Australians at War Film Archive

Leslie Kerr (Jake) - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1949

Tape 1

00:42 **Good morning, and thank you for joining us and sharing your story with the archive. I would just like to start with a brief summary of your service, just staring with when you were born and where you born**

South Yarra, Victoria,

01:00 when, was 18 January 1927.

Where would you actually call home?

I lived in quite a lot of places, but Adelaide is now home.

When you were growing up?

Probably Mount Isa in Queensland.

I understand

01:30 **that you joined the Home Guard when you were 16?**

When World War II was on, the Home Guard was officially 18, but out in Mount Isa, so close to the Japanese, we were north of the Brisbane line, the chap who ran the Home Guard said anyone who was 16 and could fire a .303 was welcome to join up as an auxiliary.

02:00 **We will just go to the points at this stage and the details we will flesh out later, but that was underage at 16, when did you enlist with the navy?**

I enlisted in 1945.

Do you remember what time of the year it was?

Just before Christmas, just after the war ended.

Where did you begin your basic training?

Like everybody else, Flinders Naval Depot.

How soon after you were enlisted did you go to

02:30 **Flinders?**

That day. The day I signed was the day I went virtually.

After Flinders Naval Base?

I was sent across to Adelaide and we went to the Adelaide Schools of Mines. My class for six months.

When did you join the School of Mines?

It would be early

03:00 1946.

How long was basic training at Flinders?

Three months.

Where were you posted after the School of Mines?

We went to HMAS Watson in Sydney to complete our training.

This would have been about

03:30 **mid ‘46?**

About mid - ‘46.

How long were you at HMAS Watson?

Three months.

And then after HMAS Watson?

I went to HMAS Echuca, which was a corvette in a mine-sweeping flotilla.

How long were you with HMAS Echuca?

Almost two

04:00 years.

When did you join HMAS Echuca?

I joined her in Townsville.

Was this in ‘46 that you joined?

Yes, very late.

04:30 **You were there for about two years, and without going into too much detail, what areas did you cover with the minesweeping flotilla?**

We swept around New Guinea and the Barrier Reef.

After HMAS Echuca?

I went back to Watson where I did another long course.

What was the long course on?

05:00 Radar [radio detection and ranging], radio, I was a radio radar mechanic.

How long did that course take?

The course itself took nine months and of course I was in Watson waiting for it to start and so on.

You had to wait?

I was in Watson

05:30 fifteen months or something like that. I just missed one course.

Once you completed your course?

When I completed the course in Watson and I was sent to Tobruk on commissioning.

What was the date you went to HMAS Tobruk?

06:00 She commissioned on 8 May and I probably wold have gone there two months before she commissioned.

About March?

About March, that would be 1950.

How long were you with the HMAS Tobruk?

I was there seven months.

After Tobruk?

I was sent to

06:30 commission her sister ship, Anzac, in Melbourne, Williamstown Naval Dockyard.

How long were you with the Anzac?

Anzac, two years.

With the Anzac,

07:00 **what areas were you covering?**

Anzac was a new ship, we ended up at the end of that year in Korea, then we were sent back to

Australia to do the 1952 Royal Tour which was aborted when the King died and the Princess flew back to London.

07:30 Then we went into a period of training and taking prime ministers on fishing trips and until finally the ship was sent back to Korea again.

By the time you got back to Korea, when was that?

I didn't go back with her, I only did the one trip.

When did you leave the HMAS Anzac?

08:00 I left her towards the end of '52, late '52, I went to Platypus, which was the reserve living in ship for the reserve fleet, Sydney.

How long were you in Platypus?

Less than a year.

08:30 Platypus was a funny ship, if you went to her, you could bet your bottom dollar you would end up on Manus Island. So I sort of used some strategies to get off the Platypus and go somewhere else, I ended up on the Vengeance.

09:00 **Then when did you join Vengeance?**

Vengeance would be about 1953, probably in around about September.

How long were you with Vengeance?

'53, '54,

09:30 about the middle of '55. I went ashore briefly to Kuttabul in Sydney.

Where did you join the Vengeance?

I joined her in Sydney.

10:00 **After the Vengeance you went to?**

I went to Kuttabul in Sydney for six months. Then I went to the Sydney, the aircraft carrier.

How long were you with the Sydney?

10:30 Sydney, just before Christmas 1956 I was sent to Darwin, HMAS Coonawarra.

It was just, left at the end of '56 and joined Coonawarra?

11:00 **How long were you with Coonawarra?**

It's a Naval WT station, Wireless Telegraphy station. I was there for about 7 months I think and I took sick and ended up back in Balmoral, a Naval Depot, HMAS Penguin, in hospital and I was there for about

11:30 three or four months and I was within my time for discharge so I was discharged.

What was the date of your discharge?

December '57.

What did you do after you were discharged?

I came over to Adelaide.

12:00 The choice was either stay in the eastern states and go into television in 1957 or come across here to weapons research in Adelaide and get a more interesting job. I elected for the more interesting job and I ended up in Woomera.

Who were you working with?

Department of Defence, it was the Department of Supply

12:30 in those days. Long range weapons, research, whatever the official name was in those days.

What did that research entail?

It wasn't research, I was recruited and I went to the original satellite tracking station which was in Woomera. This was the one for the International

13:00 Geophysical year in 1956, 57, 58. The Americans said they would attempt to launch an artificial earth satellite and they established a number of stations around the world to track and record data from that

satellite. As you know, the Russians beat them to it but the stations were still established, but the

13:30 program started and look where its ended up, man on the moon and things like that, but I wasn't around that long. Not with that program.

How long were you with the weapons research?

I was with weapons research until I was sixty, I was thirty when I joined them and sixty when I left them. That was to go in and have a valve fitted in my heart. That's how I

14:00 went out early. I was in the satellite field just about the whole of that time. There was Woomera, Island Lagoon, that's all part of Woomera. Island Lagoon and then of course I came down to weapons research here in Adelaide and I went out to a tracking station they had at Smithfield

14:30 and this ended up there was a US Navy satellite tracking station and run privately by American universities for the navy and it was for the US Navy Navigation Satellite

15:00 System and that developed into what we now call GPS [global positioning satellite] which you probably have in your motor car to tell you where you are. The first receiver we had out here was around about a quarter to half a million dollars and now you can buy them for four hundred or eight hundred bucks. Times changed.

15:30 **It would have been very interesting period.**

It was, I probably lost a lot of promotion within the establishment but I stayed where I was and I was happy. I think it's better to work at a place where you are happy rather than get a better pay at some place where you are not happy, it's just drudgery. That was the working life.

16:00 **Just touching on your personal life, when did you get married?**

Alice and myself got married in 1959 when I had been out of the navy for twelve months or fifteen months or something. I was still in Woomera so I took her up to Woomera with me.

Where did you meet?

I think I was in the Sydney.

16:30 We came into Adelaide, a casual meeting.

Children?

We have two boys, one just had his 40th birthday and the other chap is coming up 43.

Thank you for all that, we are going to go right back to the beginning now. You said you moved

17:00 **around a lot in your childhood?**

Yes. I was born in Melbourne, that was incidental. We actually lived in Queenstown in Tasmania and I was quite young over there, very young. We hadn't been there that long and my father who had recently qualified as a

17:30 stationary engine driver. Now back in those days a stationary engine driver was an important man in a mining field. Everything was driven by steam, he drove the steam engine, it pulled cages up and down from the bottom and generally the plant ran on steam so the engine driver was very important. By the time I was about

18:00 probably three, there was the Portland Cement Company opened up a cement plant on Maria Island, just north of Hobart. He was lucky enough to get the job there as the engine driver and unfortunately before they produced one sack of cement, the Depression hit and that was the end of that place. As a younger man, Dad had

18:30 been up to Cloncurry in Queensland, this was before they put the railway up the coast. He used to go up by sea and catch the rail in from Townsville into Hughenden and then Cobb & Co coach from there to Cloncurry, it was quite an arduous trip. He had been up there and he said, "If there is any work in Australia, that's where it would be." Away he went

19:00 and he got as far as Mount Isa and got a job and then there was this two year period roughly where we got up the coast and into Mount Isa. Virtually he had to save up enough money for our fare and then send it down to Mum and then we'd move up another rung, Sydney to Brisbane, or so on. I

19:30 got to Mount Isa in time to start school.

So he was travelling on his own during the Depression, is that similar to a swaggy?

Well, yeah, he used to, he didn't have any money. He left the money with Mum. He got across to the mainland and from there on

20:00 it was all free travel via the railways. As he said, occasionally a policeman would catch all the hobos riding the trains, and he'd run them up into the local cells, feed them, do all the housework around the police station and the next morning he'd take them down to the rail yard again and say, "There it is

20:30 fellows, get out of my town, but there's a train, jump on." There were hundreds of men doing this, as a matter of fact he told me when he got to Mount Isa he spent the nights on the banks of the Leichhardt River which is non-existent most of the year, and the next morning he put his suit on and a collar

21:00 and tie and he went up to the staff at the industrial office to see if he could get a job and out come the staff industrial officer, and he said, "I want a winding driver." A winding driver is a stationary engineer, a winding driver works on the cages up and down the shaft. My father had a real voice and he'd shout

21:30 and he said he let go a shout to wake the dead and there were two other blokes on their feet doing the same thing. There were three winding drivers there all qualified and fortunately for him he had better qualifications than the other two so he got the job. That's the way it was. The men that built Sydney Harbour Bridge used to go to work with collar and tie on and all they were doing were punching rivets in and stuff like that.

22:00 If you wanted a job then, you had to dress the part.

Your Mum was alone with you at this time, what was she doing during this time in Tasmania?

Raising me, she didn't work. Work was hard to get. You couldn't get any work.

22:30 Digressing slightly, my wife's father was out of work for seven years in the Depression. He was a slaughterman, butcher, out at the meatworks in Adelaide. That's how hard it was to get a job.

Do you remember your first home that you had in Queenstown?

Very much so. We stayed there until I was 18, I left there to join the navy.

23:00 **How would you describe your father?**

He was a fair man, he was raised on a farm in northern Tasmania and he was the oldest of thirteen. Not all of them reached maturity,

23:30 but he was the oldest and when he was 14 his Dad gave him the sovereign which was common in those days. Advice, "Out you go son and make your way in the world." He went down to one of the local mines and got himself a job as a miner.

24:00 He got buried alive underground. When he got out of that, the chap with him was killed and when he got out of that he said, "I am not going down in the wet mine again, I will go to a dry mine." So he went north, the first time. Cloncurry, and the mines up there were very dry so he was happy. That's where he started

24:30 his work off and away he went and that was it.

Your mother, you were with her for quite some time on your own, how would you describe her character?

She was a very quite woman. Very quiet. As woman were in those days. We weren't very rowdy. She had a better education than Dad, as a matter of fact she

25:00 had about two years of high school and he was fifth grade. She put him through his training for engine driver which in those days was more labour than anything else. It wasn't just a 'go to college and come out with a piece of paper'. He did about five years stoking boilers

25:30 at the Engine Drivers' Federation and stokers, fireman and engine drivers, their union, so you had to do your fireman time as the railways did. He did that time and he used to go to the local school of mechanics, Mechanics Institute in Tasmania and he,

26:00 with her help and one handbook, he became a stationary engine driver. Everyone did the same thing, you hung around where the engines were when you weren't stoking the boilers and if you had a friendly engine driver he would let you drive.

You were talking about

26:30 **his role as engine driver, whereabouts was he based in respect to the mines? Where were the engines based?**

In mining the hoist as they call it is on the surface and the cage goes down into the mine. The cage for men and material and for the oil itself,

27:00 they use a skip, like a huge bucket and the oil is tipped into the bucket and when it gets to the surface it goes up into an automatic tipple and virtually turns over and empties the oil out and down it goes again. It's a pretty automatic process.

Where is his engine

27:30 **though?**

On the surface.

He's above ground?

Yes. Have you ever seen a photograph of Mount Isa? You seen there is a hill and on top of it there is a house, that was his shaft. That's the one he drove. It's still there but not used anymore.

Your home in Mount Isa?

28:00 We had company house, two storey, bottom and top, bedrooms up top, wood fired kitchen below, and it wasn't air conditioned and the toilet, the wet area, was down below. There was an outside staircase where you went up. Quite comfortable but of course it was very hot in the

28:30 summer, but there again, what was, very little creature comfort in those days. You've got sulphur gas off the works, spots of lead falling out of the sky. It was a fairly comfortable existence there and so much so that not everybody got accommodation in Mount Isa, it was

29:00 limited to the men that they deemed essential to run the plant. Labourers didn't get accommodation except for single men, so hard times.

Where was the home based in conjunction to the mine?

Mount Isa was divided into two parts. You had the Leichhardt River running roughly through the centre

29:30 and as I said it was only in existence after it rained, on one side of the Leichhardt River you had the free town of Mount Isa and on the other side you had the railway line going through to Townsville then you had what they called the 'mine side' and all of the mine and all the company's housing were in that area. The company were a

30:00 funny mob. Yankee company. They looked after their men in that they had their own store there, their own butcher shop, their own club house, men could get credit there providing they worked for the company. This made it very attractive and all the housing was in that

30:30 area, we would've been from his place of work, a mile. But up a great hill.

How many houses were there in the area allocated for the people of the mines?

How many, there would be some hundreds.

Quite a big area, like a big suburb?

Mount Isa started to grow from the time we got there. It had nothing

31:00 to do with us, it just grew. We are looking about 1931, something like that. They started to come out of the Depression and the town was growing and all of a sudden along come World War II and up until then the company mined silver lead and then

31:30 when World War II the price of lead went down and the price of copper shot up. Guess what they had underneath the lead? Copper. So they went down a few more hundred feet and mined copper, and made a great profit. That put Mount Isa on its feet really.

You said you got there just in time to start school, what was your school?

The company built a school for us.

32:00 This is the company, you go into these big mining fields.

What was the company's name?

In those days it was called the Anglo American Mining Company.

What did that turn to?

I don't know, I think its Mount Isa Mines Ltd now because they came to Australia and established. A chap by the name of Kruttschnitt.

32:30 He was the manager of Mount Isa, the general manager, and at the same time he was chairman of the board. A millionaire, American, and he was the first one to combine both functions and I think they are still combined, I don't know, I've lost interest in Mount Isa.

So the company built a school for

33:00 **you?**

When I started there, I opened the school, little boy in short pants, it was a two room school and every

year I was there they built another room on it. When I went to high school they turned the corner and went out and built the high school. I was just,

33:30 I watched my school grow with me

You said the opened the school?

It was brand new, it was a brand new school. The company, in their own way, they looked after the men, they looked after the wives, they provided the club, there was an old hospital there, so they turned it into the ladies club. Gave the ladies somewhere to go. The school itself,

34:00 the headmaster needed a house so they built him one in the school grounds. We wanted a football field so they built one for us, tennis courts, the company built them, the company did all these things. It kept the men there, it kept the people happy and it didn't cost that much.

The process for wanting a

34:30 **football field, was it as easy as just saying, "Dad, can we have a football field?"**

Not quite, I think the headmaster probably raised a thing with the company saying could we have some help in getting a football field together. They had an old chap who used to work on the roads, used to fill in all the potholes. None of the roads were

35:00 bitumised. He used to, as the trucks put holes in the roads, he'd come and fill them up with earth and stamp them down. He appeared up at the school one day, they got a grader in and they graded an area flat and they dumped some trucks of earth from the Leichhardt River all over the field and he come up with his shovel and spread all the stuff around and as the truck arrived with some Couch grass

35:30 which they got, naturally grown stuff and he planted it and bits and pieces, add water, and we had a football oval. The boys used to go down and shift the sprinkler around so it would grow, it doesn't take long.

This little micro city that's happening around you, was the

36:00 **company running the area, if there were any problems were with the road, I am just wondering where the council fits in to the perspective here?**

There was no council, it was on the company's lease and the company owned it and they ran it. If you went to the free town of Mount Isa on the other side they had a council and there was a gentleman there who had a powerhouse,

36:30 he owned one pub, there were two pubs in Mount Isa, there was none on the company's lease, they wouldn't have one. The free town of Mount Isa had two hotels and the gentleman who owned one pub, name of Smith, not the pub, his name was Smith, he had a small diesel generator he supplied

37:00 power to the free town, and then one day the company said to him, "You are running this generator, it's going to drop out one day, we will supply you with power and you can distribute it in town," and this is the way it worked, I don't know whether its still that way but you can rest assured the company's got its hand in it.

The school that you mentioned, the brand new school you started at,

37:30 **can you remember who your teachers were or your teacher was?**

There was a Miss Young, taught me when I started and she left and got married. Married women couldn't work in those

38:00 days. She got married, her husband was killed in a mining accident and she came back to the school just before I left. I can't remember her married name, she wasn't Miss Young anymore, she was Mrs So and So. There was a headmaster called Sainsbury, he was only a little short bloke who couldn't cane you very well. There was a bloke called McFarrel,

38:30 these blokes would be long dead now, he was a tall slender man and he swung a mean lump of bamboo and that hand is solid still. Old Bowls, he came from Brisbane and lived with us. You see the Depression, still around, we had the headmaster at one stage before they built his house

39:00 he lived next to us in the company houses and he came to Mum one day and said he had this young teacher coming in from Brisbane, his first school, he's 17 years of age, could you put him up. Mum said, "I will put him up." This chap lived with us. There was a Frenchman, he taught us French.

39:30 **How did it feel living with a school teacher?**

It didn't worry me. He didn't try and teach at home. I can't remember whether he was, I might've been past his classes when he arrived there, he was a nice young fellow, until Mum fed him goat, that's another story.

40:00 **What kind of food did your mother put on the table?**

Kid, young goat, baby goat, like young lamb, beautiful. Dad used to, goats everywhere in Mount Isa, he'd disappear up the creek occasionally, it was all dry,

40:30 and he'd come back with a baby goat he managed to capture, kill, skin, and we had one of these beasts in the ice box and Mum cooked it up and he was very much a young gentleman and would always wear his coat, collar and tie, and the temperature would be over a hundred, and he

41:00 congratulated Mum after Sunday's dinner on the magnificent lamb she produced and of course my old man piped up and said, "That wasn't lamb, it was goat," and I thought this school teacher would throw it all back up again. These things happen.

Tape 2

00:31 **We are just talking about school and this was during World War II or the beginning of World War II?**

It was the beginning of it, I was twelve in 1939. Yes,

What were the teachers teaching you about World War II?

Everything.

01:00 The education I got when you did geography the first thing you ever thought of doing was to draw a map of the subject country. You'd just draw a map of Australia and we'd get the pencil out and draw a map of Australia, just like that, draw a map of England, Scotland, Ireland, we'd draw it,

01:30 once you could draw the country, it was just a matter of filling in the details. We were heavily indoctrinated with World War II stuff, there is no doubt about it. It was all news and we didn't have a lot of news in Mount Isa. There was no newspaper, the newspaper came from Townsville

02:00 published weekly and they'd sell it in Mount Isa, the Weekly Bulletin it was called. Schooling, because there was tremendous interest in the war. Little boys could hardly wait to grow up, join up and get killed. Of course we were all impervious to shot and

02:30 shell but little boys all they wanted to do was be old enough to join the services and I mean, when Hitler invaded Russia, the world opened up and France, and we had troops in all these places, a lot of them. It was a whole new world to us,

03:00 war.

You said the school had taught quite a bit about World War II, what exactly were you being taught or the teachers telling you?

You'd get, it was all factual stuff they were putting out but you'd draw a map of Europe and there would be a map of Europe on the charts, the wall, the map charts,

03:30 the atlas of maps and they'd hang them over the blackboard sort of thing. There was always a map there updated showing you where the French were, where the British were, where the Germans were, the Italians, the Russians and you were encouraged to know all these things, even talk about them. It was news of the day and of course there was a

04:00 great feeling because we had troops involved and there were men from Mount Isa involved in a lot of these, in a matter of fact it was pretty hard for some companies to keep open because their people were all joining up. Mount Isa lost, I forget how many electricians,

04:30 they lost so many electricians, I was an apprentice at the time, they lost so many electricians they were forced to use apprentices to do electricians work. I think virtually we had more apprentices than we were entitled to, there was a ratio, two journey men, one apprentice sort of thing or whatever it is and I think we had more

05:00 apprentices than we should have, but still, they had the apprentices, the electricians left and they just used the apprentices.

The war that you were being taught though was in Europe and would've seemed a whole world away and then Japan entered the war and it became quite close, do you remember where you were when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbour?

05:30 I would've been in Mount Isa. Pearl Harbour to me didn't have a great deal of significance because it was along way away, and they were American, not British, not that that's a point, but still, Pearl Harbour was a long way away. What I do remember well was the people suddenly

06:00 came down from Darwin when they evacuated the women and the children and the elderly from Darwin. They came down the road, some of them went to Alice Springs, others came into Mount Isa, two rail

heads. We knew that Darwin had been attacked but we didn't know the extent of

06:30 it until those people started to arrive. The Government never told us, it wasn't the question of a big news release, we saw all these people and we wanted to know what the hell they were doing in our town. It came out that they were refugees from Darwin and that really shocked me. I realised then

07:00 how close we were to what was going on. If you sort of look at the islands and look at Darwin and Mount Isa there is not much difference in that range. When they were bombing in the Coral Sea they were bombing from Townsville,

07:30 they were bombing from Charters Towers, they were bombing from Cloncurry. Now Cloncurry is about sixty miles from Mount Isa. If you can bomb them, they can bomb you. There was a lady in Singapore, one of these renegade broadcasters and she used to regularly tell us about

08:00 the time the Townsville-Darwin episode when they were bombed, she often used to mention Mount Isa which wasn't a very comforting thought, there was nothing in Mount Isa. We didn't have any anti-aircraft batteries or anything to protect us, they were all down here.

What about blackouts, do you remember blackouts?

We never had blackouts.

08:30 Blackouts didn't occur in Mount Isa, sorry, you are on those blackouts, you mean to blackout the place for the air raids. They just went, car head lights were blacked out, street lights were blacked out, you'd put a tin over the bulbs in the street light so they'd only shine straight down and not out. Motor cars so

09:00 their headlights were out and down rather than spread out. There were, I think there were greater blackouts south down into New South Wales and places like that. Queenslanders were very casual.

