Australians at War Film Archive

Richard Colahan - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 16th July 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2141

Tape 1

00:47 **I might just start by asking where you were born and where you grew up?**

In Mentone, which is a seaside village in Melbourne,

01:00 it was a great life there really, because it was right on the beach and I loved the water and the beach. And because I was interested in going out on the water and building canoes and buying little sailing boats and …

You built canoes?

Yes.

What did you build them out of?

Well those days there was no such thing as sailcloth as we know it now, but it was unbleached calico,

01:30 which is a type of heavy cotton, and that was sort of standard. And the other thing is, which you don't see much of now, but cane and bamboo was a very standard commodity for a lot of things, so we used to buy this cane, about the size of your finger, bend it round into shape and then get this unbleached calico, get it sopping wet and then you'd just put oil paint on top of

02:00 the sopping wet and that'd seal it, used to get in trouble with my mother because I was forever pinching the broom handles to make the mast and booms for the sails, and she really 'did her crumpet' one day. Yachts need some sort of natural stability, and they either use a centre board or a keel as such, but when her ironing

02:30 board disappeared she got very upset.

How long would one of these boats that you made last?

'The Little Imp', I used to have that for three or four years, go out fishing in it, just paddle out from the beach and fish in Port Philip Bay, but we used to rig up – if the weather was favourable and the wind was favourable, try and get it to sail. We managed to get along, but not very successfully.

Did you have to do a few test voyages and make a

03:00 **few adjustments before you got them seaworthy?**

Yes. Well definitely, but it's all a learning curve, it's all self taught, if something didn't work you just thought up another idea, get experimenting till you got something that worked.

Now who were you making these boats with? Was it friends or did you have some older person or …?

No, it was mainly just mates, most of them have passed on now, but there's one of them still alive, Max Gault

03:30 but no, two or three mates, we'd get together. And they would also make their own, a few of them were fortunate enough although it was Depression years, Dad'd have enough money to buy them a professionally built canoe or a professionally built little dinghy, sailing dinghy. But we lived on the beach literally all the year round there, and it was pretty hard to go to school some days, much easier to go down the beach for the day.

Did you have little races between you? Can you talk

04:00 **about some of the …?**

Not necessarily, there were yacht clubs in the area where they had more sophisticated boats, and as we grew older we used to sail in those, Mordialloc, Parkdale, Chelsea, Frankston. I suppose we matured

into them eventually. But in the early days we just did our own thing.

So the early boats that you were building, was that just for one

04:30 **person, or could you fit more …?**

You'd get two in them usually, one or two, two was about the maximum, they'd be about seven, eight feet long.

Would you name these boats?

Well the first one I had was a boat called The Imp, I don't know where the name came from, but I'm a bit short on other names at this stage, I'm afraid.

That's OK. Where do you think your love of the sea came from?

05:00 **Well I think if you grew up on a beach in Australia, well you know you just – whether it's come originally from the family or not, but we all had to make our own entertainment those days, there was no sophisticated entertainment, we had to do our own thing. There was always something to do on a beach, as you know.**

05:30 **So how old were you when you started making these boats?**

Eight or nine, I'd say about eight or nine, yes.

Quite young.

Yes, but I had to do something.

What year were you born?

1925.

And your town, tell me about what were the industries of your town and what your parents did for a living.

Well Mentone was a – and still is, largely a

06:00 semi-elite visitors town, it was only an hour – half an hour's train ride out of Melbourne, but it was a very nice beach, very impressive cliffs all round, a painter's paradise, painters from all round the world used to come and stay at Mentone and do their painting, there's a lot of their paintings hanging in –

06:30 well, Melbourne Art Gallery, I know there's several there.

So famous painters?

Yes, I'll show you some of their prints, but names elude me just off the cuff.

So when you were growing up you knew that there were a lot of artists around your community, did you?

Oh yes.

Would you see them at the beach and that sort of thing?

Yes, we'd often watch them painting the cliffs around Mentone and Beaumaris and Black Rock, Picnic Bay.

07:00 It was – no, there were some very famous paintings done.

So you said it was a bit of a holiday town, but I mean how did people earn a living there, what sort of things would they do?

Well oddly enough I always thought, and it was only recently I read a book which took that story away from it, but all the street

07:30 names, Mentone itself is named after a little Mentone seaside village in the French Riviera, on the Italian border, all the street names are Italian, Como Parade, Florence Street, Brindisi Street, and I always thought it must have been originally Italian fishermen who lived in the area. But that wasn't the case at all apparently, it was just whoever planned the town and

08:00 designed it. There were a lot of activities, there was the Coffee Palace, was one of these three star guest houses that was built – that's now Kilbreda Convent, it's a great school town, St Bede's College which is run by the De La Salle brothers, there's the Mentone Boys' Grammar and Mentone Girls' Grammar School, the Kilbreda Convent,

08:30 it's quite a big racing fraternity live there, there's the Mentone racecourse, and a lot of race horses were trained there, they used to take them down the beach every day swimming for training practice for the race horses. Jockeys, trainers, hangers on, strappers.

Was that something that sort of interested you as a boy, seeing that …?

09:00 Yes, there was always activity, and race day they used to have special trains coming down, we didn't have motor vehicles for carting the horses around in those days, if you lived at Flemington or you lived at Caulfield and you had a horse you wanted to put in a race, you'd go up on the special race train that had stables on the train, they'd all come down and shunt into the yard and the horses would trip off up the road to the racecourse and you've got the horse and cab,

09:30 very few motorcars, they'd have horse and cabs, and every train that would come in there'd be half a dozen people would race out and get into one of these, a mile up the road to the racecourse. Apart from that it was a residential area. There's no intense industrial or commercial involvement – it's just a little seaside

10:00 resort town.

So would people travel to work outside of the town?

Oh yes, they'd commute, there's a train went through from Frankston through to Melbourne, Mentone was about half way along the track. Maybe about a thirty-five minute train ride into the city, but the majority of them worked in Melbourne itself, and a train up to work every day and back in the evening.

So you said it was a very elite town. Were most of the people professionals

10:30 **that lived there? I mean your friends parents, your parents, what did they do?**

No, they were a mixture, but it was more of an upmarket suburb I'd say, than a lot of the other suburbs round Melbourne at that time. It was the elite as five star, but it's a pretty little town, beautiful beach, great place to grow up in.

It sounds

11:00 **beautiful. And what did your dad do for a living?**

He was a doctor, he did medicine, it was a bit of a family tradition, medicine – Grandpappy, old Jack, and that's his sea chest there in the corner, he was a surgeon, a surgeon general in the British Army, an Irishman that joined the British Army and

11:30 had an uncle who was a doctor in Melbourne, and had another great uncle, Grandpappy's brother, whom I never met, but he was a doctor also, and Bing Crosby made him famous, apart from being a doctor he wrote quite a few songs, and one that Bing Crosby made world famous was –

12:00 one of those 'blackouts'.

That's OK.

Go Away Bay. If you ever go across the sea from Ireland. A song called, 'Go Away Bay'.

How does – do you know some of the lyrics at all, or how it goes?

'If you ever go across the sea from Ireland' … Yes, I used to know it all off by heart, I've got them written down inside. But

12:30 he married a Scottish lass, and she didn't like Ireland, and insisted on going back home, and so he – to save his marriage, the only option was to move to Scotland and live there, where he became a professor in Scotland, but he always wanted to go home, and he wrote this lament about if you ever go across the sea from Ireland, looking back

13:00 across the Irish Sea, he just wanted to go back home all the time.

That's a pretty good claim to fame for your family, isn't it?

Well, another uncle was Colin Colahan, he's quite a famous artist, he only died a few years ago, but there's a lot of his paintings in the Australian War Museum in Canberra. He was an official war artist in England and Europe during the Second

13:30 World War, and he's world famous, he's got several paintings hanging in the Melbourne Art Gallery, and actually there's one of his paintings in the Louvre in Paris. I've got a very nice print of one of his photos which is hanging in the War Memorial in Canberra. I don't know if it would come over on the camera, but it's very famous, should I get that for you?

14:00 Get the print?

We could have a look in a break, yes, that'd be great. Now tell me about your dad, did he practice in Melbourne, or was he the doctor for your town?

He had a what they called a general practice in – he went to Melbourne University, graduated there, then he went to Ireland and did some post-graduate work in Ireland for some years, came back to Australia and started to practice in Mentone, and he was just a general practitioner in Mentone

14:30 until 1939. He sold his practice and joined – or he specialised in Collins Street in Melbourne and he also joined the Royal Australian Air Force, and he became a senior dermatologist, a group captain in the Royal Australian Air Force by the end of the war. But Basil died a few years ago.

15:00 **And what can you tell me about your mother?**

Vera? Best mother you could have had. Vera Coffee, her father was Frank Coffee, my grandfather, he was a fantastic chap, he used to – all our school holidays he'd take us up to some relatives in the country and stay on a farm and take us fishing and 'yabbying' and shooting rabbits.

15:30 But her mother died when she was only a very young child, and Frank looked after her, and eventually she had a step-mother, they were a very close family. She died some years ago.

I imagine being a doctor's wife, did she have to socialise a fair bit, or did you have dinner parties at your house or…?

Well yes, we were

16:00 always a sociable family, and Dad and Vera had a group of very close friends, and they used to have their card games and have their parties, and they were very – it was a very sociable life, there were a lot of friends.

I guess a doctor would be sort of the 'heart of a community', wouldn't he? He'd know so many people.

16:30 **Did you get the impression that, you know, that your dad sort of moved a lot through the community or …?**

Yes, he was deeply involved in most civil affairs and town affairs. Looking there, just over your shoulder, there's another cocktail cabinet there in the corner, that was presented to Mum and Dad in 1939 when they left Mentone, the

17:00 citizens took up a collection, and that was hand made by Jacky Jones, a local carpenter come chippy—

It's beautiful.

No, he was very highly regarded in the community, not only as a doctor, just as a general citizen of the town.

Did you have aspirations to be a

17:30 **doctor from a young age?**

We're jumping quite a few years now, aren't we? …

Well we won't jump to when you became a doctor, but I just wondered if …?

No, actually I knew it was inevitable, that someone in the family had – one of the male members of the family would end up doing medicine, but I thought it was – there were a lot of reasons why I joined the navy, but one of them at the time, was during the war, I

18:00 wasn't interested in doing medicine, I didn't say I joined the navy to get out of doing medicine, but to postpone it.

OK. We won't go to the navy just yet.

Yes.

Just tell me a little bit about your schooling years, what school you went to, what it was like, what the teachers were like?

It started off with Sister Damien, the local little parish St Patrick's school in

18:30 Mentone run by the Brigidine nuns from Ireland, yes, that was fun, they were strict but they were very good teachers.

How strict were they?

Well Sister Damien always had a big lump of leather strap hanging down from her belt, she was not slow to pull it out any time at all, because she had some

19:00 pretty wild children around her, particularly boys, girls were – I don't think they were ever reprimanded physically, but the boys were always queued up, one hand out, one hand out, 'bang, bang'.

What sort of things could you get in strife for?

Everything, I think everything.

Did you have a uniform that you had to – I mean were there uniform rules or anything like that?

19:30 Not really, well it was what they regard as or what is termed Depression years, a lot of people had money and primary school uniforms were not in, simply because of the financial situation in the community, people just couldn't afford to dress their children up in special uniforms and things, in those days.

Were there ever any

20:00 **kids that didn't even have shoes, or anything like that?**

Well rather than just specifically pointing out the shoes, I think everyone was money-starved in those Depression years, and everyone seemed to get by. But …

How did the Depression impact on your family?

I grew up on 'Weeties' [cereal] and

20:30 toast. My mother was very generous, and there were people wandering all around Australia trying to earn a few bob for their family at home, and get some food for them. And they used to come knocking at the door, you know, "Can I mow the lawn, or can I do any odd jobs and that." To earn a few shillings. And they'd

21:00 say, "Have you got any food left over?" So Mum would have a nice roast cooked for dinner or something and then someone would come knocking on the door about an hour before dinner, hadn't had anything to eat all day, Vera used to give it all away.

All of it? Even – so the family didn't have any roast?

Oh we did occasionally, we did

21:30 occasionally, yes, we ate reasonably well, but every time there was something special on, it seemed to be that someone would come knocking on the door asking if there were any odd jobs they could do or any spare food that they could have. It was very impressive, when you see this as a child growing up, because we couldn't understand it.

22:00 **What did you make of it as a child? What were your thoughts?**

We had all our mates, and we'd go to the beach at Mentone and that area, a lot of it was just wild bush, tea tree country, and we'd go ride our bikes through these bush tracks for miles and miles, chasing rabbits and bird nesting, getting

22:30 birds eggs out of their nests and things, climbing trees and doing all those things that people don't seem to do these days.

But when you saw your mum giving food to the – were they swagmen?

Yes, you'd call them swagmen.

What did you think of that as a kid?

I don't think I thought about it much in those days, if someone was hungry or you had something to eat, share it round.

23:00 I don't know, Vera was like that. Very generous.

Has her example affected you throughout your life, in terms of helping people?

I think it has. Well more so as you get older, those sort of things

23:30 impact upon you, you're more considerate or thoughtful of people that are without money or struggling and having their problems, that's why I admire an unlimited amount of community and other projects, but people like St Vincent de Paul or the Salvation Army,

24:00 I think they do a fantastic job. There's thousands of others I haven't mentioned, both in Australia and throughout the world, though I think there's still a terrific need for a lot more consideration of those that are lacking.

I was just wondering, your dad, being a doctor, I know that people used to sort of trade and barter food and things like that, did your dad ever get paid in

24:30 **other things, other than money for his services?**

Oh yes, every night, or every day, someone would come in for a consultation or to thank Dad for delivering a baby or something, "Sorry we haven't got any money." But they had a couple of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s or a dozen eggs or a basket full of vegetables, that was very, very common. Very common. They

25:00 couldn't pay for anything, but they had to give you something, they knew that you need to have things, so food was a very common method of barter or remuneration.

I wonder if it was difficult for your dad to get medicines and things like that in those days?

There weren't any credit cards in those days, but

25:30 again, I feel that everyone had trust in their neighbours and their friends, and I think if he needed something he'd just go and see Alf Garter in the local chemist and say, "I've got to have this, I've got to have that, and can't pay you this week, I'll see what I can do next week Alf." That was the impression that I got of what life was like in those days, early 1930s, mid-1930s.

26:00 **Now just tell me when you decided that you'd join the navy, and why, why you decided that that would be a good idea?**

There's no one particular reason, there were many of them. But up until 1938, '39, Dad left Mentone, I'd had a fairly

26:30 stable education, just from the loca primary school up to De La Salle Brothers to a secondary school, but then the war played havoc and I was in a boarding – put into a boarding school and that didn't work, and I was taken—

Why didn't that work?

--to another school, and—

Why didn't the boarding school agree with you?

The headmaster.

27:00 Yes, I was doing very well at school up until then, I enjoyed it, but being put into a boarding school with an intolerant headmaster in my book, I just kept running away.

Did you miss the freedom that you would have had as well, you know, being able to – because I guess in a boarding school you didn't

27:30 **have as much freedom to sort of go outside the school? Was that hard for you too?**

Oh no, I think it was just – his attitude, I think he regarded that I needed a bit of putting in order.

Do you think you did?

In retrospect yes, I suppose like all kids we were spoilt,

28:00 but I used to be pretty much – which I still do I suppose, I'd do what I want to do, not what I'm told to do, and that didn't gel. So then I had a couple more schools and things, but schooling in the war years, I just wanted to get out. And I had already

28:30 decided on the navy because of discussion with ex-servicemen from the First World War plus knowledge of Gallipoli and the Flanders and the mud in Europe in the trenches and that, there must be a better way of living than that. So the navy sounded pretty good to me, because three meals a day, and a nice comfortable hammock to sleep in at night. But the other thing is, the

29:00 childhood I'd had was so fantastic that I just couldn't believe that anything could ever happen to change it. We could talk in German or talk in Japanese and we were having to – I just decided to get into the navy and get all this over and done with and go back and doing all the things that we enjoy doing and live in this great country we live in.

