would go in that branch, and the remainder of them were going to be gunners on board merchant ships. What a hell of a job...or trained for it. And we did our full training. We became very very smart. I believe I have a picture of me standing out in front
- 06:00 of my little squad and being inspected by Admiral Cunningham. I think that was before he was Lord High Admiral, or was that in Gilbert and Sullivan? He came down and saw us all and he wanted to know about my history. Where

06:30 I went to school and all the rest of it. Did I know this one and did I know that one. I remember him mentioning the name Barnett. Later I found out he was admiral for the Russian convoys and later I found out he was educated at the same school I was. Anyway to move on.

07:00 We passed out by a written paper...no, it wasn't a written paper, more, which is right - that question or that question? So we did all this type of thing. My dear friend of Port Line was still boasting about being top of us all, and anyway it's unfair because leaders are given so many points. Strangely enough Port Line did. He was top of the class.

07:30 So one has to admit it. But I never saw or heard of him again. I was second. Yes that was a long way. And they were all going to be sent to Liverpool to a special place for more advanced gunnery training. I was to be sent

08:00 with two fellows who had passed the initial training. One I didn't see again, so he didn't come with me, and the other chap did. So there was one fellow and myself. He failed initial training and he was going down to Portsmouth. What they did with him...whether they fed him into the boiler, I don't know.

08:30 I was given my papers and everything. That was part of my training. I had to get myself to Portsmouth. I had a terrible thing with CW Candidate. That's commissions and warrants. Anyway, the train journey, I remember that quite well. I went a different way. The line's been scrapped for a long time.

09:00 I finished up on Cruse [?] Station. Then to Euston in London. I got out there and I saw a rail travel officer, again a chief petty officer, and I went to him and said I've got this. "Yes m'lad, yes sir."

09:30 And he said, "The next part of the journey you won't finish with this chap, he's going another way. You're going in the same train but going to a different place." When I got down into Portsmouth, there were a number of people and we were all taken to...there was AA for

10:00 Probationers and A for those who were thought to be going through for promotion of various types, and we were given a whole lot of square bashing [parade marching] and really smartened up. Mathematics training for navigation. And then

10:30 we were told that the next thing was we were going to sea and you will report late at night. So the rest of HMAS Victory as it was then called. It's now called HMAS Nelson in Portsmouth, the old navy headquarters. Half past eleven at night, a truck and several people,

11:00 and it took us by train...I didn't think we were leaving at that time, but there was a train. It not only stopped at all stations but it stopped at all rabbit holes I think. It was an electric train to London. We were herded away from everybody else and somebody came down and said, "You're on an active service ship and rather a famous one,

11:30 and nobody must talk to you, you won't be allowed to talk to anybody and you're to be completely separated." There was big advertisements, 'Walls have ears.' So the enemy didn't know. "Sorry we can't tell you your actual destination, but you'll be told on board." I'm getting that first feeling I had when I first joined. There's something pressing on my ribs.

12:00 I said to someone "What's it about, this Scylla?" "Don't you know, she sunk the this and she sunk the that, and she's going up to...or at least they say she's going up to Murmansk to take the supplies to Russia, and the first lot that went through they never got it."

12:30 Thank you very much. So that train journey...or before we made it, the truck put us in an old coal yard and there was a steam train with two carriages behind waiting to back down onto the main train. That was locked off, and

13:00 there were people going to all sorts of places. They were mainly navy, but there were others. They were all separated. I always remember that steam engine, being a bit keen on steam engines, and it was called the Union of South Africa. It's still going today. Still preserved. Sister to the world's fastest steam engine. We backed down and we were supposed to...we were told

13:30 we were going to Newcastle, 'Heaven-on-Tyne', where Scylla was in dry dock. She wasn't in dry dock when we got up there. With whoever was in charge of our little party, we went into a place called Dockyard Maties where they fed us. Food, we hadn't seen anything like it for ages.

14:00 Some were saying, "Oh, you're going on Scylla are you? Best of luck mate. That's a famous one." And when we climbed up to go on board. Don't forget to salute when you go over the side. She's not in dry dock now. We went over and formed up. The first thing they did was tell us what our jobs are. "Oh, you're a bit of an aircraft recognition one, so aircraft recognition on the bridge. Where you're going it's only the

14:30 enemy." Day cruising station. On the bridge. Night action station. Lower tier conning tower position. That's right down the bottom of the ship. You are sealed in. That was your introduction to the ship. You soon got into your mess.

- 15:00 Mess three. Fo'c's'le division. "I'm your leading hand. I'm in charge of this mess....and so and so." He said, "Have you got studies to do?" And I said, "As a matter of fact I have leading hand hookey." He said, "You'll be alright with me mate. I've got ambitions myself. If anybody gets on you, just let me know."
- 15:30 I didn't have to. Everyone was marvellous. In the mess there was a bloke from not too many streets away from where I had come from. Off we went. We left and went up the North Sea, and was it rough! I wanted to be in the navy. Up and down up and down.
- 16:00 I wasn't seasick, but of course you couldn't sleep anywhere. Water was slopping in and coming all over the place. We were dog tired, and the next thing it was all hands below deck, we going into Scapa Flow, (a secret place). So we went into Scapa Flow and we heard we were going out on a convoy almost immediately.
- 16:30 **What was your action station? You mentioned a couple of different things?**
- Night action station was right down in the bottom. Day action station was to help the ADO, air direction officer. On the anti aircraft guns and all the rest of it. I wasn't trained in that. I hadn't been in long enough but you worked with him.
- 17:00 You had the glasses and all the rest of it. He was a very nice bloke. Your job was to spot and announce what the planes were if you knew which ones they were. I had to call them out. I had to learn to stop talking because there was someone more senior to you just over there.
- 17:30 The interesting thing is, before we went off on our convoy, being a bit churchy myself, we had volunteer divisions. I turned out and there was a misplaced...the cruiser Scylla, five hundred and fifty tonnes, seventy five thousand horsepower, thirty three knots, eight anti aircraft guns, the main armament had never been put on it. So all anti aircraft, smaller stuff and bristling with it.
- 18:00 To the volunteer service I turned up with about four other people. Nobody was interested. Must tell you this. Once we got to Russia we couldn't get in. On the Sunday morning, I went
- 18:30 off to...they called, "Holy Communications being held on the so and so." And of course when I got there, there was a chaplain, a bloody admiral and a four ringed captain. I mean, now a captain is well below an admiral but he was the captain of the ship. He's two places higher than God and just ordinary God is the admiral. Anyway we went in
- 19:00 and they went through the service and then we came to the part where you go up to receive the communion, and I stuck fast there. I felt a hand on my shoulder, "After you," and that was the admiral.
- 19:30 I got to know him quite well, actually, on the bridge. Several times we met. We had to be very careful because the kids, the ordinary blokes on the mess deck never got to see the captain. Every day you had to salute him except of course when you were out on the high sea. The journey to Iceland was uneventful.
- 20:00 We went up at twenty five or twenty seven knots. That was moving for a big cruiser. We refuelled at a place called Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. Then we went around to a place called Akureyri. My pronunciation may be wrong but you only get the pronunciation that everyone else is saying.
- 20:30 The most amazing sight actually as we approached it was all the ice covered caps, and we were February 1942. Less than February. January 1942. Right in the middle of winter. I remember it being so cold on the deck,
- 21:00 a lieutenant saying, "Don't shiver. It's not as cold as where we're going. We're going with the ice breakers. We're going to break our way through to Russia." It didn't happen actually. We saw tons of ice but we weren't able to get up there. But the first day out, an aircraft carrier came along side us,
- 21:30 it's name escapes me. There were two occasions when this happened. The next one, the aircraft carrier was the Dasher, and they came along side and the sea was getting very very rough, and the next we heard was a rumour that the aircraft carrier had sunk. She had been torpedoed. The same happened with the Dasher. I don't know what happened to the first one.
- 22:00 But the Dasher went down with five hundred and fifty hands. All were lost. Torpedoed and just went down. They called them banana boats. They were built as a banana boat and they put a flat top on them. It was an American idea....to get aircraft carriers up there. There was a big aircraft carrier but she stayed with the principal fleet.
- 22:30 That shadowed us but we never saw them. They carried a great big battle ship. After I left, years later, one of those battle ships ran into the big German battleship, Scharnhorst. It shot it to pieces. No, it was very nerve wracking and we were working four hours on and four hours off. We would get tireder and tireder and during the day
- 23:00 we would be asked to clean this, and at night you painted over it, so it didn't shine out. That was the Royal Navy. It was to keep everybody busy. There were all sorts of menial jobs being done by all sorts of people. Some were being asked to take a toilet from one place to the other.

23:30 So it was a culture shock to me.

Can you give us an idea of the convoy, how large it was and what work it was doing?

Yes. That first fleet there were thirty seven merchant vessels. Many of them were quite new and built in America. They were built in a day or something or other and they were meant for one journey.

24:00 They were wonderful ships, the Liberty Ships and they stayed up for a long time. There were some old merchant ships. Most of them were around about the seven to ten thousand tonnes. Very impressive. There were exactly the same number of escort vessels. Most of them destroyers.

24:30 None of the new frigates or anything, although we had a number of trawlers. That was to give us encouragement. They were to pick us out of the sea if we got thrown into the sea. Your life time in that water was about two minutes before you froze to death. But you see, we had only been going two days when action stations were sounded and I still remember going up on the Bridge for the first time,

25:00 and to me everything had absolutely changed. I reported to my little corner and the Air Direction Officer was saying, "Take the main sights and scan the sea and see what you can. We're being circled by a bomber."

25:30 And then within moments, a voice came over, "All hands to first degree of readiness. Radar has picked up that there is a massive fleet of aircraft coming. And massive, I mean massive. We cannot get them on the screen. There's probably about a hundred bombers heading directly for us."

26:00 Did it mean we forgot the other one? Then suddenly I saw enemy plane and I screamed out what it was. I recognised its type and screamed out what it was. An FW Condor 200. Just as though it had heard me it turned away.

26:30 The others were obviously coming in. And a voice said, "Well done, that man." The admiral. I felt suddenly part of it. And within moments the sky high up...it was very difficult to see because it was so hazy was one mass of bombers.

27:00 ME Heinkel 111s, quite a few Ju 88s, and what were the others? They used to call them 'Flying Pencils' [Dornier Do 17Z-2]. Number 17. Anyway it doesn't matter. We saw all these things coming. I had finished my job, enemy aircraft and I had to sit and watch it.

27:30 And then I didn't know, an officer said to me, "This is secret information, not for the rest of the crew. We have German speaking people tuned in listening to their radio." You could hear them saying exactly where they were coming from. They decided to pick out the ack ack [anti-aircraft fire] ship.

28:00 That's us. Over they flew and the bombs started to come down and not one hit anybody. But the sound is quite peculiar. The bombs come down, anti aircraft guns are going off everywhere, particularly the lighter ones, the 20mm ones, right in front of

28:30 where I was standing. Somebody, the gunnery control officer said, "There's no point, you're out of range." I remember that. Then they came within range of pom poms [cannon]. They were firing two pounder shells. They had a big battery of four there.

29:00 There was another battery of four I think there, and suddenly they opened up. I was in front of them. Now I know why we had to wear this special gear. There was a plane coming right for us and you could see its torpedo underneath. I shouted out that it was coming along with

29:30 fifty other people, and it got hit. It got hit by one of our anti aircraft shells. It veered off and exploded and that was the only damage our ship had at that stage. It didn't kill anybody or hurt anybody. It exploded. The torpedo didn't actually explode. I remember seeing it drop in the sea and my old business of watching...the torpedo went skating off somewhere or other,

30:00 and then there was a sickening whroom. You sort of looked round and I got told off along with others. "Look to where you're supposed to be watching." It was a merchant ship with a great column of water. It had been torpedoed. Not aerial. The subs were having a go at us the same time. It was very frightening.

30:30 Very intensive and the time was twelve o'clock when the rum tots...they don't get it these days...were coming up for the people. I was under nineteen so I was under age and wouldn't have got one anyway. They chosen the time well. And then some dive bombers came along and they are really horrific to watch.

31:00 Particularly when you see their wings getting larger and larger and larger. And you see the machine guns firing and they were going through your eyes. Of course they're not but that's what it looks like. And just at the last moment when the bomb is about to go, you hear the command given, 'Full ahead, hard astern.' And you look down in the wake. An enormous great explosion.

31:30 And it wasn't you and it wasn't anybody. And then there's another one coming in. Then someone said, five of the enemy shot down. They just went straight into the sea. It was believed years later they had actually frozen up on the way down. On that journey that happened

- 32:00 day after day after day. Three times a day all the way up there, until our convoy was 50% destroyed by the time we arrived in Russia, and there was a lovely big merchant ship which had been hit by a bomb and it was low in the water. Where I was up in the bridge I could hear what all the nobs [British term for the ruling class] had to say, "Ask if there's any possibility of a tug
- 32:30 to take her into harbour." We're now off from Murmansk, and from Soviet control, "No, if you want her saved, bring her in yourself." Good friends. That was said to be a misinterpreted message.
- 33:00 And one of our destroyers went and took her in tow. I'm sure they were not trained in towing or anything else, and they got her in, and I believe she had to be scrapped in Murmansk. It had 10,000 tons of supplies which the Russians dearly needed. Then we saw some planes flying over up there. We were so surprised. They were
- 33:30 British bombers with Soviet markings on. Already we were supplying them with stuff. They weren't very good ones. But they were being supplied with stuff. The officers were having quite a time on board the Russian ships. And I heard later on from one who I got to know when my position changed that
- 34:00 they got told off for fraternising with them. Don't fraternise because the Russians will kill their own people if they fraternise with us. They're very jealous or so we were told, of a ship like Scylla which had everything that moved on it. Whether that was true enough, I don't know, but that's what I learned.
- 34:30 I remember an oiler...that's a tanker to oil the fleet, came along side and I was very surprised to see where its funnel was. It was a dummy funnel in the middle and the smoke was just coming out of the deck. I suddenly look and all the crew were women. Big strong women. Somebody said, "Get some money off them."
- 35:00 What do you mean? "Bring them something. Some spare gloves. They haven't got anything." So I went below and got some gloves. I've still got the Russian money. The Soviet Ambassador when he presented me in Melbourne with the Soviet medal, he said, "That's pre-Stalin. That's worth a lot of money." I've still got it.
- 35:30 It's not even the Soviet Union now, is it. I was asked to go on a shore visit with people on a ship and we went over to the British merchant vessel that had been bombed, to take certain stuff. I didn't really have much to do except
- 36:00 I was part of the boat's crew. A fat lot of good I was at that time but never mind. We went over there and we were told, "You can go anywhere you like but this man will come with you." He had a submachine gun over his shoulder. We didn't have an officer with us. Again it was a Petty Officer. "Alright my maties, don't go anywhere
- 36:30 you shouldn't." It was very very oppressive. It seemed that everybody was just being told what to do and when nature called I went to spend a penny, it was only one. It was a hole in the ground inside a building, both sexes, and that was it.
- 37:00 But I'm always glad I had that experience and really saw things as they were, and you really felt sorry for the people. But they were as adamant as we were and we were on the right side.
- 37:30 Later on we began to know and understand that they did appreciate it. They had beautiful resplendent uniforms. The officers had these caps. I was in a normal ratings uniform at that stage. They'd go by and call out "British!" and give you a lovely salute.
- 38:00 So it was quite good. We had come. I've got a book actually written by someone from those times, and they had heard that Britain now had a home guard. 'Dad's Army'. Why didn't they send the home guard, one million of them to fight the Germans?
- 38:30 They were amazing memories. Then we had to go back. I remember again, we went out into the worst sea I can ever remember. One moment you were looking at the sky and the next minute you were looking down in the ocean. It did mean there were no submarines attacking. And it seemed to stop the air attacks.
- 39:00 And then...this has an anti climax in it. In the middle of the night we were called to action stations and I go and get myself locked into the bottom of the ship. Again that was where all the messages went. Everything was collated there. I always remember the fellow, he was only a leading hand, steering the ship with all the messages coming through, And my job was 'Slow ahead, full ahead' and I had to turn the lever.
- 39:30 You were considered very intelligent if you could do that without doing it wrong. He had one saying, "Friday night in the RN [Royal Navy]." He was a real regular. "Anything you want mate, just ask me. Don't ask them out there, they'll tell you anything." And then it started to smell terrible and a pipe had burst there.
- 40:00 It was a pipe up from where the tanks were. Fuel oil in the heat down there and the ship moving up and down, I lost my tea. A little later on a message came through, "Hands to action stations. Two enemy ships sighted. Believed capital ships." That's battle ships and we only had anti-aircraft guns.

