

Australians at War Film Archive

John Choice (Seagull) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Righto John, good morning - thank you very much for talking to us this morning.**

Pleasure.

Yeah, perhaps we could start with your early life, you know, where you were born and when and those few early details?

Yes, well I was born in Tottenham, London, England in 1921.

01:00 Didn't know much about it of course. But my father was a dental mechanic. And he started to suffer with pneumonia type of thing. So they decided to come to a warmer country. So that's when we migrated to Australia. And he immediately got a position up with the local hospital.

01:30 And we started our new life here. So I had the normal education through school. And then decided I wanted to join the navy, which was something I wanted to do right from the start. So one morning I decided to walk down to Rushcutters Bay recruiting office and applied to

02:00 join, which they accepted. And that night I was on a train to Melbourne. Where I arrived to the cries of, "You'll all be sorry, you'll all be sorry" as you walk through the gates you know. And you, new entries, course the other guys have all been there about, they'd be old tars by that time. But anyway, then

02:30 you commence your training, field exercises for about a month. And then torpedoes and gunnery and things like that. But when it comes up to the seamanship part, which was the most important part of it. Course I, that's what I was joining as a seaman. And the Munich Crisis started, that's the war

03:00 nearly started in 1938. So they shifted everyone from Flinders Naval Depot out onto ships. So I finished up on the [HMAS] Sydney. But then the Munich Crisis, and then we went to sea and as under wartime conditions, excuse me, and that

03:30 petered out, that war scare petered out. So they kept some of us at sea to keep the ships, the maximum personnel. So I went to sea as a seaman, never having done seamanship. But that was okay. It was easy to pick up. But after a while I could opt to go into a different branch.

04:00 So I operate, opted for the torpedo branch because they also run the electricity part in the navy. So I thought, in thinking "In later time when I retire, I've got something behind me". But anyway I was in the navy for about a year and then that September day came when the war started.

04:30 So Sydney, we were already operating off the Fremantle coast. And then the war looked like coming on fair dinkum sort of thing. So we then proceeded to Middle East. And arrived there. And there was, I've never seen so many ships in one harbour

05:00 before you know. This, the interest of the French fleet because they had bases around the Mediterranean of course. But things went along smoothly for a while until the war did really start. So that's when we saw a bit of action. We started off by going out with the French battleship Lorraine. And

05:30 a couple of other cruisers and the Sydney.

Yeah, how were you finding military life, were you enjoying life in the navy?

Yeah, it was good. Yeah.

How long was the Sydney in the Mediterranean for?

A year. No anyway we, our first action, we went out, there was

06:00 in harbour in the Alexandria there was French battleships, about four French cruisers and probably about four British battleships. And, anyway that constituted a fleet. But you didn't go out as a fleet. But

you had a cruiser squadron in amongst that group, which had about four

06:30 cruisers operate together, and we were one of them. But our first action we went out and bombarded Bardia. And that was a successful bombardment. They had no opposition or nothing worth worrying about. And then after that, back to Alexandria our base. From then on it was patrolling all

07:00 round the Mediterranean.

Many escort duties and

Pardon?

anti-submarine escort duties?

Yeah we had, generally we had the destroyers with us. But they put, when you go out as a fleet action you've got destroyers out the front with their anti-submarine equipment detecting before the ship you know. But mostly, I would, we only really went out in with

07:30 two big fleet activities. But generally, we went out as a cruiser group.

How many in a cruiser group?

Oh there's, well there was about three of us'd go out, sometimes just one of us you know. But anyhow, as I say our first action was bombarding Bardia.

08:00 **And were you operating with the Royal Navy as well?**

Oh yeah, I forgot the Royal Navy. Yeah, no they had the main force there. We were under command of the British Navy. And

And where were you when you found that Japan had come into the war?

I was in Flinders Naval Depot doing a course.

Oh, you'd come back at that stage. Sorry, could

I'd come back three years, or two years later, or a year and a

08:30 half later. And I was going up, upgrading my training. I was, I'd opted for the electrical branch. Or torpedo actually but they did electrical as well.

Did you, so did you come back on Sydney from the Mediterranean as well?

We come back, stayed on the Sydney, I was on the Sydney for about two years, two months.

And then she came back to Sydney to...?

Then we came

09:00 back, then I got a draft off to Flinders Naval Depot for a step up on the torpedo branch, which is more electrical training, more torpedo training. Then I got a draft to a brand new destroyer, the [HMAS] Arunta, which is a very fast, fibreglass destroyer. Which I had seen in the Mediterranean, they had them, the British Navy had them there at that time.

Were they built in

09:30 **Australia or England?**

Ours were built in Australia. There were three, the Arunta, the [HMAS] Bataan and [HMAS] Warramunga.

She was brand new?

Mmm?

She was brand new?

Yeah brand new. Beautiful. Thirty-eight point eight knots in its trials and that's, in the water, that's really going. But on our ship we were blessed with a captain by the name of Ginger

10:00 Morrow. He had been a skipper of the [HMAS] Voyager in the Mediterranean while I was over there in the Sydney you know. He made a bit of a name for himself over there. And anyway, he was the captain of this brand new destroyer. And very efficient swash buckling type you know. Rakish hat on the bridge you know.

10:30 Always had a few nurses, oh better not put that down.

We can talk about that...

He was the only one that'd have females on board. Only showing them round the ship of course.

Of course.

Yeah.

You came onto that boat, sorry, that ship as a torpedo officer or as a...?

11:00 No, I joined as the lowest ordinary seaman, when you're under eighteen you join up as an ordinary seaman. Well, I was under seventeen, sixteen and ten months. You're an ordinary seaman third class. But there was no third class with us, that's the bottom. You start off as a second class, so I was a second class.

On the Arunta you were second class?

No, I was, oh no well you

11:30 gradually go up. By the time I left the Sydney I was a leading seaman. You got, ordinary seaman, able seaman, leading seaman. But I, besides that I did this course in torpedoes, mining, depth charges, demolition and electrical. So then I got

12:00 this draft to the Arunta. Which I was on there, what they call an LTO, [Leading Torpedo Operator], today they'd call it the leading electrician. And looked after all the electricals.

Round about what year was that?

That was in 1941, '42 or even '42, '43. Then I was there two years and two months.

12:30 We had, she was a very popular ship up there we joined. We went alone for the first time, you know, single operation. Then as the war heightened in the Pacific we joined an American task force. So we were operating with the Yanks, just about as Yanks, you know. But they were most impressed with

13:00 the Arunta. They had destroyers. They didn't build a pretty ship. It didn't look a real greyhound type. The old Arunta was like a racing greyhound. And her thirty-eight point eight knots in her trials proved that she was a pretty fast ship you know. But we went out with the Yanks on several occasions. Oh quite

13:30 frequently, probably a lot more than that. We might as well be just about Yanks.

What main areas were you operating in?

We started off - when we were going alone we did Milne Bay and the eastern part of New Guinea. And then when we got in the task force we started, like we bombarded a place that I

14:00 just forget at the moment. Geez I got a book out this morning.

That's all right we can check that later, after we break the tape.

Yeah, area had to bombardment in northeast New Guinea. Had another one at Hollandia, then another one at Admiralty Islands. In between this, you're patrolling with

14:30 ships, you know, American task forces and the, all that sort of business. So then I got a draft off it, after being on it for two point two years. And was to go back to do a higher course in the electricals and torpedoes and mining and that sort of thing. So I went out to Flinders Naval Depot for, did another year's course.

15:00 And oh they put me in - I went to South Brisbane ship repair base for about a year.

What year was this roughly when you finished now?

That would be about '43.

You finished on the Arunta?

Oh yeah, when I finished on the Arunta, thirty-nine, fourteen, I've got it in, I've got a thing.

That's all; right, you were a couple of years on the Arunta

15:30 **though, yeah.**

Yeah.

Was that your favourite ship at that time?

That was my favourite ship, and favourite skipper. Like he was a John Wayne type you know.

What, could you just, without going into too many details, what were the major actions that the Arunta, you saw when you were on the Arunta?

When I was on the Arunta, we, oh that's what I was coming to, oh we bomb, our first action we went in and bombarded

16:00 positions in Milne Bay when the Australia troops were going ahead in Milne Bay. And then after that

was further up the coast, on the east coast which I've got written down in my book, I could look it up if I,

That's all right. We can come back to these in detail. I was just wondering about the...

yeah we had that bombardment, and then we bombarded Gasmata,

16:30 Hollandia and the Admiralty Islands. But in between these bombardments of course we're escorting ships and you know just patrolling the seaways.

Did you engage the Japanese at any time on the Arunta?

No, not on the Arunta. That's before an action they had that,

17:00 in the Philippines, I got a draft to go to the next step up.

Okay, yep.

So then I went down I did, I went to the South Brisbane ship repair base. That's, I think they tried to give you a little bit of a break now and again. And so I went.

You were a bit tired were you from?

No, when there was no education I was tired, I don't know when they think you've done a certain amount of sea time, given

17:30 a bit of a rest so. So I was looking after small ships and checking their electricals and their gunnery and all that sort of thing for a while. Then I got a draft to Sydney, Arunta. And,

18:00 yeah this was after the Arunta, I went to South Brisbane ship repair base. And you went round and when small ships like corvettes come in you check their firing circuits and electricals and things like that you know. It was a sort of a bit of a break. But then I got a corvette came in one day without my counter part

18:30 on it. So off to sea I go in a corvette. And that was the [HMAS] Whyalla.

What happened to your counterpart?

Oh it was just, I suppose he got a draft to go further or some other ship or something like that. Yeah, so I finished up on this corvette. We had a senior electrical person and it's all yours, the electrics you know.

19:00 I wasn't very, I was a bit cautious about going to a small ship, you get a bit of a snob when you've been on crack ships like the Sydney and the Arunta and things like that. But I found it very good, very friendly, more, friendly atmosphere because you get to know everybody, whereas on a cruiser with six hundred and forty-five, you wouldn't see someone for about two months or something like

19:30 that.

How many people were on the Arunta?

On the Arunta, oh about fifty-five or sixty.

How many people on the Whyalla?

Oh about six, oh Whyalla. I should have said with the Arunta would be probably, be a hundred and fifty. But the Whyalla would be about eighty,

20:00 something like that.

So, it was a small community?

Yeah, small community, yeah. Happy mob you know everyone, you see more of everyone. Everyone would, joins in there you know, closer association. Now where was I?

Oh, where did the Whyalla, where were you deployed?

Oh yeah we operated, oh the Whyalla, yeah. Now I was on the Whyalla

20:30 when the war finished, the bloke on the Whyalla, the [HMAS] Bendigo, a fella on the Bendigo was drafted off. And so they put me in his place on the Bendigo.

That was when the war finished?

Yeah. And that's where we started minesweeping. We were minesweeping out the

21:00 China coast. We probably wandered about three hundred miles up the coast, up and down. Trailing gear that, wires behind with power veins to spread the area that you know you're covering. We did a fair amount of wire mine-

21:30 sweeping up on various ports up the east coast of China, and China proper as well. Like there's Hong

Kong and that's the British protectorate of course. But then north of that it's China. One of the places was Kulang Su, one of the towns, one of the seaports, I forget now the others. But that was interesting you know

22:00 being in China and adding to the places you've been in the world. You know Greece, Crete, North Africa you know, all that sort of thing.

Had you, what were the major actions that you saw on the Whyalla, the actions?

Oh, the only actions I had on the Whyalla were depth charge, anti-

22:30 submarine.

Did you get any submarines?

Well you never know, you never know. Sometimes they come up to the surface but I wouldn't say we would've got any. Most, excuse me most of the time on the Whyalla was involved in escorting convoys. You know there were a lot of ships going off and that. And then

23:00 we did a lot of convoy work. Round there, that's was the main operation that they of the corvettes. You saw more action on destroyers and cruisers you know.

Did you see any submarine, did you attack any submarines when you were on the Arunta?

Oh yes, yes, we got, have credit for two subs on the Arunta.

While you were on board?

Yeah, I was on board. I was on the depth charge throwers.

23:30 You had a batch of depth chargers down aft, they roll off, they'd roll off two and then you'd blast off one either side. And another two, another two either side, so it give a pattern you know.

24:00 So we did quite a bit of depth charging around the place. But sometimes you'd never know whether you got, you never knew really whether you'd sunk a sub or not.

Yeah, pretty hard to tell when it's...

Yeah.

On the Whyalla, where were you escorting ships?

Pardon?

Where were you mainly doing the escort duty on the Whyalla?

Oh the Whyalla. We were mostly, we were with the British

24:30 Pacific Fleet, operating with them. But and we were operating north of New Guinea. Then in the, that area of the Pacific as you go up the China coast, and then we went probably about a hundred miles north of Hong Kong, in that area. And down the China coast there, we

25:00 were operating. If I'd pulled out that, if I knew where that diary was, I could tell you, you know, the places.

Now that's all right, no it's a long time ago, I understand, it's difficult. Then you on the, what was it, the other, the [HMAS] Brisbane?

Oh that's right, then the war finished. And the fact that I was a permanent serviceman, they drafted me onto another one, the Bendigo.

25:30 Because the bloke, my counterpart on there was time expired, he was reservist and so he was drafted off and I was went to the Bendigo. I found the Bendigo a much more happy and relaxed ship. Although the war was over by this time, which would have helped, but the Whyalla was run pretty you know,

26:00 the bloke that was skipper, I think he was on a cruiser. You go where there's tons of pomp and ceremony trying to keep it that way you know. But the Bendigo was much more relaxed. It was like an ocean cruiser on that one. Well, you weren't under stress by that time. But you were still sweeping mines, you never know when a mine'll go up with seven

26:30 hundred and fifty pounds of TNT [Trinitrotoluene] in it you know. But no, we did a certain period of time then came down to Queensland, Brisbane and that's where I went to the South Brisbane ship repair place, look, op, looking after corvettes you know.

27:00 And then they started, when the war finished, they started to phase them out.

You were in Brisbane when the war finished, is that right?

No, I was at sea when the war finished. But then I had a nice phase of being in the navy where you

know, you didn't, wasn't under any stress. But then I went to Flinders Naval

27:30 Depot and did a course. And which resulted in me being a chief electrician later. It took a while to come round. And so, I was one of the five chief electricians on the carrier Sydney. They drafted us over to the UK. Where we went to Plymouth and waited

28:00 while the ship was completed. Where we did various courses, electrical courses around the place. There are tons of naval establishments just in the south of England. Damage control courses and things like that. It's in, until the Sydney was completed.

She was a carrier, was she?

She was a carrier. And we come home. Brought it back.

28:30 So I was on it for a while and then I was drafted off. Just wondering what happened after there.

Did you say you were also flying aeroplanes off the Sydney, you saw the...?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. I got, I pulled out an album just a minute ago, just...

That's all right, it's all right, we'll

29:00 there's a couple of crashes there

I'm sure it was never a dull moment on an aircraft carrier.

We were in the UK when we first boarded the carrier. Everyone sort of settled in and we took her to sea a few times. Then the RN [Royal Navy] or the Fleet Air Arm joined us for a while and had some old Bombay sea fires and

29:30 sea furies. That was probably near the end of their run. And they started doing deck landing practises and take offs and all the manoeuvres required when they were operating off carriers you know. So we did that for a while then, sea round there. Then we come back home and I was not long

30:00 back in Australia, then they gave me a draft to, one which was called the commanding officer reserve ship's staff. It's, we had to put a lot of ships into reserve. And we had to seal a lot of equipment, which had deteriorated, left untended you know. I was looking after that in Sydney.

30:30 Had a staff of about three and we'd go round. The beauty about it was all the ships were down at Watsons Bay, Bradleys Head, all the nice little places you know. It was nothing like being in the navy. You just turn up there, do your job, have a swim at lunchtime and maybe a beer or two over the Watsons Bay pub. But it was a nice

31:00 time to be in the navy, no wars, no stress, no supervision. 'Cause I was the supervisor at the time you know. But anyway I then happened to meet an ex-naval person in the same branch off the Sydney but then. Oh that's right,

31:30 I come to get my plans passed for the house. I'd bought this block of land for three hundred and twenty-five pounds. And, which was pretty cheap. It was dear in those, most of 'em you could get land for fifty pound at that time. But being a big shot, I went for three hundred and fifty pound land. And that was this. But I went up to get my plans passed with the building of

32:00 the house. And here is a fellow up there that I was on two ships with in the electrical bands. But he had done a course in health and building. So he was the health and building inspector up at the Sutherland Council. So when I went up there to get my plans passed to get the house started, I met him. He said oh you know,

32:30 you know, shaking of hands and all the rest of it and conversation. He said, "What are you gonna do when you leave?" And I said, "Oh, I'll try and get a local job if I can." He said, "How'd you like to work here?" Fantastic. So anyway, I finished my time in the navy. Had a couple of weeks off, went into the Sutherland Shire Council and worked there for the rest of my life. Then the, during that time the Sydney County Council took

33:00 over Sutherland. But, so therefore, we'd become City County Council.

When did you get married?

When did I get married, about '51. yeah '51.

Just after you got out of the navy?

Yeah that's right. Oh be, just before I got out. Yeah, I was married in uniform, so probably about six months before I left the navy.

How many kids have you

33:30 **got?**

Three kids. But the wife was beautiful. Still is.

That's great. I think we can go back to start talking about some of the details now.

Okay. How I got to have three kids.

Oh no, none of those details.

34:00 **I was thinking more of generally like starting back then. Can you remember London at all and Tottenham before you left? Do you have any sort of early memories of those times?**

Very, well I was four at the time when I left there. But I do remember walking through snow and walking through

34:30 a park with tons of trees and you know nice suburban atmosphere. But other than that I don't remember much about it.

35:00 **Do you recall your dad speaking about that time back in London?**

Yes, my father was a dental mechanic over there. He had a brother also in the dentist, dental industry. He worked as a dentist over there. But he liked his game of soccer in his day. And

35:30 it was a very narrow life they were living in England. It's you know not like Australia, like take this road here, you know everyone, not now but like when we first moved in, the house, this building built up, everyone knew everyone. We had Christmas parties and all that sort of thing, never, would never happen in England. You know very quiet and

36:00 restrained and that sort of thing.

Did you, your dad immediately get work when he came to Australia?

Yes. Probably how he come to come to Australia, my mother had a sister that came over here first, she migrated here. But then she started writing letters and saying "What a great place it was",

36:30 etc. etc. So that's what happened. We boarded the Sophocles, the ship and came over. And all I can remember about the Sophocles was the aroma of seasickness around the place. But didn't remember much about the trip, only being four you know.

37:00 But, what were we talking about then?

Oh no, we're just talking about your family coming to Australia.

Oh yeah.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Yeah. But that, this is right, my mother had a sister over here and he worked for the Lidcombe State Hospital. So he said to my father "Would you like to come and work up at the hospital, see?" So old pop says "Yeah, that'll do me".

37:30 'Cause he had been a dental mechanic in the UK, so that made him a bit medical inclined. So he got a job up there as a hospital attendant. But as the time progressed he went into physiotherapy. He used to call it "Massaging" in those days. But he become

38:00 a physiotherapist. I'd, when I was in the navy and I'd come home, I might have been away for about nine months. I'd always call in and see him when I come home you know. I'd come home in the middle of the day and I'd usually walk up to the hospital to see him, to see how he's going you know. But he had all his physio, all his

38:30 equipment, he had a room about twice the size of this place square with exercise or business on it, you know stationery push bikes, exercise stuff. I'd always hop into those when I went up to see him. But no, he was a masseur, he had a good job up there, he was quite, he's a pretty popular bloke.

39:00 **Had he been in the First World War?**

He was in the First World War, yeah.

What was he doing in the First World War?

Sergeant. He was a sergeant on the ground. And what I mean is, he wasn't in any tanks or anything like that. But he had a bullet wound through his arm, I always remember he had a dent in there one side and that's the only thing that ever happened to him in the full period of

39:30 the war.

Do you think, can you tell us about the decision - did he ever talk about the decision he made to come to Australia? Was it connected with his service in World War I?

No, the reason they came to Australia was, my mother's sister came over Australia first and settled

down. And was writing, kept writing

- 40:00 to my mother and saying "It's wonderful, you've got a come". So that's how we finished up in Australia. We lived with her for seven weeks, not having any accommodation to go to, which was hell, because mother and aunty clashed. It's funny how you think, remember those things, isn't it. But anyway we,
- 40:30 then we rented a house at Granville. Then my father was working for the Lidcombe State Hospital. They shifted to, oh then he got to know a hospital attendant who, this bloke had a house for let so my father, we shifted to Lidcombe from where my father could ride his bicycle
- 41:00 up to the Lidcombe State Hospital to work. But as I say he was an attendant for a start, looking after patients but then he went into the physiotherapy side.

Tape 2

- 00:32 **Can you recall your father talking to you about his First World War experiences?**

No, he didn't talk much about it. It's only that wound that sort of brought, you know, you thought about it you know. He told you "Once he got shot and that was it", he didn't talk,

- 01:00 he didn't talk much about it at all you know.

As a young bloke, did you wonder about that wound?

No I, well I looked, I did, quite often I looked at it. You know you'd see him in the bathroom or in, we used to play tennis actually, the family used to play tennis. And you'd see it with his short sleeves on. But no, that was all - he didn't worry about it.

What sports were you

- 01:30 **interested in when you were growing up?**

Well, I was always into tennis. Because this area of Lidcombe, Berala where I was, where we came to and the fact that my father was going to the hospital which is not far up, he met a lot of people you know. He, in his, you know, you get acquaintances and that sort of thing. And our, the street

- 02:00 I was in around our place there would have been about thirteen tennis courts. That was the scene in those days because land was cheap. You know you could buy a block of land for fifty pounds. In fact my first block of land I bought was fifty pounds. Then this one, when I bought it in 1950, was three hundred and fifty pound. So it was

- 02:30 pretty cheap land.

I'll say, it's hard to think about these days but.

