

# Australians at War Film Archive

## James Dobson (Bluey) - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

00:36 **Okay we were talking off camera about this overview, maybe starting with where you were born.**

I was born in Caboolture 30th September 1923 and lived on Oakey Flat Road on the family farm, was reared there.

01:00 I was reared there. Went to school at Morayfield School all my school years until I was just under fourteen. Left school, was needed on the farm to help the family survive. Carried on there, learnt to plough, harness horses and do all the things that were necessary round the farm and by this time the war had got started and got itchy feet and thought,

01:30 "Got to be in this somehow". Parents wouldn't sign the papers to enlist until I turned eighteen. So shortly after I turned eighteen I volunteered for the navy. At that time the navy had enough recruits, didn't want any more. The chap who interviewed me said, "If you like you can go into the Citizen Military Forces and we'll call you when we want you. I said, "Oh yeah, that sounds alright" so I went in there

02:00 and I volunteered for the Citizen Military Forces. I was put in to the Royal Australian Artillery and the first night was spent on a palliasse [mattress] on the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds and next day down to Fort Lytton. That was somewhere about the first week of January 1942. Then of course all the usual drill,

02:30 parade grounds and what have you. Next door was the remounts, that was the horse people. We used to have some funny times watching them breaking in horses with carts and what have you and we were there when Darwin was raided in 14th February 1942 and there was hell to pay that day. They didn't know who was coming and who was going,

03:00 rumours around that the Japs [Japanese] had landed and there was all sorts of stories and tales. Anyway they seemed to quiet everybody down. The living conditions there were something shocking because there was no preparation for the amount of men they had there and you can imagine what the latrine situation was like, it was a plank out on the riverbank. How they kept the disease under control, well it weren't long they had the allied works council, the CCC [Civil Constructional Corps]

03:30 building latrines and it wasn't long before we could have a decent shower and go on. Then it would have been about the end of February I was sent to 16th AA [Anti-Aircraft] Battery at Pallarenda Point, Cape Pallarenda in Townsville. There a week and they were putting, allied works council was putting anti-aircraft guns in to protect Townsville and they were also putting another

04:00 lot of guns in on Mount Saint John near the airport, near the aerodrome at Townsville and I was one of the ones that was shoved out to Mount Saint John. That was primitive. We were in tents, had a tent for a cookhouse and in all due consideration we were issued with rifles. Mine was an 1892 model 303 [rifle] and five rounds of ammunition.

04:30 You had to jealously guard these five rounds. That was all right. While we were there we were trained and I was getting trained as a predictor operator, that was the thing that showed the guns where to place the shot in front of the aircraft. When the first lot of Japanese planes come down none of us had ever fired a gun, none of us had ever seen a gun fired,

05:00 you never saw such a performance. They loaded the guns and fired, one bloke forgot to lift the barrel and the shot went out over Townsville and blew up out there somewhere. The cloud of dust that blew up and went back around the gun was amazing. That was all right. We got over that. From then on was practice and the Japs seemed to keep enough planes coming to give us plenty of practice. It was quite amazing to see the line of explosions behind aircraft.

05:30 We never seemed to be in front of the aircraft, we always seemed to be behind them. That was that.

Coral Sea Battle came and went and we got talking to some of the aircraft crews, used to get allowed into Townsville one night a week, they were having that much trouble with that many men there being more or less a military town that they used to restrict how many could go in and

- 06:00 I remember one night we got talking to some of the aircraft crews and he said where the Coral Sea Battle was being fought he said, "You'd be surprised the amount of bodies there was floating on the sea there, the amount of ships and that that had been sunk". Soon after that the navy sent me a communication they would like me to report to Brisbane for the navy and the CO [Commanding Officer] in charge of the gun said, "Yes, you can go" and put me on a train
- 06:30 to Brisbane. From Brisbane in to Melbourne, the service depot and then I was in the navy. From there did the necessary three months in Flinders Naval Depot and met a couple of locals there as well. We all seemed to get, a lot of us had mumps.
- 07:00 They put us all in isolation, the blokes with mumps. We other come that. Next thing, the three months was up we were back to our various postings. I was sent to Brisbane. A friend of mine was sent to the HMAS Armidale and within six weeks the Armidale had been sunk and he wasn't one of the survivors. That was one of me mates that went. I was posted
- 07:30 then to a ship, HMAS Coongoola in Darwin, Darwin Harbour. I had never heard of it, all I could find out about it was there were six in the crew. I was given a train ticket to Townsville. From Townsville they put me on to Mount Isa, Mount Isa would put me on to a convoy to, no that's wrong.
- 08:00 That was the second time. The first time to Darwin, it was to Cairns and I had to, in Cairns I got dengue fever and was shoved into hospital. I was in hospital a week, ten days. That's all right, out of there on a ship called the Darvel for Darwin. Well the Darvel had got out of Singapore, there was bullet marks all over it. I thought, "Well, this is a good introduction".
- 08:30 We got into Darwin late one night. The Japs had raided it that day and there was smoke and dirt and dust everywhere and made ourselves, there was houses there. Of course there was no civilians there at that time, we were put into a house and the mosquitoes were waiting for us. We didn't get much sleep that night nor for a few nights after. None of us could work out why we were all waking
- 09:00 up of a night, scratching. A bloke had said, "I think we've got bed bugs". I'd heard of bed bugs but never seen anything of them. I had great scratches down my side where I'd been itching, these things had been biting me, everybody, they had bunks for us were sort of cross sticks with hessian and these things were in along the thing and one bloke there said,
- 09:30 "I know how to get rid of them" he says, "we'll boil some water and run boiling water along all the seams" and he said, "that'll kill both them and the eggs". We got some sleep after that. Every night that the Japs would come. We used to have to go out and get into slit trenches. Well the mosquitoes knew where to go to find food, in those slit trenches, it was terrible. Sometimes we'd be there
- 10:00 an hour, sometimes be there half an hour, sometimes be there three hours and back to the hut we'd go, the houses we'd go and I couldn't understand why I hadn't been sent to Coongoola. Eventually I got lined up by the CO there and he said, "Dobson, you're not going to the Coongoola" and I said, "Might I ask why sir" and he says, "Yeah, the captain says he's got two Dobsons there, he don't want a third bastard".
- 10:30 Rather enlightening that was, and that language. And I thought, "Oh well, that's it". That ended that. I didn't know, he'd have three Dobsons in a crew of six, I could imagine what sort of a problem he could see he was going to have. So that was all right. I said, "Will I be getting some sea duty" and he says, "Yes, after a while you will". In the mean time I had general duties round Darwin, in the dry dock,
- 11:00 cleaning down ships, knocking rust off etc. Then I got sent to the HMAS Latrobe, the corvette Latrobe. I got quite an experience on that and some of the officers were exceptionally good, the captain, Lieutenant Commander Bruce, ex-Royal Navy, he was a real gentleman. His second in command was
- 11:30 Lieutenant Brackenridge from the merchant marines. He was a bloke that took quite a liking to me and he was teaching me the stars and how to find out where you were with the stars, etc. I was only there six months, I didn't have enough time to learn as much as I should have. It was quite an interesting episode and when me first nine months was up in Darwin I got sent home
- 12:00 on leave back to Morayfield. When I went back after me leave was up, I had a month's leave. Went back and had the necessary tickets back to Townsville by train, Mount Isa by train and from there on was on a convoy. These trucks were going all the time
- 12:30 stuff for Darwin there was iron, there was spuds, there was everything on these trucks and they used to put so many men in on top. They had a canopy over it and you used to sit there all day. They used to stop so far out, they'd boil the billy, give you a stay in camp and you'd have food there and then you'd go on. When I got to, we went to Tennant Creek and then we went north to Orlando,
- 13:00 I think it's Aloomba where the Darwin rail line finished, there was a rail line where they used to truck cattle. The CO in charge there says, "Where have you been?" I was the only navy bloke there in navy uniform and he says, "Where are you from?" I said, "I don't know but I've got to go to Darwin to meet

- me ship there". He said, "Where have you been?" and I says, "Oh, I've been round a few places",
- 13:30 he says, "Have you been to New Guinea?" I says, "Yes, I have" and he says, "Oh, you can't go any further". I says, "Might I ask why?" well he says, "We're trying doing our best to keep malaria out of Darwin, anyone who's been to New Guinea can't go to Darwin". So they kept me there for three weeks and the flies were terrible and they gave me a net to put over me cap to keep them out of me eyes.
- 14:00 That was really a long three weeks. Back to Brisbane he sent me; give me all the necessary papers, straight back to Brisbane. I get back to Brisbane depot and the bloke that was on the gate when I left was there and he says, "What the hell are you doing back here?" I said, "There's the papers" and he said, "We can't have them telling us where we're sending men, you'll be on a plane to Darwin tomorrow morning". So that was it, I was back in Darwin. Of course I'd missed the ship I was supposed to go to
- 14:30 and I got put on the HMAS Inverell for three weeks. Then three weeks was up, I'd been relieving a bloke that was away, taking his place and they went through the mess decks one morning and "We want a team of men", "Yep, what for?", "Volunteers we want". I heard a saying "You never volunteer".
- 15:00 I said, "Oh well, anything for a bit of a change. Yep, what for", "special duty guard". I thought "Oh, this'll be interesting" and out to Coonawarra wireless station. They must have been expecting the Japs to raid it and we were out there. Eight of us went out there and there was two houses, four of us in each house. We had to more or less
- 15:30 cater for ourselves, used to be a cook in charge of the depot. That was a permanent navy wireless station for northern Australia and we didn't know at the time what was on. We weren't supposed to know and they didn't want anybody else to know either. We camped there, we had two, one up this way would meet a bloke and go, "Guard this place day and night". We knew there was something funny going on and thought, "That's all right". I got friendly with one of these blokes that
- 16:00 used to head off down through the bush to another special place they had. I said to him one day, "Where do you blokes go way down there?" he says, "I can't tell you" "All right". Any rate, we used to meet up with them occasionally at meal times and I said to this bloke, "How's things going?" he says, "We're right, we got him last night".
- 16:30 He said, "I'll tell you one of these days". Anyway, a few days later he says "I think we're going to raid them tonight. Just keep your eyes open about dusk. I think there'll be something doing". Of course I'm thinking there's going to be a raid on our station. Anyway, all these planes took off out of Darwin; they were Beaufighters and all carrying special fuel tanks under the wing and
- 17:00 later I found out that they had a wireless place in New Guinea were jamming all their signals, he was going tutututut. Lucky enough they were able to stop him. When they'd stop, he'd stop. This night he must have been half asleep, early hours of the morning half asleep, they all stopped, he kept going. What with Honolulu and Darwin and another place they had, they had
- 17:30 a direction on him and they raided it. They said no more trouble with him so that ended that episode. So we got sent back to Darwin barracks then and I finished my time round there. Back to Brisbane and when I was going back the doctor said to me, "I want your eyes seen to". I said, "Might I ask why?" "Yeah", he says, "You've got things growing on your eyes".
- 18:00 Of course I used to have very keen eye sight and I was always used as a special look out and I had pterygium growing over from the corner of the eyes so they sent me back to Brisbane to get my eyes operated on and then they stopped me any sea duty then for so many months. Next thing I knew I was sent to the HMAS Australia. The Australia was returned from the Pacific, she was rather battered about a bit
- 18:30 and she was to go to England for a refit and we were to bring another, there was supposed to be an aircraft carrier out and they told us when we got to England we were heading for Singapore. I thought, "Well there's a lot of us blokes won't get into Singapore, that's for sure". At any rate, of course at that time the suicide kamikaze bombers were on the job and they were a real headache for everybody. We thought, "Well, if they're on suicide business
- 19:00 we're going to have real trouble". At any rate much to our great gunnery skill I come out of there with a good...lined up before the commodore wanting me to transfer to the Royal Navy because my ability to shoot they wanted to, I'd be good for training and go a higher rating in anti-aircraft work.
- 19:30 I wouldn't agree to that. The war was over by then and I was heading for home. The commodore was disappointed with me. He wanted me right or wrong to stay with the royal navy. In the mean time I'd met a girl that I wanted to marry. She was coming out to Australia to marry me and I was heading for home. That's roughly my story of what happened to me during the war. There was a few episodes if I can go back a bit.
- 20:00 **We're going to cover a lot of that in detail. This is just a brief at the start. Briefly what did you do, just quickly, what did you do in those years after the war?**

My Father owned the farm on Oakey Flat Road, up the road from where I am now. Hilda come out and we were married. I had to put so much money to the government to guarantee her fair because I wasn't

keen on getting married

- 20:30 in England until the war was over and nor was Hilda. We thought we'd wait until after the war was over and see how things are then. She came out here and we were married out here. By this time I was starting to get a bit restless, I wanted to own me own farm, me Father and I were doing a partnership deal, it was all right to a degree but it wasn't what I wanted. I was offered another farm a five thousand
- 21:00 dollar property, it was worth a hell of a lot more than that. When I said to my Father, "Would you guarantee me that?" what he told me about my thinking power wouldn't bear repeating considering, to be considering such a thing at that time. Actually I missed a chance I did regret but as it turned out since I've done all right on me own and I had to
- 21:30 issue an ultimatum, he'd either sell me the farm or I was going to buy a farm on me own. He agreed to sell me the farm, we agreed on a price and I took over the farm and he bought another property and retired on it. We were married, we had four sons and one daughter. After that we were on poultry farming then and citrus and the British Ministry of Food stopped
- 22:00 taking food from Australia, they could get it cheaper in other countries. The poultry industry did a down flop and my brother in law and I had joined a partnership in poultry so we decided we're not doing any good in this, he knew about growing bananas and I would join with him and we'd take on bananas. We've done very well. The boys, we went to North Queensland. My sons
- 22:30 all reckoned they wanted to grown bananas. We agreed if they wanted to grow bananas they'd best go to North Queensland where it was easier working and they were to buy my partner brother in law out in due course which they did and then things didn't all together work out as they should have. The farm didn't seem to prosper and one son pulled out, that left a hole. Another son sort of weren't fitting
- 23:00 in to the picture and then another son and the youngest one eventually got round to the stage where things weren't doing any good, the bank give us, my youngest son and I a hell of a lecture because we were equal partners and we could do better than that, he'd checked up on our history and we could do a hell of a lot better than we were doing. So we had to issue an ultimatum to the other son, he either agreed to us taking him over, buying him out or otherwise we were going to sell the whole lot
- 23:30 and take what you can get. That was it, the youngest son took over and we're now in a prosperous place and where we should have been twenty years ago. It's no easy matter when you've got to start sorting sons out, you can take it from me. I had that to do and they've all survived and they're all going along quite well. One bloke has got his own farm and is doing quite well, that's his daughter that's here today.
- 24:00 Still on good terms with all of them but it had to be sorted out. We're now in a position where I'm retired, I'm a consultant to the farm and carry on doing what I like, when I like and how I like it and that's it. I have a veteran's pension, keeps me going. While I didn't say I made any money out of farming, I've put me sons into
- 24:30 a position where they're not relying on the government.

**Nice one. Well we'll go right back to the very beginning. Tell us about your family, about your Mum and your Dad.**

We were very unlucky with me Mother. I'd only been home from England, Hilda came out here in 1947 from England and we were married in 1947. We had two weeks; the government give us two weeks to get married.

- 25:00 So I didn't lose the money that I'd had to leave for her fare. That was no problem. We got married and my Mother didn't seem to have the health that I thought she should have. At any rate the following year it got to the stage where I had to say to her, "Well you're either going to the doctor or the doctor's coming to you, now please yourself". Well, she had cancer and it was far too late. She died in 1948 and she took
- 25:30 a very good liking to my new wife and they got along very well and that put a real hole in the position for Hilda and she didn't have a sort of...my sisters were very good to her, they had their own families to look after and that was it. Mum died in November 1948. Dad carried on on his own for quite a while then he remarried again
- 26:00 ten, fifteen years later.

**What was she like as a kid when you were growing up, what was your Mother like?**

My Mother was very good to us. She was a terrific cook. If things were, vegetables were short, we used to grow a lot of our own vegetables. If things were short she always knew what to get and she had a habit of green pawpaws. I'll never be able to take green pawpaws again. I could just not stand them. But we had them to eat, if she cooked them

- 26:30 we had to eat them. Only once did the meal get back a second time. She was a good cook and she was very good. Dad was a good farmer. On this poor country he was able to survive and rear his family without any help and he retired and I'm afraid I wasn't as good a farmer on the hard soil. I couldn't see us slaving away on that poor soil like he'd done.

- 27:00 He wouldn't have anything to do with machinery, it had to be a horse and the horses and I didn't seem to get along. I bought a tractor soon after we got married and my Father gave me a great lecture about I had more money than brains and all the rest of it. Within six weeks he was using the tractor, he thought it was the best thing I'd ever done so that's the way things change. We used to get, it was just under three miles which is just on five kilometers from where the farm was
- 27:30 to Morayfield school, night and morning. We had to give a hand to milk the cows before we went to school of a morning and get home in time to milk the cows at night. That was on for all of us kids barring the younger brother, he was what you say, badly spoilt. He was very sick when he was a baby and that seemed to overflow to him right through. Always seemed to be a sore point with me that I always had to get out and get things going
- 28:00 and he could always lay in bed. That didn't seem to go down too well with me and that was it.

**How many brothers and sisters did you have?**

I had two sisters and one brother. My two sisters have been very good to us all the way through. They've been terrific. If I wanted anything, they're there to give us a hand.

**What was this area like, Morayfield?**

Oakey Flat Road was notorious

- 28:30 when I was going to school there was eight bachelors lived on it and they were all farms that the bank had closed on. It was one of those things, it was in the Depression years and a lot of them they'd come, start up, they'd plant pineapples or citrus or something, next thing you know, they're gone. There was no money for them. If they went on to the relief work as they used to call it,
- 29:00 they had to, if they had a man, his wife and one child, he could get one day's work a week. If he had two child he could get two days work a week, up to four children he got a full week's work. That didn't seem to work either. But it did work and sometimes there used to be great heaps of men walk up the road. They could get rations from the police station.
- 29:30 Well Petrie was the police station, then they had to walk to Caboolture, the next police station. They could get another lot of rations there. Then it was Landsborough police station, another lot of rations there and then they used to, what they called jump the rattler, they'd get on the good wagons on the train and jump so far up the line, looking for work. Many years later I met a couple that had come from Victoria into Queensland and they've settled in Queensland. As
- 30:00 the 1930s progressed things started to get a bit better. When the war started then they couldn't find enough men for the jobs they had, enlistment and it was just one of those things that happened and there was no money from the government and the government seemed to be in a dither. They had financial advisors come from overseas to advise what they should do and they got well paid and away they went but they still left the problem behind.
- 30:30 **How did your family cope with the Depression?**
- Well, they coped and they coped without going in to debt. Dad was a good farmer. I don't know how he did it. We didn't have any irrigation but he always seemed to be able to get a crop. Even to this day I wonder how he did it because he used to reckon in August it was time to get planting, the storms will start in September. And sure enough they used to start in September, they don't now.

- 31:00 The weather's changed that much. We couldn't grow anything now without irrigation even my small farm now with my brother in law. We have irrigation and if we didn't have that we wouldn't get anything. So the weather has changed quite a lot.

**Apart from the irrigation, what else would he use like to fertilise the soil?**

He used to go round the district collecting cow manure and he used to plow that into the ground

- 31:30 and it had a very good effect. He used to use so much fertilizer, if he could get any fowl manure he didn't have any poultry at that time, anything like that always went in. He always had at least a dozen head of cattle. Caboolture butter factory was in full swing and he used to always have cream for the butter factory. We had our own separator and would separate the milk from the cream and he always had a few pigs and by and large
- 32:00 he survived. He had citrus trees as well and him and Mum used to, he always seemed to have somebody round working for him, a couple of days a week to give him a bit of a hand. He seemed to land on it right. I don't know whether it was luck or good management. I think it was more good management than it was luck.

**You mentioned you did a bit of milking, what other kind of work would you have to do as a kid?**

Chipping the rows of tomatoes

- 32:30 or whatever, pumpkins that were growing. That was a job, I don't like a chipping hoe even to this day. If

I can't do it mechanically, it won't get done. I couldn't take to a chipping hoe. But we used to have to do it to keep the weeds down so that you did get a crop.

**What about fun activities, what would you get up to as a kid?**

I had me first

- 33:00 rifle when I was twelve year old. We used to go shooting and I used to get quite a bit of pocket money. You used to get a shilling for a crow head, threepence for two flying fox claws, sixpence for a bee-eaters head. Used to get a wallaby, skin him and dry his skin on the wall, send it to the skin merchant. I used to always have a kangaroo, get them,
- 33:30 tack them out to the wall and dry them, put the whole lot in a bag and send them off. Fenwick and Co was the skin merchant in Brisbane, he used to welcome all these hides coming. I was never into possum and koala shooting, that was before my time, I was too young for that. I remember it going on, they used to shoot the koalas. They were wanted in Britain for the handbag trade, furs and what have you.
- 34:00 And the possums, they were wanted for the fur trade. That was it, just about cleaned out. I remember we used to see a stick leaning up to a tree, that was a possum snare and he used to have a wire on it and when the possum went through it it grabbed him and the possum would choke himself and he'd be hanging down. They used to go out the next morning and any possums around, they'd take them out of the stick. That was how people survived. The greenies now would have had a blue fit.
- 34:30 That was it. Used to go chasing goannas and things like that. We used to have a lot of fun going lobbying down the water course. Get half a dozen lobsters, put them in the billy can and boil them. We always had no trouble making our own fun. We never seemed to get into any trouble. The only trouble we used to get into, we used to be late coming in to meals and we had something we had to go and see or something to do,
- 35:00 that was the only trouble we used to get in to. Mum used to have a meal ready at a certain time and you were there for it and that was it.

**Who taught you to use a rifle?**

Me Father. There was always a couple of rifles at home and they bought me a twenty two rifle when I was twelve year old. I never had any trouble with it. Always liked a rifle. I still have one.

- 35:30 I'm a registered shooter. I don't have any; I have it for pigs in north Queensland.

**What was the first thing you shot; do you remember the first thing you shot?**

It was a chicken hawk that was killing chickens. I got him, he was a long shot and I got him straight through, no broken wing, no nothing, he was stone dead, first shot. I never forget that.

- 36:00 He'd got a lot of chickens before I got him. Mum used to have a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s before we went into poultry and always shoot a few chickens for a bit of eating, chickens to eat, eat up all the scraps and that, any old milk and that that didn't go to the pigs went to the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Sunday dinner was always poultry, roasted poultry. Might have been an old rooster, he might have had to have a boiling before he
- 36:30 went into the oven to soften him up a bit but he was still good eating.

**What did it feel like to get this, was it a chicken?**

Chicken hawk.

**Chicken hawk, what did it feel like to get the chicken hawk?**

I was very pleased with myself. We didn't get any bounty on them though; there was nothing on their heads. Birds that we had a bounty on their heads, they were the ones we liked. We used to take them up to the local council in a bag, there's so many flying fox claws, so many bee eater heads,

- 37:00 so many crow heads, so many of this and so many of that. Had them in a packet. There was no way in the world he'd, he wouldn't count them, he'd take your word for it, that was it. Somebody reckoned the best thing to do then was to go where they chuck them out the back, in the incinerator and get them back again but I never got round to doing that. Once was enough for me. That used to keep us in pocket money and cartridges.
- 37:30 **Why was there a bounty on these particular?**
- Well the bee eaters were eating all their bees. See the bee keepers were very prolific in those days, on of those things, they wanted rid of them. There used to be a lot of them about too. You don't ever see them now, very seldom you see a bee eater now.
- 38:00 You know you never shot a jackass, or a kookaburra, you never shot a magpie, never shot a peewee, didn't touch any of them, oh no, that was foreign, you didn't do that. I'll never forget one thing that always stuck in my mind. I showed you a photograph of that old chap who used to work for my family I think for twenty or thirty years.