- 40:30 You could hear all the messages going through. "Load all guns. Semi armour piercing shells. Half head so many revolutions. Steer this and that." It was all passing through and you could see it happening in front of you. What was our skipper going to do? He went right for them and I was expecting to see a big shell come right through the ship.
- 41:00 "Hands to second degree of readiness. Two of our own tankers." It may not have been the enemy. The sea was the worst enemy. The cold equally and the whole excitement of the thing. You were there. We got three quarters of the way back to Scapa Flow. Home was Scapa Flow, and we got turned around again and one of the officers, a navigating officer. An awfully nice chap, Lieutenant Commander, he said to tell everybody we were being temporarily seconded to the Soviet Navy.

Tape 5

- 00:31 **We're just going to pick up on the Scylla again and the convoy work you were doing. So that was the first trip?**

The first of many, actually. And in between when we had nothing else to do we went out into the Atlantic to pick up convoys coming across the Atlantic, and there there was very little air raid activity.

- 01:00 It was day and night searching for German U-Boats and they were searching for us. So much so that the anti submarine people with the depth charges and so on, they got closed up to action stations and the rest of the ship didn't. You couldn't disturb five hundred people just because there was a submarine down there somewhere. The Germans generally came in with about

- 01:30 five in a line in front of you to make the convoy turn and when it turned there would be about ten there to send the torpedoes into when it turned. Eventually of course by about the end of 1943 onwards, the Germans were losing a submarine for every ship they put down. It was very hot. It was entirely British and Canadian navies.

- 02:00 Occasionally we saw an American vessel but it would be doing something else. They probably had more important work to do, to look after the Pacific.

What was your ruse in the Atlantic? Were you still based at Scapa Flow?

Oh yes. And in fact for quite a while in Iceland. We would pick up the convoys there.

- 02:30 Occasionally we went down to Scotland. I forget the name of the place, where the convoys used to assemble. The merchant ships. Yes, we were crossing the Atlantic and operating from

- 03:00 either Iceland or Scapa Flow and sometimes operating from Greenland. I remember being up there for Christmas and going to a little place and finding a nativity scene in an igloo. It had seal and polar bear and all that type of thing. No penguins because there ain't no penguins up there.

When you arrived at port

- 03:30 **you would disembark and go ashore for some time?**

Very rarely. Usually at a place like Scapa Flow...we were just kept away from the public so they would never know what was going on. Not like the films where you see them all being welcomed by sweethearts and everything else. Your family just didn't know where you were, and rarely they got a letter that came through.

- 04:00 And most of those were in special privilege envelopes. I think a lot of the mail went down to the bottom. It was put on merchant ships and just didn't get through. I wasn't weeping because as I said I didn't have a girlfriend at the time.

That was really horrendous that first trip. Did you come under the same sort of intense attack later on?

Yes always up there.

- 04:30 When you went round the north of Norway, North Cape, they stacked all their dive bombers up there. By 1943, and I had left by then, they were easing because that first convoy I talked about, we were credited, that is the full convoy, merchant and Royal Navy, with shooting down

- 05:00 forty seven enemy planes. That's quite a number. What we noticed is they were flying higher and higher and coming in and dropping their bombs and going off quicker and quicker. The skipper of the Scylla, as soon as they came in, he used to take us out at high speed...the bombers used to go and get in the cloud.

- 05:30 They didn't know we had a thing called RDF [radio direction finding - radar] which was radar and it was getting through and seeing where they were and we would pump all the anti aircraft fire up there, and I

think the Germans were beginning to wonder what the heck we were up to. But the intensity of the attacks up there never eased.

What was the strategy they used from the ship, the anti aircraft actually being able to hit those planes?

06:00 Oh, I mean the radar told you where she was. A lot of it was visual and if you went into open sights as they called it...the open sight was like that and if you estimated that the enemy was doing 300 knots, you put its nose onto that ring, 200 knots onto that one and a good gunner could go somewhere in between.

06:30 They became very skilled after a while. We had one who got the distinguished service medal. In half an hour he got five down. Pretty remarkable. He was offered an instant commission in the fleet air arm and the wise man turned it down.

Why do you say wise?

You had about five minutes in the fleet air arm.

07:00 I don't know if he survived but he did go on and get promotion and do all sorts of things.

What else were you doing on the Scylla?

Oh nothing else. Scrubbing decks. Painting and trying to get away and do a bit of study because I had to pass certain navigational tests so I could do navigation and that type of thing.

07:30 It wasn't that you couldn't do mathematics, but you didn't know the kind of mathematics that were required. And of course you had to brush up your signalling and know what all the flags meant. They wouldn't waste time in training people from basics. The Royal Naval College for the RN itself, they

08:00 spent several years doing all that. Volunteer fellows were thrown together and had to come up with the same knowledge in a very short time. Whether we ever did have the same knowledge I don't know. We nearly always seemed to have a jolly good leading seaman around, and what a Leading Seaman didn't know, then of course the

08:30 Petty Officer did.

So what would you be qualified to be?

A junior officer. And at actual fact at my age, a midshipman. For some reason or other that was very limited and I got accelerated promotion to a sub lieutenant.

09:00 But running the ship. It's daily routine. In the morning what ever the allocated time was, everyone gathers on the pointed end of the ship, on the fo'c's'le as they called it, and the leading hand, sometimes the petty officer, would tell all the men their various duties

09:30 and once that was done there was nothing to do but walk around looking important. But there was usually maps to be looked over, particularly if you knew there was an operation coming, and the groups that I was on it was constant ops [operations], even if you didn't see anything. So much time at sea is wasted with nothing happening.

10:00 The weather getting bad, the monotony, but you daren't let up for a second because there was someone underneath watching you all the time. And as the mechanisms got better they had to stay further and further away because it was fair soon and they could even catch a submarine by its prop just turn like that and it was showing up pretty well.

10:30 So you knew where he was, or you hoped you did and as soon as you thought you were on to him, they went down as low as they could get. So who ever's job it was, he had to work out the depth of the enemy. You had instruments...if you went over it you were very very lucky, but you could generally hear where the sound was coming in from.

11:00 **Was this the ASDIC [Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee - sonar]?**

Yes the ASDIC. You would drop a whole lot of depth charges. Some were thrown over accidentally. You usually had a couple of small ones first and then a couple of your biggest and then a couple more small ones.

11:30 And you had to get the depth right. Twice I remember seeing oil coming up to the surface when we were attacking. But you didn't know whether that was an enemy or not. So that was reported but wouldn't be counted as a claim. He was getting crafty too. He was putting oil in his torpedo tubes and firing them. So it became very crafty. I wasn't on that type of work.

12:00 By the end of the war you could hear each other speaking and they were getting very, very crafty then.

How do you mean, you could hear each other speaking?

You could actually hear audible voices. I wasn't ever an ASDIC operator or had much to do with them.

Did you have a German translator on board?

Not on -

12:30 no, the joke was at one time, the Italians came once and someone said, "Throw all the depth charges you can in the sea," and they were never seen again, they made off. They weren't very good fighters. Perhaps they were all wise. They just cleared off.

13:00 So much for big ships.

Let's move on now to the next phase of your career?

Well, getting qualified for a higher jump and going to school all over again. There was such petty discipline.

13:30 At the meals there were good looking ladies would wait upon you and if your eyebrow went up you were failed. If you were given a run ashore and someone thought you had been out with anybody you were failed. I mean I don't know how many people lost their job because they had an eye for beauty. But I was

14:00 pretty scared of everybody I think.

But that was why? Was that because you were a risk?

I would think so. I often couldn't see the logic. I remember a question being asked of me by an admiral on a panel. I think there were about three admirals and about four four ringed captains. They'd speak to you...the first thing, if you

14:30 didn't look at them you didn't get through. If you turned your head away. I remember one speaking, "Now do tell me, who do you bank with?" A nineteen year old, now I ask you! So I gave them the name of my father's bank. But whether it was to make you think quickly I don't know. It was a terribly snobby type of attitude.

15:00 "Do you know anything about wine?" Well now, what a thing to ask. "Not very much." I knew what a chablis was and a sherry and a port. But most peculiar questions. But some of the most famous officers in the RAF for instance...what was his name who lost his legs? He was so snobby that he wouldn't have any of his pilots

15:30 unless they had been to an absolute top school costing thousands of dollars a year, and if you were a ranker there you got demoted or put on another squadron until one day he found out that his sergeants were doing better than some of his officers. Class distinction is very heavy. But these were the people climbing up the ladder.

16:00 I generally found that most of the regular people were quite nice, but there was a heck of a lot of class distinction. This is why I think when the war ended, everybody voted Labour. They had had enough of it. I didn't strangely enough. But then after the training, which somehow I got through...

16:30 When we passed out, this is worth while. The passing out guard were the people next to go and right up to the last moment, you had ordered a uniform, you weren't allowed to see it and put it on until you got permission to go and get it. The first uniform was paid for. The passing out guard would be on what was called divisions.

17:00 That's the church parade in the morning. Marine band there playing away like mad. And you'd be told, one hundred and twenty thirty inch paces per minute, and the hymn will be, and then the band went into the hymn and you started marching like this, so many paces. The Chief Petty Officer

17:30 who was in charge, he was at the Naval College...we had a fellow who was a right marker. He must have been about nine feet tall. He was this height. He would lengthen his strides and we got rather out of step occasionally. And he came on and said, "Today you are the passing out guard.

18:00 The hymn is Hymn Number 15, Onward Christian Soldiers, step short the bastard in front. So when ever I hear Onward Christian Soldiers I nearly always say, step forward the bastard in front.

So where did you actually do this training?

Brighton. Modern school in Brighton became HMAS King Alfred. A wartime acting naval college.

18:30 **And how long was that for that training?**

More or less four months.

So was this full time training? Had you completed your...

Yes, that sea bit and all the rest of it, that was only to get you started. Even when you had passed everything, you then went to sea again,

19:00 still doing the old menial duties and the people on board that ship would take it in turn because we

were all in the same position. In fact I well remember one ship, it wasn't mine unfortunately. They went out there and they said, "Well you be a gunner and all the rest of it," and they shot a plane down.

- 19:30 They didn't know what to give them...a distinguished service cross or a distinguished service medal because officially he wasn't commissioned yet. I never did know the answer to that one. It didn't apply to me. So there you go. So yes, they were pretty tough. And then almost as soon as you went to the last dinner,
- 20:00 when everybody had their hats and threw them up in the air, you got a train to Royal Naval Barracks, and of course you had only walked out of that place a few months before hand, and you realised you could go to the left now because I was one of those. Conditions had totally changed.
- 20:30 I was sure what I was supposed to do until someone came up to me and said, "When you were in your school cadet corps, did someone ask you whether you wanted to do something for your country?" I said, "Well they did, but how do you know?" "It's all down. You volunteered for special operations when you were at school. You've got this far." I said, "Good heavens."
- 21:00 He said, "Would you like to become an instructor? Go to Lancashire, HMAS Gosling and become an instructor and you'll take a class through, or at least, be in charge of four classes, each one has a leading seaman or a petty officer training them. You'll be in charge of them.
- 21:30 Then you go off to the naval rifle ranges with them. You're down as being a pretty good shot. Just go down there and show them what a good shot you are, and then when they come back, you'll be retained at the naval gunnery training. Then I can't tell you where you're going until you sign the Official Secrets Act. Are you willing to sign the Act?
- 22:00 Before you sign it, are you willing to take a risk and wear civilian clothes at sea? If you're caught you will be shot." I said, "Where are you sending me?" "Well, that we can't tell you but we'd love to know what's going on in France. All our people are being parachuted in are being captured. We're going to start sending them in by ships.
- 22:30 We've got special MTBs [motor torpedo boats] converted "...and the one I was in was "Gay..." something or other. Fancy saying 'gay' nowadays. So we did that and I took these classes through. Classes A B C and D.
- 23:00 I thought then I must get some leave now. No, no. I was off to the North Wales coast and onto an old pleasure boat there. It was all decked out with guns and things like that. Some of us were taught how to take command of it,
- 23:30 changing speed, changing course, navigating and all that type of thing. Then we met again on the North Wales course and I was transferred to that unit. It was the SOE, the Special Operations Unit [Special Operations Executive] of the Royal Navy, and it was a special sabotage unit. It was never SOE itself.
- 24:00 Although today they would say I was. It was so mixed up. Our job was to get them from Britain to where ever it was we were to go to. There was one bit of knowledge that I've never told anybody, which could cause a lot of trouble. My first operation was to a new
- 24:30 neutral country which was suspected of giving oil and fuel to German U-Boats. I never went there. We took a whole number of people on board. They were seven miles up a river. We left them to go in there. They were all merchant seaman and they were going to board a merchant ship and of course as they put their packets down, just like the modern people, they were full of ammunition.
- 25:00 And then we went back the next day and picked them up. Our ship was American. Our guns were American. The small boat the people went on was American. They smashed that up and left all the stuff lying there, so if people tried to say that Britain attacked a neutral country, the Yanks would get the blame. Wouldn't the IRA...now you can guess what country it was, would love to have known.
- 25:30 That's a story and you won't find that one anywhere. But I can still that coastline and the seven miles up to Cork. That's the story. I was sent on leave after that. Dear mother...my clothes were in a shocking state and I thought I had better get my uniforms dry cleaned.
- 26:00 My dear mother said, "You are not instructing. I know the smell. It's the sea. I don't know what you're doing but I guess you're back on that Scylla again." And of course she was wrong. And my father was saying, "Don't ask him too much what he is doing. I know he's got quite an important job but he won't tell you." Then there were ten operations, six
- 26:30 of them were aborted whilst we were on them. We were just told to turn around, mainly because the weather was just far too bad. I remember one chap got ill. We got him back but he had had acute appendicitis on board. We had no medical staff, no anything. I've got a picture of us both actually. It looked like a merchant ship. We had a device on the back.
- 27:00 And you could key in the engine and go boom boom boom and give us about five knots. The flag we flew was Spanish. So we were Spaniards. We had two people who spoke fluent Spanish. To get from Cornwall where the Seafic Depot was, was a place called Cliff. It's not on any map. It's still