Yeah. But where was I. Oh pop, oh yeah. My father, it was a tennis area. In our street, it was only a small street, there's probably about sixty houses in the street. But around us there would have been about fourteen tennis courts that'd take you three minutes to get to.

- 03:00 So my father became president of the Berala Carnarvon Tennis Association. So they played pretty consistently. But when I was in the navy, every time I came home I'd play with them you know, having a game of tennis.

Who was your tennis hero?

Pardon?

Who was your tennis hero?

- 03:30 Oh when you first said that, Adrian Quist came to mind. But there's a lot of heroes. Would you, you wouldn't have remembered or heard of Adrian Quist, I don't suppose. There's John Bromage, Adrian Quist, very good tennis players that brought the Davis Cup home many times. There were different generations, if you watch different

- 04:00 generations of tennis champions and very good. Even went down to White City and had a game myself on White City.

You were a pretty fair tennis player, were you?

Oh no, I was only a B Grade comp player who got invited to go down to White City one day and have a game. But I enjoyed tennis. In fact later in my time in the navy we went over to the UK

- 04:30 you know to do this, these courses. And I took a tennis racket and I played over there too. There were some of the naval establishments there had courts. Yeah and I was able to play there.

Yeah it's a good game, I grew up playing tennis too, I liked it.

Yeah, nice game. And up here it was only because I got too old, I had to knock off playing here, just playing up the road.

05:00 at Botany Bay, up the road.

Were you enjoying school at the time?

Na, I never enjoyed school, I wasn't a good scholar. Most of my learning came from the navy, 'cause you had more responsibility at that time and there was a certain amount of pride, you didn't want to be the dunce of the class or anything like that. But

05:30 it's amazing how much study you do in the navy. You know you got a pass a little exam to go in. But if you want to progress you got to pass a thing called ET1 [?]. You pass that, that qualifies you, education into become a leading seaman and a petty officer and that sort of thing on the arithmetic side, type of thing. But

06:00 no, I did a lot of electrical training in the navy and a lot of the training is maths you know.

Were you good at maths at school?

No, I wasn't. I had to work, when I was in, I left. I learned all my maths in the navy. And I was, had to work hard on it. It was a matter of pride you know. When you're in a group of blokes in a class, going through

06:30 these courses, you don't want to finish the bloke on the bottom you know. So I put a lot of work into that and I got through on all those, finishing up, ultimately a chief electrician. Which is, that's as far as I could go with that.

What hobbies did you have when you were, you know?

Well, I was always, been interested

07:00 in the sea. So very early in the piece after we moved in here, I bought a small heron sailing craft. And I joined Botany Bay Heron Sailing Club. And I used to take one of my three daughters, or two of them alternated, there's twin daughters.

What about before, before when you were growing up, what hobbies did you have?

Oh just sport,

07:30 oh I jumped the gun there a bit. Through my father being in the tennis scene, I used to play tennis. I've played comp a few times. I wasn't that interested in it to get into comp. But I was interested in trying to beat my father, so that lifted my game. Yeah, no I was very interested in tennis and even here until they started shutting down golf, tennis courts

08:00 due to the fact that the land become that expensive, there was more, they went, people sold their tennis courts for building purposes you know.

Did you have any - did you collect anything when you were a boy?

Oh I did, oh I didn't collect anything when I was a young boy.

08:30 But there's a few odd navy things I acquired when I left the navy.

Oh yeah. Can you recall any significantly unhappy events when you were growing up?

Yes, yes. My mother was a bit of a tyrant. She ruled us with an iron - I was going to say an iron lung

09:00 but an iron fist. She was a bit tough. She was a nice woman, very clean, good housekeeper, but pretty tough. So the navy was a natural place for me to go in because that was pretty tough too. But I was already attuned to it.

09:30 **How do you mean tough?**

Oh tough, oh pretty, she was a hard taskmaster but she used to probably blow the stack a bit you know unnecessarily. You know. But that was all right, you lived with that. That tuned me out for navy time.

10:00 That was tough but I was already toughened.

Was it a happy house when you were growing up?

Yes, you might say it was reasonably happy. My father was a happy, no he was a very quiet person. But he was a nice bloke you know. And we, I played tennis with him a lot in later years. 'Course he was, as I say president of the Berala Carnarvon Tennis

10:30 Association. When I'd come home on leave, bang, bang, we'd play, I'd play with them. No, she was a bit - she had a sister that come out to Australia first from UK. Aunt Ethel, bit, Aunt Ethel enticed my part of

the family to come over. So that we went and lived

11:00 with them for seven weeks and it was hell. It was like Belsen [concentration camp]. But we shifted to Lidcombe near to the, be near the hospital. And from then on I grew up there and was in the navy from there.

Did you always want to join the

11:30 **navy when you were as school?**

Always.

Where do you think that early desire to join the navy came from?

Well, mother always said "It was from her grandfather". He was, they always had to be a sea captain. But you know some of her forebears were sea people,

12:00 that'd been to sea you know.

How did you know about them, if you were in Australia?

Oh no, well we were all in, the family was in Australia. But you know in conversation round the kitchen table sort of thing. But when I decided I wanted to join the navy at the age of fourteen and I was told "To come back in two and half years", it was all through that you know. I always wanted

12:30 to join.

Can you tell us the story of you wanting to join the navy when you were fourteen years old?

Well, it's just a matter of fact of not saying a word and jumping on the train at Lidcombe and going into Rushcutters Bay. And going to the navy office down at Rushcutters Bay there. And walking in and saying "Excuse me, could you tell me how to join the navy?"

13:00 And the bloke looked over the counter and said, "How are you son?" I said "Fourteen". He said "Well, you come back here in two and half years time and I'll talk to you". So I went back in two and half years.

What did you do in those years, between fourteen and when you joined up?

Menial jobs, I was working

13:30 at a newspaper, country, company. Which is pretty crook when you had to clean all the machines and get all the print stain on you. Then I went to a spare parts place, Wescott Hazel, working in their store. And it was from, but I had applied to join the navy

14:00 while I was there. Then I got a call up from there to go in. And they did physicals and interrogations and told me that "I'd hear from them".

Can you think of anything else you wanted to be other than being in the navy?

Na. Na. I probably think by coming over from

14:30 pommie land when I was about four, I don't know whether any of that rubbed off on me. But my mother said, "Oh that was grandfather so-and-so or uncle so-and-so, you got it off him, you know", that's what they reckon. Anyway, I got there.

Can you talk about the day that you were finally accepted into the navy?

Yes, I remember.

15:00 I went down in a matter of fact way and joined up. And I didn't know I had to be on the seven o'clock train for Melbourne that night. That was a bit of a shock. But you know I accepted that. That's what I wanted to do and that's where my sights were. And I took what came.

Did your parents bring you down to the

15:30 **recruiting office?**

No, I come down myself. Oh, they wouldn't even know I went 'til I got home and told them.

Did you discuss?

Yeah.

Can you, how did you describe telling your parents about you joining the navy? Did you tell them before you joined the navy?

Oh, I might have talked around the kitchen table sometimes "I wouldn't mind joining the navy", etc. etc. Just before that

16:00 the American fleet had been. It was the hundred and fiftieth celebrations or something like that. And I was down there looking at all these ships and all these sailors with their uniforms. That didn't make any difference but it poss, oh, no it might have accelerated my desire to get in. Mmm.

Do you have any recollections of what

16:30 **it was like during the Depression years in Sydney when you were growing up there?**

I remember but you didn't know. That was the standard, if you were born in a Depression that's what the world was like. You accepted that you were battling to get a penny off your mother to buy a lolly or a popcorn, or something, you know. That was the life you lived. But you made

17:00 your life. I, I wanted a bike so I could be mobile. So what did I do, I bought a frame, I bought rims, spokes, at different times and built it up. And I had a bike. And then I had a job at Metters in the eastern suburbs

17:30 here when they, just near Mascot. But I used to ride that from, that bike from Lidcombe to Metters every day when I was going to work. That was my first sort of, one of my first jobs. But I just about lived on the bike. I don't know whether I mentioned this, one of my brothers,

18:00 the folks were frightened of him getting away with a street kid, did I mention this?

No.

They sent him to a place called Skyville. Now that was later, an air base over near Richmond somewhere. Skyville was a place for boys. It wasn't any place

18:30 that you'd say was a punishment place. But to teach 'em farming and things like that. So they sent him there for a start. And he stayed there for a while then got fed up and then made his own way in jobs you know. Oh, he went down to Wagga and worked on a farm.

19:00 And that's another point. He was down in Wagga. And my father on one of his holidays decided we should go down and see Denn and see how he is on the farm. So my father and I rode our bikes three hundred and thirty-six mile to Wagga to see my brother. But when I turned to come back I baulked. I didn't feel

19:30 like going. Anyway, my father was, had it too by that time, so anyway we come back by train.

How many days did it take you to ride down there?

It took us five days. And sleeping under trees and you know bit of canvas we had. Yeah.

Was he your older brother, the one in Wagga?

Yeah, the older brother. My parents were frightened my older brother was gonna

20:00 get into the wrong mob you know, the street corner guys or billiard room people in those days. Billiards are a respectable thing these days but billiard rooms in my day, in those young days was a place where blokes that weren't working would accumulate and get up to mischief and that sort of thing. So that's why mother decided

20:30 to get my eldest brother away from that scene. So there was a farm-training centre, Skyville it was called, later an air force aerodrome during the war. He had to, he went to Skyville and learned all about milking cows and work on a farm.

21:00 **Did you look up to your older brother?**

Not really, I felt sorry for him. A bit, the fact that he was more or less not ostracised but he was sent down to this, this farm. But I know that the reason was that my father, my mother didn't want him to get mixed up with

21:30 the wrong mob you know. So that's why he went down there.

What happened to your brother after you joined up?

Oh, he came back home of course. Then he got married during the war, but he just had local work. I think he worked at Vesta Batteries thereafter.

Did he go on to join

22:00 **the army or any services?**

No, no. Oh, he had a bad eye. He had a bad eye that put the kibosh on that. He, my father was a hospital attendant at the Lidcombe State hospital and he was a physiotherapist later. But he could, got my brother into the hospital as a hospital attendant.

22:30 So that's what he did for a number of years but then went round and got other jobs.

So can you describe the, your first, your early induction into the navy when you first joined?

Yes, yes. Can I describe it, yes well I remember ... There was a batch of us, about sixteen of us, all found ourselves standing on number one Central Station one night. On our way, we'd all applied from different sources to go to the navy. I always wanted to be in the navy. Incidentally, as I think I've mentioned

- 23:30 the Yank fleet had been out recently and we got all fired up with ships and but I've always been that way inclined you know. Anyway, what was the question?

Oh just, we were talking about when you first, you were very quickly sent off to Melbourne, is that correct?

Oh that was, the navy was the only one that sent me off, my parents didn't send

- 24:00 me off. This was all my, completely my idea that I join the navy. No, but my mother didn't come down to see me off but my father did from Central Station, she would have cried her eyes out, thank God she didn't come.

Why didn't she come down to see you off?

Well, I don't know why she didn't come down. I didn't even

- 24:30 ask or think it unusual. I didn't think it was unusual at all. Because she probably didn't like travelling home from Central to Lidcombe on a train at that time at night, so my father did the job.

Okay sorry, you were.

Just a second, what was I gonna say.

- 25:00 Oh yeah, the night we left Sydney, I left Sydney to go to Melbourne to join the navy. As the Melbourne express flew past Berala Station at about eighty miles an hour I had the evening paper. She said "She'd wave to me from the platform". And I remember going through,

- 25:30 flying through and I threw my paper out and all these pages of paper went everywhere you know. Course I didn't think it would in my young mind at the time, that it would all get, this would happen. If the paper, if she wanted to read it, she'd have to look all round Berala to find it.

You saw your mum on the side of the platform?

Yeah, yeah she was at, and my younger brother, they walked from our place to the station. She knew that it was

- 26:00 on the second division of the Melbourne Express, and what time it went through. So they were there.

How were you feeling at the time?

I didn't feel sad. I felt this is gonna be good you know. I always wanted to join the navy. And this is, the time had come.

- 26:30 Sixteen and ten months, well that was it, the time had come.

You were on your way to a new life.

Mmm.

Can you describe a little bit more about that feeling?

Well actually, I've thought since about that. How I was able to walk away without any worries,

- 27:00 no regrets. I'd made the decision. I always, maybe for months or maybe years, years had been interested in ships and wanted to go in the navy. So when I flew past in Berala with The Sun newspaper flying everywhere and waving to my mother, I was as happy as Larry. You know.

- 27:30 But I was a kid that, I had a bike from a young age. And I, and others, rode everywhere. I think I told you I rode to Wagga. But we'd do long rides like that and stay overnight under a tree and things like that you know, and take a blanket, just for exploring.

- 28:00 **Do you, can you recall or can you tell us about the people you met on the train that night?**

Well, they were all young blokes like myself. Probably, say there'd be nine of them. They were eager to join the navy for a wonderful new experience but we just chatted like boys at a cricket match

- 28:30 or anything like that. We didn't look, wonder what it was going to be like and all that sort of thing. You were looking ahead and cutting off your last part of your life phase for want of a better word and going into a new one.

Can you describe your first encounter with navy discipline?

- 29:00 It didn't surprise me because my mother was a good disciplinarian herself and I was already trained by

the time I got in the navy.

Who was the person that made the most impression on you at that time when you joined the navy?

Geez, that's a long time ago.

Do you remember your recruiting person?

- 29:30 I can get little intermittent glimpses of them but I forget their names now. See you went down there, you went into a class, you did six years, six weeks' field training and then you did fortnight's torpedoes, fortnight's gunnery. And
- 30:00 supposed to do six week's seamanship, which was the main thing we were going in for. But the Munich Crisis started. That's when the war nearly started, old Hitler had come into power and ranting and raving. And the war nearly started in 1938. The war that started in '39, nearly started in 19...
- 30:30 ...38. That's the time I got called up, I was, we got to Flinders Naval Depot and went into classes for a short time then the Munich Crisis started. And then pack your bag and hammock, on the special train up to Melbourne. Then on the Melbourne express and down onto HMAS Sydney. So I arrived supposedly a sea, an
- 31:00 ordinary seaman, that was my classification never having done seamanship. Because of this Munich Crisis, and I went to the Sydney and had to start there just by doing it, learning by doing it you know.

How much did you, how were you aware of the development of hostilities in Europe? Did you know about Hitler and the?

- 31:30 He, don't forget this was March '38 I'm talking about now. But yeah, but noises about Hitler, you just passed, you know it didn't worry you. And when the war did actually start I got a bit of a pain in the old anxiety box down there.
- 32:00 But you know after a couple of weeks you reconciled yourself that there was a war on, you know.

So had you joined the navy to go to sea or to go to war?

No, I joined the navy to go to sea and to see the world.

When you were doing that initial training in Melbourne, which part most interested you?

- 32:30 Torpedoes. See you did a fortnight's torpedoes just for familiarisation. And I think I did a bit longer gunnery, about three or four weeks' gunnery, six weeks' seamanship. But it was the six weeks on seamanship I missed through the Munich Crisis started, starting.
- 33:00 And so I was a seaman without being a seaman.

What was the fascination with torpedoes?

Well, they were something that had to be maintained like a racing motorcar, like a sophisticated

- 33:30 engine in them, and depth keeping mechanisms and directional things, gyrocompass in them to maintain the course. And the depth keeping mechanism in them, which was all very interesting mechanically.

Can you take us through a torpedo - describe how a torpedo works?

I could do a

- 34:00 fortnightly routine on one, right now.

Perhaps you could, I mean I don't know anything about torpedoes. I don't even know how they work. I'm most fascinated by the fact that they go, you see the bubble trail in the water in the films but I have no idea how a torpedo works. Can you tell me how, from the start of the torpedo to the back of the torpedo, how it works?

Well, for a start you've got the main part of the torpedo. And most of that is air vessel.

- 34:30 And the rear end is the gearing and that for the contra rotating propellers. The front end is the warhead. Now there's provision, like when you're practising you can put a collision head on the front instead of the warhead. A collision head, like if it hits something but not damage that something in front.
- 35:00 Instead of seven hundred and fifty pounds of TNT, what's the other part I was saying?

Well, they're quite a sophisticated weapon, I'm just wondering what are the main parts, like how does it steers itself and?

To describe them, they're a semi diesel cycle burner. Now that is they're mostly diesel but fresh air, high pressure air, twenty-three

- 35:30 thousand pounds per square inch in the air vessel was mixed with the fuel and that's how you got your propulsion. They could go, they went about thirty - you could set them thirty-five or forty, thirty or thirty-five knots.
- 36:00 In other words you reduce the pressure, if you wanted to go further you'd just reduce the pressure.
- So it's got a diesel engine in their or is it electric engine or?**
- No, semi-diesel.
- And there's compressed air as well, how, can you describe that motor for us?**
- Yeah. The, it was
- 36:30 known as a semi-diesel cycle burner. Had I think four pistons in it. The air vessel was from here to that cupboard over there. That was full of compressed air. As I say twenty-three thousand pounds per square inch. Forward of that air vessel
- 37:00 was the head that would fit the warhead. Or for practise people, persons, you could have a collision head, which had cork in it, so if you hit the target it wouldn't damage the target. But it had a mechanism that when you're firing practise torpedoes for practise you wanted that torpedo back again. So when it
- 37:30 went to the end of its run or hit its target as with the cork head, it would sink down like that. And these are like a Rolls Royce these things. But there was a hydro-static valve in these things, it was operated. You blow water out of the vessel, okay. When you had a practise head you had water instead
- 38:00 of ammunition, TNT, in the warhead. So you could, so you put water in to make it the same as the real thing.
- How did the steering, how did it navigate or steer?**
- Well, first of all it had a gyro in it. Gyro, the gyrocompass wheel rotates, some of them rotate
- 38:30 about twenty-four thousand revolutions a minute. But I forget how many revs the old torpedo one did. That would keep it on a straight course. But also it had inside a balancing thing. If the torpedo started to nose dive, that would come like that and pull
- 39:00 up rudder. Or if it went down too far and you wanted that to come up to a certain, whatever you'd set it to, you'd do the reverse. That's that sort of scales thing, the weight on it, kept it at the right depth.
- They're an impressive piece of technology, how did?**
- Yeah, you had a gyrocompass, an actual gyro
- 39:30 which did about twenty thousand revolutions a minute. That's what gave you your correct direction. So.
- And how did it launch off the, how do you launch these things?**
- Out of torpedo tubes. You had torpedo tubes from that corner to here - this is the length of the tube.
- 40:00 And course they were in there on rails. And those rails were always maintained to be pretty, lubricant added to help them get out. But when they fired, you put a charge in the top of the housing. And when you pull the old
- 40:30 trigger, that would ex, ignite. You had three cartridges in that. So if one failed, the other one you know. So it had a failsafe provision. And that'd fire it and whoosh, over the side it'd dive down and then its depth keeping mechanism would bring it up to the desired
- 41:00 depth you wanted it at. If you were firing at the [HMS] Queen Mary, you'd fire deep because the lower in the water it is, there's more pressure to overcome and that does more damage, with the water pressure you know. But if she's firing at something with not a very big keel, or
- 41:30 under water bulk, it's got a do it at a lesser depth. So you had the options you know on the height. So they actually went through the water, under the water like that. 'Cause this weight would take it down to a certain depth as per what was set on it. Then it'd level
- 42:00 at that. But if it started to come up...

Tape 3

- 00:34 **Can you tell us the range of the torpedo, how far did they go?**

You're not spies are ya, for the Japs or anyone are ya?

Pardon?

You're not spies for the Japs are ya? Ah, they had two speeds, depending on the target how far they were. See you carry an air vessel.

01:00 As I say from here to the corner there, they were, had so many thousand pounds per square inch. But if you, it wasn't for long range you'd just turn a handle before it went. And that would give it maximum air or the other one was slightly reduced air pressure. So it wouldn't go as far.

01:30 Yeah, you might have been in a confined area, you want, might want to sink a ship a thousand yards away. But behind that ship there's one you didn't want to hit. So you could, had two ranges you know.

What, how, say maximum of about three thousand yards? Or how far would these things go if you really wanted to shoot them a long way?

Yeah, two thousand yards, or two thousand five hundred

02:00 On one pressure you know, on giving it the works. About two thousand, bit over two thousand and bit less otherwise.

How much did they weigh, a torpedo?

Oh, it's pretty hard to say that because the air vessel was that heavy, very heavy. It

02:30 had to have pretty good tackles and davits to handle it. Like you used to have to pull them out sometimes, not right out, but they were pretty hard to handle. And being slippery and beautiful machined steel,

03:00 you know they were like a Rolls Royce you know. Better than a Rolls Royce.

How much explosive did they have on them?

Seven hundred and fifty pound of TNT.

Can you describe, were there different types of torpedoes? Can you describe the different types of torpedoes?

Well, you had eighteen inch

03:30 diameter or twenty-one inch. Cruisers and destroyers had twenty-one inch but submarines had eighteen. They were a bit lighter and easier to handle and didn't take up as much space on a sub because they didn't have the room for the large ones you know. But they had a decent range as well.

04:00 **What were you gonna say?**

In the war there's conventional weap, when the war started there's conventional weapons - the normal four-inch, six-inch, eight-inch, fourteen-inch, fifteen-inch guns.

04:30 They had torpedoes of course. And getting onto torpedoes they were twenty-one inches and about twenty-seven feet. Twenty-one inched in diameter and about twenty-seven feet long. But you could, had two speeds, it all depends what sort of a target you're going for.

05:00 But you could change to about thirty-five knots or thirty-five knots. But if you went to the thirty-five, that would reduce the range. 'Cause it'd use more air, if you went for the lesser you had maximum speed of thirty-five.

Can you explain just one more thing that I didn't understand, maybe Rob [interviewer] did but can you

05:30 **explain how the compressed air and the diesel motor work? Does it, diesel motor, what does the diesel motor do and what does the compressed air do?**

Well, the fact that I think because you've got this very high pressure, it makes you get more miles to the gallon type of thing. You know. There was thirty

06:00 thousand, no, I just, I forget the...