It sounds like that, because you hear of blackouts in

09:30 **Adelaide which were a lot more severe than what you are talking about.**

The company see, when you are running a big mining plant, on the surface that's where all the crushing and grinding and smelting, it's a big plant above ground level and I can remember that they used to, the lights, they took the shades off, these are

10:00 just general lights in the plant, and they put something like a jam tin on with the pole and that kept the light to a minimum. You could still see the lights, probably a glow from the plant but it wasn't a blackout.

You said that the people from Darwin came in, how did they describe what was going on in

10:30 **Darwin?**

They said it was terrible. I think they were restricted too, they probably had the "don't tell the people down here," talk but word got round. There was a great wealth of military in Mount Isa because they were controlling the road. The

11:00 Americans just after that had a big hospital there, they took over the ladies club which was a hospital, they took it over, put tents around it and made it a bigger hospital. There would've been, I just couldn't say how many men there were in Mount Isa in the military, but it would've run into

11:30 ten thousand or more because there were people guarding the road. They were trying to build the north-south highway and at the same time the troops were trying to use it. When you've got a nice flat service with the tatty old road next to it it's hard to tell the driver of the truck that he shouldn't use that nice flat service because you are planning to put some

12:00 bitumen on it. The troops would get up on it and the police would say, "You can't do that," and they'd try and edge the military police off and they'd respond with a well aimed pistol shot through the cabin and the trucks come off the road. Things like that. There were a lot of troops in Mount Isa. They were also the supply for the road, the people who drove the trucks, the military

12:30 police, there were a lot of people there. When you've got troops there they were handling the refugees from Darwin and they'd be invited home to somebody's place for Sunday's dinner and the word would get out a thing like that you just can't keep the lid on it.

You were a teenager at this stage

13:00 **what age were you when you left school?**

Twelve, thirteen, about '41 I think I left school.

What was your first job?

My old man got me a job in the company's

13:30 office. I was fairly young and he got me a job in the company's office and they had two mail boys, and we used to take the company's mail around from various parts of the plant, things like this and you were given a pushbike to do this. I got a job, a chap went off sick and I got his job for a

14:00 fortnight. As I recall it, it was my job I was going to get it, except the chief typist told me on Saturday morning, this is the old 44 hour a week job, that I had to do her shopping and I told her I didn't have time and that was the end of that. I went to the assay office, an old Frenchman, Peter Legerche,

14:30 he ran that place and I worked for him for a while. Then I went as assistant to the company's metallurgist and then I started my apprenticeship. I wasn't in some of these places, two weeks, in that hell of a

15:00 job, delivering mail and then I think I was with Legerche about three or four months and then I was with this other chap who looked for all the world like King George. He used to smoke a pipe, came from the tin mines in Burma, Fred someone or other. I went to him and he almost cried when I left. He thought I was his and I was going to work for

15:30 him for the rest of my life. Then away I went as an apprentice.

How old were you when you started your apprenticeship?

I was pretty young, there again, it was the war. They put people on, the company was real powerful right down to the Brisbane

16:00 School of Technology and would say they were going to put an apprentice on and that was it.

Due to the mass of men that were enlisting as apprentices, as you noted before, apprentices were having to go in to do electrical work, how long were you in the apprenticeship before you started taking on these full duties?

Two years, two and a half.

16:30 We were being trained while we were doing the course at night. All correspondence, that's the way it went.

At sixteen you unofficially joined the Home Guard?

I wasn't the only one. There were quite a lot of us. Country boys, I mean, I had a

17:00 pea rifle when I was, .22, .22 calibre rifle, single shot, when I was about 13. I think my old man said he could trust me. Then I probably went up in calibre a little bit and by the time I was 16 we used to go out shooting with blokes and they'd have .303s. Even though the .303

17:30 had been called up, you see you couldn't own a .303, but men managed to keep them as much as men have got rifles and pistols now when they shouldn't have. I learnt to fire a .303 and then when we went down to the Home Guard place this bloke told us he'd put us on a

18:00 junior, just so we got the training. We'd never get the medals or anything for it because they gave a medal recently, another bit of tin. We'd never get them, but what are you going to do if the Japanese have invaded up there?

That's what I am trying to explore, your motivation to join the Home Guard?

18:30 As I said, every little boy wanted to grow up and be old enough to go away and get shot. It was a sort of, something that happened. Blokes wanted to go, they wanted to do aircrew, you could even do at high school a special subject which would help you get into aircrew

19:00 in the air force. That was a special subject by the education department.

I was going to ask you, with this great desire to join up and fight did you consider joining the naval reserve or cadets?

There was no naval reserve, not up there, no naval cadets. As a matter of fact when I did join up, a bloke said to me very

19:30 jokingly, "How did you hear about the ocean?" We were 600 mile inland. There were kids I went to school with had never seen the sea. Never. The Queensland Government has a special thing going, if you've never seen the sea, never been to the beach,

20:00 they would subsidise the lads' fare down to places like Townsville and they actually had a camp down near Rockhampton, Yeppoon, where lads could go, young lads, young girls, could go and go to this camp, on the ocean and this gave them the chance to see the ocean.

20:30 **That sounds incredible.**

There was no money. We get back to this shocking Depression that was on, there was no money for people to go away. My father, he was Tasmanian, Mum was a Victorian, and they both had family down

there and every two years the company used to encourage

21:00 their employees to leave the field and go away somewhere and get away from the dust and all this sort of stuff and to this end they'd subsidise fares. As far as Townsville. So we used to go down to Townsville very two years then we'd catch a ship and go to Melbourne. There were ships running up and down the coast all the time.

21:30 Cairns, to Perth and back. Six hundred passengers, cargo, they are all gone now. These ships used to run round the coast so we'd jump on this ship and for the price of a fare, second class, from Townsville to Melbourne, was the same price as a

22:00 rail ticket, second class from Townsville to Melbourne, and on the ship they fed you, so guess what? We travelled by ship. Then we'd catch the ship across to Tasmania, then Melbourne, and Tassie, then we'd come back by ship then train to Mount Isa. That was our two year holiday and actually I

22:30 think when I joined the navy I had done more sea time than a lot of sailors who were in the navy.

I would just like to talk to you a bit more about the Home Guard. What was your role in the Home Guard?

I was a kid with a rifle. I was just a member, that's all. They didn't put much faith in us because we were too young and we would have to be

23:00 decided at the time if anything had happened, like if the Japs had come in, it would have had to be decided that they use us or wouldn't use us. It's one of those things, fortunately it never happened.

Was their any guard duty?

No, we didn't worry, they never worried about guard duty,

23:30 it was a corps. In England, the Home Guard, they were very prominent. They guarded installations and things like that but up there it was all so remote. We figured that anyone who landed would probably die of thirst before he got to us. It's a hard country.

I am just curious as to whether

24:00 **you did any work patrolling the Brisbane line or anything like that?**

The Brisbane line was roughly the southern border of Queensland and that would have been from Mount Isa probably eight hundred miles south.

How often did you meet with the Home Guard?

We used to meet every week, it was mainly, you'd meet and they'd

24:30 drill you. I think, when I started off I had a, I don't know a broomstick or a .310, they recalled all the .310s which they used in the South African war from the colleges and they were the Home Guard's weapons and then they got .303s from somewhere

25:00 and they were all new and they re-equipped the Home Guard with .303s and gave the .310s back to the colleges. A lot of faith wasn't put in the Home Guard. Half that troops up there didn't have a rifle.

How long were you with the Home Guard?

A couple of years I suppose.

25:30 **Just before we talked about the Home Guards, you were talking about going down to Tasmania every two years, and having that experience being on the sea, were there any other members of your family that were part of World War II?**

I had, World War II,

26:00 no, I think I had a couple of cousins, Victorians, they were in World War II, one was in the air force and one was in the navy, strangely enough.

Did you have any contact with them during the war?

Not really, I knew of them through family letters. The chap who was in the air force, when he

26:30 enlisted he was working for The Argus in Melbourne as a reporter and when he joined the air force they made him an officer and he used to write for the air force magazine called Wings. He did a lot of travelling and I remember once he told me when they landed on Balikpapan, he was the only man who went

27:00 ashore with no armament and all he had was a portable typewriter, and a fold up stretcher. He wrote the air force landing on Balikpapan and he wrote another big article, he took a trip in a Catalina which flew up and put mines down off the coast of China, they were in the air for twenty hours or

27:30 something. He was a bit of mystery and the navy bloke, he went, this is his brother by the way, two brothers, Bill was a linguist, didn't do much good at school but he used to go around the wharves and by the time he was

28:00 16, he could speak every language known to man. When he joined, he joined the army, they found out he was a linguist and then they transferred him to the navy because they could move him around in naval uniform where they couldn't move him in an army uniform. Soldier turns up, you expect to

28:30 see another six hundred with him but if a navy bloke turns up and he's just going up to join the ship by himself. Bill was, he finished his time in the navy and he did a lot of interpreting and stuff like that. He could speak Japanese like a native, he was one of those blokes, it didn't matter which language it was, he could speak it.

Do you recall where you were when you heard the news the war had ended,

29:00 **the victory in the Pacific?**

In the pacific, I was in Melbourne, I had decided I wanted to join the navy and I went down to Brisbane and they told me that, because this is right at the end you see, they had enough men and I'd have a better chance if I went to Melbourne. I went to Melbourne and I actually stayed with that chap's

29:30 father, he was an old sea captain, him and his brother, they were both sea captains in sail and they both enlisted and went to World War I as privates in the army, both masters in sail. I went down and stayed with these people and I went and signed

30:00 up for the navy and I was still waiting when the Japs came, tossed it in.

How did you feel, that you were so eager to join up and you get down to Melbourne and its over?

What could you do? Nothing. Basically, the reason I stayed on and went further was that I had gone so far, I had nothing to go back to.

30:30 I wasn't going back to Mount Isa, so I just went on and I ended up in the peace time navy.

Was there a great demand for enlistees during the peace time?

Was there ever! When war broke out, the navy had, you could always count the men on one hand. The

31:00 Depression had been on, there was no recruiting during the Depression. The numbers were small, they lost a great percentage of those numbers, peace time, pre-war, during the war, Sydney lost, most of them were perms, the Perth recruit,

31:30 perms again. They lost a lot of perms, the replacements were three year enlistees and most of them had done their three years and they wanted to go home and they took, I remember my draft had six hundred in it. A fortnight before our draft, they took

32:00 four hundred, that's a thousand men in a fortnight, now that's a lot of men. A month before that they took four hundred, a month before that they took four hundred, a month after us they took four hundred and then strangely enough they reduced the twelve year stint to two years and the blokes come in in droves, did their two years and go out.

32:30 Then of course they went to six years, there were blokes who joined up for six years and got out before me because I signed for twelve. It didn't make any difference.

Why did you choose the navy?

Is there any other service? I've always, to me the navy was always the

33:00 service, that's the one to be in. If they'd said ordinary seaman in the navy or an officer in the air force, I would've been an ordinary seaman. It was a choice.

So you finally got round to enlisting in Melbourne, at that time, it was peace time, who did you foresee as a threat to Australia?

33:30 I didn't. It was over, but there was still a lot of Japanese floating around. The Japs were up in the Islands, Manus Island, they were still up there in '47, I guess, '46, because they were doing, war

34:00 crimes were on and there were odd pockets of Japanese that didn't know the war was over. As far as they were concerned they were sent out there to die for Emperor and no one had told them any different. All the emperors had gone home. They were dangerous men because they wanted to fight the war

34:30 still.

Had you completed you electrical apprenticeship when you went down to, and was that

recognised when you were enlisted?

No it wasn't because the navy, this grew over the years, electrical artificers in the navy

35:00 at that time were basically selected from fitters and turners and the navy trained them as electricians, it was an odd set up. So I actually tried for the fitter and turner bit and I didn't have enough experience, to do fine work on a load, I could spin a load,

35:30 I could file, I could do all that, but to do the fine work they required, I couldn't do it. There was an old chap in the recruiting office in Melbourne and he said to me, "You've got the intermediate, haven't you?" And I sad, "Yes," and he said, "This is what you want to be," and he gave me this

36:00 signal, they were recruiting radio mechanics, train them, whole bit, good promotion and I said, "Yes, that's it, I will go for that," and he said, "I will put you down." That was it.

Was that at enlisting or Flinders Naval Base?

No that was before. When I was enlisting, the Old Fleet building in Melbourne and he was the bloke, his name was Tony Moore.

36:30 He had a son who was as old as me.

After enlisting you went straight to Flinders Naval Base for basic training, what was involved in basic training?

How to march on the parade ground, the swimming test, they taught you a bit about gunnery, they taught you a bit

37:00 about torpedoes, they inoculated you with all sorts of fluids, they taught you how to use a gas mask, they issued you with a gas mask, a respirator and gas, and all those little things you have to have to be in the service. It was a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of something else. From this a bloke could actually

37:30 say, "I want to be a gunner", "I want to be an electrician", "I want to be a torpedo man." It gave you the insight into everything. All it did for us was give us blisters. We knew where we were going, we were going to be radar mechanics, we were going across to Adelaide to do our course.

38:00 **Just to clarify, was that the School of Mines where you trained in radar mechanic?**

The School of Mines we did a radio course, with radio receiving and transmitting and what they did, they took the five year trade course which would get you a diploma and they condensed it

38:30 into twenty six weeks full time and we had to do five days a week, Saturday morning and two nights a week, that course, that's what we did and when we were finished we got everything except the bit of paper, they never gave us the diploma, but I

39:00 believe we recently, in the last five years or so, we ran a reunion round here for old radio mechanics and we found out if we paid twenty dollars or something we could get our diploma, what's the use of it, it's just so much paper now, when it could have done some good I didn't have it, we didn't have it.

Where was the School of Mines based in Adelaide?

Right opposite the nurses

39:30 quarters in the Adelaide Hospital. If you go down Farm Road there is a whole mess of buildings on the North Terrace end, if you go down, there is a little old building, quite wide, two stories at least, maybe three, and that is the old School of Mines building and we did our training right there.

So if you are heading down towards the Adelaide Zoo, on the left or right hands side?

Left,

40:00 nurses quarters on the right.

What were the nurses quarters like?

In most cases the drain pipes held. A lot of our blokes, some of them married the girls from the Adelaide, as a matter of fact, ten or fifteen years ago I was in the Adelaide hospital

40:30 and there was a very old nurse there, maybe 65, and it turns out she was a junior nurse under training at the Adelaide when I went through the School of Mines, but I never knew her at that time.

Did you socialise with the nurses?

Of course we did. We were 18, 19 years of age. They were 18,

41:00 19 years of age, what else? That's beside the point, that's where the School of Mines is, as a matter of

fact the building up on North Terrace as you turn into Farm Road that is a big block building there, then there was a space, piece of open grounds, then the School of Mines, so it's not far down.

Tape 3

00:31 **You went off to Flinders and this was your first experience of being officially in the navy, what was your first impression when you first got to Flinders?**

I'd meet up with a couple of blokes like when they took us in, in the Old Fleet Building in Melbourne, and

01:00 one chap, his name was Neal Tindle, he became a life long friend. The other chap was Lorry Milne who didn't become a lifelong friend, rich man's son. Joined the navy over a dispute in his allowance and he eventually arranged his own discharge. Neil died

01:30 when he was 65 which was only about twelve years ago and he was the other chap. The people at Flinders came out to meet us at a place called Green Point Station which is outside the depot with the band, there was six hundred young hopefuls and we marched in and

02:00 I didn't think too much of this so I said to Neil Tindle, "Do you know the way back to Melbourne," and he said, "No," and I said, "If I knew the way back to Melbourne I would go," and he said, "I would come with you." We didn't know the way back to Melbourne so we stayed and that was my first impression of Flinders. I remember that evening,

02:30 it was evening when we got there, it was dark, someone dropped a hammock on my head and told me to bear it off down to a building where I slept and they gave us this feed of fish and chips but I didn't realise it then but that was the best meal I was going to get in Flinders Naval Depot. That's about it. I mean the navy had some funny ideas,

03:00 they said that if we had any money we should, there and then, open up an account at the Post Office which was open for our business and put our money in the Post Office in the bank book. I had been managing my own affairs for years, Mum died in '42 and I had managed my own affairs for years

03:30 and I couldn't see any sense in opening up another bank book, I already had one. I had about five pounds in my pocket so I thought, "I am right.," Everybody put their money in the bank and no one had any money. No one could buy cigarettes, I didn't smoke so it didn't worry me. I can remember my two mates saying,

04:00 "Lend us enough money for a packet of smokes will you?" This was, you see, the way things went. I can see the navy were trying to safeguard, people might steal our money and stealing was rife down there. But I still managed to have my five pound in my pocket and I didn't lose it.

You said you did have a flash of having a second thought, but how

04:30 **did you feel when you were issued the uniform and put on the navy uniform?**

Terrible. My old grandmother took one look at my uniform and said, "That's not a sailor's suit." Hanging, it just hung on us, just shocking stuff. When you went up and spent two pound ten or something on a tailor made uniform, then you looked like a sailor, that was the main

05:00 thing.

So you got issued with a uniform that didn't fit? Did you then get a completely new one made?

Yes, uniforms don't fit. The navy in those days, when we went into the clothing store I can always remember there was a kit bag and on top of it were several article of clothing like underpants,

05:30 one size fits everyone, they had a big drawstring in the back, had to adjust the waist, at that time, I was just over seven and a half stone, I was a thin young fellow, and the shirts, sailor shirts with a blue collar, one size fitted everyone. You grew to

06:00 fill your uniform, you didn't get the uniform didn't fill you. This is, the chap came along and he'd look at you and say, "Twelve, thirteen," and that was your jacket size and your pant size and someone hurled these things at you and you'd put them on top of your kit bag. You were marked so you couldn't change them, it had your name on it.

06:30 But when I came over here to Adelaide we were here in winter time and you don't wear your good uniform to school. There was a tailor down the port and he used to cut down uniforms, he did a good job, about a pound or something to have your uniform cut down and I had them done and you could always tell the new chaps who had just arrived across to do the

07:00 course they had beautiful tailored suits and the scruffy lot up the front they were the blokes who had been here a while and wearing out their other stuff. We never lasted long in the round rig as they call it,

the peaked cap.

Before we move on and talk about the School of Mines, what was the physical instruction like in

07:30 **that first three months of basic training, I understand that PT and physical fitness, was highly important, how did you find that training?**

Well blokes did better than me because I was small, I was strong enough but I didn't have the stamina to go it. I always remember in Flinders Naval

08:00 Depot in the morning when we fell in for work they would say that one watch would clean ship. In other words, clean windows, sweep paths, and the other watch would exercise the boats. They would march us down to the wharf and they had all these pulling craft there with oars and

08:30 things and I know one of the bigger boats, I got in that one morning, of course you just get shoved in, they had this monstrous great oar, and I had to toss this up in the air and it was a bit of a battle, I didn't know whether the oar was going to get me out in the water or I was going to get it up in the air, fortunately I got it up in the air and that was it. That's the sort of thing that, after a

09:00 while we were so fit, it didn't make any difference to us. I could get it in the boat and pull it out to the other side of somewhere and the other blokes were the same.

Did you have to pass a swimming test?

Yes, in a white canvas suit which was a number five dress, you put that

09:30 on, it wasn't an arduous swimming test, it was a matter of swimming a couple of lengths of the baths and tread water for so many minutes. They didn't care how long you took to do it as long as you could do it.

You could swim already?

I could swim. There were a lot of fellows that couldn't swim, it was amazing. Some of them were trying to do it too fast

10:00 and they were swimming like mad and they'd get puffed out. I just took it easy because it was murderous swimming in those canvass suits. It was something you had to do.

It's interesting, because you grew up in Isa which is a long way from water or the beach.

We had a dam there in Mount Isa, what they called

10:30 an experimental dam, the company had put it in trying to find a stop to get water from Mount Isa and this was a failure and we used to go up there and swim as kids, some of us nearly drained. I fell in one day and learnt to swim, I couldn't touch the bottom.

11:00 **After that three months, was there any other incidents or stories from Flinders that stay with you or impressions from that time?**

I always remember, we had a chap in charge of our block, there was six hundred men living in a block, eight dormitories, whatever that works out to, divide it into six hundred and that

11:30 gave us hammock space and a little box to put what kit you owned in. We had this old petty officer, he had probably done fifteen years and he was in charge of the block and he used to come back from the POs' [petty officers'] mess, at ten o'clock at night half full when we were supposed to be all in our hammocks tucked up

12:00 asleep and of course there would be blokes talking, blokes out running on the floor and what have you, and he'd give the order, "Everyone back in their hammock," and a voice from the back would tell him what to do, and his punishment he'd say, "Right everybody out," so we'd all get out of our hammocks and we'd lash them up, we'd parade out in the road with them and our caps on,

12:30 underpants and boots and away we'd go up to the Westgate Gunnery School and he'd follow us on his push bike, he'd run us up and he'd run us down.

In your underpants?

Yes, it was ten o'clock at night, the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] were down at the other end of the establishment. The navy didn't issue pyjamas so you were either in your underpants or in the nick.

13:00 He would ride back with us and get us back into the dormitory and everybody would put their hammocks back up again, and he'd say, "Righto now, you all get to sleep," or coarser words than that usually. He just turned the light off, someone down the back would tell him what to do with his punishment and on again went the lights and out we'd go again with the hammocks rolled up, up to the Westgate Gunnery School

13:30 In the end that poor old devil, we had him for almost three months in the time we were there and he got slower on that push bike and we got faster on our feet and we used to think it was funny, three or four runs up to the Westgate Gunnery School with your hammock on your back and he'd be puffing along on his pike and oozing beer all the time, that was Flinders Naval Depot.

14:00 **So you didn't encounter, or did you encounter, any kind of incidences of bullying or bastardry?**

No, that came later, when I say that came later, someone stretched out later. I never came across any bastardry or anything like that, it was more in boarding schools I think because then you gave very young men power when they shouldn't have had it.

14:30 No, nothing like that in Flinders, we were all happy smiling.

So after Flinders you then, the whole class came over?

Yes, we were recruited as radio mechanics and when classes went to Flinders Naval Depot, they were, men were segregated into classes, or class numbers

15:00 and you could be in a seamen's class or a stoker's class or a communication ratings class or a radio mechanics class, we were just an odd little mob, engine room artificers, their class, men not dressed as sailors, sick bay, writers, they had their own groups and

15:30 whatever group you belonged to that's where you went and radio mechanics went to Adelaide.