38:30 He was a bachelor. We used to get a lot of frill lizards used to sit up on the posts around and as soon as you went near them they'd put this big frill out. One day he showed me, he got the old pipe out, he always had a pipe in his mouth, he got a pipe and a bit of you know, the nicotine down inside it. He put a bit of that down inside his throat and in half a minute he were dead on the ground. Oh, that impressed me, I thought if it's that deadly you don't want anything to do with that.

39:00 "How doesn't it kill you?" he says, "Doesn't kill me but that thing can't take it". I'll never forget that as long as I live. Poor old frill lizard he got that nicotine down his throat and he were dead. That quite impressed me.

**You could have told the cigarette companies.**

I remember my grandfather he used to chew tobacco. He used to get a plug of tobacco and it had a little

39:30 metal tab used to be on it with two spikes and as kids we used to think those little tab things were wonderful. If you walked on them they had these two spikes sticking up. You knew where they went in, they were sharp. We used to treasure these things off granddad's tobacco plugs, block of tobacco. Used to come in a block and he used to cut a bit off with a knife,

40:00 shove it in the pipe and light it.

## Tape 2

00:33 **Jim I'm very interested to know how you got interested in the navy when you lived in rural Caboolture.**

That's something I just can't fathom out. I've often wondered about that myself because I'm not a swimmer all together, I'd be glad to save myself if you threw me in the water. Navy was going to teach me.

01:00 With the navy to be able to swim you had to swim fifty metres or fifty yards in your overalls. I had a bloke, PT [physical training] trainer in Darwin said, "I'm going to teach you how to swim, don't worry" and I was getting, I could get to forty yards but by that time I'd just about had it. I was coming along quite nicely and low and behold they shoved me on a ship and I never had a chance to finish. My papers were

01:30 always marked non-swimmer. I never got through because here as a kid Mum was always scared of the water. She was from a fishing family, always scared of the water, you don't go near that waterhole. Of course there was a lot of children did get drowned. That was sort of an inbuilt thing. My Father, while he could swim, he was never interested in teaching us boys how to swim. I could never understand that. Of course we never had the facilities for

02:00 swimming pools round here. It was either a water hole and be careful you don't get stuck in the reeds or something like that and that was it. It was just one of those things. I've never understood why but always had a feeling to go to the navy. It wasn't the uniform. It was just I wanted to, you know, see the world in another aspect. I got broken in the hard way

02:30 because when I landed in to Brisbane the first ship I got put on to was a tug. There was three of us put on to tow a target way out here in the Pacific for the Yankee [American] fleet to have a shoot, night shooting. There was me and another, we were only ordinary seamen and didn't have any rating as an AB [Able Seaman] or anything. He said, "You see this, you lay down on here

03:00 and you see this and the shells will fall so far that way or so far that way. Keep this line on the target". This target was six hundred metres behind and it was a big cement pontoon with a thirty foot high sail. When we got way out there, we sailed all day out into the Pacific and there was three cruisers and four destroyers,

03:30 the Yankees out of Brisbane and they were going to meet us way out there. We sailed and we dragged this thing all day. We didn't know there was a heavy change of weather coming. Come nine o'clock at night they were ready to start. Well they put the search lights on the target. They were miles away, all we could see was a flash over the horizon and bang. Of course the first lot come, there were red shells

04:00 and this other bloke yelled out, "Red, lift two hundred yards so you don't fall short" and then the blue shells come and here's me on the blue shells, "Drop them two hundred yards". Every gun, every ship had a different colour. By the time we were that confused with which shell was which colour, well eventually they all opened up together and we thought, "Well we'll keep our head down round here,

04:30 we don't know where some of these shells are going". Well that went on till midnight. By this time the weather had got up and this target was towing us, not us towing the target. We ended up way down off the New South Wales coast the next day; we were supposed to be back in Brisbane. I've never seen anything like it. These waves are pouring over this tug, of course a tug's always low in the water and talk about getting broken into the sea, I certainly did. We were flat out hanging on let along doing

anything else.

05:00 We eventually got this target in and when it come daylight the next day there was this bit hanging off it, they'd flogged it. They weren't supposed to knock it about too much but God, they knocked it about terrible. The shells missed us, that was the main thing. That's what was worrying us, how many of these shells were going to go astray but they missed us. Of course they had the search lights on it and they could see it in the distance but we weren't sure they could see us. Anyway

05:30 that was all right. The next ship I got on I was on that about a week then I got shoved onto the HMAS Bangalow, cable laying. That was in Moreton Bay. They were laying this cables so if anything came through in the channels, if a ship came through they'd be able to see. They were starting on the electronics actually. We were out there laying this and we got into Bribie Passage one night and there was a south easter

06:00 blew in. I didn't think Bribie Passage could get so rough. We tied up to Bribie Jetty. It was a fair lump of a ship too and she just about belted that wharf apart during the night. God it was rough. They lost a sailor. It wasn't off our ship. At that time they were doing practice on landings, a new breed of landing craft. All these men were on it and one bloke got washed over the side and they never found hair nor hide, all they found was his cap.

06:30 Never found hair nor hide of him. They searched that place the next day and whether a shark got him or not we don't know. That was my first two ships in the navy and boy I was learning fast.

**It's kind of crazy that you would be on a ship and not know how to swim.**

Don't need to worry about that. You had your lifebelt. Doesn't mean to say if you can swim you can save yourself because if you've been injured or something you mightn't be any good to you. You had your Mae West on.

07:00 As soon as you went to action stations you put your Mae West [life vest; explained below] on and when you got in the water then you blew it up and that was it. There was quite a lot couldn't swim in the navy. I was amazed. I was dying to learn. And I would have learnt too if they'd left me there long enough. I only had about three more days to go.

**The Mae West is the...?**

It sort of fits around here and you take it in, it fits on here

07:30 all it does is hold your head above the water.

**I see, so it's around your chest then?**

Yeah. That's how it got it's name the Mae West [actress], she was big in the front, see. This thing, when you blew it up you had a tube, you blew it up and it held your head out of the water, didn't matter about the rest of your body.

**She was quite a va va voom, wasn't she?**

Yeah, she was, that's how it come to get the name Mae West.

**Was she a sort of pin up girl for the blokes in a way?**

Yeah she was, they all had pin up girls.

08:00 **What about, was it Betty Grable [actress] with the legs, that picture of her with the nice curvy legs?**

Yeah, there were a lot of girls had nice curvy legs; anything that was a girl had curvy legs when it comes to it.

**Did you have a particular favourite movie star?**

No, I can't say I did. We didn't get to the movies a lot, we couldn't afford to go.

**You're talking about**

08:30 **growing up out here?**

Yeah, that's right. I was still growing up when I joined the navy, when I joined the army in fact. I just turned eighteen.

**How much were the movies when you were a teenager?**

I think it used to be twenty pence, it depended on what seat you got, I think one was ten pence and one was twenty pence. That's what it was. I remember a lot of us young blokes and girls used to walk down here to Caboolture to the pictures

09:00 and coming home we used to have a great time. We used to get all the dogs in the district barking. People over there had a dog and you only had to make a few funny noises and these dogs would all start



up. There was no lights or anything, it was all pitch black dark. No electricity here then.

**How could you see, did you have torches?**

No, you knew where the road was. You got used to walking in the dark. A torch'd get you lost for sure,

09:30 you lose your sense of direction if you've got a light. I'd be lost in me own paddock with a light, with a tractor with lights on, they're damn dangerous things of a night. Things look different of a night with a light.

**I've heard for instance in the scouts to get you used to your sense of direction that you close your eyes when you put a light on, when you put a torch on and then open your eyes.**

I don't know about that.

10:00 I've never heard about that. I know this much. Once you get used to the dark and you've got your direction you're pretty right because we knew where all the roads were, we knew we were all pretty safe. You didn't have the bashings and that that goes on now and there used to be about six or eight of us used to come down here, we used to pick up a couple of Allen girls down here and we used to walk up to Caboolture for the pictures.

**So coming up with the ten pence though,**

10:30 **that was quite difficult?**

Yeah. It was.

**But then you couldn't take a girl to the pictures.**

Sometimes you did. Not often. You didn't take a girl to the pictures if you couldn't pay for them. The girl never paid, that was it.

**Growing up in the Depression were you aware of the many homeless people around Australia?**

Yeah.

11:00 we were aware a lot because the swaggies [itinerant workers] as we used to call them, they were numerous. Sometimes there was as many as eight or nine walking up the road at once. They were all homeless

**Walking out here?**

Yeah, some of them we used to get on this road, this road used to come right through from Narangba but the main road was up here through from Deception Bay, that was the road. There was a lot of it about. These bachelors that used to be up here, they'd all been the same, they'd all come from various parts

11:30 and the bank wanted somebody on the property and the bank agreed to them going here. They were supposed to pay so much but they couldn't meet that so they walked off again. It was a calamity, there's no doubt about that. And yet when the war started there was all the money needed, employment and things flourished, amazing.

**Who looked after the properties when the swaggies walked off?**

They were deserted, a lot of them got burnt down.

12:00 **Would the government burn them down?**

No, bushfires used to come through. The bank was keen you know of somebody being in there but how were supposed to pay, that was it. The bank owned all these properties up here. There was only, they didn't own my Father's place, they didn't own Scudamores, they didn't own Tinney's, they didn't own Woolman's.

12:30 All the rest were bank properties and the bank was always keen to get somebody to go on them.

**Did you parents actually end up feeding any of the swaggies around?**

Mum used to if they used to come in but we were well off the beaten track. If they used to, Mum used to always make them a sandwich or something and get them on their way again.

**Was it hard, you were talking about what a clever**

13:00 **farmer your Father was, was it hard on your Mother?**

She was a worker too, she used to take the horse and scuttler too and do that too.

**The horse and what sorry?**

Scuttler, that was a gadget that went through the ground, worked the ground up. Yeah, she could handle that all right. She was a terrific worker. My eldest sister's exactly the same but she don't do any

horse work of course. She's just the same round the garden, straighten this up, put that up, dig that up.

13:30 **So everybody pulled their weight except for your younger brother.**

Well he as a bit spoilt. I suppose there was reason for him, they had a hell of a job to save him and that'd be the reason. It used to get under your skin a bit at the time. Used to get under my skin.

**What about your sisters did they get annoyed?**

They used to get annoyed too. He used to get away, we always had to do the washing up and that meant more rows over the washing up.

14:00 Mum used to get in amongst them some nights. It'd be somebody's turn to wash up, somebody's turn to dry up and then they used to take it in turns. "It's not my turn tonight" and all this carry on, you know the usual. That used to happen quite often but Mum used to get in amongst it and sort it out and that was it.

**Was your Father a strict man?**

14:30 Yes. Many times I got a clout for something I shouldn't have done, many times.

**What do you mean, a back hander?**

Yeah, a back hander, kick up the bum, yeah. You'd remember not to do it next time. That's what's wrong with half the world today, there isn't enough discipline. Some of them were over the fence. I very seldom went to school I didn't get the cane or something, I always seemed to be able to do something wrong.

15:00 **Where did they give you the cane, on the fingers?**

On the hand, yeah. Used to hurt in cold weather, gees it did hurt. Then I used to get another lot when I got home. My sisters used to say, "Jimmy's had the cane today" "What have you been doing this time?" - another lot at home for playing up at school.

**Wouldn't your parents think you've already had your punishment, that was enough?**

No had to make sure that they knew what was going on and you're

15:30 not going to play up at school. "My kids don't play up anywhere", that attitude.

**Did you want to go and throttle your sister for dobbing you in?**

No. You knew damn well it was going to happen. Don't worry, it used to happen vice versa too. Although the girls never used to get caned or anything. It was only the blokes who got caned. The old headmaster used to be always stuck into me. He used to like when I came home on leave, he used to like me to go and see him, he always had a drop of scotch for me.

16:00 **And yet he was the one that caned you?**

Yeah, he was the one. He didn't make any difference. He caned his own kids too. No preferences. He'd won the military medal during the First World War, old Ted Nolan. I had to go and get two references for the navy. He gave me one and the local shop keeper gave me the other one,

16:30 that was my two references. You had to get two references on character for the navy.

**Speaking about school Jim, how did you like school?**

Actually the best day I had at school was the last one. I always had something else I could do. The biggest part of my family is the same. The grand daughter that's here today, she's the first one of the Dobson clan that's ever been through to university. I had to

17:00 congratulate her on being the first Dobson that's gone through the university from our family. When you come to think about that's three generations that there's nobody. It's one of those things and yet you know I was only starting to learn when I left school. That was when I should have actually been starting. I always regret

17:30 the day they started the class on algebra I wasn't there and I could never understand it and I never got a chance to go back over it. Didn't have time, see, one teacher had three classes and couldn't fiddle about with one. I wasn't there the day they started on that and I never could understand it and yet it's one of the things that's fundamental. I've learnt since that I should have gone back to school

18:00 and learnt it. I wish I had of.

**Well I did algebra and I can tell you I still don't understand a thing about it. Jim we were talking about discipline and school and how you tended to get a bit of caning it seems so I was wondering if you liked school, if you played up?**

I didn't play up unnecessarily.

18:30 Well, unnecessarily, I used to get into troubles. I would sometimes back answer when I shouldn't have and things like that. By and large I think I was pretty ruly. Some of them they were really obstreperous but I wasn't, no shape or form. I'd have got murdered at home if I had of been. I'd have got real trouble.

**Did you have a nick name at school?**

Yeah I had a nickname, Jimmy.

19:00 Everybody knew me as Jimmy. Somehow or other I detest that title. Even my sister still call me Jimmy yet my younger sister, Mavis she still calls me James which is me right name and oftentimes I don't realize who she's talking to.

**Is that right?**

Yeah.

**Now you talked a little bit about school and your favourite day was the one you left,**

19:30 **what about, there must have been some subjects that got you interested in joining the war and perhaps seeing the world.**

Geography was always one that I liked, different parts of the world and I always thought I always had a fancy to go to Alaska fishing but I don't know why. Always had that feeling

20:00 that I'd like to have gone to Alaska, fishing. I remember seeing a film or reading about fishing in Alaska one time and I thought, "That'd be a great place to go fishing". Plenty of fish, cold water, good solid fish and didn't have any trouble preserving them, having them cooled down or anything, a great place to go but I never did anything more about it. Even when the war was over, no, I was gone back to farming and that was it.

**Did you say that your Father**

20:30 **was in World War I?**

No, my Father wasn't, my uncle was.

**Did he survive?**

Yes. He only got slightly wounded and nothing to effect him at all.

**This was your Mother's brother or your Father's brother?**

My Father's brother. My Mother had two brothers, Mum had

21:00 two brothers that went to France and they both came back again. When we were coming back on the Australia we called in to Perth and I knew one of them was there. He'd lost one leg, he didn't lose that in the war, he become a wool classer and they were on a building and he fell off. Broke his leg and it had to be amputated. We were allowed to have

21:30 visitors on the Australia and have them for afternoon tea. They were highly delighted. He went all over that ship, even with one leg, a wooden leg and a walking stick he was able to go up and down those ladders and stairways as good as. He was a great bloke, I got along well with him. He died of cancer also, cancer apparently runs in the breed and they've been watching me for about twenty years. They found a few polyps in the years gone by.

22:00 That was part of the history and system.

**What about pets and animals growing up, did you have any special favourite pets?**

I always wanted a kangaroo dog, always. I had an old friend lived up the road said, "I'll get you a kangaroo dog, I'll get you a pup" and he got me this pup.

**Can I just ask you sorry Jim, what is a kangaroo dog?**

It's a heavily built

22:30 greyhound. You know a greyhound, he's about double the size. They'll take on a kangaroo, that's why they had them, there was a fair amount of kangaroos around here and they would take on a kangaroo. I get this kangaroo dog, Pluto we christened him. He was a proper Pluto, he was anything. If you were wheeling a wheel barrow he'd jump in and take a ride and say, "That's me". That bloke always, I had him before the war

23:00 and he always knew when I was coming home on leave. It was amazing. Mum used to say, "We knew you weren't far away, that dog had a sense that you were coming". He was a funny dog though. The trouble that he got into, you wouldn't read about it. I remember we used to have to, having a number of cattle and dairying we used to have to get a lot of feed for them. We used to grow oats and that

23:30 and dry, for hay. This dog always wanted to be up in the dray, he always had to be there. This day we were getting a fair lump of load on and we used to have a telephone line, one line for a telephone and

we went along underneath this and I don't know what happened but we shifted the horse to put another load with hayforks up and this dog got tangled up with this one single wire and here he is, yelling his head off going round and round on the wire.

24:00 You wouldn't read about it. Well he eventually dropped onto the ground, shook himself, thought, "Where am I?" and that was it. He survived it without any trouble.

**Did he live to a ripe old age?**

He did. He was a kangaroo dog. He didn't like kangaroos though. We were chasing a kangaroo one day, went under a barbed wire fence and his tail come up and sort of half broke it.

24:30 Well he had a knob in his tail like that and the old dray we had had a rail along the side. One day his tail got in there to the knob and he tried to pull it out. Well he's yelling and screaming and here's me trying to hold this dog. And the uncle was there and he was going to cut his tail off, "don't cut it off". Eventually I choked this dog down and got his tail out, he jumped out there and shook himself, a silly thing to do, and that was it.

25:00 **So he wasn't much of a kangaroo dog after all?**

No, no. He found a kangaroo one day that had his, the roos used to jump the fence and this roo had jumped and caught the two top wires and got his leg caught. He was injured badly. Dog saw, "I'll have this bloke" and the old roo shoved his back to the tree like they usually do if they're in trouble and Pluto'd go up to him. He grabs Pluto and

25:30 gives him a great hug, he was yelling for home, he never went back to a kangaroo. That killed him for kangaroos. He was a funny dog.

**What about religion Jim, where you brought up a certain faith?**

No. My Father wouldn't have religion at any price. Nor would I if it come to it.

**So you didn't have to get dressed up in your Sunday best?**

No. They decided they could spend their time better.

26:00 Yet my grandparents up at Caboolture church, they partly built that. They were very religious yet when it come to their final days none of them wanted anything to do with them. No, I've never forgiven all the poor Jews that got murdered, they all were praying to their gods and nothing happened. Can't have that carry on. Nope. Religion and I had a disagreement

26:30 a long time ago.

**Did that start then after the war or during the war?**

During the war I could see it. On the cruisers we used to have prayers every morning, eight o'clock. Gunners party fall out. I was always seemed to be gunners party and used to go and oil the guns, clean the shells and I thought, "This'll do more good than all them out there praying etc." and they weren't relying on the prayers either

27:00 they were relying on those guns being ready for action all the time. I just couldn't come at that. I've seen a lot of things in religion. I had a grandfather, I remember him telling me as a kid, "If the neighbours preach the gospel, brand the calves early".

**What does that mean?**

It means, don't trust your neighbours, he'll get your calves.

27:30 I'll never forget him telling me that and I was only a kid at the time. If the neighbours preach the scriptures, that's religion, brand the calves early, otherwise somebody else'll be branding them.

**Meaning don't trust people who are so righteous, so religious?**

That's right. When it comes to anything like that they'll let themselves down. That's been in my family practically right through.

28:00 **I know this isn't about me but it does make me think.**

Please yourself, have religion if you want it.

**No, I agree with you. I think better to just be an honest person.**

Too many people have been in the position, they've all been going to church and you wouldn't trust them very far, I know too many of them.

28:30 Not for mine.

**I'm just curious because when you were speaking with Kiernan [interviewer] before you mentioned well I took it that you had a bit of a disagreement with your Father about selling**

**the farm when you bought the farm off him, did you remain friends?**

Oh yeah, until the last. When I sold it then. Government was going to put a satellite city out there. We weren't using it. We got into bananas and had various properties up the coast, we weren't using it

29:00 and I thought, "We've got an offer, we'll take it". My Father was very upset about that, he'd worked hard to get that together but I didn't see any point in keeping it going just because he'd worked so hard to clear it and it was only going to be an anchor around my neck and every year we had fire troubles, fires coming flying through, no. In the latter end he didn't even want to know me, regrettably but that's the way of the world.

29:30 He didn't want the younger brother for a long while but he took onto him at the latter end so that was all right by me.

**Did you go to his funeral?**

Yep.

**He died up here?**

Me Father was buried, no he was cremated, he's cremated. I didn't even get a chance to say what the funeral arrangements were. I went along and that was it.

30:00 I thought, "Oh that's all right". Of course me Stepmother, I didn't get along with her. I could never do anything right and Hilda could never do anything right. That was all right. She looked after Dad well, so good luck.

**I was gonna say, families, who needs them?**

That's right. You're stuck with them, as the saying goes you can pick your friends but you're stuck with your relations.

**That's right.**

30:30 **Something that I was thinking about when you were talking about the Depression is petrol rationing, that would have had a huge effect in the rural areas but your Father didn't have a tractor.**

He didn't have a tractor but he had a utility. He had to get his goods to the station. That's it. I had a motorbike. When I come home I used to go to the police sergeant

31:00 and I knew him, "I'd like to do a bit of travelling around while I'm at home can I have a bit of petrol for my motor bike?" "Yeah, how much do you want?" I used to get rations four, eight gallons or something, give them to Dad, he was right. I didn't take the motorbike far. They didn't have any drama about giving ex-servicemen petrol so I used to get that for him and that was it. Used to help.

**I've heard about in some rural areas**

31:30 **even in the city I suppose, men that didn't go off to the war were sent white feathers.**

That's right.

**Did you know any chaps that received those?**

I didn't, no. I don't know whether you'd say it was loyalty or what it was or whether it was desire for something different. I wouldn't like to say which it was.

32:00 We knew we didn't want the Japs and the Germans telling us what we were going to do, that was the main thing about it. Of course when Pearl Harbour got raided that's a different complexion on things completely in this part of the world because it was in the Pacific. Before that it was all in Europe, it was a long way away. As soon as it came in then they lost Singapore then they raided Darwin then bombed Townsville. Well, we were

32:30 really in trouble then. They had no trouble getting all the men they want. They had a lot of trouble keeping enough men at home to work the farms and what have you. All the Land Army women were out on the job too.

**Did you take an interest in girls from a young age or later on in the navy?**

Not really. One girl I wrote to, her brother was in the army

33:00 with me, I wrote to her for quite a few years. When I decided I was going to marry Hilda somehow or other she never sent me a photograph and when we come back. They didn't give us any time in Sydney I just thought, "Oh well, forget it" and that's it. It's just one of those things. I'm rather sorry I did drop it like that but I thought, "Oh well, I've undertaken to marry a girl and that's it".

**Would that have meant if she had sent**

33:30 **you a photograph that she was serious about you?**

If I had to go and meet her I wouldn't have known who I was looking for.

**Oh.**

I thought a bloke would look a fool. That was it. I'd only ever seen her once.

**I misunderstood, sorry. What was your favourite food growing up, was there anything special or a treat that you got?**

I think

34:00 I was one of those blokes that liked any food. Only one thing I didn't like was chokos and green pawpaws.

**I was brought up on chokos too and I like them with a little bit of butter and pepper.**

My Mother used to make a white sauce to go with them. My brother and I one day, we used to always have a choko vine, Mum would have a choko vine over the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK fence or over some fence and we were going down

34:30 to the pigs, I forget why we had to go down to the pigs and we'll take a couple of chokos to the pigs. The pigs wouldn't eat them and we thought, "The pigs won't eat them, they're no good to us" that sort of put the finish, I only eat chokos now if they're done for me and Hilda wouldn't bother cooking them for her, she don't like them, I wouldn't worry about them. Run them all down, they got any amount of chokos there. Got plenty of food without that. Some people go mad on them.