So what were some of the – you said that you

29:30 **talked to some World War I navy men, who were these men, and what were they telling you that made you think, 'definitely the navy for me?'**

Well the majority – I mentioned these 'swaggies', for want of a better name, but good honest people that had fought for Australia and walking round the country with a sugar bag on their back, literally – not begging but pleading for a job

30:00 to get a few bob, or get some money to take home to buy some food for the family, but there were other individuals, we had a housemaid come cleaner that used to help Vera, 'Ellie', who had a husband who'd been in Gallipoli and had been in France, and back in the '30s my sister and

30:30 I were sent away for six months to country, there was a poliomyelitis epidemic in Melbourne, and any doctors who were exposed to treating these patients, the health department decided the family – the children, had to be sent off to the country somewhere, boarded out, because of the danger of the

31:00 father, the doctor, bringing home the poliomyelitis and transferring it to his own children. So we lived on this farm up in Western Victoria for six or seven months, my sister Mary and myself. And Harry Ellison was – as I mentioned he'd been at Gallipoli and had been in France, and he used to talk, not much, but

31:30 what he did say about the war, World War I was like – there must be a better way of life.

Was it – I just wonder, your feelings as a kid, meeting these men who'd gone and fought for our country, and then seen them come home and suffering so much. What – did you sense that at the time? I mean, what were your thoughts on that?

32:00 I don't think you really appreciate it at that age, the significance of Gallipoli and the significance of war. I think that just comes with maturity and with age, you think more about those things. But when you're young and growing up and having a lot of fun, I don't consciously recall stopping and thinking about it.

How was life for you on that

32:30 **farm?**

We – Mary and I had a ball, we trapped rabbits and milked cows and no crops (UNCLEAR) and – no, we had a fantastic time. It was near the coast, we used to go down the coast for a nice day and spend a day down on the Bass Strait fishing, well just off the shore, off the rocks. No, we had a great time.

Do you recall when you heard that war had broken

33:00 **out?**

Yes.

Where were you and can you set the scene for me?

It was – from memory it was Sunday morning, but I was at boarding school and Mum and Dad had moved up to Melbourne, they were living in Melbourne, and I was walking on my way from the school to the station, illegally, gone walkabout again, left the school, I'd had enough of this

33:30 place, I'm going home. And I remember a kid came by on a bike, "Hey, look at this." And he had a pile of newspapers he was taking round, delivering, war had been declared. That was 3rd September. That's my memory of it.

And what impact – what did it mean to you when you saw that newspaper?

I said, "Good, I'll be able to get in the navy in a couple of

34:00 years." But no, I remember it quite vividly, the outbreak of the war.

Do you recall your parents' reaction to it?

No, Bas at that stage, actually he was working

34:30 with the army, although he was specialising in Melbourne in medicine, a particular brand of medicine, but he was working part time for the army, examining recruits at the Melbourne Town Hall, and then he joined the air force in a medical capacity. My brother was still at school, he – I was the

35:00 youngest in the family, in a couple of years time he was in the air force and released, and of the group of mates that I grew up with, I was one of the younger of them, and all the others were in the army in Tobruk, or in the air force off somewhere. So I just, the first opportunity I could, to get into the navy.

35:30 **Did your parents expect that you would join one of the services? Was it …?**

I think it was inevitable, but they weren't very happy when I went in under age, but …

So you went in under age? How did you manage that?

Changed a few figures on the birth certificate, the petty officer had one look at it and he said, "You've altered this." and I said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" And he said, "Nothing."

36:00 **So how old were you?**

Sixteen.

And where did you join up? Talk me through that.

The navy had a recruiting office in Collins Street, the Spencer Street end of Collins Street in Melbourne, it was a recruiting office and you did preliminary

36:30 medical exams there and went through the necessaries, and then you were just put on a call-up list, and you just had to wait until you got the letter to report on such-and-such a day, at such-and-such a place, all naval training was done in those days, at the Flinders naval depot in Crib Point in Melbourne, or on Western Port Bay

37:00 in Victoria.

Did you have to undergo a medical at all?

Oh yes.

What did that involve?

Everything, no it was very thorough, they covered everything, from teeth to toenails.

Was there any – were you, you know, a healthy boy, you didn't have any problems? Obviously you …

No. No, well while I was on the waiting list, I had left school at this stage and I'd taken a job in a tea-packing factory in

37:30 South Melbourne, in a suburb of Melbourne, carting these big chests of tea around, I developed a hernia or a rupture, so that delayed my call-up for a while, but apart from that no, as far as I was concerned I was a healthy young kid.

And so your training took place at Flinders, was it?

Flinders naval depot.

Could you tell me your first impressions? Like maybe your first few weeks or months there?

Well

38:00 it was standard for all the services that those that have been in for a couple of weeks or a few months, greeted the new arrivals every time with, "You'll be sorry." At the time you didn't quite understand what they were talking about, but a couple of weeks later you'd be out there greeting the new intake, telling them how sorry they'd be. But the navy was good, I liked the navy. I

38:30 think all the services did it in some way, but I think the navy really made men out of boys.

So you said that you were a bit of a wild kid at school. Did you enjoy the discipline of the navy when you first got there?

I think it did me good, yeah, I think it did me good.

Was it hard – how hard was it to adjust? Can you talk me through that?

No, not at all. No, no

39:00 trouble at all, I think it's all service life is basically the same in one sense, but it's the comradeship, comradeship, the reliability of your mates. In a corvette, I spent most of my time in corvettes, the size of this room we're in, it

39:30 housed something like sixty people in hammocks and bunks and things, never a case of theft, never a case of anyone in trouble, needing a hand, needing assistance, it's just the reliability of your mates and comradeship and there's never any petty theft going on, you never locked anything away.

40:00 No, it's the spirit of the service life, particularly in the navy, was fantastic.

Tape 2

00:31 **I'd just like to get a little bit more detail about what your initial training involved. Can you talk me through that?**

This is in the navy?

Yes, in the navy.

Well I suppose the thing that sticks out more than anything is the discipline, which didn't do any of us any harm, we were all, as I say, wild young kids. But the preliminary

01:00 training in the seamen's branch, there's many branches of the navy, you can be a cook, you can be a steward, you can be a gun layer, you can be a torpedo mechanic, but I nominated for what they call the seamen's branch, which is a Jack of all trades, so over a three of four month period down at Flinders, you did everything, boat work, general seamanship,

01:30 gun gunnery, mine laying, mine sweeping, it covered the whole facet of every part of the navy that you're in.

Now I don't really understand when you just say that, what that means. Can you talk me through it in a little bit more detail, you know, what the specifics were of each of those different areas?

Well on any vessel at all, it doesn't matter what it is, a rowing

02:00 boat or a yacht or a warship, they don't – they're inanimate objects, they don't just go where you want to go, you've got to take them there and you've got to do all the bits and pieces to maintain their viability and their activities, and apart from that it's a home, it's a house, you live in it, so you've got to have bathrooms and toilets and

02:30 galleys and all the other things that go into kitchens, and all the other things that have to be kept clean. So it's a Jack of all trades occupation. Any activity, particularly in the navy, they just put you through everything that you've got to do from day to day, because you're living – your home is the vessel that you're serving in.

03:00 It's an interesting thing too, isn't it, you never serve 'on' a vessel, you serve 'in' a vessel.

So you mentioned that you'd learned mine sweeping, was it?

Yes.

What exactly – can you talk me through the exercises you did?

Well, it's a team performance again, you have various gear,

03:30 the mines are sown, they're usually anchored on the bottom of the ocean, so you have paravanes which are sort of small guiding things on a long length of wire, which is let out from a big davit on the stern of the boat, you had one each side steaming out, and the intention is that these lines have

04:00 cutting equipment on them, so if they come across a mine, the anchoring cable or chain is broken, and the mine floats to the surface, and then you destroy it with gunfire, if you're unlucky and it gets caught in the wire and explodes under your boat or such things, so it's potentially a very dangerous occupation, mine sweeping. There's a

04:30 vessel just off – not far off here, a mine sweep in 1947 after the war, HMAS Warrnambool, four chaps were killed, and this was two years after the war was over, but they just got a mine caught and …

Tell me, what was your job in say the mine sweeping? Does everyone have a specific job or do you learn different things?

Well there would be, yes,

05:00 a group which was specialised in machinery, and you've got to have engines to handle all this equipment and everything, but no, I was never actively involved except in the shooting, if we – when we did sweep mines and they'd come to the surface and float, you'd have a guns crew up on the deck, rifles and guns, I had to sink the mine by puncturing it, or if you're

05:30 for fortunate enough to hit one of the detonators and blow it up, but I used to – had practice shooting ducks, I suppose for that particular occasion.

What sort of guns were you trained to use, and can you talk me through that training?

Well everything from small arms up to – we had four inch breach loading triangle guns which were capable of surface or aircraft attack.

06:00 **How many men sort of, operate that kind of gun? It sounds like a big …?**

Well, six men on the gun, you have a layer and a trainer and generalised things, but then you'd have probably another half a dozen down the bowels of the ship, the magazine, for hoisting up more ammunition and little sort of system of pulling it up to the deck, and then loading

06:30 and carrying it around. But all in all, I suppose a four inch gun, a gun's crew would entail at least a dozen men.

And how do you communicate with each other if some of you are above deck and some of you are below? How do you communicate?

These days it's all radio telephony type of walkie talkie radios or a mobile phone situation, but in those days it was it was by just

07:00 voice, either yell out or they had these special tubes, which is just a tube that you talk into and that'll go round between the various decks, put your ear onto it and then you scream into it. You're trained to do a job and everyone does their job, and there's really little communication required, once everyone is trained and they know their job, because you just automatically do it. And you have your job, you don't do anyone

07:30 else's, and they don't do your job. There's no confusion then, you know what you've got to do, and that's all you do.

So what was your job?

Well, just situations where just routine day-to-day sea work, and occasions when you're at action – in action, and I was what you call a

08:00 firer, I'm a port aft depth charge thrower, so I used to pull a little tessellate through a forty-four gallon drum of this high explosive over the side, and set the depths where it's suspected the submarine is, and when it goes down to that depth it automatically explodes itself. But that was heavy work, working with a forty-four

08:30 gallon drum of solid explosive, and loading it up into a thrower. But that was my, what you call action station, when we were in action. Most of the time during the day and night, because you're twenty-four day on board a vessel, you don't stop and sunset and drop the anchor or anything, you just keep going, so you work around in watches.

09:00 And that can be a bit wearying and trying too, four hours on, four hours off, twenty-four hours a day. So on your four hours off there's a lot of other things you've got to do during the day, except to sleep.

So I'll just take you back to the end of your initial training at Flinders, how prepared did you feel at the end of that, was it three months, did you say?

About four months.

Four months. How prepared did you feel to sort of go onto a

09:30 **real ship and start your career?**

I think very confident really, it was the best way, you know, we were anxious to get to sea, get on a ship and get to sea, but no, we were quite confident, we'd been well schooled and well trained, and we thought we knew our job, till we got on board a ship then we found out we didn't know anything.

What was the ship that you were drafted to?

The first seagoing ship was – soon after – well I

10:00 left Flinders I was sent to another Naval depot in Port Melbourne, so I was waiting to be sent overseas to join a ship overseas and I spent two months on a vessel that was in Port Phillip Bay at that stage, but operating in Bass Strait, the HMAS Wagga. But I had been allocated to go overseas to join a

10:30 pool, a reserve pool of reserves in Colombo to pick up a vessel over there, and it was just – I had two months waiting because we went over on a passenger liner, a group of servicemen, air force and navy, to Colombo, and some went on to Bombay and India.

So you went over on a passenger liner? Now being part of the navy did you have to

11:00 **do jobs on that?**

Yes, we were on four hours on, four hours off watch, lookout for enemy ships, aircraft was always on the go, and we had an escort of a couple of naval vessels with us. Yes, we just worked – what they say, work part of ship, so it was just – we were on a warship and we had to do all our duties and peel potatoes and wash

11:30 dishes and keep lookout and polish the brass, and all those other jobs.

Was that the first time you'd been on a big ship, at that point?

Yes.

What was that like, being a kid that grew up making his own boats, and then you're finally on a huge passenger liner, what was it like?

I suppose the sea life was what intrigued me, the albatross', the bird life, particularly in Bass Strait, and then

12:00 the whales, the dolphins and other sea life, and once we got into the Indian Ocean – I liked the sea, always liked the sea, there's always something to see and it's always different.

What was the journey to Colombo like?

Very interesting, because as you said, the

12:30 first time in a big vessel, getting to know the run of the ship and seeing all the seasick people around you.

How did you cope with that?

Fortunately I've never been seasick, I can't understand anyone that goes to sea who gets seasick. But I don't suffer from it, fortunately. But having seen so many people with seasickness, I don't know how they go to sea.

13:00 **So did you go directly to Colombo?**

We went into Fremantle, went from Melbourne to Fremantle, had to fuel up and get some cargo and picked up a few more servicemen going overseas, were in Fremantle for a couple of days and then we

went on to Colombo.

Did you stop there, or

13:30 **what was …?**

Well no, I was transferred then to a shore base, pending the vessel that I'd been posted to go to was out in the Indian Ocean, or the Bay of Bengal, and we had to go into this naval depot, shore base, till the ship came back so I could join it to Trincomalee which is on the other side of the island. So while I was waiting there it so

14:00 happened another vacancy came – an urgent vacancy for a replacement crew on HMAS Ipswich, another corvette, so they transferred me to the Ipswich so I never got put onto the Nizam, which was a destroyer that I'd been posted to. So I spent some time on the HMAS Ipswich.

Were you disappointed that you didn't get to go on a destroyer?

I was a bit at the time, but once you got on

14:30 corvettes and lived on them for a while, a smaller crew, the camaraderie and the ship's company, the friendship, no, I was quite happy on corvettes, and the discipline was less rigid than – the bigger the ship the more the discipline. It was very laid back, as long as you did your job, everyone was happy.

15:00 We were all living in the tropics, clothing was usually just a pair of shorts, no footwear, a hat if you could find one. No, it was just a great life.

Tell me about HMAS Ipswich.

She was one of fifty-six corvettes which were built during the war years, the corvette

15:30 worked on mine sweeping work, convoys, everything, there's nothing that corvettes didn't do. She was probably one of the most travelled corvettes, she served in the Mediterranean, she even served in the Atlantic, at one stage she was at the invasion of Sicily, she was at the signing of peace in Tokyo Bay at the end of the war,

16:00 but she was probably one of the most famous of the corvettes insofar as her performances and she had Captain McBride, he had been a merchant navy captain, McIlwraith McEacharn, a shipping company in Victoria, before the war, and he was on the naval reserve and he was the CO [Commanding Officer], but he was

16:30 an icon of the navy too, he was a very respected and great captain. A very happy ship.

Tell me, what's the process when you get drafted to a ship? How do you come on board? What's involved in getting on and finding where you need to be, and all that sort of thing?

Well the first thing you come on board and you've got to go and see what they call the master at arms,

17:00 he's a senior petty officer who's in charge of all the drafting, he's the policeman of the boat really, and he just says, "You're in such-and-such a mess, and you're in such-and-such a watch, and go and see leading seaman so-and-so." And you just got your bag and hammock and trotted off down to the mess deck and say, "I'm here." And he'd say,

17:30 "G'day, I'm Charlie and that's Harry, and you're Dick," you know, "Go and get some scram." Which meant food time, go and get something to eat. Because you know what watch you're on, they'd say, "Oh well, you're on starboard watch, you're on duty at such-and-such a time." And everyone's given a job to do, when they are on watch at that time.

18:00 It might be a coxswain, which means you're up on the wheel steering the boat, or you might be on lookout up in the crow's nest at the top of the mast, or just on the bridge wing deck out, you might be a stand-by guns crew, there's any one of a hundred jobs they could – you'd have action jobs appointed to you. As I say, everyone knew their job and you just did it, you didn't have to worry about anyone else's job because you knew they'd all do their job.

What was your favourite job to do?

The coxswain, steering

18:30 the boat, I used to enjoy the coxswain, we used to do a four-hour watch, you were an hour on, an hour off, an hour on, an hour off, that's on the wheel, and on your hour off you'd be on what they call bridge lookout, so you're just on either side of the bridge or up on top of it, with a pair of binoculars, and just keeping a look out for anything and everything that you see that's unusual. You've got to report it.

19:00 But you're right in the hub of all the activity, all the activity on the boat was on the bridge, so everything was happening, you were in the atmosphere of it, the anti-submarine protection equipment was there, the radar control was there, everything operated from the bridge, so working on the bridge you were involved and knew everything that was going on on the boat the whole time.

Do you think that sort of comes from,

19:30 **you know, having been a sailor and you know, being I guess more involved with the travelling journey, the direction of the ship? Was that – you found that more interesting than maybe being below deck or doing something that …?**

Yes, there's more activity, there's more going on, you could see what was going on, I often felt sorry for the stokers, although they felt sorry for us. But just being down in an engine room all day reading gauges and

20:00 walking round with an oil can, I could think of nothing worse than that, being locked up below decks and not having any idea of what's going on around you or outside you.