So how many roughly were in this group?

I think we had about eighteen to start with but we skinnied right down.

16:00 I was in number two class. One class was a very studious class and they passed with flying colours. Number two class, we were a mob of ratbags. We ran things to suit ourselves, we lost a lot of men, a lot of good men. They should've been

16:30 radio mechanics, they weren't, they got sent back for odd reasons, drunk when they should've been sober, all that sort of thing, we just lost a lot of men. I think of the original class there was probably about maybe eight of us finished. That's finished in Adelaide, we still had the one to do in

17:00 Watson.

Why were you known as the number two class? Why was the number two class known as a ratbag?

Number three class was a studious mob, number four class was a studious mob, number two class was a mob of ratbags.

What did you do?

I remember one occasion we went to the university

17:30 sports, they gave us half a day off and most of the people went to the university sports. Two class went out and got drunk. I remember one of them was asleep in the urinal, a chap, a mate of mine, he was asleep in the urinal, he went back. Your uniform gets a bit smelly.

18:00 Another chap walked into the, there was a young ladies sewing class adjacent to ours, night school and this bloke, having had his sports day, he walked into the young ladies sewing circle and he had the seat off a toilet around his neck, he was drunk. He went back. These sort of things happened. If something was going to happen

18:30 it happened to two class and we were known for it. As a matter of fact they sent an officer across to straighten us up, a chap by the name of Blackshed, warrant officer, and he got our class together and he said, "If I'd been here that night I would've got the lot of you, I would've rubbed your nose in it or you would've rubbed mine in it but we would've had satisfaction."

19:00 **Was it a bit of a badge of honour to be a ratbag?**

No, they were all good blokes, they could all do the job. They could all, their studies were good but they got knocked out for these little things. The navy had a thing, if they said you were going back, you were going back, that was it, finished. There was no second chance. All of our people, you either

19:30 passed the first time or you didn't pass at all. I remember lack of personal effort came into it. There was a mate of mine, he was in the same class, he ended up going to the Warnambool, the one that got sunk, the corvette that got sunk up on the Queensland coast.

20:00 When they gave us the first exam after one month, an officer came across from Melbourne and he was a man responsible for radio mechanics, for the recruiting and the training, he was the man responsible. He was a school master actually. He came across from Melbourne and had a look at our results.

20:30 He got us all in the classroom and he said, "I've seen the results and only one man passed. Taylor, stand

up," so Taylor stands up. He said, "You've passed, eighty one percent," and then he said, "One more may have passed, with a bit more effort, stand up Kerr,"

21:00 so I stood up and he said, "Seventy nine percent, with a little more effort you could've passed but you are a failure." He kept us, about eight of us got a reprieve on that one and I was one of them, but only Taylor passed according to him. He was a hard man.

Normally fifty percent is pass mark?

Not with him,

21:30 no way. The lowest pass mark I ever saw in a radio course was seventy five percent and that was the next one, next one we did. Two more to go. As I said, they weren't all ratbags, they were all good blokes, they were capable, but little things

22:00 knocked them out. Could've knocked me out too.

Did you find the work or study difficult, or what did you find was a challenge?

It was easy, it wasn't easy, it was a question of doing it. We were in the navy, we were sailors and we felt we didn't need to be going to school,

22:30 little did we know.

What was the favourite drinking hole in Adelaide?

It depended, just after pay day we used to go to the Richmond, then after pay day when funds were starting to run low, and they did run low, we used to get into some wine shop where we could buy

23:00 half a gallon of wine for about two [shillings] and six [pence]. It sounds ridiculous now, but that's what it amounted to. We just didn't have the money to drink, and beer was out of the question, apart from payday.

Where were you living?

At the old depot down in Port Adelaide, Torrens as they called it, later encounter and now it is a

23:30 housing development. That was our home, we used to come up everyday by train and we'd fall in at the Adelaide railway station and we'd march up, originally it was along North Terrace, we'd come up by the railway station, along North Terrace, down Farm Road, to the School of Mines. Then

24:00 when people got sick of us they used to send us up behind Government House, between Government House and the parade ground and we used to walk right through the university grounds. I think, I don't know whether the public got sick of seeing us on their streets or whether the navy thought they might run over us, whatever it was, that what we used to do.

24:30 The young ladies of Adelaide all enjoyed us marching along their streets, they had this stream of men and they were all of 18.

How did you find marching in formation along the streets?

Just going from A to B. It didn't worry any of us, we used to just fall in, we had our

25:00 class leader, it was a Western Australian chap, he just got out of the air force, aircrew and we elected him as our class leader and we'd fall in and away we'd go, our little class.

So you were ratbags but you were disciplined?

Of course we were. We got the name 'Two Class', even now, you get them together,

25:30 "Gee, you blokes had it hard, not many of you got through," not many of us did, it was just us that's all.

You mentioned the one instructor you were talking about who marked you really hard, what sort of blokes were those instructors generally?

This chap, John Lowry, he was a

26:00 navy school teacher and his specialty was radio electronics and when they formed the radio mechanic branch, it was formed in the war, he was put in charge of it, he had to get the men, select the men, to become radio mechanics. He did. As a matter of fact

26:30 he personally interviewed all of the applicants, he didn't interview me. I mentioned that I got seventy nine percent in that one exam and he looked at me and said, "Have I met you before?" and I said, "No sir," he said, "I interview everybody for this branch," and I said, "Not me," and he said, "Where did you join up?" and I said,

27:00 "Melbourne," and he said, "I will interview you now," and he did. He told me, "If you don't make the grade you are out, you are going back." He interviewed me and said, "You can stay."

Were you scared of him?

No, it was like old Blackford when they sent him across, he

27:30 decided he'd exercise us so we used to get up an hour before the depot and he'd take us out into the swamp lands in front of the depot at Port Adelaide and we'd go out there in the mist in winter time and run around, exercise. One morning, he used to always get in the

28:00 centre, and we'd all run around him. He got out in the centre one morning and this great fog had rolled in and he fell down a hole and we had to got and pull him out. The poor old devil, in navy parlance he was an old man, he must have been thirty five and that is the people you are dealing with, a

28:30 man thirty-five is an old man. Now days they encourage them to stay in until they've done up to thirty years. Not then.

I guess I was just wondering whether there was any going adrift from the barracks at Port Adelaide?

A little bit. There was a wine shop just up the road.

29:00 We were towards, it was owned by a chap, Carmichael, and he had two sons in the navy during the war so he was very fond of sailors and what we used to do was, you see, a flagon of wine was two and six I think but there was two and six deposit on the flagon, so the night before payday

29:30 we'd scratch around amongst the class and all the pennies and threepences and sixpences and come out, and usually we had two and six for the flagon of wine but we didn't have two and six for the deposit on the flagon. Someone would be elected to jump the fence and go up to Carmichael's and talk him out of the deposit on the flagon. Which we did. He always gave it to us. So back we'd come, "Pass the flagon

30:00 over," a mate of mine passed the flagon over to a duty petty officer one night and he said, "Get this," and this voice said, "Pass it over," and he did and the duty petty officer said, "Stop that man," and he was off up the road, so we lost that wine. You know, blokes jumping the fence, so what, the place was meant to be jumped over, that's why they made it so high.

What

30:30 **was the general kind of punishment for misdemeanors?**

First of all you had to be caught. We never got punished down there because we were going to school and they couldn't really punish us because they couldn't say, "You can't go to school," because the navy sent us across there and

31:00 paid a lot of money for us to go to school and that's why we were going. There was no real punishment, besides at the depot it was full of men who were going out, the war time men, and they, we were just dobbed in there and I don't think anyone knew where we were actually perms. We were there for accommodation only

31:30 and food and a place to sleep, that was our lot, these other blokes, they didn't care, we used to go home at night and jump the fence, do what they wanted to. No one worried about us, we were just there.

You were learning the tools of the trade of radio receiving and transmitting,

32:00 **did you graduate with a certificate?**

No, they didn't give us one. We were told years later that if we wanted to pay twenty dollars we could get our certificate. It was a proper course, tradesmen's course, we should've got a certificate but we didn't and it didn't matter.

Was there a passing out parade

32:30 **or anything equivalent?**

No, passing out parade, you finished and the main thing was when you finished you got leave. We were finished on Friday night and by Saturday that depot was empty as far as we were concerned, we'd gone.

Where did you head off to?

Mount Isa. Didn't get that far.

33:00 **I was going to say Mount Isa is a long way from Adelaide?**

There was no one going further than me, the Western Australians of course had to go to the West. I was sent to Brisbane with Bill Farley, he was another bloke, he came from Rockhampton, and we stayed

33:30 one night in Brisbane then we went up, I dropped him off in Rockhampton, and away I went to Mount Isa and I got home and I got a telegram from the CO [commanding officer] in Moreton, that's the depot in Brisbane. "Come back for course in New South Wales." I threw it away, I wasn't going

34:00 back. I got back after a week or so which I think we had three weeks to get from Adelaide to home and back to Sydney. By the time I got home, I was well into my second week and it was, I didn't feel like going back so I went back a bit later. It didn't matter because they got them all down to Sydney to Watson again and what did they

34:30 do, they had them milling around for a week, typical navy. Typical service. They never started anything on time so I was back in tons of time, all was forgiven.

You were then at HMAS Watson for another course?

This was the radar course.

35:00 We had only done the radio side, this was basic training, like teaching you to read and write and then having done that they can teach you something realistic. Watson was the indoctrination into radar and when we left there after twelve weeks I think it was, we were fully trained radar mechanics.

35:30 You got a box of tools, a kiss on the cheek, and a ship. Literally, it was as good as that. I was sent to a corvette, another mate of mine was sent to a destroyer, it had radar on it, that he had never seen on course so one night, it was in Sydney, one night I went over there and gave him a hand to get his radar on the air,

36:00 then we went ashore and had a few beers. That was it, we were trained.

Just in that fifteen months before you got posted to Echuca, was there, you are now in a peace keeping navy, I am just wondering did you at that

36:30 **point have any second thoughts or had you finally, you were on track and decided to keep going?**

It wasn't as peaceful as everyone thinks. I got sent to a minesweeper, we were sweeping mines and a mine can be very deadly. I think they gave

37:00 us a shilling extra every day because there wasn't a war on but they took the two and six a day you got during the war so you were a shilling a day down the plug. There were blokes going off to Japan, the BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces] business, the war with Japan had just ended and they had a lot of problems with Koreans trying to get

37:30 across into Japan. Up in the islands, New Guinea and places like that, there were constant patrols up there and the Japanese were not friendly up there. These were wartime Japanese and some of them didn't know the war was over so you had to be careful no matter where you went.

I will move on because we

38:00 **do have quite a lot to get through today. So you graduated from your radar mechanics course with a tool box, set of tools, knowledge**

A kiss on the cheek and a ship.

and with that kiss on the cheek and a ship, did you get any choice or could you put in about which ship you were going to be posted to?

The

38:30 class of us we were told that whoever got the best mark had the choice of the ships available, there was another mate of mine who wanted to get married. He wanted to go to Lonsdale in Melbourne so I thought I would give him a scare. He was a pretty smart cookie this bloke so I knuckled

39:00 down and did all my studies for the radar course so I was lucky enough to finish ahead of him so when they brought out the list of drafts available, the officer came in and he said, "Kerr, you've got first choice, go for your life." I said, "I think I would like to go to Lonsdale," and this mate of mine his face went and I said, "No I

39:30 don't, I was just joking." The Hobart was going to Japan, six inch cruiser, so I said, "I would like to go on the Hobart." Then they decided there was a bit of time to waste and decided they'd give us another week's course and I was busily doing that and one morning, about lunchtime, they

40:00 sent for two of us, a fellow by the name of Chamberlain who lives down at Glenelg, they said, "Chamberlain and Kerr." So we got into the drafting office and a man said, "Which of you is Chamberlain?" And he's a big tall bloke and Herb said, "I am Chamberlain," and he said, "You haven't got a draft yet, you are going to Mildura

40:30 in the 20th Minesweepers," and Herb said, "Okay," so he was cleared. Then he said, "You've got to be Kerr haven't you?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "You are going to the Echuca," and I said, "But I am going to the Hobart," and he said, "You were going to the Hobart, you are going to the Echuca," and I said, "What's that?" and he said, "A corvette." I had never heard of it. So we mustered around and we got our tool boxes

41:00 issued, wait on, I didn't get a tool box, Herb got a tool box, we tossed for it, there was only one. I got a kit of tools and I put it in the top of my kit bag on top of my clothes and away we went both to the same flotilla. We both left at the same time the ships made off so that was us.

Tape 4

00:31 **Where did we get up to? We got up to graduating from Watson and you were telling us about Chamberlain and you got a draft to the Echuca?**

He went to Mildura I went to Echuca.

What did you know about the Echuca before you stepped foot on her?

I didn't even know it existed until I was drafted to it.

01:00 I knew it was a corvette, we had seen corvettes going in and out of Sydney Harbour. Watson looked straight down on the heads and anything that goes in or goes out you see. I saw the flotilla sail, I saw it come back, I saw it sail again and then I went with it. You know you saw them all going in and out. I knew what a corvette was, I didn't particularly want to go to

01:30 one. There is always a nasty thing in a sailor's life, are you going to get seasick? I mean, you look silly in naval uniform being seasick. As a lad gong up and down the coast I was seasick, I was seasick going across to Tasmania but that was mainly on the old Murana, a very small

02:00 tub, and I was seasick on another ship, it was caught in a cyclone, was travelling in ballast from Cairns down the coast and I got sick on that and they put me on this corvette and I thought, "God, that's only a little one, will I get sick?" and I didn't. I never ever got sick in the navy but it was a worry. I don't know why, sailors worry about funny

02:30 things and that was one of them.

Obviously, a corvette you are more likely to get seasick on a corvette?

It's smaller. Although I know blokes who've been sick on big ships and not on little ships. But I think if I was going to get sick anywhere I'd get sick on a corvette but I didn't.

Tell us about that day you took the tools you had

03:00 **and stepped on board?**

I didn't step on board, I stepped onto a train with Chamberlain and we went Townsville and were caught in floods going up the coast and the party had grown from two to four by the time we left Brisbane

03:30 and the other two blokes didn't have any money. We got up as far as Eyre on the Queensland coast and we sort of got beset with flood waters and we couldn't go to Townsville and we couldn't go back to Eyre. We stayed at a little place that had a pub and two houses and we ran out of money there

04:00 then we got back to Eyre so we lived in the police station for about four days then we finally got to Townsville to find the ships weren't there and we had to go to Cairns. So fortunately, I had a bank account in Townsville, signature, so it got us some money. We picked up another bloke he had just got out of jail in Townsville and the five of us went to Cairns and there were no ships there either so we

04:30 lived in the old depot, derelict, we lived in the old depot for a couple of days and a small ship came in and they wanted to know if Chamberlain and myself were cooks because all we had was khaki and a hat on and a leading hand, and we said we weren't cooks we were radio mechanics and they said, "That's a problem." A

05:00 couple of days later from then we went out onto the reef and lo and behold there was the Echuca in all its glory and that's when I got to the Echuca. The chap who was on board, a wartime chap, Tom Chapman, Tom kissed me on both cheeks and said, "Here's the keys," and went, he was gone. All he wanted to do was go home and pay off. I

05:30 think the same thing happened to Chamberlain, he came on board and the chap said to him, "Thank God you are here, have a happy day," and he was gone. It wasn't a welcoming that we got, just the fact we were there and they could leave, and they did. Taylor got the same thing when he got to the Warnambool, he relieved somebody

06:00 they're gone.

The crew, where was the rest of the ships' company?

They were on board and I found out I was the postman. The postman on board a warship, every postman has to be leading hand because you are handling official mail. The Secrets Act and all that sort

of

06:30 rubbish. I was the postman and I used to help the bloke out in the canteen.

Just to clarify, what is your rank by this stage?

I was leading hand. Leading hand came when we finished at Watson and went on draft. We sort of,

07:00 I was the postman, I used to help in the canteen, I inherited that, I used to do the chart corrections with the navigator to stop myself from going mad and I was the radar mechanic and any other duties they could find for me.

I might just come back to talking about

07:30 **your duties, you've just listed four things, chart corrections, radar mechanic, postman, and canteen. They were the main duties you did on board the Echuca?**

Yes. I was the junior petty officer in the mess, even though I was the leading hand I lived in the POs' mess. I was the junior petty officer in the mess and the coxon said to me of course, "You will do the meal rounds."

08:00 I used to have to cart the office around once a week or something like this and you would go right through the ship and say, "Any complaints number two mess, any complaints number four mess?" And so on. They would stand up and say, "No complaints two mess," or they wound voice a complaint then if you have to run somebody in, you are the junior, you do a routine run in, like the cook forgot to put the eggs in boiling water. Therefore

08:30 you, it happens. Nothing worse than a raw egg for breakfast. Anyhow, you know, if the cook had to be run in for something then it was my job to run him in. I know one bloke, one cook, he was a hell of a nice fellow now, he's forgotten

09:00 the number of times I ran him in because he couldn't cook. Some of the things he did was quite stupid, that's the way he was trained, or wasn't trained. Corvettes you got any duties that were slung at you, you did.

09:30 Simply because if you didn't do them someone else had to do them.

Who was Captain?

We had a chap, what was his name, Noel S Townsend.

10:00 **What sort of reputation did he have?**

He was a very nice fellow, he was a barrister. He was a yachtsman, pre-war and he joined up during the war and he was still on board, he paid off the day the ship paid off in 1948, but Noel S Townsend commonly known as 'Fenders', he had a rather corpulent – and

10:30 he was an excellent seaman. He was a good minesweeping man, he could do the whole bit, he was very good in dishing out justice at the table, of course his profession went along with that one. The one thing he couldn't do was bring a ship along side and he'd approach the wharf, at a not safe speed

11:00 and he'd look over the side of the bridge and the executive officer would be standing right down in his normal spot and he'd look down and say, "Number one, number one, Fenders," and crash, we'd be there. Number one was a very quiet bank teller type, I forget his name,

11:30 he wasn't the gay minesweeping type and he could handle a ship but he was very very quiet and he used to bring the ship along side when he needed to, he'd bring it along side and you'd never hear a sound, just him giving his orders, "Stop", "Finish", "Tie it up." Old skipper, bang.

12:00 **Is that why he was known as Fenders?**

Fenders. We had a chap who was quartermaster he come off one of the destroyers and he joined the ship and they made him quartermaster, we were in Cairns and down come the skipper's brother, who was up from Sydney.

12:30 He said to the quartermaster, it was about eight o'clock at night, he said, "I would like to speak to your captain." He said, "Okay." He said, "Now what's his name?" You see he didn't know this bloke from Adam. He said, "What's his name?" and his name is Noel S Townsend, and he said, "Our skipper's name is Fenders."

13:00 This bloke convinced him it wasn't "Fenders," it was "Townsend," and he ducked down into the gully and said, "What's the skipper's name?" and he said, "Townsend," and up he went again and let the man's brother in.

Back to you joining the Echuca,

13:30 **where did you get a bunk or hammock?**

Bunk or hammock, the bloke I relieved didn't get off the ship until the next day so that night I slept out under the, well the petty officer's flat contained the petty officer's mess, the chief petty officer's mess, the naval stores, the naval inkling stores, down below was the

14:00 magazine, four inch magazine, coxswain's office and the main refrigerator, we only had one refrigerator, all down there, and it was serviced by a ladder, an almost vertical ladder and until I got rid of the chap I was relieving he slept in the mess and I slept under this ladder. It was alright, very hot during the night,

14:30 but the beauty of it was the next morning the tanky, the supply bloke, opened up the main refrigerator and the freezing cold air came out and here am I in a pair of underpants and a layer of sweat, a pair of underpants and a layer of ice on me I think. That was the main refrigerator. The next night I moved inside

15:00 the mess and myself and another bloke, on little six inch stretchers we slept with our head under the table and our feet into the mess. That's where I slept the whole time I was on the ship.

Was that a choice?

That was the only space available. Let's see, we had one stoker petty officer that used to sleep on the cushions,

15:30 one who used to sleep in front of the lockers, two of us on the floor under the table, the coxswain slept in his own little thing, one bloke slept on the table and two in hammocks.

It sounds very squashed.

It was. As a matter of fact I took Alison on board Castlemaine in Melbourne, it's still afloat. Castlemaine,

16:00 the petty officer's mess has been restored, you can't go in there it's got a chain across it to keep you out, it's been restored, and I said to Alison, "That's where I used to live in there," and she said, "How many?" and I said, "Eight or nine of us," and she said, "In there?" and I said, "Yes, eight or nine." That was it, she couldn't live in there, she's slightly claustrophobic.

How did you deal with eight or nine

16:30 **men in a very confined sort of space trying to get to sleep? How did you manage that loss of privacy I guess?**

I never had any from the day I joined the navy, privacy. The Flinders Naval Depot there were seventy of us in one mess, we all slept in the hammocks, we all slept together. If you jumped out

17:00 and changed your underpants you had a lot of people watching you, it was communal showers, there was no worry, it was a bit cramped. We had a bathroom, the bathroom consisted of a wash basin, it was two cubicles, one was the shower

17:30 and the other one held the wash basin and they were common by the door from the shower and it was just so small and next door was the toilet, one toilet, for eight or nine men. One shower, one wash basin. Hanging on the wall was your mother's old galvanised iron tub, something about that round and that deep and

18:00 that's where we did our washing. That was it, you wanted to do your hammock you put it in the tub and it was your washing machine. That was living on corvettes, there was no, very little privacy on those things.

You mentioned you slept

18:30 **on a little stretcher underneath the table, where did you stash your stretcher?**

It all broke to pieces and you rolled it up and it was three foot long and six inches in roundness with the legs, what have you, and half the time you had nothing on, no mattress, in the tropics, you would just sleep on the canvass and every so often

19:00 you'd just give the canvass a scrub and leave it out in the sun, everything tighten up. You were right then for another week or two. The corvette living was very crowded so was living on the destroyer, you've got to go into something bigger than the destroyer before you get into the luxurious style of living and even then

19:30 it's not too good. It might on ships like the Melbourne, bunks, four high in the sailors' messes. You put four bunks into this room on the wall and you've got one almost at floor level and the other one, if anyone sits up in a hurry they will brain themselves on the ceiling. You had a couple of steam pipes running through the mess and the fire

20:00 hydrant, the hose, the water supply, and you haven't got much room for four men stacked high.

