Australians at War Film Archive

Reginald Pope (Reg) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 5th May 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2068

Tape 1

00:36 **Okay Reg, as we discussed if you could just provide us with a summary from go to woe.**

Well firstly I was born in a little place called Sussex in England. In 1921 my Mum and Dad and I, we came out here from England by sea and after a few little stops around the coast between Melbourne and Sydney we

01:00 ended up in a little place called Murwillumbah. By 1923 I had a sister so then there was two in the family and we went back to England for a quick trip to visit my Dad's Mother and Father. We returned here in 1933 and settled permanently then in Murwillumbah. I went to school, firstly in Murwillumbah primary and then

01:30 to a little place called Crystal Creek, a one teacher school and another place called Chillingham which is about ten mile out of Murwillumbah, another one teacher school. Things weren't too good and I lived with different people most of my life from the age of about seven and the people I lived with was a family named Mr. and Mrs. Reeve, Nat Reeve. They were second parents to me. Early days, get up about

02:00 four o'clock, go and get the cows, get them in, milk them, feed the poddies, feed the pigs, get dressed, go to school and come home a little bit too late to do an afternoon's milking. So that was the beginning of a day. Then I eventually got to the stage where I had to go to high school which was Murwillumbah High School. I was there for about one and a half years. Unfortunately

02:30 the teachers and I didn't get on too well but that's a different story. I was interested in the things that they didn't teach and my main interest was woodwork. I left school at thirteen and a half. I had a stint of time with a builder called George Forster. I had a stint of time in a bakehouse making bread and delivering bread and another thing too, if I was out of work for

03:00 a few days, if anybody with a truck would take me, I would go with them, deliveries, the grocer, the baker, the mailman, just so as to get out and get around, which I did. In 1936 it might have been I started work for a carrier called Archie Mills at Burringbar and the job there was to go and pick up cream and bananas and bring them back to the railway station at Burringbar, the bananas to Burringbar and the cream to Murwillumbah and

03:30 load them on and so be the end of the day. When the bananas came on we had to make sure we were out of certain banana plantations on a Saturday early for reasons which I won't discuss and that was it. My sister, she lived at the same boarding house as I did, Mrs…can't remember, too far back. However, we lived there. She worked for a

04:00 fellow called O'Connor who had the post office and a little store at a place called Crabs Creek. That sort of ended my association with her because I had volunteered to join the navy and my first lot of papers came through to join as the communications branch. Unfortunately I failed that but however the next one came and it was as a seaman in the Royal Australian Navy.

04:30 On the 4th of July, the American Independence Day, 1938 I put my name to paper at Garden Island and I was a member of the Royal Australian Navy. Now we've joined the navy. Coming down from Murwillumbah I had to meet what we called RTO, the Railway Transport Officer

05:00 at Central Station. There were several of us and he decided then that we should go down towards Garden Island and he said, "I want you to go down to the quay", Q, U, A, Y, that's not how I spell quay, I spell key K, E, Y. However, we got down there and we were eventually taken by ferry over to Garden Island. At Garden Island we found them destoring

05:30 a ship, HMAS.. I'll have to come back to that one, seaplane tender and the reason being she was being destored of our particular type of weaponry to go to England as a part payment for HMS Apollo, a six inch Leander class cruiser to be renamed HMAS Hobart for the Royal Australian Navy. Hobart got here

06:00 in about 1939 and I was then in Flinders Naval Depot. I had done the padding of the boot, the marching and all that and come out all right and the next subject was seamanship. Each of the subjects we took down there apart from parade ground, you could benefit by a month's advancement towards your next rate. Seamanship was

06:30 quite good. I got about eighty-six per cent which gave me a month's advancement. As far as gunnery was concerned I did all right there and that gave me the best of another month, bet at eighty-six per cent. Problem was the next one which was torpedoes. I wasn't so bright in that and I only got about sixty two per cent and that gave me half a month. So in total I had gained two and a half months in advancement to my next rate. I might add that I

07:00 joined the navy at seventeen as an ordinary seaman second class. At eighteen I was promoted to the great rank of an ordinary seaman and when I went to sea on the Hobart and completed my initial training plus the advantage of the two and a half months, I was made an able seaman. So then I started my rise in the navy. Hobart was sent on a shakedown cruise

07:30 about, must have been, September early because the war had deteriorated over in the continent and it was a shakedown [a trip to run the engines in and accustom the crew to the ship] cruise so that everybody on board knew what their job was. We came back, stored ship, oiled ship and watered ship and then we went off on the journey that followed. The first stop was around about

08:00 Darwin. On the way through to Darwin, up through the barrier reef.

Reg I won't get you to tell all the stories at this stage because we'll come back to the stories, just go through your postings in a fairly brief way.

All right, well having gained the rating as an able seaman the next thing to do was to go for the next rating. I used to go to what they called voluntary instructions and at quite an early age I became an acting leading seaman. You're only acting as a new

08:30 rate for a period of time until the CO [Commanding Officer] or your divisional officer might decide that you're suitable to hold the rate. I was acting leading seaman. From there when we came back from overseas in 1941 the draft note came through for me to go to HMAS Swan. Swan is a sloop and her main duties in those days was ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Commission] patrol and minesweeping. Minesweeping

09:00 anywhere between Tasmania and northern Australia. From north Australia we were sent to Darwin. The Japanese had joined the war and had made quick advances down the Malayan peninsula towards Singapore. So we went off to Darwin to do our bit. In Darwin we had boarded

09:30 to us the Sparrow Force commandoes who were going to Timor to back their mates up and Swan and HMAS Warrego, we went to Timor and on the way up we got a bit of a reception from the Japs [Japanese], high level bombers. Now one of the problems here was the Warrego was a much more modern ship than the Swan. The Swan was built in 1936 and her gunnery was gunnery from 1914 - 18 war

10:00 or in other words it wasn't the best, heaviest of armament. Our HA range, high angle range at aeroplanes would be about twenty thousand feet. So the Japs would come over a bit high beyond our range and we weren't a great problem to them. However, Warrego, she was there and she had the more modern guns so she could give them a bit of curry [ack-ack; anti-aircraft fire] too. We landed the Sparrow Force in Ambon I think it was

10:30 and in Ambon we were bombed by high angle aircraft. Fighter aircraft came and fired on the shore installations and it was decided that we should get out of Ambon and the navigator got us out of there and on the way back to Darwin. On the way back to Darwin a lookout recorded, "Bearing right ahead

11:00 sir, a mast or a periscope".

Reg I won't get every single story, just keep stepping through the ships of roughly where you were. We'll come back to those in more detail.

Okay, we'll come back to leaving Ambon and back to Darwin. In Darwin we found this huge fleet of ships and we were told that we were to take them back to Ambon with a full complement of troops

11:30 to back up those already there. Didn't get far the next day when we were heavily bombed by Japanese and returned to Darwin. We had to go alongside the Neptuna to [the] ammunition ship as we were out of ammunition and that's when the Japs come over. They saw where we were and they let us have it for good or for worse. Now, when the first lot of bombs came, the Neptuna was hit,

12:00 it blew up, it blew a big hole in the stern of the Swan which I was to learn later but the men we had on board were blown over the side. As the coxswain of the motorboat alongside the gangway I went and picked up whoever I could find in the motorboat for take them to safety hopefully. While we were doing this we were attended to by a Japanese fighter. He came down and machine-gunned us. Well, fortunately

12:30 we're here to tell the tale, missed us and I went to the mangroves. In the mangroves we forgot about

the tide. The tide went out and here we are high and dry in the mangroves for about nine hours. Got our way out of that, found the ship at night, came back on board, found out how many had been killed and all the damage done and the orders come through to take Swan back to Brisbane dry dock for repairs. I don't remember much about the trip down

13:00 but however we got there. After that part we go down to the Coral Sea, there was a battle going on there. It was our job to go and anchor near an island. The captain told us there was a force of Japanese coming from north to south to Milne Bay and another force coming from the south to north in the direction of Milne Bay and it was our duty to sea what happened and report any activity.

13:30 Well the thunder and lightning that night was terrible and it was wet and uncomfortable but in the morning we found a hospital ship coming in and the thunder and lightning we'd seen and heard the night before was actually the Japanese fleet bombarding Milne Bay. We did what we had to do then and eventually the Swan, doing her patrol was sent to Port Moresby

14:00 HMAS Basilisk where I left on Christmas Eve 1942 and took up station there for eighteen months. I might add that just prior to going to Darwin we had to go to Port Moresby and we had to ship the troops from the troop ships to the jetty because the troop ships were too deep a draft to go alongside so that was just another little thing

14:30 the Swan had to do in the mean time. After my eighteen months in Port Moresby, after nine months I was given leave. I came home. In Port Moresby my main job was building roads and things like that. I became rather an expert in

15:00 T boning and all this sort of stuff to make sure the roads were level or what they were. However, go on leave, come back and when I returned off leave I found that the chap who was a coxswain of a little ship called HMAS Wato. was going away so I asked the powers to be if I could take over the job which they said yes and so for the last nine months I was the coxswain of Wato.

15:30 Actually it was a commissioned ship, HMAS Wato. So I had a bit of a thing up my sleeve there. The main job on Wato was to take the AMWAS [Australian Medical Women's Army Service] swimming over to a local island, let's say on a Wednesday and they used to change in the crews' quarters. On the Friday I'd have to take the nurses and the senior female of the various services over to the local island swimming and they would change in my cabin.

16:00 That's where the story began and ended. We'd bring them back and this was like a weekly routine. After Moresby I went to Flinders and did a gunnery course and on completion of the gunnery course I eventually joined HMAS Kanimbla, an ex-armed merchant ship which had been converted to a troop landing ship. My first trip on

16:30 the Kanimbla was to Leyte Gulf. Leyte Gulf had been reinforced or taken by the Americans. They had their men down there and the Kanimbla had been there once. I was with Kanimbla on the second run in to there. We landed the troops we had and then the real bad one came when we went to Lingayen Gulf after Leyte.

17:00 If anybody wants to have something happen to them and then be counseled, Leyte was the place and then Lingayen. When you see a fella in an aeroplane flying his plane right at you in a ship about ten thousand tons you don't feel too comfortable. This went on for a day or more. Eventually we got out of Leyte, Lingayen and after a period of time

17:30 I went back to HMAS Hobart. Then it became my turn to have the fun. I was the trainer of the six inch gun on Hobart's quarter deck, namely Y turret. It was from that gun that along with the other three on board, A, B, X and Y we started to pound the foreshore of Borneo at Brunei and Balikpapan. This having been done we went then to Tokyo Bay

18:00 for the Armistice via Manila and that's where I saw the end of the war as a fighter. After the signing was done it was decided that the navy canteen had been established at a place called Koori if I remember correctly and I was invited to take over the job as the canteen manager. But seeing the Hobart was coming back to Australia

18:30 I decided that rather than be a canteen manager in Japan I would go back with the ship which I did. We went back for occupation forces the second time and it was one of the capital ships we had who came to Sydney and finished the time. After that my time was coming to an end. I had signed on for twelve years and I eventually got posted

19:00 to HMAS Platypus at Watsons Bay. Watsons Bay of course was a nice little spot and I was there for quite some time. Might I add that today when I see them on TV [television] cutting down those fig trees they cut down a bit of me because that's where I met the girl I married, what about that. About two and a half years we kept company and then finally

19:30 we were married. I would go with my Mother in law to be just prior to our being married house hunting and between us we bought a house at Bexley, Westminster Street, Bexley. The estate agent said, "Eleven hundred pound, Mr. Pope" and I said, "Yes", so I peeled him off eleven hundred pound notes and gave them to him he said to me, "I think you and Mr. Lean",

20:00 who was the man that owned the house, “have something to talk about”. I said, “Yes”. He said, “You can use that office over there”. So I went over to that office over there and I peeled off seven hundred more pound notes and gave them to him I got the key. Key money. We moved in to number ten Westminster Street, Bexley with my in-laws to be because they had a little place in Cleveland Street, Redfern which was not very nice

20:30 at all and seeing I had this house, what better place to take them and of course keep an eye on the bride. We eventually got married from there on the 26th of November 1949 and all this time I’m in the navy getting towards the end. Well on the 9th of October 1950 my twelve-year engagement with the navy finished and it came time

21:00 to make up my mind what I was going to do. Between getting married and might I add about ten months after we were married a little fella by the name of Alan Pope came in to the world from Roslyn Private Hospital and this was the culmination of my life. I had got a house, a wife and a son. That was it. But unfortunately the navy

21:30 saw fit to change this for me a bit and when I did eventually sign up for another engagement of two years I ended up at a place called Manus Island. On Manus Island I was the chief warden of a war criminal compound for twelve months. “Twelve months, not on your life.” The twelve months was ended and I was to come home and the master at arms on HMAS Tarangau was due for his leave.

22:00 We went up together in the same plane but however his time was more positive than mine. He was sent back to Australia, I was sent up to Tarangau as the acting master at arms until a chap by the name of Howard Stanley came up who was the actually qualified master at arms. We were allowed one phone call a month to home provided the atmospherics were good and that was really nice. Now on,

22:30 while I was on the compound the early days the trials were going on at a place called Nutt Point. So many Japanese would go for their trial and come back and one by one some of them were sentenced to death. When I went there the only man in the death cell was [Japanese] Lieutenant General Nishumora. He occupied cell number one. When the trials came to an end

23:00 say about the 9th of June 1951 I think we had twelve or fifteen down there that were sentenced to death. The commandant said to me one day, “Chief” he said, “I want you to get the weight, the height, of all the prisoners down there”. He said, “Can you do it?” and I said, “Just give me a little bit of time to think and I’ll give you an answer”. So I said, “Yes,

23:30 I can do it”. So he said, “What will you do?” I said, “I will get Takahara” I think was his name, ex-navy lieutenant commander, he spoke very good English and you only said what you wanted to say near him. So I said to him, “When were you last checked for tuberculosis?” “Oh, Mr. Bob, let’s see”, he said. I said, “Well, right, the commandant mentioned that to me this morning and he wants

24:00 to know your height and your weight and when you were last checked”. Would you believe the next, when I told Lieutenant Commander Chapman, he was the commandant what I was going to do he thoroughly agreed with me. He gave me a set of scales and a tape measure and the next day I took them down the compound, gave them to this bloke and said, “Now it’s your job. I want their weight and their height.” He gave me the written report

24:30 of these things and I took them back to the commandant. About one day later he said to me, “We are going to sort out names” which I don’t remember “and leave five there.” These five were to be hung. In preparation for the hanging, works and housing much earlier than my going to Manus had constructed big

25:00 concrete pits and filled them with logs because with the Japanese they were to be cremated and their ashes sent back to Japan, as is their custom. On the night before the hanging, by the way I’m getting ahead of things.

I just wanted it as a summary anyway, because we will talk about it in more detail later. Maybe just step through.

Do you want to hang them?

Go and hang them and then just finish off telling me what you did after you left the services.

25:30 Right, well I was responsible for taking out those that weren’t wanted and those that were wanted which we did. The Buddhist priest and newspapers and all went down to the cells that night while we took out who we wanted and who we didn’t and sent them back to the normal camp. The other five were given a piece of paper to put their last messages on to their family and friends and next morning.

26:00 Well the next morning at about four o’clock we went down, I’ll tell you the one about the rain after. It was my duty then to load these guys in to a truck, have them driven up to the gallows, sent to the gallows as required. I might add, the reason for the weights was, before a man’s hung they have a sandbag with his own weight in it, which is dropped on the rope

26:30 before he is. They heard the first sandbag go and they thought it was first one and they all come up with “Banzai.” Well fair enough, it’s going to be their turn next. The hanging took place between about five o’clock I think and about eight o’clock in the morning. When these men were hung the doctor

pronounced them dead. The were taken down and laid out on the

27:00 ground ready for the final disposal. Seeing the fires were out, there could be no disposal. Lieutenant Commander Chapman said, “What are you going do?” I said, “The only thing we can do is to sew them up in a canvas and take them for a swim”. So that’s what happened. They were sewn up in canvas, they were taken out on the motorboat. I was not there and instead of getting out the hundred fathom line where they were to be dropped, I think that was the idea, they were dropped on the ten fathom line

27:30 because the sea was so rough. I think that’s about the end of that story.

So just bring us through then the end of your service and roughly what you did after the war, after your service.

Right, when I finished my duty at the Tarangau as the acting master of arms my draft note came through back to Watsons Bay.

28:00 There I stayed and of course the first night home. My wife had sold the house we bought because she was much younger than me and her Mother-in-law lived then in their own house round the corner. That was a bad mistake but however we only had enough money left then to buy a block of land and build a house. The first night I was home my son Alan was put out of Mum’s bed in to his cot and he looked over the edge of his cot in the morning

28:30 and he said to his Mother, “Mum, I hate that man in your bed” and that’s what I had to fight with. Thank you navy, you cost me a house, nearly cost me a son and almost a wife. However we’ve ridden the storm and we’re happy all one today. Then I made a fatal mistake. I went and joined a thing called the dockyard police so I wouldn’t sent overseas again and

29:00 a more mentally destructive job you would never get. We became a little bit, how should I say, psychotic and I put in for discharge. Instead of the five years I was discharged after three years with a clean sheet, end of navy.

What did you do for a job after the navy?

After the navy I went looking for a job. Nobody wanted a sailor.

29:30 I went to the department of labour and industry with the papers I had for carpentry and joinery. I said to the fellow there, he said, “Can I help you?” and I said, “Yes, I hope you can” and he said, “What is it?” and I said, “Well I’d like to get a start as a builders labourer somewhere. Here’s my papers that I’m doing carpentry and joinery.” “All right” he said “Where’s your union ticket?” and I said, “I haven’t got one.” Well he said, “You won’t get a job unless you’ve got a ticket”.

30:00 I said, “Okay, where do I get a ticket?” and he said, “You won’t get a ticket unless you’ve got a job.” I said, “Why don’t we go through that again, that doesn’t sound right.” So to cut a long story short I approached some people I knew at Shell. I was too old because I was thirty-five and their maximum age was thirty but however perseverance got me in and I started with Shell and I worked with Shell for twenty years starting from the store and ending up in the

30:30 dispatch office, I worked my way there. I finished work completely I think it was in 1960, I can’t remember the date I ended there but however I left Shell. To this day I still get Shell privileges insofar as each year I send my petrol sheets down to Melbourne and I have the pleasure of looking at my bank balance

31:00 go up slightly.

And when did you retire then?

From Shell. I was offered early retirement which I took and to do something I approached May Nicks on the payroll. I went and did their course at their grounds and I said to the instructor, “Please don’t call me up before about November”.

31:30 He said to me, “Why?” and I said, “Because we’re going overseas for a quick trip now that I’m unemployed.” He said, “You’d better come and do the course again in November” and I said, “Yes, why?” and he said, “How do I know you’re not going to jail?” I said, “May Nicks knows I’m not going to jail, I think he’s got an eye on things there.” However, it all worked out that they did call me again about November after we came back to Australia and I was given one day

32:00 a week, then I got two days a week. We moved up to Umina and seeing work started at five o’clock the early get ups put paid to that job down there. The fog, trying to get down to Sydney in the fogs at that early hour of the morning, I think that was enough. So I haven’t worked since about 1975. Had a long retirement.

I hope it’s been a happy one.

I have

32:30 because I’ve got a good woman and I’ve got good kids.

Okay, that was a good summary of a very long career. I just want to ask you now some

questions about your earlier days and then we'll start going through all the history in more detail again.

Right.

You were born in Britain and your parents emigrated to Australia, why did they do that?

Well, I was never

33:00 officially told but my Dad did say to me one day, he said, "Well, we're twelve thousand miles from relatives and we're six weeks by mail." So I think that might have explained things. See that was in 1921 but of course in 1923 we went back and what happened there I don't know. Can't remember back that far. However, it all worked out that there

33:30 was four of us on the second trip, there was only three of us on the first trip and I might add that my grandmother, my Father's Mother, came out with us in 1921 and she kept a diary all the way out from England to Australia until she went back to England, how, please don't ask me, I don't know.

Had you Father served in the First World War?

Yes, my Father served in the First World War and I have a certificate in there from a fellow in England

34:00 called the keeper of the privy seal who was instructed by the king to write to my grandfather on the seven sons that he had in the First World War. We lost one or two but the only one I ever met was my uncle, Frank Pope who came out here to see my Father at Waterfall Sanitarium where he was suffering from tuberculosis.

34:30 **In what manner had your Father served in the First World War?**

He would have been an infantryman and the exact places, I'm not sure. One thing I do know, he said to me, "Never get tangled up with those Afghans, you'll never beat them because they've got too many holes, some to walk in and the others to walk out." That's the only thing he ever spoke about. He never spoke about anything else about the war to me and it was in 1933 when a guy by the name of Mussolini [Benito Mussolini, Prime Minister of Italy]

35:00 decided to invade a little place called Abyssinia. He went in there with his tanks and his aircraft against the bows and arrows and he eventually ousted the guy that was there. Halie Selassie [Emperor of Ethiopia] I think was his name, and he formally took over Abyssinia. Then the next thing of that was the Spanish Civil War, the Munich crisis [1938]

35:30 and my Dad said to me, "You'd better join up somewhere son, I wouldn't recommend the army, it's too much dirt." This is why I applied for the navy.

What do you remember about growing up in Murwillumbah?

As I said growing up in Murwillumbah, not being millionaires,

36:00 we had to make sure there was something to eat somewhere. My Dad was a painter and he worked for one carpenter in particular and a second one if he was required. Me, as I say, I left home at an early age.

Why was that Reg?

I suppose the people who took me were helping the family out under the difficult circumstances of just getting out here. I remember quite clearly in 1927 going out

36:30 with the Reeve family to a little place called Crystal Creek. Naturally the next morning I was a little bit upset and wanted to come home and I can tell you this from plain memory that Nat, Mr. Reeve, said to me, "If you can catch a horse we'll put him in the sulky and take you home". Well he knew damn well I couldn't catch the bloody horse because every time I went near it, it went like hell. So I settled down to these things and in the end I used to write to the Reeves when holidays come and ask them if I could come out.

37:00 I always got a yes so I must have been a good kid with them. I eventually followed them through in the dairying. Get up in the morning. Then of course when the winter comes there's not a lot of dairying, then I had to find other work. Okay, I found other work in a bake house at Bilambil. We would get up about three o'clock in the morning and do a bread run, come back about six, have breakfast,

37:30 make a dough, load up again and go and do a second bread run and come back maybe about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. We would what they called knot the dough and go and have afternoon tea and about an hour later come back and pin the dough up. Then we might have tea. After that the bread had to be put in the oven and baked and this took 'til about nine o'clock. By the time I'd finished greasing the tins after

38:00 it was all over say nine or half past, then you go to bed. Well, there was a little girl across the road I took a bit of a fancy to. Her Father said to me, "Would you like to come up to my brother's place up in Bowral tomorrow after work?" and I said, "Yes". Unfortunately it rained and up there the roads are all

clay and when a car gets stuck in clay, that's where you stay.

38:30 Well I was late getting back home in the morning and I did not get up at the appropriate time. The boss came out and shook me and said, "Why aren't you on the road?" Well I started off and to this day I don't remember filling that truck with the bread. I served one customer and then regrettably I must have gone asleep at the wheel and I went over the bank, down through a banana plantation and when I woke up my Father was standing over me

39:00 and I said, "Where am I Dad?" and he said, "You're in hospital" and that's when I heard that I'd been hurt. So I was in hospital for a while and I got out and then I had to get to work again. That's when I went out with a fellow called Archie Mills on cream and bananas at Burringbar.

You mentioned that you were not much of a student at school.

No. When I knew certain teachers were coming I knew that I'd be standing outside

39:30 for the twenty minutes they were there. What it proves that school to me was BS [not suited to me]. When I joined the navy, as I said, I went from the lowest under the table being ordinary seaman second class to the highest I could go without getting a commission and that was a chief petty officer. It was at that stage of course, that things were going well for me, but they went back when I joined that, I was going to say that mongrel dockyard police, I've said it, haven't I.

40:00 **You obviously spent a lot of time outside school when you should have been in it?**

No, I didn't wag it. I'd go to school because, no, I did do that. But I didn't like it and that was about all there was to it. I didn't do homework. Why do homework? But when I joined the navy I did a lot of homework, what they call voluntary instruction because I realized then the navy was my life

40:30 where I would stay 'til it ended and I had to do the best I could. I might add that my Father died four days after my twentieth birthday and from 1951 until we were married I used to send my Mother home a pound a month.

Tape 2

00:32 **Tell us about the family who you went to live with when you were seven.**

The family I went to live with, Nat and Mrs. Reeve had no children of their own. They were English people also and they came out here and they were people available to work for dairy farms. Now they worked for a fellow by the name of John Korn at Crystal Creek.

01:00 John Korn of course was German. The farm that they worked on was owned by his Father who was deceased and buried in the orchard of the house that John occupied. There was a second house for what you might call the staff, the workers, Nat and Mrs. Reeve where they lived independently of John Corn. I suppose they'd milk something like about fifty to sixty cows

01:30 a milking. Both Nat and Mrs. Reeve were quite good milkers and of course at my early age I was soon introduced to the bucket and the sot under the old cows and get on with it. That was that. As I got a little older there, there was a fellow by the name of Wot. He had a big red horse and he was a rather religious type of guy

02:00 and he used to come back of a Sunday and pick me up on the horse and take me to church at a little place which is now occupied by one of my nieces at Crystal Creek. Get to school I used to have to walk to school and get over the creek, go down there, do my stint and come home at night. I rather enjoyed it because there was a family up the road who had

02:30 youngsters my age. We would go bird-nesting and shooting and do all those things that kids do at this age. I quite enjoyed the country life. Eventually Nat and Mrs. Reeve decided they were going back to England for a trip which they did. When they came back they leased a farm at a place called Zara which was the post office. So I went up there with them when I had the opportunity and I met up with the family up the hill,

03:00 named McAndrew. They had a son and a daughter and of course in those days the girls, nice and young and the blokes nice and young, we would go out doing all sorts of things, up exploring creeks, whatever. Make a spear and go spearing eels and bring them home and cook them for the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Those sort of things. Life was quite good. However, like all things as you grow

03:30 so you have got to grow in other fields. Eventually they sold that farm and they went down to a place called Nimbin which was only a few mile out of town. By this time I was looking for further fields and this is when I say I got more involved in the manual labour or trades, bakers, builders. I got a job with a fellow called

04:00 George Forster who was a builder. Well Mr. Forster and my Dad were friends and I was with him for

quite a time but of course things were never certain tomorrow what you would be doing and consequently in the building trade whenever he had a job I had a job and I quite enjoyed it and I went along in that vein enjoying it and letting him see that I did enjoy it because I wanted to go back tomorrow. When this was all over

04:30 then something else had to happen. This is when the bake houses came in. The fellow at Bilambil I worked for if I remember correctly his name was McCully and they were some hard days. He was a good boss, he didn't want any more than his hours a week that I put in and of a Friday night, finish early, we would go down to Tweed Heads and have an evening out.