**Did you Dad used to give you a clip around the ears if you didn't eat anything though?**

35:00 No. That didn't happen. The only one time that, I forget what happened, we didn't like it, "Well you're going to eat it. It'll be there for the next meal". That only happened once. Had to go down the next meal, we cleaned it up after that. That only happened once, don't remember that happening. We used to get well fed actually. We used to grow sweet potatoes and

35:30 pumpkins, lettuce. Mum always had cabbages and things like that. They had a lot going for them.

**What about dairy?**

We were dairying, yeah. We always made our own butter always. In hot weather it was a terrible job to get the cream to separate from the curds. In cold weather it was a simple matter, three or four stirs.

36:00 They got up to milking about thirty head of cattle at one time.

**By hand?**

All by hand, yes. I was taught to milk not long after I started school. Learned how to strip a cow to get the milk out. You can strip a cow all day unless you know what to do you won't get milk. You've got to get the teat and squeeze it downwards and you'll soon

36:30 get the milk out of them.

**I'd have no idea because I've never.**

Yeah, that's right. Now it's all done with machinery.

**Let me ask you before I go on to my next little bit here, you mentioned a chicken hawk, what is a chicken hawk? Is it a bird?**

Yep it's a bird.

**That looks like a chicken?**

No, he's a special breed of hawk that likes chicken.

37:00 **Oh, right.**

He likes chicken and they'll murder chickens one after the other. They just sort of pick them in the back of the head, that's how they kill them. They're deadly on chickens.

**So what, you'd wake up in the morning and there'd be half eaten chickens?**

He might come in ten o'clock this morning, might come in this afternoon, you never know when they come. They come when they feel like it. So you had to keep the chickens shut up and all this carry on. Then they got out, look out, there'll be a hawk round here before long.

37:30 They were cruel things on chickens.

**Now growing up around this area here, did you make any friends with aborigines near Caboolture?**

No. there was no aborigines here in my time. They were here when my grandfather and grandmother came but they weren't here in our time. My Father remembered King Jacky when he was a lad. He was

reared here and he remembered him.

**Who was King Jacky sorry Jim?**

He was the last

- 38:00 king of the tribe here. He lived out on the mountains here and he lived over on what we call Franz's place. There was Franz's Mountain over here and he lived over there. I remember my Dad telling me that him and his friend, Theo Franz went down one time and Theo thought he'd play up. He had an old bark and tin hut, the aborigine used to live in and he chucked a big old stone over onto his roof
- 38:30 and out he come "Walla, walla, walla" and Theo got into trouble. The old bloke went up and told his Mother he'd been down there throwing stones on his roof. Theo and Dad got into trouble with Mrs. Franz for upsetting the aborigines. That was the last of the aborigines here; they took them away to Palm Island. One of the dark parts of our histories was the aboriginals.
- 39:00 End of tape

## Tape 3

- 00:32 **We were just talking about the aboriginals at the end of the last tape. Do you remember what was said about them to you as you grew up?**

Not a lot. Used to be a lady in Caboolture was a full blooded aboriginal and my Mother used to work at the household of the local butchers and she had a lot of time for that lady.

- 01:00 She ended up dying many years ago now. I can't remember her name but she was one of the last of this area. She must have been just a very small child or somebody brought her here, I don't know exactly what happened. It was Mrs. McAllister was her name. I remember her; we used to go up to rural school in Caboolture

- 01:30 and she used to be sometimes on the street. She never interfered with us and we never interfered with her. She always sort of nodded to us and that was it.

**Were you told anything or taught anything at school about aboriginals?**

Not so much aboriginals, more about the kanakas at school and how they were brought in to help

- 02:00 labour for the sugar industry. Not so much aboriginals because they seemed to be put into the back paddock sort of business, you know what I mean, leave that alone, no interest there for you, that was the attitude. The kanakas they were sort of more looked up to, well they helped us out with growing sugar. Of course there used to be quite a lot down here in the Caboolture area, they grew a lot of sugar down here at one time, they even had their own sugar mill.

- 02:30 All that country down there was kanaka sugar. That was it but aboriginals, I remember Dad telling me about the last couple that was on the ranges up here. I can't be sure now whether they took King Jacky to Palm Island or whether he died, they let him die here. I think they let him die here. Where he's buried I don't know.

- 03:00 I know there's a gravesite up here over Bevingerry Creek but who that is I don't know.

**Talking about this area here and these kind of stories, what was it like, was it country?**

Oh yeah, it was really bush. Where we're sitting now was bush right up until, Hilda and I built this house in 1975.

- 03:30 It never had nothing on it 'til then. The bush had sort of been pushed back and pushed back. They'd rolled all this back with a dozer then and the big heaps of timber were still down here. When we went to school it was all bush all the way. This road wasn't here then, there used to be a shortcut we used to call it from back here at the house here, there was a clay hill here and it used to sort of go down at an angle down to the bridge at the bottom, that was the only road. This road

- 04:00 here was opened up with the relief workers in about 1936, 1937. The bloke that was the last mayor of Caboolture shire, his Father did that. He had so many days a week on relief work and he did that with a wheelbarrow and shovel along here. That was when I was going to school. Before that it was just a track, a two wheel track. Horse and cart and the old vehicles. Going home from school

- 04:30 we used to put the sand, nearly on top of the hill all the way and the water used to run down and bring all the sand and there'd be two sand beds and if you put the sand down in the vehicle'd all get bogged and we used to have to disappear before they got bogged otherwise they were looking for kids'd put this sand in, see. I remember one old bloke up there used to go up and cut firewood and he had bakers wood, the two bakers in Caboolture

- 05:00 they had to have special wood for their fires, for their ovens and he used to, he had an old truck and he

used to wind the crank handle up and if she wouldn't start he used to bring it down, bang on the bonnet. We used to stand and watch this lot, never saw anything like that in my life, haven't seen it since either. That was a bloke called Vic Skipper. I'll never forget him. We always reckoned he'd kill us if he caught us. We used to, every afternoon, going home, push all the sand down into the tracks.

- 05:30 That's all the road that was there, only two wheel tracks. The stumps had all been pushed back, there was a stump here and a stump there and they jumped over. That was it. That was right the way through to Narangba, two wheel tracks. Of course when we got this road here, built up here, Bruce Highway that went through well they were building that, they did that with horse and scoops. There was no tractors on that, it was all horse work.
- 06:00 That was about the mid thirties [1930s] that went through. Then the electricity came through after that. The electricity came through here to go to building Somerset Dam, we had no electricity before then. This area here, brother in law and I was guaranteed up here, we had a chicken hatchery down here near the school so we could get their power. Before that we had engines, making our own power. That was no good. As soon as an engine broke you were in trouble. We used to have a tractor and an engine and they were going day and night, that was no good. So we moved the whole the lot down to here and then we had to put a guarantee up, brother in law and I put up the guarantee for the area to get electricity.

**Strange being so close to Brisbane.**

- 07:00 That's right. That happened in the seventies.

**That must have changed your life when they built the Bruce Highway back in the thirties. How did it change for you as a kid, what did you notice?**

The amount of traffic that was on the road; that was the only thing that changed. The first death, road accident in this area, motor car was an old chap

- 07:30 used to live up the road, had been to Caboolture, picked up the pension, I think he'd had a couple of drinks and come back on the push bike and a car come down and took him and skidded sideways down into the gully down here and killed him. We were at school that afternoon and some of the kids at school, he was their grandfather. It was a real sad day for the area. That was the first road death in the area, a bloke called Bill Anderson and he used live up here next to

- 08:00 where our farm was up there. About three mile up the road.

**Did you ever go down to Brisbane town much at all when you were young?**

I don't think I'd been to Brisbane as such until after I'd left school. I'd been to the Exhibition three or four times before then and Dad used to take

- 08:30 a truck down to Kedron tram terminus and leave it there and we used to go in the tram from there. That was the Brisbane show, that was a real event, the Brisbane show. We used to, Dad used to supply so much fruit for the near north coast fruit exhibit in the Brisbane show. We all had to go and see that and see what cattle was there. We were interested in dairy cows too

- 09:00 because we had a few up here. That was the way of the world at that time.

**What was it like going to Brisbane as a country boy for the show?**

Were a real country boy. We used to take our own snack with us as well. Used to take the billy can. Used to get a billy can of boiling water down there and make your tea and that. Used to go and sit out under

- 09:30 the trees near the number two oval. That was lunch there and when they'd had enough they'd get on a tram and come home. That was always the trouble was the cows had to be milked. They had to milk them of a morning before they went and then they got milked very late at night when they come home. It was a very late night too.

**What was the things that really impressed you about the show when you'd go?**

- 10:00 Those country exhibits, the district exhibits I think were the main interest. I don't remember being very impressed with the side shows. Wasn't very interested in their hurdy gurdies, whirly winds and all the rest of it. Never sort of went for that.

- 10:30 Used to like to see the grand parade. Used to think that was wonderful. They used to have a parade every day and there was only the one day when everything had to be on show. The parade, that was wonderful, I used to like to see that.

**Was your family at all interested or involved in politics as you grew up?**

- 11:00 Not so much involved in politics, no. Always had what you'd say an opinion in politics but I don't remember anybody ever being a member of a political party. Always followed I would say to the left of politics, but not always.



11:30 **Tell us did your family or yourself follow the lead up to the war? Were you aware?**

Yeah, we were very much aware of it. We were all very worried, what's going to happen next. Britain had declared on Germany, Australia did likewise.

12:00 It seemed to be quite a while before they got started again. There was a couple of ships sunk, that sort of brought home that things were.

12:30 **We were just sort of talking about the lead up to the war. Do you remember hearing the news, where were you and how did you hear the news that war had been declared?**

It was one night after tea we listened to the radio, that's where we first learned about it.

13:00 I think everybody, even the children sort of stopped, we've got trouble this time. That was the attitude. Then of course as the news went by, nothing seemed to happen 'til they started sinking ships then we knew very well it was getting serious. It was one of those things that sort of flowed on.

13:30 I remember the night very well but I don't know whether it was the actual time it was done over there or whether that was just when we'd put the radio on, I just don't know. It was supposed to be, what, eleven o'clock over there in England, wasn't it. By eleven o'clock the next morning if he hadn't answered, that was it. That would have made it about eight or nine o'clock here wouldn't it.

14:00 It was after tea I know and this night we were listening to the radio. Chamberlain came on and said we are now at war. I was only what, I was born in 1923,

14:30 I was sixteen year old so didn't perhaps register as much for me as it did for somebody. Within a week they'd sort of started recruiting men and things started to change more or less straight away. All these blokes that had been on walking the roads they all had a job. All they had to do was volunteer and they gave them uniform and food. That did happen.

15:00 **Did you think you'd possibly be going to war at that stage?**

Not at that stage, no. It sort of built up in you as the years went by and this happened and that happened and something else happened. When they sent the first lot of troops away that must have been in 1940, that was when it really hit home that we are in trouble this time.

15:30 So many of the first troops went straight to England as forestry workers. They wanted to catch up with timber or something in England. I don't know whether it was harvesting forest or what it was. I don't think it was planting. It's be the wrong time to be planting then. Must have been for harvesting timber. One of Hilda's brothers in law can tell me, he remembers when the Australian men arrived

16:00 for the forestry but what they were doing I don't know.

**Did you follow the progress of the war closely as a young man before you joined up?**

I think so. We used to get the paper every day and listen to the radio every day. I think we were all following what was happening, how they were going backwards and forwards in Africa. The first bit was when

16:30 the HMAS Sydney locked horns with an Italian ship and the Italians bolted for port. Sydney put a couple of shots into them and they bolted. They had more speed than what our ships had so they left our blokes behind, they couldn't catch them. They must have had some beautiful ships the Italians but they didn't know how to use them. That was when they started to, you know

17:00 things were starting to get serious for us.

**What effect did hearing these stories, this news, have on you as a young man?**

I don't know that it had much effect on me. It wasn't until I got up to nearing volunteering age that I thought, "Well, it's going to have an effect on me all right, I want to volunteer".

17:30 My parents had told me loud and clearly they weren't signing my application until I turned eighteen so that sort of shut me out of it otherwise I think I'd have been in before then. I could have got into the navy as an ordinary seaman second class at seventeen but they wouldn't agree to it.

**Why did you want to join up at such a young age, what was the motivation for you?**

18:00 I don't rightly know. I don't know whether it was king and country or what it was. I don't rightly know. I wouldn't say it was any definite matter in it but it was a desire, "I'd better be in this, we've all got to be in it" and that's what the attitude was. So that's where we

18:30 sort of got into it and the further we went along the more it become desirable to be there. Everybody else was joining up and thought, "Well, better go give a hand as well". The women were forming the Land Army to get the work done on the land and that was it.

**Interesting you should raise that, were there any impediments, obstacles because they might**

19:00 **prefer you to stay on the farm?**

That hadn't come about. I know later on I wouldn't have been able to join, they wouldn't have let me join but that didn't come at that stage. My brother, he was two years younger than I was and he couldn't join, they wouldn't let him join. They'd take him in the VDC, the Voluntary Defence Corps, the locals and they had a uniform

19:30 a rifle and everything else. In fact they had better rifles than what we had, they all had new rifles. The Volunteer Defence Corps. They used to give them weekend training. I remember one time I was home on leave I went to one of their weekend sessions. It was quite an eye opener. They seemed to think of it as one big joke sort of business. Knowing what we'd seen and what we'd done.

20:00 It was quite interesting to go and see how they'd perform because a lot of the blokes we knew there couldn't hit a with a cow in the arse with a shovel full of shot, as the saying is, we knew that. Some of those blokes that had rifles and been brought up with rifles we reckoned we could hit what we wanted to hit, as long as the rifle was all right, we could use it right.

20:30 **Interesting you should say that. You had a bit of a talk with Heather about why you joined the navy, why didn't you become say a sniper in the army?**

Don't know. You couldn't actually, if I remember rightly, you didn't get much choice in where you went. They looked at you, what your vocation was, where you shoved

21:00 in the army, being a farm lad they must have thought, "We can shove this bloke in the artillery, we'll make some use of him there". You didn't get much choice of where you went. In the navy you didn't get much choice. You could go to a seaman or stoker. A friend of mine now suffering badly from Alzheimer's, he

21:30 didn't have a say. Wanted to know if he'd take on an officer's steward job, he said, "Yeah, I think I can handle that" and he did all right at that. Him and I were together, we used to land together at a lot of places. We were at Darwin together. One time we were outside Darwin we'd taken a convoy across from Thursday Island to Darwin and then we had to go to Merauke for some reason but I never

22:00 quite remember what. They met us outside Darwin with fuel and water because we were running low, all our washing water then was salt water, we'd run low on fresh water. They used to issue us with salt water soap. You can imagine what that was like, having a shower with salt water soap. You always got that sticky that you felt as though your clothes would stick to you. They had to watch that because we had a fair bit of skin disease in the tropics with anything like that. This night

22:30 we had to meet with this ship outside Darwin. Well out in the Arafura sea we were. This low vessel, you could just see it in the dark on the water line coming along and they pulled alongside. They had hoses coming across to give us oil and water. Somebody said, "What ship is it?" and this bloke yelled out, "Turka [?]" and I thought, "Geez, I know a bloke on that", "You got a bloke Bob Hughes on board?"

23:00 he said, "Yeah. Hughesy. Bloke here reckons he knows you". Up he comes. "Hey" he says, "come with me. I know where we can get something to celebrate to drink", "Do you?", "Yeah. Come with me". Went down into the officer's, where he used to look after them, got a bottle and had a good drop of this each. Said, "Well, glad to meet you again, I think I'd better be moving". Next thing, somebody yelled, "We've slipped".

23:30 That meant the hoses had gone and I took a flying leap and I got across. Geez, I just made it. The longest jump I've ever done. Otherwise I'd have been in real trouble being on the wrong ship. I didn't see him again after that. We both got sent back to Brisbane. We'd done our time in the Pacific, eighteen months on the Pacific station.

24:00 We both got sent back to Brisbane. They put me in to hospital to operate on my eyes and then I got sent and he got sent down to Pinkenba Boom Dept, that's where they put the net across to keep the submarines out. That was a curse of a job. Those damn nets I could never get them sorted out. They were all set of heavy steel rings and if you put them in a certain way you could handle them, if they went the other way

24:30 they sort of folded up under one another. He was officer's steward there and him and I used to come home here sometimes on weekends, we were doing all right, we were having a great time. Used to go to all the dances round Brisbane and what have you and used to do a lot of times when we'd jump the fence. About eight barbed wires. To get the sailor's blue trousers over a barbed wire fence is a bit of job. So you tacked them into your socks and then hope

25:00 you didn't tear them on your way down because you'd walk up these wires on the post and then down the other side. We did that quite a lot. We always had to be back by midnight.

**We might talk about that a bit later. Just joining up the first time, did you join up with any mates, did you go to sign on?**

No. Nobody else wanted to go to the navy that I knew and the blokes from Caboolture, the biggest part of them had already joined the navy.

- 25:30 For some reason or other I wanted to go to the navy and I was in the army. Even when I went to the army it was just me on my own, there was nobody. I had a cousin who wanted to join, he didn't know what he wanted, he joined about six months after me and never knew what quite happened because he didn't qualify for a veteran's pension and I don't know why. I've been going
- 26:00 to ask him about it. Him and I never seem to get on very well. I never knew why. We had the chance when we were in the army, we had a chance of volunteering for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. See if you joined the CMF [Citizen's Military Force] you weren't in the AIF. It was a different clan all together. I remember they came round one time wanted to know anybody wanted to join the AIF.
- 26:30 I said, "Well I want to go to the navy" and they didn't worry any more about me. Whether he never agreed to that or not I don't know but he don't get any pension or anything and he was in nearly as long as I was and I think he spent the biggest part of the war on Townsville jetty with an anti-aircraft gun. I never got round to talking about it with him. I know he couldn't get a pension and that's the only reason I can think, he didn't volunteer for overseas service.

27:00 **Tell us, you mentioned that you were in the army, why did you have to join the army instead of the navy?**

Well when I went to join the navy after I turned eighteen they weren't taking any more recruits. The bloke there said, "Well if you like" I said, "How long is it going to be before you start recruiting again?" "Oh," he said, "could be six months". He said, "If you like", he says, "You're too young for the AIF,

- 27:30 join the CMF and we'll get you when we want you" and I said, "All right, that sounds all right" and that's how I come to be in the army. They shoved me into Lytton and then into Townsville and then the navy sent word that they wanted me and sent a ticket for me to come to Brisbane and shoved me into Melbourne from there.

**Tell us about your time in the CMF. What was your very first day like?**

- 28:00 Very first day that was a peculiar day. Get a uniform and the boots that wouldn't fit. Don't know whether I had feet that were wrong or the boots were wrong, I don't know. The very first day was terrible. They didn't have the place set up to feed us properly. We were in the Brisbane Exhibition grounds where the horses used to be and oh god, it was terrible. We had to stay there that night all they gave you was a palliasse
- 28:30 which is a sort of, something like that full of straw on the concrete floor and one blanket. Double the end over and you had a pillow, that's what you slept on. Some initiation that was. I think that happened for two days. After that they decided they would draft some of us down to Lytton. That was even just as primitive but they did have
- 29:00 palliasses there on tent boards, they weren't on concrete. There was six of us to a tent. We did drilling and marching backwards and forwards and all the rest of it. The shower and toilet facilities were something damn terrible. The toilet facilities, well they were just over a plank on the side of the river.
- 29:30 They were getting the men alright but they didn't have the facilities, you can imagine what sort of a stink that was. How they never got a disease there, I'll never know. They must have been covering it with lime or something every so often. It wasn't long before they had all the buildings there and we had proper toilets and proper shower facilities.

**Where exactly is this?**

Down at Fort Lytton on the Brisbane River. It was a

- 30:00 bloody crude turn out, I can tell you. They were trying to get these men trained but they didn't have the facilities to handle them. That didn't last long because they must have known very well they'd have a disease break out they were certainly going the right way for it.

**So you were going to the toilet just on the river?**

Yeah, on the bank. Not in the river, on to the bank, on the side it was a rare turnout.

30:30 **So if you needed to do a poo or something you just?**

That's right, that's all it was and each man was allowed two squares of paper. Every time you wanted to go to the toilet they'd give you two pieces of paper. It was a rough show, I can tell you. Up on the hill there, there was a signal station and then the remount, the horse boys, they were further over. They were training horses for the light horse.

- 31:00 We used to see some blokes down there they were training these horses in a wagon and they'd come galloping across that paddock there full ball. One day one bloke couldn't stop the horses, they'd bolted and she went into this drain and bounced out. The horses took off and the whole lot rolled over a couple of times. It was nothing to do with us, we don't know whether they got hurt or not. We used to watch some funny turns over there. We used to enjoy that. Nothing to do with us but it looked funny.

31:30 **How were you taking to the army life at this early stage?**

I was taking to it. I didn't have any option. We had one bloke down there I went to school with. He was a drill sergeant major and I thought, "Geez, I'm in for trouble here". He was always a bully and I never did like him. Anyway, that's all right. One night apparently he got pelted into the moat. He was pretty hard on everybody.

32:00 Real bully he was and he got chucked into the moat but they never knew who did it because there was no lights on. I think I got a heavy looking at the next day, I'm damn sure I did. Everybody looked to be looking at me. I knew him but I had nothing to do with it. I wasn't anything to do with his lot, I was in another sergeant major's lot. The bloke we had wasn't too bad but he was a real bully that bloke.

32:30 **Did you find out who did it?**

No. Never wanted to. I wanted nothing to do with it. Then we got shoved out of there to Townsville and that was just after they raided Darwin. That was on 14th February, wasn't it, 1942, they raided Darwin and I think in three days we were on our way to Townsville.

**So had you joined up before Japan**

33:00 **had entered the war or just after?**

Just after. Japan entered the war in December 7th 1941. I joined up December 1941. Of course we knew by that time things were really going to get serious and they wanted everybody they could get.

**How had that news struck yourself and everybody? What did the news of Japan entering the war, how did that affect you?**

33:30 I think we were rather pleased because it brought the Yanks in. They'd been supplying munitions and stuff and they were hauling the money in, trade in from all parts of the world, supplying everybody lese, we were sitting safe here and feeding the world with all the ammunition and that they could get and getting paid for it and then they found the country couldn't pay so they had to come to that lease lend arrangement.

34:00 So I think a lot of us were very pleased the Japs had come into the war and the Yanks would have had to get dragged into it, they didn't have any option, they were in. It was a terrible thing that happened to Pearl Harbour though.

**So tell us after the bit of initial training you said you were allocated to artillery, tell us how this was done and what you were told.**

34:30 When you were lined up, what they were going to do with you, you sort of fell in to, "You go one way, you go the other", that was it. I suppose they had a look at your papers to see what you'd been doing. If there was anything there, I think if you'd been a clerk or something like that you'd be out to office work for sure but seeing I'd been a farmer they'd say, "Well this bloke wouldn't be able to do much of anything perhaps, shove him in the artillery" and that was it.

35:00 It was fortress artillery; that meant we were on coastal artillery. We got shoved from there; we were transferred into the ack ack [anti-aircraft] battery in Townsville. We had, there was eight of us in a tent in Townsville. I lost track with all of them. We got along well. I was the bloke that pulled out and left them when the navy wanted me

35:30 and they all wished they were going with me but of course that wasn't so. Because they were getting it pretty rough in Townsville. They were stuck on top of Mount Saint John. They've nearly knocked it all the way now, even the ammunition place is still sticking out of the ground now, I've never been up on top of that mountain since. It's only a small mountain but if it looked down onto the airport, you could see what was going on down there.

36:00 As far as qualifications go for anything, I didn't have any qualifications. I knew how to work, that's all.

**What role were you being taught to do?**

In the army I was being taught to be a predictor operator. That was the gadget that tells the guns what time fuse they had to put on the shell and to give what angle they had to fire

36:30 ahead of the aircraft. Every morning they used to line up, bring all the guns together on top of Mount Stewart on top of the tower there and they'd set all that up and the predictor reading that and then they used to do a complete circle with all the guns and the predictor and see if they all come back to the same spot again see, they reckon that way they could put their shells so far in front of the aircraft.