Did you have a least favourite job?

No, they were all good, captain of the 'heads' [toilets], 'captain to heads' means you have to keep the bathrooms and toilets clean, no-one ever enjoyed peeling potatoes, there were always

20:30 galley duties to be done, peeling potatoes and washing dishes. But they have a – the system again is self serve, even on small vessels at sea now, the captain will take his plate back to the galley and wash his own plate and cup after he's had a meal, even the captain of the ship. Everyone has a duty to

21:00 do, and one of the duties is that the cook cooks it, and you clean up, doesn't matter who it is, the captain, everyone on the boat does their job.

Speaking of food, what was the quality of food like?

Depends where you were, it was usually shocking, you never got any fresh food or if we did, we had very little refrigeration, so anything fresh in the way of vegetables and even potatoes, a week or ten days at sea and that was the

21:30 end of it, it was just tinned stuff, bully beef, tinned bully beef and tinned food. But fresh food was always a problem, particularly up in the Persian Gulf, the temperature's a hundred and forty degrees in the shade, the temperature used to get up to in the Gulf. We had no air conditioning or anything like that. So food, twenty-four hours there's no fresh food left.

Were you ever able to fish at all, or get some …?

22:00 We did fish a little, but our main thing if we were in harbour and to fish you basically had to be in harbour, at anchor, and we were more interested in catching up on sleep, or getting ashore and having a game of football or going for a swim ashore, it was just to get off the ship for a while and get on some dry land. It's very restricted, as I say, an area not much

22:30 bigger than this room, but eighty people on a boat a hundred feet long and twenty-five feet wide, although there was a couple of deck levels, it was pretty crowded.

It must have been a bit confronting at first, not having enough personal space, can you tell me what that was like?

Sorry, I didn't catch that?

Was it a bit confronting, not having much personal space when you first went on board? Was that something you had to get used to?

Oh no, everyone was always friendly.

23:00 **But just not being able to get away from anyone, you know, and in such a small space. Was that …?**

Well, you just accepted it, there's nothing you could do about it. I suppose it was like the chaps in Gallipoli, the chaps in Flanders in France during the war, in the mud and everything, that's just life, there's nothing you can do about it, so you've just got to make the best of it, and just accept it.

You talked about it was good to get ashore sometimes, was there, I mean for you personally, like

23:30 **how many days could you be at sea before you really just wanted to have a break?**

Most convoys we did would be a ten-day passage, Colombo up to Calcutta, round to Bombay, down to Diego Suarez or somewhere, but you'd usually take about ten days to get there, and then you'd turn around and go back to home base or wherever you were operating

24:00 from. So you'd be at sea basically for three weeks at a time. You'd get into harbour, you'd – by the time you refuelled and revitaled, filled up the water tanks, filled up the oil tanks and did all the other things, two or three days and you'd be off again on another convoy, so you didn't spend much time harbour. The only good thing about the particular engines they

24:30 had on these Australian corvettes, because we didn't have a great engineering skill in the country in those days, they had to use modified steam engines off railway yards, with the bases for the motor, and

because they usually – sure they were coal burners, that is

25:00 steam engines on the railways, they were converted to oil, and they used to coke up very badly, so at least every six weeks or so we knew we were going to get three or four days in harbour, because we had to have the boiler cleaned, to get all the coke out of the engines, which was good.

Were you involved in that at all?

No, that was the engine room staff did that.

So when you were in harbour, did you have a different job that you had to perform?

Well ships are steel, and salt

25:30 water and steel don't go together too well, so you would never stop chipping rust and anti-fouling and putting red lead on it, painting it, so that there were always jobs to do, and just routine maintenance round the ship, replacing ropes and painting, a thousand and one jobs, so there was plenty to do.

Did you have a 'tiddly suit' for when you went ashore at all?

26:00 Sorry, a ..?

Did you have a tiddly suit for when you went ashore?

Yes, the navy issue, no-one was very happy about what the navy issued you in the way of clothing, so your number ones, you used to call them, you'd usually try and get a – there was always someone on the boat who'd be a hairdresser, self-appointed, there'd be a tailor, self-appointed, people would just take up various skills and do them, and they'd get roll of cloth from the

26:30 stores department and start making uniforms for us and things, so we always had a number one tiddly suit.

Can you tell me about some of the alterations that you made to the style, or were some people a bit more fashion conscious than others?

Well the navy issue had a very narrow V-front collar, at the back and everything, it was very difficult to get into it, particularly in a hurry,

27:00 because it was a jacket that fitted like this jumper, and you'd pull it down fairly tight. And being of short stature, your arms, the sleeves and legs were always too long for me, so I had to chop a few inches off, get that few inches chopped off and sewn back together. But it was only when we were going ashore in cold climate, because

27:30 basically the whole time I was in the navy, operational at sea, I was in the tropics, and we just had shirts and shorts, navy shorts – khaki shorts and shirt, or white shirt and shorts, that was all.

You mentioned that people had I guess little businesses on board, like the barber and the tailor, did you

28:00 **have one as well, or did you have a particular skill that you were able to make some extra money on, or anything like that?**

No, I enjoyed – we were all young and very active, and everyone was involved in sport, swimming, football was the forte on all Australian ships, Australian Rules football, every ship would have their

28:30 own team, and the first thing when we got into harbour, if you saw an Australian ship, you'd immediately signal them and say, "When do you want a game of football?" Every opportunity we'd go ashore and play football or get involved in some other – cricket or whatever was available. But football was the big thing, right throughout the navy, Australian Rules football. Swimming was too, that was always very common, as soon as we were in harbour, a

29:00 swimming party over the side.

Was there ever any ongoing competitions between different ships with the football games and so forth? I mean did you keep ...?

Yes, well see the navy again, you don't act individually, each ship is only part of a flotilla or a squadron, so you're basically operating with these same vessels all the time. So you got to know a lot of

29:30 them personally because you played football with them, went swimming with them, operating at sea with them, on manoeuvres and convoys and everything, so yes, a lot of competition between various ships. It was the in-thing in the navy, well I think the army and air force – more so the army too, because you know, you're in groups, whereas the air force were

30:00 more dispersed, and the Australian air force really were – really, except in Australia itself, they were always related or operational in RAF [Royal Air Force] or American air force groups, rather than Australian groups. So the army and the navy, they're very close knit, particularly in recreational activities.

I was just wondering, do

30:30 **each sort of crew love their own ship and sort of you know, is there honour about your ship when you meet someone else from another – I mean are there ever any blues over different things?**

Oh yes, yes.

Can you tell me about that?

Well there was always a decent fight every time you got ashore anywhere. It's a matter of where you were and how much rum someone had drunk, and how much – but that's universal, even before we went

31:00 away during the war years when the Americans were in Australia, you know, there was more fighting they said going on in the pubs of Townsville and Cairns and Brisbane, than there was in New Guinea.

Is that an important part of sort of I guess letting of steam?

I think it was. There were a few black eyes and a few blood noses occasionally, but no-one really suffered from it, they were just letting off steam, that was all. Plus personal pride, and a great individual camaraderie as I say, if

31:30 someone hit one of your crew, that means, they didn't hit him, they hit eighty blokes, had eighty blokes to answer back to. No, but that's just human nature I think, particularly young, fit, virile kids, too much spare time or not too much spare time but just growing up.

What about organised boxing on board, was there much of that at all?

Boxing not so

32:00 much, it happened, yes, but it was always encouraged, all activities, and we had singsongs and card games and I think they call it 'Housey Housey' or something these days, with 'Tom Bowler', you know, you pull numbers out of a hat and get a board and then the first one to get all the numbers, Housey Housey or 'Bingo', or whatever they play. There's a lot of those sort of games played, cards is very popular,

32:30 reading, but you never had a lot of time. As I say, this watch-keeping, four hours on, four hours off, twenty-four hours a day, half a day a week we'd get what's called a make and mend, and that's simply you had to mend all your own clothes and do all your own washing and ironing. It was very individual, the navy made provision for all

33:00 that, there was no excuse if you didn't have any buttons on your shirt, because you'd get half a day a week to sew them back on.

Who taught you all these things? Is that something you learn in training, or does an older seaman sailor help you, or how do you learn those skills?

You learn some of it as part of your naval training, but the rest of them, they just come, if you've got to iron your uniform well you've got to iron your uniform, if you've never used an iron, well you'd

33:30 better start learning, hadn't you? It was just part of the lifestyle.

Could you just talk me through a typical convoy?

Well, we always wondered what the crew that was going to come aboard was like. She was a convoy, so you used to have a captain's meeting, briefing, before the convoy

34:00 took off, everyone was allotted their job and their positions and what they had to do and where they had to be placed in the convoy, and where we were going and what speed we were going at. So it was quite a big thing, but of course all the sea captains, the majority of them, even the naval captains were retired or reserve, naval reserve merchantmen, so they enjoyed a few rums after their briefing, and you always wondered what the skipper was going to be like when he came back on board after it. Because

34:30 normally they'd come on board late in the afternoon after a day ashore. But if you had to sail that night very often you wouldn't get to see the captain till next morning, he just disappeared to his berth. There was the first lieutenant, everyone had a job to do, and everyone did their job and if someone was unavailable, well someone just hopped in and did it. If the captain came back drunk again, well it's all right, he'll be sober in the morning, let's get out of here.

35:00 **So would you be briefed about where you were travelling to, or was that not really important to you?**

No, we were never told till we were actually at sea. We always knew, from the type of convoy, and you could sense where we'd be going. But officially when we were out to sea, half an hour or so of steaming, it'd be announced over the what they called the PA [Public Address] system, throughout the boat,

35:30 where we were going and when we were due there, and that was no problem.

What sort of ships would you be escorting?

Predominantly just merchant ships, by far predominantly although we escorted floating docks, we escorted floating docks from Sydney up to Manus Harbour, submarines, damaged ships returning to harbour, submarines were not uncommon,

36:00 they would often be damaged, you know, they'd limp into a harbour somewhere and had to be sent back further south have a major refit and repair, and we'd have to escort them, because they were not capable of looking after themselves. But no, the majority was just old 'tramp' steamers, as they call them, just merchant ships. Anything like troop transports or important vessels, firstly they'd go too fast for us, and

36:30 secondly they'd put big naval vessels in any convoy of troops, a ship convoy with troops on board, they would always have big heavy units of the navy looking after them.

How dangerous or nerve wracking is it escorting a whole bunch of merchant ships?

With no lights at night? Not much to see out there at

37:00 night, the ships are totally blacked out, there's no lights. But your night vision gets better with time and experience, and everyone's got a position that they've got to operate in, and so you sail a course for a certain length of time, and you sail another course for a certain length of time, and it's surprising really how few collisions there were. Well, three Australian corps vessels

37:30 were lost during the war, just from collisions with merchant ships. But again, because of the circumstances under which we had to operate in enclosed waters and harbours and things, manoeuvring the big ships around, because some of those larger vessels, it'll take them

38:00 three minutes before they'll respond to the helm. You going there and if you want to go over there, you turn the wheel over, and it's so big it takes three minutes before it'll come around on course, come a new course, so it's just not like parking your car at the supermarket. Oh, there's a spot, I'll pop in there. They're very difficult to manoeuvre, those big ships.

So just talk me through a little bit more detail about the kind of jobs that you're

38:30 **doing when you're escorting a fleet of merchant ships. Like what are you doing?**

Well you'd have a screen of vessels in charge of the convoy, and the convoys, usually they'd make up into boxes of ships, and then we'd patrol outside, one would be on the top right hand side of the box, another one on the

39:00 top left hand side, so we'd circle it. But even the convoy and the ships, because of the danger of submarines, we'd never steer a straight course, we'd zigzag the whole time in case a submarine gets a 'bead' on you, and you're not aware the submarine's there, and if you were just going straight along, he just lines up his torpedo and 'bang'. So at varying times, usually a few

39:30 minutes, probably four or five minutes twenty-four hours a day, you're changing your course. Every ship in the convoy is changing course. Plenty of work occupied, like I say, keeping stations, keeping lookout at all times, because although we had a lot of equipment, radar and asdic for submarine and aircraft detection,

40:00 they were not always operational and even if they were operational, there's nothing like a human ear or a human eye to pick up something in a hurry, and identify it, and next thing, if you find something unusual, identification, which we called IFO, Identification Friend or Foe.

Tape 3

00:32 **Dick, I was just interested in going back and looking with a little more detail at your time at Flinders. Do you recall the actual day that you arrived?**

Yes.

Could you walk me through that first experience? What you saw and what you were told to do?

We travelled by train, we had to report at nine o'clock in the morning at Flinders Street railway station in Melbourne, I think the train

01:00 got away about one o'clock in the afternoon, but it was a long way to the station before the train took off. It went direct from Melbourne to Flinders naval depot, so it was late in the afternoon, about four-thirty when we arrived there. I suppose a couple of hundred of us. So we all got out of the train, which ran right into the naval depot

01:30 itself, and lined up and marched across the parade ground over to where were to camp for the night, in dormitory type style buildings. Of course activities had finished for the day, as far as the training to do

with the older hands, and as I say, they're all out there telling us how sorry we're going to be. They were a friendly happy bunch, but we

02:00 got a bit sick about their nagging, about how unhappy we'd be.

There must have been quite a few different classes at various stages of their four months training?

Well apart from preliminary admittance of the new recruits, Flinders was also a base for training for all categories of servicemen in the – the naval servicemen, so there'd be gunnery schools, and there was a

02:30 torpedo school, chosen by the countless schools of training for management and the existing personnel, and then all the ancillaries that go with it, there's got to be cookhouses, and there's got to be cooks, and everything. The first couple of days when we got there, was fitting out with

03:00 clothing, rigging …

What were you fitted out with?

Uniforms, basically. We had two lots of uniforms, there'd be number ones, your best uniform, and another one like a working uniform, big heavy army boots. The navy puts their preference on certain things, but I was

03:30 looking at my discharge certificates yesterday, just going through some memorising, and the first item that navy issued me was a life jacket. Apparently they put more emphasis on keeping you afloat so you didn't drown.

Did you used to call those a 'Mae West'?

No, we used to have rubber inflatable ones as opposed to the 'Mae West', just a little belt, thick

04:00 belt, rubber balloon, which you blew up. The advantage of that was you could wear it all day if need be, or all night if need be, but it didn't impede you physically at all, whereas a Mae West, if you had one on, you try and get someone out of a boat that's got a Mae West on, it's just physically impossible. You can't get them in over the gutter on the boat because of this big bulky

04:30 kapok construction sticking out like a pair of 'boobs' in front of them.

So going back to when you were actually issued with your stuff, what else was included in your kitting out?

Well apart from uniform, again flash burns in the navy, from guns is a very real phenomenon, and the second thing they gave you after a life vest was anti-flash gear, it used to be

05:00 an asbestos-type hood and gloves, goggles, just protection against flash burns from gunfire or bombs. Apart from that, a knife, you can't be a soldier without a knife, but just routine toiletries and cleaning gear.

What did you bring from

05:30 **home? What personal items did you have?**

A cut lunch, I remember that, be there at nine o'clock, no they just – one set of civilian clothes which you wore in, clean underwear and pyjamas, the other thing is we were issued – in the navy we always slept in hammocks, these days hammocks have about gone out, but we

06:00 always had a hammock, and actually there's nothing more comfortable to sleep in than a hammock, particular in a boat at sea, in rough sea, they're very comfortable. Used to wrap them up, secure them every day, lash them up, bundle them and they'd all go in a hammock bin, a great big bin up in the corner, a wire bin, and you'd just chuck your hammock in. But the other thing that the navy were very strict on, that everything had to be branded with your name, every item of clothing, you had to sew your

06:30 name on, you hammock, everything that you had had your name on it. I think the navy considered the greatest sin you could commit was to have someone's else's – any particle – an issue of clothing or anything at all, very adamant that everything had to be named and used only by that person.

What were the hammocks made out of?

Heavy canvas, the actual canvas underneath, and inside

07:00 was a thin little kapok-type mattress, and one, depending on where you are, but you had to have one blanket usually, but if you're in cold climate, the southern Bass Strait or somewhere, you'd probably have two blankets. But they're very warm, it's very cosy. But the intention of them, you lash them up in the morning, there's a special way of lashing them up, to a waterproof

07:30 stage where they'll float, and they say that a properly lashed hammock will keep you afloat for three or four days, before it got waterlogged and sank, so they were another method of life preservation.