Don't worry about the figures so much, just the basics, I don't understand the compressed air.

Yeah no, the compressed air you were, it would be impossible to keep a conventional engine going with oxygen.

06:30 So therefore you had to have compressed air. And to send something that's probably about thirty feet long and machined steel of about that thick, you had to have compressed air to get as much distance out of your fuel that, you know,

- 07:00 increased the range by having the air. Because otherwise you wouldn't be able to wear petrol tanks or fuel tanks on a torpedo.
- It's very simple, I'm surprised, I didn't realise. Yeah, of course, it makes so much sense. Can you explain to me how you set the engine running? When you launch these torpedoes you had a charge that blew them out of the tube, how did the engine get set running?**
- Well, you
- 07:30 have a little notch like that on the top of the tube. Now the tube is fired by a separate charge to get it out and running. But as it's going through out of the tube it, that's when it starts that. But then you only get
- 08:00 a small pressure of fuel, I think it's only five percent of fuel to keep it just going until it hits the water. Because it would burn out in that short time it's being fired and get into the coolness of the water. So that's what happens there. But then
- 08:30 when it does hit the water, there's a flap on the side of the torpedo and the pressure of the water knocks that back and it gets a hundred percent of the fuel from then on. And you've got the range of thirty or thirty-five, or the speed of thirty or thirty-five knots.
- It's quite amazing technology, even today it's quite amazing. Did this notch to set the engine running ever fail? Did you ever fire a dead torpedo into the water?**
- 09:00 I never, it would happen because there's human error but I've never had a situation. Like I was on the Sydney and I was also on the Arunta. And I never had a, never seen a failure. But they built, if Rolls Royce's have got high standards in making their motorcars,
- 09:30 these torpedoes have got a greater standard than a Rolls Royce.
- While we're talking about the torpedo, we'll just continue this conversation you know about torpedoes until we're finished it, I think and we'll go back to your life in a minute.**
- Yeah that's all right, that's all right.
- In the torpedo room, can you explain what that looked like and how it was laid out?**
- Oh well the, they weren't
- The tubes were**
- the only room, like if you were on a cruiser you got enough room
- 10:00 to do certain regulation routines on a tube. But on a destroyer you do it on the upper deck. You get tackles and pull the tube out to a certain distance and then you can get to the works. The works as I say are a third you know, all the bits and pieces
- 10:30 that are necessary, a third through on the rear. And that's where, you just pull it out that far and there's that much weight in the front of the tube to hold it up.
- So you can maintain?**
- But you used tackles to get it out.
- What's a tackle?**
- A tackle, you know, ropes to reduce the amount of weight.
- You'll probably catch me on a few naval terminology. I'll have to check up on it. But that's**
- 11:00 **good for the archive too. In a hundred years time they may not know these terms. So when you were going to fire a torpedo, how did the orders come through and what was the procedure for firing?**
- Well, there's two ways of firing. You, when you were at action stations there'd be a fellow sitting on a seat on the torpedo mounting,
- 11:30 on the say right hand side of it. And he's got four handles, four firing handles. And they are indicated not by one, two, three, four, they're indicated by F-I-R-E. If someone went and the reason they do that is, if they fired the E one first, it'd collide with the F one,
- 12:00 you know, they got a have a certain distance apart. So they don't fowl up their, you know direction.
- Did they always fire four at, in the same sequence?**
- Oh yes, you'd always fire
- At once?**
- Well, you had to for that reason.

But they sometimes just fire one torpedo and leave it at that?

Oh yeah, oh sometimes you only did one or two or whatever.

So you're at action stations, can you describe

12:30 **to me what that looks like?**

Action stations?

When, when you, action

We're talking about round the torpedo tubes now.

Round the torpedo tubes now.

Yeah, well there's a fellow sitting on a tractor seat and he has four levers there and a sighting apparatus there.

And then how does he get the order to fire? Who is in charge

13:00 **of the orders to fire?**

Oh, he's got a torpedo control officer up on the bridge. He's got all his sights and all that sort of thing. And that's transmitted. Oh, he's got levers, although generally the bloke on the tube does the job. He's on his seat, with sights, he's being, worked out the

13:30 geometry of thirty-five knot speed. As of, and ten thousand yards or whatever.

Is that a difficult thing to do?

Well, if it's done, you know, personally it's not as efficient as it could be. Because you got a,

14:00 too many variables. Like you know the ship could just - in the time it takes to get from the firing position to the target, that ship, the target could have shifted. Because it's taken three, four minutes to get there, you know. So that, but with, as

14:30 opposed to shells, they're going pretty fast and they've got a pretty good fire control system that - it's just accuracy.

On board the different ships that you served in, your job was mainly to maintain these weapons or were you firing them as well?

No we,

15:00 I assisted in maintenance of the torpedoes. There's your chief petty officer, he's in charge of the torpedo branch. He's the bloke that sort of did - he was the main person in the routine, in the maintenance routine.

And so what was your job, say in the torpedo branch?

In the torpedo,

15:30 the torpedo branch was a bit of a misnomer for the name. But since then they've changed, like in my time you're an electrician. An electrician. A torpedo man that, you knew how to maintain torpedoes. Depth charges for sinking subs and the

16:00 mechanism that goes along with that plus all the electricity generation on the ship, dynamos, generators, gyrocompasses, the works. But since, at the latter part of the war or after the war, they divided it. And said "Right, either

16:30 you're an electrician or you're a torpedo man". And it's known as TAS, Torpedo and Anti-Submarine, they've grouped together now. Which is more sensible.

So you were an electrician, did that mean you worked in all different areas on board the various ships you worked as an electrician on?

No, I was what, a higher power person,

17:00 in other words, general 220 volt stuff and dynamos and generators and things of that nature.

What sort of equipment would be powered by that kind of power on board a ship? What sort of equipment would you be dealing with in that role?

Oh, all the lighting and generation and fans. Ventilation equipment.

17:30 Few things like that.

So much for talking about, I can't wait to start talking about depth charges but we'll come to

that a bit later. We'll go backwards, I think. Before you became an electrician, I want to talk a bit more about your early days in the navy and what you were like then. When you first joined the navy you were only sixteen years old.

Sixteen and ten months, yeah.

Did you get homesick at all?

Na.

Were there many

18:00 **other people your age around?**

Oh there was, a few of us very young blokes, not many. Like probably on the Sydney, there's six hundred and forty-five people on it and probably there'd be about four young blokes my age.

How did you get on with the older people around you?

Exactly the same as anybody

18:30 else. You know you listened to them. Like maybe in the mess deck when you're having a feed and relaxing, they had more to say than we did. But you know there was, you were sort of palled up with blokes you got on well with. And usually stuck with the same branch,

19:00 like a ship. If you're in the seamanship branch, or on the ship anyway, there's divided up into the foc'sle, the sharp end. That comes back, say one third. Then you've got the middle section and that's divided up into two halves. Foretop men on the left

19:30 hand side, maintop men on the right hand side of the ship. Then the last third is the quarterdeck. And, but so they're divided up to, into divisions - foc'sle, foretop, maintop, quarterdeck men. That's the area of work and mess decks, numbers and

20:00 all that sort of thing went.

And you were on the quarterdeck on the Sydney?

No I was a foretop man.

foretop man.

Yeah, I was a foretop man, the first part of my time in the navy. But then when we were over in the Middle East I changed, it was possible to change to a certain other branch. So I went into torpedoes. The reason I went into

20:30 torpedoes, they not only worked on, they were in charge of torpedoes, depth charges, dynamos, generators as well as maintaining the torpedoes, which needed a lot of maintaining. Every, they had daily routines on them, fortnightly routines, six month or six weekly you know.

21:00 They were, as I say, a Rolls Royce job that needed a lot of attention. Air pressures had to be checked every day, your air pressures and that sort of thing.

Let's talk about your time on the Sydney, your very early days on board ship? You hadn't done your seaman training. How did you find those early days on board the Sydney, was it difficult?

No, no.

Can you talk about when you first went to sea on board the Sydney?

21:30 Yeah, the first time I went to, when we went to sea was in the Munich Crisis. I think, did I mention that? I was a pretty easy assembly type of person. I'd been in cubs and scouts and cricket teams and things like that.

22:00 So you were sort of an organised person and a mixer you know. I didn't have a lot of trouble in that regard.

Who did you mix with in those early days?

Oh, my people I joined up with generally, you know, on a mess deck you had ordinary seaman, which is what you are.

22:30 You know when you first. Actually, I was more than ordinary. In other words you're an ordinary seaman from the age, you join up from the age of eighteen was it, sixteen. Anyway, I joined up at sixteen and ten months. So my time, then you sign up for twelve years. But the fact that I was sixteen and ten months, my

23:00 time extended that much further. I had to go to thirteen years odd because I joined up, yeah, six, fourteen months before the age of eighteen. So I had to do that much extra.

So you were an ordinary seaman second class, is that right?

I was an ordinary seaman second class, then an ordinary seaman first class, then a

23:30 leading seaman, yeah.

Can you explain your role on board the Sydney, on the foretop?

Well on the foretop when I was, when you went further, when you're an ordinary seaman or an able seaman, number one you're scrubbing decks of a morning. And in peace time they

24:00 are white as white. But horrors of horrors when the war started, they had to paint 'em a purple blue, so the ship couldn't be easily recognised from aircraft, reflecting a white deck instead of a, this colour. So all of our work in those early days was not necessary. So that's what happened, you,

24:30 but I didn't do that for too long though.

What else did you do?

Well, a couple of my mates who were very nice blokes who I got onside with, we went into the torpedo branch. We were seaman right, but then you can go for gunnery as a secondary non-substantive rating they call it.

25:00 Or you could stay a seaman, just an AB [Able Seaman], but they go nowhere. So I chose to go for torpedoes because they did all the electricals and power production and all that sort of thing. 'Cause I was just thinking in terms of "When I leave the navy, you can't fire torpedoes down George Street, but you can do, pick up a buck by, do a bit of electrical

25:30 work". So, you know I used, when the war started, you know I was an ordinary seaman. My action station was what they call the number one of the left gun of B turret. See you had two guns per turret. And oh no, first of all I was down the shell room,

26:00 you know, loading into a hydraulic horse the ammunition, going up. But that was in peacetime when you were doing exercises. But when the war started I finished up, that was my, no I was made number one of B turret. Number one's the bloke that follows the pointer and

26:30 puts the muzzle of the gun on the elevation, hit a ship twenty-eight thousand yards away.

And that's what you were doing when the Sydney went into action in the Mediterranean?

That's what I was doing when I was in the Med [Mediterranean].

Let's go back a little bit to the exercises before the war started. What kind of exercises was the Sydney doing at that time you went out when the Munich Crisis was on?

27:00 Oh, we were just on a cruise, yeah a cruise. But you would do exercises. Like for instance there used to be a battle practise target in Sydney Harbour. And they'd tow that out now and again. And that was a thing with framework and we'll say hessian over it.

27:30 Well, you'd use that as a target. But then sometimes they'd fire a, say a smoke shell or with calcium in it that gives off blue smoke and aim at that and stuff like that you know.

And your job at this time was in the ammunition room. Can you talk a little bit about what you were doing during these exercises?

Didn't like going down

28:00 there because it's in the bowels of the ship. Probably about four or five decks down there, there's this horrible stale ammunition-y smell you know. And you're in an area, the maximum moveable area but still you got bits and pieces of gunnery equipment and things jam, sticking

28:30 out. And so you haven't got a lot of room. And there's probably about eighteen, sixteen people in turret. And like having two guns there. So you're six on either side I think it was.

You're down in the bowels of the ship?

Oh, no sorry, I've jumped ahead, I've now been elevated.

Before you get it, don't jump ahead yet.

29:00 **In the bowels of the ship, how many people were down there?**

Oh, probably four of us.

And what were they doing?

Like for this one gun. You know you had to be, and there was another, the shell room was down below us. But then the shells were sent up hydraulically in chutes to the ammunition lobby. That was our place

on the second block,

29:30 bottom one. And the shells'd come up like that, hydraulically, and come, they come up vertically and they'd automatically lay on their side and go into this ring. There was a ring about that wide in about an area of about down there you know. They'd come up and they were available, as always one comes to the loading

30:00 person. They had a loading tray there you know. Oh equipment. And that was...

How quickly would you have to work, loading?

All the time, all the time, you just continually

30:30 going. Particularly, say in the action with the [Bartolomeo] Colleoni, we were, you were going for about an hour. Which was pretty hard yakka. But by that time I had a sweet cop, I was, I was the bloke on the elevation, gun layer. When you say gun layer, I'm the, all I'm doing, you got a direct the

31:00 control tower up on the top of the bridge and that transmits distances. They've got range finders and all that sort of thing. They transmit that down to the TS, which is the Transmitting Station they call it. And we get it on a dial. I'm sitting here on a tractor type seat handle there for large movements of the gun,

31:30 big brass wheel in front of me for small adjustments. So as the transmissions comes through as for direction or, yeah direction. Or distance not direction.

So you, would you be connected with the transmission room, how would you talk to them?

Voice pipe.

Can you explain the voice pipe for us?

Round metal pipe

32:00 goes down about forty feet. And at the end of the pipe it opens out you know, so you fit round your mouth. And you communicate like that.

And they'd talk up through that pipe to you?

They'd talk through the pipe. But it's all mechanically, there's no need for talking. There's no need for talking, when you're in action, you're doing a job. There's no

32:30 reason to say, "Hey Bill, you know hurry up, we want some more shells." It's just automatic.

So what sort of communications would they give you, just directions or?

Well you had gongs, when your, the gun was gonna fire just to brace everyone or make sure there's no one

33:00 around, there'd be two audible sounds. Become, you did that much practise in peacetime and war that it was automatic. You know that during the sinking of that Colleoni, all I was doing for an hour was down, they've put a

33:30 shell and a charge. And then they press a switch, number two man, after they close the breach. A light goes on and a light goes on and bang you go on target again. Then ding, ding goes the bell, bang, goes, and this is all done by the director of the control tower. They've got lights

34:00 to know when the shell is actually in the breech and the breech is closed and ready for firing. So when they, we've got eight guns of main armament, when they've got eight lights they know everyone's ready to go. But you're doing it that quickly you know, it all happens in a short time. But if you asked me to do it now I'd drop dead in five minutes.

34:30 **It's hard work.**

It, hard work. But I was lucky, as I say I was number one. Oh initially, when we used to do practise in Jervis Bay and all that sort of thing. But by the time we got to the Mediterranean and that I got a good sit down job on the, on the elevation side of it.

Could you see out of the gun turret when you're doing this work?

35:00 No, no. There was only one, there's a periscope, the officer of the turret sat back at the back of the turret and he could watch both guns and he had a periscope. And he, not for any firing accuracy or anything like that, but just to see what was going on. Or

35:30 in emergencies, you know, if everything else fails they'd have to be firing by visual, but that never happened.

Did you have any idea of how the battle was going on in this Colleoni...?

Didn't have a clue, didn't know a thing that happened. We sunk the Colleoni. I didn't see it. I was that

busy for an hour,

36:00 watching that, and up, down, up, you know. Bang, you know, both six-inch projectiles go at once and everything rattles.

It must take an incredible amount of practise to get this teamwork, this mechanical teamwork so well organised?

Well, it is practised a lot, yeah.

Can you talk a bit about the practise you did before in peacetime even?

Oh yeah, we did it

36:30 in peacetime.

How did you take to that kind of routine when you first had to do it?

Well, when you're in the navy, you're, I won't say a zombie. You're an, automate. You know you're trained to that point where it's very done, very smartly and with precision.

37:00 **Is that what you had joined the navy for? Was your dream of the navy like it was when you arrived?**

I must admit I was a little bit shocked when I hit it. But after assimilating you know it's a completely different world than living in such and such a street in some little town with a little sheila you liked down the bottom of the road.

37:30 You are there under, under pressure, and like particularly when the war's on you know. We had, you got an officer of the turret, he's a lieutenant. He's Buster Crabb, very nice bloke, very athletic type, 'bout six foot two,

38:00 marvellous athlete. But he was the boss of the turret, our turret. But he had nothing to do, only just watch. 'Cause everyone was so well drilled, that it was automatic.

Back to just when you joined the navy, can you talk about that process of assimilation? How long did it take for you to assimilate into this new world?

38:30 Not very long, because bear in mind that I got - I joined the cubs and the scouts for a start. Well, that's sort of, you learn to act with people and communicate and know which is your right hand and which

39:00 is your left foot and all the rest of it.

Were there any shocks - was there anything that you really didn't expect?

No, you just grew with it. You know you, when you first heard your first six inch projectile fired, that'd frighten the hell out of you. You know and it took you a while, you know a short time to get used to that bang but then you didn't hear it any

39:30 more. End of tape

Tape 4

00:34 **How were the conditions adapting to life on board ship? Can you tell me a bit about what your conditions are like early on in the Sydney?**

Well they're very sparse. You just got the necessities. You've got a locker

01:00 that big for all your worldly possessions. You'd, the old bugle call goes for your breakfast, for your lunch, for your dinner. When it's time to go ashore, when it's time to get ready to go ashore. Then you'd front up at the gangway and get inspected to

01:30 make sure you're clean and immaculate and in the dress of the day and all that sort of thing.

What were your sleeping quarters?

Could be amongst machinery and you'd sling up hammocks, you're in the. No, in mess decks they've got hammock rails going across the deck heads you know. And that's where you sling a hammock. That

02:00 like on the Sydney and ships and even destroyers. But sometimes I was a, not sometimes, but I was a fresh air freak. You know I wanted to keep healthy I'd take my hammock up on the upper deck and find a spot and sleep up there instead of sleeping down the mess deck. 'Cause down the mess deck there could be forty people in the

02:30 mess. And when the ship's at sea in war time, all the portholes are closed. And you've got no forced air. Not air conditioning, forced air, but it's not as efficient as modern day ventilation. So I, being a bit of a fresh air freak I would sling my hammock up somewhere open

03:00 to the fresh air.

Can you explain what the mess decks smelled like?

Yeah, there was a definite aroma about mess decks. Be hard, but you couldn't call it acidic. But there was an aroma there. And it wouldn't matter which ship you went to.

03:30 **Did everybody smoke below deck?**

No, no well that was banned. There was upper deck smoking. Initially, when I went there it was smoking down below. But then they started putting restrictions on.

Why was that - was it dangerous or for health reasons or do you know the reasons?

Oh, could have been for you know on ships they're frightened of fires. That would have been the main

04:00 reason. But you'd hear on American ships the statement would be made over the loud speakers, "The smoking lamp is out". In other words "You can't smoke after that statement".

Okay, That's interesting they stopped

04:30 **smoking, I didn't know that before. You mentioned a hammock, did you have any troubles sleeping in a hammock for the first time?**

No, probably the first three nights.

What's it like to sleep on a hammock at sea?

It's as good as anywhere. Course it you know, the funniest part about it is the hammock rails.

05:00 **That's all right. The hammock rail's about six foot off the ground, yeah.**

And you had to grab a rail and pull yourself up into your hammock. If you wasn't a strong bloke, you'd have to sleep on the deck. But there wasn't, that situation didn't arise.

Wow, that's a difficult thing to do when

05:30 **you're tired and you want to go to bed?**

Yeah but that's what you had to do. It's like doing more than a push up, more than a, you know, you had to pull your whole body up, and your legs at the same time. Sort of swinging yourself up into it.

It's a long way up, did anyone ever fall out of these hammocks?

I've seen many thrown out of their hammocks. When the boys were skylarking and

06:00 you know someone's peacefully in bed and someone comes and squick. Or they'd put a slipknot in their hammock rope and the bloke'd be just gone to bed and got him self organised. And some smart alec would come along and go klunk and release the - there'd be a few words you'd never heard before in your life.

Below you, what was below you?

06:30 Hard deck, it's steel. On cruisers, it's steel decks of course, but what they call, oh a heavy lino. I just had the word in my mouth but I forget what it is. But it's a good insulator.

So would have been a bit painful to slip out of your hammock?

Oh God, yeah.

Were you one of those practical jokers?

Oh in a

07:00 minor way I might have, everyone goes through it.

Was there any particular crewmember on board the Sydney that played those jokes that you remember?

No, there was a splattering of jokers.

You mentioned before you had a locker, a small locker. What would have been in your locker, when you were sixteen, seventeen year old first time out at sea?

07:30 See that door there...

Right.

All your sole possessions, three uniforms, probably uniforms, and they used to call them by numbers. Number one was your best suit to go ashore or ceremonial purposes. Number two was to be reasonably respectable

08:00 and another one for working.

Anything else?

Oh, a pair of overalls. Oh but you had two lots of whites. There was a white rough canvass of pretty rough canvass uniform for working around the ship in the tropics.

08:30 But then you had pure white, very nice material is what we call your number one suit, you know, your best suit.

What personal effects did you have on board the ship?

Negligible. Nothing.

Were you allowed to have anything or was that a rule?

You weren't supposed to but there's

09:00 nothing really. Or you might go to some country where there's some exotic something to be bought. But you could always put that in your locker, no one's gonna come round, only saw about one or two locker searches in all the time I was in the navy. And that's probably because someone pinched something from somewhere. But thieving in the navy was a very serious crime. And 'cause it causes

09:30 lack of, forgot the word I'm after.

LMF [lack of moral fibre] or moral...

Yeah, morale, morale. But you got very little of that.

How was the morale on board the Sydney, was it a happy ship?

Yeah, yeah. It all depends,

10:00 you're in a group. Like, I was in a particular branch. Like you start off, I won't go through the whole routine. But you got a group in your mess that you just chum up with and they're buddies on the ship. But you know you've got a couple of other you know ten, twenty, thirty other people you

10:30 communicate with as well you know.

Was there any tension?

Oh, probably there was stress in action. But if someone had a positive job to do in action, they were too busy concentrating on what they're doing. If someone is sitting down waiting and in position

11:00 for something to happen and you know they've got time to think about things, then that'd be the worst part.

What about in those very early days, you went to sea during the Munich Crisis. The war wasn't on but it looked like it was on the horizon.