37:00 Of course you're not doing any good if you've got the shells exploding behind the aircraft, he's not seeing them, but if he's got them exploding in front of him he's going to get very worried and there's every chance you'll get him where you won't get him from behind.

**Did you get much opportunity to practice this role?**

I was doing all right on it until the navy wanted me. I thought they mightn't let me go but the bloke in charge there said, "If navy wants you fella,

37:30 you can go" and that was it. I thought they might stop me.

**What about any actual circumstances, did the Japanese have an air raid in Townsville that you remember that you had to act?**

Yeah. First time they raided was one afternoon about two o'clock and of course, action stations, planes are coming. Where are they, they're up there. They were up about thirty thousand feet they reckoned.

38:00 All the shells were set to explode at thirty thousand feet. Well we fired shells. One bloke forgot to raise the gun barrel and the shell just got out over Townsville and it exploded way out there somewhere. He got a lecture. None of us had ever fired a gun before; we'd never even had gun practice. Of course the cement had hardened but that was about all, the guns were just put in and I think they were

38:30 dead scared that the cement might break but it didn't. That went on every morning thereafter we used to have gun practice. They didn't fire any shells because they didn't have any shells to spare but we had a fair stack of shells there. They all come in two in a case. There were a four inch shell and had a cartridge about this long behind them. Used to shove them up into the breach, lock her down

39:00 and the bloke down there on the layer and trainer, they'd get their reading and that's where they'd fire them. Of course the shell, once he'd fired it, that fuse set at thirty thousand feet it burnt out in that time. That's where she was supposed to explode.

## Tape 4

00:32 **Jim something that occurred to me was that when you were talking about joining the CMF the militia weren't actually, were they actually paid?**

Oh yes, they were on army rates of pay, yes, definitely.

**The same as the AIF?**

Yep. Same as AIF, that's right.

**Can you remember what you got paid?**

01:00 Six bob [shillings] a day. That's what we got paid. They supplied clothing, they supplied food and clothing. The navy was a bit different. They paid you I think it was a bit more than that. Ordinary seaman I'd have been five bob a day. You had clothes allowance of eight pence a day. You got an issue

01:30 of clothes and then you got eight pence a day to keep that standard up and they were pretty strict on the standard too. That was their rate of pay, they were a bob a day less than the army. Once you came to AB you went above the army because you were sort of qualified, you'd done so many years, so much and you'd done so many courses and what have you. You become an able seaman then you were in a position you could be put in charge of this, see to that and something else.

02:00 An ordinary seaman was just sort of one of the boys...roustabout.

**Did you make an allotment, is that what it was called, home?**

Yep. I made an allotment home, Mum banked that for me. I think two pound fifteen, it's in my pay book, I had an allotment of two pound fifteen a week went into my bank account.

**So how much would you have when you came back?**

02:30 A hundred and, might have been two hundred and something pounds. Then I had a deferred pay of a hundred and thirteen I think it was, that's what I had to put up to guarantee Hilda. If we didn't get married in the fortnight and Hilda wanted to go back, I lost that money. They didn't give me it all

03:00 back either.

**Why didn't they give it all back to you?**

I don't know, never queried it. They'd have a reason. I don't remember now but they would have had a reason.

**So if I understand this correctly, if an Australian man wanted to marry a woman from abroad, you'd have to put up a deposit**

A guarantee, you had to put it in actual cash.

**A guarantee that**

03:30 **this is the real thing and then if she just wanted a trip over for example and said no, I'm not marrying you**

That's right, they kept the money.

**That wouldn't have been the bloke's fault.**

That's beside the point. That was the conditions they placed on it. If I'd have married Hilda in England they would have brought her out for nothing but because we weren't prepared to get married in England we waited 'til she came out here

04:00 then they give us fourteen days to get married.

**And you did mention to Kiernan before, what was the reason why you didn't want to get married in England?**

Well we didn't know whether, it'd give us a bit more time. I don't know whether I was going down too well with the in laws. There was a few things which is understandable. I wasn't keen either. I'd be married, wife on the other side of the world. What would they do with me when it came to discharging me?

04:30 Would they send me to England or what would they do, see. You sometimes had to go to where your next of kin was. So, no, there was too many complications both ways, all ways. I can tell you this it's the wrong thing to bring a favourite daughter away from Mum. Mum never forgives you. Although she was out here three times with us

05:00 and she liked everything here, Hilda was doing all right, wasn't the same. The daughter was over here and not with Mum. It wouldn't have mattered about the other two sisters, that was a different matter, it was her favourite. Don't worry; all families have got their favourite, that's what happened. I think the government was a bit harsh on it though. They said I had to pay, I think it was a hundred and thirteen pounds and for some

05:30 reason or other I think they give me back a hundred and five. Every pound when we were starting off and let's face it we had nothing, Hilda couldn't bring anything with her, all she could bring was a few clothes and that was it. I had nothing, I hadn't had time to get anything together because I joined up with nothing and the war was over, that was it. They did give me, when I was discharged, they give me

06:00 a shovel, a crowbar and an axe. That's what they gave me. That was to get started. God knows what you were going to get started on but that was to get started.

**Did every man get that?**

I don't know but I was a farmer, a builder would have got something different he perhaps got a saw and a chisel and a hammer but I got a shovel, a bar and an axe. I don't know whether I was supposed to chop me way through,

06:30 dig me way through or what I was supposed to do but that's what I got.

**Have you still got them?**

No, I hope I haven't. I don't think I have.

**We'll talk about meeting Hilda and your wedding later on today, right now I'll just bring you back to that time you were in Brisbane and you were learning the predictor.**

That was in Townsville.

**Townsville, sorry, that was the anti-aircraft gun?**

Yep.

**Okay now I know you were talking a bit how it works but what did it actually look like?**

07:00 It was a big square box, about three foot square and about two foot deep and all the working inside there. You looked into this and you sort of screw all these knobs until you can get the aircraft in there and it tells you what angle you're on, what speed he's travelling and what have you. That's all getting fed into the guns, or supposed to be getting fed into the controls on the guns, supposed to be

07:30 but we never seemed to be able to get ahead of those planes so we don't know whether the thing was set right or whether the thing was wrong, I wasn't there long enough but I was only starting to get in the way of it and I was rather liking it. It quite impressed me did that. Later with the Royal Navy I was leading shooter in the group. More accurate equipment. I'll tell you more about that later.

08:00 **What was it about the predictor that you liked?**

It was telling us what to do. There's the aircraft, that's what speed he was travelling at, that's his angle you've got to be at and that's what height he is, it was giving us all that. That was getting relayed to the guns, we hope.

**It must have been difficult for you when actually your posting did come through, when the navy said okay we'll take you now if you were starting to actually like something.**

- 08:30 I wanted to go to the navy. The blokes that I was with in the tent, they were disappointed, they wanted to be going with me. Of course they were having a pretty rough time; they were down the end of the earth out there as far as the army was concerned. They used to get fed, food used to get taken out when they thought of them. It was a pretty rough show, don't worry. Three of us late one afternoon,
- 09:00 there was a lot of, we were out near what was Robinson Zoo, Mount St John. The zoo was way down there, we could see it and there was a great big dam over there and it had thousands of whistler ducks. They are a brown whistler duck and they're a wild duck. We'd go down and we'd get some of these ducks. We had five rounds of ammunition each and a 303 rifle and down we'd go and all these ducks would come up we'd put a bullet through them and we got one duck.
- 09:30 Three shots, one duck. That was all right. None of us had ever cleaned a duck before. None of us had ever cooked a duck before but we were dead keen on having a go. We cut his head off, pull the feathers off him, put him in some water and boiled him. He was the toughest duck. We didn't have a clue but we had a go. We pulled him apart and tried to eat him.
- 10:00 By geez he was tough.
- Did you eat him though?**
- Too right we did. We boiled him 'til the poor bugger was soft.
- Have you found out since then how to actually cook a duck?**
- Yeah.
- Did you do it the right way?**
- No. Put him in a bucket of water and boil a duck's not the right way to cook it. Had we have persevered with it, it would have been all right. We had too much water in, we should have had some vegetables or something chucked in with it.
- 10:30 We could have made a feed out of it. None of us young blokes knew anything about that.
- You know when you clean a fish you take their guts out, do you do that with a duck as well?**
- Yeah that's right.
- But did you do that?**
- Yeah we did do that. We tried to pluck it. You can imagine what plucking a duck is like. I got the brainwave, we'll skin the thing. Cut him down and the skin wrapped off quite good, feathers off
- 11:00 then we had a duck. We soon scratched his guts out but we forgot about the crop.
- What's that?**
- That's the part where the seed and that go down into. We forgot about that end. We cleaned out the other end and forgot about the crop. All this stuff out of the crop was in the water. Don't worry, it was rough. We were learning.
- Gee, you must have been desperate.**
- 11:30 We were damned hungry. I'm not kidding, we were hungry.
- All right, I guess I led you astray there on the duck story but it was quite funny.**
- We had the most trouble over the three missing cartridges. See you had five cartridges and they only give you five; that was all. If the Japs landed, that's all you had.
- 12:00 Three of us were short so we did a fiddle. When they come round to inspect the thing we used to have to whip a couple of shells down to him, couple of cartridges down to him and keep ahead of the bloke doing the inspection. We were able to wriggle that one, we got out of that. We would have had trouble if we hadn't accounted for the ammunition because we weren't supposed to be shooting.
- I'm just curious, did you get up to as much pranks in the navy as you did**
- 12:30 **with the army blokes?**
- It's a different world in the navy to what it is in the army; it's a different world all together. But we get up to as many pranks; well we didn't actually because we had to rely on one another more in the navy. You had a job, you were relieved of that job, you told the bloke what was here. If you were on lookout, everything's clear
- 13:00 at the moment, everything's all right and so you trusted what he'd done and everybody had his own job. It's a different world all together. In the army you're all in a tent, that was it, righto form up outside the tent, righto, up for a meal, action stations, out of the tent, up to your gun. In the navy it was a different routine all together.
- Which did you like the best?**

I liked the navy the best.

13:30 No doubt about that. I'd go back to navy any time you like.

**All right then, after you'd been up in Townsville what happened, did you get a letter from the navy saying all right, we'll take you now?**

That's right. I think the letter's here in the heap there.

**That's okay. How did you feel about receiving that then?**

That's what I was hoping for. I was dead scared

14:00 the army wouldn't let me go and I'd be stuck up there in Townsville. That's what I was scared of. But it didn't work that way. The navy being the senior service they would just say no, he's ours and that's it. That happened in a lot of areas in a lot of ways. The navy ruled everybody.

**I didn't know that. What do you mean by the senior service?**

They were. They were the senior service and that's all about it. The navy everywhere goes first.

14:30 You line up a team of men, the navy's always first. Senior service always go first.

**When you say senior service, do you mean the service that's been around the longest?**

Yes.

**Just before you moved when you went down to Cerberus I guess you didn't really get much time to socialize up in Townsville?**

No, there wasn't much time. We used to get to the pictures. They had an open air picture theatre there and we used to get there one night a

15:00 week and that was it. It was some wild west or something like that and then the truck'd pick you up. The truck used to take you there, pick you up and bring you back again. Sometimes you could get a couple of hours leave, if there was a café there you could sometimes go and get a meal at the café, sometimes. But there was that many troops round there, there was very seldom you got time for anything. Then the Yanks arrived, there was more fighting with Yanks than there was

15:30 socializing or anything.

**In Townsville?**

Yes there was no love lost between the Australian services and the Americans.

**What do you mean, what happened?**

What happened? They'd fight at the drop of a hat.

**The Australians or the Americans?**

Both. The Yanks used to play with all the girls and the Aussies were missed out. There was more fights. They even banned troops

16:00 going in to Townsville at one time. All troops going in to Townsville was banned there was that much fighting and rowing going on there.

**What were they fighting over, women?**

Oh yeah but it didn't only take women to cause a fight. It was just that they didn't like one another.

**I wonder why they didn't like each other, was it because the Americans got more pay?**

Yeah. More food, and

16:30 they got ice cream fed to them, they got this fed to them, they got everything fed to them. We had what was left.

**You had a skinned duck.**

Yeah, well that's right. We were going to supplement our tucker with a skinned duck as you put it.

**So you weren't allowed to go into town then because the riots would break out?**

For a while there they banned all troops out of Townsville and they had to relax that because

17:00 all the business people in Townsville were kicking up a fuss, they weren't getting their business either so that had to be eased off. Patrols in there, the military police had to patrol all the time and what have you. It was a pretty rough area, a very rough area.

**Did you get to know any of the Americans at all?**



No, not up there I didn't. I got to know one American when I was going from Brisbane to Townsville

17:30 to Mount Isa. There was an American there. He'd done something wrong. He'd said something about some gas or something that was loaded somewhere and he was ex-communicated, he was being sent to Darwin. He was on his own. He told me he'd been in real trouble and he was getting sent to Darwin to some out of the way place there.

**What did he do, he spied or something?**

No.. He'd let out that they were loading gas, war time gas somewhere

18:00 which was highly secret. That was all I got out of him. He was a decent sort of bloke; I got along well with him. Him and I used to talk quite a lot.

**So he was banished?**

Yeah, he was sent to some out of the way place up there where he couldn't get into any more trouble.

**The "loose lips sink ships business" [careless discussion in wartime might allow the enemy to obtain information...].**

No, it was gas.

**Yeah. Okay, so now you decided, you were able**

18:30 **to take up the offer of the navy, where did you go to first when you received the letter?**

Went to the commanding officer with the letter. He said, "Right. Got no worries about that. You'll be on the train". They told me what train I'd be on, you'll be there and that's it. I had to send me uniform, when I got to Brisbane, I had to send the uniform back and go in civilian clothes. Well I'd grown that much

19:00 in the time that I'd been there, I looked as though, my trousers were up to here and my shirt, I'd filled out and my shirt, I looked a bit of a freak when I landed in Melbourne I can tell you because I had my old civvy clothes on and I'd grown quite a bit with exercise and food they were shoving in to me. Quite a bit, I'd grown.

**Did you go into Myers**

19:30 **and buy yourself a new outfit?**

No way in the world. I got some of my old clothes from home. No going buying more clothes. I'd only be wearing them the once to get to Melbourne and then I'd be in my navy uniform.

**Did that fit, the navy uniform?**

Yes. It had to fit. They saw that it fitted all right.

**So you arrived in Brisbane and then you**

20:00 **went home and waited for your draft?**

I think it was only one day or two days. It was only a matter of, I arrived here one day and I think I had to be in Brisbane the next day. The letter will tell you, I think that's what it was. I wasn't here long.

**How were your parents about you going away in the navy?**

They didn't seem to be worried, in fact they seemed to be the least worried of anybody. I've often wondered about that. I often come home on leave

20:30 and wondered why I bothered coming home. I don't now whether it was, I didn't ever knew what the reason was.

**I don't know, I'm really speculating but maybe they were used to the First World War and people?**

Yeah, either that or I wasn't the favourite son. I don't know what it was. I'd often went home thinking

21:00 "I wish I hadn't bothered coming home". It's a terrible thing I know but I used to have a good time. The old dog used to go everywhere with me. I used to give a hand, not that I got home much. I never got much leave.

**I wonder if it's because maybe they think something bad's going to happen so they maybe already prepare themselves.**

I think there was something like that in it.

21:30 They didn't think I would be surviving there, surviving the war. Of course there was a hell of a lot, although there wasn't that much from this area, an only son down here, I went to school with him, he was killed, he was a sniper, a sniper killed him in New Guinea when I was home on leave once. I had to

leave the morning that they got word he'd been killed. I was very friendly with his Mother. She was a hell of a nice person. She was the same age as my Mother.

22:00 It was a real tragedy that, their only son. I recently had luck enough to get the council to name a park after the Allen family down here.

**You were active in that?**

Yeah. Weren't for me it'd never get there. The council knocked it back the first time. I went to the council said, "Come on, I want this. How do we go about it?"

22:30 She said, "Get them to withdraw the applications so I can have a further look at it and get more information. Have you got any people that'll write in?" I said, "I'll get some people to write in and tell them that you want to get it for that family". We ended up getting it. They put a good sign up and we had a party down there as well.

**Good for you. Now you were going from Brisbane down to Victoria, Melbourne.**

The middle of winter.

23:00 You can imagine what it was. It was a change of life if ever there was one. The navy, first morning, "Righto fellas, out, shorts only, football". Freezing cold, bloody hell, it did play hell with me. I got a cold, I got everything, then I got mumps and shoved in isolation.

23:30 I thought, "By God I'm going to miss out on my group" but I was able to catch up with them. I was sick. It was too big a shock for the system altogether.

**What did they say when you first arrived? Obviously the navy met you at the train did they?**

Yeah, the train pulled in to the depot, a train load. There was thousands coming in from all parts. They were on the navy train from Melbourne

24:00 in to Frankston. That's where you go down that line to Cerberus and chucked us out there. They allocated a certain hut, we were all in huts there, dormitories and that was it. When I land in isolation, low and behold here's another bloke, a stoker from up the road here, he was in there too.

**Did you meet any mates on the train though, coming down?**

24:30 No. We'd mated up with a couple. One was killed a few weeks after we left there. Him and I got along rather well. They were all from different. We all got split up. They got different classes to what I got. There was writers, electrical blokes, they all went to different sections then. I was what you call the lower class of seaman. Ordinary seaman

25:00 then. An ordinary seaman second class is the worst. Ordinary seaman is just one grade above that. An ordinary seaman second class is younger than eighteen. From seventeen to eighteen they take you.

**Was there any sort of state rivalry when you first arrived there as a new navy recruit?**

25:30 State rivalry?

**Like, you know, you're from Queensland, would they look down upon or anything?**

No. The only ones that were looked down upon were the Tasmanians. We always reckoned they were too slow. They weren't getting enough sun shine we reckoned. The Taswegians [Tasmanians]. We always reckoned they were slow. It's a fact. Don't know whether it's right or not but it always seemed to be right.

**I wonder if that's still the case now.**

26:00 I don't now. That's what we reckoned. Whether it'd be right or wrong I don't know.

**How did you start training, that was your first day, playing footy?**

That was before breakfast. Then you had five minutes to have a shower and get in your uniform then for breakfast then out to the parade ground, line up on the parade ground.

**Now did they assume that every bloke knew how to play football or did they teach you?**

No, they didn't play, all you had to do was chase that football, it didn't matter if you play football

26:30 or not, it was only exercise, that's all it was, get moving and a bloke stood there to make sure you did get moving. They were hard on to us, don't worry about that, they were going to put us into physical trim. Then we went from that. Then we had to crawl up the rope, about twenty feet up, go over the bar, come down head first. You remembered what to do, you got told and shown

27:00 what to do, how to do it. A bloke stood there. I saw one bloke come tumbling down one day and the bloke just grabbed him and stood him on his feet, just like that. He'd been used to it and he was one of the trainers and he knew what to do. He just grabbed the bloke as he went past and whipped him over

and he was on his feet.

**How were you at that?**

Well for three days I could hardly breathe. My stomach muscles were that sore from hauling myself up the rope the first time, I could hardly breathe

27:30 for three days. God I was sore.

**That seems like a particular skill though, climbing a rope.**

Too right it is.

**So how long did it take you to learn how to do?**

It didn't take long because you knew damn well you had to go over the top. It was, you got shown how to do it and that's it, now then, get down and do it and that's it. You were shown how to get the rope, how to lock your legs around the rope.

28:00 I couldn't do it now but I could do it.

**Now this was the basic training that every person got.**

Every person, seaman, I don't know about the others, seamen all got that. You went up over that rail at the top and down head first.

**And what would happen if you couldn't get that skill, wouldn't be able to do it?**

I think they'd end up sending you out of the navy.

Oh yeah, you had to get past to go forward.

28:30 They keep you there 'til you did do it.

**Was there a particular subject let's say, that you excelled in?**

I wouldn't say a particular one I excelled in. The only one I excelled in later was gunnery but at that time there was nothing I excelled in. It was just that I was there, I wanted to be in the navy, I was going to do what was in

29:00 and I always seemed to land with a mug beside me or near me. The first day, rowing, I'd been able to row a boat round the river and creek and that but when you have three men on the one side and two men the other side of a life boat, it's a different matter. Of course Westernport bay is one of the windiest bays I think in the world and the coldest and of course when you get out there rowing you have to know what to do with the oar to get it back again. This bloke in front of me

29:30 couldn't get his oar back right so I used to get a shower of cold water nearly ever time. Geez I used to curse him. See you pull the oar back and then you sort of feather it and pick up again but he couldn't do that and I used to get a shower. Geez that was cold. I'd get wringing wet.

**Did you suggest that you changed positions?**

No, you didn't have any say in that, you were in there.

30:00 We used to have rowing practice three days a week for an hour. I'd nearly get a wetting every time, some galah that didn't know how to feather the oar, that's all it was. You had to work the wrist and then you pull it, simple, but many blokes couldn't get the knack of it.

**You must have been tempted to just smack them on the back of the head?**

More than that, hit over the head with the oar you mean.

30:30 **What were the officers like that were teaching you all these skills?**

They were pretty strict. I wouldn't say abusive but by God they were on to you. They weren't as bad as we were to learn later with the Royal Navy, our blokes were gentlemen. They were pretty good to us. They made it loud and clear that

31:00 you were hear to take notice of what we tell you. Don't forget twenty one years time we'll have another one in your place. In other words for your own safety take in what we're trying to teach you and tell you. That was what it amounted to.

**That was three months of training?**

Yep, three months down there and back up here in October.

**What happened then Jim, they said "Go home and we'll call you for your posting"?**

No,

31:30 posted back to Brisbane. Either you went direct from Melbourne to a posting or you went back to your home depot which was Brisbane was mine. I was there Brisbane for Coongoola in Darwin. I think I've covered that Coongoola business before.

**How long were you actually in Brisbane before you took off on Coongoola?**

I think about four or five days, not long.

32:00 **Oh.**

Might have had a week's leave, that's about it.

**Do you remember what you did in that time?**

I got round home here. Go here and go there. See my sister and brother in law had just been married and they were setting up house, a banana farm up in Marina and

32:30 I spent a couple of days with them I suppose. I know I did but whether that was then, that would have been then otherwise I wouldn't have been back for eighteen, another nine months before I was out of Darwin for a fortnight and then next nine months I was back into Brisbane at the hospital.

**When was it that the crew came down with dengue fever?**

That was in Cairns.

33:00 That was when I was going to Darwin.

**Hang on, this was the first time you were taking off, your first posting after Cerberus?**

Going to Darwin, then I went to Cairns to get a ship.

**Okay, tell us about it because I asked you but I'll come back to your time in Darwin just for a little bit.**

I went up to

33:30 on a train up to. They didn't have long distance trains or anything, they had the ordinary things and if you could get a seat, lay up on the luggage rack you could sleep up there otherwise you're on the floor. Of course white shirts, you can imagine what they looked like when we got up there. Had a hell of a job to scrub them clean. In that occasion we'd been shoved into a guest house

34:00 in Cairns waiting for a ship to go to Darwin. I was fortunate I suppose, I'd been appointed NOIC's [Naval Officer in Charge] runner. That was the bloke who takes orders to the ships. Cairns was getting pretty busy because New Guinea was in full swing and they were feeding a lot of stuff out of Cairns. The NOIC's office

34:30 was out on the Esplanade, the Cairns' Esplanade, he was in a house there. They gave me a push bike and I had a bag and they used to lock the bag on to my wrist and give me the key. I'd have to go to, nearly all liberty ships that was in there, coming in. I had to go to ship so and so. Up I'd go. "Officer in charge?", "Yes", "Here's the bag, here's your orders". Put the bag back on, back on the bike and back again, "Delivered that sir".