Being a corvette they had a bit of reputation for being fairly wet, I am just wondering how dry was your mess area?

We were dry by virtue of the fact that we were one deck down.

20:30 The sailors didn't do too good, particularly if it rained, and the hatch behind the forage gun, which is as big as that table top, if that hadn't been shut properly and the rubber had sort of worked out of it, it would rain and the water would run around the hatch seal and they'd get it

21:00 down below. If it, when the thing was diving underneath the ocean looking for the bottom you'd get water flushing over there even though everything was dogged down. It would still leak, there was always water coming in. The poor old sailors, they lived, it was terrible. But it didn't get down to our mess, unless some come straight down the hatch

21:30 and you just had to mop it all up and get it in a bucket and throw it back to where it came.

You were one deck down, what was the general kind of hygiene like?

Hygiene is always good in the navy. There is no room, you can't afford to live dirty, you've got to live clean

22:00 otherwise the whole ship starts to sink so basically part of your training is that you live clean, you do your washing regularly even though you might only put it in a bucket and rub it with your hands, Rinso and your hands, and then rinse it out, that's good enough.

Was there any hot water?

Yes, we

22:30 had hot water and we had, what was there, the only time there wasn't enough hot water was when we went into harbour and everyone wanted to have a shower to go ashore or do their washing and that sort of thing then we were short of hot water but if you were in the engine room branch or as I was, I lived with four stoker petty officers

23:00 who were all engine room branch, if I wanted to do my washing when we were underway I'd just go down into the boiler room and use the waste steam off one of the feed water pumps to boil my washing in a kerosene tin or a bucket and rinse it with feed water and hang it in front of the boilers and it would dry there inside five minutes. I used to take it away and iron it,

23:30 but not everybody had the privilege of going down to the boiler room to do their washing, therefore, the old sailor he had to wash in a bucket and that sort of thing. There were some nifty little washing machines that people made. The torpedo men had a model it was a copper funnel. They made a funnel about six inches in

24:00 diameter at the top and it came don, it had the regulation thing on the funnel and used to put a stick down there and that was the handle and around the funnel they used to drill holes, quarter inch holes and

24:30 that, you can see you've got the agitator out of a washing machine. You put the stuff in the bucket and you'd stir the handle, pump it up and down and it was amazing how clean it got and that's what the sailors used. I know one who made one and took it home to his wife, I don't think she ever used it, I think she was after something better than that for a washing machine.

25:00 **What sort of work was the Echuca doing?**

At the time I was on it we were sweeping mines. Naval mines have got sort of somewhere contact mines. These are the things with horns on the top of them you know, the sinister things featured in kids books.

25:30 I was very disturbed when I saw the first one, it was covered in coral, it shouldn't have been covered in coral, it should've been all black and sinister with all these horns sticking out but it was all coral and didn't look right. The mines got about three hundred pound weight of TNT [explosive] in it and if you rub against one it can blow a good size

26:00 hole into a ship and they were laid during the war and they had to be removed and we got the job The Barrier Reef was mined all along its length, I think there were three openings from memory left in the reef that could be used, the rest of them were mined. Up around New Guinea, same

26:30 thing, every opening was mined. Particularly useful openings where you could get in to say Port Moresby or Finch Harbour or something like that, there were minefields laid there, they all had to be swept. We had the contact minesweeping gear, we had the magnetic minesweeping gear.

27:00 The Echuca was the only Australian corvette that bagged, like on the Australian coast, was the only one that bagged a magnetic mine, believe it or not. They had another invention of the devil for acoustic mines. They used to drop this thing, it looked like a forty four gallon drum and you'd drop it over the front end and it was a typical paraffin[?UNCLEAR], it swam out from

27:30 the ship's side and inside it had an electric motor with an arm on it and two filthy great washers, one either end of the arm, and as this motor spun round it was powered along the cable, and as this motor

spun round it used to thump hell out of the side of this drum and the noise below was something terrible. You'd go down below for a cup of tea and you could feel all the fillings shaking in the teeth.

28:00 We were equipped for all three, some of them weren't, I think there was only the Echuca and Deloraine that had all three sweepers and the others were contact mine sweepers, the other four we had.

How many radar mechanics were there on board?

We had one of the Echuca, one on the Warnambool, one on the Mildura.

28:30 **So are you saying you were the only –**

We had two ships each to look after.

You were the only radar mechanic on board?

In the fleet, yes, in the flotilla.

Can you describe to me being the only radar mechanic, what sort of watch would you do?

None. We were as required. Corvette skippers were funny men, they believed

29:00 that the only person who could operate a radar set was the mechanic. We would be coming down inside the reef and it wasn't then lit as much as it is now, when I say lit, I mean beacons, lit beacons, and we'd be travelling along at night and we'd go through a passage and a lot of the beacons were just channel markers, wooden telegraph posts with a

29:30 triangle on top of them, no light at all. The old man would get me up on the bridge and he'd say, "We are going through this pass and I want you on the set and this is what it's going to look like, the beacons are there, and there, and there and I will call them down to you and you tell me the bearing to them." He wasn't interested in range because in

30:00 surface navigation it's all bearings and he had to learn to trust the range, which he did one night. We couldn't get a certain thing so I said, "Look, Sir, the range is so and so," and he said, "I'll take it," and he took the range and the next day he said to me, "That range was correct." That was the sort of, the radar

30:30 mechanic, I used to fix the Asdic [Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee - radar] and echo sounder, deck sounder.

I might come back and talk about the Asdic, but just to stick with the explanation of this work as required on the radar, so where was the gear set, or the set located on board?

The

31:00 set was on the top of the mast, one of them. The other one was on top of the searchlight, on top of the bridge you had the twenty inch search light and on top of that you had the surface warning radar which looked like a water tank. It was a wooden screen but it looked like a water tank. The two equipment were in what used to be the captain's bathroom.

31:30 When they fitted radar they ripped out the skipper's bathtub and put the two radar sets in there and he wasn't pleased at all. They were there when I got there but that's exactly what they did. Underneath the radar set you could still see the angles on the deck, that's where his bathtub sat, just bent it off, away it went.

32:00 That was it as long as they were working, and those on the other ship I looked after were working, my duties had effectively finished. But they hadn't because there were other things to do, as I said, the echo sounder, the sonar [sound navigation and ranging], I was an electronics mechanic literally before our time.

Did you have any problems

32:30 **with the radar set?**

Yes, they used to stop occasionally. I can remember my very good friend, Herb Chamberlain, when we did the course we were told that if anything ever went wrong with a certain scan, lay scan, then we were in big trouble. We came into Cairns once, we got a signal up from,

33:00 the skipper got it, up from the other wharf, saying could they borrow the radar mechanic tomorrow morning. He's got me up in his cabin and he said, "This request I've got from the Mildura, has Mildura got a mechanic?" and I said, "Yes sir, a chap by the name of Chamberlain." He said, "What in the hell does he want you for?" And I said, "Sometimes you need a second

33:30 thought on things." I got down there the next day and this poor old, he was in a terrible state, he had a fault in this amplifier the one that you should never get a fault in, it's bad news. His skipper, he was a mongrel of a man, he greeted me with, "Is this the man that knows all about it?"

34:00 I said to Herb, “Have you had a look at it, have you turned the thing over, have a look at the resisters and things?” and he said, “No, no, I remember what we were told,” and I said, “To hell with that, we are not there anymore.” So anyhow we turned it over and here is a big black resister looking at us, as black as carbon you know. I said, “There it

34:30 is,” so we changed it and away it went. Everything was right. After that he had no problems so you did get shared amongst the fleets and shared around here there and everywhere.

So how many operators were there on the Echuca?

I believe there were six. Most of them were quartermasters.

35:00 **They would reports problems and faults to you?**

No, I did my own. I think all of them were quartermasters and their job was manning the gangway and things like this. If required, they could operate the set, I think on occasions when we operated for a couple of days or something like that. We were

35:30 going south to Brisbane once and we ran into a cyclone and I think we had the radar closed up for four days. That was the longest we had ever had it closed up because they weren’t like modern radars, you couldn’t just switch it on and look at the wondrous thing with that going around. All of ours were A scan types where you had to take the bearing and take the

36:00 range off another tube and they weren’t as good as they are now.

Was it a cathode ray tube you were using?

It was an A scan, do you know what an A scan is? An A scan is the one that runs across the scope and that’s the ground wave where you are and that’s the return echo out here somewhere and you run a pointer out, read the range off and the bearing of course you get off wherever the antenna is.

36:30 It was an accrued system. But it was still being used, we found the Vengeance, she had a radar set on her that you actually had to press a big button on the floor and that put a two to one reduction in the antenna drive and you could read off where the antenna was pointing. A

37:00 piece of rubbish but that’s all we had and that’s what we used.

Just going back to the Echuca, so you would be called by the skipper directly if he wanted you to fix any problems or take bearings?

If he wanted it operated he’d usually have me

37:30 out of the bed, but it’s the old story, the officer on watch would get himself lost. He’d call the skipper and if the skipper wanted the radar, he’d call me. It was one of those things. I was still a young man, I wasn’t yet twenty one.

The work that Echuca did, the minesweeping, you mentioned that you were called

38:00 **occasionally to other ships, was the Echuca in a flotilla or in a fleet doing the minesweeping?**

In the flotilla we had a sloop, which was bigger than a corvette, Swan was the leader and she carried a full captain, MS 20, Minesweep 20, he’s the full captain, then we had six

38:30 corvettes, Warnmabool was the second in charge, she had a commander, the rest of us had lieutenant commanders as captain, six of them, or six corvettes, then we had four harbour defence motor launches, the purpose of the harbour defence motor launch was one, to go in against the reef, they were very shallow,

39:00 six foot, we drew more water than that, they’d go in against the reef and take the first cut and drop marker buoys and then we’d got just inside the marker buoy and put our sweep out into clear water or mined water, but we had a space to work in and these four HDMLs [harbour defence motor launches] were there for that purpose, they were also there to sink the mines or explode the mines

39:30 once they were cut. We also had MSL, mine stores lighter and she was under the command of Captain Harry Snow, and I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of Snows of Melbourne, a big department store in Melbourne years back

40:00 and Harry Snow he was supposedly the black sheep of the family, that’s the way the story went. He used to run this Stores Lighter and his job was to keep the stores up to us, like wire, we’d lose mine sweeping wire, it would hit the bottom and it was gone, otter boards, orapies [?] floats, various other odds and ends, that was his

40:30 function in life. The first time I ever saw them I thought they were a mob of pirates, they didn’t look like sailors. There are some funny blokes in those flotillas. We had the MSL which was common to both of us, three corvettes and two HDMLs as a working group, half the flotilla. We had another three corvettes

41:00 and two HDMLs the other half of the flotilla The Swan, the leader, would work between us, if she

decided she like where we were in our section of the reef she would come over and help us so we had virtually four corvettes.

41:30 In amongst the working group you had a leader, a second leader, or sweeper, and the last one, the third one was what they called the dan layer and her job was to, first one would go in and take his cut into the field, the second one would go in and take his cut into the field and the dan layer would come in way over here somewhere.

Tape 5

00:30 You want to start on dan buoys. When you are sweeping contact mines remember they are all laid in water which is accessible as far as depth is concerned. The mine is held in place by a sinker which has got a ratchet winch in side it

01:00 and the mine sits on top of that and the cable connects the two of them. When the mine is ditched over the side in the required spot, the set a ratchet in the cable release and down goes the sinker and the mine being buoyant floats off, the cable reaches its limit as set and it stops running off the drum down below

01:30 and the weight pulls the mine below the surface and you've got the mine sitting down at say four metres down, or twelve feet, whatever, it could be thirty feet down. When you sweep them you cut that wire with another wire, you drag this other wire across the wire that is holding the mines in the field and the wire you are dragging has got

02:00 little nicks over, instead of being a nice smooth wire you get, they go over like that, and it's rough. If you run your hand down it you wouldn't have any skin on your hand. When you run this wire along the wire holding the mine, the wire gets cut through holding the mine and up she comes. Now, if you've got three

02:30 or more corvettes sweeping, the first one goes through and he sails, the edge of the field is marked by dan buoys, you've got the reef, you've got the reef over there, one of the little ships goes in, HDMLs, and he trims out just a little bit there marked with dan buoys, small dan buoys in this case, and there is just room for a sweeper to get in there, so

03:00 through he goes, and he's got his sweep wire out into the field, this is below the surface. The second one is going in, he is over here, there is a flag on the end of this sweep wire, a float and a flag. He goes through here and his sweep is out in the field there and behind his flag is the dan buoy layer and she

03:30 lays three dans, one at the start of the field, one at the middle of the field, one at the end of the field. In the meantime these blokes wheel off and they've gone through another hole, previously swept, we hope, round, round, round and round, and way over here where the dan buoys are and they take another cut and the dan buoys lay is following them all the time. You always know how far you've gone, which is clear water and which is

04:00 bad water. You don't want to go over there, you'll get holes blown in you. That's the principal, the whole thing works like that.

How was the bad water identified?

The fact you haven't been over there. Bad water has active mines in it, you started the reef here and you've taken two cuts into it and you've marked them. Then you come along and

04:30 anything on that side of the dan buoys is bad water, it's got mines in it, so you come along, you take that one, you take that one and you mark it again. You try and sweep only in safe water.

How big were the areas that you were sweeping through?

Around about, the sweep was round about six hundred feet long.

05:00 Two hundred yards.

How long would each section take to sweep through?

It depends how wide the gap is. Some of them you do in half a day, some it takes the whole day, some you may have to come back and do more the next day. Generally you'll get one gap done in a day otherwise its too wide

05:30 so they would permanently mine it, no fool around with it. That is the minesweeping principal. Nowadays they've got a new method which they hook the sweeping wire between the backside of two corvettes. They do it with a loop but it's still the same

06:00 principal, you are still starting from the reef and taking a big cut out and mining it and if you blow up in the meantime, too bad.

It sounds like quite serious and dangerous work?

It is, that's why they gave us a shilling a day extra. That's true. You didn't get a shilling a day for nothing.

How did your time on the Echuca wind up?

06:30 When we finished the minesweeping, or our side of the minesweeping, that was the end of 1947 and it was decided that they would pay off the flotilla and we would pay off in the west. Swan stayed, the leader, and she had two general purpose vessels attached to her and they

07:00 went magnetic minesweeping, that was a different part of the game. The five of us that were left, they didn't send the HDMLs across, they kept them in Sydney, the five corvettes, we lost the Warnambool, the five corvettes that were left we all went across to the west and paid off. It took something like, Herb and myself, five months I think to pay

07:30 off the five corvettes. Then they sent us back to be redeployed.

Before we leave the Echuca, at the end of your time there do you have a rough estimate as to how many mines you detonated?

I worked it out once, a thousand or something. Each corvette seemed to get about a thousand mines. Of course, not all of them blew up,

08:00 some of them sunk. That's why if you get an admiralty chart out, even today, say, the barrier reef, you will find the openings that were mined, they still record the fact that there could be unexploded mines on the bottom and they are the ones that sunk. They are all dead now.

Why would, when other mines were floating, why would some sink?

Because they had a bloody great

08:30 hole in them. What used to happen was when the mines were cut and were bobbing around on the surface, these small craft used to go and fire at them with a .5 buoys anti-tank gun which when it hits the buoyancy chamber, two things could happen. One, is they could hit one of the horns or rapture it with

09:00 concussion, the bullet hitting the mine, in which case the mine will blow up. Or secondly, they can punch the buoyancy tank in the mine because they've got to be buoyant otherwise they'd never float to the required depth, they hit the buoyancy tank and down she goes, she has not exploded. Of course they are still on the sea bottom. They are so old now

09:30 they would've rotted out but you can never be too careful so the admiralty always say, "Unexploded mines may be on the bottom in this area."

When the mines were being blown up, were you feeling reverberations in the Echuca?

Yes, reverberations and dead fish everywhere. Good feed of fish out of a mine. A mine,

10:00 when it blows up, it throws up a column of water about three hundred feet high. Quite a solid piece of water comes up and of course the fish get stunned and killed. The ones that have just been stunned, if you can get to them quickly enough the fish itself is quite

10:30 edible, knock it on the head with something and its quite edible, but the ones that have been killed outright have been squashed and the flesh in them is all pulverized and its like trying to eat a piece of sponge. It's still good fish, but it's like a sponge. I don't recommend them.

Would you get much variety of seafood?

The

11:00 navy at that time, it's not renowned for its victualling, and if we didn't get enough seafood we starved. We used to live on such delicacies such as, and I am not joking about this, baked beans, we had baked beans until they ran out our ears. 'Goldfish' – herrings in tomato sauce. We

11:30 used to get these things thrashed at us. In reality, they are good food, but you can only eat so many of them. Then there was, what's his name, bully beef, we'd get that thrashed at us. It had been chilled, if it hadn't been chilled and sometimes it couldn't be chilled it

12:00 tasted like yuck. There was a couple of other things but it was very monotonous food. We used to get the potatoes that they used to chip the potatoes and nowadays you can get potatoes as a powder

12:30 and that's good. The potato we got was this chip potato and it's terrible. They had all these of dehydrated vegetables which were equally terrible and most blokes threw them over the side, wouldn't eat them. We've come a long way with food so you'd

13:00 be back to the old standby, beans, goldfish. I've seen a bloke come up out of the stoke hole and he's

done the morning watch, that's four to eight, and he'd come down into the mess and say, "What's for breakfast," and someone would say, "Goldfish." He'd open up the heater and pull out the tin of goldfish, for him, and throw it out the hole.

13:30 Wouldn't eat it. Yet, if you could get them ashore, there were civilians there who would fight you for them because they couldn't buy them. They were all for the troops but the troops had had too much of the stuff and so it went on.

When you said the Echuca was paid off, what do you mean by that?

It was no longer required by the navy and they took her down to

14:00 a quiet little place and shackled her onto a buoy and sealed her up and that was her, she was there. The Echuca was there about three years and one day I saw her sailing up Port Phillip Bay in Melbourne and I thought, "That's the old Echuca." I

14:30 got a pair of binoculars and had a good look, she was the Echuca alright. They had sold it to the New Zealand navy, or given it to New Zealand. Her and four others I think.

How did it feel having to leave the Echuca knowing she was no longer required?

She was just another ship. I couldn't stay there, there was no pay if you stayed there. It was time to move on.

15:00 The ship was finished and that was it. We paid her off, we made out all the lists and what have you, we did the right thing. It was all over.

You then went to HMAS Watson to do a course?

Yes.

Radar and radio is that right?

Yes, originally

15:30 we were trained, the first one, two, three classes that came through the Adelaide School of Mines were trained as radar mechanics because there was a need for radar mechanics. The next class was trained in radio, just radio, nothing else, because they needed to

16:00 reinforce the radio bit. These poor devils they didn't go to sea they sent them up to Harman in Canberra, Coonawarra in Darwin, they got shore drafts, they didn't like it. Then, after four class, alternatively, they radar, radio, radar, radio. There was a need to train the classes in radar only in radio.

16:30 As well as that they also had to train us in enough, all the radar they had done previously. So when they trained us in radar they only gave us three sets, three types. We should've done a lot more than that but they didn't have time so they pulled us back for conversion courses and there was R-W conversion course, radar to wireless, where you

17:00 did seventy percent radar and thirty percent wireless. Then there were the W-R classes where you did the wireless-radar bit. Eventually they got the whole lot of us through and instead of being known as a radio mechanic W or radio mechanic R, you were radio mechanic. If you got seventy percent in your conversion

17:30 course which took nine months you were considered to be qualified for chief which was pretty fair. All you had to do then was to wait for someone to make a you a chief if you were lucky enough.

You had done quite a lot of learning on the job on the Echuca, so when you got to Watson what new things were you learning?

We were

18:00 trained in, to give you numbers, we were trained in an Australian radar which was a conglomeration of air force bits and pieces and an antenna that had been built in the New South Wales radio workshops, railway workshops sorry. We had another radar set which had been made by AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia], again

18:30 Australian one, and the third one was a gunnery set which was British. Now, there was a lot more radar, British radars surface warning, aircraft warning, gunnery, a lot more radars to be learnt. Of course we hadn't touched any of the radio and similarly the blokes that had

19:00 done radio they had touched any radio at all and they had to go right back and do the basic radar training which took eight weeks of half days. Basic radar training. We had to be trained in the subjects we missed and our first run through they were basically getting them ready to go on corvettes

19:30 and frigates to fill the gap. That's where we came into it. When we got back, it's amazing, I got back to Watson, I was still a leading hand mainly because corvettes don't carry electrical officers or anything that looks like an electrical officer. So I couldn't be recommended for promotion so they sent me back to Watson and said, "Don't worry son, it will all be fixed up

20:00 there." They did the same for Chamberlain, he was still Akilic[?] and we get back to Watson and I arrived there, Phil didn't, I don't know why he didn't, there was a reason he didn't arrive with me. He only had to go here for leave and I had to go to Queensland but he didn't arrive with me, he probably struck someone favourable here and

20:30 gave him a couple of extra weeks. I got back to Watson and they were just going on leave and I just had my leave. The boss grabbed hold of me and he said, "During the first leave period I've got about six mechanics here, just finished their training, I want you to shift that radar

21:00 set from tether into the next building." This was a British radar, I had never seen it before. We shifted it, we got it going and when they came back after their two or three weeks leave, it was all done. These kids knew as much about it was I did. As he said, "You are the senior leading hand, you do it." So I got the book out and read it at night and thought,

21:30 "That's easy isn't it." I had the training, I had the confidence so I just did it. That's the way the whole thing went together in those days.

What was the reaction when you found that you had actually done it successfully and with no problem?

It was alright, very good, here's your next job.

What was that?