Can I ask a question Reg?

05:00 **What was it like not living with your family from such a young age?**

Well I suppose I'd have to say I missed them, yes, but I could handle it. This all showed up later when I joined the navy. I can say this quite categorically that when I had joined the navy and I went home on leave once my sisters and brothers, of whom there were six, of various ages said

05:30 "I didn't know you lived with the family." So I wasn't talked about very much. I suppose that's all right. Then my younger brother Walter, now deceased, we would take our guns and go shooting, all the poor little birds and come home and fill our day when there was nothing to do. But we always found something to do. To get a few bob we might get a tin and go out grass seed picking. I have a relative in England

06:00 when I tell him this story about the ergot on the paspalum [weed] seed he said, "What's paspalum?" Anyway, we'd know out here. But the ergot was sticky and it would stick to your hands but the grass seed was bought by the local produce merchants so out we'd go and look for a good paddock and get stuck in to it. We might only get thrippence [three pence] or sixpence for a day's work but however, it was something. That went on. This is where you started to learn to

06:30 build your own bank. I remember quite distinctly about 1933 when I was home or 1932 when I was home my Dad said to me, "I've got a withdrawal form here." He said, "I want you to go down to the Commonwealth Bank", which was on the corner of main street and Tumbulgum road and he said, "Hand it in and get the money." This is when the Depression started to show up.

07:00 Luckily I was home because I went down and presented the thing, we emptied his bank and I took it all home and that's what it was. Dad was rather, what should we say, not strict but he wanted to know where it was. I used to have to add up when I was at home, how much money he gave Mum, how much he spent on groceries, this that and the other and how much we had left over at the end of the week and that was my study in balancing books. Yes,

07:30 life was a bit rough and a bit tough but however we managed and we got out of it. As I say, it wasn't until I joined the navy that I made the decision that this was the end of my young career and get on to something different because as I said to you before, my Dad died four days after my birthday in 1940 and then somebody had to help Mum and I took the bit.

How did your Dad die so young?

08:00 TB [tuberculosis]. He was in the First World War, he was gassed and being a painter the effect of fumes from paint didn't help. In those days you had to mix your paint. You'd go and get a barrel of white lead and you'd go and get linseed oil and another oil you put in, I used to spend an hour or more before getting to school mixing paint, mixing oils for him. Then the other little job that would come on, the builders would finish putting

08:30 the floor down in the house so you'd get a bit of putty and go and putty up all the nail holes. There was always something to do. That was that. However, when I joined the navy I didn't realize that he was so sick until I joined the Hobart. The message came through that Dad was to come down to the Waterfall Sanatorium I think it was and he'd only come by boat. So I asked the Red Cross.

09:00 They said no, they couldn't do it, so I asked the ship, I put in a request for so many day's leave to go to Byron Bay, bring him down on the boat and take him to Waterfall which I did and was granted. It was at this time when his brother Frank came out from India where he was living and went to see him and I think it was the first time in about twenty odd years they'd met. That's the family split up.

09:30 **Just going back slightly Reg, you talked about shooting with your brother, what else did you do as a child for play?**

Well you've got to find things to do. For example, apart from shooting and I say we'd go grass seeding. Okay, the slaughtering yard was down the road from us and we would toddle down before school, no good going after school and just see

10:00 what was going on if we had the time. I've got to try and fit all this in with my time at home and my time away, so I don't want it to look as though I'm crossing the street somewhere along the line. When I was home we'd go down the slaughtering yards. The bloke would say, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Whatever you've got" so we might get the tripe section to clean out which is not very pleasant. The eels are down the end of the trough waiting to pick up any tidbits that come down

10:30 and then for that you might get a slice of meat so you got breakfast. Also by the same token I did a milk run. I used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and go out with a man called Mr. Jimmy Gwin on the milkcart and serve milk where I saw the buckets, the cans out. Every month was a different milkman coming so at the end of the month we had to make sure

11:00 that every billy we saw had milk in it. This went on all right and I was with him I suppose for, well long enough to get on to another job. During this time he developed what he called his own, what do you call the thing they run down through the water, not preservative, I'll think of it later. Anyway, he developed this thing

11:30 and he was the first man ever that I knew of to introduce milk in bottles. These bottles were one pint and of course we would handfill them and as we filled them we used to get a cardboard cap and in those days the old Vicks shaving cream bottle, which was green, was the appropriate size when it was empty to stamp

12:00 the thing in to the bottle and away we'd go. When that started Mum said "We're going to change milkmen because you only got a pint in the bottles" But when you took the hand measure out if you didn't have a pint and a half in, no go. So that's how it went there. When he was separating his milk whatever left we might go over and get a can of separated milk and bring it back.

12:30 We managed. It was a bit hard but there's always a way out if you put your mind to it. Next question.

School days.

School days. We had to walk in Murwillumbah from where we lived in Tumbulgam Road to which ever school, to the primary or whatever school. I suppose that would be a good mile and a half,

13:00 nearly two mile. Didn't have shoes in those days, couldn't afford them, so away you'd go barefooted, up you'd go. I got on all right in the primary school and I got on all right in the kindergarten. I got on all right to a degree with the primary school because in the primary school we had a man who used to teach woodwork and as I say I liked woodwork. I always used to try and set my mind on woodwork day, whatever it was

13:30 and do my best with the other things. We used to have to take our little book home at night and learn how to spell all these words and twice two's or four fours are sixteen. I got quite good at that in the end but that was just growing up but it was when I went to high school that things went bad because I didn't go much on that.

How many kids were in your high school class?

I suppose about I guess twenty, a few more.

14:00 The teachers were nice. I suppose it was more my fault than the teachers but I didn't want to know when King Arthur died or who shot somebody else's head off over in England. Nothing to do with me. They've got their problems and I've got mine and this is why I didn't like school because none of the things they taught satisfied my mind and that was it. I have never graduated to what we used to call certificate. We used to get a leaving certificate

14:30 I think in sixth year and that was the big piece. You have your own things for that today when you leave school. I have no paperwork to tell you how bright I was or how pain in the bum I was either.

What prompted you to leave age thirteen and a half?

Well I didn't like school and at that time you could leave school at thirteen and

15:00 it was promulgated I think from the state or somebody that the age of thirteen was then allowable to leave school. Because in the earlier days you were told how long you had to go to school. I don't remember what age that was, probably would have been sixteen but when you don't like something it's best to get away from it rather than aggravate it and aggravate yourself. Therefore I left and this was when I started

15:30 all my little jobs. I never did find it difficult to find something to do to earn a shilling. I used to clean out sumps, grease traps at a hospital every Saturday, a shilling a day. I used to look for the months that had five Saturdays in them because when I took my bill in the last day I got five shillings, I'm a millionaire. These are the sort of things.

16:00 People say, "How did you live?" You had to live, not by your wits but by what you could see.

How do you clean a sump?

The sump is one of those things that has three compartments. When you pull a plug out of the sink all the grease and that collects in the first one, it stinks. The second one cleans it out a bit more and the third one lets it go in to the silage pit. These things build up

16:30 quite high, particularly hospitals with early suds from the kitchen sink. We didn't have any washing or things like that go through, it was only just sink work. You have to clean it out, take it away, bury it, put your gear away for next Saturday.

How long would it take you to clean one?

Maybe half an hour. But it was a walk from home to the job, maybe another mile and a mile home, no shoes,

17:00 grass a bit cold and talking about the dairy farm in the mornings when you go to get the cows in where they have been laying all night was nice. Kick the old cow up, stand there, lovely and warm, you've got no shoes on. So you get out in the frost, clean

17:30 your feet up, all right now and you take them up to the dairy. You had to think about these things.

At the hospital where you were working, what did you see of the patients when you cleaned the sumps?

Nothing. My work as I say was about an hour at the most. I didn't go in to and I had no contact, the only contact I ever had was with the matron on the last Saturday of the month because I'd take my

18:00 bill in, she'd give me my money and I'd go away a real happy kid.

What did you do with that money?

The same as I did when I joined the navy. I had a piggy bank and at one stage still going to school I was able to buy a pushbike. Then, to Murwillumbah High School I had a pushbike to take me up there instead of the old two feet.

18:30 **Were you particularly close to any brother or sister?**

Not in the way I suppose that families are today. For example I am probably closer to my own children than I ever was to my brother. I have two sisters with whom I've not spoken for ages. I'm one of these fellows that I like to be straight. If I like you, I tell you. If I don't like you

19:00 I tell you. But I don't want you telling other people to tell me because this way things become misconstrued and they're not as they were put out. So the nearest, I have one sister now, Bonnie who is unfortunately like me suffering with that terrible C [cancer] thing and I don't expect that she'll be here to much longer but when she goes I won't have any connection at all to the rest of my family

19:30 except my brother, Jim, who lives in Bundaberg.

Did you ever spend time doing household chores with your Mum?

No.

Tell us about your Mother.

Mum, she was rather to the point. She would get down and scrub the floors with the sand soap and a scrubbing brush and I suppose the only time I ever

20:00 helped her in that direction was if I had to do the steps. Our house in Murwillumbah was about six feet off the ground and it had to be up there because the Tweed River would flood every February. Never go north in the months between the end of January and first of March because the monsoon season up there, it brings the rain down and believe you me, the floods do come. I've seen the flood within four steps of our six-foot house at the worst peak but

20:30 eventually they go down. They used to have a dredge in the river in those days to keep it open. They used to have sea going ships come up as far as what we call the Norko Wharf where they'd come and pick up the sugar and whatever else was there and then go down to sugar mill and load the sugar there and bring it down to Sydney but of course road and rail transport took over then there was no need for the dredge to keep the river clean

21:00 and it's only got a trickle a little bit now and there's a minor flood because the river is just so silted up. You can almost walk across it now and this is a regrettable thing.

During the summer months did you spend time at the beach?

No, we didn't have a car. The only time I ever went down somewhere like that would have been the Cottee's from

21:30 the famous Cottee's Passiona [a cordial]. They lived close by us. They were good Christian people and they had their own form of worship which I won't mention and every year they would come down in their Jowett car. A Jowett, bull nose and they would put on about two extra tyres for the trip down. While they're away I would have to take over their place. They had two cows. I had to go and milk the cows, I had to look after the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and just see that the house

22:00 was kept in order. Then they would come back and I would leave and they'd take over where I left off. Nice people. They had two children, Lindsay was the eldest. I think he joined the air force but I'm not sure, however their lifestyle was different to ours in so far as, I've said it, lifestyle, not that they ate pork and chops and all that stuff, no, they had a thing

22:30 which had to match their religion. As I say, they were good Christian people. But unfortunately when we came down here I was sad to see Cottee's Passiona go. The big Yankee giants bought them out. In fact while I worked for Shell I was delivering oil one day and they put a load of oil on the truck I was driving and they said, "Take this out to Cottee's Passiona at Liverpool". So I've got this great thing

23:00 and I'm driving down the road, looking for it, can't see Cottee's Passiona. So when you get to a T street and you've got a trailer, you've got to turn around, it's not the easiest thing because people are coming up behind you and you're trying to back it. However I eventually got around and I drove back the other way and I got to the other T end of this road and I thought, "Hell there's something wrong here". So I turned around and came back again and I saw this sign,

23:30 what's the coffee people? So I went in and said, "Where's Passiona mate?" and he said, "Here". I said, "You're not Passiona, you're", anyway, one of those coffee mobs, they'd bought them out. So then I learned that Cottee's was no longer available. They used to have a shop in Leichardt and if you were going past that

24:00 shop of a daytime which I did quite often you could pull up on the other side of the road, walk over and there's a case full of Cottee's Passiona. You don't take the case home, you could just take one out have a drink and put it back. That was Cottee's in those days. Maxwell House.

What about religion or church, did you ever go to church?

I was a very religious man. One of the reasons, well my Mum was.

24:30 My Mum's Dad was a lay preacher in England and of course religion had been stuffed right in to her and she tried to put it in to us. Well we obeyed, she would send us to Sunday school and then we would go to half time church. We'd go out when the sermon started and go home. There was a good thing about this because if you went and you had your name in the book they used to have a picnic every year.

25:00 So I think we started at the Methodist. We went to the Presbyterian, the Presbyterian was a more common one because it was closer home. So you go and have the Christmas party with them. There was a dear old lady at a place called Greenhills. She and her sister had this huge property and they would invite you up there for the party with a telescope to have a look at the stars,

25:30 with something else to look at something else. That was the attraction of going up there. That was all right. When it all finished in the end and I joined the navy and had to go to church every morning, that got a bit up the nostril.

What did you eat as a family?

I suppose you'd have to say the normal things. A lot of the things that you have today

26:00 we didn't have them. For example it used to be something like Grainos or Wheat Bix. Meat dishes and all that were similar to what you have today but there was no spices, didn't go down and get some Dolmio or something like that. Everything Mum did she had to spice it herself. We had a big garden and veggies were rather plentiful and the other thing, when Dad was starting to get too ill

26:30 which I didn't quite catch on to then, he planted a lot of pawpaw trees so we had a backyard full of pawpaw trees. How do you get a quid? Well, I'll go and see if I can sell a couple of pawpaws. So you'd pull a pawpaw down and go, "Yes, how much?" "Oh, thrippence". Of course a couple of thrippences is a sixpence. We found a way and Mum always found a way to spice it up where necessary. The big deal was the grocer would come around on his pushbike

27:00 and sit down at the table with Mum and say, "Now what do you want today Mrs. Pope" and she'd put in her order and he'd go back and pack it and that would be delivered. When it was delivered the bill came. Now they liked you to pay the bill promptly. The one we dealt with most was a shop called Wilkinson's, T A F Wilkinson's I think was the initial. The beauty of that was it was a fight between Walter and I if we were both home or Eileen, my sister,

27:30 I'm sorry deceased who was second to me to see who took the bill up to the shop to pay because we got a little bag of boiled lollies. How about that. How'd you like a bag of boiled lollies when you go and pay.

What else did you do at this shop, apart from pay the bills, what else was there?

That was the main grocer. Being the grocer, he used to do country runs.

28:00 If I was home and nothing to do I would go and see his driver and ask him if I could go with him. The answer was sure to be yes because when you go to dairy farms delivering somebody's got to get out and open the wire gate, get the truck through and shut it. I'd come in handy for this because I could open the gate, he could drive through and I'd shut it and get back on the truck and away we'd go. One particular place we used to go to at Tumbulgum was the police station. His name was

28:30 Vardy, Constable Vardy and we would arrange to get there sort of when the tea was on the table, we'd have a cup of tea. This proved to be one of the saviours of my life because when I went over the bank at Bilambil in the bread cart the nearest policeman was Constable Vardy at Tumbulgum and I am told that

he went and investigated what went on

29:00 and instead of the boss being charged. I didn't have a licence, I was driving a vehicle without a licence. Instead of the boss being put to court I am told that he said to the boss, "You've got enough expense down there, I won't charge you". He said, "As far as Popey's concerned, he's got enough trouble here" and so I never did hear any more about it. Constable Vardy,

29:30 handy name to have known.

How did you come to decide on the navy?

Well as I said earlier my Dad was an army bloke and so was his six brothers. He had seven brothers in total in the services, one navy and the rest were army. Of course he being an army man, he said to me, "Make up your mind and join up. The army's in the mud".

30:00 He said, "If you're in the navy at least you've got your bed and you've got your meal." I didn't think about if you got sunk it was a long way to walk along the bottom to get home. However I was lucky I didn't get sunk. So I joined the navy. As I said to you a little earlier the first thing came through was for communications. Well as I said to you, at school I wasn't the scholar. Of course the questions they asked me even though I was being given some tutorial help

30:30 by an ex-teacher, didn't match what the navy wanted so I lost that round. But they did send me another form a few weeks later to join as a seaman because the seaman didn't have to have the knowledge that the communications did. Because the communications had to communicate with anybody from maybe the Queen down to the captain of the ship.

31:00 They had to have a good knowledge of English and all this. That's where I fell down. However when I did join and I made up my mind I went from being under the lowest because of my age to the top.

Let's start right at the beginning of your naval service then, can you tell us about signing up?

Yes, when I signed up it came through and Dad said

31:30 to me, "Here's your ticket now I want you to get off at Concord West." Concord West, I hadn't been any further away from home than Byron Bay. The conductor must have got me off at Concord West and I was met by a person who I can't remember who took me home to his place for the night to take me in to

32:00 the RTO [Railway Transport Office] the next morning. That was another step. Next morning comes, we go down to the railway transport office, RTO, at Central Station and there must have been about twenty or thirty of us there, all joined up together. We were given our instructions and as I said to you before he said, "Now I want you to get on the tram and go down to",

32:30 I looked at this name, the Quay. I said, "The Quay?" and he said, "Yeah, it's up there", Q U A Y, Quay, "No, that's wrong". At least I did learn that at school, K E Y. So we've always got the smart bloke on board, he knows everything. So okay, we got on the tram, we go down and one of the RTO went with us. We were bundled then on to a ferry and sent to Garden Island. In those days Garden Island was an island, you could not get on to it

33:00 by road. We were taken around to different places to sign on which we did. This is where I saw the Albatross, HMAS Albatross, a seaplane tender of the Royal Australian Navy being destored to be sent to England as a part payment for HMS Apollo which was later christened HMAS Hobart. That's

33:30 where I started my seagoing career. Another interesting thing too. I'll jump ahead a little bit because this only comes in now and then. When I joined the navy I will use, is the word analogy the right thing, as an analogy I got a pound a week. When we went out over the hundred fathom line that pound became twenty-five shillings because we were under sterling command.

34:00 Prior to the war everything was BSA [British made]. If it wasn't made in Britain it wasn't worthwhile and then slowly we've seen it all go to somebody else as did the money matter. So we didn't mind going away because every payday for every pound we got we got an extra five shillings. This was quite good. But as time went on the British lost their position. The British used to be what the Yanks are today if I might say this in a roundabout fashion.

34:30 If there was a bit of a blue on somewhere they sent their troops. Well okay, the Yanks are sending them now aren't they. So everything today is governed by the dollar and much I suppose by the American way of thought. So therefore as time moved on we lost our twenty-five bob to the pound as we called it and we went back to static rates. But that was all right, you still get a quid. When you're at sea, what do you do with your money?

35:00 Well there was only one thing. It's no good keeping it in your pocket in case somebody knocked it off so therefore you pocketed it. This is how I was able to have enough money in cash in my pocket to buy a house with cash, to pay the key money in cash, and to take my bride to be and her Mother and Father in to my house by cash. That was the greatest thing ever.

I'm going to go back a bit

35:30 **to that first trip to Garden Island. What could you see down at Circular Quay?**

Well only, time was short, the ferry was coming in and of course everything's coordinated, the tram trip down, the ferry coming in and going to Garden Island. There wasn't much. The main thing was that we had to be taken to Garden Island for something, I can't remember just exactly what.

36:00 But when we got there and you saw all these big great things with things sticking out of them in various places it was an eye opener. Remember I'm a country kid who's milked cows, done bread, done this, done that so you can imagine what a bit of a shock it was to come down even at that age of seventeen and see what I saw for the first time with a group of fellas.

36:30 **Had you ever been on a boat before you got on that ferry?**

Never, oh yes, I'm wrong. On the Tweed River we used to have three local boats run up and down the river between Tweed Heads and Murwillumbah. It was the Emma Pires [?] and two others. The Emma Pires happened to get washed up on the bank down there and she rotted on shore. When the river was open they used to come and they were the only boats I'd ever been on. So it was rather an eye opener to come down and see these. So here we are, we

37:00 gambled up the gangway and got in this thing and there's passages here, there and everywhere, there's blokes walking around doing their job. It wasn't scary but look where you tread.

When you first got to Garden Island, what happened to you?

Well we were in a group and we were being conducted by one of the RTO people. Why we actually went on there I can't rightly say

37:30 but I would presume the idea was to fill in time because that night we had to go and catch the train to Melbourne. I can't think just what time. So if you can start say about eight o'clock or nine o'clock in the morning or ten o'clock and then do these things quietly you can well imagine that by this time it's getting around four o'clock or something. Well, we had to be fed didn't we. So we get

38:00 the train at night and in those days you could only go between Sydney and Melbourne as far as Albury because the train lines gauge altered and you had to go from one train to the other. However we did that and we got down to Spencer Street I think it was in Melbourne. There to catch another train to Crib Point.

What were you carrying with you?

38:30 As little as you could I suppose. A few undies, a bit of PJs [pyjamas] and maybe a shirt because we knew we were going to be kitted out. So we go down to Crib Point. The big master at arms comes out with his cap and all on and says, "Everybody out, at the double". This was the first time they're starting to throw words at you. We were marched from the train to the clothing depot where we were given a certain amount of clothing including our hammock and other things before we were

39:00 marched up to the dormitories to spend our first night. We were shown how to hang a hammock and when they were hung, you asked me how I went going away from home because there I could hear all the little sniffs, those who were leaving home for the first time. Not to me, I'm an old hand.

Before you left home did you have a send off from your family?

No. I said

39:30 to Mum, my Dad was working, "If you come to the station I won't go" No I don't want send offs. We have never, all the ships I have been on I have never, ever been on a ship that's been welcomed home, never. You know they have big marches and all that. Not that it matters to me today. The only thing that upsets me today,

40:00 the landings at Leyte and Lingayen were bloody awful.

Tape 3

00:31 **How did you take to navy life when you got down to Flinders?**

Well of course it was a bit of a startle to go down to Garden Island and it was a bigger startle I suppose to go down to Flinders because first thing in the morning we had to get up and do a little trot around the block and to see this huge paddock and all these buildings. You can't see any ships or things like that. It was a bit of an eye opener.

01:00 However, we were given messes to go to, to eat and when that was over they delegate what they call mess cooks. The idea for a mess cook is that he gets the food there and just gets rid of the table and at the end of the day they have different ones, it's never the same one permanent. The meals were quite good I thought and I'd had a pretty fair night's sleep. So having gotten that part

01:30 over we were formed in to classes. I suppose in my class there was about twelve to fourteen of us and it didn't matter what branch you were, you were all in the one class. When the classes were finished you were then sent to your particular branch. For example, the seamen went to seamanship classes, the

02:00 cooks went to the cook's classes, the stokers, the telegraphists and the communications and so on. So we started to begin to settle down to what was going to happen. There was a certain amount of parade ground work to be done, how to march, left, right, left and all that rubbish. Well, we completed all that. Then the passing out parade, we got through that. By

02:30 this time you're starting to find out what goes on down in Flinders because you see some of the other classes doing things that you are going to be doing a little later on.

How was it determined which branch you would go in to?

When you joined up, you joined up as a particular branch and they're soon brought out because it's not good

03:00 having mixed people learning things that they're not required to know. They were soon sorted out and put in to their own divisions as we might call it. The parade ground was perhaps the hardest of the lot. We were down there what, in July, that's the winter months naturally down in Flinders and of course like most

03:30 of us got a dose of the flu, needles or no needles however I, myself, I managed to stay up and the only thing I ever did when I got the flu was to get the bike and go up to somewhere and get the ice cream and bring back for the chaps who were really sick. Then so we start out. Seamanship classes are formed. Our instructor

04:00 takes us on and away we go and for about two months or a little more he will be the only guy who will have anything to do with us apart from the PTI, physical training instructor. That was a bit of a rough one, I couldn't, had to climb those ropes and sliding down and as to the old boxhorse, I'm sorry, I'm only used to the other sort of horses, not boxhorses. I didn't get on too well with that. But we'd get that over and then as

04:30 I have said before I think it must have taken about three months or a little longer to do the seamanship course, that was the main one.

What did that comprise?

You had to learn everything from what we call knots and splices to handling ships and to reading compasses and things like that. About halfway through the seamanship course we were sent on to the

05:00 HMAS Stuart, a destroyer. The reason for this was to put what we had learned in to practical knowledge. We were on Stewart I suppose for a week. No, it was only to show what we had learned, how it applied to a ship going to sea. Come back and finish off the course and the next course we do is

05:30 gunnery. Well gunnery of course takes in an awful lot of things. I often stop and wonder when people look down the barrel of a gun, say a six-inch, fifteen-inch, something like that and see all those little bits of wire down there, you know, funny stuff, that's what we used to call lands. The reason for this is and we learn very quickly, that if you have a cannon and you fire it, it's a ball, it just goes almost anywhere but when you fire a gun these

06:00 building of the gun is such that when the shell is propelled through the gun it is rotating to the right. This is the only thing that keeps it going straight until it gets to the end of its trajectory. So that was something quickly learned. The other thing we learned too was that the propellant for anything out of a gun as far as the navy is concerned was cordite. The reason being,

06:30 cordite, whilst it makes a hell of a bang it's only fast burning it doesn't explode. If you put an explosive in a gun you'd probably blow, that's how they used to blow the muzzles out of them. So cordite was the propellant. With the Hobart we had two sorts of guns. We had the gun that fired fixed ammunition, that is where the shell is attached to the propellant in a cartridge and the other one where the shell is loaded

07:00 and a propellant put behind it and it is fired by an electrical current. The reason that they're not all fixed, it'd be too heavy anyhow for the six-inch guns. Of course with the four-inch being fixed it had another thing coming too because when an aircraft comes over the director layer he finds it and he gets on to it and then all this information goes

07:30 down to what was our computer in those days down below. It calculates and it sends back to the gun at what stage the shell must explode on its way to the target. In other words, it is fused. So, have a little fuse machine alongside on the gun. These are in the four-inch guns. Six-inch guns the only fuse

08:00 shell you might have there is a very special one. Gunnery over we've got to do torpedoes. Now torpedoes involves electrical work and torpedo men normally ended up with a degree of electrical knowledge which is not entirely applicable to shore because we have DC [direct current] current on board ship and we have AC [alternate current] current mainly on shore.