35:00 "We've got nothing more for you today; you can stand down for the rest of the day". I'd go back to the quarters or have a run round town or do anything. I had a push bike so I was mobile. I did that I think for about ten days. Next thing I was very sick and I went to the doctor. Reported to the thing that I was very sick and, anyway, up to the hospital.

35:30 He says, "God, you are in a bad way, we'll put you into hospital". I was in hospital, sweating terribly and that was all right, I was getting over that. I had a night nurse used to come on and used to look after me pretty well. She used to see that I had a bit of extra sandwiches and what have you at night, another cup of tea and all this.

36:00 Anyway, that's all right, fit enough to go out. Well, I got out of there must have been there a week, ten days before that happened. We'd been up to Kuranda, a mob of us at a party and grog was hard to get and they got stuck into the rum in Kuranda, a pub up there, the old train come down the line. Well these blokes of ours, I always seemed to be the mug that had to look after them, I don't know why but

36:30 I was always the mug. I looked out and here's a bloke on top of the bloody carriage. I thought, "Jesus man, get them off there you'll get killed". Down he come, "Sit down, for Christ's sake stay there". That's all right. We had a real good run. My friend, Bob, down here, he was going to come with us and he had to go off to Mossman, his Father was on a coastal station at Mossman. He had to go up there that day

37:00 so he missed out on the trip to Kuranda. Back on to duty with the bike and that and then I took this sick and they shoved me into hospital. Must have been in there nearly a week. I was there for Christmas 1942. I had Christmas dinner there at the guest house.

37:30 Got out of hospital, got on to this ship the Darvel to take us to Darwin. I got that sick on that, I was sweating. The skipper wanted to put me off the ship. We were on passage. It was a private ship, it

wasn't navy or anything and he was dead scared I wasn't going to make it and he wanted to put me off on Thursday Island. I begged him not to put me off on Thursday Island. Old Bob stepped up, "I'll look after him. We'll take him with us".

38:00 At any rate, by the time I got to Darwin, that was another week away, getting to Darwin. I was dead scared I was going to get shoved into Thursday Island on my own. Anyway, Bob said he'd look after me and he did too. He changed the blankets and the sheets and that in the bed. I'll be forever grateful to him. By the time we got to Darwin I wasn't too bad. We got into Darwin at night time and that was it.

38:30 They kept us a minimum of food on that ship. They had to make every penny a winner that lot. I know we went down to the cook house once, the galley, we couldn't find any food. We would have eaten anything. They were terrible.

**Why were you so scared about being left on Thursday Island.**

I don't know. I could see me being shoved on an island with only me and somebody else there. Of course see it was all

39:00 more or less a military zone. All the civilians had been shifted out and I could see being stuck there on my own. I got to Darwin and I was all right. I was to go back to Thursday Island many times after that, with a convoy with corvettes. It wasn't such a bad place then.

## Tape 5

00:33 **Okay, we were just talking about your trip up on the way to Darwin, tell us about coming in to Darwin, what were your first impressions?**

It was nightfall. The Japs had just raided the joint and there was oil over the water. We got into this place, of course they had a dock that everybody got off the ship and then we got taken in a truck

01:00 to different houses that was round the town where they put men into up towards Milly Point. We got up there. We got into there and then the Japs decided they'd raid again after midnight. We all crashed down through the bush. We were told to go to the slit trenches, well we didn't know where the slit trenches were. We didn't know they had trip wires all over the ground. Anybody running of a night,

01:30 they didn't go far before they fell head over heels. If the enemy got in there, landed and they didn't know these were there they'd really upset them. We were pretty upset too. We didn't know they were there. Once you knew you knew how to lift your feet, you were on top of the wires. That was all right. We got there, got settled down into this place and got eaten alive by bed bugs and mosquitoes the first night after we got settled down. Next morning there was hell to pay,

02:00 we didn't have all our gear and oh god. Any rate we got that sorted out and then what they're going to do with us. It was a couple of days before I got lined up and told I couldn't go to the Coongoola. I think I told you about that when they had two other Dobsons in a crew of six. I would have been the seventh crew and the third Dobson. The skipper said "I don't want any more bloody Dobsons".

02:30 He must have been having trouble with the other Dobsons. I was happy to be left out of that.

**What was the ship you were going to go on to?**

The Coongoola.

**How many crew?**

Seven crew and there was already two Dobsons and I was going to be the third. Can you imagine anything so stupid. The bloke at the other end who was doing the work in Melbourne, he can't have been watching what he was doing.

**Couldn't they perhaps use your first name?**

I don't know.

03:00 All I got told was he don't want any more bloody Dobsons. Whether he was having trouble with the Dobsons he did have or not I don't know. Never found out and I never met any of them. She was only a ship that went round the harbour, she was only harbour patrol.

**Mustn't have been that big, how big was it?**

No, it was seven crew. Perhaps it would be thirty foot long, that's about all. Quite a good fishing boat. That's all it would be. A couple of rifles on and a machine gun or something and that'd be it.

03:30 **How did you feel about?**

Damn terrible because I wasn't going to sea. Anyway we settled down then on various duties. Me mate, he got sent to the captain's quarters, this officer's steward, he was right. He and I used to go swimming

some afternoons to get used to the water

- 04:00 and something to do. We had a pretty lax time there when there was nothing doing, the Japs weren't round. We used to see how far we could go along the bottom of the water. We didn't realize there was that many crocs in there. We got warned, "Don't go swimming too often in the same place you blokes or there'll be a bloke there waiting for you". "That's all right. We'll keep our eyes open". Well, we did and then while I was in there I had to do a commando course,
- 04:30 being a seaman. Was it a course. Along the northern, eastern side of Darwin Harbour there's a big cliff. They had a rope coming out the top and you had to go down there. Six at a time used to go down one after the other. Then they used to chuck down some explosive after you to make sure, if you were down there it was just hard luck.
- 05:00 You got warned, you don't hang round the bottom. They do that, the six of you jump out, grab this rope and then go down. At the bottom, then they used to chuck explosives after the sixth man went down and had time to get away. Then we had to run across through this and they were firing machine gun bullets. I don't know whether they were supposed to be coming towards but you could see the damn things hitting the dirt. They were trying to frighten the hell out of us I think. They were trying to make it as realistic as they could without killing us I think. They must have been expecting
- 05:30 trouble there. That was all right. We got over that all right. Out of there. The next day I got sent on, there was a lieutenant, a sub-lieutenant, an able seaman and an ordinary seaman, that was me, I was the runner. We went on a boat called the Southern Cross out round Arnhem Land
- 06:00 pulling Japanese mines apart. It was a pretty good sort of a job if you didn't think you were going to live long. There was no regimentation, no nothing. It was just, we had a thousand 303 rounds of ammo [ammunition] with us, two rifles and this ship used to take us out and there'd be five or seven aboriginals on board
- 06:30 and they were in touch with the blokes ashore and they could tell us where the Japanese mines were. We used to go out, they used to anchor the ship and we'd go in the ship's boat ashore into the mangroves and you'd here an old crocodile grunting away over there and another one away out this way, we always had the rifle pretty handy. I've never seen more mud crabs. There used to be a lot of mud crabs round here one time but I never seen more mud crabs in me life and I didn't know how to handle them.
- 07:00 We could have lived very well there. We found this mine. The tide rises and falls about thirty feet there and of course this mine had been, they weighed about, they said about three hundred weight and this thing running round in the mangroves, they made quite a hole. We didn't know how long it had been there and the officer said "We've got to roll him over to see if the detonator's still in him". When they let a mine
- 07:30 go and the steel cable breaks it's supposed to release the mechanism that chucks the detonator out, it's supposed to be safe. This thing still had two horns sticking out of it. We had to roll him over. We knew if the horns were broken there was something wrong, he should have been blown apart when the horns got knocked off. "Righto" he says, "I think we'll take the detonator out". At any rate, we did.
- 08:00 He took it out all right, we got it out. Now he said, "We've got to pull the thing apart; we want to find out how they're making them". Muggins got given the spanner, undo, round the top there's all these screws, bolts, I undid all them. I knew there should be air in there somewhere because he was still floating in this water he was sitting in. I just happened to hit it with a spanner and all the air blew out.
- 08:30 I nearly died a thousand lives there, frightened the hell out of me. I got inside and the bloke in charge says, "Well, I don't know, there's something funny here, we've got to do a search on this". At some point when they break that glass the acid goes down onto another acid, makes electric current to fire the detonator. He says, "The only thing that stopped that mine going off when the first horn got broken was grease between the points". So we got
- 09:00 all the pieces of dynamite out. Must have been about a hundred weight and a half of explosives in there. A screw fitted into each piece. Took one piece over there, another piece over there, so if one went off the lot didn't go. Had me scattering these things round. Get out of here. The detonator was buggered he said. The chemical had gone out of it. Then we had to go
- 09:30 and find another one. We had a hell of a job to find him and these aboriginals couldn't agree where it was. Eventually we found him. He was another job but his detonator had gone and he still hadn't blown up. He says, "I think we'll have to blow this one". Oh God. Gonna put a charge under this and blow it up but he decided to pull him apart again. He pulled him apart.
- 10:00 We didn't find anything in him. I'd have remembered if we'd have dynamited any. We dynamited something but I can't remember just what it was. We went all along the top of Arnhem Land. We found three mines that the Japs had put there. Two of them we pulled apart and one we didn't. I don't know why, I think we must have exploded him but I thought I'd have
- 10:30 remembered clearly exploding a mine with that amount of explosive. I can't remember it. Then we went from there, we had to go back in then, we were running short of fuel. We had to go out for another lot,

that's right. On the way back we had to call at Groper Island. It's another island along the top

- 11:00 through the channels there and there was an aircraft crew we had to pick up. If I remember rightly there was four members of this crew. I think it was a Hudson that had crashed, went down into the mud. It sort of glided down. They weren't badly hurt, none of them were injured and they were able to walk out. They'd reported
- 11:30 by radio that they'd left everything behind and one bloke had a revolver. I might have told you about that and I got very friendly with this bloke and we had bunks together. We only had bunks on board, they didn't have beds. He must have been an officer because he had a revolver. He said "We're not taking anything back; we had to walk out and leave everything. You'd better take this revolver". I said, "Oh yeah",
- 12:00 it was beautiful revolver too, brand new. I thought, "Hmm, that's all right", put it in my gear and I kept it. At any rate I carried that round for near two years. No bullets in it, just the revolver and I brought it home. Had my Mother known I had a revolver in my bag she'd have had a blue fit but she didn't know and it didn't worry her.
- 12:30 I woke up one night thinking by God, the navy had a habit of having an inspection of kits, kit inspection, to see all your clothes were in good order, they were clean and they were kept tidy and all the rest of it and I thought, "By God if I get a kit inspection and they find that revolver I've got real trouble, not only for me but for that bloke who gave it to me because they'll know who it was". I was thinking about this
- 13:00 for quite a while. I had a couple of good shoots at home with it. They were thirty eight calibre. I woke up one night with this revolver. I had it at home a couple of times, had a couple of good shoots with it because you could get thirty eight bullets quite easy. I had an uncle that had another revolver too and we'd go out and have a few shoots in the gum trees and what have you.
- 13:30 That was good. I woke up one night in a cold sweat, "If they find that in my kit they'll know damn well who gave it to me because by the number and that poor bugger'll get into trouble. I'll get rid of that". We were going over the Atlantic when this thought hit me. I tossed it over the side into the Atlantic so that's where the revolver went. That got rid of that.
- 14:00 Save any embarrassment on my part for the bloke that gave it to me.

**Tell us more about this job with the mines. Tell us about the aboriginal sailors on board.**

There was five of them. I remember one, Harry, quite well. He was a big rough sort of a bloke. They can't have been from the same tribe

- 14:30 because I remember one day we were all sort of sitting down, it was smoko time and we all had our mug of tea and sitting round and one of these blokes, the ship's carpenter bloke, was doing some repairs and there was a chisel laying there and one of these blokes went straight at the other bloke with it and got him fair through the ear. We had blood everywhere. I never knew an ear, I knew they bled a lot but I never knew, by the time we wrestled that bloke down and put two or three stitches in his ear
- 15:00 to make sure it healed up all right we nearly all had blood on us. We never did learn what the ike was about but they had to split them up after that. We had another couple of blokes came with us and they seemed to get along a lot better. Some days if there was nothing doing, we weren't doing anything, they'd go out onto the reef and they'd come back.
- 15:30 They'd show us how to do it, I remember old Harry quite well, they used to come back a lot of fish. They'd get a long stick and they'd shove it through the gills. These pools in the reef had a lot of fish in them and they used to get these fish. They'd come back, two of them with a stick between them with enough fish for the whole mob of a night and perhaps next day too. That was amazing to me; I'd never seen fish like that. Then I remember old Harry, must have been
- 16:00 an old tusk or parrot fish. He'd seen it go down his hole in the reef. The reef was this deep and there was a big pool and when the tide went out quickly they must have been left there. Old Harry goes and shoves his hand down and next thing he comes out blood everywhere and the bloke's teeth had nipped fair through his finger. He hopped around for a while but he didn't let go, he got the fish. I never forget old Harry and that.
- 16:30 Old Harry used to have a crab shell for a pipe. He used to stuff the tobacco in the big part of the shell, cut that off and then smoke that. That was his pipe. They used to take so much tobacco for them but it was a real black string strung out about that thick, about as big as a sausage it was and they used to chop a bit off. God, it was rough stuff they used to get, really rough.
- 17:00 They used to smoke away at that as right as rain. They were happy.

**What were they given? You just mentioned being given tobacco, what was their payment?**

I don't think they got any payment. They lived up in the forecastle of the ship. They must have had some arrangement for feeding them but weren't all together fed with us. I don't know how they worked it. I've got no idea. Never bothered to even

- 17:30 check it out properly. They lived there and they were always with us for two or three days. Then I tell you that bloke that we picked up. Another time we had to go out we had to go to a mission station out on Melville Island, Milikapiti was the mission station and the boat was, we had to take a boat out. I remember we
- 18:00 were to leave Darwin during the night. Bring our gear on board, this Southern Cross. They'd open the boom up during the night; see they'd pull the net apart. I remember half waking up and all this terrible scraping noise underneath. They forgot to open the gate; they went over the top of the fence. They'd stopped the blades and she'd slipped off and they had the rope of the
- 18:30 boat that they were towing out for the mission station, it was only a big sort of rowing punt, they had the rope of it caught round the blade. They had these aboriginal blokes down underneath trying to get this rope off. They ended up getting it off. Next morning, we must have sat round outside there for a few hours sorting this lot out. I'll bet there was trouble over that gate not being open but we never heard any more about it. We had nothing to do with the crew.
- 19:00 We were only on passage going out there to see what we could hunt down in mines. We took this boat over and Father something, he was the mission head out there at Milikapiti mission, I can't be sure what his name was, Father somebody, he was the priest in charge of it all out there.
- 19:30 We dropped him off and then we had to go and find some more mines. I just don't remember where we went that time. I know we had to go to the mission station then we had to head off from there and it just beats me now where we actually went. That was the second mining trip. I only had two of them. They were interesting trips.
- 20:00 **How did you know what to do with a mine, were you taught techniques?**
- The lieutenant and sub lieutenant, the sub lieutenant became Lieutenant Batterham, he was an expert in de-mining in later years and he played a big part after the war too in delousing things. He was a damn nice bloke, Batterham. I didn't have to do anything.
- 20:30 All I had to do was do what I was told. Take explosives there and leave it over there, and that suited me fine. That was that. That was rather an interesting exercise.
- Was it kind of scary dealing with mines and explosives when you don't even know exactly what you're doing?**
- Well it wasn't to me because I'd been reared with explosives. All the stuff we had to get rid of on the farm. We had
- 21:00 dynamite, we had detonators, had the fuse. We knew how to handle that. It was no problem. I rather liked the job to be quite honest. I would have stayed there with that job willingly. No, I had to move on. That was the Southern Cross.
- How did they get the aboriginals to work on the boat if they weren't paid properly?**
- I don't know, they must have had some arrangement.
- 21:30 There was some arrangement because they had no trouble getting them. We took a, on the HMAS Latrobe, we took a ship for the air force loaded with stuff for the air force into Millingimbi. It was in a sort of big lagoon. The tide went in and we went in with the tide in the channel. We had to stay in there. The Japs raided it on a Sunday morning and we were in there. They blew
- 22:00 the guts out of that mission station, that was Millingimbi mission station. All the time we were there, the tide used to go out, they used to bring the pontoons out beside the ship then they'd sit them down, load them, when the tide rose again they'd sneak them ashore and unload them, take them back, load them up and that's the way they loaded the ship. I think they killed a bloke on that ship.
- 22:30 I know they had us doing circles in there to make sure that we were as good a chance as any of missing the bombs that were coming down. That was the only time Millingimbi was raided apparently. We didn't see any more, they all cleared out after that. They'd had enough of that apparently. We never saw anything more of aboriginals around there.
- Where were these aboriginal men on the boat from?**
- 23:00 I don't know where they were from but they were from some of the local tribes up there. Of course we went one afternoon we went ashore on Melville Island. We went shooting. There was cockatoos there by the thousand. A couple more of them wouldn't make any difference. We had a run round on that, up the beach and round there, fired a few shots at this and that and next thing along comes
- 23:30 an aboriginal, two blokes, one woman, a couple of dogs and a couple of kids, they went on their way. We don't know where they come from, where they went to, they just kept going. "Nothing to do with us. They were all right, so were we. I don't know how they ever existed there. They must have lived on the land.

**Did they talk to you**



24:00 **about their lives?**

Never got the chance. They were sort of in a different world to us.

**How would they communicate to you about things such as the mine clearing?**

The officer there in charge, he understood their lingo [language]. He must have been there I think before the war. He understood their language; he understood what they wanted them to do. That was it.

24:30 It was very interesting. I can well understand why these people like to go up there fishing now, holidaying up there. It's a beautiful place of the world. There's a few crocodiles. There was a lot of crocodiles there then. We never had any trouble with them. You just had to keep your eyes open and make sure you didn't go hanging around too often in the one place.

**Did you shoot any?**

We had shots at them but

25:00 we don't know whether we shot them or not. Slipped back into deep water and that's all you'd see of them. They were unloading that ship, there was two crocodiles coming. You could see them coming ever so far. The next thing, one shoved his head straight up the side of the pontoon and our blokes signalled to them, "Don't be jumping in the water over there, there's a bloke waiting for you over the side". He were there. One of these others went round. One of the officers said, "We'll

25:30 give him a fright". They put the Oerlikon gun onto him and bang, we never saw any more of that croc either, he didn't shove his head up any more. Give him a blast of anti aircraft gun. That kept him quiet.

**Did they get him?**

They don't know. You wouldn't know. They slip back into deep water. They give him a hell of a fright if they didn't because they were all [(UNCLEAR)].

26:00 **What did you get up to after being on this small Southern Cross? How big was the Southern Cross actually?**

It would have been about fifty foot long. It was a fair lump of a boat. A friend of mine ended up being officer's steward on it after we'd been there. I can't think of the captain's name. He was a big lump of a bloke.

26:30 He wasn't afraid to talk to you. I can't think of his name, didn't come to mind.

**It's main duty was coastal patrol and de-mining?**

Yeah. Servicing areas around the area and what have you and de-mines and things like that.

27:00 They had a need for them.

**What was your exact duty on board when it wasn't collecting a mine to do?**

I was a seaman. Whatever had to be done. Often times I was maintenance man. Damage control party, that's what I used to get pushed to. I wasn't a gunner by then. I didn't have a gunnery rating.

**What were the guns or defences on board that?**

27:30 Machine guns mainly. I just can't remember how many was on board. I know there always seemed to be quite a few rifles round there.

28:00 Where did we go another time we went out? Doesn't come back to me.

**We'll get to that later. Where did you go next after the Southern Cross?**

I was put

28:30 onto Latrobe after that.

**What was the process of getting on the Latrobe? Did you request it or were you just assigned it?**

No, I was on loan to the Latrobe. I must have been taking somebody's place. I went out to the Latrobe as an individual from Darwin. I was put on to there. The first trip out of Darwin on the Latrobe, it was an experience

29:00 and a half. I might have told you, no, I don't think I have told you. It was a howling wind coming. We were going opposite to what the wind was. We were going with the wind. I got shoved up in the crows nest, look out. To get in the crows nest you had to

29:30 go up past it, the other bloke come out and you dropped back in to it. An hour at a time. An hour up there, an hour on look out down beside the bridge. That was all right. My first hour in a crows nest. Well, first of all the ship was out there, then we changed places. With the wind following us I was

- 30:00 getting all the fumes out of the flaming funnel. They shouldn't have had me up there but I didn't know that then. God, nearly choking me and I was sick as anything. Didn't worry the ship because nothing landed on the ship, it landed a mile away. I was that sick. Out of there. We hadn't gone far, the wind eased off and I got taken down out of there, my turn was up and another bloke went up.
- 30:30 They didn't leave him up long, they brought him out. They must have looked hard at me and thought, "Well what have we got here" because he should have complained about the fumes but I didn't. They didn't know that I hadn't had any experience in that. I come out of there. That was a good trip after that, across to Thursday Island and back. There was two ships we took across there, escorted them across.
- 31:00 In to Thursday Island and there was about eight of these old pearl luggers tied up there. Everything was right, we were in there, the Cootamundra was in there. There was two other corvettes in there, some were going to Merauke, some were going to Darwin. We were waiting for a convoy. Next thing we're out of there and back to Darwin.
- 31:30 Had to change the course so they didn't get that. Going across there we just about got to Wessell Island and the Japs were in the area. The first thing I knew, I was up in the crows nest and a bomb landed not that far, about fifty yards away in the water. God, it nearly deafened me.
- 32:00 My ears are ringing, out of the crows nest, down here. Nothing much happened and then they found out then, we had to watch the sun from eleven o'clock to about two o'clock because the Japs used to come directly down with their engines shut off, idling and drop the bomb onto you if they could. That's how this bomb come down, nobody knew the plane was in the area. That was a hell of a job
- 32:30 was that, looking into the sun. One bloke had crook eyes. That was all right. Then it just gone back to normal routine. Then one day there was, they were all float planes and this float plane come round, we had a Hudson escorting us that day and the float plane must have whipped into a cloud, out of sight. The Hudson must have come round as the float plane come out,
- 33:00 got him, down he went into the sea. We were all very jubilant about that and thought, "Well that's one won't worry us any more". He parachuted out and the parachute was still floating. We went and picked the parachute up but he let himself out of the parachute. We thought, "Oh well, he's on the island". They put a number of blokes on the island to run up and down there but
- 33:30 no footprints appeared on the sand so we don't know what happened to him.

**What happened when you shot him down?**

We didn't shoot him, the plane shot him down.

**Did everyone let out a cheer?**

Yeah too right they did. They were very happy to see him go down. We used to get raided every time we went past Wessell Island. Tokyo Rose used to be able to tell us. Like tonight she'd tell us that "J234, our planes will meet you tomorrow.

- 34:00 Be ready, we're coming". We thought, "How the hell do they know that?" We always reckoned it was a Jehovah's Witness. They were all conscientious objectors [objected to war service]. We reckoned some of them must be letting them know what's going on because Tokyo Rose [Radio Tokyo propaganda radio host] knew exactly where we were, what we were doing. We don't know how it happened or why it happened. All we know we used to catch it of a day time.

- 34:30 **What effect would hearing Tokyo Rose say this have on you?**

My head was ringing for about three days. I reported to the officer that I had a ringing head from that bomb the other day. He said, "It'll clear up all right" but it didn't clear up and it never has done clear up. Still got very weak in one ear so I've got to watch what I'm doing if I want to hear anything.

- 35:00 It's just one of those things that happened. I couldn't even prove now that it happened.