Yeah, that's right.

What was the atmosphere like at that time?

Well, I wasn't very happy. I joined the world, joined the navy to see the world and see the girls. And

11:30 no, you had a little bit of, slight little thoughts about it you know. But you know that not worth thinking about, not worth thinking about. You adjusted to the situation you were in.

When you were started on these practise drills, did you think about possibly having to use these skills in battle?

Oh yeah, oh well that was the whole object

12:00 of the thing. You, it was very, there was a lot of discipline and it had to be perfect you know, the gun loading and all that sort of thing.

Just stop... Discipline and there was an atmosphere of seriousness on board the ship?

Serio, fury?

Seriousness. Was everybody quite serious about what they were undertaking?

Oh yeah. They're all, everyone had

12:30 their job. I suppose you had a few, very few, layabouts you might say. But you know the type of person that I was, they were joining up, they, pretty good type you know. And most of the blokes I met and met, you know, I never met, I would've never met a crook ear in all the time

13:00 I was there. And I was on Sydney II, Sydney III, Arunta, Bendigo, Whyalla, shore establishments in England and here. And I never had any problems or, you know.

Did you have any little problems with the disciplines of navy life? There were a lot of rules to learn, did you have trouble learning all the rules of hierarchy and

13:30 It comes natural, it comes naturally, as far as discipline. My mother was pretty tough on it anyway, so I was a ready-made bloke for the navy.

But you don't have to salute your mother.

No, no.

Did you have any trouble with getting to know your place within the higher ranks and?

Oh yeah, well you stayed with on your level. But it all depends. Like my first ship was the Sydney.

14:00 And cruisers were very regimental, everything in its place and salutes and all the rest of it. Then you come down to destroyers, which are known as a much happier ship because you're closer together and you see more of everybody. Whereas on a cruiser you mightn't see

14:30 a bloke for six months, or a carrier, aircraft carrier. But the corvettes again are much more family oriented, because they're a small ship and you can yell out from the quarterdeck and talk to the bloke on the foc'sle.

On a big cruiser like the Sydney though, you spent almost all your time in your particular area, in the foretop or...?

15:00 No, I went into the foretop and with a good group of fellas. When, just digressing, no I'll go with the first bit. Now what was this question again?

Where did you spend most of your time, was it all in the one area or was it all with the same?

Oh yeah, you've got your own mess deck and

15:30 that's where you have your recreation, cards, writing letters home, ironing your duds, eating, all that sort of thing in the one area.

You said there was a good bunch of blokes? Can you tell me a little bit about the first group you met on board the Sydney?

Well, you

16:00 go in as a class. N-1 ours was.

N1.

But you meet up with nine or ten blokes you'd never seen before. Now there's one there, Dusty Ayres, he come out, his mother owned a pub. So he come from a pub environment

16:30 you know he knows probably all the facts of life and that sort of thing. There was religious, a couple of religious people you know. But generally they're every day blokes that you'll find on a tennis court or a golf club you know. And that's the way you mix.

Did you have a group of friends you'd formed in training that went on board

17:00 **the ship together?**

Yes, yeah we was in a class of about ten. And but most of us went to the Sydney when this Munich Crisis started. They were started going everywhere you know but probably about, most of us went to the one ship. Then when they got to that ship they went to different divisions. Like a ship's in four divisions,

17:30 and you're mostly restricted to that area. That's where you live, work and eat amongst that. So you can become a family, like a suburb. It's, as a matter of fact I remember hearing like during the war, the damaged ship being

18:00 towed. And the signal was I've got a suburb of Pittsburgh in tow. It's, I forget the, this was the suburb of Pittsburgh but it's, this ship had been damaged and that was the signal.

In your particular suburb if you like, was there any particular person who you were particularly good mates with?

In

18:30 my sub, in my...

In your part of the ship, yeah.

Yes, yes. There was a Ted Dillon, he was a Tasmanian, very nice bloke. And our paths were the same all the way through. We were foretop men on the Sydney then we both went to the torpedo electrical branch together. Then we were drafted to Flinders Naval Depot to go to the next step up, then

- 19:00 different ships. Then he went to the Australia and I went to the Arunta. Then we go to the UK on the Kanimbla for the carrier. You know so, you, I went all, most of the way through with him and a couple of others like that.

Anybody else you remember from the Sydney?

Oh yeah, which Sydney, the cruiser?

The cruiser, the first, Sydney II.

Oh yes, there is

- 19:30 a lot of people I remember, yeah. Only the live ones, you know the couple of the ones that went down on it I remember now and again. But the fact I'm going to functions you know, navy things now and again you meet Sydney people.

- 20:00 There's a fellow up at GyMEA was on two ships with me. He was on the Sydney, the Sydney II and also on the Arunta. So I see him once a week and a couple of other ex-navy blokes and we have a couple of beers up at GyMEA Club.

Back on the Sydney the cruiser, how did the command

- 20:30 **structure work? In your group, who was in charge?**

Well, there was the captain, there's Captain Collins. Then there was under him is Commander Hilton. He was the executive, was using the word executive, they're seamanship branch because they're the people that run the ship. You've got a commander on a big ship and lieutenant commanders in the engine room department.

- 21:00 And that sort of thing, see. But what's your question again?

Who was in charge of you, who was your direct commanding officer?

Well, Collins on the Sydney.

He was the Captain?

He was the Captain. Then there was the commander, then there was a divisional officer. See the ship's divided into four

- 21:30 and this bloke Crabb, Buster Crabb, not long died. Lovely bloke, a bloke about six foot two, built like an Amazon, and good personality, good sportsman. Yes, he just recently died old Buster.

What was his role?

Well he was, he finished up a Rear Admiral. But he was

- 22:00 our Divisional Officer when I was a young sailor doing seamanship. And the port side of the ship is the foretop. So he was the Divisional Officer for the foretop. But then the next ship - you go off the Sydney, do courses, about six or eight months or something. And finish up going to another ship. But this happened that I went to the Arunta.

- 22:30 And some months after that Buster Crabb arrived on the Arunta.

So he was a bit like your, if you were a family in the foretop, he was a bit like the father figure, he was in charge?

That, that's right. He was the Divisional Officer responsible for that area of ship, that area of supplying

- 23:00 staff, for coning the ship, for your action stations, your cruising stations, various other activities that they place yeah.

And what kind of a man was he?

This particular bloke I'm thinking about, very nice fellow. He was a sporting type. He was about six foot one, about that broad and a happy disposition.

- 23:30 And but he was also our officer of our gun, B turret, when we were in the Middle East, but he stayed awake all night. Like, you know we used to snooze, we'd take time out to be on the telephone to the bridge, but he'd be there all night.

Did you ever go on board the bridge? And did you ever go to the foc'sle or the?

24:00 No, on the bridge what for, working purposes?

Yeah during your time on the Sydney, did you have much call to go these areas for, to command areas?

No, I being in the branch that I was in, I had access to anywhere on the ship.

In the electrics?

Yeah. But this, see, first of all you go in,

24:30 at that time you went in as a seaman. And I was a seaman and Buster Crabb was the Divisional Officer. So I saw a lot of him. But he was a very nice bloke, very good sporting. You know we used to have inter-services sports and he'd [?] the ship's sports. Old Buster was there, running down the sideline with the ball tucked under his arm. He died about earlier this year.

25:00 **Did you play any sports or recreations on board ship?**

Yeah, you had deck hockey was the most recognised or the recognised game, deck hockey.

How do you play deck hockey?

Oh, say there were rules, hockey sticks and it all depends how much area you had and what ship you were on. Like for instance

25:30 hockey wasn't real good on a destroyer. 'Cause it's not on, it's all necessary equipment you know. And reels of rope and stuff like that. But you had more chance on a cruiser and aircraft carrier, because on an aircraft carrier there's stacks of space on it for sport.

You could play football on an aircraft carrier?

Just about.

You said that

26:00 **deck hockey was the most recognised sport. Were there other unrecognised, a little bit home made sports that people played?**

No, well there's no. No, cards was the only other one. No, that was the only recognised thing, deck hockey.

Did you play cards for money?

26:30 There would have been people, a lot of people played for money. That was illegal too. But I was never a gambler, so I wasn't one of them.

You were only sixteen, you didn't have time to become a gambler.

That's right. I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen.

Did you have an introduction to sort of adult life on board the ship? To gambling and drinking and all the things

27:00 **that adult men did?**

No. I mean I could have. But you know I sort of find people or you know you're in a mess with fourteen people, you get a buddy you know. You automatically take to someone, you know, you got good communication

27:30 activities and same ideas. But there's usually four or five people in a group that you see more of than anybody else.

Were you ever lonely at sea?

No, no. Never. See

28:00 I was in the cubs and the scouts and lived in an area where there was tons of wide open spaces with trees. And running around climbing trees for bird's nests and all that sort of thing you know.

Did you miss trees?

Pardon?

Did you miss trees?

No, no, oh you did a bit, you did. Yeah, it was pretty

28:30 sparse, all steel and timber. Or upper decks, upper decks on cruisers only were timber. But on destroyers and aircraft carriers were steel.

Was there anything that you could do on land that you couldn't on board a ship that you

missed out on, that you really wanted to do when you got into port?

Well our,

29:00 my family, I'm talking about my father, tennis, we were tennis people. And I had it, took a tennis racket with me, in my, travelled many hundreds and thousands of miles and probably only got to use it once. But I had a game in say Gibraltar for instance. And but that was in peacetime off the carrier Sydney

29:30 when we were bringing that back.

Where did you keep your tennis racket?

Well, you had a locker and the bottom drawer was that long, and 'bout that wide and about that deep. And a tennis racket could. But I was in it, after my initial seamanship life, I transferred into the torpedo and

30:00 electrical branch. And you got more hiding spaces, more places you can deposit anything you want to in these areas. You got switch rooms and switchboards and various places like that.

What sort of things would you hide?

Oh well no, it's only, on a ship. For instance it's customary that every Saturday

30:30 there's captain's rounds. Captain goes round every living position on the ship, touching the tops of lockers to see if there's any dust on it. And you know looking at lockers. He'll even ask a bloke to open a locker to see whether its contents, you know, got it,

31:00 you know, nice and tidy and all the rest of it.

Did you ever get pulled up at inspection for your uniform or anything that you hadn't done correctly?

No. No. No.

Were there any customs particular to the Sydney that belonged to that ship, any things that were done on board that were particular customs or rituals

31:30 **on board that cruiser?**

No, no. Everything's pretty well, although when the war started and later as the war went on you got more young people going on the corvettes you know. Built about seventy corvettes, so therefore they had to have a lot of new people trained down

32:00 at the various training areas, but these people didn't get consumed by the normal naval life, you know. Like don't get me wrong they would still feel navy-ish as good as anybody else. But probably they wouldn't have taken part in the,

32:30 some of the routines you know. I'm, don't, not making myself very clear there.

You, on the Sydney was a very naval ship?

Yeah, she was as they say very, army people would say "Very pukka". No, she was a, you know it's discipline was very

33:00 strong and the old book, the bible in the navy was KR and AI, king's rules and admiralty instructions, everything's done by the book. You know. If you're going to do something different, there's ways of doing it. And like for instance, I was a goer in the navy. You got goers and

33:30 people that just don't do anything. But I would request the use of a whaler, a twenty-seven foot boat. And get a few blokes out of the mess and we'd lower it over the side and sail or row around a harbour. Like say the Admiralty Islands, I can still see myself sailing

34:00 in the Admiralties. In Milne Bay and even Alexandria Harbour in the Mediterranean and Malta, I've sailed navy boats in those harbours, and Plymouth as well.

How did you get permission to do this in wartime?

Oh no that, the Plymouth one was in peacetime.

But in all those different places...?

34:30 All the others, you're in a safe harbour. You know it's always a harbour with tankers that refuel and you know a few ships around. So you might be in there. You can't be at sea all the time, you got a refuel and you know you get fresh water if you can but

35:00 mostly they make their own water. When you're out you know doing a lot of sea time.

Let's talk about your trip over to Europe, on board the Sydney. First of all was the Sydney a

prestigious ship to be on? Was there a certain amount of prestige attached to being on a cruiser?

There probably was, there was a bit of prestige. Because it's,

35:30 they were called more for sort of pomp and ceremony you know. And let's face it, I suppose it'd be the same in the army. There'd be certain groups that were well drilled, well trained, well dressed. See in the wartime and thank god we had a lot of these people, you had merchant

36:00 captains from merchant ships. In the reserves, but you had also pen pushers join the navy and could pass the necessary examinations and studied you know they had to go through courses, and they become captains of corvettes. But I didn't think, I don't think they got in

36:30 anything higher than a corvette. But that was, you know, good effort.

Were there any 'rockies' on board the Sydney?

Very, there were, yeah there were 'rockies' on board Sydney. Because when the war, first war scare started, we were in Fremantle, we were on the west coast. And we took on board about a hundred and

37:00 twenty West Australian reservists. And they stayed in for the duration. Some of them put into go you know to go full term, as in the permanent navy, mmm.

On such a strict naval ship was there any prejudice towards those reservists?

There was a bit, there was a bit. But no, it was only in fun. It was

37:30 more in fun, but only in the first, only in the initial stages.

What kind of thing are we talking about?

Oh, you could tell the difference, you could tell the difference between a reservist and a trained sailor that'd done his time in Flinders Naval Depot. And maybe have

38:00 been on a couple of other ships. They're more seasons to navy life, but that, there was no ridicule or anything like that. It was, I've had some very, very, nice reserve blokes you know and become good friends with them.

When you say there was a bit of jibing in fun, what would a kind of light hearted

38:30 **jibe be against a reservist?**

Oh, they'd call 'em rockies, reserve. "Oh ya bloody Rocky you know." If you made a blue you know. Wasn't all that, that was only in the early stages, it was all assimilated.

As the war went on?

As the war went on yeah, because they, it had to be like that because we were getting more

39:00 ships and so you had to have more people. You had to have more reserves.

Tape 5

00:30 **Can you tell me again for the tape what you just said about the navy? What would you say a navy person is like?**

Well, you had the permanent service people, they settled in to it very well. And you become a family, you know.

01:00 But and that was fine. Then the reserves came along and they were a great bunch of blokes too, there's nothing wrong with them but you could see the difference in the lack of knowledge about their ability to do certain chores. That was the only difference. But they you know, they learned by

01:30 doing the work.

Is there a certain type of personality for someone who's always wanted to be in the navy, is there a certain type of person that you become?

I suppose there is.

What kind of person is that?

I suppose a bit of a dreamer that wants to see the world. And thinking at the

02:00 same time as about permanent training in the, in later life. Like, I went into a branch, so I would have a job when I came out. Like, I went into the torpedo branch, because in those days they did the electrical

as well as torpedoes, depth charges and

02:30 mining, see. So the fact that doing the electrical part, when I came out I went to tech [Technical College] for a few weeks and did an exam and got my electricity, my electrician's licence.

So even when you joined the navy you were thinking ahead of a career after it? The navy was a chance for you to sort of sew your wild oats and see the world?

Yeah.

03:00 No, just I wanted to join the navy regardless. I didn't, in, I probably imagined far horizons and nice countries and all the rest of it. Probably wasn't thinking about dames that much at that time.

What about those far horizons? On your first major trip, the Sydney left for Europe

03:30 **just after the war had started, is that right?**

That's right.

This was the first time you'd been out into the world?

Oh no.

No?

No.

Where did it go before that?

In the navy?

Yeah.

Oh yeah. Well we went, the navy all went down, always went down to Jervis Bay where you would do gunnery practise and exercises of all description, you know you'd be doing sailing. You'd

04:00 be doing whaler rowing and cutter rowing. About sixteen people in the boat and short bloody handles on long oars which were, hell trying to row. No you know you did things like that.

So you went to Jervis Bay, where else did you go during training?

Oh, Jervis Bay was the most prominent

04:30 place. You'd do minor training on the ship you know.

Did you go overseas at all before you set off for Europe?

On the Sydney?

Mmm.

Oh, our first cruise was up the Barrier Reef, and Darwin, West Australia.

05:00 But it was, oh the year before that we did the Hobart Regatta. And then that lot I just mentioned, then the war started the next September. August, September.

How did you feel, you spent most of your life in Lidcombe to that stage. I mean you'd come over from England but how did you feel to be seeing all these new places?

05:30 I, yeah I enjoyed looking at them but I, you know you get a few shocks. And you know very ancient places. And all the destination signs were ineligible and shops and you know. But it's a bit of a, you've always go ashore with buddies. You know you're like

06:00 a couple of kids going to the football or going into town for the day. But you're, anything that's recognised as a tourist place you would make sure you went there. Like, I've been to Nice for instance, did I do that in the war? I forget. We had a round Europe trip too, my wife and I. I decided to do this,

06:30 there's a thing, Europe on ten dollars a day. Someone had it in the paper you could go round Europe on ten dollars a day so. As a guide I just, my wife and I decided to do it. So we went to UK and did all of Western Europe, all of the British Isles.

07:00 And home again.

Ten dollars a day?

It would have been a bit more than ten dollars a day but it was possible.

Back in the, the first time you went overseas on the Sydney, do you remember the first port you called into?

Out of Australia?

Out of Australia, yeah.

Fiji.

What were your first impressions of Fiji?

Oh it's exciting to see it you know. The nice tropical

07:30 growth and the colour of the water and sands show up better in those tropical waters. And the natives of course, it's interesting to see them getting around.

Did you go ashore?

Oh yeah, oh yeah.

What was your first shore leave overseas like? What was the Fiji experience?

Very nice, enjoyed it.

08:00 **What did you do?**

Went round with a couple of buddies and looked at all the tourist attractions. Didn't find any sheilas though.

Were you looking for sheilas?

I don't, well had there been any there, we probably would have been interested. But naturally, oh my wife's not here, is she? When you,

08:30 you're talking in our own lounge room you've got to be.

I think we're safe.

No, it was very interesting, no it's nice to see you know, it's from a tourist point of view.

Were there many shore leaves on that trip across to Europe?

Oh you stayed at, what

09:00 **Other places you've, Fiji was one, where were other ports you stopped in and saw?**

Oh no, that was only a winter cruise that one. But when we, no when we went to Europe

I'm talking about on the Sydney at the moment, when you went to, yeah.

Oh the carrier?

The cruiser yeah, sorry. When you went to, across the first time yeah?

Yeah the,

09:30 oh first of all we went to the west then we come home. Then we went, we was operating off the West Australia coast because there was supposed to be raiders up and down the coast. But then one day we went out and we kept on going. We finished up in Singapore, refuelled and had a couple of days there.

10:00 And then we went to Colombo we went through the Sunda Straits and through Indonesian Islands, which they weren't, wasn't Indonesia then. Got to Colombo. Then up through the Suez Canal and into Egypt. And Alexandria was the naval base there. But from

10:30 the naval base we went to Greece and Crete. We, you know we had bombardments of the, of North Africa. And we're talking about war now, aren't we?

Yeah, we're getting, we'll get into it, we'll be talking about the war a lot more from now on.

Are we?

Your trip to Europe though, through Singapore and Colombo,

11:00 **were there any shocks?**

Oh that thing in port Colombo was at the start of the war.

The start of the war, were there any shocks for you going to these new places in the start of the war?

No, not particularly, not particularly. Like I, but we had done a

11:30 cruise before on the Sydney up to Singapore on the Sydney. But you know you expect to see rickshaws and coloured people and hats, wide brimmed hats and everyone trying to get a dollar out of you, you know, one way and another.

12:00 It's you know good experience.

Were you still looking for sheilas?

Yeah but yes we were looking, we was looking for sheilas. But all depends where you were. You usually, it was a bit wary, you'd rather stay with your mates, you were in

12:30 the security of your friends. We didn't take part in any - go in any of the brothels or anything like that.

Were there already brothels set up for troops at this early stage in the war?

Well I think, no, no they weren't to my knowledge, there was none put up for that purpose. But Singapore

13:00 for instance, those places have always had brothels. Like probably Sydney's always had brothels but we don't know them 'cause you don't visit 'em or sight see in the areas where they are. But when you're in these other places you don't know what area you're in and all that sort of thing. And there are brothels

13:30 in each, every town you go, every city you go to. Naturally. Blokes got a make, got a work their passage, haven't they?

Is this something that the men talked about a lot? What would they say about the brothels?

I suppose there'd be some conversation about it. I

14:00 suppose there naturally would be conversation about it. But you know there's always general conversation about sheilas and girls and, in the navy.

You were still pretty young, had you had much exposure to women, at this stage?

No I hadn't, I'd only had two casual girlfriends.

14:30 **Were you curious?**

Was I curious? Well, put it this way I knew where it was.

Not just about that, but about women in general?

No, no, I thought "It was quite natural to have girls around" and I thought "They were very

15:00 nice people to have around". No, I had a, when I was in the west I had a couple of girls I knew and took around a bit and various places like that. I did go into a couple of those places you're talking about of course, you'd be unnatural if you didn't you know.

15:30 You got a, I was after an educational trip. But you know, when you go to places like Aden and those places, you wouldn't go near it. You know you go to Colombo. Colombo's a nice city. But in those days

16:00 you know everything looks dirty to our standards. It's, and Egypt, you know you go to Egypt and you get the shock of your life. You got the rickshaws and oh they don't call 'em rickshaws there but anyway pretty dirty and

16:30 there's a lot of eye disease in Egypt you know they got crook eyes and they never dressed nice and cleanly like at home and all that sort of thing.

And the couple of places that you went and saw inside of, where you shocked by what you saw, or were they quite clean, decent places?

Oh no, they were quite nice, decent places yeah.

17:00 I think they'd only accrued about twice to be quite honest.

Did they tell you on board about VD [venereal disease] and about that kind of thing?

Oh yeah, they got notices on the notice board.

What did those notices say?

Did they have noti, no, I'm, the notice was King's Rule and Admiralty

17:30 Instructions. Small print, I don't think I ever got around to reading it all and I was in the navy for thirteen and a half years.

Was there a King's Rule regarding diseases?