08:30 Torpedoes, what I did learn was the torpedo itself is a special steel, very, very high tensile because the immediate compressed air in them is, and I'll only use this as an analogy, about thirteen thousand PSI, pounds per square inch. When the torpedo is to be fired certain settings are made by the torpedo

09:00 operator. I don't know the distances or anything but the depth that it goes through the water and when all this is done it is ready to fire. Now on firing torpedoes have two propellers at the back end contra-rotating. If they only rotated one way the torpedo would spin so therefore one goes one way and one goes the other and as the propellant

09:30 air gets to the driving system of the torpedo it goes through a heat chamber. The reason for this is that if you heat the air it goes further than if you don't. So that is basically from my experience what the torpedo is about. How deep it travels, that depends on the setting the bloke has put in. If it's too deep it goes under. I didn't have much to do with them.

10:00 And so it goes. That's the torpedoes. I'm sorry I wasn't as bright a student at torpedoes as the other two subjects.

What was the level of discipline like in these courses?

There was one boss and this is what sets us apart from them, sorry to say that but that is. In the navy there was an old saying, "You do what you're told and then

10:30 after you've done it if you don't like it you complain". You don't complain before you do it. I feel this is where we're let down today, not only in the navy, army and air force but even at home and other places. The captain is not in charge of the ship. There's too much latitude given to lesser lights and of course this in turn leads to internal friction and I don't think I have to say too much at this point in what we see around

11:00 the place these days.

So it was fairly unforgiving there?

Yes. The orders of discipline were such that very, very bad crimes were so many days in a cell. The cells on board Hobart were up in the bows, the worst bloody place you could be in a ship because as you go through the sea it hits

11:30 and it shudders and bangs and goes on. You get the full force up there. However, that's where they were. You were entirely locked up in almost isolation. Your meals and that are taken to you and you are escorted to the toilets and whatever for ablutions. That's the worse one. The next one is stoppage of leave. The master at arms or the regulating

12:00 petty officer, he would take any offenders before the captain or the commander, explain to him what the offence is and he would say so many days leave stopped or so much pay or so much pay and leave. So that ended that one. The worst punishment you could have in the navy, when I left I left before my time and I got my full service certificate with the corner attached.

12:30 If the offence is such that it warrants extreme punishment the top right hand corner of your certificate is cut off and thrown away. This then to anybody who knows navy talk means that he's been rather a naughty boy and done something very bad. Other disciplines, you might have to go to voluntary instructions or do something, something minor. But yes, you had to do

13:00 what you were told and I think that was a good thing because if everybody did as they were told we knew what the next guy was going to do when you were working with him.

So when you were doing that training, who was in charge of you at Flinders?

Petty officers were allocated to each class, normally in their particular field of expertise. For example in the gunnery class you'd have a gunner's mate, the man who'd gone right through from the bottom to top in gunnery.

13:30 Torpedoes, much the same but on the parade ground you would have a man who was, what should you say, considerate up to a point because out on the parade ground it can get very hot and you're going up and down and he's shouting, "No talking there." Just one little thing and if you cut this out it doesn't matter, a good friend of mine his name was Ray Luxford, we were marching up and down one day and we got spoken to by the PO [Petty Officer] about talking

14:00 so I gave him a little tap on the back and I said, "Luxford you've got a hole in your pants" and he said, "Yes, you have a look you'll find a hole in your skin too." That was just a little aside and that was true too. Get your marching over, you knock off for morning tea, go back after ten minutes, knock off for lunch, start again later and another ten minutes break in the afternoon and then

14:30 back and finish the day off.

And it was PT [Physical Training] in the morning was it?

No PT was once or week or something like that and it wasn't difficult. You'd do the boxhorse, you could do wrestling, you could do boxing, a certain amount of calisthenics and I have a feeling today that one

of the PTIs has quite a set up in West Australia that I

15:00 was under in 1938.

Was your age fairly typical of the men who were with you?

Yes it was though we did have some who were older. I do think that at that time the navy and I suppose the other services were looking for men. I have a relly [relative] who couldn't join the services because he had polio, okay, good thing. But

15:30 I also had a chap in my class, the class I was in, who had much worse than polio, I think he had a little lapse of memory from time to time but he was there, he did his job. Regrettably he used to be singled out by some because of his, whatever it was that was wrong with him but he served his time out and I did see in the navy magazine where he had gone

16:00 upstairs to join the crew of the upstairs mob.

What sort of regulations were there about how you kept your hammocks and your personal gear?

Regulations were rather strict in this way. Every morning you would lash your hammock up and stow it away in a hammock bin and if the inspecting officer or PO or somebody came round and he didn't like the way you'd stowed it he'd pull it out and throw it on the floor and tell you to redo it.

16:30 As far as lockers were concerned I quickly learned that the only way to have all your stuff in your locker was to roll it up, tie it up and pack it up. If you just threw it in loose. Every now and then you'd have locker inspections, stand by your locker, open them up and the officer of your division. The ship was divided in to four sections, my ship, Hobart, still my ship, Hobart.

17:00 Forecastle up front, main top, fore top and quarter deck the back end. Now the two tops were either side of the ship. I think fore top was the starboard side and the main top was the port side. I don't know. Each of these tops had an allocation of men for the maintenance of things within that area. You would have a PO in charge of the section but he

17:30 would be responsible to a divisional officer. The divisional officer would get him out and say, "I want this done, I want that done" and then it was his duty to find the people to do the job. So it was. Or in other words you weren't what you might call the whole box and dice because you're the petty officer. You took your orders and I suppose the divisional officer took his orders from the commander or the captain who said, "I went through somewhere and saw it's dirty in the corners, I want it cleaned out". Full stop.

18:00 The captain didn't tell you, no way.

When you were training at Flinders there if any of your classmates weren't pulling their weight how did you deal with them?

We didn't. I remember quite candidly with the gunnery school in particular, if you didn't perform the way you were expected to the quick punishment was,

18:30 "Take that six-inch shell up to the doctor." Now they used to weigh about a hundred pounds. So you'd pick it up and see them struggling up to the doctor and get up to the doctor and the doctor would abuse you for taking it up there and tell you to bring it back. It didn't happen often thank God. Did I do it? No way, I always tried to do what I was told. See you observe these things and in observing them you try and avoid them.

Were there any of the recruits that

19:00 **didn't make it through the course?**

Not to my knowledge because I think they were so keen to get people in that as long as you could read and write and I doubt whether this particular chap I talked about earlier could read or write, only up to a certain level but however he made it.

At this stage, what did you know about the growing war situation in Europe?

19:30 I had a little bit of a knowledge of that. As I said, my Father and his six brothers were in the first war. I think it was in the early thirties, 1933, something like that, this fellow Mussolini of Italy, he was the prime minister, the boss of Italy. They were in Algeria if I can remember correctly as part of what was then their empire.

20:00 Now they wanted to expand so they decided that they would go and take over Abyssinia. Abyssinia was run by Emperor Halie Salassie and his troops, their best armament I suppose would have been bows and arrows. The other guy had all sorts of armaments on his side, guns, planes, you name it, he had it. Of course it didn't take long to overwhelm the Abyssinians and he to install himself.

20:30 While this was going on there was another little bit of a ruckus in Europe. I don't know if the Munich thing fitted in there or a little later. However, there was a civil war started in Spain. General [Francisco] Franco [ruler of Spain] endeavoured to out the ruling Junta and take the place over himself. Okay, they

got really stuck in to it and I think in the end he did but he was aided and abetted by a fella called

21:00 Adolph Hitler [German Chancellor]. Insofar as Adolph I believe supplied him with planes and a degree of troops to overcome those opposed to him. It was while this was going on that I joined the navy.

So you were aware of all that happening in Europe?

Oh yeah, my word I was.

How did you get your information?

My Dad. He was, I wouldn't say a student of military

21:30 happenings but having been in it so long and seen so much, yes, he had a good knowledge. As he said to me, "It's going to happen. You'd better make up your mind what you're going to join. If you join the army it's pretty dirty down there when it rains."

So you really had that feeling that a war was going to come and that's why you joined early?

Yes. I had the feeling because I had

22:00 been what you might call some way indoctrinated by a man who'd been through it.

Once you finished that training at Flinders where were you posted?

As soon as Flinders training is completed the next thing to do is to send you to a ship. I was one of the luckiest guys this side of nowhere because I drew HMAS Hobart. I didn't see it until I went down to join it and

22:30 here was Hobart about a six and a half thousand ton ship with eight six-inch guns, four forward and four aft, eight four-inch guns, two mountings on either side, port and starboard, as well as sundry smaller arms. When I got on the Hobart and the fella said to me, "You're in mess number" whatever, I thought, "How am I going to handle all this?" It all came

23:00 rather natural because to do something, if you were told to wash up you had to do something. Okay, if you're going to fire a gun you've got to do something and I enjoyed doing these things. As I say I went to voluntary instructions to further my knowledge in doing it. This all paid off for me in the end by virtue of the fact that my promotion which I can prove, I've got my service certificate, came rather rapidly

23:30 and with the promotion came pay. I was only interested in one thing apart from a job was to get more money. "If I get more money, okay, I'll have a go at doing it". I did what they call the ET [entry test?] one which allowed you to go to a certain stage in the navy. I started to do what was called the ET two. Well the ET two was an examination, which would have then put me in line for a commission if I was so elected.

24:00 Well the war was getting a bit hectic and when you're working four hours on and four hours off you don't get much time for anything else. How do we spend our time off duty? Am I getting too far ahead?

First of all I just want you to describe to me in a bit more detail the Hobart when you first arrived on her.

Right, Hobart, as I say, was about a six thousand ton ship with

24:30 with the armament I've described and all the guns, the six-inch guns were in turrets and the four-inch guns had shields around them so we were pretty safe from shrapnel. It was a nice ship. It was well built. It had teak upper decks in other words all the steel parts had a wooden surface which was something very, very useful

25:00 when you got up in the tropics. The between decks, the floors were nice, the decks were nice, the stuff they used to put on there was easily maintained and by and large if one fella does his job and the other one does his job it was quite good. I enjoyed it and I've said that too often haven't I.

What was your job?

My job

25:30 was in the first part what they call partnership in other words certain people are allocated to bathroom-sweepers, to mess-deck cooks, to this sort of sweeper and other things, well they were set jobs for a week or something like that. The rest of us, we were like loose ends and we had to do what was required. One of the jobs that used to happen was when they decided to make the ship nice and polished and all that they would what they call holy stone the upper deck.

26:00 Now this meant washing the deck down, wetting it well, sprinkling it with a lime content I think it was and getting holy stones, like bricks, you get down on your marrows and up and down, up and down and when you get about twenty blokes doing this thing you can go right across the ship without much trouble. When you're finished, okay, you've got to wash it all down. That used to keep the teak decks nice and clean and I think the lime too added as a bit of a bleach

26:30 towards keeping it clean. Okay, the next job, got to keep the ship clean outside so they have what they call side parties, people who work permanently over the side of the ship patching up paint spots here and there perhaps or chipping rust or doing things that had to be done that wasn't big. When the big jobs came and the ship was going to be camouflaged or the ship painted then it became the duty of each member of that part of ship

27:00 to do his job over the side painting or whatever. Upper deck, okay, rust they get you out with the old chipping hammers and all these things. You would sit and pick and get all the rust out of that or somewhere else then you would treat it to see if you could make it last a bit longer before rust set in again. That was all right.

27:30 Then I suppose you've got to look after your own self a bit. How do you wash our clothes? Easy, at times. I suppose you could put them in a bag and throw them over the side and let the water wash them but that wasn't it. However the washing was fairly liberal until such times as you got up where water was scarce then even the showers used to come through at times as saltwater.

28:00 But we used to have saltwater soap to lather up. Washing, okay, which I was talking about, do that in the orthodox manner, go and get the Lux [soap] or something from the canteen. When the washing's done they had drying rooms so you go and find a space in the drying room and hang it up and let it go. In the canteen, who run the canteen? When I was on the Hobart a fella by the name of Zammutt ran the canteens. I think he was known

28:30 amongst the crew as Jesus because when the air raid siren or anything would go he used to grab all his dough and hop up in the lifeboat and be there in case he went down. However he was all right, he didn't worry you too much and he had a good canteen. I don't think he robbed you but we had no price comparisons. That was his lot. The only thing that did draw a little bit of flack,

29:00 when we were coming home the first time from overseas I would say about a day out from Fremantle which was our first port of call the captain cleared lower deck and he gave a speech. Now we used to have the Jews on board, the fellas who would lend the pound for twenty-five. I'm not talking about payment, I'm just talking about you borrow a pound off him today, on pay day he wanted twenty-five shillings back and

29:30 I remember Harry Howden saying, "I've heard about these and I've heard how broke some people are. If I get to know who they are I'll guarantee them they don't get ashore while we're in Sydney". Whether they shut shop I don't know. However, I wasn't involved in that.

So on that initial shakedown voyage to New Zealand you were really just an odd job man?

Yes, well most of us were because

30:00 they were trying to see if the job they had given you, you were suitable for. Okay I might be up there on a six-inch gun ramming shells up the barrel and all this stuff. I might be on a four-inch gun with fixed ammunition practice or by the same token I might be a runner, going down and getting messages from the captain and bringing them up for something else but no. I'd like to go back in to gunnery because there's something

30:30 which a lot of people don't know. I've talked about the lands in the barrel, why they're there, to spin the shell to make it go straight because if you don't, ever watched a bloke playing football how they spin the ball, all the same. Now how do you fire a gun at sea when the ship's going like that? Not too difficult because the gun sights controlled by a gyro. A gyro, as you know, is always still provided it's going in the right place. Well when the target is

31:00 sighted, the director layer he has a trigger up there that fires every gun that's connected to his trigger. There is a rotor in there and a ball bearing and as a ship rolls up and down so this ball bearing rolls. There's a break here, that's positive, that's negative, when the ball bearing hits the break it's on it's way and it will always be

31:30 straight by virtue of the fact that the gyro has got the gun steady. Would you have thought about that?

Yes, so you were involved in gunnery at that early stage?

Yes.

In which sort of gun?

Well mainly six-inch guns. We didn't do much with six-inch guns because it's rather an expensive exercise to fire them. The main thing used to be we would have an aircraft towing a target

32:00 quite a way behind it and we would use the four-inch guns in what we call practice ammunition. Now practice ammunition is usually painted black. The shells are painted a colour according to their use and all the action for the practice shell is the same as the action for the actual shell. The bloke up in the director sees the aircraft and he's following it and he's taking certain measurements and the range taker's measurements and it's going down there,

32:30 it's being calculated. That's sending the fusing up to the fuse box in the four-inch, poke the shell in,

press the button, it does the fuse, you push it in the gun and at the appropriate time it fires and it is set and it's rather right too, it goes off at that time. You fire a couple of shells to see if you are ahead or behind, you can correct your aiming and

33:00 set it going from there. I was never down there, I have to say this, I said to them one day, "Don't put me down there because I won't be bale to work. I want to be up there watching them". Claustrophobia, terrible thing, believe me, especially when you're down there and all this is happening.

So you suffered from that at sea did you?

Yes, I would but fortunately for me and I must say with me

33:30 I was never subject to it.

How did you take to life at sea?

I rather liked it because it was something totally different to what I'd done as a kid. Remembering I'm only eighteen then on the early stages and of course as we grew up so we went further. We went to New Zealand first. Yes, had a nice time at New Zealand. The comfort fund [Australian Comforts Fund]

34:00 people picked us up and took us for tours. That was something. Then we come back and the ship you're told is going north. So we do, as I said before, you ammunition, you fuel, you water and get in all the provision that you want and away you go. So up through the Barrier Reef, going good, what happens? Reg and about ten others got the mumps. If you've never had the mumps, you don't know what the mumps are.

34:30 We were confined to the forepeak of the ship, that's up in the forecastle near the cells only we had the privilege of being lashed up in the open and there we stayed until we got to Singapore. It used to take about a half an hour to get out of your hammock and walk up those ladders as we call them to the heads which is the toilets and come back. That is a painful thing. At Singapore they decided to send us off

35:00 to hospital. So we were all sent off to hospital in Singapore what a lovely place that was. The walls of the hospital to me seemed to be hinged at a certain point so when the walls were shut they were all there but when they were open they were all like that for ventilation. The nurses would come around at night and tell you why all the drums were going off

35:30 and things like that. While all this was going on the ship had gone out on a patrol and the aircraft had crashed. Didn't tell you we had an aircraft on board too, did I? We had, what they called a pusser's duck, a pusher plane. Okay, we're all better so we get sent back to the ship and away we go back to our normal.

Did you enjoy being cared for in the hospital?

Oh yes, it was lovely. They enjoyed

36:00 us because we were a whole group of people straight from Australia somewhere somebody had never been and others had family. They'd just come and talk to you. "Have you been here?" "Do you know that?" It was good. Unfortunately we had to go back to sea and that was the bad part.

It must have been quite an eye-opener for a young boy from the country to end up in a place like Singapore?

36:30 As I said before can you imagine the feeling of a bloke who's used to sitting under a cow milking it suddenly being in a place like Singapore, God yes. We weren't allowed to go far. While we were in Singapore to lighten the whole affair for us because we're still under quarantine to a degree the captain sought to have a canteen opened somewhere that was in the vicinity

37:00 of the ship where we were not still in quarantine. Okay, away you go, go and get a few beers. On the way back, the natives used to have their huts built up off the ground and they all seemed to have a couple of monkeys on a leash underneath. Of course good old sailors give the monkey a bottle of beer to have a sip when you're going home but don't give him an empty one because they'd been trained. That was all right, it was quite good.

You must have also

37:30 **been messing with guys that were a bit older and a bit more worldly wise than you.**

For sure, yeah. You see you come from my situation down to chaps who have lived in the city all their life, who have been trained in some of the higher grade schools and who had grades of learning far and away above mine. Then you've got to try and

38:00 understand. Because if you said, "What did you say?" too often they'd say, "For God's sake listen" and this generates a bit of animosity. However, we worked that out in the end.

They must have had more streetwise life experience than you as well.

Yes, that's true. The only thing they didn't have more than me, what do you do for recreation, I'm talking now on the way to Singapore

38:30 before we were sort of involved, you have the old rec room, Mahjong, bridge, five hundred, euchre, you name it, it was there. I fancied myself at Mahjong and I credit Mahjong to the training that I had to have to my recollection of things today because in Mahjong if

39:00 you've never seen it, it's rather a quick game and you've got to remember what the bloke throws away. I even say to my kids today I wished they'd get out. They don't play cards, they don't do this, they don't do that, don't do something else.

Where did you go off to from Singapore?

Singapore, we went to Colombo, Colombo we were headed for Aden. We've always got a convoy with us.

39:30 On the way to Aden, I think it would have been at that stage we had a petty officer by the name of Barker on board who got violently ill with something, I don't know what, so the ship diverted from the convoy to Bombay at high speed to land him and come back and join the fleet. Regrettably the man died in hospital. So we came back and our next stop from there was Aden.

I take it the war had broken out by this stage?

Oh God yes, the war started on the 9th of

40:00 September 1938.

When it did break out what were your feelings?

I suppose a bit of a degree of shakes and shivers but okay, there's one of two blokes. He's going to get you or you're going to get him so you've got to make sure you're the first up.

You mentioned that doing your job and earning a quid was very important to you, what about feelings of patriotism?

40:30 On board? I think it was there. You've only got to go back to school days. Every time you went to school the bell would ring, you all fall in there. You muster and then somebody would play the marching tune, you'd come in to school and when you'd get in there, "God save our gracious king" it used to be discipline, the thing that's gone today. Then when you finished that each class in their own rank,

41:00 quick march and away goes the old piano again, always left, right, left, right.

Tape 4

00:33 **Reg, what were your first impressions of the Middle East?**

Well in Aden it was terrible. Makes you wonder how people lived there, how they existed, what they did. But they did. Aden on the southern end of the Red Sea, it was in what you might call

01:00 two mountains and those mountains I believe used to have dams in them so when it rained whatever rain came down one of the dams would fill down, down, down. That was about the limit of their water supply unless there was some somewhere else. Aden was very hot and humid and, keep your mouth shut at the right time. We would go on a run out to a place

01:30 called Shaykh Uthman. Now that used to be one of the places that seemed to attract a few guys. On the way out you would see piles and piles of white stuff, salt, and on the other side piles of skins, animal skins. So where they're all coming from, don't ask me, I couldn't tell you. In all it was fairly placid as far as I was concerned. There was myself, a fellow called Alf Mernick [?], Ray Luxford

02:00 and one other. We were sort of a group that used to go ashore together. A few beers, yes and here you'd see the boys with the punka-louvre. Do you know what a punka-louvre is? Well it's a big thing, several of them, hanging down from the roof, as wide as the room and about that big. There'd be one boy up that end and he's pulling the string and the other the other. That was the air conditioning. So away they go.

02:30 It wasn't too bad. The beer was always cold, there was enough of it. In those days I used to smoke I'm sorry to say but I did. Night-time would come and you'd go to the open air pictures. The screen was down there and here the stars were the roof and there were these canvas type seats and you'd sit in there, watch the pictures, have a good smoke, all going up. The old saying was

03:00 when you've been to the pictures always shake your head before you stand up in case it falls off. The boys had these hari-kari knives. This is what I can't understand. We did so much for these people, they treated us in this way and here we are today, we're killing them and they're killing us. I can't understand it.

Can you elaborate on that, what was the threat with the hari-kari knives at the time?

03:30 Well most of the people over there have a very defensive attitude. I suppose this is because their style of life is they've got to fight for what they want and they get curved knives and if my sweetie comes home

and, I'll get some pictures and show you after, but they're very necessary. I don't say that they used them all the time, maybe

04:00 they're for killing animals, anything at all, I'm not sure but they are there and it might just be a little bit of a joke, shake your head before you get up in case it falls off.

What was your relationship like with the locals?

Well I found if you treated them as you wanted them to treat you, you would normally get away with it. I have never, ever been involved in any altercation with anybody overseas. I used to try and make a

04:30 habit of if it looks like getting out of hand, go away.

How much time did you spend on land there in Aden?

We might get so many hours leave. They couldn't give you all night leave because there was no where to sleep so you'd be given X amount of leave, come back on board ship, do your job and go back again in the afternoon,

05:00 something like that. I enjoyed Aden because it was something different. The other thing too was the things that they had for sale. I bought my Mother a beautiful big kimono and on the back of it, it had a huge dragon. I came home and I gave it to her, I said, "Mum, this is for you" When I came home again some time later I said, "Where's the dressing gown", she said, "I threw it away".

05:30 I said, "Why?" and she said, "Every time I went down the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK yard the rooster used to jump at it." I don't know whether they saw something aggressive in the gold work or what it was. So she said, "I've had to take it off, I've put it away." Money became of no value getting towards this stage because you had to change your money in to theirs and every time you change it you go down a little bit. So always

06:00 be careful what you want.

What sort of operations were you doing around Aden and the Red Sea.

While all this was going on you know Italians came in to the war when Hitler was doing pretty well over in Europe. Well the Italians came in and they were going to clean the Allies out of Africa and so on. The message

06:30 came through that this was going to happen. We were given instructions from naval officer in charge I suppose or somebody that we had to go to three ports on the western shores of Arabia and make smoke. Now by that, when you're at sea you try and not make smoke because somebody will see it.

Make smoke?

Yeah, now the idea for this was we were going to go up the Red Sea and come down at

07:00 these three ports and make smoke so that the natives would see us there and know who it was there. Now the first port and I would on the memory there was Kamarau, Mocha and Hodeida. I think that's how the came out. The first one we went in and made smoke. Then we go on to the next one. Now you asked about the knives. When we got there this bumboat come out and all these guys come on

07:30 with all their knives. They're followed on with a heap of blokes with calves and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and what have you for the butcher's shop. The next one that come along with a boat, with all his retinue on, was a guy called Ben Yassaf Ilum Saud and he was the big chief, the big chief of the whole area. So he came on board and he was met on the quarterdeck by our captain Harry Howden, shaking hands.

08:00 He and Harry go and have a bit of a pow wow [meeting] and all the guards were around the door of the cabin, I suppose to show, now listen, keep away. When it was all over he came back and got in his boat and went away and then we went to the third place. Make smoke to tell the natives that the allies were still here. So back to Aden I suppose and a little bit of a rest there.

08:30 The Italians, as I said had come in to the war and they made a bit of an attack on Aden. They had a good lead in too because they came from one end. Remember me saying it's in a valley, well they would come in with the valley in front and try and bomb the valley to try and knock out all the dams, the water, get rid of it. They weren't good bombers and then of course we've got ships in harbour. They had a go at them. I think

09:00 it might have been the HMS Ramillies, the British battle ships and our cruisers, quite a conglomeration of ships there. I didn't know of any ship to be sunk in Aden harbour while I was there. What I do know that during, this is going on, a trawler by the name of Moonstone was out doing her job patrolling for submarines and she patrolled and picked up this Italian submarine,

09:30 I don't know the name of it, and she brought it in to Aden and it tied up alongside one of our ships. I don't know what damage they did to it to get in but anyway they captured the sub and they brought it in and put it alongside one of our ships and there it stayed until they decided to take it up to Port Tewfik which is the southern end of the Suez Canal. The reason being that submarines are very, very highly

10:00 that's not right, their capacity to produce electricity is very strong so they take this thing up to Tewfik, tied it up and I believe they hooked it up to the main system to supply light and power to the town. We had our little session going up there. We came back and we paused at a town on the other side of the canal.

10:30 By the way, I've never been through the canal but on the southern end there were these lions. I've got pictures of my buddies and I underneath the lions. The little bit you can see of the canal, it's funny to see two sticks just going through the desert, that's the mast of the ships inside the. Of course you know later on after the war was over the Egyptians sank ships all over the place so you couldn't use the canal.

11:00 **At this point what were your thoughts about the enemy?**

I think you've got to put them out of your mind, forget. It's one of two blokes, it's you or them and whilst I don't condone what's going on in Iraq today, the pictures of blokes hanging up on wires and things, no, I don't go along with that at all, the thing is he is sent to do a job and you are sent to do a job.