Now after you were issued with your kit, were you sent off to your barracks?

Well that came over two or three days, there were a lot of lectures of naval etiquette, behaviour and …

Is there anything that sticks out from the naval etiquette that struck you immediately?

Wear your hat straight. No, the discipline, everything was orientated towards discipline and uniformity of discipline, there were no exceptions,

08:30 the rules were there and you just – 'KR' and 'AI' they used to be called, Kings Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, and that – it was a bible, and everything had to be – pusses is the common colloquial term, everything had to be pusses, but – pusses was KR and AI, Kings Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, that was the bible for all – the admiral down to everyone how you behaved, what you could do and what you couldn't do and what you had to do.

09:00 **Was that an old document, or was it fairly …?**

No, it's part of tradition, naval tradition. No, they still issued any new direction that comes out, is KR and AI, well it'd be QR and AI now, wouldn't it, Queens Regulations and Admiralty Instructions. But that's a nomenclature, but KR and AI is just every order, every instruction that ever comes out is printed and that's the naval bible.

09:30 **And were you told to basically read up and know where you stand?**

It'd take you a long time to read it all up. You soon got the message, you never had to be told twice, you're told don't do that, you don't do that any more. Or do this, and you do it every time you had to do it.

People were made examples of in those early days?

No,

10:00 not really. There was no victimisation, there was no problems, of course there was the discipline, the police force, the navy, service police, and they had cells you could be locked up in and all that, but there was no victimisation, everyone had a job to do, and if you didn't do it properly you were told very quick smart.

Did you have a

10:30 **chief or a PO [Petty Officer] who was principally responsible for you?**

Yes, we had a petty officer when we were in the training depot, each class, a couple of hundred of us were admitted on that day, we were all subdivided into classes of about twenty, and then there'd be appointed a class leader, just one of the crew would be picked on in a day or two, once everybody got to know each other, it was usually suggested by the petty officer, who –

11:00 we were under his control for that whole three or four months of our basic training, he directed everything we did, although a lot of the lectures, a lot of the instructions we got were given by specialists in that particular field. He was responsible for us, and took us everywhere and lined us all up and marched us here and marched us there. It's no use wandering off anywhere, if you had go anywhere you had to fall in and march there.

Do you remember who he was? Who was

11:30 **your PO?**

He was a petty officer, all I remember of him, he had served in the Mediterranean on HMAS Sydney but he'd been overseas for many years and he was sent back just for a bit of a rest, leave, had his leave and he was sent down there as a training officer. But he was very good, very easy to get on with, very laid back, very helpful. No, he was excellent.

12:00 But I think they made a point of selecting suitable personnel to run these classes. No, I can't recall his name, never saw or heard of him after, the day we left Flinders, that was the end of the story.

What were your barracks like? What were your sleeping quarters like?

Just standard dormitory type buildings, Flinders was established about 1920,

12:30 back in the 1920s, and it was originally brick, two-storey permanent place, but wartime they put up these temporary timber dormitories for accommodation, but we still slept in hammocks, there were no beds or anything.

So do they have horizontal bars …?

Yes, they had hooks up on the ceiling, you had a hook on both ends, the hooks would be up about

13:00 six feet and you had to crouch down, the hammock was suspended and hang down probably about five foot six clearance, that's all it was, if you get a big heavy bloke into it, they sink down a bit. But you could walk round all the hammocks are the same, they're all coming down, first thing in the morning,

‘wakey wakey’ ‘rise and shine’, ‘lash and stow’, hop out of bed and lash up your hammock and stow it away and then get dressed and go on with your day’s – the

13:30 whole dormitory area then became just a big open room.

A few people used to get turfed out did they, of their hammocks?

Oh yes, there’d be a duty officer – a petty officer come round and say, “Time to get up, time to get up.” And “Wakey wakey, rise and shine, lash and stow.” And you could soon see if someone was in their hammock or out of it, you know, he’d just go round with a big

14:00 baton, you know, and belt the hammock. It wasn’t physically damaging, but you got the message. Get out or be rolled out.

What were your showering or wash facilities like down in service?

Heads? Just basic like any arrangement, queue up, half a dozen showers and heads, the toilets and wash basins and things. But no, that was no problem.

14:30 **Did you have requirements in regards to shaving and that sort of thing, where you have to have a certain level of presentation?**

Yes, well hygiene has always been a big thing in the navy, and if someone was a bit lax or a bit slow about their hygiene, they very soon got the message that that’s not good enough for the navy.

What were the major concerns in regards to hygiene in the navy?

15:00 Common things, I don’t think head lice was a problem, but all those things that you get a group of people living together, you get lice and you get bed bugs and you get things that come up. But as I say, the navy – hygiene, they were very strict about it, all personal hygiene and general hygiene, about sweeping mess decks and keeping everything clean. captain’ rounds, every

15:30 Saturday morning it was captain’s rounds, the captain would – the whole ship – would spend the whole morning examining, he’d go into every room, and the first thing he’d go into, he wouldn’t look at the walls or anything, he’d put his hands up on top of the windows, to see if there’s any dust, you know, out of sight, out of reach. But if he found any signs of dirt or dust or anything, you very soon got the message. If he came round a week later and it

16:00 hadn’t improved, you’d have stoppage of leave for ten days, no leave for anyone, just stay here, and normal off duty time clean up the place. But it was very strict rules, and looking at people living in small confined areas like that, indefinitely – you’ve got to have it. Though no-one complained about it, is was pusses, you did it.

Was there a certain level

16:30 **of urgency to your training, given that you knew you were being prepared to go to war?**

No, there was no urgency about it, everything, every subject that you did, you had to pass exams at the end of it, so everything, there was an exam at the end, and you were all classified and it went into your records of – but no-one to my memory

17:00 was actually failed, in other words it’d be marked on your record ‘Very Good’, or it might be marked just ‘Fair’, well that’d go with you right through your service during the navy, and every ship you went to the first thing they said, “Oh, you weren’t too good on seamanship, you’d better get stuck into that and smarten up your act a bit.” There’s no disciplinary – it was just word of mouth, get your act together and smarten up a bit.

And what sort of things would you be judged on for your seamanship rating?

17:30 Knots, tying ropes, securing vessels and rowing boats, there’s a thousand and one things that you do on a boat that you never think about, but you’ve got to be competent at it. How to splice ropes and how to – the proper way to moor ships, everything that goes to running a

18:00 ship.

And it sounds like that was an accumulative judgement that your PO made of you throughout the period of your training, or did you have actual set exams, or set tests at the end?

No, the results of any exam or special course that you do, that just goes into your naval records, and actually navy have a system which none of the other services have, but when you’re discharged they don’t

18:30 give you a discharge certificate, you’re given your naval records. My are getting pretty worn and torn by now after sixty, seventy-odd years, but I’ve still got all my records there of everything that I ever did, every exam I sat for, what my category was, fortunately most of them were VGs, very good.

Is there anything that you really excelled in, in those early days?

19:00 No, I was a couple of times referred for officer's training, but I declined that, I was happy where I was with all the boys, and I didn't want it. No, I would have missed time, I would have had to go back and do another six months course before I could get back to sea again if I went and did officer's training, and I was enjoying life at sea too much, and didn't want to. And

19:30 I wasn't staying in the navy after the war, I knew that'd be out, back to civvy [civilian] life.

In those early days at Flinders though, was there a particular role or job that you really took to? Something that you excelled in?

No, I just got generally what they call VG marks on everything that I did, but I never got excellent that I'm aware of,

20:00 never failed anything. No, we were just kids learning, and the lectures and the classes and the teaching was excellent really. As I say, they made men out of boys, apart from teaching technical trades and things, the whole system was excellent.

Lectures on the Kings Rules and Admiralty Instructions?

KR and AI?

20:30 **What else might you have lectures on?**

Flags and etiquette and – there was a lot of tradition and etiquette in the navy, about how you – between ships particularly at sea, and relations between ship's company and the officers, and it's a breed of its own the navy, it always has been, it always will be. But it all comes together very well, I

21:00 thought.

What was the attitude to officers amongst …?

Pigs. They were standard. Even the officers knew that they were just referred to as 'pigs'. We used to call them pigs, it was just a – I don't they were admired very much, mainly because everyone associated – as soon as they saw an officer they'd associate that with discipline, and no-one enjoys discipline, even if they listen to it, they don't

21:30 enjoy it.

So as young seamen did you really look to the chiefs and the petty officers for your guidance?

Oh yes, yes. Each group, you'd be in, what do you call them, 'divisions', when you go out and join a ship, be it a trainee ship or a depot or anything, and you're in a division, and each division has an officer who's responsible for them, and he's supposed to care for them and look after them, but I can't only

22:00 remember ever seeing my divisional officer once in the whole time. But if you had a problem or you were in any trouble, see you're living in a small mess deck, and the officer would be in the ward room at the other end of the ship literally, but a leading seaman or a petty officer, you know, he'd, say if something's not right there and notice something wrong, he'd hop in and sort it all out, or sort you out.

22:30 So we basically had very little to do with officers, very, very little. On the watch, on bridge at sea, yes, there's always an officer on the watch, so there's always an officer on the bridge. But apart from that, we didn't have a great deal of communication with them.

Do you remember anyone in your class who wasn't able to cope with the adjustment to life in the navy?

23:00 Not really. There was one lad from Tasmania, 'Bluey', red-headed lad, he'd just grown up a country boy in Tasmania on a dairy farm or something, he had troubles. Sorted himself out, he was just lost in it all, I don't think he had much education either, it wasn't his fault. But I heard later that

23:30 he was discharged, but he was intractably seasick, every time he went to sea he was just violently ill to the stage where he was given the option, I guess, permanent shore job, or discharge. And a permanent shore job didn't appeal much to young kids in those days, so he took his discharge. But he – I don't think –

24:00 I wouldn't say he didn't fit in, but he just didn't have the education or the ability, or the attitude to handle naval life, and the seasickness was just the nail in the coffin.

He was a kid from a dairy farm in Tasmania, you were fairly local, being from Melbourne, where else did people come from to form that class?

Everywhere in Australia. Western Australia,

24:30 Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, everywhere in Australia. Same in the ship's company, you go onto any ship, there's the 'Bean Stalkers' and the 'Banana Benders' and the 'Crow Eaters', in every state you have representation on every ship, they're all just mixed u in a big bowl of

people on a boat, from every state in Australia. It's

25:00 still, always has been, always will be the case. There's no segregation. The army groups often tend to maintain areas or states and everything, but not with the navy, no, everyone's just put in a bowl together.

And can I ask you about your early experiences of drill? Was that one of the main things that sort of was used to bond you as a team?

Well we had to

25:30 use – learn drill and marching and all sorts of small arms management and behaviour and everything, but that was all part of the course. But as I say, everything is regimented, you never walked anywhere, you marched everywhere, everything you did you were regimented into full military style, you might say, of marching and carrying your rifle the right way and doing all the right things.

Did you ever question how that was

26:00 **relevant to life at sea?**

I think everyone thought, particularly if you're at sea, you know, and you're working on a boat and you've done a lot of sea time and you get into harbour and you're told, you've got to go off to some function in your number ones, march and salute and do all these things, you know, that used to irk us a little bit at times. So you'd do anything to get out of that routine drill

26:30 type of operation, if you could avoid it.

So amongst the etiquette training and I guess learning a few of the – about some of the traditions of the navy, why do you salute with your hand down?

Yes, well that's the navy – that's how you held it, thumb under your palm of your hand, slight angle down, it's just a navy tradition, you know, the

27:00 army used the full hand, I don't really know the answer to that, but I know there is just a difference about how you – but why do Scouts always shake hands with the left hand?

Is that to do with the swords?

No, no. Scouts, Boy Scouts. That's to see if they haven't got something in their right hand to hit you with. You didn't know that one? Scouts are always – if you meet a scout, you always left-handed shake,

27:30 in the hand. Yes, they've got a different salute.

'Dib dib', yes?

Yes.

What were some of the other naval traditions that you learnt about in those early – in your early days at Flinders?

Well tradition

28:00 is the end all with the navy really, they only talk of tradition. Everything is 'tradition', it's a whole system of the navy is built on tradition. Being the older senior – they call themselves the 'senior service' because being the oldest they regarded everyone else, as just trying to follow their idea of

28:30 tradition, but they're a very isolated group in a way, the navy, they live a different life, they live at sea, and they regard themselves as a bit different really, all the 'hoi-polloi' of the other services. That's the impression I've always had, might be wrong there, but I think their tradition – they are a group of their own, and they stick to their own.

29:00 **And was that sense of tradition something that appealed to you? Did you enjoy …?**

Yes, I'm a traditionalist, I think that makes the navy – it's the heart of the whole story, their tradition, they believe in something because it's been proven to them, they hold it high and cherish it, follow it. So tradition,

29:30 it makes anything, but I think it makes the navy more what it is, what the navy is, because of that demand almost, that navy tradition is – how you fly a flag and how you salute a vessel at sea, there's so many small bits of it, it's more part of life, it makes life – I feel, more enjoyable too. Everyone sticks by the rules and everyone

30:00 knows the rules.

The Royal Australian Navy is obviously very similar to the Royal Navy, and in fact in World War II was under the command of the Admiralty, wasn't it?

Yes, well I served – although two-thirds of the time I was in the navy, I was serving under the Royal

30:30 Navy, I was in the British Pacific Fleet, although it was not an Australian ship, we were operating as the 21/9th mine sweeping flotilla which was the British navy, the 9th mine sweeping flotilla. When we were in Colombo in the Indian Ocean we were serving under the British navy, although again on Australian ships, but we were part of the British navy and

31:00 it disciplined us more, deep-rooted, because Australian servicemen as a whole, probably everyone's fully aware, the British always regarded the Australians as no different to us, except they won't salute officers, that was known throughout the world, the only thing different about the Australians is they won't salute officers, particularly on leave, on your parade ground, when you're on duty, yes, but if you're out on leave or

31:30 walking down the street with a couple of mates, you know, you don't stop and salute an officer when you walk past. But the British services, that's part of the drill, you're on a charge if you don't salute an officer, no matter when you meet him. As long as he's got his hat on, he has to have his hat on. You 'don't salute the man, you salute the hat'.

That's what I'm interested in, is how significant or how important the empire was to you as a young man when you enlisted?

It didn't mean

32:00 much at all, I was only interested in Australia, in the lifestyle, the friends. No, the British Empire didn't mean much at all to me. I knew we were part of it, but it was – I was just interested in Australia.

Was that different to your parents?

No, they were Australia, with Irish tradition. But no, I think the Australians as a

32:30 race, from what I've seen of the world, they are unique, we are a unique race, entirely different, I think it goes right back to the days of the convicts and forced labour, plus the emigrations and people who came in at various gold rushes and you know, we're only a nation, but I think we've developed into a fantastic nation. The

33:00 best place in the world, as far as I'm concerned. Always has been. The older I get the more convinced I am. I'm quite happy to live here.

So you actually enlisted in early '42, is that right?

'43, January '43 I think it was. I've got the figure in there.

But what I was interested

33:30 **in was that Japan had entered the war?**

Yes.

Pearl Harbour had occurred, and in fact Australia had – if it was early '43, come under significant threat? So in joining the services and going to fight it was very much about fighting for Australia? For you, rather than being sent off around the other side of the world to fight for the empire? Is that a fair statement?

No, I wouldn't have cared where I went, but as I say, I was fighting for Australia and the

34:00 Australian way of life, I wasn't interested in the Japanese style, or the German style, I wasn't very interested I don't think in the British style of life, you know, I just liked Australia and the lifestyle and the people, I wanted to see it stay that way.

Do you recall hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbour?

Oh yes.

Do you remember where you were and the

34:30 **circumstances of finding that out?**

See, age does weary them, doesn't it? I said on 3rd September the war, the Second World War started, that wasn't a Sunday, the Sunday was the day of Pearl Harbour, that was when I saw the kid with the newspapers. But I still remember when the 3rd of September,

35:00 I remember hearing the then Prime Minister of Britain announcing that it had hit, we were 'at war with Germany'. That Sunday I mentioned about the boy distributing the newspapers was the day of Pearl Harbour, it was Sunday for Pearl Harbour, yes.

And I imagine that you'd remember the fall of Singapore in February '42?

Oh yes. I knew several

35:30 people who were in Singapore, a father and a brother of a friend of mine, they were there.