**How scary is it to see a bomb go down near by?**

Wasn't so scary when you didn't know it was coming. It's when you know they're coming it gets scary. We had quite a few of those episodes. We had another ship one day, they were making a pretty willing on it and it was called the Swiddagan, some name just like that, it was a

- 35:30 Norwegian ship [possibly the MS Skagerak]. They had all the upper deck lined with forty four gallons of fuel. Well, once bullets start flying around that's asking for trouble. They were wheeling all these drums over the side. There was drums of petrol floating everywhere. I thought, "God if we get out of this today without a fire on something we'll be lucky" but we did. They never rescued any of the drums or anything; we don't know what happened to them. They'd all disintegrated into the sea, corrode away.

- 36:00 They were pretty good at that on that run. There was the next convoy we'd taken that convoy back, taken another one back to Thursday Island then they used to go down the east coast unescorted inside the reef into Cairns. We went back next time

- 36:30 and they'd taken a different course. They must have gone deeper into the gulf. This afternoon we're going along. Everything was quiet. We had a fishing line out the back hoping we could get a couple of mackerel or something. One of the officers was keen on that. Going along, I'm on the wheel, my turn and I said to the officer, "There's something wrong underneath here". I said, "There must be a reef or something, look at the surface of the sea". He goes and has a look at the chart, "No, there's nothing under here".
- 37:00 We got over all right but the ship didn't, it landed onto it. Well the sirens went up. It was properly jammed. They reckon they pumped fourteen ton of high octane fuel out onto the sea. Took all the matches and cigarettes off us so nobody, not thinking, would strike a match. The whole of the top of the sea round there was just petrol where they'd pumped all this out to try and see if they could lift the ship, see if
- 37:30 she'd come up off the reef. She wouldn't shift. We had to stay there then and they ended up sending the tug out from Darwin. Lashed it up to it and put her pumps in. They were able to get it to Darwin and get it unloaded, cement the bottom up and send her back to Sydney for repairs. It was obvious to me that there was something radically wrong underneath but
- 38:00 the charts they had, they were Matthew Flinders' charts. Whether the reefs had grown or whether they'd missed that one or not, I don't know. Funny thing about it was when my son got married in Townsville, talking to one of the blokes there, one of the bridal party it was, one of their friends. He said, "You were in the navy?" I said, "Yep". He said, "I was in the merchant navy. What boats were you on?"
- 38:30 I said, "I was on the Latrobe for quite a while". He says, "Latrobe. Did you used to be on the Darwin run?" and I says, "Yep, we did the Darwin, Thursday Island, Merauke run for quite a while". "He says, "Were you on the ship the day the ship went on the reef?" I says, "Yeah I was on the helm that day" and he says, "I was on the helm of the ship that went on the reef", "Are you serious?" he says, "Yep", I says, "Pleased to meet you.
- 39:00 I didn't realize that I would some day meet up with a bloke from the same incident". It was quite amazing to me. Out of all the people that was there he was the one bloke that saw exactly what I saw. He says, "I knew there was something wrong underneath". I said, "So did I. I reported something was wrong". He says, "We didn't report, we had no need to, we were stuck on it". They got her back to Darwin all right but I think they lost a lot of fuel
- 39:30 out of that. It was all Spitfire fuel too they reckoned. I wouldn't know.

## Tape 6

- 00:32 **We were just talking about sea sickness and that was something I said I was going to ask you. You said that you got it pretty bad, but did it ever get better?**
- It did with me. The last thing in the world a sailor wants is his papers marked 'Unfit for sea duty'. It's the last thing in the world you want so you put up with it. I did
- 01:00 always beat it. Three days I'd be a bit queer. Then I'd be right. It always had me beat. The sickest ever I was was when I walked on the wharf one time and the wharf wouldn't move for me. It was a most peculiar feeling. It was frightening actually, knowing the wharf was steady and I was the one that was unsteady. It was really frightening.
- What happened?**
- On of the officers, they'd sent me for the mail
- 01:30 and there used to be a truck come and pick us up, take us up for the ship's mail. One of the officers spotted me, he knew I was in trouble, he'd seen it before. He sent somebody to grab hold of me and bring me back to the ship. He knew very well what would happen, I'd end up over the side of the wharf or something. You sort of get that giddy that you just don't know what you're doing. It's a most peculiar feeling. It's frightening actually, knowing very well that the wharf is stable and you're not. Most peculiar
- 02:00 I wouldn't even dream it could be so but it has happened to me.
- It's funny how you said there would be nothing worse for a sailor than to be marked unfit for sea duty as if it was a terrible thing, I mean they can't help it, it's a physical thing isn't it?**
- That's right.
- Is it just a male pride thing?**
- Not a male pride so much.
- 02:30 When you go to sea, I don't know but you get attached to a ship. You might think it's queer but you do

get attached to a ship and you hate to leave it. I know, I've been on a couple and I hated to leave it. I hated to leave the Australia. When they took her to outside Sydney to sink it I was really upset. She was a wonderful ship and a damn good home.

**That was just recently wasn't it?**

It was after the war, well after the war finished.

**You said that you**

03:00 **basically are a midshipman.**

No, a seaman.

**A seaman, okay, when you're a seaman that means that you're a general dog's body [general duties of all kinds].**

That's right. In sea duties.

**So what was your favourite sea duty?**

I don't know how I'd answer that. There's lookouts, there's the general maintenance,

03:30 whatever's going.

**You liked the lookout?**

Yeah, I did like lookout. I had good eyesight used to be called upon to make sure of something. I think that's one reason I had trouble with my eyes. They'd been used to the maximum which was fair enough, that's what I was there for. I did have good eyesight for seeing things. Reared in the bush you more or less had to.

04:00 **You mean you'd strain your eyes looking out from the crows nest?**

The specialist operator on me told me he very seldom saw that in England. He says in the country where there's a lot of sunshine, a lot of eye strain, that's where you find most of it. It's what they call pterygiums and the sort of skin grows in over your eyeball. It was starting to get to the pupil of my eye, it was that bad. The doctor said,

04:30 "Heavens, how long have you had that?" Well, I'd only been in the navy for what, under twelve months, just on twelve months and there was no sign of it when they went over me in the first place so it must have had something to do with it. Never had any trouble since either with that.

**What about hitting really bad seas, bad weather on ships, how would you fare then?**

Look after yourself,

05:00 do your duty and just be careful you don't get washed over the side. If it gets really bad they'd have lifelines to move around on. Very seldom you'd have to do that. Some of our nights, worse, we had a real rough night up in those northern waters. In the day time you used to see numerous sea snakes sunning themselves on top of the water and when the water was

05:30 running round the decks during the night we used to think, "I wonder how many snakes are in that lot". That was rather something to think about. We thought the snakes are there of a day time, what do they do of a night time.

**But you'd be fast asleep?**

No, the watch on top's not, the watch on duty's not. There's got to be a watch on duty all the time. The boy's sleeping are all right. They're down underneath,

06:00 they're locked away.

**And it was hammocks?**

Yep, all hammocks, for the seamen.

**You were talking to the office when they were researching you, you were talking about hearing Tokyo Rose. Can you tell us about that?**

We used to get it second hand from the wireless operators.

06:30 When they used to come of duty they used to say, "Old Tokyo Rose had been at it again", "What's she on to this time?", "J234", that was our number. The planes'll pick you up tomorrow, Cape Wessell at a certain time. Sure enough, they'd be there. We don't know, we've often wondered how the hell they got that information. We could only think it ended up to be

07:00 the conscientious objectors.

**What do you mean?**

What do I mean conscientious objectors?

**I know what a conscientious objector is; you mean how did they get their information?**

They must have had somebody in the know somewhere. Must have had. Must have been somebody letting out information somewhere.

**Did they often get**

07:30 **it wrong though, too, the propaganda?**

They used to reckon they'd sink us the next day but they never got round to doing that. They never got that far but we only used to get what we got from our, perhaps anything serious they mightn't have told us, I don't know. Sometimes it doesn't pay to know some of these things. That was a concern that we had somebody like that

08:00 against us and we couldn't. We thought we were sailing along pretty well; we didn't want anybody else putting their spokes in upsetting our works. All these ships had to get through one way or another if we could get them there. We used to have some rather frightening nights. You get the sea of a night and you've got say the moon coming up over there and you're a sitting shot.

08:30 They were the nights that used to cause some concern. We were never allowed to light a cigarette on the upper deck of a night. If you wanted a light you had to go in. You could smoke a cigarette but you couldn't light a cigarette outside of a night. I remember one night we were coming along, we were escorting the Katoomba. We loved her. She was for speed, she wasn't one of these the waves went past and we were still coming. She'd sit on about eleven or twelve

09:00 knots and we loved that. We can take this. Our escort had been with us all day. We used to have a Catalina escort all day. She come round and they sent us a signal. They left us just before sundown, "We think there's a submarine surfaced behind you". We thought, "All right, that's all right tonight. He can't get on the land side of us because we've got land down there.

09:30 Watch out early in the morning". During the night I'm on the starboard bridge and I thought, "There's something out there". I said to the officer on the bridge, I said, "I think there's a ship out here sir". He said, "There can't be". I said, "I'm pretty sure there's something there". He had a good hard look; he had a pair of special binoculars. He said "It's our ship that we're escorting".

10:00 He was going to beat us. He wasn't waiting for daylight, he must have read what the signal had said. He was ahead of us, he was heading in to Thursday Island. He was going to be there before daylight. You wouldn't read about it. He was getting ahead of us. That suited us. They shoved a bit more speed on too. I'll never forget that episode.

**Did the navy have rules**

10:30 **that for instance if another ship came by you couldn't yell out and talk to each other.**

We could talk to each other. You could signal one another. You couldn't use radio because they wouldn't break radio silence. They'd have the Morse light. If they wanted anything they'd send out the daily

11:00 code. You had to reply to that and if you didn't have the right answer you were in trouble. I just can't remember whether you sent them in code or not. They all had a word for a certain day. You had to be on the lookout and make sure if you got challenged you knew what you were on about. It was a wonderful experience for a young bloke of my age.

**You mentioned earlier**

11:30 **today, I think tape two for me, you said the Royal Navy we were so polite but the Royal Navy weren't polite but I'll tell you about that later, were you talking about a particular incident?**

Yeah. A lot of incidents. We had to take the Australia to England. Out of Sydney we went, into Bora Bora

12:00 for fuel and oil, through to Panama up to New York. We had a march through New York. The fighting lady ceremony was on. That was the launch of some big new aircraft carrier. We never did find the full strength of that. We had a march down Fifth Avenue in New York, the Australian team. They'd picked a group of us all about the same height. We had a pretty good show there even if

12:30 I do have to say so ourselves. I reckon we gave very good account of ourselves and according to all the press there we did too. We came out of there. We were there a week. Out of there and in to Plymouth Sound to go into Devonport Docks. We arrived there on 1st July. They had double

13:00 daylight saving which was two hours different. Lights out, pipe down and here's the sun shining in the port hole. We weren't used to anything like that because it was the middle of summer. That was all right. After we left New York we went on a detour course. We hadn't been out of there very long, I suppose a day and here's ice floating on the water. On our way, we got to there. Then they had to split,

13:30 half the crew had to come back to Australia. They were coming back; I think it was on the cruiser HMAS

Devonshire that was coming out to the Pacific. The rest of us would stay, were kept there. They told us we were heading for Singapore. That's interesting that is with those kamikaze suicide bombers. So many of us had to go through the anti-aircraft gunnery school.

14:00 I was one of them. When it came to Drake Gunnery School nobody walked there. Everywhere you went in there you run, that was it, finished. If you weren't running, an officer spotted you, he let out an ungodly yell. They were really hard. We were colonials because we had HMAS [His Majesty's Australian Ship] on our cap. Their patrols loved to get stuck into us.

14:30 We had more fights and stinks with them than enough. We couldn't do anything right according to them. On one occasion they'd line, I wasn't with this lot, I always used to get lined up with a mob and I used to have to sort of try and get them home again. This lot got hauled up to the, line them up on the bridge of the Australia. We all went back there, they went back there, we didn't, we went back to Devonport Barracks.

15:00 Line them up, officer of the day came out, "What's this lot being doing?", "Well, we found them doing this and doing that" and he said, "The best thing you can do is get off out of here and leave my men alone. I don't want to hear any more of this". We didn't have much trouble after that. He wanted them off the ship, the Royal Navy patrol and after they'd gone he said "Now for Christ's sake you blokes wake up to yourself

15:30 we don't have to be fighting the British as well as everybody else". We seemed to sail along fairly comfortably after that. That was in early August. Middle of August the war finished. Gee, did we breathe a sigh of relief. The war in the Pacific finished in the middle of August. Geez this suits us fine.

**I want to talk with you in detail about that**

16:00 **but can I just bring you back a little bit before that because in the end of 1943 after the Latrobe, that's when you went on the Inverell, is that right?**

That's right. I was only two weeks on that.

**Oh, only two weeks?**

That's right. I was only filling in for a bloke that'd been put into hospital.

**I see. What was that like anyway? It was a corvette wasn't it?**

Yeah, it was a corvette exactly the same as the Latrobe. Exactly the same,

16:30 town class corvette. I had no problem with that. I fitted in well with them. I had my place at the mess deck the same as everybody else and did my job and that was it. I was there a fortnight and, "Cheerio fellas. I'm on my way, the other bloke's back".

**Didn't you have good mates though that, you know, you wouldn't want to leave?**

Wasn't any good mates you wouldn't want to leave. You didn't want to leave the ship actually, that was the point. You got to know a lot of blokes

17:00 but you weren't altogether mates because you didn't altogether knock round, well you knocked round together because if you were on one watch and another bloke was on another watch, he was on duty and you were off and of course on a corvette there was four hours on, four hours off, day and night, you become very tired. The officers worked four hours on, eight hours off but all the lower decks, they were all fours on, four off, day and night. By God it played hell with you, don't worry.

17:30 Stand to at daylight, only off an hour, back you come, stand to, everybody to their own guns and positions, that's it. Four on, four off, by geez it's hard.

**I couldn't do it.**

[(UNCLEAR)] found ourselves standing up asleep.

**Because you're not even getting a good night's sleep, you're only getting four hours.**

That's right. You don't even get four hours. By the time you get down off

18:00 and what used to annoy me, the officers they were on four on and eight off, see there was enough officers to do that but then when it come to change, we'd be up on, I always used to get up on the bridge either lookout or the wheel, that was my job. Lookout on the side of the bridge and helm in the middle of the bridge. If it was my turn to go and wake up an officer.

18:30 You had to go down to the ward room, down the deck, right away round through, "Sir, it's time to be up" "Yep. Right". Go back up to where you were, ten minutes'd go by, no sign of him. The bloke up there, he's wanting to get off because he's done his time. He'd say, "Dobson did you wake that sub lieutenant up?" "Yes sir, I did" "Well you'd better go back and wake him again". Back I go again,

19:00 "It's time to be up sir". Back I go up onto the bridge again. When you're lookout you can do that. When you're on the wheel you can't. Another ten minutes'd go by, no sign of him again. Third time get down

there, geez by this time I'm starting to get in a sour mood. Not only is he in a sour mood because he hasn't been relieved on time, this bloke's still asleep and I used to think

19:30 to myself, "If ever I get a chance I'll shake the guts out of you". You weren't game to touch them, no way in the world. All you could say is, "Sir, it's time to be on the bridge". "Huh", another grunt. After that I didn't know what you do. What do you do now? Then he comes staggering up. The other bloke'd say, "You're a bit bloody late ain't ye?" That was it.

20:00 **Why did the officers, I mean what did they do to warrant them getting eight hours, what kind of work did they do?**

They sat at the bridge. They were in control. They had a skipper's bell there and all the other officers, they were all on duty, but they were asleep. The skipper mightn't have been. We had one officer, he was a funny bugger. Anderson was his name, I'll never forget him. He'd been on the HMAS Larrakia. You might have heard about the Larrakia, the one

20:30 they sent to Darwin when they thought the Japs, before the war. It's come to protect north Australia, the Larrakia. It was about twenty five feet long or something like that. They sailed all the way from Sydney, up the way round the coast, round and back and round. They got to Darwin, they were all dead thirsty, tied her up to the wharf. Of course the tide there goes down thirty feet and they came back and the thing's stuck hanging up by the rear end. They couldn't

21:00 let her go, otherwise she'd have speared into the bottom. They had a real headache. He was telling us about that one night, on the bridge. You know, there was nothing doing, everything was sailing along nicely and he was telling us about that. I said, "How the hell did you go?" "Well we were lucky enough to get the rope to slip. We could do it and we tied the snout so she couldn't go down any further so had to go backwards" and I thought, "By geez, you're one of our officers".

21:30 The same bloke though, he was a silly bugger in a lot of ways, one day I don't know what was wrong with me but you've got a course and you set this and you sail along on that course. They used to allow a movement of about three degrees each side of that course. Well a perfect bloke can stick to pretty well one degree. This day for some reason or other I was wandering about five degrees each side of the course. I couldn't get her to steady

22:00 down. He's going to show me, "I'll show you how to do it Dobson". In he comes. He had to get down sort of under, because that was all brass round there so it didn't affect the compass. Gets down, gets in there, gets a hold of the wheel and next thing he's chasing the compass. He forgot the compass stands still and the ship goes round the compass, doesn't it, here he is chasing the compass. The old skipper must have looked down at this cabin and here we're doing a circle. He flew up there,

22:30 "What the hell are you doing in there?" and then he got stuck into me for letting him in there. I'll never forget that episode, "Dobson, you don't let anybody in there when you're on that wheel". It was one of those things that happened. Don't worry, a lot of people have chased the compass. That's what they call it. Remember that the compass stands still and the ship goes round it.

**But he was an officer?**

Yeah, he was an officer.

23:00 He was a funny bugger. Another night we'd taken a convoy and Darwin was being raided and they said we had to stay outside. They left, put us into, there was two ships and the Latrobe. They slipped it out near Groper Island. They anchored them up against the island we were to drift up and down

23:30 past them with the echo sounder running. Go up and then drift back with the current. The bloke on the wheel, the lookouts are there, they let him doze for a bit, nothing to do and the officer was there watching. We had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s at home and I heard a bloody rooster crowing and I thought, "Geez, I've gone off me bloody head", I lifted up like that and nearly knocked myself out.

24:00 The officer said, "What the hell's wrong with you Dobson?" "Sir, I heard a rooster crowing". He said, "You're going bloody stupid" and I said, "You hear that?" and he said, "Yes, I heard that". I thought, "I'm not going stupid after all". The ship had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s on board. The officer only found out when we got to Darwin that he had a dozen WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s on board and a rooster. They used to feed them and they'd get their own eggs and what have you.

24:30 Dead of night and I heard this rooster crowing I thought, "God, I'm off me bloody head". I'll never forget that episode. I jerked my head, nearly knocked myself out. Of course when I said, "I heard a rooster crowing" he said, "You've gone bloody mad". I thought I was too. Then I heard it again, "You heard that?" "Yeah", he said, "I heard that". I'll never forget that episode.

25:00 I don't know whether it was the Swiddagan. The Swiddagan was when they had to dump all the fuel off it but this was another Norwegian ship that had poultry on board. I'll never forget it. I'd never even heard of anybody having WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s on board before but they had it.

**I wonder if they had it also for food?**

That'd be right; they'd have it for eggs. They'd use all the scrap from the kitchen, the galley.

25:30 Chooks'd do well. Me and me episodes.

**The coast line of New Guinea was a place that you saw quite a bit of, is that right?**

The coastline, yeah. We only went up the Merauke River.

**Was that beautiful?**

No, that was all low flat country and daylight

26:00 of a morning, we used to try and get the ship there for daylight so you'd get up the river and you had to look hard on the skyline to see it, it was that low. The water coming out of the Fly River was a big line all the way up the coast, fresh water, dirty water coming out. It was amazing. You used to go into that

26:30 and you'd think, "Geez, gonna hit something here" but it was only dirty water. They used to let the ship go in there. They'd unload it in the day or two days and they'd send us up the coast to see if there was anything the Japs were doing. You can imagine one corvette going up the coast because we had to wait to take it back home again see, they get escorted back.

**Which ship?**

Oh, we used to get a number of Norwegian ships going in to Dutch New Guinea.

**And you'd**

27:00 **escort them?**

Escort them to the river, in they'd go and we'd go up the coast. See if the Japs are doing anything. Our skipper used to say, "If we see anything up there, we're not backing off". We thought, "No, we see anything we're gonna be up there all right". He used to make it known that we had to go up there so far, see if anything was doing then come back, be back there to bring those ships back.

**Did you hear any fighting though**

27:30 **along the coast?**

No, not in Dutch New Guinea we didn't. There'd be Japs there somewhere.

**Were you aware of the Australians over there in New Guinea at that time?**

Yeah, we were aware of it all right but they were on the other side. They were on the northern side of the island. They'd come to the Owen Stanley [ranges] and over the Owen Stanley and we were well south of the Owen Stanley. You couldn't even see,

28:00 sometimes on a good day you could see the mountains in the far distance but normally about all you could see was this one line just like a low water line, that was the mangroves. You had to look hard to see it. You had to keep watching it and keep your eye out for it, they were looking for certain marks.

**And you did have a few of scares coming back to Australia was it, was it with the ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Commission or sub detector] equipment?**

Yep.

28:30 A couple of times the ASDIC equipment wasn't working. The convoy didn't know so it didn't make any difference to them. We weren't going to tell them it wasn't working. No way.

**Do you remember any particular scary times?**

There was a couple of times they reckoned they had a submarine lined up. They don't know whether it was a submarine or a shoal of fish. The same thing when you get echo.

29:00 We put off quite a few depth charges. Brought up a lot of fish too.

**Did you eat the fish?**

No we didn't eat them. Although one of our officers one day with a net, he had a net on board. We went to one of the islands and he brought back a hell of a lot Travelley fish. I don't know where he got them but he knew where to do it. He'd been up there with the merchant marine and he knew

29:30 where to go. Another day when we were in Thursday Island they said we could have a picnic party over to Wednesday Island. There was deer and goats on Wednesday Island. They used to send a rifle and so much ammunition with us and the boys said "Ah well we'll have a bit of venison". Shot a couple of deer which was highly illegal and brought them back

30:00 with us and the cook butchered them up for us and we had venison. It was very nice.

**So you did get moments of nice food?**

Oh yeah. We always had fairly good food. It was the army where we had the rough tucker. The navy



used to look after us pretty well. They were pretty good cooks. Old Tom Kennedy was a pretty good cook. He made some horrible bloody home brew though.

**He made moonshine [home made alcohol]**

30:30 **on the ship?**

Yeah, who didn't make moonshine?

**Did you make moonshine?**

No, I was never in a position to. You had to have the necessary equipment and the wherewithal. I could never come at the idea of that substance; the look of it was enough to put anybody off it. I didn't want that at any price.

**He'd say come and have a taste**

31:00 **of this and give you some of his homebrew?**

No, they kept at their own parties. Where else have we got to go?

**Well I hadn't realised that you were only on the Inverell for a couple of weeks. Actually after you went up to Merauke**

31:30 **quite a few times didn't you?**

That's right.

**Was that pretty much the main route?**

No, Darwin and Thursday Island was the main route. The other route from Thursday Island to Merauke was the main route. You used to go to Booby Island and then turn otherwise you went straight on.

**What was the most frightening part of that journey sea wise in regards to the war, I mean to be concerned about, the Japanese?**

Japanese

32:00 and mines. Never knew the day that you were going to lose a ship to a mine. Corvettes didn't draw enough water actually to be worried about mines, that's why they were called mine sweepers. We used to have veins that used to go out like trawlers have got and they've got a wire in them that cuts. As it drags it cuts the wire off and lets the mine float on top. Then they came with magnetic mines. The ship got near them, they blew up. They were a different matter but they were always floating.

32:30 **Now you did mention earlier today Jim that you did get a few times on leave during the time that you were in the navy. Can you remember what you would do when you came home?**

Didn't do much of anything. Hand round the farm, do this, do that. Go visiting here and visiting there. I don't remember anything in particular. I had a fair few families I used to go and stay with occasionally and

33:00 say g'day to. Other than that it was pretty routine sort of business. You never knew the time you were going to be recalled.