11:30 Do your job. This might be one of the reasons why we're here today because the majority of us did our job. I'm not going to say some didn't. I could tell you that but I won't. Some didn't do their job and low and behold we're fortunate, we're here. When the Italians came in they had a little island halfway up the Red Sea on the eastern side and this aeroplane we had, pusser's duck

12:00 we called it, is a pusher plane. In other words the engine pushes it, it doesn't draw it. To fire it, it's on a catapult. The catapult is swung around and at a given time the guy who's in charge he gives the order to rev the engine full ball so when the ship goes down, no and comes up so he waits and going down he give the order to go because it's

12:30 down, it's going to come up, give it a lift to start. How about that?

What kind of shore scenery were you seeing in your operations in the Red Sea?

All you could see was desert. It isn't the sort of thing you'd like to go to for a holiday. Mind you, I'm talking back in 1940, not today. I don't know, I haven't been back.

Did you see any marine life?

13:00 Such as?

Fish.

Yes. I don't know just where it was but at one stage when we were down in the Aden area it was decided to take the sea net, sea net's a fishing net that they put out and catch fish, and catch a few fish. So okay, a few of us we got the net and took it out but I tell you what we got out of the water too there was all these blokes with the sting in their tail, everywhere.

13:30 That was about all we did. Mind you there wasn't too much time to do it because there was always signals coming in that something unknown is sighted somewhere, something else is unknown and no, there wasn't much in the way of fishing

14:00 as far as recreation was concerned.

Now I understand during your time in the Red Sea you captured a Danish fishing boat.

Not in the Red Sea, that would be somewhere between let's say Bombay and Aden. The ship that they captured I think was by the name Afrika. It wasn't an enemy ship,

14:30 it was a Danish ship. The reason they captured it is that unfortunately old Adolf had taken over Denmark and anything to do with Adolf had to be ours. So they put a boarding crew on. Where it went to I couldn't possibly tell you. All I know is that they captured it and took it somewhere. That's about the only one. The only other thing that we got involved in

15:00 with a ship was after the war we had to go and tow a Japanese ship up in the sea of Japan to somewhere. That was rough that one. Big seas, ship hanging on the back of you. When you see a six-inch cruiser put a side under the water, it's scary.

What about the minesweeping that you did on the way up?

That was done mainly

15:30 by ships built specially for that task. As far as the Hobart was concerned we had her protected from moored mines. There's several sorts of mines. You've got moored mines that are anchored at the bottom, you've got magnetic mines, you've got pressure mines and there was one other sort. Now the moored mines were anchored to the bottom and floated to whatever the setting might be.

16:00 They could only be held down by an amount of wire that was conducive to their coming up to the height they wanted. So these mines were what we call cut off. On the Hobart we had a thing called a shoe. Now as you know in a ship you've got the forepeak and what we used to do was put a shackle

16:30 on the forepeak back to the ship that determined the depth that this thing went down. On the back end of the shoe we had other shackles and we would hook two paravanes [towed device used to cut the moorings of submerged mines] on to them, one each side so that if we went through a mine field hopefully these would run the moored mines out to the paravanes and because they are a special wire called serrated wire, which is like a knife,

17:00 they would either cut it on the way to it or when they got to the paravanes they had cutter jaws in them fixed, they would try to drag them on and cut them adrift. On the Swan that I was on her main duty in the initial stage was mine sweeping and ASDIC control. Anywhere at all we were operated from Bass Strait to

17:30 Darwin, Ambon, places like that. While I waited for the Swan I was put on a ship called HMAS Samuel Benbo. Samuel Benbo was an ex-red funnel trawler. The navy took over three, Samuel Benbo, Goolgwai and Goonambi. They commissioned them as HMAS ships. The staff or the crew remained much the same. I got posted

18:00 on to the Samuel Benbo to show the blokes how to use the guns up forward in case they got submarines chasing them. It was from there I went Hobart, Samuel Benbo, Swan. On the Swan she had big winches on what we called the stern, down aft. That had huge coils, drums on it loaded with this serrated wire. Now being one of her jobs

18:30 she had what we call davits and with these davits we would lower what we call the kites in to the water and then the floats, these other things. When they were down they would release the wire and let it go out. They used to work in tandem. If one ship was there with wires out this wide there's another one the other side just the same almost

19:00 covering that section. That was the Sydney eleven mile run every day to keep that channel open for ships coming in and out. When you got out to say the hundred fathom line you couldn't put down a maud mine because the weight of the wire would pull it down so therefore we only went so far. When it's all finished you come back. Now what's a kite? A kite's a thing you see up there, it's got little funny things on it and as you tow it along so it goes down

19:30 in the water. Why doesn't it go too deep? Because the float up there is attached to it and it only lowers it down to the depth determined by that wire. When it comes back the reverse is done, the wire is wound on to the drum and it has a system whereby it is directed in to its right layer on the drum by a guide that runs across these drums to make so that they don't overlap. If they did that then

20:00 they'd probably lose half their cutting capacity as a serrated wire. The hardest part used to be trying to get the float and the kite back in because it's.

I want to go back to Hobart. Is it correct to say that you were in the Mediterranean on the Hobart?

No.

Just the Red Sea.

The furthest I've been on Hobart was to Port Tewfik, southern end of the Suez Canal. We came

20:30 back in 1941, February 1941 I think and that's when I was drafted from Hobart to Swan.

In February 1941 do you remember how concerned Australia as a country was about Japan?

1941, when did they come in?

They came in to the war at the end of 1941.

21:00 I don't know because we didn't hear a great deal about it. All we knew was that things were a bit uncomfortable but I think if you go back in history there's a fella by the name of, an English lord somebody used to go from England to Germany checking up on seeing what's going on and never once from what we heard did he tell our blokes that old Adolf's got a big army,

21:30 a big air force or something like that. This is what I have reasonable cause to believe. Whether the same thing was happening with Japan I don't know but what I will say is this, that Japan has never gone in to a war where she had informed her adversary that she was coming. She did it then told them. That's Pearl Harbour, that's Manchuria, Korea.

So what was the

22:00 **route that you took from the Red Sea back to Australia?**

We came back by what we might call the shortest route to Fremantle. It was during that trip that I'm told my Father had died, four days after my twentieth birthday and almost back to Fremantle and we were told of a ship, a raider and we were sent off

22:30 to chase it. We didn't find it and we come back. That's the only day when I knew that potatoes didn't

always come out of the ground they came out of flour and water. The poor old cooks had to make all these things up. So we came back to Fremantle. We got a little bit of leave there and when I was in Fremantle a few years ago somebody said, “Can you see any difference?” in 1941 when I was there you could walk down the main street of Fremantle

23:00 and at the end of the street, there’s the desert. Same as when I went back to Darwin, somebody said, “Can you see any change?” I didn’t go ashore in Darwin, so how could I see a change? Well I could what had been built. But from Fremantle I think it was our captain was Harry Howden, our commander had a brother in the newspaper business here

23:30 in Sydney and he came aboard in Fremantle and come over with his brother, the commander, to Sydney, David McNicholl. He came back to Sydney and he took passage there. Come back to Sydney and that’s where Hobart and I departed until the end of the war.

24:00 **What was it like walking off her for the last time?**

At that time a degree of wonderment because while this was going on I had been elevated to the dizzy heights of a leading seaman. Oh God, I’m nearly to bloody admiral at this rate. A leading seaman and I’m a leading seaman without a badge. Now we get these badges I think it was three, eight and twelve years. You see the one on there with the three badges, he’d had a long service.

24:30 I didn’t have one. When I eventually got my stint on Samuel Bembo over and went to join Swan that was where I sort of wondered what might happen. Because when I joined Swan and they said, “You’ll be the leading hand of mess number whatever” and when I got down to this mess whatever here were five people, five seamen. Two blokes have got three badges, one’s got two and I’ve got none, yet I’m

25:00 the senior hand. I thought, “Holy hell, how am I getting out of this” but we arranged it, it all worked out. So that got rid of what you might say a little bit of wonderment.

You were on a ship between the Hobart and the Swan.

Yes, Samuel Benbo.

What kind of a ship was Samuel Benbo?

Samuel Benbo was one of three red funnel trawlers

25:30 that used to do all the fishing out of Sydney and the navy commandeered the three of them because they all had the sort of gear on them that the navy would require for minesweeping, that is the kites, the davits and the drums.

And where was it that you were posted on the Swan?

I was just a general roustabout. So my duty was to show the

26:00 merchant sailors who were still then navy men how to operate this gun on the forecastle. As I said before guns are propelled by cordite. There are several sorts. The one that the Samuel Benbo had on it we called a Woolworths gun because you could put the shell in it and fire it and you could watch the shell go, that’s how ineffective it was. One the Swan, the

26:30 first lot of four-inch guns we had on that before we got knocked around in Darwin, her guns I am told were First World War guns and they had an elevation or a height of twenty thousand feet, you couldn’t get them bigger. Of course the Japs knowing this, they come in at about twenty-five thousand feet and you couldn’t even scare them. Luckily the Warrego alongside us, she had more modern guns and after the Swan had been badly knocked around in Darwin we went back to

27:00 Brisbane and repaired, we too had the better guns put on us and then, get up a bit higher Japs, we’re coming after you.

Do you remember the date you were drafted to the Swan?

To the Swan, no, because I was looking forward to it. I wanted to get off the Samuel Benbo because with all due respect it was a coal burner. You’d go to sea and come in at night

27:30 and have to coal ship. Now you couldn’t throw ashes over the side at sea. You had to wait until you got in harbour in case the ashes spread and the enemy found them and said, “Ah well, we’ve got an old coal burning ship at here somewhere.” So that’s why they were all done inside. Regrettably you’d anchor, you’d tie up anywhere between Watson’s Bay and Cockatoo Island, Goat Island, you didn’t get much of a run ashore.

28:00 **What kind of job was it to empty the coal ashes on the boat?**

It wasn’t too bad because see they’re already equipped with the necessary gear to de-ash, if that’s the word, ship. You’d get in and come up in buckets and throw it over. The worst part was getting coal in to it. I think that was dirtier than getting the coal out of it. However, it happened and we did it. The fisherman, they never did worry.

28:30 They were nice blokes. Because of their and my age there was never a, “C’mon kid, get in”. Treat them

nice and they treat you nice.

How did you enjoy being in charge there?

On the Swan? Well I was given that I suppose I say by choice because I had done something that

29:00 elevated me in my rating. As such well as I said before good education, you do what you're told and worry after, don't worry before, just do it. If you don't tell somebody to jump overboard and swim behind the ship for a couple of hundred yards, okay, it's all right because you're not saying something impossible. All I had to do was make sure they were fed. What the navy used to do, they used to have total naval feeding, in other words

29:30 we'd have somebody go to the galley each day and get a dish and take it back, that's your meal for this meal and then they decided on what they call a half vitalling [vittles; food] arrangement. That is when they paid half of the vitalling allowance to the senior hand of the mess and he had to find the vitals for the other half. Well I did that. In fact I think the first thing I did was I thought, "Hell, I'll get out of this".

30:00 So I got half a bag of cabbages, half a dozen slabs of corned beef and some spuds and for breakfast, dinner and tea we had potatoes, corn beef and cabbage. While this was going on I had already asked my sister to send me a cooking book. So she sent me a little cooking book and it showed me how to make a cake. So I go to the galley and say, "I want, I want" and they put it against [(UNCLEAR)] and low and behold instead of me being the only cook I have four other

30:30 cooks. I only wanted one to break him out and at the end of each month when we were put on full rationings by ourselves that means the navy gave us nothing, we had to get all our own, I could usually give those blokes about a pound each at the end of the month that I'd saved buying food. Because see when they went ashore at night you didn't have to feed them. When they come back in the morning and so it was. They'd say, "What are you going to have today Popey?" "Oh what about some more beef and cabbage".

31:00 So you'd go and get something lesser, wasn't as expensive. Instead of having five spuds each you give them one or two so there was a saving there. Unfortunately a lot of food is wasted.

Whereabouts was your battle station on the Swan?

On the Swan I had rather a mixed one.

31:30 Because of the gunnery rate I had I wasn't the chief at the gunnery rate. A four-inch gun, yes I'd be up there doing my job there but in Ambon when the big raid came I was in the director. This is the thing that looks at the aeroplanes and follows them and sends all the information down that comes up. I tell you what, there's nothing more scary because when they came over

32:00 the leading Japanese plane fired what we call a varies pistol. Now a varies pistol is what they take to sea or should take the sea, these blokes that go out and if they get in to trouble they fire it. It's a series of different lights. This bloody bloke he fired his vary pistol and that was the signal to all the bombers to let them go. You're looking up there in the telescope and you see these things coming down in the telescope and I tell you what, you duck for cover. Luckily, down both sides

32:30 of the ship, good. Out of that, up come all the fish that had been blasted so we had a nice fish for tea but the skipper wouldn't have anything. Going back to this thing about the director, on the way back to Darwin from the first trip with the Warrego to Ambon we were coming back and the lookout, I was on the bridge. I used to

33:00 be anywhere where I knew I was wanted. Now why was I wanted on the bridge? In case they wanted to do some gunnery. Okay I'm on the bridge and the lookout reported, "Bearing right ahead sir, either a mast or a periscope". So being on the bridge I thought, "Okay, I'll have a look at this guy." I get up in the director and I wind it around and I see him. Then I go from there to the range finder to find how far away he is and he's gone. So I said to the bridge, "Whatever that was sir,

33:30 I have seen it with the director but it has gone." I make this statement in full knowledge of what I say, the message came back to us, "Maybe another ship going in the same direction as us." Now you're land people. How the hell had another ship going the same direction as us get out of sight within a two minute break, from there to here? Well that night we knew that that ship going the same way

34:00 as us wasn't one of us because the little ASDIC bloke we had, Billy Walker said, "Well he fired two fish at us last night". I said, "Two? And Missed?" "Yeah". Well you know the Earth's got a bit of a curvature, don't you? It depends how high up how far you see. Well with him with his periscope up you'd have to say his greatest range would have only been a couple or three mile so he sets his torpedoes to run at the depths

34:30 he thinks we are. What we sea lawyers concluded the next day was that because the Swan has such high masts, very high masts, he must have reckoned that our ship's weight was about ten thousand ton whereas it only weighted one thousand. So if you set something to run at a ship that's ten thousand ton, maybe down about twelve, thirteen feet but we only went about five or six feet so lucky for us they went under.

35:00 That was a ship going same way as us.

How many men were serving on board the Swan?

I suppose about a hundred and twenty.

What was life like on board the ship?

It was quite all right but being a small ship it was very, very vulnerable to the sea you're in. It was rough, it was wet and it was uncomfortable

35:30 but then by the same token, otherwise it wasn't too bad. I don't know if there's a ship afloat that wouldn't be rough in a rough sea.

What was it like the first time you encountered a really rough sea?

Not what you'd call happy. It may seem strange but now the Hobart, as I say, was a six thousand ton ship. In all of these ships as far as I know they're all made

36:00 to bend. Now the Hobart had what we call two expansion plates in her so when she got on long waves, might be on a big wave here and a big wave here and nothing in the middle, she had the ability to flex from both ends. So it was. When you're on board, I'll stick to the Hobart and you're doing maybe twenty, twenty-five knots which is more like thirty mile an hour in your language and she hits a wave and you feel her go,

36:30 you can feel the shudder go right through the ship because the hardest thing to hit so the air force tell me, is water. You come down, you hit water, you've hit it. So it used to be with a ship. If you hit a big wave head on it would make the ship shudder, just through but she'd regain herself, she wouldn't break in half. This was one of the beauties of pommy [British] engineering alongside Yankees [Americans] so I'm told.

37:00 **Where did you go on the Swan from Sydney harbour?**

The first thing was to go north for patrol. So on the way north we got as far as Torres Strait and they decided they'd stop and let people go ashore on Wednesday Island.

37:30 A very good friend of mine, he went ashore Wednesday Island with a rifle and when he came back he got the antlers of a deer he shot. I don't know whether he bought the body or not. However, that was him. He put the antlers on the wires around the ship, the guard wire and we all took our photos that wanted it and then we went to Darwin. This was when we started to get introduced to the old slope eye

38:00 because they were coming pretty smart down the Malay Peninsula. That's where the Darwin stuff began. From there we went to as I say we took the sparrow force on board, the commandos, took them up to Timor, unloaded them, had this incident coming back, stayed there, saw all these ships, set out again with another convoy but what's the good of us going? We didn't have

38:30 any ammunition that we could shoot at those planes that would hurt them. We were down to what they called practice ammunition. If you didn't hit spot on, you didn't do any damage. With the guns we had it couldn't get there.

Obviously we're going to go in to detail about that but probably after lunch. Can you describe for us the waterways around the Torres Strait?

Yeah, the tide is such

39:00 when you tried to steer a ship through it, there's an old saying you don't steer a ship by a cloud or a star, you steer a ship by the compass. It's the only thing that tells you where you're going. When you've got to turn the wheel a little bit more one way than the other, this is where the turbulence comes in. Going through the rip in Melbourne I believe it can turn the corvettes around, they couldn't counter the rip. However we go back to where we were, I

39:30 have never seen it like that but I can understand because I've been there.

Did you see many natives on Wednesday Island?

I didn't go off, no, I stayed on board. I'm not a go ashore bloke because I don't know anybody there and I don't want to get in to trouble there. Dull life I lead, didn't I.

What was your greatest fear?

When?

40:00 **On board the ship.**

My greatest fear on the Swan was when that first lot of bombers came over in Ambon and as I say I didn't go up in the director very often and it was my job to be up there and steer the guns and watch these bloody bombs, there seemed to be hundreds of them coming down. A fear greater than that would be in Leyte and Lingayen Gulf. The greatest fear because

40:30 you could see dozens of them, hundreds of bombers and fighters and here you are in a ten thousand ton ship and he can't bloody steer his plane on to you.

On your way north when you went through the Torres Strait, what was the mood on board ship about approaching the Japanese?

Calm. I didn't notice anything untoward because you had to be. As I say, it's no good getting frightened in this time

41:00 because if you do, that's when you lose your cool and this is what I attribute the fact that I got my motor boat out of the machine-gunning without losing a man. Instead of going all over the place to dodge his bullets something told me just keep going straight ahead because the guns on a fighter are about fourteen feet apart and my boat was only about six, seven foot wide and that's why I could watch the bullets go down the side.

Tape 5

00:23 **Reg as I said we've missed out some of your action in the Red Sea there. There was a few scraps with the Italians.**

00:30 Yeah well could we start off by saying that the Italians were the problem later on but prior to that it was the French. As you know when the Germans occupied France and a few other places there were two French, the Free French and the Vichy French [French who were opposed to their German occupiers, and those who sympathized with them]. We happened to be in the Red Sea and we used to work between British Somaliland and French Somaliland. The capital of French Somaliland

01:00 was a place called Djibouti and the capital of British Somaliland was Berbera. When the Italians were doing a bit of a run down we escorted quite a few troops from probably Aden but anyway from somewhere to Berbera to boost the numbers that were there. Over a period of time the Italians and Germans if there was any there, they overwhelmed our guys and they come down. Now our

01:30 job was made more difficult by virtue of the fact that the French having sided with the Germans, that part, at Dachau and around there went on their side, French Somaliland, Djibouti, became a no no also so we were caught in the middle. With this situation things did deteriorate over times and after we put these people on land at Berbera

02:00 then we had to turn around and take them off. That was perhaps more difficult than putting them on because when they came down out of the hills, If you haven't seen a fella that's been without water and washing and anything for about four days and his tongue's hanging out and you're there with a water bottle then this is trouble. On board Hobart the army decided to recruit some of us on the Hobart to go ashore as soldiers. I was one. I think in total there was about twenty-seven

02:30 and we went ashore and our job was, if we were wanted, to go and be like a nuisance force to the Italians and the others as they came through. But seeing they had a tank force, .303 rifles weren't much good which was all we had. So they asked for a bigger gun. The captain of the Hobart asked for

03:00 three people who would go with the saluting gun. Now a saluting gun is really something nothing. It's something that's mounted on a ship so when you go to somebody's place if you've got to salute them you fire these blank shells to make a noise and let them see you're acknowledging them. These three I think was Harran, Sweeney, there were three, Sweeney, PO and two others. What they did, they mounted this,

03:30 they took it off the mounting on board ship and they got a fourty-four gallon drum and what they filled it with I've got no idea but however they mounted this gun on the fourty-four gallon drum and took it to the narrows where the tanks would come through. Okay, our blokes retreated so the gun opened up. Now the gun harassed the Italians for a period of time until such time that

04:00 they were overwhelmed and taken prisoners of war.

What were they using as shot?

The blank ammunition that we used for saluting.

So they weren't actually firing any projectiles?

It would have a black projectile in but even if it hit you it'd probably bounce off you, especially a tank. That was that. How many rounds they had I've got no idea but they were eventually overwhelmed and taken as prisoners. It wasn't until some time much later that we found that

04:30 they were still alive and eventually we got them back to Aussie. As far as I was concerned we had been told that our job was finished so we started to backload the residents and the army people who came down on to Swan and take them back to Aden. There were some very badly wounded and it wasn't nice. However that was my experience as a soldier,

05:00 going ashore in Berbera.

What sort of condition were the British troops in that were coming back aboard?

I suppose you'd have to say very distressed because no food and water for three days out in the desert, three or four days takes it out of you. Took it out of us and we were alongside the waterfront. When we have got all these people back on board ship the order then came for us to have a bit of fun.

05:30 I was in Y turret. I was a trainer. I watched the shells being fired and hitting Berbera and blowing it to pieces. Everything that was left was put on the foreshore and we had target practice as we went. Then when we left we went along the coast north in the direction of Suez to see if we could see anybody else on the foreshore and pick them up. The worse thing that happened while we were there, we got caught in

06:00 a bad wind, I can't think of the name of it but this wind comes in usually of an afternoon and it blows like hell. Where the Hobart was anchored was on a sand bottom and the wind was so strong that it blew the Hobart off her anchorage, dragged the anchors and she went aground for a while. It wasn't too long, anyway they got her off and she got away.

06:30 **What anti-aircraft defences were there on the Hobart?**

The anti-aircraft defences in the beginning was eight four-inch guns, about four by four point five mountings, that's each mounting had four point five guns and that was about it.

Because I believe you had some bombing attacks by very small numbers of Italian planes.

Yes, in Berbera, we did.

07:00 I think one of the big things was there was a British anti-aircraft ship, the HMS Carlisle. It wasn't there with us at the time but as I've often said I think the Italians were easy beat. We were having a shot at them and well they didn't do any damage while we were evacuating the people

07:30 from shore that I know of.

And your own little Walrus plane aboard?

Yeah, well the Walrus plane, the first one, it was fired off in Malacca Straits in the early part. For what purpose I don't know. However, coming back it didn't land as it ought in the sea it hit something and it crashed up. It was put ashore in the Singapore area and a second plane brought and put on board.

08:00 That plane who had a pilot, a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] pilot. The navigator was Lieutenant Vivian Malleson off our ship and a machine-gunner. They went out on a bit of a sortie [operational flight] and they went over an island that the Italians owned and they dropped a couple of bombs on it, did a bit of a shoot up on it but came back with a few holes in it themselves.

Fairly brave in that sort of aircraft.

Oh yes, they were. They're the brave ones. Because it only goes at about I suppose

08:30 sixty to seventy knots what's that, eighty mile an hour round figure. You could almost chase it with your foot.

The evacuation of Berbera was that the first time you'd seen wounded men?

I would have to say yes, badly wounded, yes.

What effect did that have on you as a young man?

09:00 Hard to say because whenever you see this sort of thing the thing you want to do is help in some way. Can we go back to the Darwin?

Just tell me about that idea of wanting to help.

Well if I saw you there bleeding with a wound in your leg and I had a handkerchief in my pocket I'd probably go and put it over it, anything to staunch the bleeding. Maybe with a water can, wet it, put it across his

09:30 forehead, this sort of thing.

We'll cut forward a bit now, you spent a bit of time on the Kuttabul.

Yes.

A bit of an ill fated ship later in the war.

Well fortunately my time on the Kuttabul was more or less only overnight because when I left Hobart to go to Swan I was billeted on the Kuttabul and the next day I was pushed out on to Samuel Benbo.

10:00 **The merchantmen that were on Samuel Benbo must have been fairly crusty old types.**

They were but they were seaman. I suppose you might have called them a bit more seamen than us because we speak a different language. Our blokes do as their told, the other blokes do more or less as they like. I had no trouble.

10:30 **On Swan you did some minesweeping off Tasmania, is that correct?**

Yes.

Were there mines around that area?

Yes and a ship was sunk down there, if I had my photos I could tell you the name of it and we eventually went out and picked up some of the flotsam off that ship.

Who was laying those mines?

Well we can only assume it would have been

11:00 the Germans. Mines were being laid up and down the east coast. I'm correct in saying even on the Benbo we swept one up. I'm not sure about that but I know I have fired on mines. When the mine comes up it floats so the next thing is to shoot it.

You talked quite a lot about mines in the last tape and you also did some ferry

11:30 **work up in Port Moresby before you went to Darwin I believe.**

That's right. As I said the idea was that when the troops came up on the troop ships only certain troop ships could go alongside the jetty because of the amount of water. It then became Swan's duty to go alongside the troop ship to load them and then take them to the wharf so they go ashore. That was the way they came there.

12:00 **Were they militia?**

Mixed army, I couldn't say.

What did you think of the army blokes?

They were all right. They were rough and ready but still I suppose they thought we were too.

How would you describe the atmosphere, once Japan had entered the war how do you think the atmosphere changed back in Australia?

12:30 I wasn't here. See we didn't come back until we were knocked up.

How was the Swan different from the Hobart?

In many ways. I suppose firstly size, secondly duties and thirdly speed and then perhaps a little more so, the ability to protect itself. The

13:00 Hobart was a later model ship. By model I mean in years, Swan I understand was built in 1936 and the Hobart which was originally Apollo I think was built somewhere around 1938, something like that. I'm not sure but she was a much later ship and therefore her armament as the way of four-inch guns are concerned and six-inch were of a better calibre and firepower than

13:30 we had on the Swan initially.

And how did the duties of the two ships compare?

Much the same. The only difference was that the Swan was about a hundred odd men and the Hobart in total about six hundred odd when the war started and when the war ended I suppose she was more like about eight hundred and then of course if you bring more men on they've got to have something to do. To have something to do they've

14:00 got to have it over there and every time more come on they put something over there that gave us less space for comfort and accommodation.