Actually, after that was over

22:00 I was sitting on my backside in the workshop one day reading a book and this warrant officer that we had, I was still Akilic[?], this warrant office we had, Ted Kirkham, hell of a nice fellow, I say that about everyone don't I? But they were. He come up to me and said, "What are you doing Jake?" and I said,

22:30 "Reading a book." He said, "I've got just the job for you." He took me into this radar block, remember this is a training depot and it had great block there and all sorts of radar sets in it. He said, "Here y'are." I said, "Not the 285," and he said, "The 285, but there's another one." The 285 is a gunnery set, swine of a thing. Alongside it was this other one called the

23:00 274 which was an advanced gunnery set so I said, "Okay," and he said, "They are yours, the three of them." I went and dug out a couple of, they were seaman chiefs, and I said, "I've just been given this couple of 285s and the 274,

23:30 what do you know about it?" and they said, "Very little." I said, "I will tell you what, you teach me the gunnery side of these sets and once I've mastered them I will teach you the radio mechanics side." Because if you are going to instruct on these things, that's the way to do it. They said, "Righto," so away we went and they taught me the gunnery side of it and I taught them the radio mechanics

24:00 side of it and we got on famously. From there I went out to Leichhardt Naval Stores where they had two 275s which were the radars going on to the cruiser Hobart which had just done an extensive refit at Newcastle. They spent over a million pound on her

24:30 then paid her off, finished, she went to scrap. I was sent out to Leichhardt because they had these two 275s there, they had to get ready for the Hobart. Since I'd done the 274 and they hadn't, I was in the advance of them so I got out of petty officer this time. I went out and worked with them for a while until it was such time

25:00 one day they said to me, "Go back to Watson, your course is starting." So I did and that's when I did the conversion course. I was floating around there for it must've been almost nine months, waiting for that course to start. Simply because I didn't come back to the original course. I was told, they sent me another telegram, to Mount Isa and I didn't get to Mount Isa, I got to

25:30 Townsville and I rang Dad one night to tell him where I was and he said, "I've got a telegram here for you." CO Moreton, because I'd had to come through Brisbane and I said, "What's it say?" and he said, "Course in Sydney, come back immediately." So I said, "Throw it in the dunny," and that's where it went. I got back, all that had happened to me was that I had missed this course and I had to wait for the next one,

26:00 nine months time. No worries.

Where were you based when you were at HMAS Watson?

Watson.

Where were you sleeping?

In the POs' mess. Watson was a training establishment. It had a rannery [?], a ward room, chief and petty officers' mess and sleeping accommodation and room for all the sailors. It was a

26:30 place where you went to do courses. The operators were trained there, the gunnery operators, the

plotters as they called them, they were trained in Watson. The radio mechanics, we were only part of it, it was our home until, after I went to the Tobruk,

27:00 they suddenly changed it and radio mechanics, their home was Flinders Naval Depot and I never went back there, thank God. I didn't want to go back there.

By the time you finished at Watson, you were quite well trained?

Yes. We were all well trained. That's why when we sort of finished with the navy

27:30 anyone in the electronics field they welcomed radio mechanics you could get a job anywhere.

I was just thinking that aside from the course there was all this unofficial training that you were having to build up your skills and knowledge?

Yeah, we were extremely well trained and there was more to it, the Tobruk and Anzac, there was more training there.

28:00 I never touched radar in the Tobruk, I never touched radar in the Anzac, or wireless. I did fire control, gunnery.

I wanted to talk to you about that, the conversion course, how did you find that?

It was alright. We only failed once. That was, it's funny, we were battling on,

28:30 it was a hard course, we had to put some effort into it, but about half way through the course they had brought on this fiddly little piece of equipment, 'Talk Between Ships', TBS, Yankee gear, and it was so simple. We did our, I think it was a week or

29:00 four days or something, the fifth day was the exam and we passed on. Lo and behold we did the exam on this thing and everyone failed. Simply because we all went up to the mess and got drunk the night before. It was so simple and of course the exam floored us and the next day the, it only took a brief minute to mark it, there was only

29:30 twelve of us I think on the course, they marked this paper and here they are, all these prime mechanics failed. We were pretty senior blokes and they all failed. So down comes the boss, he's only a little bloke and he was ranting and raging and saying "Mob of idiots, you've all failed, you'll go back and start again."

30:00 We said, "It can't be that bad?" He said, "I will tell you what we'll do, we'll give you another exam on Monday morning. Anyone who fails it goes back." No one failed it. We'd been warned. So we all knuckled down and did our weekend study, it was so simple and we disregarded the fact that we had to pass this exam. So we'd rather get drunk instead, which we did.

That was quite a simple piece of equipment you had to master,

30:30 **but what was the most difficult?**

I don't know, it was all fairly difficult because it was mostly new to us. Where we had the game by the throat was that we'd all been to sea and we'd all been to different classes of ships.

31:00 When something come up, the instructor who hadn't been to sea, he was one of our original instructors, he was the senior instructor, he was good man, but he sort of came up and said, "Now today we are going to do the 961." That was the warning aircraft on the Australia. It had just been put on it at the end of the war.

31:30 He said, "You've all got a handbook so away we go." He opened his mouth and he said something and a bloke by the name of Frank Ludley, who had just done two years in the Australia, and he said, "Sorry, that's not it, you've got it wrong." He said, "Alright, you've seen it, I haven't, you take the class." So he did, and he taught us this 961 whereas

32:00 the instructor had never seen it, had never been with it, but this other bloke had.

Who were you instructors?

They were chiefs, mostly chief telegraphists, who had changed over from the telegraphy branch to the radio mechanic branch and a few officers. But one of the officers that taught a lot,

32:30 taught us a hell of a lot, he was a commissioned school master. He was one of the three school masters the navy had that taught radio and his job when we started our conversion course we did eight weeks of half days on radio radar theory and he took

33:00 us. That was hard. He said, "You have probably forgotten everything that you learnt at the School of Mines, so I will run you quickly through it again." I had done physics at high school, that was my first time round, I did my apprenticeship that was my second time round, electrics, electronics

33:30 stuff like that, I went through it at the School of Mines and then I went through it again with him and

each time it got harder. You think it would get easier but it didn't, it got harder. By the same token, he taught us and that was one of the best things that came out of that course because I still say to go back to basics it's, that's where you learn things.

34:00 **I was going to ask, was it more in depth than what you covered at the School of Mines?**

No, I think we virtually went over the same ground but we did it in depth and that's what we didn't do at the School of Mines and that's what we didn't do at high school. Probably because of the stupid instructor I had couldn't do it.

34:30 The radio mechanic branch was a funny branch and the longer we stayed in, the better we got. We were like old fruit you know, we mellowed with time. Strangely enough the day we all left the navy, and we left inside a year, the navy

35:00 made no effort to keep us. We were only thirty, only boys. But they made no effort whatsoever to keep us, just let us go. About six or eight months later they had a revelation and said, "Where are all our radio mechanics gone?" That's when they did try to keep them. That's when they really had to start recruiting, they've never got back to the

35:30 same, I don't think myself, they've ever got back to the same standard.

You mentioned in one of your classes there was a student who was more knowledgeable than the instructor, how often did that occur?

Quite often. He was more knowledgeable because he'd worked on the equipment but we had two blokes, let's see,

36:00 we had Dick Withers, I've got a photograph of him there, Knocker White, Percival White, he was this dirty looking character, he was Knocker, unofficial Percival because he was dirty, the two of them, Dick Withers and Percival White, and who was the other chap,

36:30 three of them. They came to the Adelaide School of Mines and they sat in the classroom for a week and they all passed the final examination and came on with us. They were brilliant. They had a lot of physics and they just went straight through it and we'd been slugging away at it for six months and they just went straight through and they were out.

37:00 Still, that's the way it went.

When you graduated from that course, was there any certification or qualification?

No, the navy never worried about that thing. You get the air force blokes and the army chaps, they have all got certificates and we had twice the training that they've had and they

37:30 gave us nothing and it's just one of those things, the navy didn't worry about it, they trained us for their purpose not for somebody else's. As a matter of fact, this is digressing slightly, when I got to Woomera, to the satellite tracking station, the bloke in charge up there, an ex-air force bloke, he watched me work for a while and he said, "Jake, you were a navy trained mechanic." I said, "Yes."

38:00 He said, "Any more like you leaving the navy?" I said, "How many do you want?" He said, "We could do with about four." I said, "Can I use the phone to ring up Canberra?" I got him four blokes on the spot. He said, "That's wonderful, why don't we get more?" But they wouldn't give him the grounds to get more, he couldn't use, he wanted to get more on the spot for other

38:30 people.

When you finished at Watson, where did you graduate in your class?

Second I think. I got seventy percent, or thereabouts, it was better than seventy, but not much more. That was about, wait on, we had one of those blokes on board, he

39:00 probably got a lot more than me, but then again, that was him, you didn't take him into account. I think I came out about second.

Were you striving to come out top of the class?

No. Not really, I was striving to pass. We were told that we had to get seventy percent otherwise we would have to do another course to get our rate when that

39:30 come up. I worked it out that I was going to get seventy percent at least and that's all I needed. Why bust a gut to get something you don't need?

How many graduated with you?

Probably about twelve or fourteen of us. What they used to do, when they started these conversion courses

40:00 they used to meet the requirements of the fleet and the depots and anyone who was standing there as

though he had a wooden leg, they'd draft him in for the conversion course. I was drafted for the first one but really I shouldn't have done that, I should've done the second one. Which since I didn't turn up, for the first one, I did the second one. We had chaps with us, well that brainy bloke he was

40:30 in about the fifth class. As I said, if you were standing around on one leg looking useless, they'd draft you in for the conversion course because they knew you didn't have a real job. But if you were at sea or something like this, they'd just leave you until the next one. That's the way it worked.

Tape 6

00:33 **To pick up your story, after that time in Watson you got another draft to the HMAS Tobruk, tell us about Tobruk?**

It's a ship where I didn't stay very long. While I was in Watson doing that course the navy brought forward two warships,

01:00 Tobruk and Anzac, they had been building for several years but they finally go round to finessing them. Tobruk was in Sydney, Cockatoo Docks, and Anzac was in Melbourne at Williamstown Naval Dockyard. Tobruk was finished first because Cockatoo made the engines for both of them and guess who got the first set, the ship at Cockatoo.

01:30 While I was on the last stages of the course in Watson the two electrical officers for those two ships were going to be appointed, they came up to pick their crews, the radio electrical crews. The bloke from Tobruk, David Johns, he took Hillis, the senior petty officer in our branch,

02:00 he was available, and he took various others and one of them he took was me because I had the gun, I was a gun mechanic, I had done all this work on these gunnery sets. He took me as a gun mechanic and I eventually joined, and Barnes, who was the electrical officer for Anzac, he said

02:30 he wanted a senior petty officer from Tobruk to head his team. They looked down the list that Johns had taken and lo and behold who was there, Jake Kerr, so I was going to Anzac on commission. I didn't know about this of course. No need to tell me, I am only the bloke concerned. Anyhow, in the fullness of time I went to Tobruk,

03:00 I went to Penguin on the north shore for Tobruk and a couple of months later we commissioned the Tobruk. We lived at Penguin until we commissioned. When I got to Cockatoo Island for the Tobruk, David Johns, I met him for the first time, the electrical officer. He casually said, "You are

03:30 from Watson, you'll be the main armament mechanic, I want you to work on the fly plane." Which was the gunnery set, nothing to do with radar, it was a computer. He said, "You'll be going to Anzac just before she commissions." That was news to me. So that happened. I spent

04:00 seven months in Tobruk, just before Christmas we went into Cockatoo for our Christmas refit. Lo and behold I had my leave pass in hand and all of a sudden the coxswain wanted to see me. He said, "Where's your leave pass Jake?" I said, "Here it is." Noel Tooths was this bloke's name. I gave him my leave pass and he

04:30 tore it up in front of me and he said, "You are going to Anzac, now, today." I said, "Okay." So I went down and packed all my gear up and cancelled any arrangements I had for Christmas leave and away I went down to Melbourne and joined the Anzac after a lot of rigmarole, rail strikes, and all sorts of things.

05:00 **We will come back and talk about the Anzac, but just before we move on, I understand that there was one aspect of the Tobruk that was really important and that was the fire control, can you just tell us, that was the first time that you?**

It was the first time that Australian had been exposed to this fire control system. It was an analogue computer,

05:30 it had two thousand valves in it. It was a hybrid machine in that it had an analogue computer and the angles were solved mechanically, electro mechanical angle solvers, we had on board to help us, two dockyard men, one

06:00 was electronic, one was mechanical, both engineers, and they were going to help us with the mysteries of this wretched machine. They didn't do a very good job really. It was new to them too, they had been to England and done a course, but it was new to them. It was a cow of a thing.

06:30 We managed to get by on it and I don't think we achieved anything in shooting down aircraft or anything but we almost got a couple.

What was the fire control system?

It was a system where the radar will give you so many parameters, it will give you the range, the way to

change the range, it will give you

07:00 the bearing, the bearing and the rate of change of bearing, the elevation, and rate of change of elevation. Given these things you put them into the computer and you come up, an analogue computer in this case, and you come up with directions for pointing the guns, pointing the director and pointing the guns. An expert would say it was all wrong but still for the purposes of giving you an idea of how it

07:30 works. It tells you how to point the guns. At the same time it takes the gun pointing information for a turret here and a turret there, both on centre line but on different lengths along the hull, it gives you the convergence for those two turrets and the throw off convergence from the director which is the

08:00 centre point for all things All in all if the computer is working properly and the information is getting there, then you should be able to shoot down aircraft, aircraft always being the main worry, aircraft up to six hundred knots. Six hundred knots is a fair speed because an aircraft to attack a ship at six hundred knots

08:30 isn't flying straight at him, he's going across him or something like that. You've got a fair chance of hitting him. Once the Korean War came on we found out that this computer was capable of doing it and the Anzac got the first shot at doing it and Tobruk relieved her for the second. It was an advance. All of the fire control

09:00 computers that they had up to that date were electro mechanical and they, electro mechanical, and when you got down to the firing you fired what they called a box barrage, you didn't fire a single shot at the target, you fired say four barrels altogether, bang. Now the

09:30 natural spread of the shells coming out of the gun barrels gives you a fair chance of hitting and then once you fired them you would then go into what you called a 'short, short, short mode', and you dropped down in range and fire again until the aircraft flew through that range. Even though you had some form of fire control system with the electro mechanical job

10:00 it was still a fairly unique system where you hoped that the aircraft would fly through your barrage of shells and there were radar things to assist it but they were pretty basic. This was the first real attempt at producing a system which would actually shoot down an aircraft or fire at a ship and hit the ship, it would do either. If it could hit an aircraft, it could hit a ship no worries.

10:30 That was the idea of the fire control system. Is that as clear as mud?

So Anzac was fitted out with one of those systems?

Anzac had the same system.

We will come back and talk more about that when we come to the Anzac and I will now go back to you, you were just about to tell us the story of joining the Anzac?

We don't have to, we can stay with Tobruk.

No, that's fine, I think that that was, we

11:00 **don't have much time today, so you mentioned you didn't really spend much time on the Tobruk.**

I stayed there long enough to learn the system. I had no training on this system, I picked it up from other people. Fortunately there was some pretty good brains on the Tobruk, and I don't mean dockyard brains, they were sailors' brains. We had one chap who used to sit there and read a book and he'd grunt and he'd

11:30 have it all up here. His name was Hofriker, Barry Hofriker. That's the sort of bloke we were working with.

You learnt off them?

I learnt off them, they learnt off me. This was the stage where the navy was changing over from torpedo men to electricians and they didn't have any electronic blokes, they relied heavily on the radar mechanics

12:00 to supply their electronics. A lot of them couldn't fix an amplifier that went crook. They'd give it to me and I'd take it down the workshop and fix it up and bring it back. That's the way the system worked in those days. Now of course the fire control is handled by the electrical branch, they've trained them from the word go. In my day, there was no word 'go'. There was the poor old radio mechanic

12:30 who pitched in and did what he could. Anzac, what do you want to know about Anzac?

First of all, what sort of class of?

Anzac I went to her, I joined Tobruk in April I think '50, I left to go to Anzac in December, wasn't late

13:00 December, just before Christmas and the electrical officer thought he was doing me a good turn, he was

a great bloke, he thought he was doing me a good turn because he took the trouble of looking up my service certificate in Victoria, navy office and he found out I had joined up in Melbourne. He assumed I was a Victorian, which I am a Victorian

13:30 but I never lived there, he assumed I was a Victorian and my parents lived in Victoria, and I could be home for Christmas. He rang up the navy office and said, "This bloke Kerr is on draft to me after Christmas, I would like him now." They said, "That's alright, Tobruk is in Cockatoo Island dockyard for a refit, we will get him down." So they did and I had to cancel all my leave arrangements.

14:00 That's just something that happened. Anyhow, I got back to Sydney, I managed to, they had some trials coming up and I did them and I managed to get back to Sydney for the Christmas leave and I went back on Christmas Eve with the padre. He was in the same train as me, same berth. Of course when I went to

14:30 Anzac, I was in charge of the department on board, you see I wasn't in the Tobruk, they had this other petty officer there. So I was in charge of the department and also I had brought with me some things to do in the fly plane, the predictor, and we put them in,

15:00 told the dockyard where they were wrong and told the gunnery officer what he should do to correct it. He listened and eventually we didn't march, we commissioned Anzac. Away we went. Next thing we left, did you want something else?

I was just wondering, you just mentioned that you were in charge of the department so how many men were

15:30 **you overseeing?**

There were thirteen men including myself. Anyhow, we commissioned the ship and we shot down a few air force targets for them. This one worked, we had no dockyard assistance. It was just navy blokes and it worked. Wonderful. We shot down a few air force targets then they announced we were going

16:00 around Australia, show the population how the navy had spent two and a half million pounds in making a battle class destroyer. We left Melbourne and were due to stop in Fremantle. The next morning, having left Melbourne, we found ourselves between Kangaroo Island

16:30 and the mainland. I went up and had a look at the mainland to see what was going on before breakfast and I said to the operator, "Where are we?" He said, "I don't know, chief, we've got lands on both sides of us." I said, "That's Kangaroo Island there and that's the mainland there. Tell your mates we will be in Adelaide tonight." Sure enough we were, we weren't due to go to Adelaide. Then we went from here up to

17:00 Whyalla and then a couple of days in Whyalla then we came down to Port Lincoln, met up with the Sydney and did some evolutions. That's fun and games the navy play when they want to test a ship out they do these evolutions. You bring down a radar antenna, you do this, you do that, take a carrier in tow, be towed by a carrier,

17:30 take the anchor off and put it on the bottom without the chain, that sort of thing. We went down to Port Lincoln and here's the old Sydney there and we did these evolutions then we sailed. I thought, "I can't fool a sailor, I know which way we are heading." We are going back to Melbourne. Then the old man told us, "We are not going to Melbourne, well, we are,

18:00 we are going there for a refit, a quick one, and then we are going to Korea, so you've done your tripping around Australia." So we did. We went to Korea and did our time up there, it was only a short run, about three months I think. Then we were relieved by Tobruk to come forward and we then –

We would

18:30 **like to spend quite a bit of time talking about that Korean tour you did so perhaps we could just go back a couple of steps, you are in charge of the department in charge of twelve other men, what were you daily duties?**

I was responsible for all of the radars and radios in the

19:00 ship. These were modern ships and were well endowed with radio and radar. These other twelve blokes I had were responsible under me for the maintenance of those things. With all the log books and stuff that goes with it. In particular I was required to assist with the fly plane, maintenance, computer maintenance.

What did that

19:30 **involve?**

It involved work, work, work. We used to work in the fly plane compartment seven days a week and in general probably about ten hours a day.

What was the fly plane?

That's the computer system. It was called the 'fly plane electric predictor'. That was the

20:00 two thousand valves and the mechanical angles and all that. It was in a compartment about the size of this room. In the destroyer they don't give that space away willingly.

Whereabouts on board was it?

Right underneath the bridge. Two decks down. The fly plane compartment, it

20:30 had a thirty inch fan to blow air, to suck air out of it and no air conditioner to put air in. It was hot, you have no idea. We were in winter, snow and ice, we were floating around there in our underpants, that's how hot

21:00 the computer compartment was.

So there was no ventilation?

No, it actually, the thirty inch fan used to pull air out of the fly plane compartment and poke it out through a mushroom on the other deck and the input of air was via the seamen's heads, straight through the toilet and into the computer compartment which wasn't too bad when the ship was open but when the ship was closed up,

21:30 like when we went up top it was closed up alright and all the air was being drawn straight out of the toilets.

Can you just tell us a bit more about the work you were doing and what it involved?

It's basically the same as what we were doing on the Tobruk. It was all very new.

22:00 I mean, one day the gunnery officer came in, no that's the bloke on the Tobruk, it doesn't matter, it's the same gunnery officer, David Hamer, who went into parliament later on, his brother was premier of Victoria, David Hamer came in and said, "Jake, on the radar and in the computer, we've got a fire control system

22:30 but I can not see the shot falling in the ocean. What can you do to fix it up for me?" I said, "I can't do anything until I've seen it to add something." I added a fire control for the shot system. He reckoned that was great, the best thing since white bread.

How did that work?

I just put another amplifier in

23:00 which the whole thing was that the one that was there had what you called an automatic gain control on it so that when you strobed the target you pulled all the sides and air goes down and of course you couldn't see the splashes made by the shells so I put another amplifier in, which we had in spares, and I pinched a scope from somewhere or other. It was a piece of test equipment, wired it in under the table,

23:30 and that didn't have any fancy gain controls on it so it worked at full gain all the time so when the shells hit the water up they came, you beauty, and that's what he wanted to see. I did the same on the Anzac. Another thing, this came from the Anzac and not the Tobruk, we had a thing

24:00 which it, let me get it into context, this piece of machinery, it would, I just can't get it into context,

24:30 I will get it in a minute, it was another piece of weird and wonderful machinery. I just can't, let's leave it and get back to it.

25:00 **Tell us about the gyro rate unit.**

The thing that controlled, the basis of the computing system was the gyro rate unit, which consisted of two parts. The bottom part when the director elevated the bottom part of the GRU, gyro rate unit, elevated with it, when the director trained, the whole thing went around. We are looking at something which is

25:30 about the height of a man and that round. The top half of the GRU kept the stability of the system so that when the ship was trained, everything was trained for and up, and the ship was doing this, the barrels would go up and down on the guns. The cells on the director would go up and down in accordance with what the ship was doing.

26:00 Similarly, if you were in elevation and moving this way and that way, but there's another movement called the yaw, that's one where you get a combination of this and this and that comes from the top half of the GRU and it was sitting there and it was planing within several microns of what it was doing and that movement was taken off

26:30 and applied to the bottom half of the GRU. This top half, it had a vertical caning gyro in it and occasionally, too often in fact, this thing would go, and roll over on its back, so you lost your controlling motion. You could still move the directors, you could still up and down them but you didn't have that

27:00 stability there. We decided we would put in this metering system. We metered this thing and once we could see what it was doing we had no trouble. We could twink it up, beautiful. That was it, it was a funny system but that came off the Anzac. It went to the Tobruk, the other way round.