Did that cause you to question, you know, the British navy's might? The infallibility that they'd seemed to have up until that time? You know, Singapore was the impregnable fortress and the sort of base for …

Yes, well we all make mistakes, I think if you look back in

36:00 retrospect, the mistakes that, well the British Army or the British navy or whatever you like – the British Empire, made after the First World War, up to and including the things that happened during the Second World War, they've still got a hell of a lot to learn, a hell of a lot. But we bungled our way through, fortunately.

As the Japanese swooped down, were you

36:30 **at any point concerned that we weren't going to come out victorious?**

Yes, at that stage the Yanks [Americans] really hadn't come into it, it was only when the Yanks went into Guadalcanal, in the Battle of the Coral Sea and at Midway, it was obvious that they were stoppable, but didn't look very happy for Australia before that, didn't look very happy at all, the fact that they found that they could be

37:00 stopped in a small way. But this is – a lot of people said England or the British Empire let us down, but there's no doubt Australia wouldn't be here today without America, a few politicians can't see that, but it's a very true statement, there'd be no Australia today if it wasn't for America. Although they're loud-

37:30 mouthed, they're not a bad bunch to get to know.

Are there any particular naval battles or you know, incidents, sinking of ships, that stick in your mind from that early phase of the war, before you enlisted?

Well, you've heard of the Armidale, and Teddy Sheehan? The corvette. We hadn't heard much about that outside, but it was pretty common language in the navy.

38:00 lot of things happened during the war that if you were in the navy, the navy would be involved in, and you'd know all about it, but with wartime censorship and things, outside of the navy no-one had a clue what was going on. But no, I think no-one in the Australian navy has ever been awarded a Victoria Cross, But Teddy definitely did.

There's now a submarine

38:30 **named after him, did you know that?**

Yes.

Could you tell the story of Teddy Sheehan for people who might be looking at the archives, who aren't familiar with it?

He was an eighteen-year-old ordinary seaman, not long out of Flinders navy depot, came from Tasmania. His particular job on the boat was

39:00 an assistant loader for, what they call a half inch Oerlikan anti-aircraft gun. They were delivering some reserve troops to East Timor when the Japs moved in there, early in '43, they were bombed for a couple of days by

39:30 American – by Japanese planes, trying to get ashore and get these troops ashore. There was quite a big muck up, getting the naval officer in charge in Darwin, who was an English officer, he bungled it even worse by sending conflicting signals and not acting on information that he had. It reached the stage where the ship was eventually bombed,

40:00 to the stage where it was sinking and the captain ordered 'abandon ship', and Teddy, who had been on this Oerlikan gun, helping to reload it for the chap who fired it, had been shot, he was – Teddy turned from the gun and headed towards his 'abandon ship station' which everyone had, he had a little rubber 'Carly' float, a little cork

40:30 float thing, it was his station, he was heading toward it, and he turned around, went back to the gun, and the captain was up on the bridge looking down on him, and he yelled at him, "Get off!" And at this stage he'd had a couple of machine guns bullet wounds in his legs, but he strapped himself into the gun,

41:00 the Japanese attacked again, and the last was seen by the divers getting into the dinghies and getting away from the sinking ship, as the Japanese were coming in and machine gunning him and the other survivors in the water, he was strapped into the gun,

41:30 mortally wounded, and the ship sank to the stage where he was under water, with the gun, and the bullets were still – he was still firing it. And he was drowning and firing.

Tape 4

00:32 **Dick, I just wanted to ask you why for you personally that story was so emotional? About Teddy Sheehan?**

Well the fact that he was never recognised, but an eighteen-year-old kid, for what he did, he knew he was dying, well he was mortally wounded, he just

01:00 did his crumpet literally and decided to – all his mates had been machined gunned in the water, he was going to give a bit of it back to the Japs, so – he could have undone the straps on his gun and got out, but no he – and the most moving thing is the fact as the ship sunk and the gun and Teddy went under water, he was still firing

01:30 that gun. And the fact he was never ever recognised, I don't think – if that's not laying down your life for your friends, well what is?

It must have been incredibly inspiring to have a story like that, when you yourself were so

02:00 **young and in the same rank, same type of ship?**

Yes, this was the amazing thing about, well all the services during the war, both World War I and World War II, everyone who volunteered, there was never a conscripted a person, everyone who went 'forward for Australia'

02:30 in those two wars, volunteered of their own free will, and the performance that they put up in both wars was just – well you know the story of it, just unreal, isn't it?

You talked a little about tradition a bit earlier on, were there any other maritime heroes, or heroes that you guys looked up

03:00 **to?**

No, because to pick out individuals I think you've got to consider the Fleet Air Arm, not that Australia ever had a wartime air arm of any significance, but some of the exploits of the Royal Naval Fleet Air Arm, against the German navy, against the Italian

03:30 navy in the Mediterranean, the exploits, there's one I've just been re-reading in a book about what they called the 'Channel Dash', the German navy after the Bismarck was sunk, the Prinz Eugen had gone into Dieppe in France, already there was the battle crews of the Scharnhorst and her sister ship, Gneisenau,

04:00 Hitler had decided to get them out of France and back to Germany, and they took a dash through the Channel with all sorts of support, but there was a bloke called Esmond, he had seven bi-plane Gladiator aircraft, really First World War aircraft, torpedo-carrying, and took on something like three hundred German

04:30 aircraft and three of their biggest naval vessels, and about forty other ancillary vessels including destroyers, in an attempt to torpedo them, and aerial cover never arrived to help them, but they were all shot down and killed. But he got a VC [Victoria Cross]. But have you ever heard of Lieutenant Commander Esmond? You know, he took on the whole of the German navy and the whole of the

05:00 German air force, in a plane which was thirty years out of date. But apart from that, it was always pretty much a team thing, going back to Teddy Sheehan, he wasn't doing it for himself, he was doing it for his mates, they're the things, you know, tradition in the navy is so important, everything's a team thing, there's no individuals. The air force, the

05:30 pilots and that, the planes, the fighter planes, they're operating on their own, but the navy, everything was a team thing, everyone did it for their mates, not for themselves.

Is that another reason that the Teddy Sheehan story is so important, or so emotional for you, that it was almost like the birth of a mythology that you could relate to, that was related to you, that was the Australian navy, it

06:00 **was a seaman, it was a young man, it was a myth that you could directly relate to rather than sort of foreign heroes or foreign tales …?**

Oh, I think it was more so that Teddy's effort was – you know, this could happen to me tonight, I could be dead tomorrow, because we're all doing the same thing, just he happened to be the man in the place at the time. But Teddy copped it. So it was just, you

06:30 know, you look at Teddy and say, "Well there, by the grace of God go I." I think that's one way you look at it.

Hearing stories back from the front line like that would have had you engaged in your early training at Flinders with a real focus and commitment, would that be a correct assumption?

Oh no, I think when you volunteer you've made up your mind, when you go

07:00 into it, you take the good with the bad and do your job, that's what volunteering's all about. You go in with your eyes wide open, and cop it sweet.

I'm interesting in some of your gunnery training at Flinders in those early days. Was there a particular range that was set aside for …?

Yes, most of our

07:30 training was on what they call small arms rifles and machine guns and revolvers and things.

Were you training on Bofors and those other guns that you'd end up working on, on board …?

Yes, but gunnery in the navy was a specialty, one of the many specialties, it always has been. Gunnery is the pride of the

08:00 admirals, guns sink battleships. But apart from a basic introductory course into gunnery and small arms, the training was very sketchy, we were taught how to handle a rifle, a machine gun and revolvers and things, protocol of handling guns, but it was only if you went in to do a natural gunnery course, and

08:30 they were real – if you wanted to do gunnery, be a specialist gunnery, you'd have to do at least a six or eight month specialist course, nothing else at all but gunnery for months and months on end, and pass very difficult exams. So it was very superficial, our introductory into – introduction into it, it was just to get an idea of what goes on, and with the idea that if you were transferred to a ship and you're place out at an

09:00 action station on a gun, you pretty soon pick up the drill of that particular gun and learn as you go.

Were you a good shot with the .303?

No. No. I even used to have trouble shooting ducks with a shotgun. But a 303 was not too powerful, but too big a gun for me, I just couldn't handle it,

09:30 my arms are too short to reach, plus their bloody heavy, they've got a kick like a mule. Have you ever fired a 303? They've got a decent kick, like a mule when they take off, yes. No, I never got deeply involved in naval gunnery, I'm afraid. There are more interesting things than that. Plus the discipline of it, because discipline

10:00 is the whole basis of gunnery. Very, very strict and rigid.

Was there any basic training in mine laying, or the theory of mines?

Yes, explosives and mines and bombs and you know, we had basic introductory courses, but everything is a specialised feature as I say, and most of the naval

10:30 features would be you know, a minimum of three months, six months course. In Bombay at one stage I had to do an aircraft recognition course.

Sorry, at what stage did you do that?

Well the ship was in Bombay.

Oh, in Bombay.

And we were having some boiler repairs done and there was an aircraft recognition course on Santa Cruz aerodrome just

11:00 outside Bombay, so I had to go up there for three weeks, doing nothing but looking at silhouettes of Japanese aeroplanes all day, and then identifying them all night. But even a simple thing of getting to identify a dozen different aircraft, that was three weeks, non-stop, day and night, lectures day and night, so in the navy everything's a specialty, and they didn't muck around,

11:30 apart from the original ship down at Flinders, where they just introduce you to the whole thing and then send you out to sea to learn, if you want to specialise in something you're looking at months and months of training, just for one specialty.

So by the time you'd been assigned to the depth charges on board, you really only had a superficial experience …?

Oh, very superficial, yes. Yes, the idea was that you were

12:00 introduced to every aspect, but the attitude was, you'll learn about that when you go to sea, when you'll get allotted a particular job to do, then you to learn all about that particular job that you get, but you weren't training to be – well there's no way anyone could be trained to be an expert in a lifetime in all the specialties that the navy had, and all the likely likelihoods that could come up.

12:30 **Did you have basic survival at sea training? Was there anything like that?**

Yes, you had to swim, if you couldn't swim, they had swimming baths at Flinders Naval Depot, and you had to swim twenty-five yards, and if you couldn't swim they just threw you in the water and said, "Swim to the other end." Nothing like a person that can't swim when they're chucked in the water and got to swim twenty-five yards. It's amazing how soon people learn to swim. It's good training.

Anyone that didn't?

No,

13:00 I don't recall any, but see, are there any kids in Australia that can't swim? Yes, babies, I know they drown in swimming pools all the time, but you know, we're a – I know we're a big island, but everyone lives by the water, and every kid, the climate, everyone's in the water, I know there are people who can't swim, I know that people in Cairns, live in Cairns, never been out to the Barrier Reef,

13:30 well you find those everywhere.

And did you have practice in the whalers or anything like that?

Yes, you had to row in.

Can you describe the whalers for us, and activities you might do with them?

Well basically the main function of any boat, whaler or

14:00 boat is a lifesaving thing, but they're all manually controlled by oars, so you had to know how to row them and how to handle them properly, on the seaway, pick up survivors. But a great sporting boat too, we used to put sails on them and go sailing, fleet regattas, every time there's a few boats and vessels tied up in harbour, there's always

14:30 a regatta put on, and they'll have sailing events and rowing events and various other activities involved. It's all just fun, all just fun, but good fun. It keeps the troops occupied, something to do, keep them out of mischief. Boat work, boat handling, I always enjoyed that.

15:00 Yes, I used to sail a lot myself. One chap particularly, a friend now, he was a midshipman on board the boat and every time we were in harbour we'd lower the whaler and rig up the sails and go off sailing for the day, if we could get a leave pass. They weren't the fastest yacht in the world, but they were good fun, good seaworthy boats.

15:30 **What would you do on leave from Flinders?**

Well, everyone would go to Melbourne, I lived in Melbourne. But there was – during wartime, Tok H, Salvation Army, NAAFI, Naval, Army, Air Force Institute, all these ancillary

16:00 wartime functions, and they all have areas where you could get a cheap bed for the night and cheap meals for the day, and you'd just go to the city and book in for a weekend. No, we were basically well looked after, there was always somewhere to go and something to do, they used to put on a lot of entertainment for the troops.

Were you a big drinker?

Beer, yes. When you could get it, there was not a lot of beer around during the

16:30 war. But we'd always get a couple of stubbies of beer, or a couple of – well, they didn't have stubbies in those days, bottles. The Australian navy, they became an identity of their own from the British navy in the late, first decade of the twentieth century, and the Naval tradition, or the Royal Naval tradition there was a rum issue every day and

17:00 it was optional for a while, but during the war years it had reached the stage where the rum issue no longer applied to the Royal Australian Navy, but they gave you threepence a day or something, some compensation for us. But most ships companies or captains would arrange that there'd be a ration in harbour, you were never allowed to drink at sea, a bottle of beer each day

17:30 for anyone on board that wanted it. Of course not everyone drank, not everyone smoked, so there was always a barter system of beer and cigarettes and chocolate was always a luxury, things going on. I worked in the canteen for a while on the boat and everyone used to enjoy coming on board the Ipswich in Toowoomba because we always seemed to have – there as always a beer ration at five o'clock every day,

18:00 a bottle of beer a man. Of course it ran out occasionally, but on the whole when we were in harbour we'd get a drink.

Did you take up smoking?

Yes, oh yes. Yes, I think that was part of the wartime life, so there weren't many people that didn't smoke, in all the services. There's no doubt about

18:30 that, it applied to everyone. I don't know if the Japanese did, but the Americans never had a – I never

saw an American without a cigarette in his mouth. I suppose you never saw a digger without a cigarette in his mouth. No, it was just part of the lifestyle. It's only the young people smoke now. You haven't had one yet?

I'm being very good. I'm a part-time idiot at the

19:00 **moment. Tell me, when you went back into Melbourne, did you get home and see your parents?**

Yes, I always used to spend leave at home, but we – probably once every twelve months during my Naval service, fortunately the ship happened to be either in or passing through Melbourne, so at least once a year, and fortunately it was

19:30 usually around about Christmas time I always managed to get home, if the ship was passing through Melbourne or we were tied up in Fremantle have work done on the ship, and refit, and we'd get a couple of weeks leave to come home. No, I was very fortunate with leave, you know, home leave that I got during the war. Because a lot of them for three or four years never see home, never got home.

Were your parents proud, do you think, of your – what you were doing?

20:00 No, because we were a service orientated family, my father was in the air force, my brother was in the air force, I was in the navy, my sister, she had a job working as a – or some relation to the American armed services, you know, we were all sort of – everyone was in uniform, when we were at home, the original type of wartime style.

20:30 The whole family were in it, so every family, or ninety-nine per cent of families in Australia were in the same category, all had family in the services.

Do you remember your passing out parade from Flinders?

21:00 Specifically no, except it was down on the parade ground, as usual. Old 'Daddy Long Legs' was there, the commander, I don't remember his name, he lived in Frankston, but he was a long-time ex-permanent naval gentleman, but he was a bit aged but very good with kids, he was ideal for kids, so we took a salute and marched round and did the usual things. I think at that stage

21:30 there wasn't much leave when you were doing the basic training, six weeks before you even got a day off, then they'd give you a weekend to go up to Melbourne occasionally, but there was very little leave, and I think we were all interested because we all were given ten days leave I think, when we finished the course, then we had to report back to a naval depot in our home state, Fremantle or

22:00 Garden Island in Sydney, every state had their own base. I went back to Lonsdale in Melbourne and then as I mentioned earlier, I got into the Wagga and then I'm overseas.

What was HMAS Lonsdale like at that time?

Just like any naval depot, you know, more so it's like a big transit holding

22:30 thing. Someone would arrive one day and they'd be gone the next, and then a couple would come in for a couple of days and then they'd disappear. It was just a clearing station, but permanent staff there were minimal because it was just a transit point.

How many ships could she have down there?

Well Lonsdale was a shore base, so it had no specific waterfront edge, although it was only

23:00 a hundred yards from the beach. But what boats were, were usually harboured across Hobson's Bay at Williamstown, all the naval vessels, and then any communication would be by motor boat, coming and going across every day, well boats were going all day, but it wasn't – Garden Island in Sydney is actually in Sydney Harbour itself, the boats can come up alongside and tie up to Garden Island.

23:30 But any boats that came in to Melbourne would be normally tied up at Williamstown.

What then – was Lonsdale purely an administrative base?

It was like a clearing house, people coming in, people going out the whole time.

You mean like they had dormitories?

They had sleeping accommodation, but the permanent staff, they'd rather them to live at home, you know, they were just

24:00 doing nine to five office jobs, they'd come to work in the morning and go home at five, sort of thing.

So what do you mean by being a clearing station?

Well, just like a railway station, you know, change trains here, so get out and sit on the station for half an hour till the next train – till your train comes along.