- 27:30 there. It's near Falmouth. And they were all Americans down there. We went over on a boat. Everyone knew what we were up to. They all said, "Good luck." It was the hunting ground of MTF Flotilla 15.
- 28:00 Now anything with the name 15, you raised your ears because they were all special units. We were independent of 15 Flotilla. Others were operating out of Dartmouth and places and going over to the continent and taking commandos to do a quick raid and all that sort of thing. They would get what information they could. Another favourite job. I did one of these...was to go into the enemy mine field. I had been trained by then in
- 28:30 mine and bomb disposal. We would capture an enemy mine, tie it to rear of our ship and tow it into the middle of the channel and let it go. I don't know if we every caught anybody but the enemy would find that their own mines...quite often you would hear a ship come out and you'd hear them fire their guns.
- 29:00 That was a common thing to see if all the guns were working. Sometimes you'd hear...the German tracer was green most of the time. Ours was likely red, or more like sparks. And you knew there was enemy very close to you somewhere. And on the CTR close contact radio,
- 29:30 which was only suppose to have a range of about five miles, and you were picking up stuff from the Mediterranean over fifteen hundred miles. You'd often hear a guttural voice speaking calling one of the others.

Can you go back to the Spanish operations?

- 30:00 **Can you tell me again, what were you doing? You were off to Spain. You were disguised as Spaniards?**

Well the ship was, yes. And it carried on it the most beautiful you had ever seen, including Spanish wines of the best type. Beautiful white bread. We carried a number of people. We weren't allowed to talk to each other on board.

- 30:30 But I remember one chappie let us know he was a major in the Marines. And I remember our skipper telling him, "For God sake man, shut up." "Beg your pardon." "I am the CO [commanding officer] of this ship, shut up." But generally we worked very well together and we went off the French coast to where the River Dordogne comes out near...what's the wine
- 31:00 place down south? We would go to a little port...I've got all the names somewhere and stop there, and we were told this was quite alright because it was in Vichy France, the friendly part of France. And the first chap we saw on the dock there had a great big German helmet on. "How the hell are you?" and our boat was going boom boom boom.
- 31:30 Our chaps would start landing stuff on the harbour and by now there were a couple of guards around. "What is this?" Wine and all the rest of it. Some
- 32:00 would say... "Oh yes," and they would put a bottle of wine under their coat and they hadn't notice the two chaps of ours who had been doing it had walked inland and two more chaps had taken their place. And that's how we got these people in. Britain's never agreed that this happened. But there's a very good book written on a few years ago on the operations of SOE, and a lot of it is terribly wrong.
- 32:30 But it's interesting. The whole operation was run by an admiral in England and he died, and his grandfather goes to our church in Bunyip. And when she found out I knew about these operations and I knew her father was a secret signals officer... "She knew about that," she said. "Do you know about her brother and all the rest of it, they all mysteriously got killed.
- 33:00 I said, "No I didn't know that." She said, "How did you survive? They wiped us all out." But I think that was just a slip of the tongue. And that was the suspicion. That the Brits killed their own. It was very exciting. I remember our first trip. People were going off to Lorient where the German
- 33:30 U-Boat submarine headquarters was. There were seven hundred submarines operating from there. It was enormous. Seven hundred out of seven hundred and fifty got sunk eventually. We had done all this business and we were standing
- 34:00 on the deck or the side and the skipper was speaking to me. We were terribly tired and we were going to get some sleep. We had actually done thirty six hours on the trot, and that's a long time on the bridge. Weather conditions, frightening conditions. We had seen and heard all sorts of things.
- 34:30 We said if it gets any worse we'll start taking Benzedrine [amphetamine sulphate] tablets. He said, "By the way, here comes old Jerry coming around, having a look at us." Suddenly, (I don't speak Spanish at all) but he was speaking to me in strong Spanish language. The German
- 35:00 said something or other, and our skipper said to me in Spanish, "Do you understand?" And I had a brain wave. I said, "Francais?" And he looked at me and said, "Spanish, France? Where's your flag?" That's what he said. I didn't know that. I learnt it later. "Well it's still there."
- 35:30 "I want to have a look." And the voice was saying behind, kill him, kill him. And this Jerry was there, and I was only a young kid, and I had a lovely knife and you can guess the rest of the story. That was my first

man.

- 36:00 We push him over the side and where we were standing, we were on the dockyard and he crashed and hit the deck and he was still there. Another voice was saying "Harper Stations. Let's get out of it." We started up and somebody fired a shot, bang.
- 36:30 Have you ever heard a bullet go passed your ear. It goes click, and back again. You don't hear any whistle or anything like that. It goes clap. So we back again and we went as fast as we could astern, turned around and made full speed. Being a pop pop boat we only had eight knots but we were now using many thousands of horsepower and came out at quite high speed.
- 37:00 We had flares and because the machine gun fire was getting pretty hot, and we could hear the ship being hit. And only being wood, they would go right through. There was no metal and nothing to save you. If they got a straight one you had had it. So we threw over these flares and in the water they lit up. The lit up brightly. It
- 37:30 worked like a charm. Machine guns came from everywhere and fired on it and then we went a bit faster and threw another lot and more machine guns game, and we went out into the dark and went on to what is known as dumb flows. That's your exhaust coming out dumb. It slowed right the way down and just crept.
- 38:00 Search lights opened up. Where the hell had they gone to? It was completely dark and it wasn't long before we heard the sound I knew was a kid, in the boom boom boom, as the planes were overhead. You could see flares drop and it was lighting up a whole lot of the sky. We knew they were on to us. Then
- 38:30 you'd hear another plane fly low. We weren't even talking to each other. I was actually operating the wheel at that time, which wasn't a normal job for us. I remember the old skipper saying we'll move off in that direction, and they were going further and further out to sea, and we were getting nearer and nearer and hugging the coast. I would think
- 39:00 it was one of the most frightening times I've had in my life. If they caught you, you were dead ducks. You would have been tortured by the Gestapo [German secret police] to find out what you knew and then done away with. But somehow or other the weather turned fairly nasty at night. We put on a bit more speed. We couldn't go too fast. We were all that full of fuel. We had come along way and I can remember a
- 39:30 cup of kye. What is a cup of kye? It's navy cocoa that someone brought up onto the bridge. I can well remember a very young fella in navy ratings uniform coming up and saying, "Here you are gentlemen." And I don't think champagne could have tasted better. It was absolutely marvellous.
- 40:00 Several people on board were sick, and I think that was with nerves. It didn't happen to me. I think that was passed that. It was a funny feeling. I've been through several things and got away with it and we gradually made our way back to the Scilly Isles, and that took another thirty odd hours. I was on my third lot of Benzedrine tables. I could have told you all the most
- 40:30 wonderful stories you wanted to know. We went into the Scilly Isles and a very wise senior officer there, I think he was either a commander or a captain, he spoke to us and I'm sure we were most impolite to this high ranking officer by suggesting that we tie up. I remember getting down on the bunk and I was out for the next thirty hours. I slept. Anyway my skipper got the DSC [Distinguished Service Cross] for it.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **So what do you mean by that? That the skipper...**

Well the captain of the base ship had no idea that he had people doing special operations from his place, covert. No one knew.

But how were you able to keep it covert?

But keeping your mouth shut. Like my own father, like why I wouldn't speak to him about the war, and

- 01:00 my mother being a very wise person was pulling out so much. She was guessing this that and all over the place. I said to her one day, "Now, grandfather was the one who came from France wasn't he?" She said, "Yes he did, and of course your grandmother. Although she was born in Britain, she was a lovely one. She had fluent French."
- 01:30 I was always led to believe they were very high-class people but I found out that they were silk weavers. I've done all that research or at least my wife has since. She came out of France soon after the revolution. But anyway, my mother wondered why I had taken such an interest in the French. She was very much, "Well I don't know, I wasn't there, etc etc."

- 02:00 And she said, "Where are you interested?" And I blurted out, "The Bay of Biscay." My father looked up and said, "That's where they come from, isn't it." The submarine. And I said, "The navy is kept very busy in that direction." It was blown.
- 02:30 But fortunately after going up to Scotland to do a covert operation and given a most terrible motor torpedo boat, all broken down and everything else. And we refused it. We said, we're not going to cross the English Channel in that. And we haven't got any particular instructions yet. We know we'll be given them.
- 03:00 There were several ratings standing there who were coming on the trip and they were talking to people on the dock side. One chap said, "All of you, you're all officers." And one chap said, "No, I'm not an officer." And the chap said, "Yes you all are. You got out on these secret missions over to Germany." You can imagine what happened. The next day the whole thing was called off.
- 03:30 Somebody was spilling things. Not all of us were officers, but there was enough getting out and we were in civilian clothes. So that was a funny thing. A lot of people were beginning to learn things. I didn't meet her...but we used to meet in a place in Cornwall where operations were discussed and anybody running that ship
- 04:00 including certain ratings, particularly the engine rooms because they knew they had to run these engines for hours and hours, they knew as much as the skipper. That was very very rare because it always used to be, "Can you read a compass, otherwise you wouldn't be on this ship. We might be blown to hell. So you've got to be able to get the ship home."
- 04:30 They were telling ordinary people that. Everyone had to be able to do everyone else's job. I remember going down in the engine rooms and being taught how to work the engines. It was a good cover up. And at the place we were I do remember a lady, and it's only imagination, and someone said to me later on, "She's a New Zealander, that's the White Mouse [Nancy Wake]." Now was it or not? I've always meant to write to her
- 05:00 about that. I've got books on her which I naturally...and there's never a hint of anything like that. It's all going to clubs and doing this and doing that but the real hard thing...see what the people didn't know she got on a plane and went there first to organise it all. I have a tremendous respect for her but I understand she's losing her marbles and she's nearing ninety. But
- 05:30 I have got someone nearer who might be able to let me know. And someone said that she said that if there was still someone alive from those days, you'd be an everlasting blood brother. But I wasn't really with SOE but I went.

What do you mean when you say you weren't really with SOE?

I was just Royal Navy transporting SOE personnel.

So you weren't an operative as such?

- 06:00 Well, who did I belong to? Nowadays they say yes I was, but we didn't even tell you. But you can't find anyone alive now, we're all dead because most of them...I was very young. Most of the people I was with were ten fifteen twenty years older than me. So that would put them at a hundred years of age or something or other. So there's nobody left.

06:30 Did you know what kind of work the operatives were doing once you had transported them?

It was sabotage work and picking up information. They would find out where there were big parties... where half a dozen crews were coming back and all the officers, the U-Boat officers would have a great big party. Sometimes they were blown to hell by the RAF. Someone told them where they would be. Until finally, I believe, the German admiral

- 07:00 was absolutely wondering where all this information was coming from. He had no idea. He had operatives from the other side working with him.

So the operatives were concentrating on the U-Boat crews and U-Boat sabotage?

Well no, not really. They were just picking up information so they would know where the crews would be so they could upset their leave. One story that came out

- 07:30 and I read it somewhere else so it must have been true, was one of the U-Boat skippers had done very very well and sunk so many thousands of tons of allied shipping, and over the radio our people got on with a more powerful transmitter and congratulated him on being the father of a son and he hadn't been home for about ten months you see. That was the type of things the Brits were up to.
- 08:00 Of course it was all won by that place where they were decoding every word the German's said. They knew every word. And another thing that was still in...and the people going to France, and again I only got this second hand was that when France was finally attacked and gave up, the telephone operator left plugged in the line between
- 08:30 London and Paris and keyed in all the lines going through. It was never spotted and our people listened

to all the conversations. There was a heck of a lot of help. That's why I'm a bit fond of the French.

Something I read was that the Germans

09:00 **changed their Enigma code in '42, early '42?**

I believe they did. But I wouldn't know. I wasn't in it. I only got the messages decoded. But our people did seem to have a pretty good knowledge. But I believe they had a brilliant mathematician who worked out something or other and he said something like this just sounds like

09:30 Gulliver's Travels or something like that, and he said, it is! That wouldn't have been the book, but he realised that all the language was from one book. And it just struck him. A hundred and one million chance and he decoded it. And yet, earlier on a Polish man said, "All the German codes, do you want them?" And people said, "Ah go away, will you."

10:00 Otherwise they could have had them from the beginning.

Ok so you've told us about two operations. One that ended up being successful and one that ended up being aborted, the one in Scotland...

Oh yes. We had three quite successful things of landing people in France. Twice we were fired on on the way out.

10:30 One time we were bombed and we were in the Bay of Biscay. It was awfully funny. They were bombing to this side of us and went on bombing to this side of us until this little radar that we had, which was quite rare in those days picked up that we were near a French fishing boat. And she was bombed in our place. So that saved our lives.

11:00 **How did it work? If HMAS Gosling was your base ship, shore base...**

In the middle of Lancashire, quite a way from the sea.

But this other boat that you had, what sort of boat was that?

The best thing to do is to show it to you.

Can you describe it?

It was a hundred and twenty foot motor torpedo boat with

11:30 all the guns and everything removed and fitted out to carry cargo so they could go to Sweden and pick up ball bearings and then run at high speed down the English Channel, which we did do. We did that through three quarters of the war. They were run actually by merchant navy people.