27:30 **That work went on while you were on the Anzac?**

I did it. I did this and I did the falling shot thing and as a matter of fact when I went on board the Tobruk I went down to the transmitting station where the fire control system is

28:00 and there was an officer down there and I assumed he had to be the gunnery officer. I said, "Lieutenant Hamer?" He said, "Yes?" I said, "My name is Kerr, I am going to look after your fire control radar and lend a hand with the grill and things, FEP [?]." He said, "Good, now yes, we will talk about this." I said, "By the way, do you know when they put your radar in that panel should be up there and that panel should

28:30 be down here." He said, "You are joking?" I said, "I am not joking, that's the way it should be." It was a question of elevation versus training and they put them in the wrong place. We had four weeks to go until commission. So he said, "I will get the dockyard bloke, don't go away." So he went and got the dockyard man and we changed it. When I got down to the Anzac some months later, guess what?

29:00 Same condition. I told the gunnery officer, different bloke, he's just come back from Korea the gunnery officer, Robinson was his name. He went up there as the fiftieth anniversary of the Korean War. Old Robbie, I went up and got him and I said, "Do you realise what

29:30 they've done?" He said, "What? Tell me." I told him and he said, "What are we going to do?" and I said, "We will get them to change it."

Did you have a personal theory as to why these systems were being put in incorrectly?

No. I mean I just looked at the one, David Hamer, you'd never forgive him, was David – was a man who really knew, he could take anybody

30:00 on, he was a navigator, he was a gunnery officer he was this he was that, he had done all the courses and he spoke about five or six languages that he learnt in the navy, he was a real bright spark, and for him to miss it, and on top of it all he was a good gunnery officer, and for him to miss it, I could never work out why, but he did.

So you sorted out the problem on the Tobruk then you went to the Anzac and found the same

30:30 **problem?**

Yes, and then when we went up to the dockyard office here they are, drawings for the Anzac in red ink, the modification, a little script there saying, "When he joins, ask Petty Officer Kerr how all this works." Petty Officer Kerr had joined and no one had asked me, I didn't know about it, I just assumed it was sent down months

31:00 ahead of it. We are looking at, between the two ships commissioning, nine months, and they hadn't sent that information. But still, that's the way the world progresses.

So you were able to sort it out?

Yes, fix it all up, a bit of overtime for the dockyard. Overtime is wonderful, it really sort of gets them going.

31:30 They won't do much during the week, but golly they'll work for overtime, but that's beside the point. Now, where were we?

We were just talking about your sort of daily activity and routine on the Anzac, it was mainly taken up with this work on the fly plane?

Fire control system, solving problems. We had one,

32:00 these are problems. The fire control system on a battle class, in the turrets they've got the turrets are oiled control. Elevation and training. Turrets, they have a sensored oil valve

32:30 and they put a little bit of dither on to this, a little bit of six volt AC to keep the valve shuddering so that it can't lock up and can't suddenly see a training signal and go, it's already doing that in miniature. We had this little, that valve,

33:00 and the main oil valve, is inside a box immersed in oil, as is the controller that actuates the oil valve. This is the end of a power amplifier, that's all it is. We were on our merry way up to Korea and we got off up the Celebes [Sulawesi] somewhere

33:30 and there was a problem. The B gun would elevate but it wouldn't go down. You could give it maximum down but it wouldn't go down, it would sit up there, and if you went the other way, it would go bang

against the stops. The captain called a meeting, I had a look at it that morning, the thing went on, I wasn't

34:00 in charge of that thing, there was another bloke in charge, he put the problem up, the electrical officer put it to the engineering officer the engineering officer put it to the skipper and the skipper called the meeting. Up on the deck outside B turret. He said, "We've got a problem, what am I going to do? Our next port of call is Hong Kong, my choices are if this thing can't be fixed we either go to Hong Kong

34:30 or I signal the depot in Singapore to get some help or we go to Singapore to get help or I signal Sydney, Australia, to get people sent up to fix this problem." I worked it out in my head that this problem was because the

35:00 transformer in the centre oil box had burnt out, we only had half of it left. Anyhow, before they made the final decision where the captain should take his ship, I said, "Excuse me sir,

35:30 I've got an opinion on this." He said, "What is it?" I said, "I think that everything checks alright up to the oil valve, the turret works properly, if you take it out of the control and just run it up and down manually, it's got to be the load on the sensored oil valve." I looked a that chief electrician and he looked at me and he said,

36:00 "Well that could be one." Then of course the ordnance artifice bloke piped up and said, "We can't do that because it would involve opening up the box with the sensored oil valve in it, we can't do that because it's not to be opened unless you are in a dust proof room." I looked at the skipper and I said, "Well,

36:30 how much dust have we got out here." We were out in the ocean, it was a beautiful sunny day. I said, "It's worth a chance, if that's the case and the dust worries us we can always go to Singapore where they have a dust proof room and fix it." So we opened up the oil box and took out the dud coil and dropped a new one in and it worked like a charm, no dust got into it. These

37:00 are the sort of things that took a day out of your time and just as well it did because we got fixed again. I don't say I am any brain on these things, I am just lucky I picked the fault.

You had a knack for problem solving?

That's what I was paid for. As I said before, you can't hold the electrical branch to task

37:30 over this because they were not trained. We were trained, they weren't. Now they are all trained, they could do the job.

That is a fair point and that is very much part of the transition and changes in technology that are taking place through these years, just to go back prior to leaving

38:00 **for Korea, I guess, first of all, what did you know about the war in Korea before you left?**

I knew that we had ships up there, men up there, I knew where it was, as a matter of fact I even volunteered to take my mate's place when he went up, my mate

38:30 Chamberlain. He was in the Bataan, and they went to Korea and I offered, there was a reason for it, I offered to take his place. We went before the departmental head in Watson before I left for Tobruk and he very smartly told me, "You are going to the Tobruk and you are going to the Bataan and that's it." So

39:00 Herb went to Korea in the Bataan and I went to the Tobruk. I knew all about what was going on up there, not babes in the woods or like that, it was just a question of getting up there.

I was just wondering what sort of lectures or preparations you got as ship's company before you got to go to?

I got issued with a gas mask,

39:30 literally, I got five injections and was issued with gas mask and away we went. I had returned my gas mask earlier on. They decided we shouldn't have them anymore but up there we needed them. None of this hooha they go through now where they have to take you to one side and let you cry on one another's shoulder and say they are sending you away from mummy.

40:00 We had blokes with us who went up because if they went to Korea they could get a war service loan to build a house and that's the reason they went with us. There was none of this crying, the only thing they worried about was that they left their wives behind.

What were the injections for?

40:30 The usual, cholera, typhoid, whatever, there was about four standard injections. It got every time you turned around they'd hit you with these, you got used to them.

Tape 7

00:33 **Where did you leave from Australia to go to Japan?**

Basically from Sydney. We were told off Port Lincoln that we were going. We went back to Melbourne, had a short refit there, scrape the bottom, that sort of thing. Then we went up to Sydney for ammunition and what have you, gas

01:00 mask, very important, and inoculations. From there we went to Darwin, to Hong Kong, to Sasebo in Japan, picked up the code books and we were on our way to Korea.

Sasebo was your Japanese port?

Yes.

So they were the ports you stopped at, did you

01:30 **get leave at any of these ports?**

Darwin, we were there for four hours and the gunnery officer said we'd do a line of sight test on the gunnery equipment and he was told, "Go to hell."

What about Hong Kong?

He said, "We'll do a line of sight test on the gunnery," and he was told, "Go to hell."

How long did you stay in Hong Kong?

About four hours. The reason that we were sent up in a hurry is that the

02:00 Bataan was due to go up and replace Warramunga. The Bataan had just had a boiler cleaned and they rebricked one of the boilers and while she was doing tests off Sydney heads, the boiler collapsed. The brick collapsed, she couldn't go she had to be redone. The Navy Office said we need a serviceable destroyer and guess what? Our old man

02:30 stuck his hand up and away we went.

You barely stopped in Hong Kong as well?

We went straight through.

Sasebo, when you got to Sasebo did you?

We were there for, the Warramunga were there, we went along side her and got the books off her, code books, that sort of thing,

03:00 they are peculiar to an area in peacetime. I think the next morning we were on our way.

Did you get off the ship in Sasebo?

Yes, later.

Not initially when you first went up to Korea?

No, I think the first day we were gone straight out. You see, everything was resting on this Bataan coming up and when she couldn't come we went up in her place and by that

03:30 time they were six weeks behind in what she should be doing. During the Korean War destroyers were always at a premium. They didn't have enough of them and aircraft carriers used to last about, light fleet carrier, about two weeks at sea and then they'd

04:00 have to come back because they needed more avgas [aviation gasoline] and avtur [aviation kerosene] and ammunition and of course most of them were Yank which meant they wanted to come back in any case. They would always be asking from the four escorts, "Can anyone do another fortnight at sea?" Everybody is standing back waiting for the other chap to put his hands up. It didn't work too well, the

04:30 Australians were mad, they'd put their hand up at the drop of a hat. One of the British ships, what was it, British destroyer, we relieved her in Korean waters and she had done eighty nine days on patrol and that's a long time for a destroyer under war time conditions.

05:00 We never ever beat that record and we didn't want to. That's the way it worked.

Can I just quickly ask about Sasebo, I just want to know what your first impressions of Japan were?

Japan is a lovely place. It's full of nice Japanese.

What did you think initially of when you first saw it?

Japan

05:30 is Japan. It's a very nice place, they've got a culture there that we can't even match, we can't even think about it. We are just, Japan, the country is honest. If you opened up your purse and you were in a bar in Japan, and you opened up your

06:00 purse, and you gave a Japanese bar attendant, sitting there lighting cigarettes for you and that sort of thing, and you gave her a fifty dollar note, and said, "Go down to the local pub or wherever and get me some change of that." Would you do it in Australia? You wouldn't, you wouldn't give anyone fifty dollars that you didn't know and get them to change that at the nearest

06:30 pub. But in Japan you do. You can give them anything, you drop your wallet in the street, and someone comes panting up behind you and gives you your wallet back. They are honest, and that's something as a country we are not honest.

You didn't stay very long in Sasebo, and went straight to Korea, what was the weather like when you got to Korea?

Same as it

07:00 was in Japan, only a few hours to go. We went up there in the summer time. Korea in the summertime is extremely hot. You get the wind coming off the land mass in Asia and it is extremely hot. Japan is hot. When the winter comes, it gets cold air off the land mass of Asia and its freezing.

07:30 **Obviously your uniform would not have changed when you got to Korea?**

What do you mean changed?

You left here in Winter then wouldn't you?

We were in overalls, the old days of fighting wars in uniforms, they went out with Nelson, we just wore overall dress and

08:00 whatever you could put on once the Winter came because it was extremely cold.

Did you stop in Korea or just patrol?

No, we never went ashore, No, we went ashore, there was an island there, just above the forty eight parallel, which was the shooting line, just above that there was an island there on the east coast.

08:30 We used to in there to give them water. They had everything but water on this island. We used to go in there and give them water. Some of us went ashore there just to have a look and float around. We fixed their radio for them once, it packed up.

I will ask you about that actually, but when you say "give them," who are you referring to?

The Americans. This particular island had two

09:00 Americans and fifty ROK [Republic of Korea] soldiers on it. The Americans – was an ensign US Marine Corps and a sergeant US Marine Corps and the ROKs were just soldiers of the Korean Republic.

What were your duties or what was your mission in the Korean water?

09:30 Kill the enemy. No, it was, we were there, we escorted carriers at one stage of the game, we were working the coast. Korea is rather a mountainous place and the railway runs down one side on the east side of Korea you've got the railway running down.

10:00 One of our jobs was to, there were four of us, four destroyers, and our job was to stop the trains coming down the east coast. The way you do this is to stooge up and down the east coast and when you see a train coming down you fire at him and bottle him up in one of these tunnels. Wherever there is mountains there are tunnels. Wherever there are tunnels and mountains there are big trestle bridges going

10:30 across, real wild west stuff, and what we used to do was bottle up the trains in the tunnel and you'd whistle up a yank carrier and he'd send in some aircraft, load it up with napalm and scoop the napalm into the holes and it got rather hot in there with the napalm burning and sometimes we'd get all conscientious and knock down the

11:00 bridge. Only one trouble, you'd knock down the bridge and as soon as you finished knocking it down the train would come whistling out of the tunnel and go over another bridge. They gave you choices. They actually built more than one bridge and they'd camouflaged the one they wanted to keep camouflaged and use. There was a beautiful bridge team out there and you'd think, "This is a beauty," and you'd go in there with war like intentions and blow that one out,

11:30 then the one beyond it was the one that would carry the train.

When you were firing to shore, how far were you?

Inside three miles. Destroyers, well, one of our destroyers on the coast was equipped with what they call

12:00 a two speed sweep mines, he used to trudge up and down the coast and we used to follow him. That was to, in the shallow water to keep the mines out of our way, because they'd sneak out and lay mines. If we hit one that was too bad, you'd get a good wash that night. This was the way, it was right in shore. If you weren't inshore

12:30 you couldn't get at these tunnels with any degree of accuracy and you had to be accurate. Sometimes, there wasn't an aircraft available so one British destroyer, we whistled him up and he got on one side of this little bit of a cut through and he's got the tunnel bottled up on that side and we went around on this side and

13:00 we shelled him from this side and it didn't matter which way he was going we were going to get him one way or another. And we did. This is the sort of thing that you do. You have to.

What were your targets onshore?

Mainly trains and we used to assist the army. They'd want backup. We'd go and stand

13:30 in there and as a matter of fact we had an American one day. We picked one American up out of the pond, his name was Fant, and we had him on board, we couldn't get him back to his carrier, he picked up a bit of flack coming over the coast and went down in the sea and we had him on board and they were dong a bombardment

14:00 against trucks and tanks that had mustered inland. Up over the hill. There was a yank scooting around in one of these little spotter planes. We put our Lieutenant Fant on to him. After they'd gone through all the rubbish about hearing the good big 'A', American voice again, I said to these limeys [British], "I

14:30 thought the gunnery was going to shoot the plane down." He didn't like being called a 'limey'. They sort of, we fired, to let this aircraft see what we were shooting at. He was going to direct us and he was stooging around up there and he said, "I can't see any shells, give us a

15:00 cluster." He wanted willy peter, which is white phosphorus, nasty stuff and we didn't have any, it's an American shell. He said, "Let's have some willy peter," and I said, "We haven't got any willy peter." He said, "Give us a good solid burst." What he was looking for, he was looking around the edges of the target and we were putting them right in the target area. He said, "I see them I see them, that's what we call putting them in the bucket." Some stupid phrase.

15:30 That's the sort of work we did. We hit a cow one night.

How can you see that from three miles out?

This cow was up on a peninsula and someone up on the bridge saw it moving around and he called from star shells so he could see what it was. This was about one o'clock in the morning and he fired these couple of star shells

16:00 and one of them was coming down. As it was coming down you could see this cow grazing on this thing and I reckon this star shell must've hit it on the backside because it took off like a rocket. Star shells are nasty things, phosphorus and magnesium and stuff like that. That's what buggered Tobruk up, she got hit by a star shell and it burnt right through her.

Up until now

16:30 **you had really just done a lot of work on the ship and not been, it was peace time, this is the first time you've actually gone into a war zone, so to speak, can you recall the first time that you saw action or a part of action?**

That was it, that's what we were doing.

You can't recall the first time?

Not really, as I said, I

17:00 was working on this fly plane. We were two decks below and the only time I went up top was if for some reason my duty called me up top. One it was too hot, and the other it was too cold. I was quite happy to stay down where I was. That's not strictly true, my station was down on this wretched computer

17:30 and a lot of blokes their stations were below. We'd worked on this computer so long and so intensely that the mess men came up one morning and said, "Do you blokes want breakfast?" and I looked at him quite earnestly and said, "What day is it?" I didn't know. I didn't know what day it was, I knew it

18:00 was morning because he asked me about breakfast. It could've been Saturday or Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, or pancake Thursday, I didn't know what day it was.

Can you recall the Anzac being fired on?

Yes, she was fired upon by a nasty big gun so we skedaddled out of there and it was only once this happened, skedaddled out of there and

18:30 got another ship and we went back in and it was a gun mounted on a railway track. He came out to have another go at us and our mate got him so that fixed that up. The war at sea is a funny. I mean when you go in and you go up a river or something, some of the frigates they went up

19:00 river. One of them, Murchison, she went in and she had fun and games up this river and she pulled out and she never had a scratch on her and a Yank went up and relieved her, same class of ship, and this Korean gun emplacement blew hell out of it, they never tackled the Australian ship, it's just the luck of the game.

19:30 **You can, being out there at sea, you can actually be perceived as a sitting duck, were there any times when you started to get really concerned about your safety or your welfare?**

No. What's the use in getting concerned about it, if you are going to die, you are going to die, we never worried about it, I never worried about it.

You said one of the other roles you had out there was escorting a carrier,

20:00 **talk me through escorting a carrier?**

Carriers are very vulnerable, low fleet carrier with petrol ribbon engines, they are carrying something like eighty thousand gallons of high octane gasoline. They carry about four thousand tonne of

20:30 pitch black oil that the destroyers burn and they burn. They carrier a couple thousand tonne of dieseline and if they get hit they go up. The carriers are escorted and it's nothing short of monotony.

How many would you escort at once?

Only one, there were four destroyers,

21:00 one carrier. Away you go, if there is another carrier there are four more destroyers. What you are doing is keeping an anti-submarine guard so that she can't get hit by a torpedo and they've just got to be escorted. That's why there is a shortage of destroyers because they were all taken up escorting these great lumbering Yanks in the ocean, but it

21:30 has to be done.

You've described it as quite monotonous, yet you are still utilising the radar systems?

It is. An aircraft carrier, when it flies off at dawn, just before dawn they fly off, you have to turn into the wind and you clank along at thirty knots or whatever it is,

22:00 then you turn and you clank along in the other direction and if there is anything up there you recover that. Then you do it again at lunchtime, you do it again at three o'clock in the afternoon, you do it again just before dusk and you recover them when you can hardly see. You would cover the aircraft, this is backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. It's not

22:30 real war, you are escorting a carrier, half the time you are out of sight of land. You know it is over there somewhere but you are not in it, you are clanking along with an aircraft carrier. People don't like that, they'd rather be where they can see something happening. All the fun of the fair you know, you have to be in it.

23:00 That's why they didn't like aircraft carrier work very much but it had to be done, and you'd take your turn, you'd do your aircraft carrier escorting. One thing good about aircraft carriers is that the Yank carriers they used to make ice cream for their crew. When they'd got rid of their noon flight or morning flight they all had helicopters

23:30 and around would come the crazy mixed up bird and they hover over your stern and they'd drop the tune of ice cream and drop the morning papers which they printed on board, all manner of good things. You never got that off the British. Off the British you were lucky to get the time of day off them. That was the difference. It was good to get ice cream, sometimes they even had fresh meat and you could get that too,

24:00 food, lollies, chocolates, everything. The tankers, they used to supply us, we used to go along side them to fuel, you are talking, a destroyer would fuel every second or third day on the coast. You still had to maintain all your minimum amounts and just before dawn you'd run in along side a tanker and fill up

24:30 and of course they always had the canteen open and one day I saw an American trying to buy cigarettes at his own canteen and he was told that, "The canteen was open for them Australians. Go off, it will be open later for you, for these blokes off the destroyer." That's the sort of, the way the Yanks work it. The British when we fuelled off their tankers, we did it underway at sea.

25:00 The Yanks would pull up and you'd tie up along side of them and that's when you could get all the good things, overalls, everything they had on board, wonderful. That's the difference between the two, if ever they lose a supply ship it won't be a British one, she's underway and she's got an escort whereas the

Yanks just pull up and you tie along side of them.

You noted the daily

25:30 **paper they publishing on board some of the carriers, what news were the publications carrying?**

They carried news from the United States, all the football scores, you name it, they carried it. They would, if we were with them, and it happened to be Monday, they would give

26:00 you all the scores from the AFL [Australian Football League], who won what, they didn't know, they would get it off the radio, if there was an Australian with them, so they would put the Australian football scores in or the cricket or whatever, half of them didn't even know what the cricket was all about. There might be a Dutchmen with you, they'd put something in the Dutchmen, the Canadian, they'd put something in for the Canadian, there might be a Yank with you and they'd put something in for me. By and large it was an American paper,

26:30 printed by Americans for Americans, they just put something in for us, probably just give us an extra bit of ice cream to shut us up. They were very fair about this. There would always be something for the other bloke.

Apart from football, that's great you could get your sports scores, but what about the propaganda that was in the publication?

Best place for that was

27:00 Hong Kong. Have you ever been to Hong Kong? If you went down to the ferry going across to Kowloon in Hong Kong, the old star ferry, on one side, the left hand side, you could get the Chinese newspaper telling you how the Chinese and the other people in Korea were knocking

27:30 the British about and the Americans, and on this side of the Hong Kong ferry landing, you could get the other newspaper telling you how the Americans and British were knocking the Chinese out. So don't worry about the American stuff, you could buy it in the streets of Hong Kong.

What did you believe was happening?

I don't think any of us thought too deeply about it.

28:00 That was an era where you did as you were told, the great television thing hadn't hit us. We had no television and it wasn't until television actually got into war that you started to get all these funny little queries. People standing up in the middle of the battlefield

28:30 saying, "This is all wrong, we should strike." That didn't happen.

But you did have radio?

We did have radio, we couldn't get much, we were lucky to be the bookies, his odds. All we could get was Radio Australia, and we didn't get much out of them, it was a bit of dead loss really.

What did you know about what was happening in Korea on land?

29:00 We used to get a fair amount of news, you'd get it off the army blokes, you'd get it off the air force blokes. We were back in Japan roughly every fortnight and you'd be mixing with army fellows, you'd be mixing with air force blokes, talking amongst yourselves, you probably knew more than the newspapers did. It was no great worry what was going on.