Like crews, whole crews?

Yes well, except for new ships, there's no such thing as a whole crew would ever be transferred to a ship, there'd be

24:30 quite a few changes at various stages, it'd be half a dozen blokes would be transferred, so you'd get half a dozen new ones out of a ship's company of several hundred, you might say. So it was – new ships are different, because the deed's done slowly, building a ship, and preparing it to go to sea, the technicians, engine room technicians and then the gunnery experts, you know, everything builds up slow, it's just not a matter of a whole ship's company

25:00 arrives on the spot on one particular day.

So in that six weeks that you had to wait before you were posted to the Wagga, what did …?

No, I was only about – it wouldn't be a week I was there.

Oh, sorry.

Yes, before they put me on the Wagga. Wagga had been damaged in a gale in the Bight, and we had an underwater projection, which is called a asdic dome, which is an anti-submarine

25:30 detection thing, and the corvettes used to roll around quite a lot, and they managed to lose theirs, so they came into Melbourne to get it replaced, it was decided it was going to take them a while, so they sent most of the ship's company interstate on leave, gave everyone leave and said, "We're going to be here for two or three weeks." As soon as everyone had gone on leave, they said, "Righto, the new asdic dome's here, we've got to go out in Bass Strait and

26:00 do trials and get the whole thing worked up again now." So they just said, "No ship's company, so just, you, you, you, and you, get your bag and hammock, get down to the Wagga." She was tied up over Williamstown, "So get on the ferry and go across and get on the Wagga, you're going to sea."

What did you think when you first saw her?

I was quite pleased, you know, stuck in a naval depot all day, and getting on a

26:30 boat and going to sea. And the novelty of it of course. And I think we were going to sea for one day. A month to six weeks later they said, "You can go back to Lonsdale now." But I think it was a matter of just glancing through Lonsdale and getting straight onto this vessel that I came across on the Colombo run.

Can you tell me about patrolling in Bass Strait? It's not

27:00 **the calmest strip of water in the world.**

No, the Coral Sea can get bumpy, Bass Strait can get bumpy. No, any sea can get bumpy, it's just probably magnified a bit there. But I think the biggest – well no, I've been in Bass Strait in bigger seas, but the Australian Bight's a pretty bumpy sort of a spot,

27:30 you get some nasty seas in Bass Strait going round Cape Leeuwin. But the problem is, the earth's round, and the waves start at Cape Horn and they go right around the world until they get back to Cape Horn again, a lot happens to a wave in that distance. The size of the wave is dependent entirely on it's what they call the 'pitch', the distance it travels across the water, so you get

28:00 a wave that travels eight or ten thousand miles, it gets pretty big towards the end of it.

And you were on the receiving end of a few of those?

Yes, have been over the years. Yes, some are bigger than others, some are more frightening than others I suppose.

What was the most difficult aspect of adjustment for you, going on board the Wagga? You obviously had your four months basic training, but what was the most difficult

28:30 **thing to adapt to?**

Well, I'd had basic training in all facets of Naval procedure and life, but the only way was to get out there and do it, so it was just a matter of so much to learn, so much we didn't know about, but everyone helps, and hops in and it all falls together. No, there was never any transitional

29:00 problems at all.

Were there any really big errors you made in those first days on the Wagga?

No, I don't remember any, I don't think so. Everyone appreciated who you were and what you were, they'd all been through it themselves. Takes time to learn. No, everyone hopped in and helped everyone else, no problems at all.

And operating with a

29:30 **greatly reduced crew, is that right?**

Yes. We were down about fifty per cent of normal crew. But navy is very adaptable, you know, the navy itself and the individuals, you've got to adapt. It's like life at sea, you adapt to the circumstances that you're in at the time. So it's a very flexible sort of existence,

30:00 and if things have got to be done, things have got to be done, and whether you're short-handed or not, doesn't matter, they're done.

What did they assign you to in your first stint on HMAS Wagga? Did you have set action stations?

Look I don't really recall, because it was only a matter of a few weeks, it was all new, I know my records show the time I spent in the Wagga, I remember

30:30 frequently going out through the Heads, going down to Bass Strait, coming back and getting adjustments done at Williamstown, and off again. But the details of my life aboard Wagga – I'd even forgotten completely about them, it's only purely accidentally that I had some communication with Veterans Affairs, I had ten or twelve years ago, and I suddenly found on my records this time I'd served in Wagga, and I'd forgotten completely about it, till eight or ten

31:00 years ago. But once I went through the records, it all came – well it didn't all come back but a lot of detail – the detail I don't recall. The other ships I served in, I served for many months, a couple of years in Toowoomba and seven or eight months in Ipswich, so the time angle is more indelible on your mind.

Maybe we'll jump ahead then up to

31:30 **when you first came on board the Ipswich. Do you remember …?**

Yes, I remember joining the Ipswich in Calcutta Harbour, opposite Gold Face, yes, I remember that well. Fortunately there was Gitties and two or three other chaps that I knew, had come across the Indian Ocean together on the troop ship, and you know, three or four of us were all on board, so it was –

32:00 we didn't go on board not knowing a soul, there were three of four of us knew each other pretty well, and I don't know, so this is adaptability of navy life. "Just come into the mess deck." You know, "There you are, help yourself, you know where the galley is and put your bag and hammock in there." Everyone had a little locker of their own, just a steel locker, to put your personal things in.

What personal items did you have with you?

Well the navy was very adamant,

32:30 only the minimum amount of gear, for various reasons. Fire was always a worry on warships particularly, so they didn't like a lot of gear around the place, particularly if it was likely to be flammable. But I always had a packet of cigarettes, a box of matches and some writing home matter, you know, material. Some might have a camera, but

33:00 you couldn't get film anyway. But you were moved around at very short notice and suddenly you're literally told, "Get your bag and hammock." And your bag was just a canvas seabag, that you stuffed everything in, and your hammock, by the time you got one of those on each shoulder, and you're only five foot three tall, it gets pretty heavy after a while, so you don't carry much around with you,

33:30 just the bare necessities.

Did you carry any books or photos, letters?

Letters was always a go, and fortunately most ships would have a bit of a library on board, you could usually find something to read, it was part of the Red Cross and the Salvation Army and all these people, they used to provide us with books and things like that, cards, writing materials for writing letters, and

34:00 pens and things. So you wouldn't carry much of that, you knew you could always get it where you were going, that they'd be provided.

And did much of the ship's company shop while they were in Calcutta? Were there any interesting bits and pieces that came aboard from Calcutta?

Yes, you know, we'd always buy knick-knacks, of course wartime, the same everywhere, India was deeply involved in the war, but it's always been a great material

34:30 country, you know, cottons and that, and we were always buying material to bring home for presents for friends and family, in the hope that we'd get home, or we'd see something, you know some nice material and get a length of that to take home to Vera. And little knick-knacks that you see, you know, all round here, little bits of knick-knacks I've picked up during the war years, and that's unusual, something you'll never see

35:00 in Australia, comes home. We never had a lot of money, by the time you have a few beers and a couple

of packets of cigarettes and that, there was never much money to throw around or to waste, so …

Calcutta is one of the poorer places in the world, or it's certainly got the reputation for being …

35:30 Yes, the people there, the people they live in the gutter literally.

How did that experience affect you?

Well by the time we got to Calcutta we were pretty immune to it, because even – we'd been across to the east coast of Africa, Mombassa and places, and Colombo, Ceylon, we'd travelled around. Been up country, went up country in Colombo to a little

36:00 recreation house they had up there, and you know, we didn't see anything in Calcutta that we weren't accustomed to or aware of, we knew it went on in third world countries. But it was – the main thing I remember about Calcutta, I got dengue fever. Dengue can make you very sick, dengue fever. Some people get very sick, some just brush it off. I was confined

36:30 to my hammock for ten days in Calcutta, I remember that. I remember how crook I felt.

What's the treatment for dengue fever?

Time, time. No, it's a viral infection, mosquito-born, or mosquito-carried, and you get it, and you get over it, in time. There was no treatment for it. Rest and

37:00 Aspros [aspirin] and a cup of tea.

And being in a hammock below deck in that sort of heat must have been a pretty horrible way to spend ten days?

Yes, it wasn't very comfortable, but I was that crook, I don't recall much about it, except I did know I felt bloody terrible.

What was the medical situation on board? Did you have a medical officer?

No, we had what's called a 'sick berth attendant', each ship would have one sick berth attendant. But

37:30 he was usually anything more than – there were no such thing as male nurses in those days, and he was just like the whole lot of us, you know, a seventeen-year-old kid just out of school, go to Flinders or if you're not much good at gunnery, you're not much good at this, we'd better make a 'sick berth attendant' out of you, so they'd do a three months course on first aid and then they were responsible for eighty lives for the rest of the war. But that's

38:00 wartime, well, this is where the navy is good, the navy – you just – what you've got you've got, and that's what you put up with, and make the best of it. But Harry Nott was the bloke we had, lives in Toowoomba, Harry. Don't remember the chap on the Ipswich.

What you got you got is one thing, but having some seventeen-year-old kid responsible for the medical …

38:30 Yes, well he put you to bunk for a couple of days if you've got a bit of temperature, but then there would be facilities normally in most of the ports of a medical officer, or there'd be a naval vessel or ship cruiser or a naval vessel, and anyone who was sick when we got into harbour they'd be sent across to see the medical officer, and if need be there was always hospital facilities or hospital ships in the area, if

39:00 someone was that sick. But we only – we lost one lad, he got appendicitis coming home from Hong Kong after the war, he was airlifted out, they sent a Catalina out from Darwin to pick him up, he had ruptured appendix, he died of peritonitis two days after they got him ashore, unfortunately, Harry Nott. But you know, you've just got to accept it could happen,

39:30 that's the way the cookie crumbles.

So you never lost anyone at sea?

No, we lost Harry Nott, then we got back to Brisbane, got leave after the war, and there was another old navvy [navigator] he was permanent Royal Navy he had been, and how he got transferred from Australian [class vessel] to corvette, I don't know, old Robbie, he was what they call a 'three-badge

40:00 AB [Able Seaman], every three years, three, seven and twelve years in the navy they give you three badges, for good behaviour, no promotion, you're still just an ordinary seaman, or a naval seaman. But Robbie was a three-time, three-badge seaman, that meant he'd spent at least thirty-six years in the navy. But happens if misbehaviour or you get into trouble and did something, they take one of

40:30 these good behaviour stripes away. So Robbie was in the navy long enough to lose all of his three stripes, three times. And he died when he got back to Brisbane after the war, but I never did find out what he died from, but I think it must have been liver failure, he used to make the most foul concoctions of home brew, with boot polish and paint thinners and anything, mix it all up, "Have a drink, Dick." "No

thanks, Robbie."

Tape 5

00:34 **I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about when you were at Point Cook and you did trials with the RAF? The exercises you did with them?**

Sorry, no, I spent some time in the air force after the war, I was at Point Cook for a while, as a medical officer.

Oh, right. So what about gun firings and things,

01:00 **was that not …**

Mainly practice shooting aeroplanes, they'd show what you call the drogue, a sort of a hollow flag behind them as a target that was used to practice gun firing. Radar was fairly new, but most of the corvettes at this stage had radar installed on them, and tuning, radar.

01:30 **What year was that, Dick?**

'43, late 1943. I'm with you here, aren't I, this is when I was on Wagga, is that right? Or in Wagga?

Yes.

Yes, that was routine sea to air, or air to sea radar practice

02:00 firing episodes.

Could you just sort of paint the picture for us, what a typical exercise would be? Like you know, talk us through your job and what the ship was doing, and how it was coordinated?

Well that was the first ship I served in, and I knew that my posting to Wagga was only a temporary arrangement, so I was a bit of superfluous luggage on board, I got the impression – the

02:30 other thing is, being first time at sea in a vessel, and I didn't really understand fully what was going on the whole time. So I wasn't given any responsibilities and as I say, I was just the first time at sea, trying to find out what it was all about. I've got very few memories of that particular episode, by Point Cook's just around the corner from Williamstown, and when we weren't going out into Bass Strait doing

03:00 sea trials and getting our asdic operations in hand, I know several times we did sea to air or air to sea manoeuvres and exercises, all in training both for the air force and the navy.

Tell me about – I'm just trying to find, you're drafted to your first ship, and you are trying to find your way at sea and get used to everything, does someone take you under their wing? Is there a kind of mentoring system in the navy that happens either officially

03:30 **or unofficially?**

No, not really, except as I've mentioned repeatedly, the comradeship, you know, your mates look after you and you look after them, everyone's a mate, everyone hops in and helps, if you don't know, even if you just look blind and say, "What's going on here?" Someone will show you what to do, lead your hand literally and say, "Watch me and do it this way." So

04:00 it's a type of education, but it's not classroom education where you're lectured and given exercises to do, you just learn by hands-on experience.

So there's nothing more that you can really elaborate about the air to sea …?

No, not really about that, no, I know it occurred, but the details of it I don't recall, Michelle [interviewer].

When you went to HMAS Ipswich, we've talked a little bit about the convoy work that you did there,

04:30 **but not much about the patrol work. Can you tell me how that was different, and I guess just talk me through a typical patrol?**

Yes, well basically it was – at that stage when I first went to the Ipswich it was ninety per cent convoy work, very routine, I suppose you'd call it monotonous, but we never got bored because there was always something happening, and being at sea and having jobs to do, and twenty-four hours a day

05:00 on duty or on call, it was always 'go, go, go'. But we did a couple of trips to a place called Addu Atoll, down in the Maldives Islands, south of Colombo, they're very famous resort islands, beautiful islands, coral atolls, but we had several trips down there, we used to call them 'spud

05:30 runs', but basically delivering mail and official papers, transferring them down for Colombo – the Ceylonese government, Ceylon in those days and the Maldives were part of the 'Colombo group', well they were a couple of hundred miles south of Colombo, they were interesting trips down, but they were just spud runs as we'd call it, 'load up, go down' .

Well would you go ashore there at the Maldives?

06:00 I think I only ever got ashore once, and that was when I was on duty in the whaler boat, which was transferring items from the boat ashore to the natives and back again. We never spent a great deal of time, we'd just go in, unload, pick up some more gear and back to Colombo. Apart from that, we had a couple of runs up to Bombay without convoy, just

06:30 on – well we were going from Bombay down to Colombo to pick up a convoy to bring back, or vice versa. But ninety per cent of it was just routine, up and down the east and west coast of India predominantly, and around Ceylon, on routine convoy work.

But the odd times that you did do more patrolling work, what would that involve? Would that just be your ship, or would it be …?

Well

07:00 around – there's quite a lot of activities went on during the war which no-one ever heard about or knew about. But there was quite a lot of both German and Japanese submarine activity right along the east coast of Africa and going up into the Persian Gulf and around the Bay of Bengal, and we'd go out routinely in harbour if things were quiet, and been

07:30 here for too long, and hadn't been to sea for a couple of days, we'd go out for twenty-four hours on anti-submarine patrol, just patrolling outside the harbour. All the harbours of significance during the war years, they used to have boomed fence vessels and big nets across the entrance to keep the submarines out so they can't get in amongst the shipping and do damage and shelling. But even so, they

08:00 managed on several occasions, the midget subs particularly, to break their way into harbours through these nets, so it was standard outside any harbour in the world of significance during the war, there'd be always someone out on anti-submarine patrol, or often two or three vessels out on anti-submarine patrol at all times.

Did you ever come across any subs on patrols that you were involved in?

Submarine detection consists of finding a

08:30 tube about the size of the lamp stand, sitting up out of the water anything between five miles away to periscope. We had a method which became very good, it was the end of the war and very accurate, it was radar, you'd pick that up, we sent back a message and it gave you a bearing and a direction, but the only thing we had was this asdic – anti-submarine detection inspection committee [commission] it was called, after the First World War and we nearly lost the war in 1917, they

09:00 set up this special committee and they came up with this asdic, which is an underwater sounding machine and it sends out notes, and if it hits a metal object like a submarine, it sends a message back. But it's very difficult to perfect it, and hot and cold water, the ocean's just not all pea soup, it's hot here and cold there, it's outflows particularly from Calcutta, the

09:30 mouth of the Ganges River, you know, it's not just a river, there's about a thousand waterways emptied out, there's fresh water mixing up with salt water. A school of fish, there's so many things can give you what you call a 'false sound', you get an echo back, it could sound like a submarine, but it could be any one of these things. So although you get lots of

10:00 messages back, firstly to interpret if they are a submarine, and secondly if you even considered that it probably is and not a change in the water temperature or water volume or a school of fish or something, you've got to identify it as a submarine. And that again, the best way to find out is drop a few depth charges, if you get a bucketful of fish, good. If you bring a submarine

10:30 just to the surface and get a positive identification, well then you've got something to work on. But it's not a 'yes/no' machine, the asdic machine.