And what about being on that smaller ship the Swan, how did that compare in comfort with the Hobart?

Not to be compared. I mean the Hobart could ride out the waves a lot better but of course the little fellow, as I say Hobart about six and a half thousand tons and the Swan about a thousand ton, the old waves could throw

14:30 it around a little bit easier. I didn't mind. It wasn't comfortable at times and I have seen the sides of the Swan under water in a roll and that gets pretty scary. Then we used to rig up lines along the upper deck as we called it, if you had to go from one end to the other, you grabbed hold of the line and you went along with a line in your hand because of the roll.

Did you suffer from sea-sickness?

Strangely, no.

15:00 The only time I got sea-sick was going out here in a tinny fishing.

What about crew comfort as far as accommodation goes on the Swan?

Well we all found our little niche and of course the thing is in harbour and I'm talking about Australian harbour, when you're ashore you'd probably go and sleep at Johnnies for the night and go back in the morning. If you're at sea, okay, some are on watch and that leaves a space.

15:30 So you take their space, when they come off, you get out and he takes it, swapping.

What about, what was your opinion of the captain of the Swan?

You've got something written down there, haven't you. There was only one officer in the navy in my eighteen years that gave me anything except a good report and that was Lieutenant Commander Ben Travers on the Swan.

16:00 What I did to him I don't know. I can tell you this that that ship was going the same direction as us, it was not me that gave the answer. The only bloke in the navy, eighteen years, that marked me down. So I work it out this way, that either he's the only bloke right and they're all wrong or they're okay and he's backward.

16:30 **Why do you think he gave you that answer about the ship going the same way as you in a situation where it would seem hostile forces were around?**

I wouldn't like to answer that question because I would probably answer it the way I feel rather than the way I should. He didn't answer me entirely, he answered the lookouts

17:00 on the bridge because they were the first one to sight it. I was only the second bloke who was sort of backing up what the first guy had found. I wanted to do it because, okay, I'm on that ship and I don't want it to go down. That was it. However, we ended up getting on all right together I suppose.

When you went

17:30 **to Timor with the Sparrow Force commandos how were you getting them ashore?**

By boat. We got them on board I suppose from the jetty and when we got them over to Timor well okay, motor boat crew take them ashore. So they put their gear in that and they whipped them ashore. That was that. About one of the only times I wasn't in the motorboat.

Were you

18:00 **under fire while you were doing this?**

I'd say yes because we'd no sooner got them ashore and the Japs fighters turned on the shore base. I have the pictures of it on fire and then the high level bombers come over and as I say I watched them have a go at the ships at anchor, that was the Warrego and ourselves if I remember correctly.

You were spotted on the way over by a float plane.

Yes, flying boats picked us up

18:30 pretty early in the piece and they show to you out of range. They're on the horizon but they can see you. They plot your course for a while and put it on the map and they're almost dead sure where you're going.

It must be frustrating to watch them hanging out there?

And can't get a go at them. Oh yes. The worst part was too there was no fighter escort up there at any time.

19:00 The only protection we had was ourselves. Then when I saw the Yanks there I thought, "Thank God for that because they've got a few more guns than we have". They reckon the Yanks were a pain in the neck but they get my mark.

When you were being attacked on the way over to Timor there, roughly how often were you being attacked?

I think they only had about two runs

19:30 on us. That's the first one going to Timor. Probably only had about two attacks. Concentrated, well I suppose they were. However coming back, when we went out with the big convoy, on for young and old. That was when the Huston was made the lead ship and everybody took orders from the Yanks, that was the Huston and after a period

20:00 of time there was a bit of damage done and apparently the reports came back the Huston was such that he instituted the signal to take us all back to Darwin.

Can you describe the intensity of those attacks?

Bloody awful. But where we came out in front I suppose, they wanted the troop ships before they wanted us. Therefore

20:30 all our fire was concentrated on the bombers after the troop ships. As I was saying, this is where the Yanks came in a bit because I think they had a lot more fire power than us and between us we just, they kept away, they didn't come down. I didn't notice any fighter attacks. Probably we were out of range of the Japanese fighters, run out of petrol or something. I don't know.

21:00 We got out of that all right, come back to Darwin. When we came back to Darwin we were ordered to anchor out in the harbour which we did.

Can I just ask you first, when you were given the signal to turn around did it feel to you like you were running away?

No, it felt bloody good. It felt good because I knew the state of our ship. We had no ammunition to fire at them, we were sitting ducks. Because we had expended it all earlier. We were down

21:30 to what is commonly called practice shells, black shells. Even if you hit somebody with one it'd probably bounce off them. What's the use of that? We were making a noise.

It must be quite a noisy affair with that many guns firing.

Yeah. It is too. People wonder why you come home and you say, "What did you say, what did you say?"

All right, so tell us in more detail, you came back to Darwin

22:00 **and were anchored.**

A signal came to Swan that we were to anchor at a certain position in Darwin harbour away from the wharf and the jetty. The reason being that in the morning we were to up anchor and go alongside the Neptuna which had all our ammunition on so that we could ammunition our ship and be ready for the next one. Okay, everything worked according to schedule.

22:30 I was in the motorboat in my old usual spot and as the ship steamed or went from anchorage to the Neptuna I followed it over in the motorboat and when she pulled up alongside the Neptuna and been there for a short time, the starboard gangway's put down, I went alongside waiting for orders, take somebody somewhere or do something. I heard this bloody noise and I said to the boss because the night before he'd said to me, "We've got no planes here Pope, we're still on our own"

23:00 and I said, "Look at them". They came from inland, fancy coming from inland. And over they came, this bloody great horde. Before you know it it's on for young and old. Ships are hit, ours is blown, not blown up, it's shaken. Blokes are over the side swimming for their life, not very nice.

And you were still in the motor launch?

Yep.

23:30 I went and picked up all I could find. One chap in particular who I will mention, his name was Charlie Weir. Charlie Weir deserves a medal. I wouldn't say a Victoria Cross but anyway a good medal because in the picking up. The motorboat on the Swan had two methods of movement, it had what you call bucket gear, you open the bucket gear, the water went out the back and away it went. If you want to go astern you close the bucket gear, the propeller threw the water

24:00 in to the bucket and that threw it back the other way and in trying to maneuver the motorboat and pick these guys up, this is before the machine-gun attack, I must have hit Charlie. We picked him up and put him in the boat and he was hit up the ribs. It's not good my saying sorry Charlie, which I might have done, because there was that much going on. Anyway we got him on board and this is when we had a little conference of all of those that were on the boat, what will we do, we thought we'll get out of the way.

24:30 This is when we were machine-gunned, we go over to the mangroves to get out of the way. I have an alders lamp, I was going to signal the ship and tell them where we were but the petty officer said, "Leave it alone, don't touch it. If the fighter sees it they know where we were." But I'd forgotten about tides. The tide went out and left us high and dry. Here we are sitting in mangroves I suppose seven or eight feet from the water and here's this poor bloody man with his ribs knocked open, there's

25:00 mosquitoes, there's knits, there's you name it, it's there and we can't even get down to get enough water to put on him to keep this thing moist, no we couldn't. So darkness was coming along and this was when the tide come back in and we were able to get going. After a little bit of searching, because you can imagine what happened during that, no ship was where it was, they were all in their own particular spot

25:30 and they lowered the gangway and we went on board and the motorboat was hoisted on board. We learned that, I think it was three of our crew were killed and you only had to look at the ship to see what happened to her. However, the shipwrights plugged up the holes and we were able then to go under our own steam to Brisbane. Interjection,

26:00 in one of the Reveille magazines the other day I read a report of this by one of the soldiers who was there who was on the cliff top and had a good view. He said, “Here I was on the cliff top having a good view and there’s two Australia sloops running around like…” what did he call them, cattle dogs or something, “firing loosely.” So I had to answer that and I did. I said, “If you can tell me how a ship with only one propeller can go around like a greyhound

26:30 and it’s got no ammunition because they hadn’t started to ammunition when it all happened. I’ll stand an argument any day”. See the Swan could do about twelve knots with two engines. With one engine out and a propeller dragging I suppose her best speed would have been about four knots flat out. So no way she could run around the harbour firing loosely at these aeroplanes up there. He also had the hide to say, pardon this, he said,

27:00 “Our shells were on the way up before the bombs were on the way down.” Well bullshit. The bombs were well and truly on the way down before anybody put a shell up.

It was a complete surprise?

It was, a complete surprise, a hundred per cent.

What sort of scenes of confusion did you witness there?

Well, being on a boat and my own little boat for that matter, confusion reined supreme I suppose within the orbit of my work.

27:30 That was picking people up, moving my motorboat, wondering what we’re going to do, where we’re going to take them. However, as I say, we did it.

When you were attacked by the Japanese fighter plane you must have thought your number was up?

Well you did. The first thing I saw when it come because you’re still trying to settle people in the boat to keep it nice and level.

28:00 I saw these splashes going down the side of the boat and I thought, “What the hell’s this?” So I had a look behind me and I suppose I said so often, I could see this bloody Jap laughing at me and I thought, “You beaut” [excellent] but instead of doing this to get out of the way of the bullets I went straight and his bullets went straight too and I thought, “That’s good. You’re a good shot mate you missed us.” Too right.

How low did he come down?

How low, I reckon if I’d had a spud I could have hit him.

28:30 They come down very low. How low, I suppose whatever he was going to come down, the lowest he was going to come down, maybe thirty or forty feet. I don’t know what sort of maneuverability they had.

What did you see of the damage done to the docks and the Neptuna?

Well by the time we got back to the ship it’s dark, there wasn’t much to see apart from the fires. Where

29:00 some of the ships had gone down and their oil’s coming up. You couldn’t see much at all because early next morning our orders were given to proceed to dry dock in Brisbane for repair. What I will say is this, that was a bit traumatic, stir you up. I can say this, I do not remember leaving Darwin and getting to Brisbane,

29:30 having stopped I’m told at Bowen to get oil for what we call the A bracket where the propeller is held in the ship. I do not remember. But I can remember so many other things.

Why do you think you can’t remember?

Took charge. I don’t think

30:00 you really forget, I think the mental computer turns you off until such time as something clicks and to this day nothing has clicked for me. I can still remain quite oblivious but I know it was done. You walk around the ship and you see this and you see that, no I don’t remember it, silly isn’t it. That was ten days.

So by this stage the Swan had been given a pasting on a

30:30 **few occasions by the Japanese, how was the morale aboard do you think?**

Well it was a little bit upset because we lost five guys and it was in a hell of a mess. The main thing was for us, how are we going to get to Brisbane with all these holes in it. I’ll show you a picture after, what I mean by all the holes in it. I understand from fellas that have told me that when we were going down, instead

31:00 of going straight across the Gulf of Carpentaria because of what they’d done to us our orders were to go around the coastal route, Carpentaria, in case there was a sub out there because it would have been a sitting duck. I’m told this and to me it seems rather logical too because we had no speed to get away

from anything.

Do you think people when you got back to Brisbane did people know about the attack

31:30 **in Darwin?**

No, certainly not to the extent that it was. People would say, “What happened to you?” and you’d say, “We copped it up in Darwin”, “Oh, what happened?” Anyway that was it, they were kept in ignorance. Not total ignorance, let’s say about ninety per cent ignorance.

It seems from a lot of people that we’ve spoken

32:00 **to that the Australian government didn’t reveal very much about Darwin to the extent that somebody like you saw it, do you think that was justified?**

No. Well I don’t by virtue of the fact that had the Japanese come and taken us over then somebody would have said, “Well you only had those there, why didn’t they send more up?” If they’d have sent more up, I don’t know, but what was the use of sending them up without something to use. This, I think was the cardinal

32:30 point, there was nothing to use. If it hadn’t been for the bloody Yanks and I’ll say it again, supplying us with a lot of stuff, you and I wouldn’t be talking here today. If when the Japs came down the Malay Peninsula and they’d obeyed the wants of one of their generals instead of the other general they’d have come straight down to Australia. If the Japs in those planes had landed on the airport on the day they raided us,

33:00 if they only had a pistol they could have taken Darwin. There was absolutely bloody nothing and any of the ships we had, we’d been pushed to the limit, we had nothing left either.

Do you think others amongst the crew of the Swan were as shocked about it as you?

I do because they’d lost some of their mates. It was

33:30 only three. And what happened to them? Normally they’re given what they call a burial at sea. I know there was no burial at sea per se but I read the report that their bodies were screened at sea, which means that they were given a sea burial. I also know,

34:00 having spoken to one of the sick bay attendants off the HMAS Manunda who was my physio [physiotherapist] here for a long time, he said, “No, they came over to us”. So there’s conflict now whether they were screened at sea, whether they went to Manunda and Manunda disposed of them or not. I won’t enter in to that debate because I don’t know.

At this point of the war the Japs must have seemed pretty unstoppable

34:30 **having taken Singapore, hit Darwin, New Guinea, was there a feeling of worry?**

Well as I say, being at sea and particularly the first ten days after Darwin I had no communication that I can recall of any of that sort of thing. I would have to say if they weren’t worried there was something wrong with them because they were walking down the place.

35:00 As I say, I do know now that had they, the General Nishimura [Imperial Guard commander], he was the general in charge of the Imperial guards who came down from Tokyo to Singapore area and was supposedly responsible for a lot of the atrocities. I think it was he who said, “Now we’re going down to Java and from

35:30 Java to Australia” but his superior said, “No, we’re going towards India to link up with the others”. I think that’s how it went. Things I’ve read and I’ve talked to different people. Whether that’s a hundred per cent or not I can’t say but stories.

You got some leave from Brisbane?

Yes, we got a little bit of leave and went home.

36:00 Of course you don’t recite these things too much. Being the eldest of the family, it was a bit of a shock to Mum, Dad’s dead. Brother’s got thrown out of the army and he’s joined the American small ships. [(UNCLEAR)]

36:30 My brother Walter was the American liberty ships’ CME [?] he was discharged from the army and he was up in the Gilbert Islands where they were really getting hammered however he did come home. He was like me, we did come home and that was the important part. When the Swan

37:00 had finished her, when we got back off leave the Swan’s repairs had been completed and we were pushed off to sea again. This time we went up through the Barrier Reef to take part in the Coral Sea battle. I’ll call it the battle.

How had the Swan been refitted while you were away?

Well the Swan was refitted by having a lot of her armament updated.

37:30 For example we had four-inch guns in turrets put on. We had Bofors [gun] put on instead of point five machine-guns, we had the position of the guns altered to give us a better view or action. A mast was cut off and the foremast was cut short. The radar was put up. There was quite a bit of things happen to help us to help ourselves. Then we were headed back

38:00 as I say to the Coral Sea. On the way up through the Barrier Reef we had an air escort. It wasn't long before this air escort disappeared out of the air into the water. So we went over, I get my motorboat, I take my motorboat and a crew over and a sick bay by the name of Charlie Marden, he was going to get in the boat and the officer of the watch said, "No, you get out", he said, "Sir, that man might be breathing".

38:30 So Charlie got in the boat and the man was dead as can be, he was floating face down. So we picked him up and we picked up debris from the aircraft, brought them back on board. What happened to the airman I've got no idea where he was buried.

Where was the plane from?

Practise plane from somewhere along the coast of Queensland.

Australian or American?

Australian, I think it was a Beaufort bomber or something like that, one of these

39:00 good planes. He was doing nothing wrong. Then we get to Darwin and we're anchored there for a while and would you believe a flying boat come in one night and dropped some bombs in the harbour. It was concluded that the flying boat came from a Japanese submarine out from Townsville and dropped those bombs and probably went back and was picked up.

39:30 I do believe the Japs had some very big submarines that carried more than men. However, it didn't do any harm. This is where I got in to trouble with my senior officer. All the lights went out except the yard arm group over our gangway so being armed with a forty-five I tried the Roy Rogers act but I missed. In the morning I got in to trouble because he said I could have caused a riot. Okay. As days went on

40:00 we had to provide a patrol ashore so I was elected as the leader of the patrol ashore to take to the police station. I went to the police station in Townsville with four blokes. The sergeant said, "What are you?" and I said, "We're the navy patrol", he said, "Where are you arms?" and I said, "These sticks". He said, "You can fill your time in that cell until it's time to go back". That's what we did and we returned to the ship stopping at the pub on the way down and having a few beers to clear the air.

Tape 6

00:32 **After seeing Australia's mainland attack, how did that affect you?**

It certainly made you realize that we had to do something because if they can get in there that easy in Darwin, if they came in any sort of force they probably wouldn't have too much more trouble getting in further down the east.

01:00 I understand that the plan was known, the Japs wanted Port Moresby and then they were in. So whatever you did, whatever come to my mind was, "You've got to do this, they've got to stop".

I understand that it was going through that water coming back up north that you saw some

01:30 **Japanese ships?**

No. Coming north, no. When we left Townsville for the Coral Sea area we had to patrol anti-submarine and anti-aircraft. In other words keep the eyes and the ASDIC blokes had to keep the ears open and we were up and down. We knew of the battle

02:00 going on by the little bits that the captain told us and then at a particular time we were told by the captain that there was a force of Japanese ships coming from south to north in the direction of Milne Bay and another force of Japanese ships coming from north to south. In other words there were two lots converging on

02:30 Milne Bay. Or appeared to be. We were given an order to anchor at a certain island on the entrance to the Samarai Straits and be very observant and report anything that we saw. That night the rain and thunder was bloody awful. Not only very wet and windy and most uncomfortable

03:00 but however we stuck it out on the guns for the night. In the morning one of the lookouts on the gun he saw this ship coming in so I said, "Well we'd better have a look at that" and we trained the gun to it and we were all ready for firing and it happened to be a hospital ship. Then we were told that the hospital ship was coming in to pick up the sick and wounded in Milne Bay harbour proper because what had happened

03:30 the thunder and lightning that we had witnessed the night before happened to be the two Japanese forces pounding Milne Bay at Milne Bay. They had sunk a ship that was alongside the wharf and they created quite a bit of damage at the time. However, we got out of that. We'd done our bit there. The hospital ship came. We went in and had a look, I think that was just to show us what had happened and

04:00 then we came out again. A little thing I'd like to add there that doesn't directly concern me but naturally I had good friends on the Warrego, a sister ship to Swan and I am told by one of my contemporaries on there that two merchant ships were sent to this point, I'll say Wato mission which is down the end of Milne Bay. The Japanese were there

04:30 and what was on, one ship was loaded with metal and other requirements for the air force to lay a metal mesh mat for the fighters to come in and off and the other ship had the personnel on it to do the job. Being foreign crewman I am told by this man that they refused to go in. So the captain of the Warrego he just

05:00 rolled his guns around and said, "Go in or I'll blow you in." End of story. They went in. So that's a story I hear and I do believe because of the man who told me. Bill Hall who is deceased now who was here, he was one of the army fellows down there and Bill attached a little more importance to Milne Bay than he did to the

05:30 Kokoda Trail even though he was on it. Because he said if they'd have got their nose in there and established we were gone, that was the end because there was so much they could control. You'd have the bottom end of New Guinea, you've got the Solomon Islands, you've got all those islands out there that the Japs were sitting in. We were in trouble. However, it didn't work out that way, we won the day. From Swan I went to Port Moresby on Christmas Eve

06:00 1942 would you believe and that's where I went for eighteen months shore service. I got my shore service.

What were your first impressions of Port Moresby?

The sooner I leave it the better. But of course I knew I had a long time to do there. The navy had their premises out at a place called Ela Beach. They naturally had the

06:30 signal station on the entrance to Port Moresby and it was really only possible to get in to Port Moresby by one narrow opening in the reef a couple of miles out from shore. That's where the ships come in and I suppose had the Japs sat there with their sub they could have picked them off one by one as they come in. However, there was a ship sunk in Port Moresby by an air raid

07:00 before I went there.

What did your shore service entail?

I became rather skillful in building roads. I was given these natives boys and heaps of picks and shovels and wheelbarrows and I had to build a road from here down to what was the sick bay because it was only dirt, it wasn't reliable. So I was shown how to use these things you call

07:30 boning rods. Boning rods happen to be three lengths of timber each exactly the same size with a T piece on it. So you start here and you put one there. Now if that's level, anything beyond that, if you look along the top and only see the top it's level. So that was my engineering skills there. However, we got the road built and then as I said before after a period of time and half a dozen air raids,

08:00 jumping in to the air raid shelter. Gee the mosquitoes get you when you're there. We all had mosquito nets on our beds up there, but I went home, I came back, I took over Wato.

I've got some more questions about Port Moresby first.

Go for it.

Did you spend any time at all on a ship in those eighteen months?

Not on a ship as such. The only one I spent time on was Wato. That was a boat

08:30 that the navy commandeered from the Wato mission down at the southern tip of New Guinea and they commissioned it as HMAS Wato.

What were your living conditions like in Port Moresby?

I suppose we faired pretty well. Pretty well by virtue of the fact that once again we had the Yanks handy. Whilst they didn't supply us with food we didn't go short either.

09:00 I think one of the main things in Port Moresby would have been the hospital because things were very unsavoury up there and the planes going out and the fellas going out, they come back all beat up, this that and the other and we had one aboriginal fellow I think he was, well he was certainly a dark skinned bloke and they used to dress him up and send him up behind the Jap lines periodically because he could understand

09:30 the language, he looked the colour and unless somebody told you, you wouldn't have known he wasn't a

native. So he went up. I don't know what happened to that man. He was a very brave fella. It only wants somebody to squeal and off lolly.

How much did you have to do with the natives?

I had them all day. When they knocked off at night, another part of the job I had too was

10:00 to get and supply them with their eats and their tobacco. We used to use stick tobacco, something about that long rolled up like the girls do their hair. They'd get this and cut it up and get a bit of newspaper, rub it, put it in the newspaper, make it a cigar and away they'd go. I used to put a little in my ready rub tobacco but it wasn't too bad. I didn't smoke it in great quantities, just something to take the taste of the tobacco away.

10:30 **Did you ever chew betel nut?**

No way.

What kind of action did you see while you were in Port Moresby?

The only action I saw was other people fighting the enemy. That is to say the fighter pilots up there having a shot at the bombers or whatever else the Japs would send in. We didn't have any armament, nothing, not from the navy point of view. All we were there was just there

11:00 to make up a number and as I say I suppose were we wanted we'd have been put in to uniform once again and sent somewhere to guard a little portion of the Kokoda Trail. Thank God it didn't happen, looked too dirty.

Did you suffer from malaria at all?

I only caught dengue fever once, I did not suffer from malaria thank God.

11:30 **How did you compare your shore service experience with being on board a ship, what did you think?**

Well on board ship I was doing more what I joined up to do than I did on shore because on shore I'm stuck in one place. I'm glad the enemy didn't come down and I had to shoot him because if he'd have come down it would have been too late, he was on top of us. While he's on board a ship, while he's in an aeroplane

12:00 and while I'm on the same thing, we've got a bit of equal ground. One of us is going to get hurt although there were no naval battles by guns, they were mostly by aircraft.

Were you mostly dealing with navy guys?

Yes. All my fellow men were

12:30 navy. Ninety-nine per cent navy. Only in Port Moresby and places like that where we had the New Guinea natives and others to do work were you divorced from your own kith and kin.

How close did you get to the Kokoda track?

I suppose about ten miles thank goodness.

13:00 I think the nearest thing to Kokoda track was what we used to call the nine mile aerodrome. The aerodromes were known by miles. I think that was the one nearest to Kokoda and I didn't go up there, no, there's a war going on up there, why go up there? Let's stay where I am.

13:30 **Where did you go after you left Port Moresby?**

I came back to Flinders I think it was and I did a gunnery course and from there I was sent to the wonderful ship HMAS Kanimbla.

When you were in Port Moresby what did you know of the progress of the war?

You didn't know a lot.

14:00 We did have a radio yes but like Darwin they only told you what they wanted you to know. They didn't tell you what you would like to know. So whilst we didn't get any reports that were too bad we just said oh well, we must be going all right.

So this gunnery course back in Flinders, what did that involve?

14:30 Just an elevation in my gunnery ability. When you start off there was I think four branches. There was what they called a seaman gunner, used to have a single gun across your arm here, to know what you were and then you had I think if I remember right they called an LR [rating] two, two guns this way and then you might have been an LR one there was two guns this way with two stars. Then you come to the top of the tree the gunner's mate with the crossed guns with a crown here and star on the bottom.

15:00 That meant in the area where I served you'd gone as far as you could go in gunnery and they were not

blokes to be feared but blokes who'd gone through the very hard school and knew exactly what they were doing and how they were doing it because they were responsible to the gunnery officer who I often wondered knew as much as the gunner's mate. Not so much in the

15:30 regular navy, in the reserve navy. Because if a bloke had gold rings on his arm he was always superior to the other guy who didn't.

Were you keen to get back on the sea again?

Yes I was because by the time, on the Kanimbla, I suppose I'm going to make a fool of myself here because Kanimbla was the ship

16:00 that I broke up on before because of what it did, how often it did it and the recognition that was never given to those on the Kanimbla by the Australian government. Now I'll never know why. We just suffered bloody hell on there with kamikaze planes, bombers, torpedo bombers. You see a torpedo bomber

16:30 coming, aiming at you you'd hope to hell he'd miss you, go over the other side of the ship in case he got you. Because you see the armament we had on the Kanimbla, we were not a fighting ship, we were a ship with troops on it. All this was going on, I refer more now to Leyte than to Lingayen, we had all these American troops between decks and you can imagine what about a thousand of them are like shouting and screaming and calling us good names and all the rest and

17:00 how they can't see what's happening, they want to get on the upper deck. Eventually you get them up, put them in their barge and send them ashore and that's good but those fellas I'm talking about claustrophobia, those blokes I don't know how they stuck it, I truly don't. Down there between decks to hear all this banging and going on and even our blokes shouting, getting barges out and moving troops from one to the other and the things that

17:30 had to be done. Have you seen a picture of the Kanimbla? Would you like me to get you one?

I'll have a look in the break.

We carried ten barges on the Kanimbla for landing troops and I think we carried three heavy duty barges up on the forecastle for tanks and the like.

What responsibilities did you have on board the Kanimbla?

I was what they called

18:00 the PO in charge of the forecastle area. My job was to see that, nothing to do with the army, the army placed the barges up forward as they wanted them because they knew how they wanted them off. Any tanks or motorized vehicles, that was the army, they did it. My job was to make sure that anything relative to the seamanship part of the ship was concerned that it was ready. So that was my job.