12:00 Of course they thought what excellent ships for us. The Gay Viking was the name of our ship. It had different engines. Instead of having three Rolls Royce Merlin engines, incidentally made in America by Packard, we had three Merlin diesels. They

12:30 actually were never fully tested but they put them in us and they put them in us and they worked all right. They were nearly as fast...it dropped out speed from thirty five knots to under thirty. But the diesels took them twice as far, otherwise we could never have made the range. As it was we had to carry fuel on the deck. That's not a nice thing when people shoot at you.

13:00 Petrol you see. One bullet and you're gone. This dear old Gay Viking. I had a bit of a cold and it was suggested that I report to the MO [medical officer] and I did. "Look, you never get any leave, go off on leave. I'll fix that for you." I came back to find out that the Gay Viking did not return from operations. She

13:30 went without me. I don't know who the crew was. You never got any follow up on any of those stories except she didn't come back, and I was told that my turn on those operations was coming to an end. It was considered I had done ten, I hadn't. So I was going back to normal Royal Navy.

14:00 **Did you have a different crew each time you went out?**

Yes. The same skipper. I went with him three times.

So it didn't return, as is, it was destroyed?

Yes. Missing lost at sea. And once again I should have been there and I wasn't. Someone was speaking to me.

14:30 By which time I was completely convinced that I was being saved for something or other and I think my religion came up again. You will have to be a priest one of these days, or you're wanted, because otherwise it doesn't make much sense.

How many crew were there on the boat?

I think fourteen. That included engineers and everybody. See we didn't need gunners but we had a couple. A couple of pea shooters just in case.

15:00 **Were they the only weapons you had?**

A couple of machine guns, yes. They were never used. We never fired back when we were fired on. We didn't want to them to see where the flashes were and hit us.

Were you always disguised as a Spanish boat?

15:30 Spanish or something. I don't know if we went as anyone else. Oh yes we did. What's the country next door to Spain? Portugal. We went as Portuguese one time. And nobody could speak Portuguese and they told me the Spaniards couldn't either.

Why did you go as Portuguese?

I had no idea. So long as it wasn't the British doing it,

16:00 it was alright. We were breaking all the rules of war, always breaking the rules of war.

Was that a trip to France, that mission?

Yes. Up the same river. They never seemed to get used to us doing it. I don't know how many other people were doing it. They never seemed particularly suspicious.

16:30 Germans are a funny lot. They have absolutely every thing tabulated down and if you are slightly unusual they're confused and bemused. It's like one of our flotilla later on on the motor torpedo boats, we could all do forty knots and yet originally they had only had low power engines in them and they were lucky if they did more than twenty five knots.

17:00 They used to go out at twenty five knots and hope the enemy radar picked them up and they would send out their ships and our blokes would then put them up to forty knots. The Germans never figured that out. Where did they go to? They disappeared. It must be a new radar. It was the fact we had changed the engines and were now going twice as fast. That was my opinion.

17:30 They were quite strange people.

How would you be briefed for these operations?

We had one place for briefing at the end of South End Pier at the end of the Thames. Those who were sufficiently senior or considered to be essential to the job came in and strangely enough...I've never heard anyone else say this but every time I went there

18:00 there was a chaplain who went and said a prayer for someone and he calmed everybody down, and from the prayer book it read 'Peril on the Sea'. A good thing to start off with. We would be brief of the operation. Just like you see with the RAF, we're going to so and so and you're going out covering the convoy and

18:30 you will leave the convoy at such and such a place. They will be going to slow for you and your operation is to patrol a certain area or whatever the job was. This was almost nightly routine. It's hard to believe there was almost two thousand small ships of the Royal Navy doing this, night after night after night. And out of that

19:00 lot, one third of them never returned. They lost names of the light coastal forces, they called them. I lost a lot of friends.

Lost names? Why, because they couldn't be identified?

Yes, but they just called them the lost names. It would appear on someone's war grave somewhere and that would be it. They went out and didn't return.

19:30 See the German ships...see all our fast motor torpedo boats...not the one I was talking about going to France in, the others were all petrol machines. The engines were Rolls Royce Merlin engines. They had the same power as a Lancaster Bomber, which is quite a lot in one of those small things.

20:00 Most of the engines were made by Packard Company in America. Packard said for ages that the Royal Navy used our engines, but they were all Rolls Royce Merlins. Although they did bring one very good one out and you couldn't tell the difference between the two. You carried petrol and you just hoped you never got hit, because the self

20:30 sealing petrol tanks were soon empty, so you carried up to eight thousand gallons of 100 octane petrol on board. They come out fairly fast from the big machine guns. One tears the casing to pieces and the next one's got incendiary material and boom, never seen again.

21:00 It was just like that. You were always very aware. I can remember refuelling in South Wales and walking around the deck and seeing one of the lads there with a lighter in his hand, filling his lighter from the petrol. I said, "Can I have your lighter, thank you."

21:30 I was so dumbfounded. I said, "When there's no petrol fumes, I'll give it to you again." I never told

anyone. What was the point?

Just getting back for the moment to the briefings for these operations. You said that what you would do is go out with the convoy and then break away with the convoy?

Yes, usually.

22:00 Because there were convoys going up and down all the time. If anyone was watching you from anywhere they would just think you were a normal part of the convoy. We'd go out...later on the ships I was on had four engines, the earlier ones three. But you'd go out on Slow Ahead One, and that would be about convoy speed. Then you'd just disappear. Anyone watching or following

22:30 and then a little later on you would just open up and go off and do your job. Whether it fooled anyone or not, I don't know. But it was quite a common procedure. If you were further down the coast or near Kent and out of one of those harbours, we just went straight off on an operation, straight out, warm up the engine and then as soon as you possibly could up to about twenty seven knots

23:00 and go from where ever you were going. You would listen to see if the enemy was about or if the enemy had a convoy coming, and you would see what you could do to disrupt it. Usually we had "Report only - Do not engage unless you have to. Your report is very important. Start sending out on radio a whole lot of words,

23:30 then drop in the word porcupine and use it twice. Enemy spotted." Then you went with your garbage and all the rest of it. You'd have to have a pretty keyed up person to know you had go onto to them. But

24:00 that type of assignment didn't happen very often. You'd hear everybody talking and all the things going on.

So you'd just start there listening?

Yes just listening for the sound of a convoy coming. We'd just roll in the water and put on hydrophones and to see if there was any underwater sound. It carried miles under water. And as soon as you heard one,

24:30 no heroics, check, course, so and so so and so. If you were with a neighbour, a little flash, yes they picked it up too, withdraw and you would just withdraw away leaving with the course and the considered speed and everything else. That was an almost daily occasion.

How would you locate them? How would you get the bearings?

25:00 Well similar to ASDIC gear. It's part of navigation. You've got a noise and you draw a line on your chart to that noise and then you wait five minutes and if your noise has moved there, you draw another line and then you get someone else to come in from the side and listen and where all the lines cross is more or less where the enemy is.

25:30 It's pretty good. And quite often you would have our bombers going over, and one of them would be off course. We would know it wasn't a Lanc [Lancaster] or a Halifax but a Wellington or something or other belonging to coastal command. So it would go over and have a quick look and then carry straight on. The blighter never noticed that you had him pin-pointed.

26:00 Then some one higher up would order up some destroyers or even light cruisers and wipe them out of existence.

Were you always under cover?

Oh no. Just for that short time when we went to the Continent. Then I was back into...strangely enough it was still 15 Flotilla.

26:30 But on motor torpedo boat 243.

So it's still 15 Flotilla?

Yes, but we were independent. There were several ships from that flotilla and half of them belonged to the Dutch. We weren't Dutch and we operated usually with three of them: 236; 250, 243.

27:00 No, 916 was an ML [motor launch] which worked with us and she got [(UNCLEAR)]. My skipper was quite a famous one. He sunk several enemy ships and he unfortunately he's heading towards ninety years of age with dementia.

27:30 I met his first lieutenant who then became my skipper later on. I've got two ships mixed up because 243 lost its skipper. Lieutenant Ford. It gets a bit hazy some of those times. But yes, we operated from the Kent coast

28:00 we sometimes used to go right the way up to Sherness which is on the way to Chatham. But we quite often went up there because that was where all the mine sweepers were. The main ships operating there were light ones, MLs [motor launch]. They went twenty knots flat out. We were just warming up our engines at that speed and we would leave them behind.

- 28:30 You'd be in harbour sometimes for several days, cleaning up, making it look spick and span. We might run ashore, go to the cinema, waste time and if you got a chance buy a train ticket from Portsmouth if you were down there or if you were on the Kent coast up to London. Funny rules,
- 29:00 we weren't allowed to go to London for ages, but I soon thought, don't go as far as London. Go half way and get a bus. So I went home and nobody ever asked. And occasionally I remember coming down from the north and we came in somewhere or other and I trained down, and all the trains down from Scotland on the London, Midland and Scottish railway used to stop at
- 29:30 Watford during the war and in those days...they don't now, but the underground used to run on the surface. So you got off at Watford, bought a ticket to South London underground station and got out there. Nobody cared a damn. I used to carry civvy clothes and I did several naughty things. I had a piece of paper that said I was on
- 30:00 covert operations and should be treated with respect. I carried that right they way through, and I also carried a wad of (I'm not saying this in public) travel documents. So I used them for a long time, even after I was demobilised.

How did you use them? What did it get you having those documents?

I went to Scotland free of charge on the War II. I went up on the Flying Scotsman and came down on the Royal Scot on the other side.

- 30:30 I didn't tell my parents.

What kind of things did you ask your identity papers for?

I never got asked for them. Nobody ever asked who I was or what I was doing. All the time I was in the navy.

So what did you flash to people to get a free ticket on the train?

I had

- 31:00 a wad of official navy documents which they were issuing out...oh, it's a terrible story. You're making me tell it. The Gay Viking of course carried them all and we had a store place in England where all these things were and when she didn't return...I wonder what law I broke, I pinched half the stuff.

- 31:30 **Your file, your documents?**

No, free railway warrants and all the rest. A good man to be a priest. You've got to have initiative in this life. My father would have been horror-struck. You handed them it at a station and they went right through. No real human being ever really saw them or knew what they were.

- 32:00 Some accounting person might have wondered, but by...when did I come out of the navy, 1946, things were still terribly war-like. Anyway, let's forget that.

But, you left the Gay Viking temporarily, why was that?

I had a bad cold and the medical officer told me to take leave.

And so

- 32:30 **when you came back, you came back to HMAS Gosling didn't you?**

Yes, I was just given a number of classes to instruct. "Great to have you back." I had been all over the place for ages and nobody said, "Where the heck have you been?" What have you been doing, and of course almost immediately I was given a draft chit to join HM [His Majesty's] Coast Forces, MTBs down at HMAS Hornet.

- 33:00 **Were you debriefed after the operation?**

Yes.

By what? Intelligence officers?

Yes, people just like you, ask every question in the world.

So what would they ask you? What would you tell them?

Your memories. Whether you saw anything. What did you hear. They were very interested in your times and

- 33:30 navigation procedure, when it was dark and you were out of sight. I remember getting quite a shock one time, I said, "Well that was really up to the navigation officer." And they said, "But you did it. You all did it together, didn't you." It was frightening because navigation was never my best. Years later

34:00 when I started doing a bit of navigation, I used to check my course with a flotilla leader and agree with him.

So you were navigating unofficially or through observation?

I mean you were doing your mathematics or if you could see the sky or navigating by stars etc etc.

34:30 You had a fairly good idea and there were varying places where you could pick up radio signals which were giving out bleeps. And if you were in a line with so and so then that would give you true north. There was a marvellous one off the Cornish coast and if you didn't know it was false, it would lead you straight onto the rocks.

35:00 These places were giving navigational signals because there were still commercial ships that were sailing these seas. It's hard to believe that during all the bombing and all the rest of it, merchant ships were still sailing into dock. What were they going to do with this stuff? I mean a ship with 10,000 tons of merchandise on board it.

35:30 That would have been ten or fifteen heavy goods trains, and they just hadn't got them. They later built about two thousand great big goods engines, and most of those finished up in France after D-Day.

What did you mean about Cornwall, that there were navigational signals?

They were anywhere. Nowadays radio signals give you constant bearings. There's a little machine...I forget its name and a little picture goes along like that and then it goes up like that in a bleep, and if you bring your bleep which is you onto that

36:00 it will give you your exact position. Today it would be satellite. But a lot of these things were running right the way through the war.

But you said there was one that was faulty?

36:30 Oh yes, yes. It gave...you went straight ahead through the passage and it led them onto rocks.

So who was generating that signal?

Oh, the Brits. There was another one that was at the mouth of the Thames to lure German submarines to finish up on the sand there. That's what they were doing. And another secret thing they were doing

37:00 was the German aircraft carried a radio beam which was to take them to their target. In Germany they had two transmitters and it went like that, and that was your target and the German aircraft followed it. They discovered its wavelength was exactly the same wavelength as British television. Now British television started in 1936.

37:30 I saw the first programme. I actually saw the first programme and it was...it was at a palace in London. Not Crystal Palace, I went there later on. So they discovered it was on this wave length so they just turned on this transmitter when the enemy planes came over and

38:00 some of them had a hell of a job finding the Midlands and everything because they were being shunted off course. They were very, very efficient. But you had to be careful that you didn't get mixed up with some of these things occasionally. Your signals which you listened to constantly for telling us what was going on or our course

38:30 and all the rest of it, sometimes they'd be thousands of kilometres out. And the stuff was going up to the ionosphere and coming back with false readings. But I wasn't a signals man. My wife's brother was. He was a signals officer. But he wouldn't talk to you about the war.

39:00 I operated with him one time. I didn't know it and he said, "Those damn silly little ships there. They were between us and battle ships." I said "I was on one of those doing the inside guard." Other than that we never contacted.

Throwing the shells in?

39:30 Yes, firing the shells from heavy ships...one thousand nine hundred and fifty pound shells. They go off with a nasty big bang. And they were very accurate. When they evaded flushing, and that was our nightly patrol then to cover it, on the inside, and we were told that

40:00 everything needed to be flattened except a windmill on the front. That must not be touched. In the morning when the light came up, it was a flat city. Behind there was a runway with a ship they were building there. I couldn't see it before because it was behind buildings.

40:30 And there was sitting one windmill. Inside, the entire resistance. They didn't get hit. And that was absolutely true. We were first hand. I can tell you that much.

00:32 **We're back on. You were just saying off camera, Laurie, that you would like to see that there is some balance here. You were saying that it's not all fun and games. That there's a lot of drudgery.**

Yes, cleaning the ship, running the crew and the crew running you and all the silly things that happen. And the crew, they were an amazing lot of people. I remember

01:00 one ship...of course the crew I remember are the one where as I say, I lost them all. There were a couple of fellows from the west of England. They had lovely west of England accents. We used to get... later on in the war, we were getting leave to go up to London. It was a time when we were only having rockets thrown at us by the Germans.