Oh no, no. No, it was only pure naval, the only, if you're on a destroyer there's

18:00 no talk or instructions. Maybe on one ship in one area, I think the old master at arms, he's an old Irishman, gave a warning to the blokes before they go ashore. "Before you go ashore as a liberty man",

- 18:30 he rattles off "Leave expires at 2200 hrs tonight and all this sort of thing". And any special notes he wants to put in and he might have put a few words in about that.
- 19:00 **Yeah, maybe you could tell us a little bit more about it. Perhaps, you don't have to include yourself but perhaps your ship mates and some of their, how did Sydney men spend their shore leave in these places that you, that?**
- I would say they were all pretty straight blokes. But you didn't, you were only in a certain group. But you know
- 19:30 there was very few that I know that would have played up. But then again I was usually mixed with a group of blokes, I'm not saying we're above anybody else. But everyone was quite aware of what could happen.
- 20:00 **You, I mean the very young people on the boat, I could imagine for a lot of people on the boat going to these places would have been their first experience of being with a woman.**
- Oh that's right, that's right, yes. Yes, of course with going ashore at sixteen you know, sixteen and seventeen and eighteen.
- 20:30 Yes probably, I sampled, I wouldn't have gone to more than about three of four. Had four of those experiences. Got to be dinkum, haven't I?
- Was there a sense that you were heading to war and you were also a sense that you had to sample all these things in life because you may be killed?**
- 21:00 Didn't think about it. No. No that's not the thought I had. I joined the navy because I was adventure-some, I wanted to see the world. And the fact that they bunged in a war a year after I joined up
- 21:30 you know you had, I was in and that was it. But I'm just saying that's my attitude. I wanted to join. Not for a job, just to have navy, naval life you know.
- Can you describe coming through the Suez Canal for us, was that?**
- Suez Canal?
- Yes, on your trip out to the Med.**
- To America, no.
- 22:00 **No, when you were coming to the Mediterranean on the Sydney?**
- Oh yeah. No, well you go up through the Gulf of Aden of course. But you get a surprise. We entered the Suez Canal at night. But I was up early, very early, daylight
- 22:30 to have a look at the Canal and the surrounding. But you know it was just like a big road. If you looked out like that you know it's where you was looking at a road but you see all the sand. Look, I think I pulled out an album there somewhere, think I might have one on the Suez Canal there.
- 23:00 But yeah, it's just like say if you was going across the Nullarbor Plains and you see this straight road going for miles. Instead of seeing brown parched earth, you're seeing, also, you're seeing terrain. You only see the seawater and that's straight line up there.
- 23:30 The only break in the Suez Canal you've got the Great Lakes, bit of lakes in the middle.
- Were you, how did you, how were you recording your voyage for you personally?**
- How am I recording my?
- Were you able to keep a diary records or camera or?**
- Yeah, oh me, you weren't allowed cameras, they were banned. But
- 24:00 I kept one but there was, they were banned. But yeah, no I didn't take too many photos. But I got a couple in there. I'll show 'em to you after if you want.
- Okay, we'll have a look at them after. Can you describe your first impression of landing in Alexandria?**
- Yes, I was a bit horrified. Like, when you
- 24:30 look at Alexandria. Alexandria from off shore it looks a modern city. But when you get down in amongst it, it was to my way of thinking at that time pretty awful you know. The streets weren't real clean. The dress of the gary horse drivers [?] was shocking. The dress they wear, they look dirty.
- 25:00 And also clean place, but there's a European quarter of Alexandria that's nice and clean and up market. But generally the main centre city was nice. But the living areas weren't so good.
- How did you get on with the army blokes there?**

Well, we didn't.

25:30 Because when we were going through there we were just in transit, we were going to the Mediterranean. So we didn't have any, but, and then when we were in the Mediterranean, we were based at Alexandria. It's a bit far away from Bardia and places like that. You wouldn't see the Australian troops there.

You didn't bump into any Australian troops on

26:00 **leave?**

No that's what I was saying, we didn't see any. Because where they were based in Palestine and Bardia and North Africa is a long way from Alexandria you know, where we were operating from, and we you know had a few actions in Greece but didn't see any, we didn't have it, we were

26:30 there and doing our work before the soldiers went to Greece.

Can you describe your first naval action, the first action at sea that you were involved with?

Yes, I was probably a little bit anxious, naturally. But

27:00 no, I'll tell you what, when I first, my first action station was down in the shell rooms, in the bowels of the ship and I wasn't very happy down there. But not long after getting into the Mediterranean I got a shift up to this, as I say the gun turret, B turret. And I've given the job of gun layer. And I'm a

27:30 torpedo man. There's two branches: they versus each other, you know in the branches. And the torpedo man is, just as an aside, they handle all the electrics of the ship and all that. And that's what I went for, for the purpose of having something when I left the navy. But, where was I?

Oh I was just, the first action, the action stations that you were in.

The first action, no well I was,

28:00 the old gun, when you're sitting in the gun turret the noise is a lot different than it is if you're outside the gun turret. You know the gun turret's about, the steel's that thick. There's a great shake and rattle of all the moveable bits in the turret. But if you're involved, see I was fortunate I was involved with a particular job, all this time.

28:30 Like being number one of the left, that's being the gun layer. Whereby if, sitting down, brass wheel in hand for short corrections, a lever down there to bring the turret breech back down to the loading position after the firing of each round. So

29:00 but that was my job in the Mediterranean on the, when we sunk the Sydney, ah sunk the Bartolomeo Colleoni and the Espero.

What was the first ship that you were involved in sinking?

The Espero, destroyer.

Can you talk about that battle for us? Can you tell us

29:30 **were you aware, can you describe that feeling of going into battle and engaging with the Espero?**

Yeah, well there was a feeling of excitement and a slight bit of anxiety. But I don't think, the fact that I had a job that kept me occupied, I didn't,

30:00 I might have had a frog in my throat or a bit of a feeling of anxiety. But the point is with the navy, you do that much training in gunnery or whatever your action stations might be that it's secondary. You know it's, or it comes automatic you know.

So the adrenaline's pumping through your body?

30:30 Oh yeah.

And

But you

Were you getting information, how was the information coming back to you on the success or how the battle is proceeding?

It's not, unless the officer of the turret had a telescope on the, he had a seat in the middle of the two, or back from the guns. But and he had a little, he had a seat

31:00 there and a periscope and he could see what was going on. But he also had the headset on coming from the TS that, the transmitting station which gives you know any talk that's going on relating to the battle, he could hear. But in those actions it's, I didn't see a thing.

31:30 **What information?**

We sank the Bartolomeo Colleoni. And I'm in B turret. I didn't see a thing. It was.

What information were you getting when you were attacking the Espero?

What, well the ships were sighted. And there was three of them actually. And we went to action stations and then you

32:00 start shooting guns. And by the time you fall out from your gunnery position, it's all over. You might see smoke on the horizon or you might.

How many shells did you fire at the Espero?

Oh about eighty I think, bout eighty. Is my book, album there?

32:30 **What was the atmosphere like after eighty shells, and or after you'd been firing eighty shells at the Espero?**

Well, you're excited you know, you've joined the navy to see the world. And you're, if you sink a ship first up, you're feeling pretty good.

So you, I'm trying to understand how it

33:00 **must feel in there, is it, can you describe what it's like during this very intense period of firing the gun?**

I would say everyone has butterflies in their stomach. And probably that little thing in there, neck there, you know sometimes, I don't know what it is. But you would, you would be, yeah you'd have a bit of anxiety. But you know I was

33:30 only seventeen or maybe just eighteen.

What was the smell like?

Pardon?

What was the smell inside?

Acrid and main, it wasn't very pleasant, it was a smell that could make you cough and not very pleasant to breathe in.

Where was this smell coming from?

From the blast of the gun, when the

34:00 gun fires the projectile you know, it's got a shell goes in loaded first. Then there's a carton of some form of repellent, ex, or

Propellant.

Propellant. Not repellent, no. But anyway, ammunition to push the, there's a charge you know.

34:30 There's a charge explodes, that's, when a gun's fired, there's a button pressed which sends an electrical charge and explodes this small cartridge and that ignites the charge. But then the

35:00 explosion from the charge is the thing that propels the shell.

What was the sort of explosive in this charge?

TNT. A TN, oh no, no just cordite, cordite. I thought you meant in the shell. Cordite.

What did cordite look like?

It was in a cover, I never ever saw it. It's in,

35:30 I think it was wrapped in canvas you know. It was canvas cover.

Can you describe for us the scene when you fell out from your pos, when after you, after, at the end of the battle, when you came out of your gun turret?

Oh, it was a feeling of excitement and

36:00 a bit of satisfaction because we'd sunk one of the enemy.

How did you find out you'd sunk her?

Well, you got this officer of the turret giving you a bit of information. But usually it was some of the times we had damaged the ship

36:30 badly and it was sunk later.

In the case of the Espero, was there, I can imagine it may have been like a football club and you've just won the game? Would that be a fair description?

Yeah, that'd be right, that'd be right.

Can you describe that moment for us, after you realised that you'd sunk the ship, the Espero?

Well, I felt excited because that was our first action

37:00 we had in the war. I was excited about it and satisfied and luck, feeling lucky that it wasn't us.

Can you just describe seeing the Espero going down?

No. No. It was a fair way off. And I didn't see, you know when you're in the gun turret you stay there

37:30 until you know it's all clear and that sort of thing.

Can you describe the scene in the water after the Espero sank?

No, I can't, no. They were too far away. We were probably firing at about twenty-five thousand yards.

Were there any survivors from the ship?

There would have been but other ships picked

38:00 them up, whatever was there was picked up by somebody else. Although I think we had, we did have some survivors on the ship, I've got a photograph in the book, in my album there, the survivors.

How did it make you feel firing a gun at fellow navy men?

Well, I didn't feel any remorse

38:30 or anything like that. In fact I felt happy that we had a success. As you'd had a game of football and you won, you feel good about yourself. Well that's, feel a bit like that when you sink a ship. You put it on a competition level, type of thing. We won the game.

How did you feel about the Italians?

39:00 Well in the early days of my life you tend to look down a bit on them. This is only for no reason, the fact that they call them "Dagos" and things like that, you didn't think of them in the same light as Australians or. I'm not saying, but that's what I

39:30 think would probably you know.

How did you feel about them as an enemy? How did you feel about them as an enemy battleship?

Oh very efficient, as an enemy, yeah. They, the Italian will, if you look at their aircraft and cars and all that sort of thing, they've always been tops in aeronautical engineering and that sort of thing, haven't they? And some of these Le Mans [?] road races,

40:00 the Italian cars really do well. So I think that sort of carries on from their know-how in the war.

Tape 6

00:06 **After the Espero what was the next major involvement of the Sydney that you?**

We bombarded Bardia.

Can you tell us a little bit more detail about that?

Well, we arrived off the coast in the early dawn. And

00:30 they picked out selected targets and mostly the aerodrome and, fire away. It was probably, I don't know how many projectiles we put over there but we stayed there for about half an hour then departed.

Did you have any opposition?

No.

Did you encounter any opposition during this period?

01:00 Oh we, when we sunk the Espero, I don't know whether we got, been up to that yet. We had that battle with the Bartolomeo Colleoni. She was one of two very fast Italian cruisers. There was the Colleoni and the Giovanni Delle Bande Nere. And we met up with one of those, both of those one, early one morning.

01:30 Clear sky, ocean as flat as a pancake, and we went into action, firing. One of the ships sort of took shelter behind the other more or less. But anyway we started to hit, I think we hit the one that departed. But then we started to get hits

02:00 on the Bartolomeo Colleoni, and to the point where she was stopped in the water and out of action.

Were you specifically hunting that battleship?

No we were, you know we were out on patrol, it was a cruiser actually. Same as ourselves, we were a cruiser. We were out on patrol and that's the time to sort of

02:30 scan the horizon, the most. That's you know, you can't see ships at night-time. We didn't have radar in those days. So at dawn you had to be very aware of what's on the horizon. There might be close, there mightn't be anything but then again there could be something. And on, but I'm not sure, I think we were informed by one of our

03:00 destroyers way ahead that these two ships were in the vicinity. So the captain put on more revolutions and we started in that direction and we found them. And went into action and started getting hits and damaged it to the point where she was out of action.

03:30 Was that a fleet action or can you...?

No, that was just the Sydney only plus two destroyers, they usually sent, have two destroyers for anti-submarine equipment, oh for surveillance and all that sort of thing.

What was the general purpose of those patrols that you went on?

Well, in the Mediterranean we were at war with the Italians. And

04:00 it was a very small area, the Mediterranean. Really, you know, in what we're to, used to, there's tons of open space. But in this case you've got a, be alert first thing in the morning, and to see if there's anything on the horizon. Because there could be a clear horizon or there could be something there. So in this case we spotted these two cruisers.

04:30 Where were you when at dawn on that day?

I was in B turret, B turret, that's the second turret on the, on the ship. Number one, oh number one is the gun layer. So my job's keeping an eye on

05:00 about three or four tiles and manipulating a handle there to give elevation or depression and that was it. But then the gun would fire and as soon as it fired I would depress or depress the barrel and we'd reload and they'd call out when they

05:30 were reloaded and I'd up and looking for the target you know, putting it on the right direction.

Did you, how do you compensate for the rolling of the sea, rolling of the ship in the ocean?

Yeah, well the firing circuits went through a, we'll say a tube with I'd say "This is the way it'd be done". With a

06:00 tube, a vial of mercury. Now if gun's not on an even keel the mercury is not making a circuit. But when it's on an even keel you've got an electrical circuit through that. So that ensures that you're on an even keel when you fire the gun.

06:30 Okay.

Yeah, that's fascinating, I hadn't realised that. So describe, so it's not quite instantaneous is it, when the gun's fired, the order to fire is given so, when you're rolling around, can you describe how that's working?

Yeah. You know with the ship rolling, there's no good firing the gun when the old ship's like that. The gun, the thing's got to go over the top of it. See. So you're just wasting

07:00 ammunition unless you're on a perfect level. So its firing circuit is closed and bang, away you go.

How big a sea could you fire accurately the gun in?

Oh, say about eleven or twelve miles.

And how rough?

Oh, how rough was the sea, like a millpond. On that day it was

07:30 like a millpond as it generally is in the Mediterranean. Because it's a closed sea plus in fact it's pretty narrow, so there's not a lot of space for waves to build up.

How much sleep had you had that night?

Oh probably three hours.

And how far into your time on actions stations were you at that time?

08:00 Oh, we could have been there for an hour before by that time. We, always, usually went to, in those days we used to sleep at our action stations, so you were there on the spot if anything occurred. But

How do you sleep at your action station?

Well,

08:30 it's very difficult because I was on a part of the gun as I say number one. I had a space of about that, about two metres, which followed the concourse of the side of the gun turret. And I found some old packaging and cardboard and laid it down on there, so that's where I slept or rested.

09:00 But each person in the turret would have to be awake for one hour, an hour each night to keep, be ready in the event of any emergency happening. So but there were times that we were at action stations, all depends on how close the enemy were. And we had to sit up and be ready all the time.

How many people were on your particular action station

09:30 **rotating through that shift?**

Oh there was thirteen people in the turret. There's six people to each gun plus the officer of the turret, he was, had a periscope. He was sitting at the back of the turret with a periscope but that didn't come in to the firing system. That was just for observation. All the geometry

10:00 of firing, hitting the target was done by the clock, there'd be a clock, a big, we'll say a, nowadays, a computer. All the wind directions, the speed of the wind, the estimated speed of the enemy, your own speed and

10:30 drift due to tides, all that was wound into this table, which we'll say a computer before computers come out. And it gave us gun range. It gave us the range.

How were you getting those instructions to elevate your gun?

To who?

How were you getting those instructions to elevate your barrel?

Oh,

11:00 I had, on the dials right in front of me there's red pointers, there's black pointers. I had to follow the red with the black. The red pointers represented the director control tower at the apparatus above the bridge. They, being the highest point to get the best view.

11:30 So but that was transmitted through all four gun turrets. Everyone followed that black pointer in each turret and blasted off.

So how, what exactly was the nature of the instructions you were receiving them from, receiving at the time?

There was no instruction. It was visual

12:00 information on the dials.

And where and how was that information coming from?

Well, that information is, commences from director control tower, which is the highest point on the ship. And they've got the, command the biggest range. And that goes down to what they call the TS, transmitting station, down below in the bowels of the ship.

12:30 And you've got a, you might say a mini computer there, it's like a table. All information is wound into it. Enemy's speed, your speed, tides, drift, etc. Any other things that might be detrimental to hitting target could be corrected there.

13:00 **And what was, what exactly was the black pointer?**

Oh black pointer yeah, well that's the one you followed the red pointer with. They were the people that were sending down the target. They weren't doing it by voice, they were doing it by pointer.

So who was sending you the, who was controlling the black pointer?

13:30 Yeah, no, I had the black pointer and I was following the red pointer.

Right, okay, I see. And what would happen once you, the black pointer and the red pointer came together?

Well that was right, you were on target. That was an indication of the target, just like that you know as of our equipment is worked out mathematical equations and said "Well, that's where

14:00 it's got a be".

And so can you describe what was happening sort of in the hour before? Were you laying, you, had you had enough sleep do you think and?

Well, I was privileged that I had a vacant space about five-foot long shaped like a banana and about a foot wide. And I curled my

14:30 body round that on cardboard that I'd gathered to keep off the steel of the tunnel, of the turret. And that's where I relaxed.

While you were there, who was looking after your action station?

No, well that was my action station but there's always someone on the bridge to, linking the bridge, the director control

15:00 tower, the turret and the transmitting station, so everyone was aware of what was going on.

And when you were on patrol, how often did you have to sleep in this position?

Every night you were at sea, every night. Like you know, at sea like, when you went to sea on patrols, you might stay at sea

15:30 for, in the Mediterranean I'm talking about, it's not a big ocean. But you might be at sea for five days in a row. Could be eight, ten. But like when you're outside the Mediterranean as we were also, going there and back, you know in between, like you

So for all of those five days or ten day patrols in the Mediterranean, on the Sydney where were

16:00 **you sleeping?**

In this space, in that space.

How comfortable was that?

Pardon?

How comfortable were you?

Ghastly but it was better than not sleeping at all. Yeah. No, I was fortunate that I had that little cubbyhole there alongside the gun. Other people

16:30 were out on the upper deck, the people on the anti aircraft four-inch guns, they were pretty well out in the open all the time.

For five days they were living out on, next to their guns?

Oh well you know they went to their action stations before dusk and finished after dawn. But being sailors they could always find somewhere to sleep.

17:00 **And while you were on action stations but nothing was happening, were you able to, how were you taking regular breaks?**

Well one at a time, if someone wanted to go down below, he goes one at a time, never more than two would be allowed out of the turret.

17:30 But mostly the least important person could probably stand in for anyone round the place you know. The place, the bloke that can be done without more than the others you know, if you can understand that.

What was the temperature at the time of when you first saw the Colleoni?

18:00 Well, it wasn't too bad but it was bearable, because it's a steel tub bear in mind. Probably about five eighths of an inch, I dunno what it is in metric. And that took a bit of time to change temperature. And of a night-time, you know, it was quite bearable. It wasn't

18:30 all that bad in the Med because it's a nice climate in the Mediterranean.

Can you describe that climate for us?

Well, it's a climate that if you was on the Bondi Beach, and you thought "Oh, no I think I'll have a swim, that looks alright to me". Yeah.

How safe did you

19:00 **feel in that turret?**

Well, I felt pretty safe. I never thought about enemy shells hitting. You're gonna ask me if you start to

thinking was that gonna happen. But no, you just kept on going. And you might have a bloke close to you that you might pass the time of day with him. Might

19:30 even have a magazine close by for those times.

What other, what were the dangers of working in the turret apart from enemy gunfire?

Oh, there's a lot of safety devices in there which counter any damage. The only thing that's gonna cause damage is enemy action.

20:00 There's no way a shell could go off by itself.

Why's that?

Because you got to have a certain temperature before you get an explosion. Like you had to have a primer. There's three, you've got a detonator,

20:30 to ignite the primer, and the primer to ignite the charge to blow it out see, to force the shell out.

You weren't in there just with shells there was also cordite?

I'm sorry, sorry, I'm sorry about that. I'm talking about when we fired the gun, we're firing the gun and you know the operation, the shell.

21:00 **Who was with you in that turret on that morning when you saw the Colleoni?**

Who was working?

Who was with you, next to you?

Well the person, up the top of the mast or we could have got a signal from some patrolling destroyer. I don't know how we exactly got it. But could, more like it was a patrolling destroyer

21:30 and I think it was. Sighted it in the early dawn and that's when as I say you are at the most vulnerable. But they sent us a signal and we were off in that direction. That's all boilers burning and had the action.

Who was with you next to you in that turret, who were

22:00 **the other men there, inside the turret with you, do you remember that?**

Joe Blow. No, I wouldn't remember them, wouldn't remember them. The only person I would remember was the officer of the turret who was recently deceased, Admiral Crabb. He was a young sub lieutenant at that time.

What did he say to you at that time when he saw the Colleoni?

He didn't

22:30 say anything. Officer didn't communicate with sailors. Only in technical, you don't, his nickname to the boys was "Buster". But you could never go up and say, "Hey Buster it's so-and-so, so-and-so". You'd have to walk up and salute him and say "Excuse me sir", etc. etc. etc. You didn't say "It's a nice day today".

Did you have a

23:00 **nickname when you were on the boat?**

Yep, I had "Seagull".

How did you get Seagull?

See the length of the legs. No, I got that in the clothing store at Flinders Naval Depot when I just joined. And you had to take your gear off to fit naval uniform. And I was standing there with my long, skinny legs and nothing else. And this bloke said, "God,

23:30 you look like a bloody Seagull." From then on I copped "Seagull" for the length of the time on that ship. And that sort of carried to the next ship I went to because someone knew this bloke and that bloke. And it took me about four ships to get rid of it.