29:30 **Just going back to hitting the targets on shore, what was the procedure or lining a target up?**

What you mean gunnery? Well, if you could see it then you could fire at it and you could do your own adjustments

30:00 and kill the target. It was as easy as that. What it did in those days, you didn't sort of look at the target with your instruments and say, "That is the target, I am going to kill that target." What you did, a bit up the coast would be a lighthouse, you'd look at the lighthouse and you'd say,

30:30 "I am laying on that lighthouse," now the target is down here and you'd get the charts out and there's the target there and you would work out the throw off, you are looking that way and your guns are here and you wanted that much throw off and that's what you laid on. Then, you could go into a, the navy had a bombardment routine which is very deadly.

31:00 It's one of these things, up two hundred, down four hundred, up four hundred, down two hundred, up four hundred, and at the same time you are going, left one, right two, left two, right one, so you are looking at a box and if your target is in that box it's gone. All the time you are laying on lighthouse, and once you are laying on the lighthouse this means that

31:30 your ship can go up and turn round and come back again and you are still laying on the lighthouse and you are bombarding that target.

So this is a target that you can see?

That's the one you can see.

What would you do for a target you cannot see?

A target you cannot see you merely whistle up a sighter aircraft and you say, "I am going to bombard a target in land, can you see it?" He would say,

32:00 "Yes, I can see it." What you do is find your lighthouse, you chain onto the lighthouse, this is your point of aim, then you lay off up and over and the bloke in the aircraft says, "Halt, you want to come left two hundred, up one hundred," and you fire around in there and he will say, "Give me two or three more," so you

32:30 fire two or three more and he'll say, "That's it, pour it in," and you pour it in, you are on target, you have it and you can't see it.

What about targets that were missed or mistaken?

You say sorry, I don't know. Missed or mistaken.

I am sure there would have been occasions where you missed targets?

Of course.

What about targets that

33:00 **were mistaken were actually, it was incorrect information?**

There was nothing you could do about it, that was just something that happens. You can procrastinate and say, "We shouldn't have done that." But it's done. The sooner you forget about it the better.

33:30 We went in onto a beach once, on the west coast of Korea and we did a bombardment there and we were walking shells up the beach and they thought, it was one of these left two, right one, bang, bang, bang, up the beach you go and we actually saw this happen, that they weren't troops, they were people

34:00 on the beach, too late, they were dead. These ships had, considering when, it was 1950, over fifty years ago, they had a marvellous fighter control system. There was a, to enter the port of Sasebo you had to do a high angle shoot, everybody did a high angle

34:30 shoot. The good ship, Anzac, and the good ship, Tobruk, we went into Sasebo and the Yanks had a little station up on the headland and they used to fly these drone aircraft and they were twelve foot wing span and going in they used to, an aircraft

35:00 carrier then the destroyers, and we were the tail end Charlie in the destroyer rank, first time. This aircraft, twelve foot wing span, flew right down the side of the aircraft carrier and they flung up everything but the soup bowls at him. Then he went down to pass three destroyers and they flung the soup bowls at him and he came to us and we only had one gun working,

35:30 one turret, the other one unfortunately wasn't feeling too good so we fired two rounds out of this turret and we blew this thing clean out of the sky. The Yanks said, "That can't happen, you can't do that, no one shoots down these targets." So they put another one up for us, two rounds, it went, they put another up, two rounds, it was gone. They said, "Go

36:00 into Sasebo," so we got into Sasebo and all these Yanks come over and they were marvelling, "What have you go in there, what have you got in there that can do this." Tobruk was the same. We were the only two ships that didn't have to do a high angle shoot going into Sasebo.

Can you explain what a high angle shoot is?

A high angle shoot, a low angle shoot is against a surface target, a high angle shoot is against an aircraft. That's all.

36:30 **Why was it necessary to do one to go into Sasebo?**

It was the done thing to improve your gunnery, you do a high angle shoot, or a low angle shoot. Some of the people they wouldn't fire their guns unless they had to, they just didn't care. They wouldn't worry if it was high angle or low angle they just fired when they had to.

37:00 Going in and out of this port you had to do this shoot, going in and coming out and we were the only two ships that never did a high angle shoot in Sasebo harbour, great to be like that. There was an American admiral came over and had a look at our system in the Anzac and he said, "I've never seen anything like it." I said, "Here we go, a stinking old destroyer, not brand new."

37:30 He said, "Look what you can do with it." He honestly said, "I couldn't do that with an American system because they couldn't maintain it." That was it.

That's an interesting point that the skill base wasn't there.

The Yankees are not good maintainers of any system. They are like what

38:00 they had with the old torpedo men before the formed the real electrical branch. They had a box of spears, spear valves and things like that, if something broke down you put all the spear valves into it and if that didn't fix it you got down on your knees and prayed because you'd reached your limit.

You said you were quite regularly stopping in Sasebo, what was the?

Alternate, we used to stop in Sasebo

38:30 and then we would go to Korea and then we would come back to Kure. Sasebo was American, Kure was British. Then we'd leave Kure and go back to the queer place and come back to Sasebo and that's what we did, alternatively, I think the one thing it did was keep the destroyers spread out, Sasebo had so much

39:00 accommodation for destroyers, Kure had so much accommodation for destroyers so you had to alternate them. We didn't mind as long as we got ashore, Sasebo was much better. The British don't look after their people like the Americans do.

In what way?

In what way, the British took an area in

39:30 Kure and they sort of said, "Well this is Kure," and just to give it a number, "There is one mile by one mile area, this is it, you can't go outside of that, a square mile." That's not real of course, that's to give you an idea, in a Yankee place they'd take a five mile by five mile strip and they'd clean it all up,

40:00 they'd license all the girls in the queer houses and all the bars were licensed and we had regular medical checks all the way round and that would be the American recreation area. The British one was really too small and they didn't want to make it any bigger. That's a reason why we used to like going back to the American base.

So the Americans would have girls on standby for

40:30 **the – ?**

No, I don't think there was any need to have girls on standby, not in Japan. There were tons up there.

How did they respond to western men?

It was a living. I mean, let's face it, Japan is one of those countries where the, you go

41:00 into a beer hall or restaurant or something like that and you sit down and have a glass of beer and there was always a girl at the end of the table and her function in life was to pour the beer for you, there might be more than one in the party, one girl to do the work, and she'd pour the beer for you and she'd light the cigarettes,

41:30 various, if you wanted some peanuts, she'd get, the peanuts were free, she'd produce the peanuts and put them in the dishes, that sort of thing, this was their hospitality really.

Tape 8

00:31 **Jack, I was just asking you about going ashore and living in the hole in the ground, can you tell us why that was?**

Well it's a very simple thing, the Americans on this small island and don't ask me what the name of it was, I don't know, they had radio transmitter and it packed up on them and we loaned them ours and they couldn't work it.

01:00 We had a bit of a schedule and we went ashore and we actually looked after it for them, it needed a certain amount of maintenance and stuff like this. There was a US sergeant there who wanted my pistol and I wouldn't give it to him, but that's another story. He had never seen a .38 calibre pistol

01:30 and thought it was an ideal lady's gun, but it wasn't, it was mine and I had to return it. That's the basic story there.

Living in this hole in the ground was?

It's alright for a night or two but it gets a bit lousy after a while. It was just an incident really, I'd much rather be on board where the food came cooked properly,

02:00 so anyway, that's the story there.

Throughout these operations in Korea, do you think Anzac while you were aboard then, was a pretty happy ship?

Yes, it was, it was a good ship, we had a good captain and had a good executive officer. This is what makes a ship. If you've got a bad captain and a

02:30 bad executive officer then it is an unhappy ship. I could quote one of the carriers, we had a bad set of circumstances and it was an unhappy ship until we got rid of the bad set of circumstances and then it was a happy ship.

What made the Anzac, you mentioned the skipper was good on the Anzac, why?

He was, Plunkett Cole was our

03:00 skipper when we commissioned and he was with us and after him we got another chap who was a better one. We had a good electrical officer in the department, and he would listen to any of the men's complaints and things like this and God knows you get enough of them. Blokes think they should be sent home because their children have got rotten toes or something and

03:30 these men are invaluable to a ship's company because they are prepared to listen, prepared to do something. Whereas you get some of the officers are, they just couldn't care less. I quote one bloke who said in Watson, "A man is only required at the laying of the keel, not the launching," and all that bloke wanted was to go home to

04:00 see his baby born and he had the leave and he wasn't going, he was staying. This is the sort of thing. It's bad, bad for morale, it's bad all round. It all rubs off, you get some bloke, it happens to some bloke, the one I just quoted, it happens to them, they tell their mate, their mate tells someone else. That bloke the skipper

04:30 whoever he might be will live with that for the rest of his time because he had the hide to say that to a man.

Did you come across any incidences of homosexuality on the Anzac, or at any time in the navy?

Yes, it existed. We did have, there was a little

05:00 bit of, it did happen on the Anzac, homosexuals, it didn't worry me, it had nothing to do with me. It did happen but a lot of that in the navy as I saw it is kept very much below board. It's not someone flaunting around the mess deck saying,

05:30 "Anyone want me?" or that sort of thing. It's definitely kept between people, between consenting adults sort of thing. If it does come out well it's usually dealt with pretty severely and the men are sort of parted and they send them in opposite directions. Whether they keep them in the navy is another thing

06:00 but they usually get rid of them from where they are. I don't think there is a captain in the service, in the navy, who would want to have queer men on board his ship at war because if there is going to be any disruptions to the daily operation of the ship he doesn't want it. How they get on now I don't know because they have a double

06:30 edge problem now with man versus man and woman versus woman and man and woman versus one another, a hell of a situation to be in but they seem to be managing I've heard various reports.

On the Anzac there was somebody known to be a homosexual but he was left alone?

I knew there were two blokes in our mess,

07:00 one of them was a definite homosexual and I know the other chap used to flog him unmercifully, a cigarette put in his face and lit and that sort of thing. All up, I never saw one instance where they were actually cuddling one another or worse. They were

07:30 just on board and everybody knew what they were and as long as they kept it out of the mess we didn't care.

It is interesting because I have talked to sailors from World War II times and their stories are of other sailors dobbing homosexuals in, so that wasn't the case on the Anzac?

No, as I say we had this one case I am thinking of now, they were definitely a

08:00 homosexual pair, the chap who relieved our electrical officer, another electrical officer, he was a homosexual and I know that because he was also a radar mechanic. He was one of our mob. I was with him in the Barrier Reef, he was in the Swan. We used to go ashore

08:30 together and drink beer, four of us, four radio mechanics in the flotilla but he never tried to molest me or any of my mates. He definitely was a homosexual, so on that basis he could stay on. He got to be an officer and he was in the Anzac in Korea and he was caught. He approached a

09:00 sailor and that was the end of him, out he went, officer or not, he was gone. That didn't concern me, I

know that up in the Northern Territory, Coonawarra, they had a case up there, the bloke that I relieved, he had become involved in a homosexual

09:30 case, not him, he was just involved in it because he was the senior chief on the station but he stuck his neck out and he got it chopped. He was good too, one was one of our blokes and one was a telegraphist and they were doing this sort of thing and he got involved in that and I think it was the sorriest day he ever did in the navy because he

10:00 got all mixed up and it backfired on him in the end. In the end he said to me, "They can go to buggery." All up, I don't think, I've never had any trouble with homosexuals in the navy. I don't know what they do now, I think it's worse now than it used to be.

10:30 Definitely nothing as far as I am concerned.

On board the Anzac, you were going into a war zone, I was just wondering were there any superstitions or anybody who was superstitious on board?

I don't think so, we were all pretty level headed blokes. I don't think anybody was worried about the big white tiger going to get them or anything like that.

11:00 No, I don't think so. If they were worried, they kept it to themselves and that's all you ask for.

You have mentioned a little bit about the weather, but one of the well known things about the Korean was the winter of '50 '51, did you get any ice on deck

11:30 **or any kind of weather that affected what you were doing?**

It didn't affect, when you get ice falling on deck, you've got to keep it clean. You've got to get rid of the ice, if you don't you start to lose the fact that you are stable in the water, you are starting to leave over and keep going. Water and ice are a terrible thing on board ships.

12:00 Aircraft carriers, if they get water in the hanger a depth of water three or four inches, they'll roll over, it's as simply as that. You have to watch water at sea and ice is an insidious thing, it builds up on your super structure. You might be carrying ten tons of ice up the mast and you've got to get

12:30 up there and either knock it off with a hammer or take a steam hose up and hose it off. Similarly on the decks. You've got to keep things like turrets have got to be kept moving otherwise the oil in the trunions will seize up. You've got to, radar aerials have to be kept turning, especially if they have

13:00 tropical oil in them which all ours had. There is a whole list of things that have to be done to keep everything going properly. Ice is one of the worst things you can get. I am getting cold already talking about ice. I hate ice. My wife, years

13:30 ago, wanted to take the children to the snow and I said, "I will go with you over near the snowfields and I will stay in the motel and you can take the kids to the snow, you are not getting me out there." I still wouldn't go up there.

You were telling Louise [interviewer] earlier that you were based in Japan and making trips to Korea from a couple of different bases in Japan. I was also wondering

14:00 **during that three months did you encounter any other bad weather like hurricanes or typhoons?**

We didn't, but other ships did. Bad weather at sea is terrible. One of the worst storms I ever had at sea was strangely enough down in the lower Tasman. I was down there in the Vengeance and

14:30 the Bataan was with us and she was chuffing along through the water and she wanted storm oil so she could, there was so much wave action that she wanted storm oil which would flatten the waves.

15:00 She was in the middle of it and we gave her storm oil and she was a hell of mess with boats smashed and things like that. She was in a worse mess with the storm oil on her, that's terrible stuff, imagine a ship that's been painted in oil that's what she looked like. I know that Sydney when she was up there she got caught in a

15:30 typhoon whatever you call it and she had a lot of trouble with losing aircraft off the flight deck and waves as big as mountains.

The Anzac was in Japan not that long after World War

16:00 **II, I am just wondering how the rest of your ship's company reacted to the Japanese hot on the tail of World War II?**

Let me just transfer that question in time. When I was on the Vengeance which was after the Anzac, we were told to go to Japan and bring home

16:30 the elements of number 77 Squadron. This was 1954, only a couple of years on, and on board we had a blacksmith. Chief blacksmith, Kenny Black, and as soon as Kenny heard this he put in a request to see

the skipper and when he got up to see the old man, the captain said to him, “Now Blackie, what’s the problem?” He said, “Sir we are going to Japan.

17:00 As you are well aware I did three years as a guest of the Japanese government on the Burma railway. I fell that if I got to Japan the first little yellow so and so I saw I would pick him up and wring his scrawny neck.” Blackie was the sort of bloke who could do it, he was built like a little brick chicken house. The old man said to him, “Blackie, the war has

17:30 been over a long time and I think that these people you are talking about on the Burma railway, they don’t exist anymore, so I think you should come up with us and further your education.” Away we go to Japan and Blackie is mumbling and we got up to the air force base on the inland sea and into Kure and Blackie

18:00 wouldn’t come ashore. No way would he come ashore. Then, one day, I think the thirst got the better of him, so he accepted the offer of the chief’s mess, “Come ashore and if necessary we will sit on you, you won’t kill anyone or anything like that.” He said, “Yes, I will,” and we said, “No, we will bring you back safely.” We brought him back that night and all Blackie could say was, “These are not the people that I knew on the Burma railway,

18:30 they are a different race, I love it here.” Couldn’t get him on board after that. He was always ashore, that was the sort of thing that happened. That was only nine years after the war was over, a man who really went through the grinder. As a matter of fact to get off the Perth, which was his ship, he actually got up into the cockpit of the sea plane crane, cast off

19:00 the lashings on the copper punt and floated off when the ship sank under him, the reason being he couldn’t swim. That’s the sort of bloke, no, he said, “I can’t find these Japanese that used to beat Christ out of me on the Burma railway.” I don’t remember anyone that was

19:30 running around saying, “We sort of can’t go along with this because we fought them and now here it is only two or three years later and they are our best friends.” I think we were damn glad to have them there, at least you could get decent feed, you got lots of presents to come home with, and as far as dockyard

20:00 facilities were concerned they could make anything, fantastic tradesman. They could dock a ship while we were thinking of it. I mean that. They’d put a ship in dry dock and bring it out the next morning painted and everything, back in the water again and it’s away. Our dockies,

20:30 you put the ship in dry dock and it might be there a month before anyone looks at it. Does that answer your question?

It does and it’s very interesting to hear about it. That’s probably quite a good segue then to move on and talk about your time on the Vengeance, but before then you

21:00 **first of all left the Anzac?**

I left the Anzac and went to a thing called Platypus in Sydney Harbour. She was an old 1916 ship I think, submarine tender and she was the living in ship for the reserve fleet in Sydney Harbour. The chief’s mess in it, I could

21:30 stand up and put my hand flat on the ceiling, that’s how cramped she was. I was the only one living in the chief’s mess, Watsons Bay, not far from that restaurant, Doyle’s. I went to this thing and I quickly realised, I was going to relieve a

22:00 chap who was paying off but he didn’t look like going and I realised very quickly that this ship was a jumping off place for Manus Island. I didn’t particularly want to do a year on Manus Island so I started to work on how I could get

22:30 off the Platypus. I succeeded and the thing was I had to go to sea and I contacted friends I had in navy office and they sent me to the Vengeance. Of course, she was an aircraft carrier.

Where did you join the Vengeance?

23:00 I joined the Vengeance when she got back to Australia, ‘52, ‘53, ‘53 I think. You will find some discrepancies in there because I think the girl got them wrong

23:30 at the other end. I joined Vengeance because they were flying then and we were supposed to go to Korea. One thing led to another and the navy decided the Vengeance couldn’t go to Korea because her gunnery system was too old. They kept us in Australia and the aircraft we

24:00 worked up went with the Sydney to Korea. Of course we couldn’t go so they sent the Sydney and all our aircraft went with her. We did a massive job of working things up properly and missed all the glory. Vengeance went ‘54 we did the royal tour

24:30 of Australia, the Queen and her consort.

What about, you did start to tell us about going to Japan to get the remnants of?

That was later that same year. We did the royal tour for a start, that was from, we left Sydney in January, New Years

25:00 Day and we went to Jervis Bay and picked up our aircraft, we went to New Zealand and picked up the Queen of England off the New Zealand Navy then we came back to Sydney and that was the start of the royal tour. We stooged around Tasmania, Victoria, our aircraft flew over Adelaide, then we went to, we were four hundred miles at sea, down that way,

25:30 we did that bit and we went from there directly to Western Australia. We sailed from Western Australia on April Fool's Day out to Copus Island [?] and we gave the Bataan a God almighty thump in the side when she got in our way. We relinquished the escort

26:00 and the Queen went off to Trincomalee in Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and we went Darwin up around the islands and back to Jervis Bay and into Sydney. I think we got in on about the first or second week in May. It was quite a long cruise.

Just to clarify, the Queen actually came on board?

No, she broke the skipper's heart.

26:30 We had our commanding officer was the senior captain in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy], and his name was Burrell, Henry Burrell. His wife had the Miker[?] concessions if I remember correctly in Australia. She was Mrs Miker [?]. She was a rich lady. Old Henry I think was a bit of an old fool.

27:00 It was often said that she kept the dog at home and sent Henry to sea. But I don't know, I've got no reason to believe that. Anyhow, Henry, he went to, his idea was to have the Queen on board and he had never been decorated. It's unusual for a

27:30 very senior officer to be undecorated after World War II. He's the only officer I ever served with who wasn't decorated. Anyhow, Henry decided that he'd have the Queen of England on board, she'd give him the touch of the sword and all this sort of stuff. He made arrangements for her to come on board as we went from Fremantle out to Copus Island. He had a door taken off, water

28:00 tight door, it was all done in teak around the edge and the ship's thing, the badge, it was beautifully done. The Queen was going to come up in the lattice base and go down the ladder into the ward room flat and she was in the ward room, all very tastefully done. There was only one trouble, we were a couple of days out of Fremantle and we ran into a bit of a blow and a

28:30 wave came down the hole and flooded the ward room. Of course, the door couldn't be shut because they had taken it off and hadn't put it back. The Queen didn't come on board, the weather it was too rough. He was really frustrated the fact that he could get the Queen of England on board. He showed it, and because he showed it his commander showed it, the master of arms showed it, and we suffered it, but

29:00 that's beside the point, we were only sailors.

It wasn't a happy ship at that time?

It wasn't a happy ship. Not with old Henry and his royal passions. We went out to Copus and as I said we came back Darwin, round the top to New Guinea and down to Sydney. Then we had a refit

29:30 and then we did the tours, the Brisbane exhibition, Sydney for the show, Brisbane for the exhibition in August and so on. Then we were up in Queensland, Brisbane for the exhibition, and all of a sudden out it came we were going to Japan to bring home the 77 Squadron, which we did. Five weeks, very good trip. Gave the air force a

30:00 thrill, fed them lots of sick bay alcohol and lemon juice.

Where did you go to pick them up?

The air force?

The 77 squadron?

They were based at Iwakuni, on the inland sea, about twenty five mile from Kure which is also on the inland sea, they were only twenty five mile up the road. We had to go up there and they had some barges and they brought these aircraft out on

30:30 barges and the idea was we were going to go up there and work through the night to load the aircraft and when we got there they all knocked off for the weekend, because we were a day early, we ran before a typhoon and we were one day early getting in. We sort of, we stopped there over night at Iwakuni,

31:00 the next day we loaded their rotten aircraft and took them through to Kure and they brought all the wings on crates, hundreds of tons of them, I think they brought all them down and loaded them on board.

These aircraft were dissembled?

They had taken the wings off, they were meteors. Our sea plane crane couldn't go out far enough to lift the whole aircraft with wings. It would've

31:30 scraped on the ship's side. They took the wings off just leaving the stub wings and the engines and they took that out. We loaded them on board and we got all engines in crates and up to Kure and we loaded three hundred men in Kure before we left, all air force, we brought them back with us. We had a great time.

32:00 Air force, they had a lecture before they left Iwakuni and they were told that they should never expect any grog upon board a warship, no beer or nothing, that was just about our norm. We got them on board and the old man had told us he would give us a bottle of beer per man, every night, while the air force were

32:30 on board. Thirteen days back to Australia, thirteen nights with grog. The system we had I used to get about six when there was a beer issue. We got the air force and we talked them in and said, "Bring your beer in here and we'll have a community party." When we had had that, the sickbay chief went down to the bay and came back with his bottle of alcohol and lemon juice.