01:30 They'd come down, bang! Oh that's right, we weren't allowed to have any leave and I would walk down the platform and there were one two three, Scarab [?] was one of them...there must have been six of them standing there all looking sheepish. There was an army chappie there with his red on and a corporal or something.

02:00 He doesn't know whether he challenges the navy where they're going. I said, "Nice to see you, fall in two deep and let's walk down to our train." So we marched all the way down, and of course there's no saluting in stations. We went down there and that went down terribly well. We all went back and nobody ever mentioned it.

02:30 We all went back to ship.

So you mentioned Scarab, the one who left something on the ferry...so you were commanding...?

No I wasn't commanding. D-Day was the only time I commanded anything. They were right down to leading seamen commanding ships on D-Day, little ones. No I was

03:00 too young and I probably wasn't that good. Dear old Scarab. He had a wonderful way. I remember we were in a port and there were great big seagulls, great Atlantic ones. Commonly known as shite hawks. There was Scarab standing underneath a gun barrel and one of these

03:30 shite hawks comes in, and he's carrying a meal to someone or other and before you could say...the bird went in at it and of course he jumped up and hit his head on the gun barrel, split the food and was wondering why the seniors to juniors were roaring with laughter. That was Scarab. Unfortunately he lost his life on that ship.

04:00 Oh yes, he was a great fellow. He should have been given a very big medal. We got hit one night. We suddenly had a close encounter. That ship that was close to us was not one of ours, it was one of them. Shells came in right at us and they went into the petrol compartment and the lid on the...way down to the tanks

04:30 lifted in the air. I didn't see that myself. I was looking the opposite way. He grabs an extinguisher, turns it on, and of course its one of these dry extinguishers, holds it over the hole, puts down the lid, puts his feet on it and held it on the top of himself and it went out.

05:00 We were carrying five thousand, three hundred gallons of hundred octane fuel. He saved our lives. I don't know if anyone even said thanks. But he didn't have very long to live then. The skipper

05:30 of that ship was very good, Lieutenant Ford.

What was the name of the ship?

243. It only had a number.

And this is an MTB?

Yes, I've got a lovely picture of it. A really fast one with an unusually heavy gun up forward. Only a six pounder but big for them.

06:00 Twenty millimetres behind the bridge. Twin 303s either side of the bridge. And speed. She officially was a motor torpedo boat carrying torpedoes so she was listed as a motor gun boat. She was some ship. I was on her for some time working out of Kent.

06:30 **You were going to talk about Lieutenant Ford?**

Oh yes. He was the skipper. He was a very nice fellow. He was a solicitor and he was studying to be a barrister. What happened to him I don't know. But I did hear, shall I say ten or so years ago that he was still living. But seeing he was quite a number of years older than me, he would be pretty old now, about ninety, if he's living.

07:00 We carried a young midshipman. God, could that man smoke. He did nothing else but smoke, but he was a very nice fellow. I'm told brilliant at academic work. He didn't have a brain between his ears. But never mind.

- 07:30 I remember having a bit of a dressing down with him. I told him off when we were tying up to a buoy and he sent a man down to get on the buoy, and that was between the ship and the buoy. You could get crushed to death. I said not to do that and then I got hauled over the coals from the skipper for dressing down an officer
- 08:00 in front of the crew...with the petty officer saying, "Well done." I said to the PO [petty officer], "What would you have done if I hadn't been there?" "Tell them to get bloody well out of it." And of course he was right. He got lost, that midshipman. The coxswain was a very nice fellow.
- 08:30 Ted Oakley was his name. I owe my life to him. He saw my body in the water and he got a rope around me. He and the skipper pulled me up the ship after she was supposed to have sunk but she didn't go right down.
- 09:00 They both had...one had a terribly leg. I don't know about the other one. One lost both his legs, one lost one leg and I wear stockings to this day. We all nearly lost our legs that day through frost bite in the water. The rest of the crew of course died of thermal loss. So that was an amazing journey.
- 09:30 Do you want to hear that?

Ok, this is after D-Day wasn't it?

Oh yes, this is well after D-Day. We can always come back to D-Day. I mean, what's D-Day?

What was D-Day...it was nothing!

I mean to me it wasn't anything. There were two or three thousand ships including battle ships and everything else. There was so much gold braid and all the rest of it. So I went home...but that's another story.

- 10:00 I remember this particular night we pulled out of this little harbour in Kent and set a course with two other motor torpedo boats. It was known as a Z-Line patrol. They thought the enemy had stopped using any of our motor torpedo boats...they were known as E-Boats or they called
- 10:30 them Schnell Boats. Schnell, German for 'fast'. And they were fast. But we were sent out on a patrol because they believed there was a convoy coming up. Now...what's the opposite to Dover? Boulogne and the other port on the other side, were never occupied by the Allies. They just bypassed them and suddenly they realised that the Germans were
- 11:00 bringing up supplies during the night. So we got sent out on this patrol, but for some reason or other, our information was completely wrong because according to the chart I was issued with or at least we were issued with, it was more interested in Holland and here we were off France and Belgium. So
- 11:30 we made off at quite high speed for a long time on patrol. And then after a while, I can remember the flotilla commander was on 250 and he said, "Good hunting," and we went off to see what we could do. And it seemed to be hours going through the night. The sea was a bit rough. There was water coming over the top. You used
- 12:00 to put a towel around your neck and then your Macintosh things, your heavy weather clothes there to keep the water out, otherwise it would all run down.
- 12:30 And a hat right over your head. We were all out in the open. And after a while we obeyed instructions, we stopped and listened. And we listened and listened and nothing happened. And we went on again and we got a wireless report which appeared to be talking to us, telling us to go much further north.
- 13:00 I will well remember that. "How much fuel have we got?" When will we go back? Where are we going back too, we'll have to go to another fuelling station. Have we got food? Have we got this that and the other? One of the lads coming up...after you had done eight hours, the men were entitled to a tin of fruit. "Yes, yes, they could have the tin of fruit." Too rough for them to be between decks.
- 13:30 I had been up on the bridge for some time and I must talk about the call of nature. The time came when nature was telling me that I had better visit the correct place. When a ship is doing 27 knots, in round figures it's about 30 miles an hour....you're moving some. You of course are moving
- 14:00 but the air between you and the next place isn't really moving at all. So if you want to go fast from one place to another, you push on your arms and you float through the air and land back on the deck. You're down. The toilet was known as the head and it was much further aft. And I went down there entirely by myself. I push myself
- 14:30 out like that and as I went into midair, something struck me, some peculiar. I heard the most colossal bang. Everything's dark...but it is dark. Silent. We had stopped, and I hit the deck with a crash.
- 15:00 Now all that was in a fraction of a second. My brain was working, what the heaven's has happened? And I heard my name being called to the bridge. So I make my way back again. "I think that was a mine, we've hit a mine. Midships. We're going down fast." Take a torch, he would go up to the front of the ship

- 15:30 and I would like – down on the mess deck. I looked down on the mess deck and oh lord, there's water there. Panic is setting in fast. Then behind the bridge, I looked down to the engine room and the most peculiar sight. I'll never forget it. The first thing my torch hit was the ship's cat. Dead on the top of the water.
- 16:00 I felt more sorry about that cat than anybody or anything else. What peculiar times do to you! Then, oh heavens, there's the motor mechanic, what's left of him. He was blown to pieces too. And over there was one of the engine room people, one of the stokers. He was dead. I turned my torch off because it looked so bad.
- 16:30 I made my way down to the aft of the ship and when I went there I suddenly realised by feet were terribly cold. I was in water. She was going down and I'm looking at depth charges, depth charges and they were all set. What will I do? So I shouted at the top of my voice to the skipper, and he heard me because I heard him shout out
- 17:00 just like a rating, "Aye aye." But it carried and I went down there and I can remember undoing these and pulling out the trigger and throwing them to the side. And the water was coming up my leg and eventually there was only the two big ones at the back and they were the ones that really counted. I managed to get it but I remember I was pulling one of them and it stuck and I
- 17:30 was twisting it and I was shouting out, screaming out, "All depth charges disarmed." I was talking to myself wasn't I, there was nobody else there. So I climbed up to the edge of the bridge. We were now looking in the water and there were lots of fellows in the sea. I mean you couldn't really see them but your eyes soon got accustomed.
- 18:00 And someone was shouting out, "Don't jump in here, it's full of oil and petrol, the fuel tanks have gone." Then there was the skipper alongside me and he said something like "Blow that for a lark, let's go." And we both jumped over together. Where the coxswain was, I don't know, but we were accredited to be the last three to leave.
- 18:30 The last three from the bridge. So there we go. I jumped over. When you jump over, you're not expecting things. First of all I was wearing a life jacket. It came up and hit me under the jaw, nearly knocked me out. And I remember taking in a breath and I took in petrol and oil and I was going down and down
- 19:00 and down. But it wasn't water. Then I must have hit the water, and this is it, I've had it. The terrible pain, the pain of petrol against your bare flesh, and let's say, your most tender places. The pain is something terrible, and
- 19:30 then I realised it was in my eyes, I couldn't see. I got either oil or petrol in my eyes. I thought I had better make a noise so I opened my mouth and nothing came out, and suddenly I was at the top of the water. I had come up on the life jacket. The water was up to my nose and it was still oil and petrol. The smell was terrible.
- 20:00 And I was trying to think what to do. You have to admit you're going to save number one. You're going to save your life if you can. I was terribly sick. All this oil and petrol was coming up. It was burning my lungs. I was gasping for breath, being sick...they're two completely different passages I know,
- 20:30 but I wasn't doing science at that moment. And then the time seemed to go on and on and the cold! The cold was so unbelievable, there was only one thing and I think about it now, I don't want to come through this. Let's get this over with. Let me die. Why me? Why am I here?
- 21:00 I must keep awake. If I go to sleep I'm gone. Why did this happen to me? I've got to argue with someone, being a religious guy there was only one bloke to have an argument with. I remember shouting out quite loudly...it would have been had I been able to get any noise out of my throat...I think there was nothing coming out.
- 21:30 Was there a section in the bible where you were going to destroy the city of Nineveh. If you found one good bloke there you'd let them get away with it, and all the rest of it. Well why me, why am I here? And so it went on. And then suddenly I realised...there was a heck of a time between when I went over. I've been passed out and my head's in water and it's
- 22:00 not in oil any more. But my eyes and the pain of the air. I remember hearing about it and I tried to open my eyes and let the air blow in and it worked. The petrol must have begun to evaporate. But I will never be able to explain the feeling of that cold.
- 22:30 Next winter, the coldest night you can think of, jump in the nearest dam in a paddock. It's like that. You hate almost everybody and yourself and then suddenly I got a terribly feeling of conscience.
- 23:00 Was I the last person to plot the course? Was I the one who led the ship into the mine field. I didn't know there was a mine field there. Probably not... no that's the midshipman's job, he was doing that. And you start arguing more or less with yourself. You're shivering and in pain and time goes on...I mustn't go to sleep.

- 23:30 Is there anybody there, anybody out there? Nothing. And you say, good heavens isn't it still. It's terribly still, and something bumped into me and I thought I wonder if that's a mine. Well if it had have been I wouldn't have know much about it would I. Then there was some bits of wood and things and I had some completely irrational thoughts in my mind, and a voice suddenly said,
- 24:00 "There's another one. He's dead." And I recognised the West Country voice, it was Ted the coxswain. A very posh voice saying, "Better put a line around him and get him in." Now, who's this and who are they and all the remainder of it? Now I could be mad. I think I'm going mad. And suddenly through the glint of the night air and there was a touch of light...it couldn't be,
- 24:30 it was only after midnight...it must be now six or seven o'clock in the morning. It's not possible. I would be dead. And there's the ship with the number 243 written on it. That's the one I got off.
- 25:00 It doesn't happen. I'm mad. I was to learn later on that the engines fell out, and because she was wood, she came up. And this line went around me. Dear old Ted the coxswain. And there's the skipper pulling me up the side of the ship. The funny thing is, I was the best off of all three of them. I wasn't to know that. They were
- 25:30 to die. And they pulled me up and all the rubbing sticks, the bits that stick out, I hit everyone. He was saying, "I think he's dead." And I'm saying "No, he's not." They pulled me up onto the deck and someone said...I was hearing voices then.
- 26:00 Someone was saying something about work on his legs and they were looking at my legs and someone said, "Don't do that, his skin's coming off." "Right, well put him in the chart house, or what's left of it." So they put me in the chart house and laid me down. I remember being violently sick again and the skipper saying, "Make him as comfortable as you can."
- 26:30 And I found myself alone, still shivering but they had found some light blankets and put them over the top of me but they hadn't taken off my wet clothes. They must have been as wet as me. They did a marvellous job.
- 27:00 There was a noise in the water, I can hear it coming through the ship...propellers turning. My voice came back and I said, "E-boats." That's the enemy ship. And I remember jumping up and falling and jumping up again and saying to who ever it was and I can't remember which of the two it was, "Are the Oerlikons still working?"
- 27:30 And I like a silly idiot went out onto the Oerlikon, turned and I was ready to have a fight. So that's the real answer to why I got that medal. Anyway after passing out again, it turned out to be a very friendly ship and they came with another ship and they said they would take us in tow and they would transfer us and the skipper
- 28:00 saying, "You will not transfer us. We are staying with our ship." I wasn't even asked. So we stayed and they put some hot food...all the wrong medical procedures. They were now pouring hot food down my throat and a tot of something. It tasted like rum but I believe
- 28:30 it was more likely to be some other spirit. But of course as soon as it touched my throat which was all roar it hurt like mad and I passed in and out of consciousness until there was a sudden bang and our ship was going up the beach. We had been thrown by a bigger one. Some one was saying, "No lights, no anything.
- 29:00 you're two hundred yards from the enemy. You're on the enemy coast in Holland." I was trying to work out, we didn't go that far north but there was a strong current taking us there. And I was doing all these calculations and I must have been running a temperature because I was doing these calculations and they didn't work out. And I can still see lines going in front of my eyes this way and that way.
- 29:30 And then someone coming down and saying, "Congratulations, you'll be mentioned for this. The army is coming to fill the bottom of the ship in with concrete, put pumps on board and we're going to take you home." The thought came into my mind, what for, she's blown to pieces, but I should have been saying, "Yes, rule Britannia! Let's take her home."
- 30:00 That did happen. That night, it was Sunday the week before Christmas and I could hear the Germans singing carols. Next morning when I guess we had been spotted
- 30:30 a Messerschmitt flew over and waggled its wings at us and went on. We're in enemy territory. And we suddenly realised that on top of the navigation house we had a lovely white star, which everyone from D-Day onwards carried for identification. I remember old Ted the coxswain came up with some paint and painted it out. And everyone seemed to be pleased that I was getting on quite well.
- 31:00 But the others were having terrible trouble with their legs. We stayed on board and we got towed and towed for a heck of a long way, but finally two of us were transferred to another ship, but we stayed with the main mob. We came to a harbour in
- 31:30 Kent and now it was three days that we had been out. God knows what we looked like. I had been cocooned in oil and grease. I was black. It was sticking out here, the whole of my body and everything

else. That's why I was alive. That had cocooned me against the cold. And the admiral in charge was Admiral of Nor, That was his post's name, Nor.