24:00 **I know, it might, can you tell us about the first shells that were being fired by you at that time? The, what the fee, how you went into action on the Colleoni?**

Well, with the Colleoni, it was a very nice introduction because we were up

24:30 and had been to dawn stand too, you always had to get up before dawn. 'Course that's as I say, that's when you're most vulnerable. But this morning this ship was sighted on the, or two ships were sighted on the horizon. But they were that far away that we were sent to

25:00 breakfast. And changed into action gear, clean underpants and singlet essential. In case you got injured you know and there'd be no infection and that sort of thing. So, we were fully prepared and all guns manned and everyone alert and

What other things were you wearing for action gear?

25:30 We always had to wear a life belt. But there was no other protection like from bullets or bombs or anything like that. But you always had to have your gas mask with you.

Were you wearing any other gear in case of flash or?

Oh, that's only

26:00 some gunnery people had anti-flash gear. In case a shell misfired in the gun barrel and caused a big flash back, you know, it's very dangerous and so those people had anti-flash gear on. I was issued with anti-flash gear but I forget if I ever had any occasion to put in on.

26:30 'Cause we was in the enclosed turret, but I think we did, no we did. No, when we were in the turret you was just as likely to, something to get hot and so yeah at action stations we had to have anti-flash gear.

What did the anti-flash gear look like?

It looked like just out of Mars. No, it was cotton, white cotton coming around tight round here,

27:00 and down to about there and you had gloves, white gloves that come right up to there. That's to stop the damage, injury from the flash.

Was that adequate protection?

Well, if you get more than 40% of your body burned, you're gone. So this reduced the possibility of going.

27:30 **What did you discuss over that breakfast that they sent, you were sent to breakfast when you saw the Colleoni, what did you discuss over breakfast that morning?**

There wasn't a lot of talk. There wasn't a lot of talk. Everyone had had rumbles in the stomach. Wondered what's gonna happen and what's, this was our first action ship

28:00 to ship. You know. So you were a bit, thinking a bit when you, it happened.

Were there speculation, did you speculate on which ship you were going to attack?

No, no, you don't get any information, all you know there's a ship there. But you know yourself that it has to be an Italian ship because the Germans weren't in the Mediterranean, or no other enemy nation

28:30 was in the Mediterranean at that time. So it had to be an Italian warship.

What did you know of the Colleoni?

The Colleoni was a very fast ship. Had about forty nautical miles per hour in her trials. And so that's pretty fast.

What were you aware of the Colleoni at the time?

29:00 Oh, I'd never heard of the Colleoni before. But no, we learned more about the Colleoni after we'd sunk it, than what we knew before.

What did you know of the ships that you were going to attack at that time?

Well the, on the bridge they always

29:30 had a book, Jones Fighting Ships. And they could, if they didn't know or but a place like the Mediterranean you know it's either an enemy or it's one of yours, in the war. Anyone that was in the Mediterranean shouldn't have been there. But they had a particular aerial signal that identified

30:00 friendly aircraft and I think that might have come later. They had what they call an IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] signal, which could be picked up and that would identify a warship or aircraft, which saved a lot of lives I'd say. Because you know, you get three or four aircraft heading in your direction and they haven't got that signal coming out, you open

30:30 fire.

What in particular was the nature of the signal, was it?

The nature?

Yeah. Was it an optical signal or a radio signal?

Oh signal, it was a, say an electronic signal. Well a radio, no a radio signal. Like sending out an SOS

[Save Our Souls], likewise you send out this signal, the same.

So after breakfast what happened next, when you were chasing...?

31:00 We went up to our actions stations and took our spots in our gun positions. Everywhere, the engine room, people went into damage control situation, boiler room people, all with their anti-flash gear was, went into their situations that prevent fire and spread of

31:30 fire. And even the old chief cook was out there as a first aid man. The cooking staff and that were in the first aid part of it. Yes. Very interesting.

And can you tell us about what happened next?

32:00 Actually, we went through about four or five actions there. One was the bombarding at Bardia, then there was the Espero, the destroyer, Espero, then there was the Colleoni...

When you were attacking the Colleoni,

When we

32:30 **yeah as you were, after breakfast, can you describe the action of attacking the Colleoni?**

Well, we just opened fire, got into a good firing position and I think must have been some other ship sort of, they didn't take part in action but they

33:00 might have something, been something. It was in an area near Crete that they didn't have a lot, long way, much area to go. But no, we were just too good for them. They were equal in guns, speed etc.

33:30 So fortunately we might, must have been a bit better.

Can you recall or was there any, how, were there any other shells coming at you or can you describe any instance of the Colleoni shooting back?

Oh yes. No, I can't describe it because I was locked in this turret.

34:00 But I know by the big hole in our funnel that they did get a hit on us. We had a hit of about six of your size could sort of go through the hole at once.

Can you describe the sound of when that happened?

No, I was in the turret, which is a sort of, almost an air-tight thing, you know in the thick

34:30 shell of it. You don't hear what's, other than the actual gunfire, you don't hear anything, what's going on outside.

How long were you in action against the Colleoni?

Would have been an hour.

How many shells did your turret fire?

I think it was,

35:00 about a hundred and forty-four. If I had a look in my little book, I think I might have that in there.

So roughly speaking how many shells a minute are you firing?

Oh about ten or twelve.

In one minute?

Mmm. They move pretty quick.

35:30 They do a lot of drill, and they get a lot of shells away. They could, you know, the more you get away the better chance you've got to get away yourself. In other words if you can damage them more quickly, in the first part of the action, you're on top.

So more or less how many shells did you, did

36:00 **the Sydney fire at them, approximately fire at the Colleoni?**

At least a 140.

That's all turrets or just your turret?

I'd say all turrets. But I, as I say, if I'll have a look at this book, a quick look at this diary of mine and I'll know because I only

36:30 read it the other day. But being an old, deaf old bugger these days you forget numbers.

Can you describe the scene when you came outside your turret?

Lovely, calm Mediterranean surface, blue sky, hardly a cloud, but a dark

37:00 ammunition smoke in the lee of the Colleoni.

How far away from you was she?

Oh sort of about five miles. Could have, that's something I don't know because being in the gun turret you don't see as much as the

37:30 guys has got action stations outside. But I think I got it in my little book there.

Is there a particular flag that you rise, raise at the time when you're doing action?

Your country's flag, in our case the Union Jack. When you go into action that indicates you're in action against the enemy.

You put the Union Jack or the Australian flag?

Oh sorry,

38:00 sorry, the Union Jack, the Australian flag. I'd, I'm thinking then, we're working with the Royal Navy, see. And they had their flag. You see a lot of, you saw a lot of Union Jacks there, my mind must have dwelled on those a bit.

And did you put this up all the time or?

38:30 No, as soon as you saw it, a ship and you were going to go into action against it, you pulled up the flag.

Can you describe the feeling on the ship when you knew the en, the battle ensign had gone up?

Made the old tummy do a couple of rolls. And little feeling of anxiety and saying to yourself, "I wonder what's gonna happen this time".

39:00 But you then charge off, blowing up, putting a bit of air in your water wings, which you've got all, on all the time. And up to your action stations.

Sorry, can you tell me about putting air into your water wings?

Just like the kids today, you put something round here and got the spout there and blow it up.

Why do you do that at that

39:30 **time?**

Well oh no, well most people put a bit in it anyway in case, so they got some in there. But if it interfered with their action movements, well they wouldn't. Yeah.

Did everybody perform to admiralty

40:00 **orders or...?**

Yeah, not a soul. The only, we had about three persons, people out of six hundred and forty-five that had to have, go ashore for reasons of anxiety or something like that. Yeah. Only three out of,

40:30 not too bad. And I've never lost a sleep about it since.

Tape 7

00:34 **Just stay with the Sydney for a moment. I believe when you got into Alexandria Harbour there was quite a reception, after that battle with the Colleoni? Can you tell us a bit about that?**

Oh, we were pretty proud of ourselves and very happy that we were the first ship in the Mediterranean fleet that had had a situation like

01:00 that. No, we were very pleased about it. Probably some of the blokes spoke too much about it because they got a bit of a bad name with throwing up, you know, "When are you blokes gonna do something?", you know. So I think some went overboard with how good they were. But that upset a few people I'd say.

Who did you have to talk to about it - did you get shore leave in Alexandria?

01:30 Oh yeah.

And who was around Alexandria at that time?

Egyptians. No, they had a fleet club.

A fleet club.

They had a fleet club. And there was the Mediterranean fleet based on Alexandria, the other half of 'em were up at Gibraltar.

02:00 And you'd go to the fleet club. You might go to a dance or some act, sort of activity and have a talk to ships, blokes off different ships.

Did you ever speak to any of the Egyptians, seeing as you mentioned them?

No. No, no. The only person I've communicated with, that

02:30 on each ship, the, an Egyptian tries to get aboard to be the garbage remover. Because the tucker, the leavings from the breakfast, the dinner, the tea was like a wedding banquet, you know, you know. Throwing out bits of this and this. And this particular bloke,

03:00 I can still see him, he's a real swarthy type and looking after about two or three. They used to pick the refuse, food refuse out of the garbage cans on the wharf or on the ship. They were allowed, one of them was allowed, but this bloke would go ashore and sell it - to the people on the shore.

How did he get chosen to be the one who was

03:30 **allowed on aboard?**

Well, if he hadn't have been, we'd have had all the odds and sods about the place. But this bloke took charge, he was the number one man you know. And he was a tough looking boy, boy. He was more than a boy but.

Did you talk to him at all or did you just see him?

I

04:00 couldn't, he couldn't talk our language and I, he knew "Bastard", he knew all those because everyone'd call him a "Gyppo bastard". But he wouldn't have known what that meant you know.

Did you go into any of the theatres or entertainments when you were in Alexandria, any of the cinemas or?

The cinemas?

Yeah.

04:30 Most of them were in English and French and Egyptian. So when you went there you was looking at the screen. And then you had to look on the right hand side to see what they was talking about. But there's other people in there from other nationalities, they had to look at the other way to see this language.

Were there ever Egyptians mixing with you in the same cinemas?

No, I didn't see any,

05:00 I didn't see any. 'Course they're always dark, there could have been, there probably would have been. Yeah, there would have been. Otherwise, their cinemas would have gone broke because half the time all the ships were at sea doing fleet work you know.

Did you mix with people from other services at all?

Oh met a few Aussies and couple of the

05:30 air force people, but other than that, no.

Were they impressed with what you'd done with the Bartolomeo Colleoni?

Yeah, it never come up. You know it's just something that happened and you didn't even talk about it you know. We were pleased with ourselves but I think some of the blokes had a go at the pommies.

06:00 Like, we had a couple of other cruisers used to operate with us, they had a go at them just for fun you know. But it gave 'em a bit of a bad name you know slinging off because they - it's like football game or cricket game you know, but no, there's not much of that, very little.

After that action you stayed in the Mediterranean,

06:30 **you did some, saw some action in Greece, is that right?**

That we, yeah the Greek Campaign started, yeah. We were escorting and took troops to Greece. And but that's before the rot set in you know, the big action of Greece came after, you know we left the Mediterranean say three weeks after that. And that's when the,

07:00 that started.

Were there any incidents that were particularly memorable from that escort duty at that time, anything that stands out to you?

What escorting other ships? No, no.

What did you do during that kind of work, it wasn't action stations? What were you engaged in on the boat?

In normal, if we were going

07:30 across the Indian Ocean at that time, we were all at cruising stations. That's with one third of the crew at action, one third of the armour is ready for action. Sorry, cruising stations were having a holiday. But then the next one was this one where one third of the armaments were manned.

08:00 Then the next one, well it was half were manned, more serious area was. Then the next one's action stations, everyone at their station.

Did they have different naval names for those different states of alertness?

First, no they went, first degree of readiness, second degree. Air-raid,

08:30 what'd they say for that? Oh, I forget now.

And how would they signal the change between one and the other?

Well, as I say the action station one - that's full on, everyone knows drop everything and run to your station. But cruising station is an organised group of people man their stations.

But

09:00 Once, one hour, four hours out of eight, out of twelve.

But how would they let you know that it was action stations, would there be, what would happen?

Oh no, oh no, you got sirens and bells that go right through the ship.

Must have been a frightening experience to hear those bells?

Oh, you drop everything. Drop everything and run.

09:30 **On the way back to Australia, this was in late 1941?**

That'd be in '41.

Was it before the Japanese had attacked in the Pacific?

That was before the Japs, yeah.

So what was the trip back like? Was it a holiday or was it difficult?

Oh, you had to man your stations as if there was an enemy around

10:00 the corner. But you still did the same, cruising stations or second degree of readiness. It would have been. When there's one six-inch turret, one four-inch gun etc. Cut it down to a third.

Were there any comforts on board the ship, things that you could do in recreation time? You mentioned deck hockey but

10:30 **what would you do when you were on holiday or when you weren't working?**

Nothing, there was nothing to do. They had a recreation room but there was no books or anything like that. Someone might go up and play cards there but you know you could play cards on the mess deck. You know where you lived really. Like, I've

11:00 played deck hockey a few times, they played that a few times, deck hockey. But that wasn't in the wartime, that was when you're cruising distances you know.

How did you cope with the monotony and the boredom in those times?

Well, when you're living with a group of young people, and let's face it we had anything from seventeen

11:30 through to the old blokes of about twenty-five and twenty-six. But you know they played certain card games, non gambling - that was illegal, and poker and all that sort of thing with matches.

12:00 If I knew what I knew now, I'd do a bit of art. If I went back under the same circumstances I'd have taken something worthwhile to do. I did these pictures up here you know, and since in recent years. But I'd wish I'd have been interested in art at that time. That would have helped a lot.

Was that something you could do in the navy at that time, was there anybody who?

12:30 Well, no one ever did it. No one ever did it.

You never met a sketcher or an artist in your time in the navy?

There's only one officer in the latter part of my time in the navy I saw painting.

Did you remember thinking that "You'd like to do that back then?"

Yeah, it did cross my mind because you've got so much to paint you know.

13:00 Or when you're travelling. Like in ships and with different harbours and things like that.

You mentioned you had a diary, did you write?

Yeah. Oh it's just a diary, it's not very exquisite. But it's somewhere.

That's all right, we can find it later. Did you write descriptions or just notes or what kind of thing?

Just, not my feelings,

13:30 not communications with anyone else, just air raid ten minutes or things like that you know. Things at, birthday and things like that.

How often would there be an air raid on board the Sydney, was that something you came across in the first ship?

Oh air-raids,

14:00 the Sydney, oh I suppose we might have had about thirty air raids while we was over there. But they were a very well prepared harbour, Alexandria Harbour. Because there was a lot of French influence there. And they had the French battleship

14:30 Lorraine and other battleships. Then there's usually, before the fleet was in, there's about forty ships in the harbour. They could put up a big barrage.

Did you ever get attacked by Stukas?

By who, Stukas? We left the Mediterranean the day

15:00 before the Stukas struck their first blow, would you believe? First blow, that's when we was heading down towards the Red Sea to come home. That was lucky.

So you'd never even heard of these, aeroplane?

Oh yeah, oh yeah. But no, we had conventional bombing in Alexandria.

15:30 Italian stuff. And at sea, you know with very small harbour, ocean that Mediterranean. And you're never far away from the enemy who were Italy. And yeah we had quite a few air raids.

Why did the Sydney come back to Australia, what were your orders at that stage?

Well, they had

16:00 three Sydney class cruisers. And the [HMAS] Hobart was stationed in the Red Sea for quite a long time. The [HMAS] Perth was on its way home from being taken over by the Australian Navy, and they come via the States. And they were held up in that area,

16:30 through, around the southern parts of Panama. There was a bit of, there was British interests down there that had to be protected. But

The third was the Sydney?

The Sydney. Yeah, well she started the same, she kept on the same routine operating

17:00 off the west coast of Australia. And that's where she was lost.

You had left the ship by this stage?

Yeah.

Do you remember the day you heard about the sinking?

Yeah.

Can you tell us about that day?

Yeah I was, cried. Yep.

17:30 You know everyone. Yes, there's a lot of people on there, six hundred and forty-five, one hit. Yes, that

was unfortunate but went to a new ship, started afresh.

18:00 **How did you hear that news, cause the Sydney there was no news about what had happened initially was there?**

No.

What did you know and how did you hear about it?

It wasn't announced, that's the trouble with the navy, the secret service. Here we are on a ship, been on it, some of us, two, three years. They, captain, commander, get the news, and the officers

18:30 but they hang onto it. The troops don't get it, only through, not an official statement, by hearsay. It was never, which was bloody awful, I reckon. That's one thing that I'm dirty on. See our necks, is just as important as theirs. Without us they'd be nothing.

Did you believe it

19:00 **at first, when you heard this hearsay?**

No. Oh I had to, I knew the bloke that told me. And he, you know, just spat it straight out. So I knew that's what happened. But it did knock me around a bit. You know when you've known all those people,

19:30 talked with 'em, had fun with 'em, eaten with 'em. Had a few beers with 'em and things like that you know. And bang they're gone. But a man's got a think of himself lucky he's still here.

Did you have some time to deal with that?

Pardon?

Did you have some time to deal with that?

No, you just carried on.

20:00 I was doing a course in Flinders Naval Depot. And you just had to wear it. No-one come down, this counselling wasn't heard of ever in those days. Word of mouth, there was never an official statement. It was just word of mouth 'til we got the news of the Sydney sinking.

20:30 And we'd been on, you know as I say we'd been on there for over two and a half years. And you've got at least a couple of hundred good mates on there. And they don't let you know, it's not the best. That's the old stiff upper lip of the navy.

Is that complete, do you think, is the whole navy like that or were there pockets of compassionate people?

21:00 Oh there's got a be compassionate people everywhere, I think. But the navy is a very Lord Nelson outfit. You know of mixing, officers and sailors never get together, at the

21:30 dinner table you might say. And they live on a higher scale you know with their stewards looking after them and making their beds and that sort of thing. Here we are winding up our hammocks. But that's all right, that didn't worry me, but when you come to think about it.

22:00 It's never worried me and as a matter of fact one of the persons I admired the most was a fella by the name of Crabb, Admiral Crabb. He died about a year ago. He was the officer of our part of the ship on the Sydney and he was in the turret. There's fourteen sailors and one officer in our turret and Buster was the bloke. But he was

22:30 a very nice bloke. Good sportsman and a fair sort of a bloke.

When a ship goes down like the Sydney did, was there some kind of service in the navy for it?

Oh yeah, mmm.

Can you tell us about what they did?

Well it's, navy is, got a book for everything. It's a standard

23:00 church service in the event of a ship being lost. But if you're on a small ship, unless you're on a cruiser or above, you haven't got a minister of religion on it. So the captain takes over any religious services or things like people dying, that sort of thing. So that's that.

Did they have something at Flinders Naval

23:30 **Depot?**

Oh yeah, they had a cemetery right alongside Flinders Naval Depot. That's been well used over two or three wars.

What did they do at Flinders Naval Depot when the Sydney went down?

Oh they would have had a full naval honours ceremony with gun carriages and that sort of

24:00 thing. Very official type of thing you know.

What about the unofficial ways of remembering it, did you have anyone to talk to, anyone that might have been on the Sydney with you or?

Well, I had a couple of ex-shipmates in different parts of the metropolitan area and in Tasmania and in

24:30 Melbourne that I contacted and talked to about it.

Did, was there anyone in particular that you thought of, that, when the Sydney was lost?

It's a long while now and there were a lot of good blokes on there and good friends. 'Cause there, it's like going to work every morning only it's closer.

25:00 You're working with 'em, you're eating with 'em, you're sleeping at the same, of you're not sleeping at the same time because you're on watch at different times you know. But you know, you get very close. Yeah, I got a couple of, still got a few good mates who went through that the same time. One is

25:30 in Tasmania, another one in Victoria, they're scattered around a bit.

Was that a shock for the Australian, the Royal Australian Navy?

Yeah, it was a shock to everyone. But unfortunately it should never have happened. It would never be put in print. You know it's

26:00 always been a secret. I think the secret's because the captain made a big blue and lost the ship and the whole of the ship's company. It's what I

Is this your own thinking from?

This is my own thinking. That's the only way I can think you know. There's no way of

26:30 getting rid of six hundred and forty-five blokes without someone knowing about it.

Did it make you think twice about going back to sea into the war?

No, no, no. Strangely enough I had, naturally, left the ship and I was doing a

27:00 course of study, and new group of people, because they come in from all different ships to do these courses, but I have always thought about it. But there's no one around here now that, I know a couple of them.

27:30 One lives at Gympie and he was on the Sydney and the Arunta at the same time as I was. Yeah, there's a few still around but they're very sparse. As a matter of fact the last Anzac Day march just recently, they fall in, in ships. They have Sydney I, no

28:00 Sydney II, in a group and Sydney I, ah Sydney III. This time I went down there, no Sydney IIs. I was the only one. They pushed me to the front. Like, they separate the ships you know. If there's a ship has two names, there's [?] have a space. So they

28:30 bunged me out the front. Which was a bit embarrassing going by myself, but I flagged behind a bit and was only just in front of the other blokes. But I forget what I was going to say. I forget the punch line.

You're the only one left?

Yeah, well I was the only one there. But I do have a mate that's still going at, lives at Gympie.

Speaking of marches, was there a return home march when you came back on Sydney?

There was, yeah.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

Well, that was held as usual, marches by the navy. They start off up in Barrack Street, all line up there in sixes and march down Barrack

29:30 Street down into Martin Place where they have the church service. Then they fall in, oh they remain fallen in after the church service and march away and then disassemble round the corner. Unless they're gonna go to a church you know for commemoration reasons.

This was when the ship went down, when did this march take place? This was when you came back or?

This was when we come back.

How were you received by the Australian public?

Pardon?

How was the crew received by, the Australian public?

Marvellous, marvellous, you couldn't move, you couldn't move in George Street or Martin Place. Absolutely,

30:30 absolutely choc-a-block. Then we marched off to the Town Hall and had dinner on the Lord Mayor.

Shortly after that you were sent to Flinders?