33:00 That finished the air force off every night. As their warrant officer said when he gave his farewell speech in the mess he said, "We were told that you blokes run a dry ship, I've never drunk so much grog in all my life." So that was how we brought home 77 Squadron.

So there was a fair amount of fraternisation between

33:30 **air force and navy?**

Yes, we had in our mess, we had about eight or ten air force staff sergeants or warrant officers and the padre, Roman Catholic padre, we had him in the mess too. I didn't know who he was, I thought he was another warrant officer, I asked him one day, I said,

34:00 "You seem to come up here in the mornings and we lose you after tea at night, you don't hang around, are you a staff sergeant or something?" They are just in khakis. He said, "No, I'm the Roman Catholic padre," and I said, "We've got one of them down, don't you fraternise with him?" He said, "That hypocrite."

34:30 They didn't get on apparently.

He wasn't a drinker?

Yes, he was a drinker, but our padre was terrible, he used to get drunk every night, but that's his business. So that's the saga of the Vengeance.

Just to clarify what your duties were during this time,

35:00 **was it still the same?**

I was in charge of all radios and all radars on board Vengeance, except the stuff fitted to aircraft, they had their own mechanics. That's normal, because when you discharge your squadrons to base ashore the mechanics go with them and they are special mechanics, not ship's mechanics. We just got rid of them. There is enough gear

35:30 on board a carrier to look after without having to worry about the aircraft.

I was going to ask how being on board a carrier, it is a different class from the other ships you had been drafted to, was it much different to you?

No. You are looking after radios and radar, some of the radars are the same, some of the radios are the same. We had more of them

36:00 though, I mean, like, UHF [ultra high frequency] equipment to talk to aircraft, that was all ours. Receive from aircraft, that was all ours, we had about sixteen sets of talk to aircraft. Normally on a destroyer you might have two, but with an aircraft carrier you have about sixteen. Then you have other equipments

36:30 talk to aircraft, four channels pre plumed[?] we had about eight of them, you didn't use them that much but we had them and they had to work. That was the thing, we had all sorts of radars and bits and pieces and you had to have when you were carrying aircraft.

Just to go back to that story of 77 Squadron, I am just

37:00 **wondering given that you got time to talk with them over a beer did they tell you about what their operations had been?**

No, I don't think anyone was really interested. We were servicemen together, we talked the same thing.

But they had been deployed to Korea?

They had been to Korea, yes, well some of them had,

37:30 because some of them had been sent home. No, we never got round to, I think we were too interested in drinking the beer.

Was there any gambling?

No, very little gambling goes on onboard a warship. There is small gambling, you might decide to

38:00 play mah-jong and keep the score for points sort of thing. It's real, you might decide to play something else, mah-jong is the greatest one but the onboard carriers, strangely enough, on board both carriers there was a pipe used to come through every

38:30 night about six o'clock and it used to say, "Ironing left may be collected at the parachute packing room." That was the two-up game starting, but I never knew that until someone told me. One, because I don't play two-up, and two I wasn't interested. I thought it was some bloke running

39:00 an ironing firm, ironing shirts and things like this. But no, he was running two-up school.

It was a fairly obscure message.

Yes, it was, because the parachute packing room is about a hundred foot long with a table down the middle and this is where they pack parachutes. Parachutes draped out on this table and roll it all up and do what they do with

39:30 parachutes but it's got to have a long skinny room and that's where he used to run his two up in there.

But you never played?

No, I played the pokies a bit but I don't, I think the number of bets I've had on a horse you could write down on two or three bits of paper, never won anything.

40:00 I just don't, I am not worried about horses and this and that.

Tape 9

00:31 **How did your time on the Vengeance wind up?**

I did a couple of years on the Vengeance, or near enough, '52, '53, '54, then I went ashore to Kuttabul. Kuttabul was a sort of interim place, Kuttabul it is

01:00 the quarters associated with Garden Island, the dockyard and we had a little place on the dockyard, in the dockyard which it was a radar unit, you gave assistance to ships if they needed it, that sort of thing. At that time we were testing a fancy little

01:30 radio set which had been fitted to all ships and you had to go out and do trials on these things, very simple trials, but you still had to do it, part of the job. Basically, we did all these and I went down to Singapore once,

02:00 we were responsible for looking at ships, look at their defect list, before they got to the dockyard and determined what needed to be done and what didn't need to be done. Of course, some of the ships, the defects were so large you had to go out and find them and come back with them, that's why I went to Singapore once.

02:30 The rest of it, with these fancy wireless sets they were doing, Corvettes were being fitted, they still had Corvettes in those days, not many, but they still had a few. They wouldn't send the whole team, that would just send the chief out and you'd do it, the pattern was completely circular. There were ships being brought forward out of commission and coming

03:00 forward to be in commission. We had to do all the trials on them to accept them for the navy. Ships mechanic, this was the new system, ship's mechanic did not accept the ship, we accepted the ship and gave it to the ship's mechanic and officers and all that. I was gaily doing this one day and all of a sudden I found myself on the Sydney,

03:30 it was just something that happened. I was due to go to sea and the computer caught up with me. I thought that I didn't have to go to sea but the computer said I had to go to sea, this is the manning computer. So I did and I ended up on the Sydney which was, the Kuttabul was just another stop.

04:00 **Did you mind going out to sea again on the Sydney?**

No.

What were you doing out at sea?

Same thing, look after an aircraft carrier, same thing I did on the Vengeance. The Sydney at that time, I think she was just about finished. Sydney as you probably know, she went,

04:30 she was decommissioned virtually as a carrier and they kept her as a training ship. Then all of a sudden they put in her in, just after I left the navy, and go her refitted as a troop ship. She was going up to Vietnam and now she had all sorts of funny boats fitted to her and she could take soldiers up and land them in Saigon and that sort of stuff.

05:00 This was all on the drawing board about the time I left her. We sort of got rid of, like all the aircraft they were all gone, we went up around the top and did some trials up there and also we did

05:30 a fleet exercise, I don't know why they sent Sydney, I think we were classified as a helicopter landing ship except the navy didn't have many helicopters at the time. We went up there, we were a helicopter landing ship and we participated in this exercise and all that sort of rubbish.

What was the exercise?

It was SEATO exercises, the South East Asian Treaty

06:00 Organization where everybody gets together. You have Americans, Filipinos, Singapore and India and you name it, they are all there, Australia, Yanks, and you participate in this exercise and its so that if the balloon goes up and we all have to go and fight a common enemy at least we know what the other bloke is talking about, well you hope you do.

06:30 Some of the things that went on, you'd get these chaps from India, they don't speak good English and the Americans who devised all the code books and things, they speak the worst We went up for one of these exercises and you take in turns being the boss cocky, that

07:00 sort of thing. We went up and we were in Singapore and up to Hong Kong, went across to Manila and about that time the exercise was finished so we came home and I went to Darwin.

Just before that, you also mentioned trials that you were doing with the HMAS Sydney, what were they?

We fitted

07:30 again, we fitted these funny little radios, UHF radios and a carrier carries more than one and when you do the trials on them you've got about fifteen sets and each one's got to have its own pattern on it, really it's routine work, we'd done it all before and there was

08:00 no real drama attached to it.

You were with the Sydney approximately a year, twelve months?

I left her in December, no, not December, November 1956 and I joined her '55 I suppose, about a year I suppose I was with her. If you add the Sydney

08:30 to the Vengeance it comes out to about three years.

Then you were posted to Coonawarra in Darwin, what were you doing up there?

Coonawarra is a naval wireless transmission station and I was sent up there as the electronics chief on that station. We had an officer, and we had a

09:00 chief telegraphist and a chief radio mechanic along side him. He did the operating side of it and I did the maintenance side of it. The officer got in the way. Actually, he's a bit of a fool but we won't hold that against him. There we were at Coonawarra and it was just a question of hang on until the time expired.

09:30 Unfortunately, I got sick and I was sent down to Penguin to a hospital there and that was the end of my days. I was up there for about six months I suppose.

What was the equipment you were using in Darwin?

It was mostly standard radio equipment except for the transmitters

10:00 which were, they were AWA, Australian built stuff and it had been there for years, the tropics was getting into it. No one worried about it but we had to keep it going of course. When the lightening flashed and the rain came down you never knew what was going to happen at Darwin,

10:30 it's a funny place. I had a good time up there, I can't say it was too bad. I didn't particularly want to go up there, I knew I was going outside, I didn't particularly want to go to Darwin, that's what the book said, that's what the computer said, "You are going to Darwin."

What was it about Darwin that you didn't really want to be a

11:00 **part of?**

Darwin was a draft for a man that had a wife and six kids. Up there he could get a house and live on station for two years. When I got there, there

11:31 was a house waiting for me. A mate of mine, he's dead now, he wanted to take my house. He went and saw the boss and said, "Can I have Jake Kerr's house?" The boss said, "No you can't." He said, "Why not? He's not married.

12:00 You could give me his house and make me and my wife very happy?" He said, "No you can't, he might get married before he comes up." So that was it.

What were the chances of that?

Zero, but this was the sort of attitude this bloke had and he could of made this chap and his wife very happy because they had two kids and

12:30 he just couldn't have my house because I might come up there married and then there'd be trouble. When I got up there the first thing this bloke said to me was, "Are you married?" and I said, "No." He said, "Thank you." He was straight in to see the boss. It was a good spot for a married man. He would be there with his wife and kids but for a single

13:00 man it wasn't much chop.

How did you feel about being posted to land?

I had been to Kuttabul in between the two carriers. Basically, I was posted ashore almost between every posting. I don't think I went from ship to ship. I didn't mind going ashore, I didn't particularly want to go do

13:30 Darwin, as I said before, it was a married man's posting, why send me? It was a waste on me. All they did was deny the bloke a house while Jake Kerr is fiddling around on leave before he went up there. They could've given him the quarters, but no. That's the way of the navy, one of the bad things about it. now of course

14:00 they've got a system where they sort of allow you to rent a house as opposed to waiting for a navy house to come along and that's a bit better. At Darwin you couldn't rent a house, you couldn't rent a house in any case because there was nothing to rent at that time.

You said that you were there for seven months and then became quite ill?

I don't know

14:30 what happened, I just go this wog and went down with it and the sick bay up there couldn't fix me and there was no attempt made to put me into the local hospital, all they said was, "You've got to go south to the hospital in Sydney." So I did and I was there for, I don't know,

15:00 three months, four months, and I wasn't getting any better so I decided I would get up and go. So I got up and decided I was going out, which I did. When I got out of the navy I went out to weapons research and I could hardly walk. I limped in there and said, "I want a job."

15:30 They took me along, I filled in the papers and put me through the medical section and the doctor there said to me, "I've never knocked a return serviceman back for a job." I said, "Thank you very much." He said, "You're fit." He stamped my papers.

What was the sickness that you had?

16:00 I had sort of, I don't know, I had lost all interest. I was sick and I don't really know what it was and I got over it so that's it.

After Penguin, after treatment, did you discharge yourself from hospital?

No, the surgeon commander

16:30 discharged me from the hospital and I had a lot of leave still to take so I started to take leave. I then, when all the leave was gone, I put in a request to go back to sea

17:00 and they said, "Since you can't go back to sea, we are denying you the right to complete fifteen years which is your long service leave time." I said, "Okay." They said, "We will have to pay you that pro rata." I thought that's a good thing, and they paid me that pro rata and after that I put in a request to

17:30 see the skipper and I said, "Can I go back to Adelaide, at no expense to the navy. I want to pay off in Adelaide and get a job there." He said, "I don't see any reason why you can't, chief." I did, I came back here and paid off and that was the end of that.

So where did you get discharged from the navy, or voluntary discharge, was that in Sydney?

No, it was here.

It was in Adelaide, so you came to Adelaide?

18:00 Then I got out. It was all on paper what I was going to do. As long as, it's amazing what you can do, as long as you don't incur any money against the navy books. I put it to them that I wanted to go out to Adelaide and this would cost the navy nothing. The navy owed me a first class train fare from

18:30 Sydney where I was to my port of enlistment, that was Melbourne. I took my first class rail fare on the books and I paid an airfare from Sydney to Adelaide, no expense to the navy, I put the extra in. That was it, I was out. Once I got over here I had a fortnight to do, I think, and no one worried about me. So I went looking for a job.

19:00 **Why did you suddenly get this motivation to leave?**

It was a question of when I tried to go back to join a destroyer up at Cockatoo, Q class destroyer and they told me that I couldn't do that because I was medically unfit

19:30 and that's when I said, "Can I go home?" Actually, a chief writer who was a friend of mine, said, "Jake, have you applied to re-engage?" I said, "No." He said, "Apply to re-engage," and I did. Once I did that they said, "You are medically unfit and you can not re-engage, therefore we have to pay you this big piece of money," for which I was grateful.

20:00 Once they said they didn't want me, I said, "Can I go to Adelaide to pay off?"

What classed you as medically unfit?

The fact I had been in hospital for about, by the time I got out, I had been in hospital for about five months and I had dropped down to about seven stone in weight.

20:30 I weigh about ten stone now, and I got down to about seven stone in weight. I was as skinny as a drover's dog and they weren't going to let me sign on, not like that. If I had put more weight on and things I would've made it. They weren't going to put me on. I was out to get all I could in cash and to get out. I went to weapons research

21:00 and a kind man said he wouldn't not give me a job because I was a sailor. I was quite happy to go out and he sent me to Woomera and inside twelve months I was back to square one again. I don't know what it was but I was back to square one. I didn't

21:30 want to do anything else and here I am.

What was civilian life like when you left the navy, straight after you left?

Civilian life after I left the navy, it wasn't really extremely wonderful because I got a lot more

22:00 money in the navy and I was, I knew I couldn't go back, I had to stay out so I just stayed out. Put it this way, my pay in the navy in today's scale, I would've been on about ninety thousand today for what I was on in the navy and that was quite a fair salary and I

22:30 couldn't get it so I just went out, went up to Woomera. There was a lot of overtime being worked so I made a few bob here and there. I am happy.

Initially when you first left the navy, navy life is fairly well structured and everything is, a lot of decisions are made for you, how did you feel stepping out of that into

23:00 **total independence?**

It didn't worry me terribly. The navy life try to make all your decisions for you but they can only do that as much as you let them. I didn't let them too much, I used to make my own decisions. The thing was when I got out

23:30 I used to, you might think this strange, but I used to think where would I be tonight. Now the navy light is a structured life and at certain times of the year you go to Hobart for the Regatta in January, you go to Melbourne for the Cup, not necessarily in order, you go to

24:00 Sydney for the Easter Show, you go to Brisbane for the exhibition and you are doing all this, it's around the clock thing. Often I would be up in Woomera and I thought, "Christ, if I was still in I'd be in Melbourne now for the Cup but here I am stuck in this stinking hole." It didn't last very long, you soon get over it. That's the only thing that used to worry me at times,

24:30 just fleeting glances, thinking you should be here, you should be there, but you weren't. Once you get the mob around you again you forget all about it.

Aside from the structure and trouble you just mentioned was there anything else you missed about the navy?

Not really.

25:00 I decided when I came down from Woomera after five years I said to mother one day, "I am going down to the navy depot, I am going to join the reserve." She said, "Okay." I was fit again, I had got over all my

aches and pains. So I went down to the navy depot

25:30 and I fronted in there on the training night and the officer in charge of recruiting was there and I said, "Are you taking on any old sailors?" He said, "What were you?" I said, "Chief RE [radio engineer]." That's the navy parlance. He said, "You were what?" I said, "Yes, Chief RE." He said, "We would love one of them. When did you pay off?" I said,

26:00 "Five years ago." He said, "I can't take you." After five years they can't take you back at your old rate. He said, "I could take you if you came in as a sailor." I said, "You are joking." I wasn't going in as an ordinary seaman. I am not that keen, so I just walked out.

You weren't disappointed?

No, it was just something that happened. I never get

26:30 disappointed about these things, if you do, you go through life being disappointed about everything. You don't need to. They said I couldn't come back in, that's it, finished, next question.

Out of that whole time there was a small bracket in which you were part of a war, in the war zone, did you have any anxiety or stress after that experience of being in

27:00 **Korea?**

No, no stress. My wife says I could live on a desert island and I wouldn't get stressed. No I've never been stressed in my life.

There wasn't any anxiety?

No, it just doesn't happen to me. I worry some of these Vietnam veterans and

27:30 they are stressed and they are this and that, what for, it's over, forget about it. Her brother was up there in Vietnam and he never mentions it. He's just given up a job as a manager of the meatworks up at Casino, general manager. He's never worried about the Vietnam War,

28:00 as he said, "It's over, why worry?"

Looking back on those twelve years with the navy

Would I do it again, yes.

How did it change you?

I don't know, it didn't. I don't think it changed me that much, but I'd do it again. There are so many blokes

28:30 you talk to them and they say, "Going into the navy was the worst thing I ever did," and this that and the other. They are all up in arms about it. I said, "Would you do it again." They say, "No, no." I would, I reckon it's a great thing. It was a life, it's something you can tell your grandkids about.

29:00 There are so many of them, they think they were hard done by, most of the blokes who reckon they were hard done by have done it themselves to themselves. They haven't bothered to go out and live but that's only my story.

You speak quite fondly of those naval years, what would you say was your proudest moment through that career?

29:30 Proudest moment, I don't know. I met Earl Mountbatten, is that a good one. Actually, I did meet Earl Mountbatten and he was a man to be reckoned with. Philip Greche [?] is just

30:00 another English nobleman. Queen spoke to us one day on board Gothic when we were fixing her radio up in Fremantle Harbour but meeting Mountbatten is probably as good as any.

What struck you about that meeting?

What struck me about it, Mountbatten was a man amongst men.

30:30 He had a sort of aura about him and he was a man amongst men and that's how I talk about him. I don't believe all the tales of him and, which one was it, the Prince of Wales. Chief of Windsor, they came

31:00 out here on a battleship before the war, well before the war, and there were all sorts of tails of hanky panky on the battleship swimming in the royal pool and things like that. It doesn't worry me.

Today we have spoken about various pieces of your naval career but focusing on career, how would you like the crew of the HMAS Anzac

31:30 **to be remembered?**

How would I like them to be remembered, I would like to think they all live to be a hundred and five, me too. I think they will be remembered, their kids will remember them, their grandkids, no one else, the

Government is not going to remember them, they couldn't care less. It will just be

32:00 the few, I got a thing the other day from DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs], they are doing a mortality study on Korean veterans. I am seventy seven, I am looking at the short end of the stick before my mortality time comes up. It's silly doing a mortality study on men that are approaching eighty. It's not

32:30 worthwhile, you may as well forget about it, we'll all die soon. I am probably classed as a sadist on some of these things but that's the way I feel, don't worry about it, we will all be dead soon and they won't have to worry about us anymore. I don't think the crew of the Anzac will be remembered any more or any less than

33:00 people think about them now, actually half the people in Australia don't even know that the Anzac went to Korea.

That sentiment that you are expressing now fits perfectly into that note of the forgotten war.

Yes, it was the forgotten war. At least the chaps who went to Vietnam they went up to fight a war, it was

33:30 all on television and that's how they got there kick and everything along. We went up to Korea and it wasn't on television so it was forgotten. That's nothing.

Do you believe that it is a forgotten war because it was not

34:00 **publicised or reported as widely as other wars?**

Possibly, it never got reported. Very few people knew about the Korean war. There was no great thing out like, "Knit a pair of socks for the blokes in Korea, it's cold up there." In World War II they did,

34:30 knit socks, do this, do that, do something else. As far as the Korean vet was concerned and I speak about the blokes on shore, the infantry, they were really doing it tough up there, frozen feet, all sorts of business. My brother-in-law says, he's dead, Alison's brother, he said, "I will tell you the tale about me eating my Christmas dinner on eight foot of snow." That was

35:00 in Korea. It was true. He said if it wasn't for Mum my feet would be frozen. His mother, she used to knit the socks that she sent to New Guinea and sent to the Middle East in World War II and she used to send them up to her little boy in Korea. There were a lot of fellows, they never got anything like that and that was it. We never got anything like that.

35:30 Occasionally, this is just an instance of how forgotten it can be, the Royal Naval Society here in Adelaide used to send parcels of books to the naval forces in Korea. You know when we got them?

36:00 The day we got back to Sydney. All these books come, parcels of books and magazines, Sunday newspapers, all from this naval geographical society in Adelaide. They were all addressed to ship and we got them the day we got back, simply because they weren't suitable to send. They were heavy newspapers.

36:30 At the time, all they were doing was sending up the mail if you were lucky enough to get that. There they were, all down at the wharf in Sydney, people just looked and thought it was the rubbish tin, it was sold, they didn't want anything.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

A day we used to go and get drunk.

37:00 What does it mean to me? I think Anzac Day is the one day that has got to be preserved. You have got to have something to remember the blokes who went away to fight. I don't care where they fought, whether they went away to Vietnam, Korea, World War II, or most of them are dead now the poor devils, up over in, where's the latest place with a

37:30 hundred men out or something, all of those men went away to fight or something or other and you've got to have one day at least to remember them and let's make it Anzac Day, it's always been our national day of mourning and the day that the troops get drunk so why not keep it. There is a lot of people know that want to get rid of it. They don't want Anzac

38:00 Day anymore, I think they'd rather have another race day or something. That's my thought, it should be preserved.

This is a record that you've shared with us to go into the archive for future generations to look back on with a man of your war experience, if you were to leave some last words of advice or any last thoughts for those generations, what would it be?

Don't go to war.

38:30 I don't know, I don't think there is anything, but when I say don't go to war, that's the thing. It's pretty hard not to go to war if somebody else is telling you that you've got to go. Wars aren't made by the common man, they are made by the prime ministers, leaders of the opposition, whoever is in power at

the time. There is really nothing

39:00 you can do about it, I don't think you can. To be perfectly honest, I don't think anything can be done. It is something that will happen if it happens, we've just got to grin and bear it. I don't think we are going to have another real war as they have been in the past. I think there will be a lot of these little skirmishes and things like that but let's hope we don't have one of these

39:30 full scale nail biting eye tearing wars, it's too much, we don't want it.

Thank you, Jake, for sharing your story. Is there any last words or thoughts?

I don't think so.

INTERVIEW ENDS