32:00 North, of course. And the admiral came down and there was his car. It was a big Humber. He came down and of course we were bedraggled things. "I salute you gentlemen." And someone said, "We've got a truck for the rating." "Those three gentlemen will go to hospital in my car. I don't

32:30 care how much oil is on them." He was adamant. Mixed ranks and everything else. In his car. So we were taken away. And that's the end of that story. Two and a half weeks later I was back at sea. I wonder how much counselling I would have got now.

33:00 **And the other two whose legs also...**

Yes, one died, so I was to learn later on. The coxswain died about ten weeks later and the skipper lost both his legs eventually and died ten years later. So I've been in hospital with these. I have to keep them with

33:30 good stockings on and all the rest of it. But they've never done me any harm at all. I'm terribly lucky and I say, why did I get out of it? And then was transferred to MTB 5003.

So with your legs, what damage had been done and what was the treatment for that?

None.

Rest and recuperation?

Yes, bind them

34:00 up. Don't forget gentlemen don't feel pain, so there you go.

You said how the Messerschmitt had flown over and wiggled its wings, why had it not taken a shot?

Well it obviously thought we were one of them. So there we are. By which time we had a number of people on board who had been dropped

34:30 by the others and everyone waved at it. The funny thing is I still have a picture of that plane. Everyone says it was a Me 109 and I think it was a Training 108. I can still see it as a 108. But then I was thinking such daft thoughts at that stage. I might have thought it was the Loch Ness Monster.

35:00 I eventually got a patch of leave from 5003, they sent me away. Again I remember my mother being very upset because I...it was then that she said I went away a boy and came back an old man. But I think in some ways you did. You learnt a heck of a lot and I had learnt a lot about the

35:30 sea. I was a pretty good seaman by then, so when I went back on the 5003, I was number two on board, and I quite enjoyed it. I was missing some of those old faces though. They were quite a nice crew.

36:00 One of the officers lived not all that far from me. He became an accountant. The CO, I didn't hear of him for years and he got dementia.

36:30 His then number two...that's right we all moved up, he became skipper eventually, and he went to Oxford to study medicine and I didn't write to him last Christmas. I should have done. But he's about 83 or 84 now and I thought the last time we met, his mind was slipping. But other than that I don't know anybody. I did meet

37:00 a stoker on a train once. He looked at me and said, "It isn't, is it?" He was still in navy uniform, still at as a base stoker. We were chatting away like mad.

So you said you were mentioned in dispatches?

Well for that and before.

37:30 **But that episode?**

But that episode was an important one.

So how was it you survived and so many perished? Was it a combination of your faith and the petrol?

No, I think I was covered in oil and I was cocooned and it worked out alright. Maybe I had a bit of extra heat being diabetic and they didn't know it.

38:00 I don't know. Here we are, and I'll tell you in ten years time when I'm ninety odd. So that's almost the last of the stories except D-Day, which is worth telling because it was so chaotic.

Well, D-Day we might save to the next tape and I might just ask a question or two about that period. I think it will be more than two minutes, so we'll leave it to the next day.

38:30 Well, Eisenhower didn't consult me.

I was just wondering whether...I mean you talked a bit earlier about Scarab or one of the men who were looking for excuses not to go back on...I was just wondering if you could recall examples of the stress and what have you really did get to some of the men?

39:00 Oh it did from the top to the bottom. The general story for most people was to 'go ashore and get pissed'. The officers went to a quiet place and I can remember being the only one in charge on the MTB and hearing them coming aboard and saying, "Quite up forward, you'll wake everybody up." And a voice saying, "OK, Laurie." It was the

39:30 skipper I was shouting at, but he was as drunk as the rest of them. This was it. I've never liked beer, it was like poison to me, and in several of my stories I've been running off to the toilet. I don't mind a good drop of scotch or something like that. But I've never been a drinker.

40:00 But there was an enormous amount of stress and particularly when you were stand by ship. What they called AA guard ship. The whole crew were just standing-to all night. There was nothing happening and they were playing silly games of cards, and in fact they were playing games of cards that were officially not allowed.

40:30 And you'd write letters. I can remember writing to one lady, saying we've had a bit of a busy time and all the rest of it, and I got a reply... "I wrote to you some time ago, and I never had a reply. It sounds as though you're at sea." I wonder what happened to her.

41:00 You could get a bit emotional over things. I often...when I went ashore, I would go to the cinema or something and I would always finish up talking to old ladies. "Oh, I've got a son in the navy" and that type of thing, and I found they were wonderful mums. I think that's what I was looking for in a way. Someone to care for me.

41:30 I loathed it when we were in Portsmouth, because the electric train was two stations to London Bridge or to Waterloo, and you felt you could board it anytime you wanted to but you couldn't. There was nowhere to run to. There was nothing you could do. And other people would say, "You lucky bastard."

Tape 8

00:33 **We were talking about being at Portsmouth and being only two stops from London and Waterloo, but not being able to get back, is that right?**

Well it was just that you didn't have the leave or the permission to go there. I did a lot of silly things, but I didn't stick my neck out too far.

So how often would you go back to London?

01:00 Well there was one time when I didn't get home for a year. But otherwise I managed to get home every three or four months usually. My father gave me a five pound note and in those days that would get you home from any station in Britain. I wish I had kept it.

01:30 **Right. Let's get onto D-Day. Actually I've got one question. I was off camera when you were talking about SOE. I was just wondering how much involvement you had with the operatives?**

None whatsoever, except one silly

02:00 major who kept on telling us who he was. I trust he got away with it. I wish I had known his name. No, none whatsoever. My job was to get them in and get them out.

Ok so tell us about D-Day and the preparation...

Oh course D-Day started long before D-Day and there was a place on the south coast of England called

02:30 Newhaven and that was HMAS Aggressive. I've never seen it mentioned anywhere. But it's an official name. I got transferred to HMAS Aggressive and then onto the torpedo boat. No, I didn't. I went on to this special HDML [harbour defence motor launch], which had been converted for D-Day.

03:00 A shocking job. It was half finished. They had taken out the main engine which were 250 horsepower Gardiner diesels and put in an American 600 horsepower petrol engine which didn't really suit because it made the middle heavy. We went there to get special instructions and training and pick up a crew.

03:30 I picked up a crew and to begin with, it was only seven but we finished up with nine of us. It was a titty little thing of about less than fifty tons. That had a couple of little guns either end and one fellow was a gunner and one fellow said he knew how to work a gun.

04:00 Anyway he seemed good enough. A signalman...he could work all the bunting and read the signals. I wasn't too bad at that myself. And we were really virtually doing nothing. I well remember a warrant

officer who was getting quite old and he was talking about this and he said, "It's not my job to tell you fellas what to do,

- 04:30 commander so and so is supposed to tell you but I haven't seen him for ages, but what you've got to do is follow a corvette. You don't need to navigate, you don't need to do anything else, just follow the corvette all the way, to where ever it is you're going when you go."
- 05:00 Lovely instructions. Anyway we had a nice little crew and then we thought, who's going to make the food, who's going to do this and that? So someone volunteered to do it. Then, where's the food coming from? Who's paying for it? Is this canteen messing? Do they get paid for it? What will happen about my share? It was surprisingly sorted out under the heading of special emergencies and
- 05:30 food kept on turning up in containers and sacks and that. We had one fellow, we called him the Artful Dodger. He would go ashore and come back and we'd say, "Where did those spuds come from?" "I nicked them." So he was a very useful fellow. So we had plenty of provisions.
- 06:00 It was going to be a nice comfortable thing, except the sea came up. And the sea was terribly...the beginning of June. The sea was terribly rough. So rough you couldn't go out and practice anything and one or two boats went out and came back and then I got an order. We were to go out so far, turn and come back and we got soaked. Water got inside the
- 06:30 boat, but the crew were working. That was alright. I remember the joke was, we were at the fair and we were going in our little boat and some more senior people came down and they said do this and that and it was difficult to tell what. And there was a little tug and there was a leading seaman in charge of it,
- 07:00 and they said there were so many people going on what we were going on. So they virtually told us what was happening. They said we've got landing craft under the care of petty officers, lighter landing craft under leading hands, tug under a leading hand and I thought someone was going to say, and yes, this one under you. We were all prepared
- 07:30 to go and then the orders came in, Portsmouth is your destination. That was just up the coast. But getting to Portsmouth was one heck of a job. Rough sea. We had a larger ship to follow and I well remember he hoisted the signal, eight knots.
- 08:00 I said to the motor mechanic, "Eight knots?" He said, "This thing will do about fifteen. We'll be lucky if it stays upright if we do more than five or six." So I said, "I'll be guided by you. Give me all you can and if conditions ease, put it up." He said, "On this engine, it will do twenty four hundred revolutions and I never want it to go over fifteen or sixteen hundred. It will blow up on us."
- 08:30 Thank you very much. So we went and we reached Portsmouth. You've never seen so many ships of every kind. Motor torpedos, big and small, wireless's blaring. "So and so go...." Well we were C22, special D-Day boats converted from
- 09:00 MLs. And the instructions came in, your job, if there needs to be a Dunkirk, take them off. You will have guns and if the enemy decides to send in all sorts of devices, shoot at them, knock them out of the water. You're not alone. There's about fifty of you. Some bigger than you. But
- 09:30 you will be in the company of B Class MLs [motor launch], they were slightly bigger. You just go along with them and you'll be told what to do. Well the day to sail on D-Day was not June the 6th. It was the day before hand. But Eisenhower had decided the weather was too bad, and they didn't go. I had been awake most of the night.
- 10:00 And worrying about things, trying to plot courses because I really didn't know where I was going. They came down with orders, but I couldn't have them. They couldn't be given until the next morning. That must have been on the 4th. On the 5th, word
- 10:30 came through, "We're going, we're sailing and you are to land on beach so and so." "Where's that?" "Right alongside the US. The Yanks. They were going in there, we're going in here and your job is to go right the way in and await orders because they're going to try and build a harbour there. Shoot
- 11:00 at anything that needs to be shot at. Don't shoot at anything, most of them will be ours. Keep your head down because they will be firing at us." That was always a joke with the Americans. We went off. It was another one of those cases where you would look at the sky and then the sea, look at the twist, up and down. Sounds of crashing as all this stuff
- 11:30 on board was moving from place to place and we went for hours and hours. All the way through the night until the sea began to clear a bit. Light was up quite early that morning. It must have been around about five o'clock in the morning. I'm all alone.
- 12:00 I tried to navigate a course, tried to go where we were supposed to, and little Stainsby is standing by, "House ahead sir?" And there is was. We were going up a beach or were about to. So, "Stop engine, slow astern, starboard."
- 12:30 Now where are we, according to me we were just about there and there was someone winking: G-E-T T-

O H-E-L-L O-U-T O-F I-T. 'Get to hell out of it'. Forward a little later on, you are standing where the world's biggest bombardment is about to take place. Motor mechanic says, "We're nearly out of fuel."

- 13:00 And then we came alongside a big ship and I thought I recognise that, HMAS Scylla the flag ship D-Day. I had been on her before. The captain had three rings and a telescope under his arm, "What the hell are you doing there?" "Waiting instructions, sir."
- 13:30 "I haven't any for you. What do you want?" "Fuel" "How much?" So someone yells out how many gallons and all the rest of it and as quick as anything we were directed over to a place and when we got there it was diesel and we were petrol. They said, "Nobody is here with petrol except the B Class MLs" "Well that's what I want."
- 14:00 "Well we haven't got any. The only petrol is in that tank and it's for the army tanks when they come in. But someone very kindly said, "You've helped us get here." We hadn't done a thing. "We can let you have so many gallons of lower grade petrol." The mechanic is saying we were going to pop a bang like mad. Anyway we filled up and that was terribly difficult even doing that.
- 14:30 We had to get the hell out of here, where do we go? Any orders for me? And the answer was "No." Then I saw someone a little bit bigger and I thought, dare I ask, "Any instructions, sir?" "Yes, return to Portsmouth!" And then suddenly
- 15:00 I hear all hell open up. Guns are opening up, stuff is flying through the air and I'm going home. And that was my D-Day. I have the Diploma of Honour from France for being there with the first lot when I was nearly there too soon. One has to tell the truth. It was a great no-no. On the way back, a Liberator bomber, American again, went over.
- 15:30 She must have been hit or something, and she was unloading bombs. They were several miles away but by golly did they shake us up. When we got home there were all the Wrens [Women's Royal Naval Service] and the girls. Of course all the lads were up on the deck there and they were getting kissed and cuddled. We were the heroes. It's on the news. We've done it. Not us of course. So really, I didn't
- 16:00 deserve a single thing. Terribly tired again. I was allowed to sleep for about twenty four hours and so were the crew. They put a shore crew on to clean us up, put food stuff on board and we were sent back again. Nobody to follow. It was get back yourself. So I saw an R Class ML, no, a B Class RML [rescue motor launch]
- 16:30 and that was a rescue motor launch carrying doctors and everything else, so I said, "Are you going to where I think you're going, if so can I follow?" The answer was, "Probably no, you're too slow." "Motor mac, what can you give me on speed?" "I can give you a burst of two thousand revs if you want it." And of course our nose lifts out and I come right along side him,
- 17:00 "Sorry chum, thought you were an HDML." And of course it was a converted HDML. There was still some of the old petrol left in it. She was popping and banging. I was a real show off and I realised I was talking to a lieutenant commander,
- 17:30 but it didn't really matter. And we followed him right the way until we got somewhere near the beach. There were a whole lot of MLs or all types and all opening fire and the Germans were sending small boats which were supposed to crash into anything.
- 18:00 It's history that not one got through. All the ships were firing on them. We got near enough and we thought that would be a good idea. We had been told to fire on anything two days before hand. So we actually fired our guns in anger on D-Day. As a target was coming in...and along with someone else, and it just sank.
- 18:30 So we did our bit there. Then someone said, "You're to carry dispatches." A dispatch boat. But I didn't get sent back to Britain. We went to leading ships to others with the dispatches. And when you have dispatch, confidential, C-in-C [Commander-in-Chief] written on it, you are an important person.
- 19:00 So we must have done our part. How many others were doing exactly the same thing I don't know. But I shall never forget that day. We were going back again to where the rallying point for our ships was and someone said, "Have you seen Stainsby?" And someone else said, "He's dead." And
- 19:30 there he was, he had been hit in the head by a bullet. And that was attributed to friendly fire. That was very upsetting that one of our crew got killed even on a nightmare thing like that. Really, we weren't doing too much.