Yeah, yes. No, well I was

31:00 up here to be in the march. I was out at Flinders by that time and on my next ship. That was the commemoration you're talking about.

Right, I'm a little bit confused. There's a commemoration march

Yeah.

after the ship went down. There was a welcome back march before the ship went down. Are we, are there

31:30 **too?**

Oh that's right. There was a welcome home march and then some time later, or maybe on the year, the birthday of it. That's when the march was. The one last year we, on the 19 December there was a march similarly

32:00 then.

These days on Anzac Day, do you always march with the Sydney or with the Arunta? Or is there ever any conflict within you about which was your ship?

Well, that's what had me beat, that's something I've been thinking about. Now I turned up there to march this Anzac Day and I was a bit late. But there was all the current Sydney people and aircraft

32:30 carrier, ex-aircraft carrier blokes there. And I can march with them too cause I was on the carrier. But the fact that they were all formed up a bloke said "You stand in front". So, I had to stand in front of the whole march. And go round. So, I was well and truly exposed on that occasion.

Can you tell us about when you joined the Arunta, you'd done the electrician's course in

33:00 **Flinders? Is this what you were training to do, the electrics?**

Yeah, I started, in those days it, you could change whatever branch you know, it was very seldom done but I was a seaman. Then I was a petty officer, oh leading seaman but I was what they called an LTO, which was a leading torpedo operator. But they also, a leading electrician that was with the,

33:30 split the branch name. But no, I went down there and I was the only Sydney person, Sydney II person down there in York Street at the assembly point. And someone grabbed me. They were all in their sixties I was a bit late, and they put me in front because there's no other Sydney people there. And I was in front of the

34:00 march by myself like a shag on a rock.

Let's go back to the next ship, the Arunta. How did it feel to be joining a new ship after the Sydney had gone down?

Excited. Because I'd seen these ships

34:30 in the Mediterranean. They were the Tribal class of destroyer. And they were the prettiest and best and fastest destroyer they ever turned out. They looked like a racing greyhound when they was going flat chat. Where am I? I think I might have a pic [picture], I dunno.

We'll see them later.

Yeah, anyway yeah the Arunta, what was I talking about?

35:00 **Joining, the first day you joined the Arunta.**

Oh yeah, joined the Arunta. No, I forget it was, I was going to say.

It was a beautiful ship, a racing greyhound.

Oh yeah, beautiful ship, very fast, and the captain we had, Morrow, he was the greatest destroyer skipper you could find. He excelled in the Mediterranean when we were in the Mediterranean.

What was his

35:30 **history? What ships had he been on before the Arunta?**

He was [HMAS] Voyager. Like he'd been through many ships up to that point, with, we're talking about wartime. He was Voyager and then the, what were we talking about?

Was it a brand new ship when you joined the Arunta?

The Arunta, yeah brand new, brand

36:00 new.

Must have been incredible to be on a brand new ship?

It was great, we were all, if you was a kid and had a new bike, well that's what it's like having a new ship. That's if you're seamanship inclined. It had pretty lines for instance. It had -

36:30 an angle of the stem was like that. The shape of it was strictly dynamically prepared to get through the waves you know. And it was a beautiful ship, very fast. 38.8 knots is a lot of knots through the water.

What had these Tribal class destroyers been designed to do?

37:00 They're a sort of all-purpose ship, their main and best part in a fleet action where you're having an action with battleships, cruisers, destroyers. The destroyers are the roust-a-bouts. The others are maintaining properly their positions and hammering

37:30 away at each other. But the destroyers are whipping in and trying to put a torpedo into an enemy ship you know. And picking up any survivors and all that sort of thing. But they're fast, very fast and well armed. And if you got the right skipper on them as we did, they're a beauty. We had a skipper by the name of Ginger Morrow.

38:00 And everyone's that ever sailed with him admired, you know really admired him for his seamanship abilities.

He was a bit of a swashbuckling gent?

Yeah.

Can you describe his character, his personality for us?

He was, he was. And he's the boy that had the girls at his, probably shouldn't say that.

You can say whatever you like.

If any, if any,

38:30 he had a few girlfriends come on board.

What did he look like?

He was a squat five foot six or seven, heavy features, brown, very alert, you know a man's man.

Was he

39:00 **a believer in that naval hierarchy we talked about before?**

Oh, he'd have to be because he finished up one of them.

What I mean specifically the very strict type of relationship between officers and sailors?

Yeah but he was fairer than a lot. He was a pretty fair sort of a fellow.

How did that fairness come through?

Well I think you get, got more respect from his crew.

39:30 **Keep going, you got a couple, you got, we got. He got more respect from his crew?**

Yeah, I think he would have got more respect. Anyone [?] was serve in any ship, like he was, had the Voyager, the old VN class, VNW class of destroyer, the first part of the war. And he was in the Mediterranean and all around there. And then

40:00 the Arunta was built which was Tribal class, which was the pride of the fleet. He was the skipper of that and he could handle it. And he was a man's man and everyone admired him because of his seamanship ability, and a bloke that could give orders and they would stick and that sort of thing you know.

Tape 8

00:34 **We're talking about Ginger Morrow, you said he was a man's man but he was fair.**

Very fair.

What would you do if he caught you in that kind of situation, if you'd stolen his hat for instance.

Oh no, as I say, he'd think it was fun, humorous. He was

01:00 **Can you explain what you were telling us just a moment ago? You were in charge of the lights?**

Yeah, okay. No, part of my job was going round places, look, making sure the lights were operating. And I happened to go into the captain's cabin and check his lighting out. And there on his bed was his cap with all the gold braid on it.

01:30 And I thought "Geez, that'd look good on me". So I picked it up, had a look at it, put it on and walked over to his dressing table and put it on my head. And looked like John Wayne. But then when I had a closer look I saw another face over my right shoulder in the mirror, it was the captain. I put the cap off, took the cap off, put it on the bed, walked out

02:00 disappeared, not a word was said.

He never said a word to you about it?

Never said a word, but he would have laughed his head off.

Did, at this stage you were leading electrician on board the Arunta, was that your job?

Yeah, I was on the way to, and I was, you say a leading electrician at that time. I was on - all the names have changed.

02:30 I was a leading torpedo operator. You know I was a part of a seaman, part of me was seaman and the rest two bits, or the next two thirds is seaman, ah is electrical and torpedoes and depth charges and that underwater stuff.

This was a lot more responsibility than you'd had previously, is that right?

No,

03:00 but they lessened the responses, they divided that one department as I say. The torpedoes, depth charges and things like that was one part to their job, the electricity was the other but that was all in one when I joined the navy. But then they got that big,

03:30 that they had to individualise it between the two.

So whereas you'd actually been a torpedo operator on the Sydney, that was then split up by the time you joined the Arunta, that's when that split took place.

That's right.

Is that right? Okay, I've got that clear now. Can you describe the Arunta for us, it was a much smaller ship than the Sydney, so you could probably got it from bow to stern or?

Well it's designed to be a different, do different

04:00 things. You know it's a sort of jack of all trades, it's can be a fleet ship i.e. it's, you've got very high speed, very good manoeuvrability, well armed and that makes it a pretty good ship.

How was it laid out? Can you describe it for us, what was in, what

04:30 **was where?**

Well, coming back from the bow, you've got your cables for your anchor laid out along the front ready to be hit. The next thing is A turret, and that is a twin turret on that particular ship. 4.7-inch guns. Then up and behind it,

05:00 so it could shoot over, that is B turret. Then you got the bridge structure comes up and, with captain's day cabin under the bridge and the bridge up there. Then behind that you got the flag deck. The flat deck, there's the mast there and the flag deck's when the bunting tossers, the

05:30 signalman putting up lines of flags indicating this or that or something, there's the flag deck. Then, you've got the foremost funnel and then the after funnel. But they're coming up from the number one boiler room, and number two boiler room, but around those you've got mess decks, chief and petty officer on the upper deck, forward of the

- 06:00 bridge, or they're under the first apartments we'll say, under the deck, forward of the bridge. And POs [Petty Officers] and then come down, and then down below that there's the foc'sle men. They're the people looking after the front part of the ship, their mess deck's there. Then you've got what they call the,
- 06:30 there's the port and side, port and starboard waists. Oh, the maintop and the foretop. That's a part of the ship, maintop, foretop. Then you've got the quarterdeck at the back, so foc'sle, the front, foretop on the left, maintop on the right, quarterdeck on the stern.
- 07:00 **Was it a big enough ship say for you to say, get lost in?**
- No, no. No, you couldn't get lost on the Arunta.
- On the Sydney?**
- You could get lost on the Sydney, yeah. Sydney was about seven thousand tons the Arunta was about three thousand tons.
- The Sydney was more. Your role on board**
- 07:30 **this ship was looking after the electrics. Can you explain exactly what you had to do on a general day-to-day basis on board the Arunta?**
- On the Arunta? Well, my category was split up three of us. There was one person was doing low power, anything working on low power. Which is
- 08:00 24 volts and below, a lot of instruments in that category, and the next one, then you've got the stern, now what was your question again?
- What was your job, one was low power, one was high power?**
- Oh sorry, sorry, I was
- Starting to go back to the boat?**
- I got, I got a memory like a sieve.
- That's okay.**
- 08:30 **There was three, the lower power.**
- I was on high power LTO and that's looking after all the motors, dynamos, generators and anything off two hundred and twenty volts. But then you had a low power LTO, which was a bit higher qualified that looked after all the instrumentation which were on different, smaller voltages and
- 09:00 cycles and currencies and all the rest of it.
- And was there a third member of your team?**
- The third, no, oh there's a torpedo bloke - did I mention him?
- No.**
- No. There's a, well he looks after the torpedoes, they need a fortnightly routine, checking air pressures, testing rudders, testing vertical,
- 09:30 horizontal plane, mostly checking air pressures to make sure there's no leakages. So that when it's fired it's got maximum range.
- On a fighting ship during wartime, you're not supposed to have any lights?**
- That's correct at night-time, no you're not.
- So,**
- 10:00 **was that your responsibility, how did you control where the lights were on, on the ship, what did you have to do?**
- Well, most of the lights, like the lights that were below decks and around and had offices and closed, those places that could be closed to the light they were okay, they had full lighting. Boiler rooms, engine rooms, mess decks.
- 10:30 Oh boiler rooms, engine rooms, they were automatically closed cause you didn't have portholes. Then you had the mess decks and offices and things like that, they had portholes. But the porthole, every porthole had a cover, very heavy and thick with three locking, brass locking screws to make it water tight. That
- 11:00 was to keep the water tight integrity of the ship. If you're in action, the worst, the first thing you do is make sure, cause when you're in an action area and in the war, anytime it's, you're at sea, all those portholes would be closed anyway. In the event of a torpedo strike or something like that, that ship's got

a stay up. And if all those compartments are sealed

11:30 off and not all of them taking water, you've got a chance of saving the ship.

Did you have to check that all the portholes were blacked and that the ship was in darkness on the outside?

Yeah.

How would you go about that, what would you do?

You had dead lights. Now there's a pole, porthole, we'll look at it side ways.

12:00 There's a pole, porthole. There's a brass ring holding that porthole and it has three very strong hand manageable nuts that screw them in tight, so it'd be impossible for water to get in and out, or out. Where was

12:30 I now?

Your job was to check that this was, these were closed?

Yeah and yeah you had to make sure the ship was, in wartime conditions, in wartime you had to have water-tight doors closed and all the dead lights on. See you can't show any light.

What's a dead light?

A dead light means no light. Once you're dead, you can't do

13:00 anything.

If someone was going between a lighted area and a dead light dark area, how would you do that?

Well, the point is they've crossed that track many, many times, that they know every footstep and every ledge. Like every door, when you're going through some, from fore to aft, and there's doors with

13:30 clamps on but that, and this is only in wartime, leave the clamps shut. But

Were there air locks between the dark areas and the light areas?

Yes, there was, airlocks to go down the boiler room. That's the only place you had air locks. Because the furnace was oil fuelled and under pressure. They had

14:00 air pressure blowing into them to keep the flame going and up the funnel. But if you opened a door near it, there'd be a flash back. There might be, it reduces the pressure going up that funnel and it could get a flash back of flame. So that's why the

14:30 **Could the same thing happen with light - if you're going from outside deck into somewhere?**

Oh yeah. They had door switches. In all those doors that could show light outside, they had door switches that automatically closed or switched on and switched off.

Mmm, that's an interesting point.

15:00 **I wondered how you'd keep that dark cause once you opened a door you'd be in trouble.**

Yeah, yeah but at the same time you've got a quartermaster that walks round with a bo's'n's [boatswain] pipe calling all over, they'd announce it over the speakers, "Close all water tight doors and openings". So that happens if you're going into action or of a night-time. So if the ship was hit,

15:30 it's still got enough area to keep it on the surface. You know you get a balance of air and water you know, so you won't sink.

Did you lose anybody overboard while the ship was in darkness?

I have heard of someone but I never had a personal. They had three guards or three

16:00 guard rails going round, three wires like you know hand rails.

And that kept the?

That keeps people, unless someone's, a few people probably have got underneath. You know you got the bottom wire there, there and there. And the ship does a ninety-degree turn while it's doing about forty knots or gets hit by

16:30 a wave, if someone's walking across, along the upper deck, could slide under that bottom rail. Never saw it happen but it was a possibility. And that's what they had to make a provision for you know, all these things.

John, can you tell us about what was the most dangerous action that you were involved in on

the Arunta?

- 17:00 I would say the, possibly the most dangerous action was when we attacked a submarine off north-west New Guinea and the old ship was swing, Ginger Morrow was the captain. He was a
- 17:30 swashbuckling type with, there's only two speeds, flat out and stop. And he used to treat the ship like a speedboat you know. He was a wonderful captain in the handling of a boat. But anyway, up there we had a, we were searching for a submarine and we had, we were dropping depth charges.
- 18:00 And one of the guardrails was down you know to give more access to the sub, the guardrails. That wasn't good.

The guardrails were down to give more access?

Yeah, no yeah, normally

- 18:30 the guardrails are up. But on this occasion we had one down but that was a bit of a mess. I forget what I was gonna, anyway we had submarine actions up there up off north-west New Guinea dropping depth charges. And which went on for about three quarters of an hour dropping our whole content of depth charges. And we feel we had a win there. We got
- 19:00 credited with the sinking of a sub. That was one occasion. We had a few sub scares with similar results.

During this time on board the Arunta, when there was a submarine scare, what would you be called on to do?

I would be a, go to the port

- 19:30 thrower. You had a thrower on the port side, thrower on the starboard side and rails on the stern. In other words they had about, rails capable of carrying about twelve depth charges. So when you were dropping a pattern you'd drop one over the stern, throw
- 20:00 two, then you'd throw two out either side of the ship out of the thrower. Then two more from the stern at the same time as another one, another either side, another salvo. Then a final two off the back that created a depth charge pattern, which made pretty turbulent
- 20:30 water for quite a large area around there. And we were credited with an action as a loss of that submarine.

Can you explain to me in a little bit more detail how these throwers worked?

Yes, actually a thrower actually is like a cradle and it holds this round

- 21:00 depth charge. And it has a base, just shapes around like that, then it's got a big, round stem. And it's round to fit snugly into a firing muzzle you might say. Then there's another area where you put in a charge,
- 21:30 which builds up enough pressure to be able to fire the carriage and the depth charge probably about thirty or forty feet out from the ship's side. Well, when you're doing a submarine attack you probably drop one or two over the stern. Then you fire two, one from
- 22:00 either side of the ship, they'd go out wide of the ship. Then a couple, then another one in the centre, then two more and that constitutes a pattern. But we, I think we were given credit for that one. But we, I think the Arunta had credit for about two or three submarine kills to my knowledge.

When you were attacking a

- 22:30 **submarine, did you always use depth charges?**

If it was not on - the only time you wouldn't is if they were on the surface. You know but you'd use your guns then, because depth charges will only work underneath the water. You know, works on water pressure to make the firing mechanism operate.

- 23:00 **How were you able to tell where the submarine was if it had dived underwater? Were there methods of following it?**

Of course all ships had anti-submarine detecting equipment, which sent out echoes on straight ahead and off each bow

- 23:30 you might say. And you'd get an echo back. And you got an echo sounder and an operator, operating this and they can pin point where that sub is. But the result, the old captain takes that course and orders the firing of the charges. And it's pretty, very pretty sight when you see
- 24:00 these giant gushes of water go up about forty or fifty feet. You know, can create quite a lot of turbulence.

Can you describe that in a little more detail, what do you mean by a pretty sight, what were

you seeing?

No, well imagine a lovely blue surface see, and as the water goes up it's a pale blue and it goes into a white, very white

24:30 mushroom type thing then falls back in the water. You know with winds drifts blowing the small drift in a, the explosion.

Would it be terribly noisy, what would they sound like?

Oh, it's pretty noisy but not as noisy as you think,

25:00 because the noise is muffled by being underwater. Now whether you set the thing to go off at fifty, a hundred and fifty, two fifty, three fifty, five hundred feet, it depends on how much water it's going to display and what sort of a splash it's gonna make you know. The closer to the surface, you get more splash, because there's, that's the least line of resistance, air. But down below it, it

25:30 makes more, does more harm, because there's more pressure around the vessel.

Was there any harm that they could do to your own ship?

Oh well, the ship's usually doing a reasonable speed when it's going over the target. Yeah, you don't just go over in a slow fashion and drop one there, drop one there. It's all

26:00 a speed thing, you've got a clear the, you know with, well the speed of a corvette was about fourteen knots, fourteen or fifteen knots. Well, they can get out the way. But we happened to have about thirty knots under our tail, so there's no risk in the world anything'd happen under those circumstances.

How far in front of the target would you be then when these brilliant sight appeared?

26:30 How far, like you've got the ASDIC [Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] equipment and that's sending out echoes. And that will send back any indicate, any metallic objects in front of the ship. And you can from that know what direction it came from. So therefore you

27:00 steer in that direction and run over the target and drop the charges, usually as I say, about five to make a pattern. And that made quite a big explosion.

How far would that explosion be from the ship?

Say about by the time, it all depends what ship

27:30 you're on.

On the Arunta, you're travelling at thirty knots, how far would you get?

You could get a hundred and twenty feet, before she goes off or even a hundred and thirty. So you're in the clear, well and truly in the clear. In a corvette it might be a bit, it would be a bit closer. They were capable of about fourteen or fifteen at maximum.

In the Arunta you also did some shelling

28:00 **of New Guinea and various places in New Guinea. Can you tell me a bit about some of those actions?**

Oh these were actions, when we working in conjunction with the Americans, we would do pre-invasion firings to you know a lot of jungle

28:30 and thick growth. So just, I've just gone off track a bit, so.

No, you're doing the New Guinea jungle, pre-invasion shelling?

Yeah, that's right. Before troops were gonna land you sort of tried to make the place as safe as possible as they run up the beach. So you usually did a bit of a

29:00 spread of where you were actually situated and bombed that, those areas you know. And then you'd cease that and then the troops would land and up they'd go. And from then on we just kept going.

Would you be part of a big fleet at these times?

No, no, we'd be operating solely some of the time. But with these

29:30 corvettes, you'd either be doing convoying work. Mostly, you wouldn't be going anywhere specifically because you thought "There were subs there". But it's more or less a protection of convoys and your own ships of course.

In the Tribal class destroyer, in the Arunta, did you shell in landing convoys?

30:00 **Or were there other ships around you when you were pre-invasion shelling in New Guinea?**

Yeah, the landing troops, was usually protected by a couple of men-of-war you might say. And they usually flattened an area. But of course they've probably got inside information of where the troops are in the jungle.

30:30 The density of them and all that and so they know where to fire you know. There might be barracks and you know signs of army life there, enemy army life, so that's where they bombarded.

Milne Bay was one of these locations, can you remember what you did in Milne Bay, specifically?

Yes, yes,

31:00 of course, well I manned the torpedo tubes and depth charges on that occasion. But it was the gunnery people that did the bombardment. Yeah, you know like our guns, the ship's guns bombarded various landing spots you know, so the troops could land there.

Did you have any

31:30 **cause to fire torpedoes in Milne Bay?**

No, we didn't, we didn't.

So did you personally have much to do during those actions?

No, I was always, well I was always on duty. Depth charges was my responsibility, both maintenance and

32:00 keeping them in working order. On a depth charge thrower in submarine activities or if we suspected there were subs in the area these places'd be manned, you'd be ready to fire at any time.

Would you be able to see the shore very clearly when you're doing one of these shelling operations?

Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

What

32:30 **would that look like, describe it to me?**

The shoreline. Nice tropical paradise. Nice sand, nice foliage in the trees and green. Very easy for an enemy to be in the jungle and get through the jungle without being spotted.

You mentioned you were working as part of the American

33:00 **fleet, the Americans were in charge at this time?**

That's right, we on the Arunta, we joined an American task force, and Task Force 44, a couple of other numbers at different times. But we were at work. Yes, we went in, we were as Yanks

33:30 at a certain period you know. Doing the same operations as they were. They had a group of destroyers and we bombarded the same places as they did and of course we thought "Our ship was better than theirs". The Tribal class destroyer, but that's only a joke. No, we

34:00 had quite a few bombardments up there.

Were your ships better than theirs? What did you think of the Americans?

I should not be talking on these lines, whether our ships were better than theirs. But being a nationalistic type I'd have to say our ships were better. They were stronger built you know. These Tribal class destroyers were first designed

34:30 and made in the UK. In fact I first saw Tribal class destroyers when I was in the Mediterranean on the Sydney. And I was struck, by what a beautiful looking ship it was - and fast, very fast and very satisfactory for submarine work or anything. It's an all purpose type of

35:00 vessel you know.

What did you think of the American Navy?

I was very happy with the American Navy. They were very efficient, they were very generous in times when our tucker was running low and things like that and they were friendly people. No, I really enjoyed

35:30 my association with any Americans I had up there in their navy.

In the Mediterranean you'd been under Royal Navy command, under the British and now you were under the Americans. Can you talk a little bit about the differences between working with those different national groups?