**So they didn't say, you have got ten days, they'd just say take off and...**

That's right. They might have to say, "Righto, we want all these blokes back again", you never knew. It was always on.

**Did you miss the ship when you were away? Did you miss the life?**

33:30 Actually yes. I don't know why. I know it was good to get home for a while but I also knew it was good to go back. It seems strange. It is strange but that's home and you look after it, it looks after you. A lot can happen in there that upsets everybody, including you. It is a strange feeling.

**Also it must have been difficult coming**

34:00 **home and finding out that some blokes didn't come back?**

Yeah well it was but normally you got to know who was what, who had succumbed to troubles.

**Did you Mother write to you?**

Yes she used to write occasionally. I used to write to them pretty often, perhaps once a week or once a fortnight, that's about all.

**This chap that was a mate of yours,**

34:30 **well, a neighbour, he died in the army in New Guinea I think you said, you were friends with his Mum.**

That's right.

**Did that happen on the first or second time you were on leave?**

That happened the first time I was on leave from Darwin. 1942.

**How did the community react in that kind of circumstance? Did they do something for the parents or the family?**

They sort of

35:00 more or less all sort of congregated to go and comfort her more than anything. It was very hard knowing what to do. It was very hard being, I know I found that most difficult hearing that and here's me on the train going away. Thought, "Well could be me next. You never know". Wondering what they'd be thinking too. One of those things that happened.

35:30 **I guess I've always wanted to ask someone who was brought up in a rural area when somebody died if there would be a wake if you like or some kind of...?**

I don't know whether they had a wake; I think they had a sort of a church service for it. That's what I think they had. I never got round to talking to his Mother much about it.

36:00 It seemed to be a very sore subject with them. Being the only son I could understand that too. Mrs. Allen was a real nice stick. I know one time she was sick in hospital and they wouldn't let her have visitors. I went to the hospital and said, "I'm home on leave. I'm her son, can I please go in and see her". They said, "Oh yes" and she said to me, "What are you doing here? How did you get in?"

36:30 I said "I told them a story". I didn't tell her I told them I was her son but I told them a story and they said they'd let me in. I did get in and I was very pleased I did.

**Did she die then, after that?**

No, she recovered after that and then they moved to Deception Bay to live, away from here. She died soon after that.

37:00 **Now you also got sent to the Coonawarra transmitting station.**

Yes that's right.

**That was towards the end of the war wasn't it?**

That was when I was in Darwin. That was in 1944. That was when actually the trouble was brewing to a head here; they'd started to knock the Japs back. That was when that Coonawarra

37:30 business was on. They were jamming all of our signals coming out of Coonawarra.

**What do you mean sorry?**

Well when you're broadcasting, you know, putting your code messages out under your code and you've got a bloke somewhere going "dat-a-dat-dat"; you can't get anything. The Japs were doing this for quite a while so Coonawarra was useless, they couldn't communicate. They were in contact with Honolulu,

38:00 Darwin and must have been Canberra and they were jamming all their signals. This Jap up there he must have had a pretty powerful instrument on that frequency. They used to try jumping the frequency but he could follow them. According to this bloke that was telling me about it, I wouldn't know, I did understand that much, he says that if they all agreed to stop at a certain time,

38:30 he used to stop, he was wide awake and that was it, they didn't have enough time to get a bearing. One morning about three o'clock they all decided they'd stop, he kept going da-da-da; they had him. They got the maps out and charts out and got all their directions. That's where he is. They give him a hell of a headache because by God there was a lot of planes went out.

**I think I might have to ask you**

39:00 **more in detail about that.**

I wouldn't be able to give you more detail. I don't know—it was only what I got told.

**Okay. Well I hadn't heard about it before so I was just trying to make sure that I covered all that.**

I know a lot of planes went out of Darwin aerodrome late that afternoon. They said that any that were coming back should be back here by daylight in the morning. There wasn't many back by daylight. Whether they went to other places though on the way I don't know. They could have gone perhaps to Horn Island which would be closer.

39:30 I wouldn't know.

## Tape 7

00:31 **We were talking off camera about Coonawarra and you had a story you wanted to tell us.**

It was obvious to send eight people out for special sentry duty to Coonawarra, something was expected to happen. All the facilities and that that had to go with them, food etc. to be arranged. It was obvious

01:00 something was gonna. It was arranged that we had four men to walk so far and meet at each corner. We could only see one reason for that is they were expecting somebody to sneak in. As such this morning I remember in particular. It was just before daylight, first rays of daylight were coming. A funny noise.

01:30 I thought, "I'd better get down to me cobber down the other end". Went down there, "Hey fella, there's something on here". "What do you mean?" he says. I said, "There's a funny noise up here. You come and listen to this; somebody's trying to get us. Watch what you're doing. There's something on round here". I could hear this beep beep. It's a signal to somebody. Slowly walked up, the hairs are up on the back of our neck, "There's something on round here all right".

02:00 He said, "It's coming from this house over here". I say, "Don't say somebody's got in to there". He says, "I don't think so but you never know. Sneak around there". Goes around and here's this noise starts, beep beep beep and "I'm Popeye the sailor man, beep beep" and I'm thinking "Why the hell would you be doing a thing like that this time of a morning". He says, "I know,

02:30 there's a bloody cockatoo here". This cockatoo's singing away to himself as large as life. We hadn't heard it 'til this time. It was just coming daylight when they started to move and we were dead certain it was somebody trying to get us away from what we were supposed to be doing. We were scared. We thought, "We don't know how many's round here" because the grass was higher than us and you sort of had a track through it and you sort of had to wait to hear if anything was rustling. It was a scary place. We were pleased to get away from that joint.

03:00 I can't remember his nursery rhyme about Popeye the sailor man but it finished up like that, "I eat all my spinach right up to the finish, I'm Popeye the sailor man, beep beep" and this in the scary hours. It was some thrill with that lot. It only lasted about another three days after that and they took us back to Darwin again. That was after that raid in New Guinea, they must have

03:30 blown her apart.

### **What was the cockatoo, was it caged?**

Yeah, one of the permanent blokes had it. He must have left it there and somebody was feeding it and looking after it. We were put into two houses. We were casuals see. There was ten houses there, I think five on each side of the street and we used to have a great time there. We could make our own.

04:00 We had our own stove. They used to give us some bread. We'd have toast and what have you. It was all right. We were a bit sorry to leave there but we weren't sorry that the whole episode was over because somebody somewhere had been stopped in what they were doing. They reckoned from then on our signals were going through quite clearly so they'd overcome the problem. They must have been dead certain though somebody was going to raid the place.

### **Did this cockatoo sound like**

04:30 **a human?**

He did sound like a human, for all the world as though I'd been saying it. You wouldn't read about it. It was just as though somebody was drawing attention away from what you're supposed to be doing and we fell for it, no doubt about that. The old cockatoo, he must have been smiling to himself.

### **Was he in a cage?**

Yeah, he was in a sort of a half built place underneath the house. The houses were all on high stumps and

05:00 he was underneath it. It was a unique arrangement. I don't know. I always seem to be having trouble with cockatoos. Can I shift on a bit? When I was held at the place in the Northern Territory where they wouldn't let me go any further, the end of the railway line, I just can't think of the name at the moment, we were in the staging camp there and all the men like that were

05:30 in transit they used to have to go up this race, like a cattle race. You had your dixie, your cup, you'd get your food and your tea and you'd come round and sit at the table. Then there was an old cockatoo and he didn't have a feather on him. He was one of the old type, you know they used to pick every feather. You can imagine what he was like; he was just skin and bone. This old cockatoo used to take delight in me. I don't know whether it was me

06:00 of course I was the only one with a sailor's cap on. This old cockatoo used to come along the rail there and he used to say, flap his wings and "A few more feathers and by Christ I'd fly". That used to tickle me. He only did it for me. I'll never forget that episode. Cockatoos always seem to fascinate me. I don't know why they took a fancy to me.

**What did he do again?**

- 06:30 He'd go like this, flip, flip, flip "A few more feathers and by Christ I'd fly". I'll never forget that bloody cockatoo there. He used to come across this rail on the side, belting his ribs with his wings. It was only the wing, there was no feathers. Click click click. Then he'd burst into this,
- 07:00 some of the blokes must have taught him that.

**Did they teach him any dirty language?**

Never heard any, nuh. It's a wonder they didn't come out with a mouthful of something. I suppose if you teased them they might have.

**This one that was singing Popeye the sailor man, when you approached did he keep singing?**

After we went over to him he shut up then. He must have been just sort of

- 07:30 chirping away to himself. It's the time all birds start to move and he must have been going through his sermon sort of, for the day.

**How did he say the beep beep?**

He just sort of went beep beep. "I eat all my spinach right up to the finish I'm Popeye the sailor man beep beep" and that's the way he used to do it.

- 08:00 We were sure there was somebody was having us on. They were going to get round us, take us there and then come in from the other side, that's what we were certain of.

**So your main role here at the transmitting station, what was your main role here?**

Sentry duty.

**You mentioned earlier in the day about two men going into the bush.**

They used to have a special place they used to go to. I don't know any more about it than that.

- 08:30 They used to head off on their own. One bloke on his own used to go down into the bush. Over the road, into the bush. That's where they must have had some secret thing down there. It was well away from the wireless station. It used to take them a while to get down to it and that must have been where their secret spot was. It was away from the main control panel. That was it. We never did understand it. He just whispered to me,
- 09:00 "Ah, we got him last night".

**What were they? Were they radio operators?**

They were all special radio blokes. They were very valuable men so why they let them go down there on their own. I suppose if you want to keep anything quiet that's the way to do. If you send somebody down there to escort them they'll know damn well there's something down there but they used to just quietly walk away on their own, away they'd go.

- 09:30 I've often wondered about that.

**How long would they be gone for?**

I reckon it'd be just about eight hours. I can't be sure of that either. It must have been manned all the time otherwise it wouldn't be any good for them.

**I've got a few more questions about your time on the corvettes, maybe a little about Latrobe. What was your action station?**

My action station

- 10:00 was damage control.

**So you had to?**

Be jack of all trades. Put out fires or anything like that.

**You mentioned you had a bit of watch, had to do a bit of watch, how good were you at looking out to sea?**

I had really good eyesight. I remember one time we had a young chap up in the crows nest and he said he thought he could

- 10:30 see a periscope then he said, "No I can't. I don't know what it is". I remember the skipper saying to me "Dobson, get up in that crows nest and see what you can see". I went up and let the other bloke out and down. I had a good look at this and I said, "Well whatever it is it's on top of the water, there's no water splashing round it". Skipper was in the voice pipe, we had it straight through to the bridge. I said, "I would think it's a coconut but I can't

11:00 be sure". So he wheeled her out, brought her around. Sure enough that's what it was. It was on top of the water see and was only bobbing up. It could look like a periscope only to me a periscope would be breaking the water. This one wasn't. So it wasn't a fixture underneath.

**Tell us in your times at sea what was some of the most interesting sights, mysteries of the sea so to speak?**

11:30 Well there was a few of them. I used to love watching the storm of a night at sea. It was really pretty. The way they'd light up and flash, really glorious to look at. One of the most scariest things I ever saw was one morning I was in the crows nest and you couldn't tell the line between the sea and the sky. The whole thing was just one great as though it was one big sheet.

12:00 Even with glasses on you could not define which was sea and skyline. The whole lot was mirrored together. You begin to wonder, "Am I looking above the water or below the water?" That was most peculiar. I saw that a couple of times. There wasn't a ripple in the sea nor in the air, there was nothing. We were cruising along and here's this

12:30 peculiar seascape in front of you. Most peculiar.

**Does the sea mesmerize you at times when you're out there for hours?**

Doesn't mesmerize you. I like watching it. We used to do some queer things you know. To get exercise you'd walk backwards and forwards in the same spot. So

13:00 two of you'd be talking to one another, you'd walk backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. Do that for half an hour or more to get exercise. You saw anybody else doing it you'd say you're balmy but you do that to get exercise and you unconsciously do it. Walk backwards and forwards, turn round, walk back.

**Did any of the men go a bit balmy on board?**

Never in my experience. They were all pretty well

13:30 what you'd say level headed. I don't know whether that's the reason they were there or whether it wasn't or they just picked at random and was lucky I don't know but we never had any trouble with it.

**What about were there any particularly funny characters or memorable blokes on board?**

Nope. Can't say I can recall any. In fact I can't recall

14:00 many of their names now. It's a fair while ago. It's what, sixty two years ago. A lot of my hairs have changed since then. I can't remember anything outstanding.

**How about the officers, what were they like, the ones in charge?**

Lieutenant Commander Brewster was a real gentleman and so was his

14:30 next in, Lieutenant Brackenridge. They were two gentlemen. Anderson, the gunnery officer to my mind he left a bit to be desired and the sub lieutenant, well I think we could have found better officers than him.

**Tell us what was the food like on board?**

15:00 Well the one thing that I did detest was powdered eggs. You'd eat that or nothing, please yourself. There's nothing else coming. They used to give us plenty to eat. We used to have a saying. Each mess table had a bloke in charge and he got his dish of tucker and he dished it out. He might

15:30 have a bit left, "Anybody want some gash?" that's what they used to call it. Right very seldom there was anything left behind. It was all eaten. It was a good sign the food was fairly good. There was nothing else so you can please yourself. We used to get a beer ration every week. Two bottles a week. That was issued to us.

16:00 You couldn't keep them, you had to drink them. What I mean is you couldn't keep two bottles, four bottles and have six bottles and have a real booze up. If you were caught doing that you were in trouble. We never had any trouble. We used to have a bit of a party some nights, have a sing song and what have you. We always seemed to have somebody that could lead off and that sort of gets them started and you go on from there. That used to happen

16:30 mainly when you were in port. You'd have a bit of a get together. We used to play a lot of cards to fill in time. If you had an hour or so, get out a pack of cards. Five hundred was the special. I couldn't play it now. I could play it but I couldn't remember the procedure now. We used to play a lot of five hundred [card game].

**With these sing songs, do you remember any**

17:00 **of the songs?**

Waltzing Matilda was one. Just the normal songs. More or less had somebody to start it off and it didn't matter what it was, it made a noise and you enjoyed it. That's what it amounted to.

**Were you much of a singer?**

No.

17:30 Never was. Never will be. I'm no musician. I can't even tell one tune from another. I'm, what do you call it, tune deaf.

**Did you have a nickname?**

Yeah, I had a nickname, I was bluey. I had red hair. When Hilda come out here I had dark hair, now it's gone white. So I've had three lots of colour.

18:00 **Why did it go black?**

I don't know but it did. It didn't go black, went real dark though.

**Comparing with life on board a corvette did you ever get to compare it to life that could have been on a destroyer or a bigger ship?**

There would be more regimentation on a bigger ship same as there was on the Australia when I was on her. It was on

18:30 regimentation. I landed the job and I don't know how and why, I don't know whether it was because I was always reasonably dressed or what it was but I landed the job of what they call half deck sentry. That's in charge of all the ship's keys. I remember one officer, I don't know whether he was trying to be funny with me or what but he came and got certain keys. It wasn't for the magazines. Everything was locked so

19:00 so every Tom Dick and Harry [anyone] couldn't go and there was a big board about as big as that wall and every set of keys was there and when you took over the shift, you'd be on there for three hours and when you took over the shift the bloke'd say, "Those keys are missing, they've been signed, you've got a signature for them in the book". This day in particular an officer come and got some keys and he was going to head off. I said, "Excuse me sir.

19:30 I must have a signature for those keys", he says, "You don't need a signature for that". I said, "Excuse me sir, I must have a signature. My instructions are I must have a signature for all keys taken". Reluctantly he signed the book. That was all right. I thought, "Hello, I'm in for it this time. This bugger's gonna get me some how". The captain's cabin was there and the commander's cabin was there and it was real

20:00 in the heart of the ship. The next day the captain come over to me "Are you Dobson?" I said, "Yeah, I am sir. That's my name", "Thank you very much for what you did yesterday", "Excuse me sir?" "Making that officer sign for the keys" "Thank you sir. I was a bit worried about it" he said, "You've got no need to be worried. You've got a job to do".

20:30 That was it. No more was said. I had that job then for quite a while. The bloke that had been on it had been shifted to something else and then he got shifted back again and then I got the job, see I was a senior seaman on what they call maintop. On the ship there's

21:00 forecastle, foretop, maintop and quarterdeck. I was senior seaman on maintop. That was all right. One night in particular, we sailed out of Britain. We had a hell of a lot of stuff coming back to the war museum, see the war was over. It had broken, some of this stuff. We were coming out into a ninety three mile an hour wind and the

21:30 seas were going over the top of B turret. That was the second turret up and they were splashing onto the compass platform which was right a way on the top. I'd had an hour up there with the binoculars. You couldn't see a bloody thing. It was dark, water on everything. I was wringing wet. I come off my hour up there and the petty officer in charge said, "Dobson you'd better change your clothes and I want you back on deck". Back I come. In the mean time

22:00 the boat's spar had broken loose. That's a spar like that, about thirty feet long and it goes out the side of the ship to anchor the ship's motor boat to when it's in port. It had broken loose and it was belting itself against the side of the ship. The petty officer said to me, "Dobson, we've got to stop that. It's going to bust the side out of the ship". "Yep". He said, "I want you to go and get a hold", it had a tail under it and he said

22:30 "I want you to go out and get a hold of that if you will". "Righto sir. Chief will you hang on to the rope for me?" "Yes I'll do that" I take my boots and socks off so I can get a feel for what I'm doing and get out there. I said, "I think I can do it". You had this rope coming down to it and you had to get down and get underneath. You had to wait 'til one wave had gone by, whip out, grab that rope and then get back in.

23:00 I waited for a while. I thought, "Geez I'm gonna get it. That bloody thing'll crush me against the side of the ship". At any rate I said, "Hang on to that bloody rope, I'll go when I'm ready". I whipped out,

grabbed that thing and got it back in again. Geez, I breathed again. We got her secured then, tied it up to the side of the ship so she wouldn't bust a plate out. It was hit with an ungodly belt. When the ship rolled over, whump

- 23:30 then when it went back the other way it went into the water then back again. It was a hell of an experience. He just said to me, "Good work Dobson." You don't know how scared Dobson was.

**How did the atmosphere compare say a bigger ship to say those times on a corvette?**

Quite a lot different. It was more, what you say, straight lined.

- 24:00 Corvettes are more easy going than what cruisers were. Cruisers were you were there for a job and this is it, this has got to be done, that's got to be done, it's got to be done this way. Had to be dressed right, what was the dress of the day. There was quite a lot of difference between them. We soon fell into line with it, wasn't anything hard. That was the first big ship I'd ever been on was the Australia. I only got

- 24:30 on to that because there was a bloke here, I was in boom depot here in Brisbane and I was getting a bit fidgety. Not doing much, was fiddling about here. I used to mow the lawn with a scythe. I thought, "Oh Christ I can do better than this". There was a bloke there; he'd been drafted to the Australia. He had a sick wife and three kids sick and one of the

- 25:00 petty officer's said to me, "Do you know anybody that'd be prepared to swap with that bloke who got a draft to the Australia and he'd like to get somebody to take his place" and I thought "Geez, I haven't got any reason why I couldn't" I says to him, "You want somebody to take your place, I'll take it". Bill Morer was his name. We used to call him the sheriff. I don't know why, that was his name when I got there.

- 25:30 I went up and saw the officer and said, "I'll take his place on the Australia if you agree to it". He says, "Righto, we'll organize that" and that's how I came to be on the Australia. Other than that I was heading back up in to the Pacific for sure. That's how I come to be on the Australia.

**You mentioned a job at the boom depot at Brisbane; tell us how you got to be in this job.**

Well

- 26:00 after I had my eyes operated on they wouldn't let me go back for sea duties for at least three months.

**What had exactly happened to your eyes?**

I had pterygium, you know those things that grow over the eyes and they'd got right down to the pupil of the eye. The doctor when I come out of Darwin he'd spotted them on my eyes. You had to go and get a doctor to say you're still okay, alive and warm, you'll stand the trip to Brisbane sort of business and he looked at me and said,

- 26:30 "You've got to have those eyes of yours seen to" and I hadn't taken much notice of it. When I took a good look at it in the mirror they were starting to get. There'd been no sign of them according to them when they'd gone over me physically when I joined the navy and that was only a bit over twelve months earlier so they were growing at a hell of a rate. Outlook duties in the scorching sun watching for aeroplanes coming out of the sun must have had a lot to do with it.

- 27:00 **What exactly causes it?**

The specialist that was there reckoned you don't see it in the cold countries, you only see it in these warm, hot, dusty and sunny countries. I don't know but that's what he told me. He was a major from the British Army that operated on me in Greenslopes Military Hospital. They'd only do one eye at a time. I was in there about three weeks. He said, "We can only do one eye at a time, otherwise" he said, "We've got to feed you", because you'd have both eyes covered up see.

- 27:30 He said, "We'll overcome them all right. They won't trouble you again" and they haven't.

**What did they exactly do in the operation, what did they do to your eyes?**

They cut that piece of skin out and turned it back in and stitch it. That's what he said they do. I wouldn't know.

**And so because of your eyes you had to take a land job?**

Yeah.

**Tell us about this job?**

That was when I got shoved into the boom depot laying out

- 28:00 anti-torpedo nets or what have you so they can close the entrance of the harbour off.

**What was the net exactly like?**

It was a big long net of all rings of real hard steel. One ring was built into another ring. Each ring was built into a ring. They were about an inch round, a number of rings they were about that round and they were about an inch thick.

28:30 Hard steel wire they were. We had a petty officer there, he knew all about them. He used to have a hell of a job laying them out. They had a crane down there used to lift up these great big things and they'd lay them out. You had to lay all these rings out one inside the other all the way. They went down about thirty feet in the water. They used to lay them out and when

29:00 they wanted a ship to come through they used to pull them up and back and then go out and pull them out again. They reckoned they were good but I don't know.

**How deep is it at that point of Brisbane? Where exactly on the Brisbane River was it?**

It was down past Lytton. Must have been a fair drop of water. Of course they wouldn't have it out in the bay. I just don't know exactly where it was.

29:30 I was only in the depot. I never went out to where they put it in. I think it was down past Lytton.

**So you weren't actually operating it at the river?**

No I had nothing to do with that. I was only the bloke giving a hand for maintenance of the damn things. It was a curse of a job.

**How would they operate exactly, would they catch the sub?**

A sub couldn't get through them, or they reckoned they couldn't.

30:00 Bolt cutters wouldn't cut it, no way. It was too hard a steel for that. I often wondered what become of it all. They must have melted them down. There was tons upon tons of those things.

**What was the system, was there just one gate or was there a couple of gates?**

No, they used to pull it from one side. That side was fixture and then they'd pull it this side. They'd open the gate and then they'd pull it shut again, that's how it worked.

**Was it staggered up the river or was there just one point?**

Just one point.

30:30 We went into Freetown and they had one there that must have been a mile long. That's where the convoy used to get inside, make up the convoys and there was all these ships inside there when they'd open the gate and then they'd let them out. They had to be careful when they were letting them out that they don't let a sub in too. They must have had a method further down that they say well a draft of forty feet, they'd be stopped from there on. Otherwise they'd

31:00 crawl in underneath that.

**How long were you at this job for?**

I was there, must have been four months or more. I was stopped from sea duty for three months and it was well and truly passed there. I didn't get down there 'til must have been October,

31:30 November I was operated on and I went out of there in May. I was there nearly six months.

**That's when you told us that you swapped with the guy; you went off on the Australia?**

That's right.

**Did you expect the war to continue for a long time at this stage?**

I did, yeah. We were all sure it was going to too because haven't

32:00 beaten Germany then and we had to face Japan. We thought, "Well, we've got these suicides to cope with, we've got a real problem. By the time we get to Japan there's not going to be many of us left". That was a frightening experience that was. I never had anything to do with that but we were getting well and truly trained for it though.