What could you see about what was happening on the beaches?

Very little. The big explosions and the gun barrages were when I was going home before hand. But what you could see were an enormous number of landing craft and barges.

- 20:00 I didn't see anything of the Americans because they were hung up for quite a while...their bombers hadn't taken out the big heavy guns above them, and they were later on and then of course they went forward twice as fast as the Canadians and the Brits.

- 20:30 But there were a lot of Canadians and a lot of Brits. There was a chappie standing on the beach directing where the landing craft could go with care and someone with our stores...they were talking then that the next place would be Ostend, Belgium. Capture that and...I didn't know that that was where I was to go to at the time.
- 21:00 But there was an enormous amount of noise and the thing that always strikes my mind was, heavy machine gun fire, from whom, to whom I don't know. And every now and then you'd hear very rapid machine gun fire. They said that was the German Mauser machine gun.
- 21:30 But the people got in there and there were a lot of very sad sights. When you looked around you realised there were bodies upon bodies upon bodies. I didn't notice it. One of the crew told me later on. "Did you see while we were there, two people just dropped on the beach."? The guns on the top were firing. I hadn't seen it.
- 22:00 We were right under fire apparently. It's a good thing not to know. So that was my D-Day experience and D-Day plus one experience. We took communications about for a while and then they decided that all the sea boats as they called them should go back. Some went back under other commanders and all the rest of it. They reckon
- 22:30 how the hell half of them every got there they didn't know. I must have got away with it. We went back to base and that was HMAS Aggressive. I went back there and got given a most unusual job to go to the channel port and pick
- 23:00 up German prisoners and take them to Wakefield Gaol. We spruced ourselves up and we had some of biggest sailors you've ever seen with rifle and bayonet. They were all spic and span. The army came along with these prisoners. Guards and knees up and butt salute to anyone who was senior to them.
- 23:30 They handed them over to us and it was all big stuff and we got on the train and then we saw the poor prisoners we were taking. They were the most dejected looking lot you have ever seen and scared to death. They thought they were all going to be executed. Some ladies came on board and I can always remember, the ladies
- 24:00 said, "You're going right the way through, they tell us, to wherever you're going." I must have said, "Oh yes, Wakefield." And they said, "Oh we didn't know that." They said, "We've got packets of food for our own people. It's all the same, from sergeant major to trooper. The tea will be provided."
- 24:30 This is civilian ladies tell me all this. "But I've got boxes of apples." And I thought, well that will give them tummy aches. And she said, "Are we allowed to give them to the prisoners?" And I said, "Well I'm not in charge, but yes, sure." Well you should have seen the look on their faces when they were given the apples.
- 25:00 And I remember there was some kind of pie. I could have done with a bit of that myself. And they gave that to the prisoners. They were really beginning to melt. I didn't hear it but one of the guards said to me, "One of the chaps just asked if Hitler's done for?" And I said, "Not quite, but he's well on the way."
- 25:30 So that was the immediate D-Day thing and then I was posted to the MTB thing that I've just told you about which blew up. But other than that nothing happened to me. So that's more or less my war.

After the mine and your experience

- 26:00 **there and you being one of the three survivors, you went onto 5003 you said?**

Yes, B Class MTB.

What sort of operations were you conducting now?

The same as on the smaller MTB. We had twice the gun power, but not the speed. And I preferred the speed actually. You can get away quicker. So she was quite big. 5001, 5002, 5003, 5004.

- 26:30 You wouldn't believe it, we lost 5001, no one ever knew what had happened to it. She didn't return off an operation. But all the rest survived. And there were a whole lot of others and they were all given to the RAF as rescue boats. That all took place, the handover, down in Newlyn in Penzance
- 27:00 by which time we were going ashore all over the place. We had been told...we had been attached to an engineering unit and we were to take out MTB and a smaller one, like the one before, and we were to go right the way up to the lochs in Scotland and dash them up and down and try and tear them about.
- 27:30 One would have Rolls engines, one would Packard engines. It didn't really turn out like that. They would put things in the water and we had to go very close to them. There were tons of runs ashore and it was nearly wine women and song from then on. I was in a group where the authorities thought we had to be wound down.
- 28:00 Strangely enough, I had lost my boys. So except on those on 5003, I didn't get to know anyone very well. There we go. I know that in my mind, I knew I would have to get out before too long and I would have to get some sort of education. I didn't know what I wanted to study.

- 28:30 Should I go back to the hydraulics firm I was at for just those few weeks. So I wrote to them. They couldn't offer me anything then, but they said they would be glad to have me and that they had written to the government for me to go to Battersea Polytechnics to study engineering in our time. And that was my gradual transfer
- 29:00 Battersea Polytechnic is now Guildford University and way back in 1945, '46, I fell out with that firm and went to a competitor and carried on my studies with another polytechnic which is now also a university.
- 29:30 And then I began to get interested in psychology, sociology, theology and so on and so forth; play acting; and having a fairly good time. I never seemed to have any money. That's never stuck to me very well. Not that I've spent it, I've just never had jobs that have earned a lot of money.
- 30:00 **So no interest at all of staying with the navy?**
- Good heavens, no. I was proud to have been there. But anyway I don't think they wanted us. They still had people going into the RN. Some people said some of us got out too soon. My old skipper he stayed on still in the reserve, and for several
- 30:30 years used to take ships up to be scrapped and that type of thing. I didn't know that until he told me that the other year. Then he started to tell me things we did together which we didn't do together. Either I'm still crazy as I found myself in the war to be, or he's not wearing so well.
- So when were you discharged or demobbed?**
- In 1946.
- 31:00 Officially I think the end day was October the something 1946, but I has been released and given a suit of clothing a long time before hand, around about June.
- So what had you been doing from VE [Victory in Europe] Day to June '46?**
- Oh well. The MTBs were...some of them and some of the MLs took on some
- 31:30 German equipment for mine sweeping. So believe it or not that gave us a nice change. They sent us out mine sweeping. When you're leading a sweep and you're the forward lookout ship, and there's nobody sweeping in front of you, you hope you don't hit anything, and you're sweep is out here, I learnt all sorts of new names
- 32:00 like Ottos [(UNCLEAR)] and all the things that float. But they used to do a fairly high speed because if there were any of these acoustic mines, the thing that would probably hit us that time, then they would blow up behind you. I saw that happen. See nobody told the mines the war was over. They went on doing that for a long time.
- 32:30 **Were there many ships lost in that period?**
- Oh yes, quite a large number. Mainly merchant ships going into harbours because of these things that they reckon had been sitting there for years and had never been activated and suddenly one comes with the right sound on the prop and boom.
- So not a stress free time for you come the end of the war?**
- Oh no it wasn't. But
- 33:00 we were put on that business of doing the speed trials and all that, it was certainly a different life. Anyway we were getting out. I remember going to get my discharge. We went for our medical and I pinched someone else's sample to get me out.
- 33:30 We went into this big place and there was this big car...it wasn't a car really, it was a sort of van. And there were people of different ranks and it was no, they can't go in there because they weren't this that and the other. Silly idiots. Ok chums, we all went together. You were split up because of the type of clothing you had and according to your rank and all the rest of it. I don't think any of them were any better.
- 34:00 But it was meant to make people feel good. So you took your little box and went to the railway station with all your gear and then home. They dumped me at Portsmouth Harbour Station and I shall never forget getting on that train and looking at Portsmouth Harbour Station and feeling ...whew that's behind me. Now I've got to earn a living.
- 34:30 **What about coming home and seeing your parents?**
- They were out when I came home. There was a big welcome notice...for them to do a thing like that with flags and all the reminder of it...I think I got the biggest hug I ever got from my mother. She was very very tearful and glad I was still alive. "Don't you
- 35:00 ever go to sea again!" I don't even take a rowing boat. Yes she must have suffered an enormous amount. The fear that she may lose her son. She didn't

- 35:30 and she didn't lose her daughter and they went on to live to a very good age. And strangely enough around the family, none of my cousins or anybody went. Although we did have some who were conscientious objectors. Very religious. Low church people. Conscientious objectors. They managed to get out of it but I think they did quite useful things.
- 36:00 One of them died of diabetes strangely enough. He and I never did get on very well. I went to the big school, he didn't. He was terribly brilliant, I wasn't.
- What do you recall of VE Day itself?**
- Very little.
- 36:30 We were in harbour in Queenborough in Kent, and everybody were blowing their horns and there was great noise and the skipper said, "When's our meal coming?" And the chappie who used to wait on the people down aft and in the officers quarters, he was out making noise and dancing and all the rest of it, the coxswain came down and said, "Can I arrange the food?"
- 37:00 So everybody was very informal. We sat around quietly because I believe it was quite a dangerous place to be. Everyone was going mad. They were getting quite blind drunk.
- 37:30 So you just kept out of the way and about two days later we were off minesweeping.
- We flashed forward to you coming to Australia. You told us that story of how you got out here. How do you...**
- 38:00 **what sort of association do you now have with those you served with?**
- I don't know if any of them are alive accept the old skipper of 5003, as I say, he and I had a meal together, his wife and my wife two years ago. They came out on a visit. But he was very well off. He became Master of Medical Science and
- 38:30 did very well as a doctor, and I believe his wife was a surgeon. I'm not certain. They were awfully nice people. So I had contact with him but nobody else except one chap I told you about whom I met on a train. But nobody else. I think that would have been typical of the people in Britain. There was no RSL, or there was a thing, but you had to be Colonel Blimp to be there.
- 39:00 They were all pulling rank on each other. And if there is time, a little story. My best man, Ted Roscow, he finished up as a major in the army. We had a chappie when we were doing the play acting thing and all the rest of it, called Beecher Jackson. He was always Captain Beecher Jackson.
- 39:30 All this rank business didn't impress Ted Roscow and one time he turned around and said, "Oh could you pass me so and so Mr Jackson." "My name's Beecher Jackson, Captain Beecher Jackson." "Oh marvellous, captain in the Royal Navy?" "No, army." "Oh, Major Roscow." So he had one up on him. I've never forgotten that.
- 40:00 That was a wonderful thing. Dear old Roscow, he's still going quite strong. He must be mid 70s by now.

Tape 9

- 00:32 The European governments, as soon as they were liberated they had governments as big as anyone else. For instance, the Dutch employed us. All our people were starving to death and we used to run up and down the coast, fill up with food...I don't know who paid for it, and unload on them.
- 01:00 They would employ us to mine sweep their shores. So we went round, generally three of the fast mine sweepers, followed by the bigger and longer mine sweepers behind. Once we cleared a narrow passage for our ships to go up. So we were to cop it if there was anything. 916 was blown to pieces,
- 01:30 but I wasn't on an ML but she was never seen again. At least, everyone saw her go. But the minesweeping was...there was a strict routine for minesweeping. You would know which side you wanted to sweep from the ship, and you put out a cable from the stern of the ship, that's the back of the ship, through
- 02:00 a think that sinks it down to a level and on which there is another cable. And on the cable are explosive wire cutters. The mine comes up, it runs along there, it hits the wire cutters and you bring it to the surface.
- And then what do you do with it?**
- If it floats there. You carry quite a heavy
- 02:30 calibre rifle. These were ex-anti tank rifles. The boys would fire a .55 anti tank rifle and you would get someone up there to put a few holes in it. And you see it on a film, it goes bank and the thing blows up.

Sometimes you would spend half a day there trying to sink the thing in actual fact.

You said you were on a smaller boat ahead of the minesweepers?

Yes on a motorised torpedo boat.

03:00 **What do you mean in what sense?**

We were the one in front so we didn't take up so much water, we didn't take up so much depth. So the odds are we'd go over a mine without causing it to blow. We went too fast for an acoustic mine. We were the lead ship and everyone behind us was safe. You didn't like it the day you were the lead ship. That wasn't often,

03:30 but often enough.

Did you say you were skippering this boat?

No. Just in charge of crew.

And how long did you do that for?

Well, when was that? From the end of the war in Europe was May,

04:00 so we started that almost immediately in May and I think it must have been about November. So May to November I was mine sweeping until we got transferred to dashing about and burning up boats job which was fun. So it was quite a long time.

04:30 It doesn't sound long to us now, just a few months, but a day was like a week.

Because of the suspense?

Yes. It was alright. You sort of breathed out...I imagine pilots used to do this. That operation is over and you breathe out and you don't think of the next one. You have a glorious meal. You have friends, you have a drink. You have a shore run or you do something.

05:00 Then you come back and you see a signal...ship's company will fall in at such and such a time. Oh, we're off again in the morning. And then you begin to think about it again. And you always hope that the most wonderful word...that the operation had been aborted. Had been called off. I remember my dear old Mum. I would tell her that operation had been aborted. And she said, "Never use a word like that."

05:30 She was the old school. An official term.

So how were things in post war Britain?

Well there wasn't anything. My father had a little petrol rationing for his job. He needed it. He was working with aircraft companies.

06:00 See, the war wasn't over. It was still going on in Japan and Britain was massing all its bombers and everything else. They would have come in with a hell of a bang but the Americans did want them too, they wanted to win it on their own. All the Lancasters were being done up and the heavy bombers. They were going to have five thousand bombs a night dropped on Japan.

06:30 And all the Mosquito 400 mile and hour plus bombers, and the Japs had nothing of that kind of speed. They would have gone over there and just bombed at will and then turned on the speed and just gone away again. But Britain itself, there was quite a bit of work on because there were still armaments. Politically it was absolutely dead because everyone was saying

07:00 "Out, Churchill." And mainly the unions. I can remember there was an election. The first election I ever had a vote in and everybody was absolutely convinced we were going communist and when they counted all the communist votes out of fifty three million I think there was thirty thousand for the whole country. They made such a big noise, you see.

07:30 Then of course if you had a father like mine, who said, "Poor things, you shouldn't be against them, you should pity them. They can't help it. They don't have the brains to be anything else." That was my father. "Poor man, he hasn't got any money. Why hasn't he got any money? Hasn't he been to school. Can't he go and learn or isn't he able to learn?" In actual fact later on when I was doing psychology he had quite a point.