And you were involved with setting off the depth charges, weren't you?

Yes. That was – when we were in 'action stations' yes. During the war of course, over a period of years, different ships, different jobs, people moved around, but basically most of the time yes, it was with these

11:00 depth charges.

How many men does it take to set off the depth charge? Was it just you, or was it a team of people that …?

Oh no, there'd be a team, we used to carry something like eighty depth charges, but they were all down aft, they used to roll them off the back of the boat, and then we had these throwers, I was on this port thrower, but there'd be fifteen or twenty people operating those four

11:30 outlets of depth charges at any one time.

So some people would be throwing them in, but what would the others be doing? I can't …

Setting the depths, you see, we'd get reports coming back from the bridge that they'd got an echo, and as the submarine was manoeuvring, going from different depths, which once they knew they were detected they did, because you set the depths that the charge will

12:00 explode, with a very subtle machine, which you use now for boats and everything, it's a hydrostatic valve type of thing, and at certain depths the pressure of the water changes, so you set it for such a depth, because of the amount of pressure. So you might set it for fifty feet, a hundred feet, two hundred feet, three hundred feet, well someone doing that the whole time, reading what's coming back, and then this primer charge, which fits in the middle of the depth charge,

12:30 has to be reset with every report that comes back from the bridge. And then the free loading, you've got – if you throw one away you've got to have another one ready to drop at the next – you'd usually try and drop them in patterns, so not just indiscriminately let one go, you'd let off half a dozen at a time, all at the same depth, all at the same – and that would cover a much bigger area, and covered at that depth. Then you could carol right back on your asdic.

13:00 'Well your depth's wrong', 'we didn't get anyone this time', so you've got to adjust your depth. It's an ongoing thing, it doesn't stop the whole time, it's not dynamic, it's not just a stationery thing, you go along with it and drop one there and drop one there, it's a very scientific involvement, but—

And yet it sounds like it's also a bit of guesswork too, because you're not quite sure what's down there, as well?

Yes, unless you get a positive sighting, you catch a

13:30 submarine on the surface, rarely can you identify a submarine from just a periscope sighting, you can't be absolutely certain. But the best way I found of identifying a submarine, was watching the torpedo going underneath the boat, because torpedos travel, varying in depth for about fifteen to thirty feet below the surface of the water, depths are automatically

14:00 designed, which is the standard depth of the ship, vessels, we only do about fifteen, or fourteen or fifteen feet. OK if we're lucky a torpedo, which the first inkling that you've got there was a submarine around, you see the bubbles from a torpedo coming straight at you. A bit frightening at times, because you wonder if it's going to hit or not. Fortunately all the ones that I ever saw went under the boat,

14:30 didn't hit us. Although they were in line for the boat, but they were just too deep, for the amount of water that we drew.

So besides seeing the actual torpedos, would you be able to detect that you were being fired upon as well?

Again, the disturbance in the water from the bubbles in the water which come from the motor, they were like a compressed air motor, and like a diver under water, you see the bubbles coming up, you can't see the diver,

15:00 you know there's some activity going on there. You see this line of bubbles coming across under the water towards you, you realise that there's nothing else that it could be.

So torpedos are coming towards the ship, do you change course quickly, or what do you do? How do you get away?

You can manoeuvre against them, you travel about the equivalent of forty miles an hour, but even so on a good clear day, particularly in tropical areas where it's not rough, and the Atlantic

15:30 and overcast and that; a good watch keeper would come into good with his 'glasses' [binoculars] or even with his naked eye, they'll pick them up half a mile away. So you know you're going forty mile an hour, so half a mile, it gives you a fair chance to manoeuvre. But most times you'd just look over the side and say, "God, I hope that's deep." You know, it's too late to do anything, you'd just go and buy it.

Do you feel you were quite lucky?

Yes, on one particular occasion, or in particular one night.

16:00 **At night? That would be even harder, wouldn't it, to be …?**

Well no, not really, it's easier in one sense, because as I say, most of the time we were in tropical waters, and you had a terrific amount of phosphorescence, you're just in tropical water, and you get these little glowing lights in the water, you see it as a boat steams or sails through the water, the bow wave, look over the back of the boat, the

16:30 propellers or the wake behind you, it's all myriads of lights, just phosphorescence, it's very common, it's a minute organism that lives in the sea, and it fluoresces at night, and the dark of the night, the more fluorescent it is, and disturbs the water if the motor's going by, the bubbles, and you see it, it's just like

a white track coming straight at you through the water, it's the phosphorescence of the water.

And I

17:00 **guess also it means that your ship moving is more of a target too?**

Well normally they weren't interested in us, aircraft or submarines or even surface vessels, no, they just wanted the merchant ships. Because the amount of cargo that they could fit into one merchant ship is just absolutely unreal. We were just small fry, you know, they wouldn't waste ammunition on us. No, that was why we were so fortunate, because so few of them were sunk.

17:30 The biggest enemy of convoy work was risk of collision, both day and night, because aeroplanes, they just went straight for the merchant ships, or they'd go for the big what they called 'capital' ships, the cruisers or battleships, but they weren't interested in us, we were just small fry, wouldn't waste their ammunition on us. Well we hoped they didn't. They rarely did, they'd just go for the prize

18:00 targets.

Still, you could never be sure, I guess.

No, you never know if it's got your name on it or not.

So just in case I've missed anything, you think, you say, if someone's detected that a sub's nearby, how quickly does everyone swing into action, and just talk me through how a ship changes from being OK, just calm, everything's normal—

Well, we had a routine watch and the first thing is, the officer of the watch,

18:30 that is the officer on the bridge, not necessarily the captain, if an incident occurs or something happens or something's report to him which is even suspicious, right throughout the ship there's a bell alarm system, like he presses a button and the whole ship just vibrates, there's electric bells ringing everywhere, day and night. Some could be asleep in their – some could be in the head,

19:00 going to the toilet or under the shower, you could be anywhere, you could be halfway through making a cup of tea or something. But everyone races to their selected station, their call it action station, and surprisingly when each section is closed up, that is the senior hand, would call the bridge, get the charge party closed up, and number

19:30 four inch gun closed up, everyone, once they get to their position …

Sorry, does 'closed up' mean that you're ready for …?

Yes, you're at your action station, you're ready to pull the trigger and fire, and even in the middle of the night and half the ship's company is asleep and there's people everywhere, within two minutes basically, we'd have the whole ship secured for action stations, getting out of your

20:00 hammock, grabbing your jumper or a shirt and your life jacket and flash your gear and running twenty or thirty yards up and down stairs, and there's half a dozen people trying to get up the stairway, and half a dozen people trying to get down them. But it would have been two minutes normally, you know, that was a good action station. But you've got no idea what it's about, you never know if it's aircraft, the bell would just ring and you'd go, it might be ten minutes, fifteen

20:30 minutes later, and you'd say, "I'm sorry, what's going on?" And you'd talk it around and eventually you'd find out it's only so-and-so, it was a suspected submarine or a suspected aircraft, or something in the air. But you've got no idea what you're doing there, when you know what you've got to do when you get there, but you don't know why, usually for some time afterwards.

What did – what did the men or yourself dread most, a submarine or an aircraft coming in?

No, finding out what it was.

21:00 It's all very well to know that you're going to be attacked, but it makes it much easier to handle the situation if you know what's going to attack you. And this is – you know, you wouldn't know, it might be a few minutes, it might be announced immediately, but there's no system of two barrels for a submarine or one barrel for an aeroplane, or anything like that. The bells just ring, and you go.

But in terms of I guess dealing with a threat, what was less appealing, dealing with aircraft coming

21:30 **in, or dealing with a potential submarine coming at you?**

Well you could see an aircraft normally, even if he kept out of range, you could see him. No, the submarine was the worst because you never really knew where he was, and you didn't know his intentions, and you didn't know how many of them were there. Fortunately we were not very much involved with what they call 'submarine [wolf] pack attacks', but if you've ten or twelve submarines

22:00 down there, all trying to have a go at a convoy, you've only got a vague idea where any of them are, it's the unknown factor, but I think that's in any frightening situation. You can cope with it a lot better if you

know what you're up against. Until you find out it's – you know, you hope it isn't, but isn't what?

22:30 **Can I just ask you know about going on lookout up in the crow's nest, like what that's like? Just talk me through going up and what you have to do.**

Very frightening the first time, particularly if you don't like heights.

How were you with heights?

I was like everyone, the first time, gee whiz, a long way up here. Everyone tells you, "Don't look down." But of course that's the first thing you do, and you say, "Oh God." But once you get up into the actual crow's nest itself, beautiful

23:00 view, you can see for miles, and you had direct communication with the bridge, and you used to do what they call 'sweep the horizon', you had field binoculars, and you'd do a sweep around the horizon. But anything unusual, even if it was – particularly if it was doubtful you had to report it immediately, not so much what it is, if you're not certain, but

23:30 report that it's an object, even if it's unidentifiable or something, and there's a compass bearing that is relevant to the ship's head, the way the ship's going, and any other unusual thing you inform the bridge, to give them more – possible information about what it was. But out at sea you see all sorts of things, even mirages are very common at sea, in certain weather conditions. Nothing worse to ring up the bridge

24:00 and you report a ship which appears to be about three miles away, steaming upside down, it was purely a mirage effect from a ship that's thirty miles away. But you must report it, doesn't matter what you see, it has to be reported.

So in that case would you say, "Well this is what I'm seeing, it's a ship upside down?"

Well you describe it as best you can, and you might suggest what you think it is. The hardest – we were

24:30 coming down to Sydney at one stage from Manus Island, you'd know Barrenjoey Lighthouse, a very prominent entrance to Pittwater, up on the northern beaches of Sydney, and it was just on dawn this morning and we were approaching Sydney, and just out of nowhere was this

25:00 thing, upside down, up in the sky, and I didn't know, being up in the crow's nest, where our position was or anything, but when I rang down the bridge I reported this unusual object, vertical object in the sky, and the bearing and everything. No-one took any notice, I thought, "This is lovely." You know, "This is the most unusual thing I'd ever seen in my life." It was this Barrenjoey Lighthouse, the mirage effect, and a little

25:30 bit of sea mist and haze, it stuck up in the sky, and upside down lighthouse, and just on dawn when you've been up most of the night, it's pretty hard to identify those things. Because the officer of the watch knew, because he had the chart in front of him, he had exact position, and as soon as he looked at the bearing, he knew I was looking at the light, but the light was way up there. In wartime, it wasn't flashing or anything, because they're all turned off during wartime, it was just this great big monstrosity sticking up in the middle of the

26:00 sky.

So when you're up in the crow's nest, is that a four-hour watch as well?

No, you do it hour on, hour off.

And what's the reason behind that?

Well all lookouts or people that have high pressure concentration jobs, like the helmsman, the coxswain who's steering the boat, lookouts, an hour – fatigue sets in, and people who go down the engine room and turn knobs for four hours, that's no problem,

26:30 people who go and sit by a gun ready to fire it for four hours, that's nothing, if you're concentrating on something, to do your job efficiently, an hour is your limit of concentration, the effects of concentration, you've got to change around.

How high is it up to the crow's nest, and how long did you have to sort of get it down, to get up there, up and down?

You became very adept, climbing up and

27:00 down. From memory about sixty-feet about the bridge, and that's twenty-odd feet, twenty-five feet above the water. But the worst thing of the lot was the crow's nest was just for'ard off the funnel from the engine room, where all the diesel exhaust fumes and burnt oil smoke emitted, and if you had a following wind, you spent your whole time choking and

27:30 breathing all the fumes. It wasn't a routine thing, if it got so bad that it was becoming unbearable you'd just call up the bridge and request permission to come down and just stand on top of the bridge, to get

out of this exhaust. That was very trying, particularly if there was an alert on, and you got a message back, “No, stay up there, we need someone up in the mast.”

You said that you were in direct communication with the bridge, how was that

28:00 **communication carried out?**

Just a simple voice pipe, a tube, just an air tube and you talk down the air tube. You see kids get a piece of string and a couple of jam tins and make a telephone line, the same principle, the air is used to conduct here, but the metal tube conducts the vibrations of your voice through the air, and that’s what resonates it, and the whole communication throughout the ship, down to the engine room, up to the

28:30 mast, out to all the gun stations, as I say it’s a lot more electronically involved these days, but it was all just voice pipes.

And in order to hear, did you need to put your ear near the pipe, or was it loud enough that it could …?

No, you could usually carry on a conversation just like talking on the telephone without moving yourself. If there’s a lot of noise or interference, yes you might have to put your ear to it and then come back and talk directly into it. But no, it wasn’t a big problem, communicating.

29:00 **Is there a ladder that goes up to the crow’s nest, or what does it look like?**

There is. They’re called ‘wet lines’, but it’s a sort of a rope ladder effect, which is attached to the back of the mast, and you just climb up,

29:30 one step at a time, it’s like a rope ladder, and the crow’s nest itself is just an area about the size of this seat I’m sitting on, with canvas sides up to about your waist level, and a little illegal seat, they used to have a little plank of wood that you could sit down on, rather than standing up all the time, but I used to – particularly around

30:00 rough days the movement was pretty horrendous, and to try and stand and search the horizon for a full hour was very difficult. But if you can sit down and rest your elbows on the framework of the surrounding canvas screen, you could cope a lot better.

The people who were prone to seasickness, was it more difficult to be up in the crow’s nest for them?

Yes, but seasickness is

30:30 an unusual disease, as I explained earlier, the only customer I even found had chronic seasickness, every time they went to sea was sick, they’re given the opportunity to get a discharge from the navy or get a shore-based job. I suppose more than fifty per cent of people go to sea, the first twenty-four hours, thirty-six hours, feel a bit woozy, but they’re all

31:00 right after that.

But when you’re up in the crow’s nest do you feel the ship more, the movement and everything?

Oh yes, the mast is like a pendulum, and the pendulum moves a lot more at that height than down at deck level. So yes, there’s a lot more movement, but as I say, twenty-four hours, thirty-six hours at the most, ninety-nine per cent of people are quite all right after that.

Have you ever been up in the crow’s nest during a storm?

31:30 Yes.

What’s that like? Is it a bit hairy at the time?

Well it’s just a magnification of when it’s not a storm. You know, there’s much more movement, much more violent movement, you hang on pretty tight if it’s very rough weather.

Would there be any times where it was just too dangerous for men to go up?

Oh yes, you know, the officers were very realistic, they’d say, if there was a smoke hazard, fumes from the

32:00 engine room, they would always consider your request. Yes, there were circumstances as I said, the masthead lookout, but you stand on top of the bridge, which is a steel structure, forty feet below, but no, they wouldn't send you up there if there was any danger associated with it.

And did you just have like regular binoculars, or was it …?

32:30 Well wartime, no-one made binoculars in Australia, so there weren’t very many, and the army loved them. But all the binoculars in Australia – particularly race-goers and people involved in it, you know, the first week of the war every pair of binoculars in Australia was requisitioned by the services, and then it was a matter of what you get, what was handed out to you. But no, some of them were massive

things

33:00 you couldn't hold, they were too big to hold, you'd have to put them on a steel frame and just operate from there. But on the whole they were just like a pair of binoculars you'd take to the races, or out with you going bird hunting. But everyone want the German ones, the German binoculars were always much better lenses, the Japs weren't bad, but they had the best, they were the best makers in the world.

Did you ever get bored when you were up there on watch?

33:30 You've interviewed a lot of people, and anyone who's honest will tell you, war is just hours and days and weeks and months of boredom, absolute boredom, with a few bits of excitement cropping up occasionally. But you get bored to tears every day of the week, doesn't matter what service you're in. It's all routine, you've done it all before, you're doing the same thing every day, it goes

34:00 on and on. You're always hoping something will happen to smarten things up a bit.

So if you're up on watch and you're a bit bored, what would you do to keep yourself alert or keep yourself from zoning out and getting bored?