**Did that cause a bit of trepidation on your part**

32:30 **you know, volunteering for sea duty?**

No, I wanted sea duty. I liked sea duty.

**What about the fear of being attacked by these kamikazes?**

That'd give you second thoughts, wouldn't it, I'd say.

**Did you have second thoughts?**

I never had it happen to me. I was lucky in that respect.

**So you headed up to England to**



33:00 **go with the Australia.**

Yep, with the Australia.

**What was it going there for?**

It was going there for a refit. Change her armament and change this and change that. We were supposed to bring an aircraft carrier back. The HMS Terrible they told us. HMS Terrible became the HMAS Sydney. She was built as HMS Terrible. When we got over there there'd been a row between the British and Australian governments over paying for it

33:30 and they decided to carry on with the Australia, give her a refit and bring her home again. That's what we did.

**You told us a bit about your time in England but tell us a bit more about how long you were at the gunnery school. You did that while it was getting a refit?**

Yeah, that's right.

34:00 There was ten of us in the class at the gunnery school. They'd picked us out for various reasons and I don't know what the reasons were and we were to go to gunnery school. Well the first day at gunnery school they expected us to have the food that the Royal Navy had. We went into a mess deck with them. That was terrible. They had toast,

34:30 a bit of hard baked bread, toast and butter was something, well it smelt like coconut oil and looked like the coconut oil you used to rub in your hair and a plate of gruel soup, that was lunch. I thought, "Jesus, that's no bloody good to us". At any rate, that's all right. We decided we'd do a protest.

35:00 We'd go out the back gate, back to our own ship and we'd get the officer on watch and tell him what we'd done because we could have been in real serious trouble. We said to him that that food, we knew we'd taken a lot of food with us and we knew the ship had a terrific amount of food we got in America. After we got out of the war zone, see the war over there had finished and we told him that we didn't like the food, it was terrible,

35:30 they were running the guts out of us. We had one bloke, Harry the Drover, he couldn't change step at the double and the whole lot of us had to run backwards and forwards, Harry getting along like a kangaroo. He was a western New South Wales and he could no more change step at the double than enough. This bloke from the Royal Navy delighted in punishing us. It got that way that we said,

36:00 "This is enough of this fella. This bloke'll never be able to do that". He said, "He bloody well will" and he threw his cap on the floor. He said, "You've gotta be able to do this". We thought, "Oh well". We were back in the barracks by this time, they shifted us off the ship so they could take out part of the armament and that, put us into Devonport Barracks. We had Harry in the barracks going backwards and forwards on his own, we were watching him.

36:30 It's a simple matter, change step at the double but old Harry couldn't do it. That's all right. Eventually they let us off. They wouldn't worry any more about it. We carry on then with gunnery, the sighting and the gun. They had beautiful gunnery. We went into a room and there was a whole sky, ships, everything was there on this big thing.

37:00 It was as real as anything you could get and everything was going, guns were firing, everything. They yelled out an order, "Red, thirty, aircraft approaching". Brought this thing down, brought your gun down and you had a spot on the dial and when you've got them two together, you fire, you only had about five seconds. You brought them together.

37:30 We managed that all right, we were doing well. So we had to go out then and do it in reality with a Spitfire [aircraft]. Spitfire. We nearly got in real trouble there, old Harry the Drover and me. I was the bloke in charge and Harry was the bloke doing the training. This Spitfire come round with his drogue [target towed behind an aircraft], up he comes and we had so many, the bell went, you had to fire, you had five seconds to

38:00 get ready and you had three seconds of firing. That was all right. I had to fire and I knew we weren't on the target, that's all right. The Spitfire went out, come round again and when he's going round his light's flashing. We couldn't read the signal. The bloke in charge said, "Do you buggers understand what that signal meant?" "No sir, we don't" "That means I am towing this bloody target, not pushing it". Old Harry looks round the gun at me,

38:30 "We'll show these bastards" he says. I said, "Well just wake up for Christ's sake". I said, "I was on target but you weren't". Anyway, he comes round the second time. He comes down, bang, whoop, away went the drogue, it was finished, the old Spitfire jumps about fifty feet because that was a fair pull to pull that thing at full speed. They was travelling at full speed. We got it out. They cancelled all shooting for that day then. They didn't want to bring out another drogue.

39:00 We wanted to have another go at another drogue but they wouldn't come at it. I won top marks for shooting. They lined me up before the commodore to transfer to the Royal Navy; they wanted blokes like me they reckoned. "No sir, the war's over, I'm going home". That was it.

## Tape 8

00:33 **We haven't talked much about...you said about cards, you'd play cards in your down time but what about actually partying and drinking your beer. You said you got these two bottles a week and you had to save it to have a party although you probably weren't allowed to save it.**

That's right, but we used to. We used to save three or four.

01:00 We used to have a party. A mob of us used to get together. The skipper was very good to us. We used to make a hell of a noise. You can imagine a mob of blokes drinking, a few beers, all these songs and some of them weren't due for publication, as you say. I think the skipper must have shut his door, shut the hatch down and said, "We can lock the buggers in, they can make us much noise as they like". I don't know.

01:30 We used to do it but it wasn't very often. It was a pretty rare sort of an episode so we enjoyed it more. It wasn't a common thing, not by any means. I don't know how we come to organize it now, I just can't remember but I know we used to have them and they were quite good. Broke the monotony too. The monotony could be a curse. That's why we liked to play five hundred, got your mind on something else

02:00 because when you start to lean up, I remember one night leaning up against the gun and I was dead to the world. We were that tired. Used to be a week from Thursday Island, depending on what convoy we had. If we had the old Alagna, we dreaded the name, we dreaded the ship. She'd only do about six knots flat out with full steam up and a wind blowing with it. Well the waves used to go past us and we'd be coming along.

02:30 I think it was nine days to get from Thursday Island. Well, it was a monotonous trip. You had to sort of have something to. Routine went on just the same only there was no speed. When we used to get a convoy doing eight knots, we were in heaven. We were churning along, everything going well but that old Alagna, I'll never forget that thing. It was a coal burner of all things

03:00 and you could see it coming fifty mile away. All the other ships burnt oil, burnt clean, you couldn't see them on the horizon. The old Alagna you could. It used to worry us that thing with that great smoke flaring, coming out of it.

**You must have gone crazy a little bit; it's like cabin fever, isn't it?**

I think we were crazy a bit. Wouldn't say not all there but

03:30 insulated sort of against reality. That's what I think it was. I think we used to look at one another at times and wonder, "Do I look the same as him" sort of business. I don't know but it was a peculiar set up. Those hours, they were terrible but what else could you do? It worked well and we were able,

04:00 we were young enough to take it. With all young people.

**What about two up, did you play that a lot?**

No, didn't play it at all. I was never a good gambler. I wouldn't have been in that if they had been playing. The skipper of the ship would never have allowed it. That way you can get into real trouble. One bloke starts to win a lot of money and start a fight over it or something or a decision. Very careful when you start to gamble. We weren't allowed to gamble and that was finished. When you played

04:30 five hundred there was no money attached, no way. Weren't allowed to play poker either for the same reason. I can understand that. When you've got a lot of men together like that in those conditions you've got to be a bit strict on it otherwise it does get out of hand.

**You were talking with Kiernan before about the gunnery course that you were doing in England.**

Yes.

**Did you complete that?**

Yes.

05:00 I got an eighty two per cent pass.

**Good for you.**

I did. I even got lined up before the commodore. He wanted me to stay in England.

**Well what happened because this is when you must have met Hilda.**

I met her before then.

**How did you meet Hilda?**

That's a long story. Hilda's a relation of mine in a roundabout way. Hilda was a Dobson in a long roundabout way. My brother in law was over there with the air force and

- 05:30 he decided, my Mother or my Father, my grandfather came from Scarborough in Yorkshire. Somewhere or other my brother in law Bill got sent to see if he could find some of these relations and low and behold he did. Of course they found out that I was heading for England and I was to meet Bill in London on the underground. Bill was in the air force. The war wasn't over then.
- 06:00 He was still over there but he wasn't flying. They'd finished with Germany. He was with the Lancasters [aircraft; a bomber]. We'd arranged, he'd written, telegraphed me on the ship and I'd telegraphed him and I'd got a leave pass. We had to march through London first before there was any leave passes. They took us, six hundred of us, out of our ship's company, no there wasn't that many, two hundred and fifty, there was only six hundred left in England.
- 06:30 Two hundred and fifty they took into Grosvenor House, London for three days. A day there to settle in, a march the next day and the next day was to go back to the ship. That was all right. Then there was leave available. I'd arranged to meet my brother in law on York station where you turn out to go to Scarborough. My train was supposed to get in eight or nine o'clock at night, he was going to meet me there. We knew one another by sight, wouldn't have any trouble.
- 07:00 That's all right. My train was very late. I didn't get in there until something like one o'clock in the morning. I went to the station master bloke and asked him if there'd been an Australian air force man looking for an Australian sailor. He said, "I had an air force man looking for a sailor but there was something strange about it, he was supposed to be on a certain train."
- 07:30 I says, "That's right. I couldn't get on that train. I'm on the next one". I says, "Is he still here?" and he says, "I think so". They had a big place down under York station where they used to put men that was travelling in a bunk. He says, "Yeah, I think he's still here, I think I know where he is". He takes me down we went all through these men and he had a torch on them. "This is him here" and I said, "Yeah, that's him". Woke him up.
- 08:00 "Hey Bill, how you doing?" "Good God, you got here", he said. That's all right. We were right. The bloke says if anybody else wants this bed, we'll go up and sit in the train and have a yarn for a while. The train was to leave to go out to Scarborough, it was a sideline, about daylight in the morning. Up we go, we sit on the train. He didn't have a leave pass, a rail pass. I had a rail pass see.
- 08:30 Away we went and we got out to Scarborough and he says "I haven't got a ticket. I'll go back and go out the railway at the far gate. I'll meet you round here". He come round and met me at the front of the station where I come out legally. He met me there and says, "I know where to go. Come on". We went up to Hilda's place, took me up there and Hilda first
- 09:00 saw me, she hated the sight of me. We were there and her Father was a cousin of my Father's, that's how it worked. He'd heard of me and they'd been told that I was coming over. He took to me like a duck did to water but Hilda didn't. At any rate I stayed there,
- 09:30 Bill couldn't stay but I could stay, I think I had a week's leave. They made me welcome for a week. So I get my feet under the table and that was all right. He was doing a bit of black market trading and what have you with, he kept pigs, a big of black pork and what have you. I used to go with him. He used to pick up all the swill round the hotels; we used to go and have a drink here and a drink there and didn't pay for anything because he's shifting the swill. This went well. Leave time came.
- 10:00 He said, "When are you coming back again?" I said, "I don't know, when I can get a leave pass. In the mean time the war finished and you were free. Of course anybody that wanted leave then had no trouble. They didn't have to feed them. That was all right, I headed back to Scarborough again. I got further under the table, as the saying is. That was it. At any rate, to cut a long story short, Hilda and I agreed, I asked Hilda to marry me and if she would and she says,
- 10:30 "Yes but Mum and Dad are not going to like me going out to Australia" and I says, "We'll have to have a talk to them about it". That's all right, we did and they reluctantly agreed. Said, "Well it's going to be a lot different world out there to what we got here. We've got no electricity or anything". Anyway, Hilda fitted in, made do and we carried on.

**Why do you say that she didn't like you as soon as she saw you?**

Well, first impressions.

- 11:00 Wasn't impressed. That's right. You don't know what they thought I was going to be. I don't know either. Don't even know to this day.

**So you missed out the courting bit though.**

Yeah we did. Nearly straight away. Got to knowing and talking to each other and that was it. We finished our courting by mail.

**But where would you go**

- 11:30 **on a date for instance, would you walk down to the beach?**

Went to the pictures, walked down around. The only time I ever pinched cherries off a tree was one

night I was with Hilda, I'd never seen cherries on a tree before. This garden, this bloke had a cherry tree over the fence, have a couple of them, Hilda was disgusted with me, pinching these cherries. I said to Edna when she was out here, we all used to go together, Edna, she was married, Hilda wasn't and

12:00 I said, "Where did we find that cherry tree? I've never been able to find it again". I've been back there a number of times since the war. She said, "I know where it is. I'll take you and show you" and sure enough I knew where it was when she showed me.

**Still producing cherries?**

Yeah, still on the same fence. That's how we come to meet and that's how Hilda come to be out here. Hilda's Mother and Father came out here first in 1970.

12:30 No, they were out here before that, they were out here in 1950, then they come back again in 1970. Sue was a baby when they were out here the first time, the next time Sue got married when they were out here. My Father in law died,

13:00 he would never travel by plane and when he died Mum wasn't a bit worried about travelling by plane. She was coming back out here and she did. She's been out here twice since then. She passed on some years ago now. Edna, her sister's coming out here in August; she'll have been out here about four or five times. I think we've been back six times since the war.

13:30 **Hilda's Father must have been pretty happy that you married her because he liked you so much.**

Well, her Mother wasn't. She didn't like her daughter leaving to come out to this part of the world. After she'd been out here a couple of times she seemed to be far more relieved, happy about it.

**What year was this that you got married?**

1947.

**1947, so that's a good**

14:00 **eighteen months, two years after the war.**

That's right.

**You wrote to each other all that time did you?**

Yep, that's right.

**Can you tell us what happened at the end of the war? You were in England and you knew about the end of the war in the Pacific, who told you, what happened?**

It was on the news. The battleships in Devonport Harbour, Plymouth Harbour put on the best fireworks display that ever you see. It was wonderful to see.

14:30 We celebrated to no end. Lady Astor, no doubt you've heard of her, she put on a party for the ship's company before they left to come home and I was lucky, Hilda was able to come down to it. We found a place, one of the people they'd become friendly with in Scarborough in the army, Hilda could stay with his Mother and Father.

15:00 We had about two or three days there together before we sailed and Hilda went back home. That was it.

**Tell us about the arrangement that you had made with Hilda about coming back to Australia. Did you say, "All right I'll call for you. I'll try to get you on a ship"?**

Well I couldn't do that until I come home. The government had a policy for bringing

15:30 new immigrants. Hilda became an immigrant. As long as we were married within a fortnight after she got here, that's all they gave you, fourteen days, they would pay the fare in other words. They didn't return all the money but I had to guarantee that and then they'd send her back after we give them a copy of the marriage certificate. It's one of those things that happened. It did happen. I'm very happy it did happen.

16:00 **Where did you get married?**

Here in Brisbane.

**With family and friends around?**

Only family. Wasn't very worried about the religion part of it. We got the Brisbane City Mission bloke to marry us. All of my brothers and sisters have been married in the registry office. Hilda wasn't very keen on the registry office so we got the bloke at the City Mission to marry us. I just

16:30 forget his name now, it'll be on the marriage certificate.

**In a park or at your house?**

At his place. At the mission place. In Ann Street it was.

**So you must have just been busting to get at each other because you hadn't seen her for almost two years, she comes off the ship, you've got to get married in two weeks so please tell me you had a nice honeymoon.**

17:00 We had a honeymoon down at Burleigh Heads.

**Burleigh Heads, nice. So you're on the water and had a beautiful time.**

We had a guest house down there, wasn't far off the water. We had a good time down there and back home to work.

**Now you hadn't bought your property from your Father yet though had you?**

No. Hadn't done that for another two years.

**So does that mean that Hilda had to move into the house with your parents?**

17:30 At the beginning, yes.

**How long was that for?**

That was nearly twelve months.

**Then your parents moved, they bought elsewhere?**

Yeah they bought down here on top of the hill. A million dollars on that place now for one block of land. My Mother was alive when they moved down there.

18:00 Had my Stepmother known, she used to always have trouble getting the lawn cut, had she known it was worth a million dollars she'd even come back now to get part of it. She was a real battler, no doubt about it.

**How did your Mother and Father treat your new wife?**

Quite good. Dad took a real fancy to her, so did Mum. But Mum, she died in 1948.

**What kind of cancer did she die from?**

18:30 Cancer of the stomach. Two of her brothers did, two cousins had it. I was a suspect, they found early traces of it in me twenty years ago and I've got to go back every so often now.

**That's something I didn't ask you, we talked about it with the Royal Navy and the Australian Navy if there was any, how they treated each other,**

19:00 **what about in the gunnery school being sent over there and doing so well, eighty two per cent you said, how did the English like the Australians doing well in the course?**

They didn't. They didn't like us going over there and showing them how to do things. We had two Scottish gunnery officers, gunnery instructors they were. For a while we couldn't understand what they were saying, really broad Scots, we had a hell of a job with it.

19:30 Wasn't long before we were damned happy to understand what they were saying. They made life difficult for us. We thought, "There's only one way out of this was to get on side with these blokes", so we used to take them out and drink with us. We paid, they'd come. We got on side of them that way. We had to do better than what we were doing.

**Why did you even bother? Why didn't you think, "Who cares"?**

We wanted to

20:00 get through the gunnery course. We wanted that for our own. We knew we were going into trouble. We wanted to look after ourselves. We wanted to know everything they could tell us about gunnery and they had the latest gunnery. That was beautiful gunnery, there's no doubt about that. We could bring the planes out of the sky all right. It was just one of those things. They put the word

20:30 colonial on us which stuck in our gizzard for a start. One bloke made no, "I'm gonna show you bloody colonials how to behave", made no bones about it. We thought, "Ah yeah, but you haven't tied up with us yet", we made it willing. We found that didn't work so we'd better get these blokes on side, take them for some drinks of afternoon. By God it worked wonders.

21:00 Get them as full as a boot they didn't know next day whether they were coming or going.

**Something that occurred to me I meant to ask you before was when you were on night watch at Coonawarra you saw those two blokes slip in to the bushes**

That went on day and night.

**Did they eventually blow up the chap that was actually jamming the signal?**

21:30 In New Guinea, yes. That's how they stopped it. They sent all these planes out loaded with bombs and fuel. A big lot of them went out from Darwin and they certainly cleaned that lot up. They had no more trouble with that.

**Where was he from?**

Somewhere up in New Guinea.

**But you don't know if he was**

He'd be a Jap for sure. He was jamming all their signals.

**What was the feeling coming back to Australia**

22:00 **after being away in England, doing the gunnery course, did you like it?**

Yes, it was home. And yet to settle down after war I had a hell of a job.

**Why?**

Well you're used to having everybody around you. I was on the farm on my own, only Mother and Father. It was very hard to get used to, very hard. I don't think I could take it again. The only thing that kept me there was the fact that Hilda was coming. Had Hilda not been coming

22:30 I'd have been back in the navy. Because they did come wanting me to join back up and go to Korea. They'd known what I'd done in England. They wrote to me wanting to know if I was interested in joining up again, another bout with the navy. Hilda was on her way then, "Nope, not interested". Had that not been the case I think pretty sure I'd have been back in the navy.

23:00 **Did you ever get to use all the skills you learned in your gunnery course on the farm, in farming?**

Nope, none whatsoever. Well it's a different world.

**What do you think about Australia becoming a republic? Do you think it will become a republic one day?**

Damn sure it will. I hope it does. I think it's about time we stood on our own feet.

23:30 I don't think we've got to be tied to Britain or anybody else. Britain, I don't think wants us, damn sure they don't. They only want us when they can get something from us.

**How did Hilda settle in to the Australian way of life?**

With great difficulty.

24:00 We didn't have running water. We didn't have electricity. We didn't have a lot of things. The house was on high stumps and you had to go outside and we sort of lived underneath. After we got going then I let the house down on to low blocks and put a bathroom on it and it become more livable then. We've been able to carry on from there.

24:30 **You had five children?**

Yep.

**Was your daughter first, was she?**

Nope, she was second. Eldest son lives up here. He works for ISS which is, something sanitary mob, collects sharps [syringes] and what have you. He works for them as a truck driver. Quite happy with that. Daughter's working doing fishing rods at the present time.

25:00 Likes it and she's also our bookkeeper for the partnership firm and keep them more or less involved one way and another. Keep them all talking to one another. Sometimes it's a bit difficult.

**Has there been a few arguments between them, the kids?**

Yeah. We've got one daughter in law is most difficult. She comes here and sits at the end of the table to have a drink of tea and hardly ever say boo.

**There's nothing much you can do about it really.**

That's right.

**One thing I was going to ask you though. A few questions that don't belong anywhere, they're not chronological. You mentioned boxing very early on in the day; did you end up becoming a bit of a boxer?**

26:00 No. I was never much good at boxing. Tried twice and got the worse end of the stick both times and thought I'd better give that away.

**And swimming, you mentioned that you were going to learn to swim in these overalls, swim fifty yards,**

That was the test.

**But you didn't end up doing it?**

No, I only got to forty yards and

26:30 I was just about buggered. It takes a bit of doing to swim with overalls on.

**I bet.**

But that was the test.

**Freestyle? Over arm swimming?**

Anyhow you please. Get fifty yards to the other end of the pool, that was the test then they signed your papers as a swimmer. Mine was signed as a non-swimmer.

**Because you only made it to forty yards?**

27:00 That's right, so non-swimmer.

**What happened at forty yards did you just have to put your hand up?**

Yeah, I just had to flaming well give it away, put my hand up and the bloke give me a hand to get out of the pool. I just couldn't go any further.

**What about when you were a really little child, did you go in the waterholes?**

No. I'll tell you what happened. There'd been a couple of kids locally drowned and my Mother had a fear of people going near waterholes.

27:30 That sort of flowed off to the kids. None of my family was taught to swim, I regret to say. Ian, he got a hell of a fright as a baby. Not as a baby but as a very small kid. I had to jump in the water one time and pull him out. He's never taken to swimming since either. The rest have all been able to swim. Make sure all the grandkids all learned to swim. They do it now through the school;

28:00 which is a terrific idea.

**What about now when you look back now do you have any regrets about joining the navy?**

No. Don't know where I'd be if I hadn't have joined the navy. Haven't a clue what would have happened. If I'd have stayed with the army Hilda wouldn't have been here and none of this would be here as we know it now.

28:30 **Jim did you go up, just a few years back up in Darwin when they had the fifty years since Darwin was bombed?**

No, I didn't get back to that. Fifty years, that'd be 1992. Darwin was bombed 14 February 1942

29:00 so fifty years'd be 1992. That's fourteen years ago, twelve years ago. I didn't go. I did intend to but didn't ever get there. Over the years I've been very involved with the farms in north Queensland. My brother in law and I had a partnership on the understanding that my sons'd buy him out when we were ready. That's what happened. In the mean time I had to haul in

29:30 to be the peace maker, director as the saying is and give it a go. Got to the stage now where all those families are pretty well placed in their own right which is very pleasing to me. I'm a consultant to the farm. I detest the word consultant. I've seen a few consultants you wouldn't give two bob for. I don't want to be in that category. That's it; we're able to keep it going.

30:00 **What would you tell a young person today that wanted to join the navy?**

Go ahead and join it. I've got a grand daughter I hope is to join the air force. I hope.

**She wants to learn to fly?**

She wants to pilot helicopters. That one that was here today, that's what she's hoping to do. If she don't soon get a posting for school

30:30 she's going to try and join the air force and become a helicopter pilot.

**Kerry?**

Yes. Be ideal for her. She's young enough, keen enough, likes helicopters, likes the thought of it, likes flying, why not. She's got a job then for fifteen years. Now she's got a Bachelor of Education and she hasn't got a full time job.

31:00 They're screaming about education and all the rest of it. That's not the way to treat people that put the

effort in to training. It's a bit topsy turvy.

**Is there anything that you'd like to add to today's taping that perhaps we haven't covered?**

Not that I can think of, I think we've covered a lot of my lifetime today. A lot of the interesting parts,

31:30 private sections and all about it. I don't think there's anything more I can add but to say thank you very much, thank you for the kindness and your courtesy and hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have.

**Thank you, you've been delightful.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**