08:00 So many people don't have the ability to learn. Particularly when it's useless knowledge. So yes, Britain was a very stark place. All clothing was rationed. All heating was rationed. Food was rationed and nobody really liked anybody. The thing I remember whilst still in the navy, our torpedo boat got asked to go from Portsmouth to the Isle of Wight which

08:30 is only twenty odd miles and take a body of one of the Royal to be buried on the Isle of Wight, and to our utter surprise they had assigned some beautiful great naval vessel and we were to be escort for it. And a lady, a most charming lady

- 09:00 came down and started talking to everybody. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. And she said, "Where are all the men who work this thing?" And the admiral said, "They'd be very dirty and below." And someone said, "How does it work?" And you know they didn't have a clue they were on a motor torpedo boat with a Rolls Royal petrol engine.
- 09:30 The Queen said, "I'd love to meet them all." "But Madam..." So she had them all brought up and shook hands with every single one and left a signed something or other for everyone who had taken part in the operation. And then it was decided they couldn't get the wretched coffin off the big ship or onto the big ship, and we were chosen to take it. Not with her Royal personage on board. She went on the bigger ship.
- 10:00 But I've never forgotten the Queen for that. She came up and she walked down the line of all the people, she didn't care what rank they were, what colour they were or the rest of it and then she walked back and waved. And she looked you right in the eyes. So that side was still going quite all right in Britain.
- 10:30 **Who was the dead royal in the coffin?**
- I don't know. Was it the old Princess Royal, I think. I don't know who she was. One of Queen Victoria's many. They were all about ninety. They all lived in wonderful isolation.
- 11:00 Now I'm going the other way. If they realised that those people over there lived in the same world or not, I don't know.
- So did you have any other assignments like that post war?**
- Yes. Our MTB again was chosen to escort a young army...was she a lieutenant or captain and her name was Queen Elizabeth, or was to be Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth. She had a nice cruiser or large destroyer to go on
- 11:30 and she looked over and said, "Can I go on that one?" That was us. And the next thing I knew she was standing next door to me and said, "How does one steer this thing?" And again a high brass chap who had never been on a motor torpedo boat in his life...or did it say, "May I show you, Ma'am?" So I finished up with
- 12:00 her on the wheel and me standing behind her and me standing behind her, so I have certainly been very near to our future Queen. But she did have the habit of talking to someone out there and not to you. She seemed to turn to the high brass. But she was quite nice and then suddenly she let go of everything. If I hadn't
- 12:30 have had my hand on the wheel...and of course the poor coxswain...
- She was a driver wasn't she?**
- Yes a driver in the army, and apparently was a tolerably good mechanic. So I hope she's got a little petrol station somewhere. But nothing else like that happened. And yes I was very lucky to see those people.
- 13:00 I should have seen some people this year with that medal I got from the Queen last year, the Centenary Medal, I was invited with all the high brass to dine at the Hyatt, but I don't go out at night now. I'm a poor old man. I've probably forgotten how to eat my meal. But I've been very lucky.
- 13:30 **Did you have any Australians on your crew?**
- I remember an Australian lieutenant in the flotilla and there was only one trouble with him. He kept on winning DFCs [?]. He was a real tearaway. He sunk a number of enemy vessels. So there was him... Lieutenant Lief.
- 14:00 I've got pictures of them in a book out there.
- But you weren't on the same ship as him?**
- No. In the same flotilla. Each flotilla would have about five ships. The skipper leading in front and tail arse Charlie the last one at the back. And you all strictly kept your place.
- 14:30 But that's almost pre-war drill. We were always too busy to do that type of thing. We were usually sent off on our own somewhere or given some hair-raising job to do.
- So was there any gossip amongst the British naval people about the Australians?**
- I never heard them mentioned.
- 15:00 I think they were sorry they couldn't do any more when Japan attacked, but you see I only joined
- 15:30 when Hitler attacked Germany and then Japan attacked about the same time. So there was nothing getting through. They were terribly concerned and of course we sent out two of our best battle ships and they went down first plonk.

- 16:00 But the admiral they sent there wanted his AA Guard as destroyers instead of fighters but then we hadn't got any fighters to send. No, there was a tremendous concern and a lot of things weren't said. For instance, every man that was sent up the Kokoda Trail was carried in a merchant ship to where they started and it was the
- 16:30 Aquitania, the old Atlantic liner. And they were all escorted by British destroyers. I've never seen that said anywhere. Whether it was that Britain had let down Australia by not defending it, but there wasn't anything to defend anybody with. We had been cleaned out. We didn't have anybody to do anything. Everybody had gone off to fight and we were depending on Dad's Army to ...surprisingly quickly they pulled out of it but there were so many other things happening at the same time.
- It was said that Britain was running out of young men who were eligible to go out and fight by the middle of the war.**
- 17:00 Yes.
- Did you find that with any of your crews, that they were under trained or under skilled?**
- No it was never a problem. Short but hard training they got, and they learned a lot on the job. It was strange. You could have a brand new fellow straight out of training school or camp and he would be assigned to the ship, but I bet he was the first one with the ropes...
- 17:30 you would tie a small heaving line to a big rope for it to tie up...and he would be the first one to throw the heaving line to show he could do it. And he would be wrapping it all up or cheeing it down as it was called. "I'm in now," and they were proud of what they were. The old Nelson tradition was there.
- 18:00 No Lady Hamilton of course. No, they were very good most of the people but I just didn't seem to meet up with anyone afterwards. So many of them were West Country and North Country and I was London and I went to West Surrey for a bit doing some work. But no, I didn't belong to any of the
- 18:30 organisations, the ex-servicemen thing. I went to one meeting and found people raising their hats to each other because he was a colonel and another a major. And that was enough for me. Here the RSL was probably a private or something like that.
- So the ranking still continued?**
- Yes still continued, yes.
- 19:00 But it does begin to be a distant memory. But we were digging it all up again with the Iraq business. I was thinking when I was reading the Anzac Requiem the other day, 'This day above all days etc etc. They who lay under the shimmering sands of the Libyan desert, Tobruk, Bardia.' I was enjoying being able to say it and
- 19:30 having done a bit of elocution years ago, I hoped it was coming out...but you get an awfully funny feeling when someone is saying, "What are you saying that for, you Pom." But it was the same war. Well I actually did go down into the Mediterranean for two days I think.
- 20:00 **But you're a member of the RSL so you're mixing...**
- Oh yes I've been a member of the RSL for 34 years. I was vice president for more years than I wanted. I was given the chance to be president but I said I wasn't an Anzac and if there is an Anzac let him take my place. And now the new one is a Vietnam chap.
- 20:30 So that's fair enough.
- So you've swapped stories over the years with the local diggers?**
- Not much about swapping stories, no. What used to happen to me, I used to get asked by Rotary whether I was speak on ...what's it like to go down in a ship and that story.
- 21:00 It could go much longer if you wanted it too. And somebody would say you weren't too bad on that, would you come and talk to Probus [Club] or something like that and so it goes until eventually you would say, oh please give me a break. You sort of become quite a speaker. I've had a fair amount of practice on this business. But it's been great and of course I've heard other people's stories.
- 21:30 All I can say is thank goodness I wasn't up on the Kokoda Trail or having suicide bombers coming down on me. It was bad enough having German dive-bombers.
- It would be good to hear a bit about your work in theology, but also later on your work here in mental health. Can you talk about that?**
- Yes, I don't mind.
- 22:00 I have a daughter who had schizophrenia and my wife and I said there was nothing for anyone, and we said there should be some organisations. And a man who is still in it, still the executive officer at the hospital in La Trobe valley said, the only way you're going to get someone to do anything is to go and do

it yourself.

- 22:30 He said, "I can write you some letters." We held a public meeting. I forget how many we had, several hundred and we spoke to them with some knowledge about what we needed, government funds and all this, and I was encouraged and made chairman which I tried hard to fight.
- 23:00 Eventually we contacted the state government of the time and they said, yes come and see us. So we went into the chamber with the lady...what was her name? She was a Labor lady and she listened to the story about the need for help and that there was nobody to care for these people. To make sure they take their tablets and do this and that.
- 23:30 There is no pamphlets and all the rest of it and she said, "How much do you want?" And we said, \$350,000. I don't know where it came from and she said, "I think that can be arranged." I nearly burst out in tears at the time.
- 24:00 They said, "That's fine and there is the Schizophrenia Fellowship." I said, "Yes I know that, I'm a member." And she said, "You'll need another organisation to do what you're talking about." So we went home and rounded up people and called it the "Gippsland Accommodation RS [Rehabilitation Support Service], and it still runs under GARSS today.
- 24:30 I've forgotten who I am. I was the founder years ago. And we founded this committee and then had people elected and voted on. I didn't stand for the original committee. And then we went away and went to school...paid for by the government to help us run organisations.
- 25:00 It was wonderful tutorials in the La Trobe Valley. We really worked hard for a long time. And then with a lot of my church business I soon found I was able to practically tell who had problems and worked with medical people. And then during my training before as a marriage guidance councillor,
- 25:30 I did the full course in the days when it was run by the state. The Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria where you had to pass your exams and all the rest of it. I was accredited and got my letter outside now. I suddenly realised that people with mental problems, marital problems, they were all suffering from loss. Loss is the key word.
- 26:00 You've lost your job. You've lost the one you love. You've lost this that and the other. And I started writing papers and sort of suggesting this and people asked me to go on and write a thesis on it and like an idiot, I didn't. I went into...
- 26:30 as it was, professional counselling and for people with mental illness who were recognised by the church...with marital problems and all the other things, and made one rule, "I don't get paid a cent. I'm a priest of the church, thereby comes my income." It cost me an enormous amount of money.
- 27:00 And somehow or other I never suffered from that. It always seemed to turn up. That's why I got that thing from the Queen. I worked with people with disabilities and even to this day...I changed my mind on weddings...I've always charged for a wedding as I charged for my son. The fee has been exactly the same for years, twenty cents. It's a wonderful bit of fun. I say, "You're coming to sign your documents and I won't sign them until
- 27:30 you pay your fees. And one of your fees is a kiss and twenty cents. When you're my age you can get away with it. I haven't married anybody for quite a few years now. But you always had a bit of fun and I hope I have the pleasure again when I marry my son soon.
- 28:00 But going back to the mental thing and all the rest of it. We have an enormous number of friends from all over the place and people have gone into it in big ways. Many people have gone further than we have, but I've always felt we began the journey, and my wife and I were at a meeting of the local people only the other day. I've got to be careful because all this is terribly confidential, but I had a lady who was saying, "No, she had to give money to her daughter etc etc,"
- 28:30 And I said, "That is completely wrong. Until your daughter hits rock bottom. But don't you hit rock bottom. Until she turns around and cries for help you won't be able to do anything. Because at the moment as soon as she is ill, she knocks off taking her medication." And she said, "Yes she does." And that's the type of thing that goes on.
- 29:00 That's the type of thing that goes on and still goes on now. I'm still a member and I still do a bit of it. I'm not with the university taking postgraduate students any more. I used to have a lovely bit of fun with them. I had a speaking clock. It doesn't work any more. It sounds like a train. This would speak the time...nine fifteen pm.
- 29:30 I would start talking to the people about mental illness and a lot of people don't realise they've got it. And a lot of people have no idea they have a mental illness. They think the voices they hear are perfectly natural. Press the button, nine fifteen pm. And people would go like this...and I would say, "Sorry, a lot of you moved."
- 30:00 Nine fifteen pm. "Sorry, can someone help me. Are you hearing something? You're hearing something that I can't hear. Have you ever checked whether you've got a mental illness?" And then of course

you've got them on side. And the voices are saying, "Don't take your medication. Kick him. Kill yourself." And you then get on to the real stuff.

30:30 You turn around and say, how many GPs [general practitioners] have had any of these studies? I've got lots of friends now but they didn't have any. In my marriage guidance stuff, the Diploma in Social Sciences,

31:00 the medical people were invited to come with us for one afternoon. We'd been there for month after month after month and I think one turned up, and they were GPs. And I hope that a lot of us, not only me, but I hope we've made the medical people realise that there's lots of other things to be learnt and some of these people with a mental

31:30 illness are some of the most loving...I can get cuddles all over the place from people you know. My own daughter these days, she's a happy soul because the medication has improved and she takes the medication. The telephone might go, "Is Dad there or is Mum there? There isn't a man in my back garden is there?" "No idea,

32:00 Claire, but probably not. What does your dog say?" "Nothing." "Well don't you think old Nigger would do something and if he's not doing anything I don't think there is anybody. But if you get any more problems - " And then something bigger will come along and you say, "No Claire, you think there is but we don't think there is.

32:30 You don't mind being alone now, do you? Where's Robert your husband? Why don't you two stay in today." He's a schizophrenic too. So we talk them around and of course we've done this to hundreds of people. And there's hundreds out there you don't do it too. And there's all sort of other people I just wouldn't dare mention who I'm still in contact with. The strange thing is the number of people from varying churches,

33:00 not my own who have phoned up. One denomination in particular, but I mustn't mention that. I mean I would never mention the Pope, would I. They seem to love to phone up and ask for guidance.

So how would they get to hear about you?

33:30 From my number, is in a number of places. And I'm still the reference person for mental illness in this district. I don't do anything myself now. I refer it. But I could refer it to people who would do things. Nothing in the world would get me to turn out at night these days because I would go and kill somebody driving there. But it's lovely having these friends

34:00 and knowing you're being useful. And of course my wife is magnificent. She is a charming soul with these people and always says she knows nothing about it. But she is the listener. The one thing people don't have these days is someone to listen to. I've spent all day talking. Listening is far more important than talking.

34:30 **So you received a commemoration from the Queen for your work in mental health, is that right?**

Yes. Well, it was for all those who had done particular work for Australia in the 100 years since Federation. And for some reason or other I got picked out for my work in mental illness and it's on the wall there.

35:00 I was very happy and proud and wondered how the heck they got on to me but there you are.

You would have been nominated for that?

Yes. I did actually bump into someone or other in the health business the other day and they said "Whatever happened. Someone asked me if I would write a recommendation for you for so and so." And I said, "Oh, was that where it came from."

35:30 And they were higher up in the world than I had expected. I think there was a member of parliament included in that. So it's interesting.

And you were nominated for Australian of the Year?

No. No.

36:00 I got Tutor of the Year or something at Monash last year. I think that's exaggerating, Tutor of the Year. But anyone, I got a special commendation from them signed by the Vice Chancellor. The only joke is someone wrote a letter from one of our departments saying how glad they were and it was from the Department of Midwifery. I have kept that letter and I will keep it until the end of my days.

36:30 I think that's beautiful.

Did you tutor the midwives?

No, no. It was just the department next door. There we are. And here is my good wife.

Well that is probably good timing, because we've only got a few minutes left on the tape. Is

there anything you would like to finish off the day with?

37:00 I want a bottle of Elixir of Youth and not like the lady who wants a box of unending Tim Tams. I think I would have something better than that, in gold or something.

INTERVIEW ENDS