18:30 I had to see that rope, wires, anchors, you name it was all there ready to go.

Was it satisfying work?

Oh yes, I enjoyed it. I suppose in the end you enjoyed it a bit more when you saw our fellas getting on top. As I say, I'll never know how a man in an aeroplane with a bomb hanging under it, he can see them as plain

19:00 as day, he's going at a ship and he can't hit you. The only thing I can concede is that some of the gunners hit him first and he went straight in to the water thank God.

So how long did you spend on board the Kanimbla in Australia before you left?

I didn't come to Australia in it. I went from Kanimbla back to Hobart.

Where were you on board the Kanimbla then?

19:30 Leyte Gulf and Lingayen Gulf. Leyte Gulf once. She went there twice, I only went once and then Leyte Gulf which was the big do or die by the Aussies.

Can you tell us about your experiences at sea the on the Kanimbla?

Kanimbla was an ex-merchant ship and what you might say there's a degree of relative comfort on it in so far it was bigger. It

20:00 used to be an armed merchant ship. It had six-inch up the sides mounted and forward and aft and they in turn took up their space and so did their ammunition but generally speaking it was all right. When you got loaded up with troops for landing it became a big congested because you cannot keep two thousand blokes down there. If one of them wants to come up, they'll come.

20:30 But what you can do is ask them not to and try and pacify them and tell them why you don't want them up there. Because they don't realize under those circumstances that to get in my way when I'm trying to organize something relative to the duties I've got could probably be the end of the ship. That's the way

it was.

When did you first come under aerial attack on the Kanimbla?

21:00 Leyte Gulf.

Can you describe that for us?

Can I describe it? I can describe it in about three words, bloody awful. As I say, how can you describe a total air force because the Japs were getting a bit of a hammering at this time and as long as a man could fly an aeroplane I believe they put him in it. How could you describe what it's like to see a total air force up there, bombers up there bombing, fighters here

21:30 machine-gunning, torpedo bombers coming in there dropping torpedoes and others just, whether they dropped their torpedoes and hadn't gone home or were just trying to make a nuisance of themselves. All these planes. You can't count them, you just cannot. Then of course I suppose that was a good initiation for me because it was my first lot for going to Lingayen Gulf. Because the same thing happened

22:00 again only more so because at this time the Japs really knew that they were gone and well you could tell, even I what I was I suppose, you can tell by some of the pilots that they'd only been in a plane for the first time because somebody was firing at them and they'd try to dodge it, well, you don't do that. You're either going to get hit or you're going to get missed. It's like me in the motorboat, I'm going to get hit or I'm going to get missed. The more you try to dodge it, the more

22:30 you get hit.

What did you see of kamikaze pilots?

I saw some bodies floating in there, I saw life jackets, I saw parts of planes. All the wreckage, debris in the water but we didn't pick them up. No, we didn't want them. What would we do with them if we got them?

What kind of casualty or injury did the Kanimbla sustain?

23:00 I am pleased to say that as far as I know and I'm pretty sure of this, we suffered nothing. I can't understand how a man in an aeroplane flying it with a bomb underneath him can miss a ten thousand ton ship. If it had been the Samuel Benbo, the trawler, yes, it's only small but the other one is long and it's high and it's black.

Did you ever think about dying?

No, what's the good. I don't even think about dying

23:30 today because I know I'm going to. I've got a special order in for when I do and my wife knows what that is. Do you want me to tell you? I'm not going to die until they've built my own coffin, I want a coffin, yes, but where my ears are I want portholes so I can see where I'm going in case I want to come back. That's a decided order. Told the funeral parlour up there as well. Stupid I know

24:00 but however. Might as well die with a smile on your face.

So what was the Kanimbla doing in that part of the world, what were your orders?

After she was decommissioned as an armed merchant ship and made a troop carrier that was her job. Where she went after I left her I've got no idea. I would presume that she was one of the ships converted to

24:30 bring prisoners of war home. Once the Yanks dropped those atom bombs up in Hiroshima and Nagasaki the war ended pretty quick. I was by this time on the Hobart and we went to Manila. I think it was just to pay our respects to the Yanks there and then up to Tokyo Bay. It was

25:00 in Tokyo Bay where we watched the Japs sign their life away on the Missouri and you talk about kamikaze pilots at Leyte, if you'd have been up at Tokyo Bay and saw the aircraft that went over, the sky was black. All size aircraft, it was black. They were telling the Japs, we're here mate, get out.

Can you describe that scene

25:30 **for us on the USS Missouri, what did you see?**

Well we were a bit too far away to get a good close up. The Japanese hierarchy were brought to the Missouri, I don't now by boat or by heli.., I think it would have been by boat and we only heard faints of what was being said. I don't know if it was being broadcast, general broadcast right around or if it was just being broadcast on the ship and

26:00 the airwaves just happened to pick, up certain things at times. But no, I couldn't describe it too much but I can assure you that it looked good.

How did it look good?

It looked good because it was all over. The only thing then was to get our blokes and the Yanks, get them back where they belonged to their own people

26:30 and then sit down and enjoy yourself. I went ashore in Tokyo Bay before the Armistice was signed. Like all sailors we went what we call 'rabbiting' and that's knocking off anything you can carry that suits you. One thing I did I got a Japanese stencil, I don't know what it said and I pasted it all over my letter to my Mum

27:00 and I said, "We're here." That would have been enough. You've got to be there to realize what it was and don't elaborate on what it was. Just tell it was bad enough.

27:30 We were there for a few days. I used to take a boat away sailing and a few of us would get our heads together and we'd go over an aircraft carrier that sunk over there, see what we could knock off as we say off the aircraft carrier. There wasn't much because it'd been knocked off, there's blokes there before us. Go ashore and this sort of thing. We were given a degree of shore leave up in Tokyo.

28:00 The second time round we were given four days leave and we were supposed to go to a place called Nikko. Nikko was up in the mountains, it was like a ski resort but another chap and I, Alf Mooney, we decided we weren't going to bloody Nikko, we'll go and do our own thing. So we had our billy of tucker for whatever days in the middle and a stick between us like a bloody Chinaman and away we went up the railway station.

28:30 We caught a train to a place called Kamakura. Well the first part of the train was bloody awful. You talk about strap hanging down here, you ought to see the Japs strap hanging. Over in that corner there's nobody so I thought we'll go over there and when we got over there here's all these little kids, better than babies, maybe up to four or five year old all huddled up in a corner, bloody grubs crawling all over them, oh Jesus, so I said to Mooney, "No, this is no good".

29:00 So the first train stop we got we got up in the engine with the driver. Went down to Kamakira there. When we get down there we had to find somewhere so we saw this hotel and we went over, kicked our shoes off at the door and went in and said to the bloke, "Want a bed." He got us one of his Jap girls to take us up to the room. Have you ever been to Japan? In a Jap bedroom then

29:30 there was nothing except a rattan type mat on the ground. So I looked in, I said, "Well Mooney, I don't know where we're going to hang our gear mate." The first thing to do is make a cup of tea. I don't care where you go, there's always somebody who speaks English. So I said, "Hey, who speaks English, I want a cup of tea." So we put a handful of tea in a teapot, he went away and he brought it back. By the time he came back I suppose there must have been about twenty Japs in that room and just two of us. We had our cup of tea and our bikky [biscuit] and

30:00 I said, "Okay, away you go". So he took the teapot and the whole lot of them went. What they wanted was that tea because the tea they drink is like a green tea, bloody awful. Away they went, we had no more trouble. So then we went for a bit of a walk around. It's getting dark, we go back and I said to Mooney, "I think we'd better go and have a bit of a shower mate." Righto, so we go up and get our towels and bring them all down. The Japanese bathroom

30:30 is in three sections. The first section, about six by six or something you undress. The second section about six by six and the third section about the same thing. Right, you get undressed, you go and get this tub, you go and get it full of water and you go in and wash yourself, soap and all this stuff then you get in the third one and wash all the soap off. Then you get in the bath. The hot water is coming out

31:00 of the ground. It is hot. When we started to go in, wanted to go in first, there was a male and a female in there having a tub and the Jap saw us and said "hoiky toiky" or something and this person went in and they turfed these two out. So we did our thing, we got in and had our bath and when we finished we

31:30 got outside on this rattan mat, there's about four eiderdowns packed like this. The idea is that you sleep on as many as you want and you sleep under as many as necessary. By gee, you sleep all right, too right. I slept like a log. But our two days run out too quick so we had to go back, get the train and go back. I thought we'd get run in for disobeying orders, not going where we're supposed to because if we'd been knocked off down there nobody would ever have found us.

You talked about the children on the train

32:00 **before, what sort of grubs were on their skin?**

I wouldn't venture in to making a description. They looked like little white grubs. It was definitely filth grubs and the poor little beggars you could see they hadn't had anything to eat or a wash or anything and they were all huddled up together in warmth.

I imagine that seeing the Japanese children affected like that must have brought up some conflicting feelings.

32:30 Yeah it does, it upsets you. Well I suppose under the circumstances what we'd been through and what had happened over the years past, if I'd say okay kids go for your life, they're doing it good but in yourself you say, "What the hell can you do?" You can't throw them a blanket because you haven't got one and if you threw them a blanket this mob here would take it before it hit them. They were all the

same. I can never understand why under the circumstances that I've just described to you

33:00 the Japs down there who must have hated us like hell didn't grab us and cut our throat, I cannot. I can't understand how me an unarmed warden at Manus Island could go through all those Japanese and not be assaulted, maybe knocked out with a stick or anything at all. We couldn't carry arms. All we had was police boys over there with a couple of .303 rifles.

Did you ever feel threatened?

33:30 No, I didn't. Don't ask me why, maybe it was just something in built. As I say I used to treat them like I wanted them to treat me. If I saw a bloke on the ground I wouldn't go and kick him, I'd probably say, "What's the matter with you?" and say, "Hey, pick him up".

Your time just after the Armistice was signed in Japan, how did you find the Japanese people?

34:00 I would have to say placid. I think had they not had that banzai hojo and all that crowd, had they had their own people it might never have happened. I don't know. See they were very warlike, samurais and I feel that's the trouble. Look at today,

34:30 I don't know how they are today, I haven't been up there since the war and I don't want to go but if anything's going to happen you'd think they'd take half a dozen blokes round the corner and cut their throat, wouldn't you. If they wanted to be nasty but no, you don't hear any of those things. Don't think I'm framing the Japs up, I'm just saying, treat them right and they'll treat you right.

How long were you in Japan for?

Only a matter of, the first time I suppose

35:00 only there for about a week or so and come back on board. Hobart, as I say, I had the opportunity of being the canteen manager at the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] Kure but I knocked it back and we came to Sydney, we did our things and I had a little darling then I was thinking a bit about and I went and bought some mink skins. Wait on, second trip. We went down to Sydney, come back

35:30 and we start our tour of duty as occupational forces in Japan. We were there I suppose for a month, six weeks, something like that, could have been more, I can't remember. Our run ashore was rather liberal and the thing was that you could only convert back to Australia currency the same amount of money as you had converted into Japanese yen in the first place. I think they

36:00 were getting fourty-four yen to the Australian pound, I think that would be the figure. Which meant that if you picked up a million yen out there you couldn't bank it, you could only bank the same as you'd taken out. So we had to find another means of getting what we wanted. One of the best things I found was American cigarettes. For about four pound I bought from the Japs ninety-five

36:30 mink skins and as I say I had a little girl in mind at the time so I bought them back here. That's only five pound they cost me. I brought them back here to Sydney and I got a furrier to make them up and he charged me a hundred and five pound to make them up. So however, that was all right. It's getting near time to bestow my blessing upon this little sweetie and she found somebody else. I thought, "That's all right. Go for your life love." Go to the next tram stop.

37:00 So I said to Mum, "Do you want it?" and she said, "What would I wear with it?" Knowing our position I thought a good answer. So I said to the furrier, "No longer wanted mate. Any good to you?" He said, "I'll give you a pound for every skin" so for the five pound I spent I got ninety-five pound. In other words I made ninety pound on my deal. Sugar, soap, were good commodities too. Take them ashore and swap them.

37:30 You didn't swap for money because money was no use. You swapped them for what you wanted irrespective of what that was. Don't look at me like that, I'm not going to answer your question.

What else was it that you wanted?

There wasn't a great deal from my point, wasn't a great deal you wanted. Yes you'd go round and see the sights. We'd go up to Ginza and Tokyo Bay and the things they used to have in bottles,

38:00 gee, you've got no idea.

Like what?

Little babies about that big, some with no arms. See they used to be in bottles at the side of the road. You could go up there and have a look around these things and come back. Good enough for me, that'll do. Didn't want to be involved. Then could go, "Okay, I'll go to the house of ill fame" and you would see those

38:30 who were very keen to get their, well, they were there. So be it. But I'm sorry, I did not put myself as one of them.

Were brothels everywhere?

Yes and the age of the girls was terrible. This was one of the things, you talk about the kids in the

corner over there, you should have seen some of these others, it was shocking. I don't know how a so called man

39:00 could bring himself to do to them what they did do. I do not.

From the two times that you were in Japan when you were first in Tokyo and then when you went back, what change had you seen in the country?

They were only beginning to sort of get it under control. Remember we were only away about a month or so. There's not a lot you can do in a month but it was certainly changing.

39:30 [General Douglas] MacArthur, [Commander-In-Chief of the Allied Forces] he ruled with a big rod and what he said went, he was the boss. This was it, the Japs knew it. If he said jump, they said how high. He was the guy running the joint.

What was your opinion of MacArthur?

Well I was pleased to see him. There's a lot of things against him. He didn't like the Aussie troops very much, that's for sure but he didn't like the Aussie troops I think because of General [Thomas] Blamey [Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces (AMF) and Commander, Allied Land Forces].

40:00 I won't tell you what Blamey was prior to the war but he used to be in Victoria. However, I don't think that he put Blamey's skills on any sort of a parallel to his and therefore he used to say, "Well you get in the back and make sure they come forward when I call them" and this is about where he was. I think he was a pretty skillful bloke. He had the courage of his convictions. He said, "I'll be back", okay, he went back

40:30 and I think that was a big thing. Yes, he had a bit of a hammering around and I think the worst thing that ever happened was when they took him out of the Korean thing. They'd let him go in to China we mightn't have had the wars we've got today, I don't know, we might have had a bigger one. He was doing all right but you've got to back him up. You can't give a man a job to do without help and by help I mean ammunition, planes, tanks, guns but okay, Japan's all right today, isn't it. Got no problems.

41:00 **What was your express responsibility in Japan as an occupying force?**

I think we were just there to make up numbers. To let them see that, yes, we have got a number of personnel we can have here, b) they're not doing you any wrong and if you don't do them any wrong I don't think you'll have any trouble with them.

41:30 No doubt there was some terrible fights went on behind the scene, I don't know but I'm sorry I would prefer to keep out rather than get in. I'm the placid type.

Tape 7

00:32 **Now we've run ahead so I'm going to take you back again. The time at Basilisk you mentioned you were building roads but you also at one point got your own command.**

Well I avoided that but I'll gladly come to it. Yes and that was HMAS Wato. It was commissioned by the navy and although we were only referred to as coxswains, navy board would write to the Wato,

01:00 "Commanding Officer, HMAS Wato". Oh gee, what a great shot this is. None of that, no. I was only a petty officer but because of the job I had on the ship that I was on, that's how the mail used to come. I might add that I didn't see much of the mail because it would go to NOIC, naval officer in command. He would sort out what I had to see and what I didn't. The only thing I used to have to see was very rare.

01:30 However, it was there. I got paid X amount of money over and above my pay because of what they call command money. I didn't get paid as a captain or anything like that, just a couple of bob here and there.

What sort of boat was the Wato?

Wato was a wooden hulled boat. I suppose about sixty or seventy feet long. It wouldn't weigh more than, I suppose

02:00 fourty of fifty ton. It was twin screwed and the regrettable part was that being twin screwed naturally it had twin engines and when I took it over one of the engines had blown a head gasket which meant that I on the Wato was like my captain was on the Swan, we only had one engine. But we used to do our duty with it. When the Yanks came in I used to go, when I knew they were coming

02:30 I'd go out a bit with a few hand grenades, jelly and that sort of stuff, toss it over the edge and blow some fish and when they came ashore we'd be all peeling fish on the side. They'd say, "Hey you've got a ton of fish here", "Yes, yes". A bloke said to me, "Can I buy some?", I said, "No, you can't buy any mate. But if you've got half a dozen eggs that'll do". He bring me down a case of, how many, forty dozen, I don't know how many you eat but

03:00 there was only me, two whites, a leading stoker white man and three natives, all these bloody eggs. However, you never knock a gift horse in the mouth. One day their engineer come down and he was having a yarn with me, wanting to know all about the boat, I said, “Regrettably I’ve got one engine out of action”. He said, “What’s wrong?” I said, “The cylinder head’s cracked.” “Oh God damn” he said, ‘You give it to me and I’ll fix that up for you.” I said, “Cast iron?”

03:30 He said, “Yeah, I know how to fix that.” So I made a mistake, I went and saw the engineer officer in charge who was a warrant and I said to him, “If I can get the head of the engine fixed do you mind?” and he said, “Where?” I said, “The Yanks want to fix it for me.” “No”, he said, “You can’t.” So that put the kaibosh on that. Then the Yank explained to me what he would do, how he would heat it and he would weld it and he would

04:00 cure it and he would slowly bring it back to norm and that would make sure it was working. So I checked up with a few people who knew more about engineering than I and they said, yes that’s correct. And here’s this other idiot. Wasn’t going to cost money, just he was going to do it, finished, fixed.

So what lesson did you learn about informing authorities?

I thought well there are bigger idiots in the navy than me.

04:30 He was only two jumps ahead of me in the service, rank. He was an uncommissioned warrant and I was a PO.

What did you think of the American sailors?

Well as I said before, I got on all right with them. When they were there they’d say, “Hey, what have you got?” I’d say, “Got a few fish” “What would you like?” And I’d say, “Oh a couple of bars of chocolate” and you used to get the chocolate. Quite handy

05:00 around at times. I even was billeted with them once for about a week while I waited for a ship. The unfortunate part there, in the Yank navy they’re different to us. They knew I was a petty officer so they wanted to put me in the petty officer’s mess which in our language was the sailor’s mess. Now I didn’t want to prove too much but there was three of us and I said, “No way fella.” In the end

05:30 we found out that their petty officers start from down there and they gradually work up. However, we got in with the chief mess and it was all right.

What sort of ferry runs were you doing on the Wato?

Not really ferry. My main job as I say was to take orders, people or whatever from where I berthed in Moresby to whatever ship they were wanted

06:00 on and the main job was Wednesday, I think it was the AMWAS I used to take swimming and on Friday it would be the nurses and the more senior female staff in the other services. Take them over to the local island, let them go swimming, have a good time, go for it girls, I’ll wait for you.

What were the girls like, the AMWAS girls?

They were all right.

06:30 But from there on, you shut up. I don’t mean you shut up because you did something, you shut up so you didn’t get in to strife. As I say, I saw too much of people having to marry somebody because of about half an hour’s stupidity. I didn’t have half an hour’s stupidity when I got married, it took me two and a half years.

For the record, your wife’s just come

07:00 **into the room so we’d better be discreet.**

Oh no. We don’t have secrets, we can’t afford to.

Can you tell us on camera the story about the ANGAU [Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit] who ended up getting a native girl in the family way?

I can only tell you this much that he was one of the cook boys I had. They were nice, good kids. They were not trouble, do anything, bring you a few fish, things like that

07:30 and he just come up one day and this is what he told me. I can’t remember his name. Anyway I didn’t speak pidgin, only on a very, very restricted basis. What he said to me, he was annoyed because it happened to be an ANGAU fellow who would be the Father of the girl’s child. He being ANGAU was supposed to be like

08:00 a captain, above all and to do a thing like that to one of his, well he was a bit annoyed.

So what was the end result of this conception?

I wasn’t up there long enough to find how the union ended up but I would assume that under the circumstances, ANGAU being what it is, that man would have had to marry

08:30 that girl and he would have to make her an allotment and I would be prepared to say that if she's still alive today, dead or alive him, she's still getting something because that was part of the, not part of the deal as far as having intercourse was concerned but if you got them in to trouble. You talk about the girls on the Wato. The same thing happened here. I could have been blamed a hundred times

09:00 that nurse so and so was pregnant but how the hell could I deny it. The easiest way to deny it is to never let anything happen that could incriminate you. I would rather come home rather than come home.

That's a fairly level-headed approach for a young navy guy.

Isn't life worked on a

09:30 level-headed approach? I don't take drugs, I know too much about them. I don't get drunk these days, I've been there and done that. So now the level-headed approach is coming out in other things. I know what you're saying. I agree with what you're thinking but I can assure you this, that I will say it in the presence of my wife, there was only three women I knew who would have ever got to the stage where Pat is. One of them was going to have

10:00 the mink coat, found another bloke, tata. The other one Pat met her one night at the ball. She said, "Oh, she's [(UNCLEAR)]" So I bowed out on that. So Patricia fell victim to the trap.

It sounds like you really enjoyed your time on the Wato.

Well I did because I did more or less what I wanted to. The only thing about the

10:30 Wato was that the machinery was well worn. Insofar as we dropped the anchor one day when there was an air raid on, went out, did my fingers because the whole chain slipped the gear that brings it in. Squashed my bloody fingers, hell of a mess. However, they're not too bad today. These are the things. As well as the engine instead of going at I suppose at about four or five knots I'm only going at about two knots.

11:00 Then when the second in charge of Basilisk, decided one day he wanted to go to one of the native compounds up near the Fly River it took us for bloody ever to get there. However we went up, spent the night there. I had my boat I had somewhere to sleep, why should I worry. Up we go. Need to see a bloke with a beard and this part of his mouth here

11:30 all cigarette smoke stained. The old bamboo piece, put the cigarette in. I don't know what else they put in.

That was you was it?

No way Jose, no way. These were shore blokes, they had the missions around the place. I don't know but I would hazard a guess that the Wato Mission was a Catholic mission and I don't say that for any reason other

12:00 than it was always told to me as something that was worthy talking of. Their boat was certainly nice.

What did you see of army personnel in New Guinea?

Not much. We had our job to do, they had theirs. The only time we ever met army personnel or the Yanks was

12:30 on picture night. That wasn't always the greatest of memories either because it didn't take much to stir up a fight between the Yanks and our blokes. They'd get in to it quick and lively.

What did you see of that?

Well you've heard about you can either stay there and get your head knocked off, that only ever happened once and that was down at Johnnies which was a naval rest, sleep house down in

13:00 Sydney. All we sailors on night leave we used to sleep at Johnnies, cost about sixpence a night or something. You got a bed in a dormitory and you might have about a dozen drunks all around you or other things. But you go down to what they call the snake pit, that's where the grog was. You'd go down there and you'd hiss and piss as they used to say. You'd drink grog until it come out. Now and then a fight developed. One developed there one night and I thought

13:30 "Well I'd better be in this and help my mob" but somebody hit me that hard there was only about three hits in it. I had two at him and he had one at me. Then his brother come along and said, "What did you hit him for, you know he's on our side." But that was one ship fighting another ship. Of course the other guy didn't know. However, my sister wrote and said, "I believe you got a black eye Reggy". I said, "How do you know?" and she said, "It's marvelous who you meet?" That's what I say, you never

14:00 talk about people, somebody knows you.

What sort of movies did you get to see up in Port Moresby?

The movies were not what I'd say, as Pat would tell you, I am not a movie man today. What used to be was they did put on some cabaret shows. I mean we had our boys who used to like to dress up as girls

and they'd put on a little song and dance and all this sort of thing. Well that was a bit of a change

14:30 to normal routine. We'll say no more. You enjoy it, about a month later they might put on another one. But movies no, I was never attracted to the movies. What would I do? I'd go and listen to the radio. What I used to like most of all was old Jack Davie and his mate, pick a box. Listen to them and just settle down there for the night.

15:00 I found if you could get sleep it got rid of more time than walking around doing nothing. I walk around here doing nothing because I can't sleep at night.

Did you see any of the official Australian entertainment unit shows?

No, American. I only saw about one or two of them. By the time they get up in their camps they're eight or nine mile away. We've got to get eight or nine mile. Maybe you could thumb a ride and get up but then you've got to thumb

15:30 a ride and get back. Then they might tell you to go and get lost. Give you the Port Moresby salute or something. Then you're stuck. You've got to get home.

How did you keep in touch with your Mother and family?

Letter.

How often did you do that?

I suppose I'd write every, two or three times a week. Of course what we had to our advantage there, you could always make a nice big letter. They had things

16:00 called censors. So just to make the letter look good you just cut out a quarter of the page here and half a page up there and the second one the same thing and then fold up and put it in an envelope and they think you had a good letter but the censors knocked it all about.

It must have been quite difficult for your Mum to have two boys in harms way.

Yes it was.

16:30 That was a bit rough. Regrettably Walter, that's the other brother, he had tuberculosis in the first case and he developed it more as time went on and he eventually came back in to Concord Hospital. I was working at Whyalla on the ships. He met himself a little darling, Flo I think was her name and he and Flo came back to

17:00 Murwillumbah. Pat and I, I was on leave and we joined them in Murwillumbah for about two or three days. I had to go back to ship, Walter went back to Glen Innes and Flo and the next thing we know he's in Concord Hospital. He died in Concord Hospital about a week after they were married. Everything in our life has happened near something.

17:30 My birthday, Dad, our marriage, Walter. There's too many.

You mentioned that he had been in the Australian Army, why had he been discharged?

Walter was a very active and agile type of guy. He, well he sort of didn't know any bounds in what you might call frivolity. He would jump around here and there and if you went past a creek he'd probably jump in and swim to the other side.

18:00 I think they call it hyperactive these days. He wasn't that way. That was Walter. He joined the army, got through the camera, he went to Brisbane and they put him in front of the small camera and they took a picture and they found he had TB [tuberculosis]. So then they put him in and then they discharged him. As I said to you he wasn't happy with that. He on his own initiative joined the American

18:30 ships on a liberty ship or applied and was accepted and he went through the Marshall Islands with that. When his ship went back to the [United] States, being an alien he had to leave the ship. When he left the ship they x-rayed him and they found he had TB again.