Yes, the British Navy of course is very efficient, very

36:00 well built and fast and well armed ships. The crews had been very well trained and they were very good, very good. And the, I'm not saying they would be any better than our, any other allies but you know seeing them in action. And being aboard some

36:30 of their ships, having work done with machinery that I couldn't have done in our own ship. But they were always very helpful and...

How were the British different to the Americans?

The British ships appeared to be built with heavier metal. There's more

37:00 strongly constructed. Like our ships, you can look at the ship's side and they're strong, tons of riveting. The Yanks were more on the welding side. And whilst they would have been equally as efficient, probably you know that'd give 'em more speed, less weight. But you could see

37:30 bows in the ship's side you know. And this is only looking at the prettiness of the ship rather than its efficiency. They were very efficient.

What about the seamen themselves? Were there any differences there?

Any contact I had with the Americans was very good, very nice people. In fact I had some

38:00 engineering thing I wanted done and we didn't have the facility to do this particular job. And I went over top the Yankee destroyer, who we were moored near. And they took us down to the lathe, fixed up the job no trouble at all. So that's what it was like, you know, they were good.

Did you have any

38:30 **time on leave in port with Americans?**

Yeah but I never, not together, but you know naturally there was various places you're in port. But you know when we were up there in New Guinea there's nowhere you went, you didn't go on leave, you didn't go ashore overnight. When you're in Sydney Harbour you can go home, you can go dances, pictures, whatever. But when you're up round New

39:00 Guinea and New Ireland and New Britain and Philip Point you can't, there's no theatres. You're on a ship and that's it.

You never landed anywhere but Australia during those actions?

If I did it would be only for a swim.

Or a sail you mentioned.

Or a sail. Yeah

39:30 sometimes, I'd take a boat away and have a sail. But I'd probably stay onshore for about ten minutes and get back on the boat and off we went again.

Did you find these new places beautiful, they were very different from where you'd been in the Mediterranean? What did you think of the landscape?

Yeah, they're two different types of places, there's, both can be beautiful in their

40:00 own right. You know then again some place, parts of Greece and Malta and around there is very pretty and nice scenery and well-built houses and got steps called, in Malta, just digressing. There's a street called "The Gut". Its proper name is Straight Street but how it got called "The Gut", I wouldn't

40:30 have a clue. But this thing's got about two hundred steps that you gotta climb up when you're going down Straight Street. That digressed a bit, didn't it?

Tape 9

00:32 **John, did the Arunta ever come under air attack?**

Oh yeah. It would, it did and it would have had a lot more after I left the ship. I was on there for two and a half years. And we had a few air attacks. But after I left that it become more volatile or ferocious up there. After I left there. And fortunately I'd had a draft down to South Brisbane ship repair base. But so as I didn't, other than the landing and bit of patrolling - that's all I had

01:30 in the Philippines.

Can you remember one of those air attacks on the Arunta?

Not particularly.

Don't stand out?

Don't stand out. It's you know, you sometimes you have air alerts and a few. I mean I was never involved in any of the dive-bombing. In any

02:00 of the bombing of the place that I was in, was high level, which is safer than the dive bombing.

What does the ship do if you're being attacked at high level?

Oh there, if you've got a captain like Ginger Morrow like we had on the Arunta, he could handle that destroyer like he could handle a pushbike. He

02:30 could, he used to, he learned in the Mediterranean in other words. When the German bombers come over there and the dive-bombers and he was captain of the Voyager. And they used to get, at that time the Germans'd come into the Middle East and they were getting Stukas and things like that. But fortunately the Sydney left the Middle East before

03:00 the Stukas came on.

How did, can you describe what it was like to be on the Arunta when she was going very fast and turning?

It was

What was it like, what was it like to be on the ship?

I know I was thinking of a word but I thought I better not.

Oh go on. Go on.

No, no it was beautiful cutting through the water.

03:30 You know and you'd change course at hard, fast speed. You know, you'd really, you could feel it going over you know. The stability was very good on them. But they really used to heel at speed, when you're travelling.

What was the word you were thinking of?

You know what I for

What was the word you were thinking of?

I've forgot, oh I was gonna say

04:00 being on a skipper with Ginger at speed. He could handle that ship, heeling, turning. It was that exciting, it was just like an orgasm. Geez, you better not put that it for heaven sake.

04:30 **When you're**

No, Mark, don't put that in.

When you're on a ship like the Arunta, must be, all the crew, it's sort of like the ship has its own personality. How would you describe that personality of the Arunta?

It's like a friend, you get a, you can look

05:00 at a ship and there's a ship. And then you can look at another ship and you get a warm feeling about it. But it, I suppose it all depends on the life and the people that are on the ship. But the Arunta had a captain by the name of Ginger Morrow, and he made himself a name in the Middle East when he was

05:30 captain of the Voyager. He had a couple of subs under his belt over there. But handling a destroyer it was pretty to watch. You know you'd get up to about thirty-two knots and he'd go hard to starboard and the old ship'd heel over a bit you know. And you thought "Oh, she'll keep on going if he does this". But

06:00 no, the Yanks looked on our ship, on the Arunta as a classy vessel. They admired the look of it and its capabilities.

If...

They were a bit more, the Arunta was heavier armed than the American destroyers. We had twin turrets,

06:30 whereas they had single turrets, which gave us twice the amount of fire power. Dunno whether the war's been over long enough to divulge those things.

I think it has, I think we're safe to talk about these things now.

Pardon, yeah.

When you're turning and weaving, did you have, was there, can you describe if there was any collisions or near misses?

I've never seen any.

07:00 Never and I wouldn't say there was never been one but I haven't been in any. And I was in, as I say in the Mediterranean for about eight months where we was operating with about thirty destroyers and a fleet you know. There were destroyers, aircraft carriers, battleships and cruisers. But there was never anything that looked like a collision.

07:30 But oh, the Yanks were very impressed with the Arunta, its capabilities. You know they were always pleased to talk about it when you spoke to them.

Did you ever get any illness when you were on the Arunta?

No, no.

Was there a ship's doctor on board, can you

Yes, yes.

remember him and talk about him?

Doctor Robinson, Robertson. Yeah, he was a character.

08:00 Big, heavy character, had a personality all of his own. He would have liked to have, been the captain of the ship more than the doctor. That was his attitude I think.

Who was the most, funniest person, who was the character of the Arunta?

No, that's,

08:30 I've met too many people since then. After being in golf clubs and tennis clubs and various other things, your mind sort of can't pick out some of these past activities.

Do you remember getting the orders to come back to Australia on the Arunta and can you talk about that?

Yeah, I sure can. I was as happy as Larry.

09:00 I was as happy as Larry. I says "It's about time they looked up and found my name on the old book and seen how long, how much sea time I've done so far".

How did that amount of time at sea was it, how was that affecting you at that time?

Oh, I was generally happy. You know I was a fellow that could mix with anyone and

09:30 had tons of crew people to talk to about this and that. But it did come to be a bit of a bore, excuse me, at times. When you're not up to much. But no, generally I was happy and if I had my time over I'd do it again.

So, which part of the operations, were getting you down?

10:00 None. No, it wasn't anything that was getting me down, it was the time I'd spent at this. I think I'd done enough sea time and being away. And by that time I'd met my now wife, so there's no way in the world I wanted to sign on, I could have signed

10:30 on for another ten years. But I, at my thirteen and a bit years I was able to pull out.

Where did you meet your wife?

Well, I had a navy friend, chap from Victoria who was on the Sydney with me. And I stayed at his place a few times. When I was down in

11:00 Victoria, and saw him and I invited him to come to our house and stay the night and have a meal and that sort of thing. And he said to me that second day I was there, he said "How about you coming over to my auntie's place over at Haberfield?" And, I got to see her before I go back. I says, "No auntie's mate, no auntie's."

11:30 Oh he says, "She's got a daughter and a couple of girlfriends". "Oh all right, I'll come". So I went out to this auntie's place, had a lovely dinner but the beauty about it was, who was sitting at the table opposite me was Valerie, this girl just here. That was the finish. So I didn't sign up, didn't do anything silly

12:00 like that. I went and got married.

Was it love at first sight?

Sure was, sure was. I think it was only six months before we married. Could have been less. 'Cause we had to make it look respectable, otherwise I might have made it a month. She's been terrific yeah.

Did you go away again on the,

12:30 **after you got married?**

No. No, I wouldn't have married while I was, I was still serving but I knew I had x number of months to go before my time expired.

Back on the Arunta, can you describe for us coming back to Australia for that time, on that time?

Actually, I

13:00 was happy to be home but didn't give me the buzz it gave me when I come back from, on the Sydney. I think when we were on the Sydney we'd been over to the Mediterranean, we'd been put up a bit of a record over there. We got a tremendous welcome home, marching in the street, dinners at the Town Hall. And there was a big

13:30 effort given by the County Council or the whatever it is, the Sydney Council, so we had a great time. None of those welcome home's after the war existed, any welcome home were the lady next door and the people across the road. They sort of formed a group that any returning ex-service

14:00 man, they would give a little welcome.

How was life different for you after the sinking of the Sydney?

Oh I was very sad about it, very sad about it because I knew all those people, six hundred and forty-five people's a lot of people. And some good friends and you felt sometimes

14:30 there's that you wouldn't, you should have been on it to be with them, but that's what went through your mind. Yeah.

Can you describe that feeling of guilt for not being there?

Yeah, I did. Yep. But I got over it. When Lady Valerie come along everything was roses.

Yet you

15:00 **describe your time on the Arunta as being happy, but you couldn't have been completely happy, could you really?**

I was happy that I liked the mechanics of the ship, of a ship that could go so fast and so well armed and look beautiful in flight.

15:30 That appealed to me.

But had something of the shine gone off your naval aspirations? Did something of the magic of being in the army, sorry in the navy?

What, now?

No, at that time?

At that time, oh I was probably getting a bit bored, after being in the Middle East and then up in the Pacific like that. And then minesweeping up the China coast, and all that sort of thing. I was starting to get a bit bored of it.

16:00 **Was one voyage becoming very much similar to the other voyage, to any other voyage at that time?**

No, when that, the stem of that boat was pointed towards home, that was always marvellous. Yeah.

Yet after you finished on the Arunta, was there another ship that you were posted to?

Yeah I was posted, from there I was

16:30 posted to Brisbane ship repair base to look after, as corvettes come in there, check out their degaussing. That's you know anti-submarine equipment and do a bit of work on gyrocompasses and things like that.

Can you talk about the degaussing?

Degaussing. Well, degaussing is a very interesting subject, in that,

17:00 that's what they used to combat the magnetic mine. Magnetic mines were constructed to blow up ships triggered, and triggered by the magnetism. That set off a chain of events, which blew up six hundred pound of TNT.

17:30 And where was I going there?

And how do you degauss a ship?

Oh that's right yeah, degauss. You put it over an area - the powers that be and their brains - you put an artificial magnetic field on a range underneath the water.

18:00 So to gauge what power and how to do a, degauss a ship, they run the ship over this area, which gave them an idea of the magnetism created in that ship. So if you're in the southern hemisphere, no it had

18:30 you know to be a ship of, above a certain size. But it would cater for the ship itself. But then there was other coils that had to be put on it for a northern polarity. If you're going north, you got a northern polarity in the stem. If you're going south you got a southern polarity. Okay?

19:00 East west, if you're a ship over forty feet, you have to have a thought ship polarity, like say the Queen Mary, she'd have to have coils round the port side. And around the starboard side to cope with that, a thought ship polarity. So if you're on say the equator, there's magnetic north

19:30 on one side and magnetic south on the other side. So that was enough to you know set off mines. So above a certain size ship width they would put those in.

And the degaussing was obviously to remove this magnetism from the ship?

No to, you can never remove it. It was to neutralise it. If you've

20:00 got a north polarity there of a given strength, and you wanted to neutralise it, you'd put in equal and opposite one against it and you could neutralise the polarity. And that's the basis of degaussing.

And once a ship was degaussed, how did that affect its reaction to the magnetic mines?

Well, that was a different

20:30 thing again, a magnetic mines. That had to have. What was I talking about?

We were talking about the degaussing to allow the ship to be invisible to the magnetic mines or was it to do with the compass?

No, the degaussing was to do with the ship. But to neutralise or yeah, neutralise the magnetism.

21:00 As I said if north polarity, southern polarity, but if you're up in the northern hemisphere, there's about three lots of coils, you've got we'll say hemispherical coils.

Are they on the ship?

Yeah on the ship - so if you're in the north you put a southern polarity around your ship, if you're in the southern polarity, southern hemisphere you put a northern polarity of equal

21:30 strength. And that neutralises the magnetism in the ship.

And the magnetism affects the compass, is that correct or the?

No, the mag no, oh well it would if it didn't have the corrections on it. They can do that. They put spheres of alongside magnetic compasses

22:00 and that neutralises any of the outside source. But ship use, besides them, that's only a stand-by compass these days. But they use, Jesus, non-magnetic...

These days.

Gyrocompasses.

These days or then?

Oh in my time. But I'd still say that most ships use gyrocompasses. 'Cause gyrocompass

22:30 is where they get to turn this wheel up to speeds like thirty-two thousand revs a minute. And it forms on an axis. You might pick up a pushbike some time and the wheel wants to go that way you know. But if you're going fast on that thing, that overcomes the turning movement, well it's the same as magnetic

23:00 fields you know.

So after your time in, at the Brisbane shipyards, were you again drafted to sea?

Too quickly, a corvette come in with its counter part on there, supposedly sick. So I had to go on there.

That was the Whyalla, wasn't it?

Yeah. Firstly the Whyalla then

23:30 later when the war finished, they put me on the, I was, being a permanent serviceman, and didn't have to be discharged they put me on the next one.

Was the Whyalla a happy ship?

Reasonably happy.

How happy were you to be on the Whyalla?

I was a bit of a snob. Being on cruisers and destroyers

24:00 that can do fancy things, I looked down on this thing that could only do twelve or thirteen knots instead of thirty-five knots. But I must say the crew, the fact that you got a small group of people, it's a happier environment. I got on well, very well with all, everyone on there. And enjoyed myself the time

24:30 I was on there.

Was there major actions you were involved in on the Whyalla?

Oh, only minesweeping, we dropped a few depth charges here and there when we got echoes on our instruments. But I can't, I haven't followed any of the main history but the, while I was on it was all escorting

25:00 large convoys, for the British. They were taken over by the British Government these corvettes, or they were built for the British Government, but we, Australian crews. So that's, we were part of the British Pacific fleet. They come out, so we were doing export, forget the word, we were doing

25:30 escort work, and various other activities, looking for submarines and that.

Where were you when the war ended?

I think we were in Manus, the Admiralty Islands.

What were you doing over there on the Whyalla?

Well, we were up there, that's all part of the, we were up in Hong Kong on the Whyalla and the Bendigo.

26:00 We were minesweeping the China coasts there.

How did you hear about the war ending?

Oh, that came very loud and clear when she happened you know. Of course the ship got a signal immediately that the war had ended. But we had to remain at wartime activity for a certain period,

26:30 because there might be ships or subs still active and not getting the information that the war had finished. So you still had to carry on as if the war was still on. For a certain period of time, it would have been more than a week but I forget the actual time.

Was there any, what celebrations did you undertake on the Whyalla at the time?

27:00 I think we might have gone and had a couple of beers. You know it was a very, I think we might have been at sea at the time. But it was a very laid back thing. But it was a relief to me cause I'd been in there the whole war and a year before you know. It was a relief but I didn't shout.

27:30 The only thing I did, I went into one of my little electrical rooms, the gyrocompass room and cried with relief. So grown men cry. Yes, you still think about it you know. You're not something, it's not something,

28:00 it's just an amazing activity you go through you know. Fighting a war, sinking, firing guns at battleships and cruisers and destroyers and looking out for subs. We sunk a couple of subs on the Arunta and things like that.

Did you think about all your mates that hadn't made it through the war?

Pardon?

Did you think about all your mates

28:30 **that hadn't made it through the war?**

Well, see I joined the navy in '38 and the war started, no, yeah '38 I joined, '39. No, I didn't get back with me mates after the war.

But at that time, when you found out the war had finished?

Oh yeah, when the war finished. You know had a few glasses then.

29:00 But I wouldn't have gone overboard on it anyway. I've, have been drunk a few times. I can, like a glass of beer but not over the top.

And can you describe that feeling of when you were finally set, what you were set course for home on the Whyalla when after the war was finished?

No, we were mine-

29:30 sweeping. But the fact that I was a permanent serviceman, they put me on the Bendigo because the old guy on the Bendigo was a time expired person. So he got home and I took his place to stay up there to continue minesweeping. For about three months, or three or four months, minesweeping and then we come back.

30:00 **And can you describe that moment when Bendigo first turned for home?**

Yeah, that's right. Then we, then I was looking after ships in reserve in Sydney Harbour. I went over to the UK, went over to the UK to pick up the carrier during all that lot. And did a few electrical courses while I was over there.

30:30 Went to, saw Don Bradman bowled for a duck at the Oval.

Did you?

In the Fifth Test.

Can you remember that particular moment?

I can remember it.

Was that his last innings?

Yeah. There was a hush in the ground you know, he was, everyone loved Don Bradman. Everyone's there waiting for a ton to be scored. But not on your life, old, poor old Don got the shock of

31:00 his life when his wicket was taken. I think it was Leyland was the bloke that did it. Yeah. That was a long walk for him back to the gates after that.

Was that Don Bradman's last innings do you remember?

That would be his last test innings I reckon.

That's when he had to get one run or something to average a hundred or something was it, the

Yeah, no I don't know but there might have been another situation.

You didn't get too many bucks on it.

31:30 No, didn't get.

That's almost rarer than seeing him score a hundred, to see him score a duck. When you finally walked out of the gates of the navy for the last time, how were you feeling after all that, years in the navy?

After thirteen years in the navy I walked out the gates and

32:00 not a word was said. One electrical officer wished me the best and then I was nothing. You know after thirteen years etc. you know. But anyway that, I thought "That wasn't the best". But had I been on a ship that I'd been on

32:30 for quite a while, I would have established friends there. But I wasn't in Balmoral long enough to, that was a come and go place you know. That was all right, had my wife at home to cheer me up.

I was trying to, of your time looking back at all those ships now, if they were human beings, which one would you

33:00 **be most friendly with?**

The Arunta. It's like a lovely girl walking up the street with good legs, nice hips and that was the Arunta. She looked very nice. Yeah and that's fair dinkum, she had beautiful lines.

If she was a woman you would

33:30 **have married her?**

I probably would've. No, no there's no pictures of her here, next door.

We'll get a photo of her. How did you adjust to life back on land?

Very well. Because a friend of mine that lives up the road there a bit, was an electrical artificer

34:00 in the navy. And he was on the Sydney, I was on the first Sydney, oh the cruiser. He was in the electrical branch. And he retired from the navy a couple of months, few months before I did, oh quite a few months. But he established himself as a Health & Building Inspector in the Sutherland Shire Council. So when I, just before I

- 34:30 left the navy, we was having this house built and I took my plans up there to get it passed. And the first bloke I've run into was Mason Shields. He said, "What the, are you doing up here?" I said "Come to get these plans passed". "Give us a look at 'em". "Took 'em out an office, here they are". So my plans were passed. Then he said "What are you gonna do when
- 35:00 you walk out of the navy?" I said "I'm gonna try and get a local job". He said "How'd you like to work for the County, for the Sutherland Shire Council?" I said "That'd be bloody lovely". So I started immediately after, oh I had a week off when I walked out of the navy gates and walked into the Sutherland Shire Council.

Did the navy prepare you in any way for peace time or

- 35:30 **non-naval life?**

No they didn't, no they didn't. If I'd been in another branch it would have been okay, no it wouldn't have been okay. The fact that I was an electrician or a chief electrician when I left and they run their own electricity authority up at Sutherland, at the time.

- 36:00 And as I say when I was getting my plans passed, still in my navy uniform, walk in the Sutherland Shire Council, see Mason Shields. "What are you doing here?" "Got a get these plans passed". Bang, they were passed. "What are you gonna do etc. etc?" "We'll go and see the Chief Electrical Engineer, McAdams". So in we go. He was an ex-9th Divvy [Division]

- 36:30 engineer. Hope this is not gonna go where...

No, that's all right. Did you miss the sea, at any time, after that, looking back now?

I thought, "Oh I made up for it". But the thing is I joined up with someone that's far better than all the oceans in the world, a beautiful wife. But I joined a sailing club. I bought a boat

- 37:00 and sailed over on Botany Bay for some years which I enjoyed. And used to sail down Port Hacking and down here occasionally, but mostly in races on Botany Bay. So that helped my sailing or water activities.

Looking back now, we're getting towards the end of the interview

- 37:30 **John, I was just wondering if you can look back on your wartime experience and, do you think the war was, how do you feel about the war now, that you participated in?**

I'd hate to see anything like that start again. And it was a tragedy the people that were killed. But as far as I was concerned, it probably might have made a man

- 38:00 out of me, it educated me in that I could walk out and get a good job. And made a lot of friends in the process. But I'm not saying the war was a good thing. I'd rather not had a war. But it didn't do anything bad for me, I was lucky to get out unscathed, when

- 38:30 I was on a ship that lost everyone.

How do you feel about war now I guess, that'd be the...?

Bloody awful. Awful. You know

- 39:00 not only the people that get killed and but it's not good for families and you know stops a lot of people in their ambitions, in certain professions they've been trying to achieve for years. And people come

- 39:30 home with anxieties and which splits up marriages and all that sort of thing, so, no more war.

We'll stop. People who might be watching this in the future, we'll give you a chance to reflect on that if you like, or...

Well, looking back over my time

- 40:00 in the navy I couldn't have done a better, made a better move from the point of view of education. You know in all aspects. Not only in the three Rs, but the ability to mix with people and share and understand things a heck of a lot more. You know

- 40:30 seeing so many people and hearing their stories etc. etc. Will that do?

That'll do.

But that's a fact.

INTERVIEW ENDS