19:00 So they put him in to the Layo Hospital in California and fixed him up and sent him back here but of course it was too late. So he come back here and when he got crook, I'll say this for the army, they at least took him back and put him into Concord. That's where he died. Now Dad's already died TB, Walter's dying

19:30 of TB and my sister is doing exactly the same thing a couple of years later.

From Basilisk

20:00 **you joined the Kanimbla?**

Basilisk, I went and did a gunnery course.

That's right, I beg your pardon. Where did you join the Kanimbla?

That's a good question. It probably would have been in New Guinea. I'd have joined it in New Guinea off the minelaying ship we had which was a dirty old coal burner but it used to run around the ports up there laying mines and the reason for that was because

20:30 the Kanimbla would normally be in what you might call a semi-sheltered harbour where she couldn't be too observed and this ship would go close. I can't think of the name. Thank God it was only a very short trip. I didn't like that. It was easier to put oil in to a ship than coal.

How had the Kanimbla been modified from its merchant days?

I didn't know her as

21:00 an armed merchant cruiser but I would imagine that anything of a luxury nature was taken out, anything of a nature not as strong as it ought to be for gunnery was added and these six-inch guns were put on. Now the six-inch guns that she had on her I don't think would be of the same quality as the six inch guns that we had on the Hobart. In other words she was more a ship to go out and tell the story

21:30 if they see anything whereas Hobart was meant to fight and fight she could.

What about AA [anti-aircraft] defenses on the ship?

I don't know what the AMCs [Armed Merchant Cruisers] would have had, armed merchant cruisers but no doubt they would have had something like the point fives. Oerlikons hadn't really come in to the picture then. Oerlikons I think was a Swiss or Swedish gun and they were quickly snaffled up when available.

22:00 **So when you joined the Kanimbla what did it have then, point fives?**

I think it had some sort of a Bofor I think, two mounted up forward in a pit as a degree of anti-aircraft defence. No, she was not set up for defence, I won't say of any sort but of any major sense. All she was, she had troops, she had to get them there, she didn't want to get in to a fight with other ships

22:30 because she had all these troops on and as soon as she got in and landed them and had done her job she was able to get back and go to the next.

So the Kanimbla was a Mother ship for barges?

No, not a Mother ship, she carried the barges. She carried ten barges. I don't know how many men would fit in to each barge but certainly I suppose seventy or eight.

How were those barges launched?

Off davits.

23:00 They were put in the water alongside the ship and what we call scrambling nets were put over the side and the troops would go down the scrambling net on to the barge because you've got the rise and fall of the boat in the water.

You obviously feel quite strongly that the Kanimbla doesn't get the reputation or doesn't get the applause that she deserves.

Exactly right. Until the day I die I will condemn the Australian government on not making some recognition,

23:30 particularly the personnel, because believe you me, we suffered. Too right. We didn't get knocked about, we got kicked about. We got all these bloody aeroplanes trying to hit you. Going to be a bad night tonight sweetheart.

24:00 **Would you rather we didn't talk about that area any more?**

No, you ask and I'll answer as best I can.

I'm about doing what's best for you Reg.

I'll answer that this way, if you want to as me was I born yesterday, do it. Whatever's on there, you ask me. If I can, I will, if I feel it's a bit beyond the pale I'll tell you.

I think we'll leave it and we might come back to it later.

24:30 Might as well get it over.

Well my questions are fairly to do with more the technical side of things. When you're under air attack like that, the amount of lead, you must be throwing quite a lot back at all those planes, what does that look like, all that outgoing fire?

Well as far as six-inch and four-inch shells are concerned

25:00 you don't see much of them because they're very high speed and they do not have any tracer in them. The smaller guns, the Oerlikons, the point fives, they have a tracer in them and this of course helps the gunner to modify where he's firing. The only tell tale you have with the four-inch high angle gun is the

explosion. Now you've got to work out which is your explosion up there but

25:30 we know pretty well because we know high they are, we know what the fuse setting is and we know what the speed of the fuse is and that's why it is that way. You can write it up pretty well. The small arms are the only ones that fire anything you can follow, same as in an aircraft. See they're all fixed ammunition and when they fire I think about every one in five is a tracer

26:00 so they can see where they're going. Thank God the bloke that fired at me couldn't see.

You talked about in the turrets the shells are put in to a fusing box?

That's in the case of a four-inch because a four-inch shell is what we call fixed ammunition. In other words the shell and the charge are one. In the shell casing is the charge itself with a primer in one end

26:30 and that's it. To use it you simply put the thing in to the fuse setting machine which sets some figure, I don't know. From there you take it and you put it in the barrel of the gun and push it home, the block comes up and it seals it in there. It can't get your hand unless you're stupid because the base of the shell and the block are one and the same.

27:00 When the block comes up, it pushes your hand out of the way. You get it out quicker than that if you can. From there it fires. When the gun fires on the recoil the cartridge case is ejected ready for the next one. This is what happens. With a six-inch gun the shells come up in a hoist, the hoist is steered behind the barrel of the gun, the gun is lowered, you have a rammer that rams it in and the idea is to ram it

27:30 in hard so that the copper driving bands on the shell will bite in to the lands that are there to spin the shell. Having that done then you put the cordite in and then you close the breach block, which has semi rotary action. With that in then you apply a fuse, a firing fuse. Until such time that that bloke up there in the director pulls the trigger nothing happens unless

28:00 you're doing what we call local firing when I in the front of the turret am satisfied, I would pull the trigger. I only ever did that three or four times. That was more in Berbera than anywhere, when we were just blowing things apart.

Say on those four-inch guns, what rate of fire could you get going?

Whatever you could punch in to them. I'd say, I wouldn't like to put a figure but I'd say ten or fifteen a minute

28:30 and being twin mountings of course that got rid of your supply pretty quick too didn't it.

What happened to the casings?

They just bounced back on board. I'll show you a picture later, on the Swan we have casings they stack them up and the reason for that was being brass casings they cost a couple of bob and to overcome the expense

29:00 they would be saved, brought back, returned, cleaned and rearmed with a shell and the cordite and a new fuse in the back end. It was just a money saving device.

When you were using those four inches for say air defence, the timing fuses, they were set by the gun director?

The fuse was set

29:30 by an electrical impulse sent from what we might now call a computer down there to a receiver. You'd never know what the figures were unless you looked. You put it in there and as soon as you put it in there it activated, it just rotated a little something in the nose of the fuse and you put it in the gun. From there on it was all up to that little rotation. That sort of a shell

30:00 was not effective against let's say a ship because the shell is much weaker with the fuse up there. With a six-inch shell that we used against ship against ship they had about I think it was two layers in the construction of the shell. The reason being that when the shell hit the ship or the other thing the first shell had

30:30 made an impression that the second part coming through would in theory penetrate and having penetrated then it would explode. Whether this actually happened this way or not I don't know. I was told that was the thing. But they were only used against targets, the others, fuse shells were used against air craft or in the case of a six-inch gun where they had a fuse, if there was a batch of soldiers over there coming over they might put a fused shell in and blow it

31:00 out there and hope it blew up over the top of their heads.

In the case where you're under attack from so many aircraft how do you choose a target?

That behooves the bloke up, the gunnery officer would select his target and that's it. In the case of Harry Howden on the Hobart, Harry Howden was a wonderful man, it didn't happen in my time on the Hobart, in the Coral Sea he would

31:30 lay on his back with his binoculars and he would watch the aircraft come over. It is written in words so I'm not making it up and as soon as he saw the bomb bays open he would say to the navigator, whoever it was, "Stop all port engines, full astern port engines, full ahead starboard engines" and swing the ship out of the way and that ship was never hit. She got hit with a torpedo in the Coral Sea

32:00 and had to come back to Sydney and be repaired. Rumour has it that it wasn't an aimed torpedo, it was a rogue torpedo that had been fired at something and, okay, Hobart, you're in the way, get out, bang. Had I been in the turret where I would normally would have been, Y turret, I would not be here today because that torpedo blew the whole gun out of its mounting on to

32:30 an angle and also blew a great hole in the back end of the ship. That must have been terrible but I didn't want to be there then so I got off.

In the case of those Leyte and Lingayen engagements it must be when there's that many planes and that many ships around the place especially with the rapid fire weapons, how do you avoid hitting your own vessels if you're engaging low altitude targets?

Well a gun is normally made in such a fashion

33:00 that's a good question, in such a fashion, say we've got a six-inch gun there and there's a ship over there I can't shoot it because there is a thing in here that stops you shooting when the gun is at a danger angle. That's what stops you. Now if we went over here it would be just the same thing until you get out of that angle, you can't do a thing. Overhead guns will only come so far and then they've got to

33:30 rotate around the other to get him on the other side, they can't follow him over.

So in the case of say a torpedo bomber that's coming in at a very low altitude, how would you engage?

That would be a job for the small arms people as well as maybe the four-inch bloke, he might have a shot too. In a thing like this the gunnery officer would say, "Pick your own target". The blokes with the heavy shooting would be told where to shoot. The blokes with the lesser

34:00 armament, pick your own target. Well if half a dozen blokes saw this fella coming in out here they might all concentrate on him and hopefully get him. Then by the same token a bloke over the other side might be missed because they're all working on this. There's no rule that you can't defeat in this situation. Target of choice.

In the movies when you see a plane get hit it sort of spurts smoke and goes gently into the ocean, I imagine

34:30 **that's not what it's like at all.**

Not always. The nearest thing that ever hit us was a plane with a bomb in it and it came down and I suppose if I said from here to that window over there that would be roughly like it but it was just coming down. You knew damn well it wasn't going to hit you because of the angle. Why, had the pilot been killed? Had some of his flying gear been knocked around? No, he

35:00 comes down and goes in the water and good luck mate, you missed.

Did you see a lot of planes hit?

Yes, well I'll say yes because it's hard to tell. There's so much going on up there, so much shrapnel, so much machine-gun and all this sort of thing. I think it's a bit difficult for anyone to say that he shot it down. I often wonder when all the fighters go up and they get stuck in to the Germans how they can count how many they shoot down unless they've

35:30 got a camera going in their cockpit or something.

Was any of the shrapnel landing on deck on the Kanimbla?

No. As far as I know there was nothing happened to the Kanimbla in the two trips that I was on it. We come out unscathed.

Why do you think that was?

Good luck. It's all it could have been.

36:00 Everything was against us, against the ship. As far as mechanical action is concerned, flying, firing, bombing, torpedoing, no, didn't hit us.

It's a strange question but the Japanese kamikaze pilots, at the time did you think of them as courageous?

No, bloody stupid. Would you fly a plane onto a ship knowing you're going to die?

36:30 No way. I mean, you might in the end. We don't know the mental make up of these people. What about these fellas in Iran who fill the car up with dynamite, run it alongside something and blowing it up and

blowing themselves up. What's the logic? What's their thinking? We don't know, do we? I know somebody used to say, "You give me until he's seven and I've got him forever". Well if you've got a pilot

37:00 and you hammer him with certain things for a certain time, you say, "There's the plane, away you go". Is he going to follow instructions or is he going to follow his own conscience?

At what point did you leave the Kanimbla?

I left the Kanimbla just prior to the bombardment of Brunei and Balikpapan and I joined the Hobart. That was when the Hobart came back

37:30 after having had the refit done after her torpedo attack and I don't know just where I did join her but I did. In fact my shore time was very limited. I used to seem to walk from one ship to the other, one ship to a shore base like Karangow [?], like Basilisk and from there I'd get a week's holiday, fortnight's holiday, come back and on board a ship. I have

38:00 a little dossier in there that I've made out that I would like to show you. I think in all the years the war was on my shore time totaled four months and that's not long.

Were you glad to be back on board the Hobart?

Yes.

The shore bombardments, particularly at Balikpapan were some of the most intense of the war, could you describe from your point of view?

Yes I could

38:30 because I just felt that now it's our turn. We're pouring shells in to it like we're running out of time. If you've never seen rockets fired from barges, you've seen nothing. Barges stood off with the rockets and how many they fired at a time I've got no idea but the sky was full of rockets going, all going one way.

What do they sound like?

You don't hear them going through the air, you

39:00 don't hear much going off because they were a bit too far away but by gee I tell you what, you saw. Made you feel good. No wonder the old nips gave up in there because they must have been feeling mighty uncomfortable.

You must have been working hard in the turrets as well?

No, I was given rather a privileged part in so far as I was what they call the turret trainer. You had the bloke who was the turret trainer

39:30 looking through, sighting ports and you had the bloke inside who was the turret layer, the gunlayer. He saw nothing because all he did was follow the pointer, all I did was follow a pointer but while I'm following the pointer I can look out there and see what's happening. This was a big thing. What was happening out there suited me because I didn't know if that was my shell or our shell that hit something over there or if it was Bob Maloney's but I know it hit it because I saw it blow up and that was a big thing.

40:00 That's quite good. I look on the Hobart with an awful lot of reverence. I do. And I think the bloody Japs bought it.

You felt satisfied to be giving something back?

At Balikpapan, yes.

40:30 I was also satisfied when I saw all those bloody rockets go. I'd never seen them come the other way thank God but I've seen them go that way. That made me feel a lot better because what they were handing out, they were getting back.

Tape 8

00:34 **Okay Reg, how did you meet Pat?**

Well in the good old days there wasn't much to do on a Sunday. I very soon learned that by getting drunk, getting sick, having headaches and all wasn't much fun so then I had to devise another method of filling my time in. It so happened that on a couple of occasions I went down to the Sydney Domain.

01:00 Down the Domain we used to have all sorts of people. There was Mrs. Green over here, she used to preach the Bible, "He's coming. Can't you see him in the clouds. He's coming. Praise the Lord." All this nonsense. There's another bloke over there with a bottle and a thing, this is gallstones bloke, he's trying to sell you stuff for gallstones. The bloke over here he's the Labour party, he's trying to tell you about

the Labour party. All this sort of thing is going on. It used to be interesting going from one to the other. I never saw any fisticuffs anywhere between

01:30 the observers or the observed. It all just worked out nicely. I was down there one day and a couple of good looking sorts over there, threw a bit of a net around and I thought, “Not bad.” I said, “Listen shorty, you can take my place here if you want to have a look”. Okay, she accepted the invitation and took the place and I brought her mate over with her. Time to go home. I said, “Where do you live?” She said, “Strawberry Hills” and I thought, “Hello, got a bloody smartarse here”.

02:00 You know where Strawberry Hills is? The corner of Cleveland Street and Elizabeth Street, it’s the post office. However we go out there and we get out of the tram at this particular place and walk up and over the hill and I thought, “Oh, hello, this is an elevated place”. Didn’t call it Surrey Hills, we used to call it Serrai Heights to get rid of the downside. So away we go.

02:30 I didn’t go in and meet Mum and Dad for a while. In the end I went in and I met Mum and Dad and I thought, “I’ll have to be a bit careful here.” Quite some time after I’d been going in, I’d never go in empty handed, always take something, the beans, the scallops, maybe the prawns, particularly on a Friday night. I wasn’t a bludger. I mean that. If I was to bludge then I would expect them to tell me to go,

03:00 to move over. However it didn’t happen. That would have been I suppose about February 1947. Well living in Cleveland Street as they did opposite a tram stop was a bit noisy then I have related to you how things developed in my favour at home. I got invited

03:30 by the lady who owned the premises that Pat’s Mum and Dad were renting in Cleveland Street to occupy a room in that building as long as I’d, all night. The reason being that this old darling, she’s a bit nuts and the old radio aerials they used to hang up in the sky and bring in through the window, they had one of these going. She said to me,

04:00 “They take them in there and cook them”, I said, “They what?” “Shh, don’t make noise” “You silly old bugger”. So anyway we go up and the bathroom had a tin floor and every time you touched it, “Don’t make a noise”. So I didn’t know how to treat this lot. I thought, well, I’ve got to put up with something to get something I want or someone to get someone I wanted. So I did. So I had my bed in the next to the bathroom

04:30 and she’d come in at night and she’d put her hand, “Are you awake mister?” God, talk about seeing bloody spooks. However, I wore it out. To cut a long story short, Pat’s Mum and I, we went shopping for houses and we saw this pretty little house at number ten Westminster Street, Bexley and as I told you, we bought it, cash on the docket. We went and got the key off the man,

05:00 cash on the knocker and we went out and then from there Pat’s Mum and Dad moved in to that house. Of course with the hopefully bride and that was the beginning. It was about two and a half years we were going together before her Father one night said to us, “Listen, if you want to carry on with this you’d better go up and see the bloke in the church” So Mother has never, ever to this day given us permission

05:30 and she’s dead. So up we go to church and we had a little chat with the bloke. He said, “Sit down. Your name?” and I said, “Reginald Victor Pope”, “Address?” “Number whatever it was Westminster Street, Bexley.” He said, “Mother’s name?” I said, “Mary Kosiah Pope” “Father’s name?” “Walter Pope, deceased”. Okay, so then Pat gets brought in. He said, “What’s your name?” she said, “Cosiah Patricia” he said “What?”

06:00 she said, “Cosiah Patricia” he said, “Are you two related?” I said “Not yet but if you get on with your job it won’t be long before we are.” So that was the beginning. We were married on the 26th of November 1949. I won’t tell you what I said to Pat when I got married.

06:30 However, everything I wanted come good. I had a house that was mine, I had a wife that was mine and ten months later I had a son that was ours. The world was mine. That’s when it all started. Of course then the navy saw or had the audacity to send me up to Manus Island. In the mean time Pat’s Mother and Father had been able to move in to a house

07:00 in Arncliffee because the guy who had been in there was an ex-serviceman and they couldn’t get him out. He voluntarily went so they moved in to that house. Me being in Manus Island I said to Pat, “Well if you feel like you should sell the house and go and live with your Mum and Dad when we come back we’ll buy another one.” When we come back I got enough money to buy a block of land. She sold the house

07:30 for two thousand seven hundred pounds and it was all in keeping when we got back and that was our sum total. So then we had to do something because I regret to say that Pat’s Mum wasn’t an easy woman to live with, not that she hounded us, she had a problem with some other drug, which we won’t talk about. We bought a block of land over in Kingsgrove. The grass was that high.

08:00 I borrowed a scythe off a bloke and I went through the whole block with a scythe and cut the grass down. I broke his scythe and had to buy a new one to give him. However, that was done and then in the end I drew the plans for the house and I gave them to an architect to tidy up and put together. I knew

some ex-navy blokes who were bricklayers and I commissioned them to build the house. We were going along quite fine.

08:30 The carpenter who I had brought in to the job, he lived close by and he was a nice chap too and everything went well. There was only one problem because as the house was going up our house didn't have corners, it had all rounded bricks which meant that to start a rounded brick off you had to have a thing on the bottom called a start and on the top the same thing called a stop.

09:00 You couldn't get a lorry load of these in because you didn't want them so periodically I'd have to say to Pat, "Would you go down to the Bond Street where it was and get them to cut the stops and starts up." There was only one problem. We had a Vanguard car. Now between the steering wheel and the front seat there wasn't much room and for some reason best known to Pat she started to develop some weight. This was son number two coming along

09:30 and of course she had trouble getting on. However she did it, we got them, we got all the stops and starts and eventually the house was built. We moved the whole lot, lock, stock and barrel from her Mother's place in to ours and when we moved in we didn't have a stick of furniture. We had boxes for tables and seats and then I had to get busy. I did the internal things myself. I built the cupboards, I built this, that and the other. Because I'd asked

10:00 Saint George Building Society for a loan, this is where I got my money from to get the house. It was quoted to me at three thousand one hundred pound but when I decided to do it myself and with the help of the others we cut that down to a thousand pounds. So then I went and saw DVA [Department of Veterans Affairs] and said, "Can I get a home loan". He said, "What stage are you at?" I said,

10:30 "Well I've got a loan at the moment from St [Saint] George Building Society and the house is finished" "Oh no, no hope" I said, "What's wrong?" he said, "If you'd have come to us first and asked us we would have given you permission to go somewhere and get the loan. I was paying more money for the bridging loan that I had had to get because I couldn't get the other loan until DVA come good on the second round than you could poke a stick at. So we decided to sell that.

11:00 I left, where was I then. I was in the navy. That's right, that mongrel job I talked about. We left there and I went over to Croydon near Parramatta Road because I had gotten a job at Shell. I thought well the bus goes up and down, I'll just get a bus. When I got over there there was no bus. It had all been bought out by the government who forced people on to the trains. Anyway we got out of that all right.

11:30 I bought a little car. I had motorbikes, I had cars, I had all sorts of things. We were going all right then our daughter number three come along. So everything was going fine. Because of the amount of interest I had to pay the DVA when I bought the house or when we bought the house at Croydon was about two per cent. So I used to have

12:00 most of my money paid in to them each pay day and at one stage there I had about four years I needn't have paid rent. I thought, "No, I'll fix this up", so we finished it off and paid the ruddy thing off.

We're going to go back a bit now. I just want to talk to you about how it was for you when you first got back from your war service, settling back in to your life on the land?

12:30 As I said my time expired in the navy and I got sent up to Manus Island as the chief warden of the war criminal compound. That was thirteen months away. In this time Alan had aged from about four months to thirteen months and when I got back home because Pat was living with her Mother, Alan had to get out of her bed and in to his cot and this was when he said to his Mother in the morning, "Mum, I hate that man in your bed."

13:00 How did I settle in? Difficult because here I have a son that I've got to get to know and his Father as far as he was concerned was my Father in law because Pat's Dad was a real man with babies. He'd look after him, he'd take him, all this sort of stuff. It made it very difficult for me. However, the years rolled on and we moved over to Croydon as I say and that sort of divorced him from pop. Slowly we regained a bit of

13:30 confidence in each other and I at this time had taken a job, I was at Watson's bay. I was doing ships in reserve, all the ships that were tied up in reserve around Sydney at about four different locations. I used to have to go in of a morning and go round, see what work had to be done, all this, that and the other.

14:00 It so happened that I saw an ad in the paper while I was on leave, wanted a man in a plastic factory so I went down to a place called Neo Plastics in Canal Road in Sydney and I said to the bloke, "You want a bloke to work mate?" he said, "yep", I said, "I'm prepared to give it a go" he said, "All right". So he took me on and he showed me what I had to do. I had to get some powder, put it in the thing, put it in the machine, pull a handle, press it

14:30 and make these light sockets and all these things. So when the first Friday came I said to him, "I'm going to have to leave you next week" and he said, "Why? You're doing all right" and I said, "I know but the navy's got first call on me." He said, "Can you fit in any time at all?" I said, "I'll get here maybe by about five o'clock or a bit later and I'll go until the last bus comes through and go home". That meant from about half past five

15:00 until half past ten I'd go and work there each night, get the bus, go home, I would get Alan who was as I say just coming around my way, still a little rock and roll and I'd pick him up, Mother would be asleep. Can I tell this bit? So I'd get him and she'd snore so I'd say, "Here you are mate", pick up, away he'd go, change his nappy

15:30 take him off for a milk supply and put back to bed. This went on for a while. Like all things it came to an end and from the plastic factory I had to revert to the navy proper. Where did I go after that?

Can I ask about Manus Island, when did you go up there?

I went to Manus Island in

16:00 February 1951.

So quite a lot later?

Alan was four months old when I went up. In the time I was there my job, there was about five wardens if I remember correctly. Now a warden's job was to go out as a supervisor to parties of Japanese who were sent out as work parties to various projects.

16:30 They didn't carry arms either. The only arms they had was the police boys. The police boys would have their .303 rifle and that was the only protection we had. However, remember what I said about the Japs before, it's a wonder they didn't attack us because we're outnumbered but no, we got away with it. Night-time, come and lock them up. They'd go and do their cooking, have their meals and so ends the day.

17:00 **What contact did you have with the executions and war crime trials?**

Very close. As I said the order came through of either twelve or fifteen, I don't remember the exact number who were in what we call the death cells which ones were to be hung and which ones were to be moved

17:30 out of the cells back to the main compound. I had to get the weights and all as I said which I did and I was told later on that the reason I had to do it was because the commandant couldn't get his next in charge, a lieutenant, to go and do what they told me to do. As I said to him before, "If you want anything done I'll see if I can give it a go".

18:00 This was when I got called in and asked if I would go and get their weights and heights and bring them back to us. As I said before I told him I would and I told you how I did it. I took the weights back and gave them to him and then on the night of the 10th of June 1951 we separated A from B.

18:30 The Bs we took back to the compound and the As we left there, gave them their paper and all that to write their notes on for the night and it rained. It rained so hard that the pits that had been dug, concrete pits that had been dug and concreted and all the logs laid in them with the two drums of diesel on each end to cremate them after they'd been hung was washed away. When I say everything, I mean everything. In the morning the message comes through that we're going to get on with the job

19:00 and finish it off. We had to go out about four in the morning, still raining, wasn't too good and I loaded them in to the truck, the truck drove up to the gallows and as their name was called so I pushed them out on to the road to march up to the gallows and then the hanging took place.

What kind of crimes were these men guilty of?

Beheading ours,

19:30 cruel to ours, all sorts, heinous crimes, really were. Not worth repeating.

Did you feel any degree of sympathy for them?

No, not really. Because there was an element you could perhaps. The Japanese system was this, if I tell you to do it, you do it.

20:00 You don't say I don't like it like the lieutenant wouldn't go and do the weights and that for the commandant. You were told and if you didn't you copped it. This was it. So people did it. Knowing this was the Japanese way of life at times I might have felt a little bit of something towards them but the final thing is they did it. I don't know what I'd have done if I'd have been in their position, I've got no idea but I certainly would have tried to back off

20:30 chopping a bloke's head off with a sword and watching the blood shoot here and there and civilians. I didn't see any executions of the Japs on our people. I hadn't seen any. I only read and I had to read details some of it.

Why did you have to read that information?

Well it's one thing to be told and I have two books in there

21:00 but it's another thing to read. A story has a beginning and end. What I did to the Japs was the end, therefore I had to read something to find the beginning. When I had done this then I was more at ease within myself for any part I played in the execution of those men.

Why were you posted there to do that work?

It was a navy

21:30 commitment. It once belonged to the army when it was in Rabaul and for some reason best known they decided to shift it over to Manus Island. There was a degree of internal bickering between the army, the Americans and the navy about what was going on at Manus Island. However, a time limit was set for certain things to happen

22:00 and in the end the navy won out so they became the masters of the compound on Manus island. It was from there on that everything rotated as far as the Japs were concerned. The man, Nishimoro, number one, I don't know. Okay, he was the boss, he was in charge, he could have said, "No, don't do it" but apparently he didn't. So what do you say? You organized it, you saw it done,

22:30 or saw it was done and therefore you cop the backlash.

How did it affect you at the time?

Well it wasn't something I wrote a long story about but it didn't worry me in this way, that having some idea of what they'd done and in some cases, how they had, the acts that they performed to do what they did do,

23:00 I simply took on the attitude that, okay mate, you've fixed my mate, I'll go and fix you up, finished.

Did the prisoners seem remorseful?

Collectively we didn't have any trouble, we had no riots, no nothing in the time I was there. Yes, now and then one bloke might go off a little bit on a tangent and then the first thing to do was to get hold of a Japanese

23:30 and make him responsible for quieting him. In other words, we were doing to them what their own superiors did to them. But we didn't have much trouble. We only had one, my friend over here, George Cheetam who was a carpenter, he had a group of carpenters out one day and one Jap came down to hit him with a shovel but he was a bit slow, the police boys got him first.

24:00 **To what extent did you see Australian men venting their anger or hatred or frustration on the prisoners?**

I didn't. I was spared that. I suppose if you, having asked that question and dare I say it the only one who sort of vented his spleen a little bit on that might have been we wardens. But they weren't allowed to

24:30 manhandle in any way shape or form. Their job was to supervise the work to be done. The police boy was to supervise that the Japs did as they were told. End of story.

Can you describe the prison itself?

Yes, it was along a foreshore, quite a lengthy piece of landfill. You had about

25:00 three houses, you had the commandant who had his wife and family there, you had two other houses I think where the lesser navy people lived, then you had the ANGAU house where the ANGAU officer lived and then we come to the store where all the equipment was kept for whatever work had to be done, picks, axes, saws and all this sort of thing. Then we had the administration block.

25:30 From there you went in to the general compound where about two hundred and fifty were held and in that area we had a sick bay where people who were sick or infectious with diseases were isolated. You had a clearance of nothing which isolated the Japs from those down in the other end where the police boys lived

26:00 and then there was another area where it was rather open and down at the far end in what we call the death cells I think we had fifteen cells in total where they were housed and beyond that was where the army corps had built what was once a workshop for trucks. When this other business came on it was realized that it wouldn't be a big job

26:30 to convert what was because the trucks used to go up on a lift so they could work underneath. Where the lift was so they built the floor for the gallows.

How secure were the buildings?

Well they saw me out up there. We were the second lot of wardens up there. The first lot came home in February 1951

27:00 when we took over.

When was the prison built?

I'd have to make a bit of a guess at that, that would have been built probably by works, it might have been built by the Japs maybe and I'm only guessing so please allow me to make a few errors. I would believe that the Japs were brought in, they

27:30 were in Quonset huts [prefabricated huts] same as our quarters, seen a Quonset? Well you know what we're talking about. They were the main buildings. It wouldn't take long to put them up. This is what they had as their main dormitories where they lived and cooked and ate and all this sort of thing and slept. I don't know just when they were built but I would say that

28:00 maybe a working party was brought down, where they got the Quonset huts from I don't know but they were put there on the site and I would imagine that the Japs would have had to put them together for their own convenience.

How much did you communicate with the prisoners?

I didn't. No. I had a job to do and they had a job to do as they were told.

You mentioned one who spoke English.

28:30 The Japanese interpreter, a fellow called Mukahata and he was a doctor and he was in the main compound and he was the alternate liaison between a Japanese and the commandant. We had two army sergeants up there who were very proficient in the Japanese language who were the main interpreters. Any interpreting to be done they did it between the commandant and the other guy or that guy and the commandant.

29:00 Mukahata was only there to listen to what was said to see that or hear that it was all above board.

How long did you spend on Manus Island?

Too long. Twelve months at the compound. One month as acting master at arms up at the depot.

Did you find after your thirteen months there that there were imagines difficult to shift

29:30 **in your mind?**

When you come home? Well I had a couple of things to take my mind off it. The little rock and roll, my wife and a job I had to do to build a house. Even today, well you've seen what happened today, it's still there. We went back to a reunion in Maroochydore

30:00 here not long ago for those of us who were stationed on Manus Island. Pat and I went up, we joined this group up there having a lovely time. The women were telling Pat about a wonderful time they had. They had boys that did the garden, they had girls that did the sewing, the cooking, looking after the kids, having a wonderful time. She said, "Well when were you there?" They gave her a

30:30 time or a year when they went up. She said, "You should have been there when my husband was there, we weren't even allowed to talk on the telephone." We used to have one radio phone contact a month provided the atmospherics were such that they could raise Sydney. I used to ring the lady next door to where Pat was and she'd go in and get on the phone. If we had five minutes we had a long time. So we didn't have a lot of time.

31:00 You can't say much in five minutes. That was it. I used to send her a letter home, I suppose three or five times a week. One thing I must say, the mail was constant both ways, out and in. The aircraft that would bring the mail in would bring the vitals in to Momote airfield and our truck, our jeep would go out to Momote airfield and meet the plane, pick up the vitals for

31:30 the compound, pick up the mail for the compound and come back. The worst thing that ever happened up there was the fact that the troops could go and buy beer at a little naughty place around the corner, a few mile away. It used to be a little, got a bit hot at times.

Now before you went to Manus Island you actually left the navy, is that correct?

No.

It was after that?

Yes.

32:00 It was after I come back from Manus Island that I left the navy.

Can you tell us about that decision?

No. The most soul destroying job I ever had they called it the naval dockyard police. I would go to work today at six o'clock in the morning and come home at two o'clock in the afternoon. Tomorrow I would go to work at two o'clock in the afternoon and come home at ten o'clock at night.

32:30 The next go to work at ten o'clock at night and come home at six o'clock the next morning and I had the

day off didn't I, lovely. In the time we were there I'm sorry to say that I saw things weren't going well for Pat and the little fella, the baby. So I took proceedings to be discharged and I had the good fortune after a little while to be

33:00 given a free discharge. In other words the corner is still on my service certificate. Believe you me, I nearly lost three things. Bloody dockyard police, ought to shoot them. Do you know, in the years we were there I don't think we had a night out. My Mother got sick and I had to go

33:30 to Brisbane to see her. I got four nights of my shift off and for fifty-six days straight, it was over Easter, I had to go to work every day to make up for those four days. What a wonderful thing, the dockyard police, ought to be hung.

What sort of work were you doing?

On the police? It was only a security job to patrol Garden Island and other different places that they had to see that there was no pilfering

34:00 or nonsense going on. But there was a problem. At the gates when the dock people went ashore, left the job for the day, you were supposed to look in their bag and see they hadn't got anything they shouldn't have. But you couldn't look in to an officer's bag and you couldn't look in to a foreman's bag. End of story. I don't like that. If I can't look in your bag, I can't look in your bag.

34:30 If I can look in your bag, I can look in yours. I'm sorry, it doesn't appeal to me. One-eyed, no, I believe in balance.

Upon finally leaving the navy, how did you go?

Settle back? Well earlier I told you that I had taken on a carpentry and joinery course by correspondence.

35:00 It's a bit hard to be a sailor by day and a carpenter by night because you don't get much time to be a carpenter. So I went up to the department of labour and industry in York Street. The fellow said to me, "Can I help you?" I said, "I hope you can" and I put my papers on the table and I said to him, "There's my papers for carpentry and joinery, I would like to get a start

35:30 somewhere as a builder's labourer. From there on I will make it my effort to work my way up the ladder". He said, "Have you got a union ticket?" I said "No" "Well" he said "You won't get a job unless you've got a union ticket." I said "Where do I get a union ticket?" he said "You won't get a union ticket unless you've got a job" I said "Will you go through that again" Mind you, at this time Bob Menzies, that was in October 1950, Bob Menzies [Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia] had said any ex-serviceman wanting a job need

36:00 not have a union affiliation. The union was supposed to accept us as what we were and take us from there. Well, when that happened, that's when I made the bad mistake and re-engaged and got caught on Manus Island.

How long were you out of the navy for that time?

I wasn't out at all, continual service. The only time I was out of the navy was from

36:30 the 9th of October 1950 until about the second week in December 1950. They kept paying my wages and that's all I wanted. I had no engagement, they could have stopped paying me, I had not brief but then the chief writer Glen Denny used to say to me, "Hey Popey what are you going to do, are you going to re engage or get out?" I said "I'll tell you next week Glen." Well, okay, the bad signal came on a Friday

37:00 that said, "Chief Petty Officer Pope decision to be made by a.m. on Monday" So I said "I want the weekend to think it over" and he said "Righto." So I went home and I talked to Pat. "What do you say?" She said "Well you've had a couple of years here in Sydney." I said "Yep" "Give it a go." So I went back on Monday morning, I would say about eight o'clock I got hold of Glen Denny, I said, "Righto Glen, put my name down on the order mate." So

37:30 he put the order in and I would say by twelve o'clock the mongrel signal came back, Manus Island. That was how I got to Manus Island. When I came back from Manus Island as I said I took that other mongrel job on so I wouldn't get sent out of Sydney again. As I say, I nearly lost three people, Pat, my house and myself.

What was it about

38:00 **that work that was so soul destroying for you?**

The dockyard? No social life. Can you imagine going to work on those hours, six 'til two, two 'til ten, ten 'til six, when are you going to sleep, see. You might get one shift off a fortnight or three weeks, I can't quite remember what it was now but you're so tired by the time that comes, all you do is go to bed. Then you go to bed to sleep, you've got

38:30 little rock and roll, he's starting to cry and you say "Pat, shut that bloody kid up." What do you do? You

upset her, you upset the baby. When you turn the camera off I'll tell you a little story that I won't say on camera but is true of my immediate superior in the dockyard police.

39:00 **What was the best thing for you about finishing up with the navy?**

The best thing was getting rid of the navy. When I left the navy I didn't want anything to do with it. I didn't join ex-navy men, I didn't join anything that was associated with the navy. I was so disgusted, when my time come to finish, instead of taking me down and perhaps counseling, showing me which way to walk for jobs

39:30 and this sort of thing, ta ta, goodbye. I was thrown out like a dirty rag. That's why they did that, that's their business, I don't know but that's what happened. As I said to you, I was a sailor going out to work in the open world. Who wants a sailor in a shop? That's how I started. I say, it was only through a bit of good luck through my wife's contacts, my wife's Father's contacts with

40:00 somebody at Shell that ultimately I got a start and why ultimately because I was too old at thirty-five to start at Shell. Their age limit was thirty to sixty and the personnel officer said, "There's an ex-navy bloke in the store, if he'll have you, okay." So I went and saw this bloke in to a store, gee, what a place to send a bloke. The main thing was I got a start.

40:30 So from the store I went down to the yard where they have all these huge tanks, painting bitumen on them and all this, what a let down. From there I went in to the garage washing and greasing trucks, I had something in mind while this was going on and in the end I got to drive a little truck about this long with kerosene. In the end my friend took his trailer out and I said, "Hey Bill what about taking me down the copshop for a licence" he said "Righto." So I got in and we go down the copshop

41:00 for a licence and I got my licence to drive a trailer. I came back to Shell and after a few months I put in for a trailer job and I got it and I slowly built myself up to the biggest trailers, not the biggest, the second biggest and the bloke said to me one day, "They want somebody in the office down at LP Gas at Mortlake, what about it?" I thought, "That'll do me." So I went down there and I took on dispatch work, office, but however, it was close to home

41:30 so I took it on and I started down there. I finished with Shell from down there after a little altercation with my chief and the personnel officer at Shell said, "I want you to come in here on Monday" and I said "Unless my wife" he said, "and with your wife." He said to us "I will fix Murphy up" he said, "Do you still want to go?" and I said "Yes, I think that will be the best" and he said, "In due course you will get your discharge"

42:00 which I did get and I got everything that.

Tape 9

00:32 **Reg, when the Second World War ended, you'd signed up for twelve years in 1938, did you feel a bit jealous of the blokes who'd signed for the duration and got to leave?**

I suppose there was an element of that there, yes. Because we knew that the jobs that were going would be gone when we got out. Then on the other hand you had to realize, you volunteered to do it

01:00 and if you do, stick with your word. Don't go purging yourself halfway through it. In the end, as I say, this is why I when I did join the navy, I made it my business to get as far as I could and get as much pay as possible and I did that.

Did you never consider going for a commission?

No and the reason I didn't consider it, as a chief as I was

01:30 I didn't do duty nights as a rule, I had somebody to look after my mess and all that sort of thing. I suppose you might say I lived a bit like a king. The only night that I was duty in many years was the night that Alan was born at Rosalind Hospital and I was then out at Watson's Bay and I had to get special leave to go out and see him and Pat in the hospital. I got away at six o'clock,

02:00 Watson's Bay remember, and I had to be back on board by half past nine. Didn't have much time out there, did I. Anyway, it happened, it did and that was the first time I'd seen my son and almost the first time my wife had seen her son also.

When you were with BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] in Japan, I believe you had a job at the White Ensign Club?

02:30 I was offered the job at the White Ensign Club while the Hobart was back in Sydney but I declined because knowing the ship was coming to Sydney I wanted to go back to Sydney also. I had no idea of this young lass then, she wasn't on the sights.

What was the White Ensign Club?

White Ensign Club, it's like any club, we call it an RSL [Returned and Services League], we call it this, that and the other. That's an RN [Royal Navy]

03:00 expression and all it is the place where you go and eat, drink and be merry.

How merry did it get there?

It can get very merry. Depends how much merriment you have.

What sort of war damage did you see in Japan?

Well I have seen Hiroshima leveled. I think it was

03:30 Nagasaki we went to, didn't look too good and I suppose that's the greatest disaster. Truly, no wonder the Japs gave in. When you can look from one side of a town to the other and see only about three buildings and might I add the buildings that seemed to withstand the shock were those that were more rounded as opposed to being square. I've got some pictures in there

04:00 of when we were in Hiroshima, did I say Hiroshima first? In Hiroshima, didn't stay too long because we used to worry a bit about the Geiger counter, how much radiation we were going to get. However, even the navy said that my problems were not caused by radiation.

I don't suppose you would have known much about radiation in those days anyway.

No, something you talked about.

04:30 **As you were coming towards the end of your twelve year enlistment things were starting to hot up in Korea.**

Yes, well I was all ready to go. I left the navy in 1956, June 1956 I think it was.

Obviously your service on Manus avoided Korea then?

05:00 No, if Korea had come in while I was there I'd have to say it was just good luck that I didn't get a posting to something going to Korea because I seemed to get caught no matter what. If there was something unusual going, as I said, my time ashore during the whole war was I think a matter of four months that I was able to work out and by ashore I don't mean the eighteen months I spent in Port Moresby, I mean the time I spent back here doing courses and little things like that.

05:30 **That's quite a long service in any war, what does it mean to you to be a thirty-niner?**

It means that at least I can say I've done my bit. I've come through it to some degree unscathed, yes I do have problems and because of that I'm lucky. I do not discuss any of these things with my family.

Why?

Well you've seen today.

06:00 Even my own wife doesn't know.

When you were on Manus Island, I've just got a couple more questions about the procedures there, how would you say those Japanese, sorry, was it only Japanese officers that were there?

No, Japanese from the lowest to the highest. The highest we had was General Nishumora

06:30 who had already been condemned to death when my group of wardens went up and that was in February 1951.

What did you see of the actual courtroom proceedings?

I didn't go.

Why not?

I didn't want to. I had enough to do when they'd gone through and came back. It was an army court, rather strange,

07:00 the army ran the court and the navy run the prisoners. Let it be at that.

You said very early on today about how when you were doing your training at Flinders you never questioned an order, you just did it. Did you then have any kind of sympathy with these Japanese fellows who'd never questioned orders and just done

07:30 **what they were told?**

Well as I said a minute ago, I suppose when I think it out in a logical manner you would have to say I had some feeling but knowing, the difference was that the orders we were given were not to kill. Our orders were, left, right, left, turn, go that way. The Japs, their orders were, you've seen pictures, an airman with his head cut off and blood shooting out there about three feet,

08:00 the bloody blokes in POW [prisoner of war]. Oh no.

When you went out on the hanging party, how would you describe the way that the Japanese men faced their fate?

Without much thought I think would be the way. I didn't have any trouble with the ones that were to follow the first one to the hanging in the truck.

08:30 We had them hooded and they were numbered, one, two, three, four, five and the number was called. I know who they were because I have a record of the numbers and that was it. They were manacled with their hands at the back and a hood on. They were just able to walk. So there wasn't much hope of them going anywhere.

Were they

09:00 **randomly numbered so that people wouldn't know who was who when they hit the gallows?**

Well, no, the guy on the gallows knew. They were only numbered I think rather than use the name. It was an alternative to naming them.

Would you say that they behaved in a dignified way?

Yes and in fact one of them even praised the troops for the way that

09:30 they'd been looked after. If I looked at my book I'd tell you who he was. He didn't come out with a long oration, he just said, "I want to thank whoever for the way I'd been looked after" something like that. I just can't remember the actual words.

Did you watch the executions?

No.

Was that out of choice?

Yes and no because when I put them up to the execution site

10:00 they had to go a certain distance away from the truck. Remember, it's dark. What happened, they turned every vehicle they could get and because of the flooding and everything, I didn't tell you this and we had no lights, they turned every vehicle they could find on towards the gallows and the light with the headlights on so they had some sort of light to do what they had to do.

10:30 So everything was pretty rough that morning.

Who did the hanging?

Good question. I'd have to look in my book.

Was it a navy?

No.

Civilian?

Reasonable cause to believe.

Do you think this was justice?

11:00 By whom?

On the part of these men being hanged, do you think justice had been served in the case of Australians?

The only way I would answer that on behalf of them all is that if they were found to be guilty by a majority then I'd have to say yes. If there was any doubt, I'd have to say I suppose a bit of bad luck for some. I only knew, this was why I didn't go to court, I only knew

11:30 what came back. The reason is that if I got too involved I might become emotional about something and I might want to knock somebody's head off before he got to the rope. By the same token I might try and get him out of it. So the best way to do it is don't get involved. Not a coward's way, I think just a more sensible way of approaching something of which you are not sure.

12:00 **The executions on Manus Island have not been much talked about, why do you think that is?**

Well, I'm wondering how much of this on Manus Island will get air time, I do because there is I think it's a statute of limitations and I have never read about it and because I have never read about it I would say there's

12:30 an awful lot of other people who haven't. The only way that you can read about it. I have two books in there, one written by a chap who asked me a few questions and called The Massacre at Parit Sulong and

that was written by, can't think of his name and then there's a second book written by a fella called Ward who was a reporter called Snaring the Other Tiger. One,

13:00 the Snaring the Other Tiger more or less criticizes the first one as not being entirely truthful by virtue of the fact that the evidence wanted was used not the evidence given. So how could I decide anything on that when I wasn't party to any of the actions they were talking about. So the easiest way, rather than getting involved in it was to keep away.

13:30 **And those five hangings were the only ones you were involved in?**

That's right, they were the only ones. What happened over in Rabaul by the army I can't tell you because I don't have any idea.

Do you have any ghosts from that time?

No. It's a mighty machine.

14:00 I don't have ghosts unless, like this, they're brought up. You don't only see the ghost, you see other things too. This is why I don't talk to my family about them in case one day somebody said, "By the way Dad, you told me." Yes, I told them something but if I haven't told them they can't ask me. It's a pity in a way.

14:30 I've written quite a lot of pages in there about my life in the navy, on Manus Island, my life before the navy. I've done this at the request of my family who know almost nothing about me prior to them knowing me as their Father. Long time, isn't it. A lot of things happen. Going out milking cows, kicking up a cow, standing where it's warm, standing in something

15:00 that's warmer still, washing it off your feet. You told them that they'd laugh at you.

Do you think that men like you who were in the navy professionally before and after World War II are sometimes forgotten?

Well with all due respect I don't think that some of us are given the credit

15:30 that we deserve. For example without mentioning names we did mention a man's name this morning. How you relate one and the other at this point, that's your business, how I relate one and the other I might add is chalk and cheese. Because I have seen both sides. Others have only seen one side and when I say both sides, the only thing that hasn't happened to me, I haven't been on a ship

16:00 that was sunk and I haven't had to scramble for my life. I have led the easy life by being on ships that still floated at the end of the war. I attribute most of that to the Hobart and the skipper.

If you were asked by somebody, perhaps somebody younger, what serving

16:30 **one's country meant, what would you say?**

I'd simply say to them this, that if you appreciate what you've got, then say thank you. If you don't appreciate what you've got, I'm sorry because I'm afraid today that what we did for what we wanted, we haven't got. As I said, I came out here in 1921, in 1923, I was in the navy all those years, I went in and out. We went to Fiji once,

17:00 I used to carry a British passport and on the second trip to Fiji the postmaster said to me, "Popey you can go but don't come back." I said "Why?" he said "You've got the wrong passport." So a few words were told to me and I was told to go to the immigration department at Chatswood and see them there. What have I got to take? I don't know. I took all of that in and I gave it to them and on my side of the counter there were only two like me,

17:30 there was Pat and me, on the other side there was none like me. Am I being racist? Maybe. However, I had my ticket, number fourty-two is called out so number fourty-two goes up and puts his papers out. He took them away and he photocopied them and gave them back to me. He said to me "Would you go over there and pay that man fifty dollars." I said "What for?" he said "For your certificate." I said "Mate, normally at this time I'd jump this bloody counter

18:00 and pull your nose" and with that the fellow put his head around the corner who was well dressed with a waistcoat on and he said "What's wrong?" I said "Mate I feel like jumping this counter and pulling your nose". He said "Why?" I said "All the things I've done where I've been and what I've been involved in and here you are you want me to pay fifty dollars to say I'm Australian." Well he said, "It's like this Mr. Pope. There's people who

18:30 come and go. We don't mind who goes but we're fussy in who comes back." "Oh" I said, "Are you?" I said "I change my name to [Robert] Trimboli or [Christopher] Skase [famous bankrupts who have left the country], which one do you want. Those people walk in and out like a bloody yoyo." Can you imagine how disgusted I am? Immigration. Because in 1945 I think it was, if you were here before that time you didn't have to appear before a judge, if I might put it

19:00 that way. I qualify for everything except the fact I had a British passport. Of course that was handy. When we went overseas I was in the short queue, poor old Pat she's in the long queue. I didn't take a

dual passport when it was changed. I have an Australian passport. When the bit of paper came I said to Pat, I said, “Look love, look what they’ve sent me, a bit of paper, I’m an Australian” I said “I’m going to put that on the wall and underneath write ‘I am not now a wog.’

19:30 What about that? And that’s true, that’s what I thought.

What sort of participation have you had in Anzac Days?

Well I go when I can, I have a, I would say that I am not a consistent attendant. We go to most dawn services even though I didn’t go to the last one.

20:00 Things play up at times and they just put you off track. I did go to the march having missed the dawn service. I’ve been to a few but I would like to have been to more than I have been. However, I don’t do what I want to do, I do what my body tells me.

What do you think about the increasing crowd attendance at Anzac Days lately?

I think it’s rather good particularly

20:30 with the young ones. It rather hurt me somewhat to read the local news here after Anzac Day that at the dawn service it was so mucked up that nobody knew if it was a dawn service, Anzac Day or just a trip down the pub, speaking very jocularly. The president was sick and couldn’t get there, the reverend gentleman didn’t turn up to say the prayers and all this sort of thing. That’s unfortunate and I suppose it will happen.

21:00 We can’t control what’s going to happen to us tomorrow. I might be dead before you leave here for all I know. That’s just life isn’t it.

You’ve obviously got some quite painful memories about your time in the service.

My word.

How do you feel about perhaps the lack of support and counseling that was given to veterans like you after the Second World War?

21:30 Bloody awful. Awful because, you’re turned on so I mustn’t say that. Awful because I know what I and my particular friends have done, where we’ve been and what we’ve gone through. You tell these fellows, I had a fellow by the name of Roxsarnus [?], the nut specialist down here at Concord call me and ask me, what’s wrong with me mentally.

22:00 I should have thrown the bloody chair at him. Bloody mongrel he was. He had a job to do. It’s like you here and me as I am now. You’ve got a job to do and I’ve got to respond yes but there are different ways to do it. I have a report in there that that man made about me and he said there’s no reason why I should be like I am. No reason. He’s a psychiatrist. Christ, man

22:30 I’ve been off my bloody rocker that many times. If it wasn’t for the pills I take now I would probably be off my rocker at this moment. I take heavily sedated pills and I take heavily sedated painkillers. But I’m walking. I suppose that’s something.

But you think more could have been done?

23:00 More understanding could have been given to what was there. I mightn’t have explained things as well then as I could today because I’ve had more practice perhaps at it talking to people. These people are specialists in their field and in my opinion they should have the knowledge to fill in the missing pieces. In other words, if I said to you

23:30 about some things, I don’t know what you thought but if I have missed something no doubt your mind will take you on. But these fellas being professional, have been trained to fill in the blank spots and the buggers don’t. No, they don’t. It took me an awful lot of time and effort to get the sort of pension I get today

24:00 and if the thing was turned off I’d tell you more about pensions. You’ve probably heard.

Do you think it was common for men of your generation that they didn’t talk about their feelings because it was maybe girly or?

No, what do they say, forgive and forget or just forget. Forget I think is the best word. I don’t go to the pub on Anzac Day and get half full and fight

24:30 all these battles again. Bugger it, I’ve had them once, I don’t want them again.

It’s not always easy to forget is it?

No. Bloody grog [(UNCLEAR)]. Too right. I just quietly stay here with my darling. We go down and do one of the services. I come home to a lovely big bottle of Black Douglas in there. I have a couple of shots at five o’clock and that’s happy

25:00 hour.

Well, we're late for your shots then Reg. Before we turn the camera off is there anything else you'd like to say that you think you haven't been able to say today?

The only thing I would like to say that I haven't said in the same words is that when you examine an ex-serviceman be him from my war, the first war or any other war, stop and think. Think what it's like to live those

25:30 bloody hours. Christ, you'll never know. You'll never know. There is only one way to see it is to do it. To be there, to have bloody planes flying at you, [(UNCLEAR)]. You do not think about the guy on the other end. All you worry about is your bloody self and these blokes sitting on the shore in the office. They want to cut half of us out

26:00 of our pension, damn them. Terrible, terrible. I'd better not say any more. I've said too much.

INTERVIEW ENDS