Concentrate. That's all you can do. And oddly enough, human behaviour is a peculiar thing, but if you're doing something which requires

34:30 concentration, whether it's on lookout or whether it's steering the boat at the wheel, and you start daydreaming, someone around you will sense it. Human nature – they'll say, "Hey, wake up." See it's just an automatic thing, because you know what everyone has to be doing, they know what you're supposed to be doing, they know what they're supposed to be doing, and if they start daydreaming, the

35:00 first thing, if the officer on the watch sees you daydreaming over a chart or plotting a course or something, he'll just walk over the helmsman and say, "Get on your course fella." You sense it, you know if someone's not doing their job. I know that might sound silly to you, but when you've got a job to do and it's all you do, you've got to do it properly. You soon realise. No, it's – and the other thing is, neglected duty is not looked on very

35:30 well in any of the services, particularly the navy, if you're not doing your job, righto, at nine o'clock tomorrow morning, captain's report, front up to the captain or the duty officer and off caps, "Righto, fourteen days stoppage of leave." No, there was no excuse for it. But that's just service life, that's not just navy life, soldier, sailor, airman, doesn't matter what you

36:00 are, you've got a job to do and if you don't do it, you're very soon reprimanded.

Did you find when you've been working together with the same people for a long time that you just sort of operate like one kind of being? Is that kind of intuitive the way you – like you said, yo can sort of sense if someone's …?

You immediately know if someone's not doing their job.

Well the other way around, like do you know when someone is, like, doing – can you feel it, like a

36:30 **good sporting team, when you just gel, you know, is there a sort of feeling like that as well?**

Yes, definitely, everyone – you sense it, or whether you actually witness it, it doesn't matter, if somebody's not doing their job, you soon know and they soon know, you soon let them know. If you don't, someone else will.

Because I guess your lives depend on it really, in wartime.

Well this is the point. But not that, the whole ship, the safety of the ship and all the people on it.

Because I guess like before you have to

37:00 **deal with the enemy it's all about keeping the ship at sea and safe, isn't it?**

Yes. And doesn't matter who you are, you're always worried about your own skin of course. If your mate alongside you is not doing his job and your life's on the end of it, well you're not going to let him get away with it.

Were there ever any times where the men would take their concerns about someone –

37:30 **take it upon themselves to educate that person, and make them chip up, or …?**

If need be.

Is it more normal for them to do that amongst themselves with minor things, rather than go to …?

Oh yes you do it amongst yourselves. See you'd have what they call 'mess deck clean', and 'captain of the heads', there were a lot of people detailed to do purely maintenance and cleaning jobs, you're not on that for the while time on the ship, you'll have a roster for month, captain of the heads keep the

showers and toilets clean and up to mark,

38:00 and toilet paper in hand and all this. And if someone has that job allotted, if someone goes to have a shower or goes to the bathroom and it's not up to scratch, they know very quick smart they're not doing their job. It's not just the one person that niggles them, it's the whole mess deck, everyone will say, "Yes, come on, get in there and do it properly." It's a sort of disciplinary thing, but it's not handled with

38:30 officer disciplinarianism, though they will become involved if they find that things aren't being done. But no, it's usually left to the crew themselves, it works very well.

Now I understand that you had a gramophone that you used to have on board.

Yes.

What sort of gramophone was it?

It was an old '68, '78, I picked it up in Bombay, managed to have a bit of money for a change.

39:00 It was days of swing then too, Woody Herman and Glen Miller, and 'In The Mood', and Lionel Hampton. I got this – traded with an Indian barter operator in Bombay, he wanted something that I had that wasn't worth much to me, and we

39:30 wanted it just for entertainment on the boat. And then you'd wander around Bombay and Ceylon and Calcutta, and find a music shop and they'd have a few old records, so we'd go and do a bit of a trade and barter for them. So we used to then have these singsongs, and movie gramophone nights, particularly in the evenings, tropical evenings, you know, beautiful, between four o'clock and eight o'clock, we had what we called the dog watchers, they'd split up four-hour watches to two

40:00 hours, to give everyone a changeover so you're not on the same roster twenty-four hours a day. And steaming along, tropical evening, you'd have most of the ship's company would be on deck and doing 'the dogs', or waiting to go on some first watch, and the gramophone always came out if it wasn't rough, it was the standard thing on the boat, gramophone night. "Where'd you get that from?"

Tape 6

00:36 **Dick, you just mentioned off camera that there was always music going on on board, you mentioned your gramophone, but what other types of musical instruments did they have?**

Well mouth organs were very popular. But I wouldn't say it was always going on, but when the opportunity came, you know, it just needed one person to start the music going and out would come – somebody would have a

01:00 'squeeze box'. See the ship's companies were never set in concrete, they were always fluid. There were people coming and going, we lose two or three people here and pick up three or four there, and changing around fairly continually, and you'd get different people with different talents coming on board.

What's a squeeze box?

An accordion piano thing, it's got piano notes on it, and it works

01:30 on the principal of a bag pipe, you know, you compress the air and the air blows the sound through it, and you get music. And they're very popular, the squeeze box.

What sort of songs would get sung?

The usual wartime songs, 'Mademoiselle from Armentieres', 'Wrap Up Your Troubles' the old fun ones, 'Roll Out The Barrel'.

Come on, you've

02:00 **got to give us one, can you give us a little …?**

Well everyone in – although it was German, everyone, no matter where you went, Lily Marlene was the song of the war.

Can you sing us a little bit?

No.

I have it on very good word that you're a fantastic singer.

I'm tone deaf. You'd all pack up and go home.

The song of the war?

I think ‘Lily Marlene’ was. I’d say most servicemen would agree with me on that.

What about the lyrics, can you repeat them?

02:30 “Underneath the lamp light, by the barrack gate.” That’s how it starts.

You’re holding out on us.

No, I’m not. I am tone deaf, I cannot sing a note. But I do like listening to music, but I can’t play it. Even studied it at school for a while, I thought I could understand, but I still have no –

03:00 I’m not a musician. Sorry. But Lily Marlene, although it was a German song, every troop, American, German, didn’t matter who they were, British, that was the song of the war. Very – it was a lullaby I suppose, that was the description of it.

I wonder if you could tell me in a little more detail what the role of the helmsman was, or what the job

03:30 **of being helmsman involved?**

Well steering the boat, the navigation of the boat depends on following a set compass course, so it’s a matter of setting the bow of the boat in the compass direction which you’ve been ordered to do, and sticking to it, and of course the boat’s moving the whole time, particularly in a seaway, you can get up to

04:00 fifteen and twenty degrees swing of the bow around. But overall a good helmsman will balance out to a very accurate course, even though he might be swinging ten or fifteen degrees the whole time, because he balances it all up. But it’s the sort of thing a lot of people get naturally. Yes, I did a lot of helming, not only on steam boats but yachts and things, and I can

04:30 sail what I consider a pretty accurate course, even though the boat’s all over the ocean type of thing, at the end of the day you’ve balanced it out, you’ve gone down the middle of the line through which you’re swinging. But there’s quite a system of helming, you’re directed by the navigator, and the navigator is usually the officer of the watch on the bridge, and it’s a system, anything that you’re told to do in the navy,

05:00 you have to repeat the order back, so the navigating officer would say, “Steer nor-nor-east.” or these days it’s all “Zero-four-five”, and then you repeat back, “Course zero-four-five sir.” And then when you come onto that course, you then notify him, “Steady on zero-four-five sir.” Or “Nor-nor-east.” Whatever course you’ve been told. It’s not just someone telling you, “Steer over there.” Or “Go there.” It’s a very

05:30 scientific arrangement. The important thing is the repetition. If you’re coming on watch, relieving someone else, you take over from the helmsman, he has to tell you the course he’s steering and you have to repeat it back to him, and then repeat back to the officer of the watch or the duty navigating officer, once you’re steady on the new – you know, you’ve setting in, you just call out to the officer of the watch, “Zero-four-five sir.”

06:00 It’s a fail-safe system and it works very well, but it’s very important that repetition of passing the orders on. Every order that you get on the boat, doesn’t matter who it is. Fire a gun, you’ll report it back, “Fire, port depth charge throw.” Or “Fire, four inch gun.” So there’s no such thing of just being told to do it, and do it, it’s a repetition thing. It’s a fail-safe method too. You’ve got it right, and

06:30 secondly if you heard it, and thirdly if you don’t do it right, it’s your fault because you made the mistake.

Can you walk me through the bridge on a corvette? The layout and who is on the bridge?

Yes. Well I suppose the corvette, the actual bridge area would be twelve feet across by about twelve feet deep,

07:00 right square in the middle towards the front end is the helm, the binnacle, the binnacle is the compass which you read, that gives you the course. You can see everything ahead out the sides, over in the right hand corner is what they call the asdic department, that is the asdic operator, he’s got his own little cubby-hole in there, no bigger than half the size of a toilet. He just sits there all day with headphones on, listening to this beep, beep. But that’s

07:30 also echoed right throughout the bridge, on a mic, so everyone can hear this beep, beep of the asdic twenty-four hours a day, it never stops. It’s repeated just in case he misses a sound, someone else will certainly pick it up. In front of you is just dials, engine room dials and communication speakers, going down to the engine room and other parts of the ship, boardroom and the captain’s cabin and everything, so you’re in direct

08:00 – the officer of the watch or whoever’s in charge of the deck has communication with any part of the ship. Then over in the left hand corner, there’s a little black-out area of curtains, and that’s the chart table, just a table with a chart on it, special lighting and everything, and at night you’d go in there and plot your course and do anything that has to be done at night, and it’s a completely blacked out

08:30 area. Then at the back of the square box we’ve described, there are two arms go out from each side of the bridge, which are called the wings, there’s a port starboard wing and they have multi-functions. One

is they're usually mounted – well we had a Oerlikan gun, a half inch quick firing anti-aircraft gun on both arms of the wing, some boats only had just

09:00 machine guns, then there's another little special area where it opens up, a little gangway you stand out on, and that's known as the chains. And chains is an area with the swing lead, in other words, the depth sounding machinery, everyone has depth sounders, but even in the wartime days, naval ships, all the ships still have it, but the lead is a twelve inch lump of lead,

09:30 with a hollow bottom on it, and a bit of rope, and you swing the thing, a very fine technique of swinging this fifteen pound lump of lead around above your head, sixty feet above your head, waiting for it to come down and hit you. But it's measured rope in various things, there's one bit of leather, or two bits of leather, or two bits of red cloth or something, but every one measures certain depths in fathoms,

10:00 and they're written by name, so you'd swing your lead and you'd call back to the bridge, "By the depth two leather." That means there are two leather prongs, so that means there's twenty feet of water underneath you, you convert fathoms into depth, so it was a depth sounding – very effective, worked for thousands of years, and

10:30 actually in small boats, particularly going into an anchorage, it's still commonly used, you go and anchor somewhere for the night in a yacht or boat or something, you drop a fishing line with a piece of lead on the bottom, oh well, two metres, we're right here for the night. That was what's called 'the chains'. Then back in behind the helmsman which is in

11:00 the square box in the middle, the twelve foot square box, there's a back wall, and that's a mass of little cubby-holes, and all your code flags and naval signalling flags are all in their little boxes, and then there'd be anything from ten or twelve different ropes going up to what we call yardarms, to hoist in these different flags, because every flag has a meaning,

11:30 and during wartime particularly, but there's always radio silence, there's no voice communication at all between ships at sea, you've got to keep radio silence. So any communication with a ship is done by flags, and even today every flag has its meaning, like 'code flag A', which is a blue swallow tail, means diver overboard,

12:00 'code flag B', which is a red swallow tail, that goes up, means that ship's carrying ammunition or it's unloading, or it's in danger of explosion because it's got ammunition on board. Each – and then you get combinations, you put three or four flags together, each ship has its personal identification, by a combination of numbers, like how do you know your car if you see half a dozen the same colour and the same model? Look at the number plate.

12:30 And that's what the code flags are. So in between all that, bridge lookouts have to somehow find their way out onto the wings, and you usually have the bloke up the top on the lookout, and there's always a signalman on the bridge, so it gets pretty crowded up there, particularly at action stations, because it's the hub of the whole activity. So everyone of any importance

13:00 operates from the bridge.

Is there a captain's chair in there somewhere?

Normally yes, and it's usually on the starboard side, that's the right hand side of the helmsman, so the helmsman here on the wheel, going ahead and the captain's chair's right there alongside, so he can immediately read the course, and he's got all his speaking tubes in front of him, he's got his asdic operator, and a radio operator and his signalman

13:30 all on his right side, and over the other side he's got his navigating officer at the chart table.

Did you say radio operator and signalman on the right hand side as well, next to the asdic?

Yes, but behind, back a bit, you know, they keep back.

The signalman's there to be running the flags that you described, at the back?

Yes, the only person that sits down is the captain, no-one else sits, everyone else is on their feet all the time. And the greatest sin you can commit is to get caught sitting in the captain's

14:00 chair when he's not supposed to be on the bridge.

Were there ever any incidents of that?

No, very rarely because we wouldn't get caught. You would in harbour possibly, even in harbour there's always watch keepers on, there's always someone on the bridge, and someone on the gangway on the boat, there's always a minimum of two people on standby in harbour day and night, doesn't matter where you are, a minimum of two. One is always on the gangway, there's always someone on the gangway and there's always someone

14:30 on the bridge.

And with the corvettes, how many officers did you have that would rotate through the officer of the watch?

We'd have the captain, he'd just operate as is, he wasn't on any rostered watch or anything at all, the most senior officer after him was 'the jimmy' or the number one, or what they call the first lieutenant, he was the senior most officer below the

15:00 captain, and he'd often act as captain, in the captain's absence, or if the captain's gone down to have a bit of shut-eye.

Would he be a lieutenant in rank?

Depending on the ship, on a corvette he'd be a lieutenant. Occasionally he might be a lieutenant commander, but mostly a lieutenant.

And the CO on board a corvette would normally be a lieutenant commander?

Normally, could be a lieutenant, could be a lieutenant commander, could be a commander, just depends on the circumstances. As I

15:30 say, particularly during the war years, there was nothing set in concrete, everything was fluid, you could have a captain one day and he'd get sick, well there's no way of getting a replacement so the jimmy, the number one, first lieutenant, he'd immediately become acting captain, and this is the system. But depending on your ship, you could then have a signals officer, if you're lucky, you'd have a gunnery officer, if you're lucky, you'd have rarely, an engineering officer,

16:00 if you were very lucky. Never had a doctor, and you'd always have a junior lieutenant or a midshipman. But those officers, the four of them would manipulate their watch keeping between the four of them. But there'd always be the navigating officer and another officer on the bridge, or a very high, a

16:30 petty officer who wasn't commissioned. There'd be two senior experienced men on the bridge at all times.

And the wireless operator, were they in a room beneath the bridge?

Yes, immediately beneath the bridge was the captain's cabin, and to the right side of that beneath the asdic operator up on the bridge there was the radio room,

17:00 and we'd always have someone on duty there too, even though as I say, rarely at sea – we always had to listen out, but we'd never talk, there was always radio silence. It's a big ocean out there and easy to get lost, but once you start chatting away, 'chat, chat, chat', any warship from hundreds of miles around, immediately they'd pick you up and identify

17:30 you because of the direction, the bearing that you're on, distance away, and it's just advertising your presence, which is the last thing you want to have, if there were submarines there they'd know where you are, in the aeroplanes …

You mentioned that you, when you were doing convoy work and patrol work, you'd often travel round in flotillas?

Yes, we nearly always operated as a flotilla, that'd be anything – could be two, could be four, could be six, but a couple of

18:00 corvettes will patrol vessels all operating on the one convoy, it depends on the size of the convoy and both the size and what they're carrying, and the relative importance of the cargo.

And would the flotilla be made up according to, you know, strengths and weaknesses about – what am I trying to ask here? I guess would the flotilla be put together

18:30 **with each craft having different contributions?**

No, we all had the same operational efficiency, there was a rate of – category of seniority. If you were made a captain last week, and I was made a captain months ago, I was the senior officer, and you were subservient to me, I controlled you. But there might be another bloke in the convoy who was commissioned to

19:00 captain six months before I was, well he's the senior officer. There's a very strict rule, and you'd never do anything unless the senior officer ordered it, you'd never act independently at all, it was a completely team thing, it was a very, very known set of conditions under which you operate.

Could I ask you, I don't know if you were aware as a seaman or working on the helm, how they worked

19:30 **out their zigzag path? How the navigators did work out their zigzags?**

That's all programmed into the convoy.

Was it pre-planned?

Pre-planned, yes, convoys just didn't happen, they'd be planned months ahead, the ships would be in the dock, the cargo they'd be carrying, where they were starting from, what time, how many patrol

boats were going to take them, the course, estimated times of arrival at

20:00 certain spots, everything is planned, they have these convoy meetings, just to tell everyone, “Now that’s the rules.” It’s all planned weeks, months ahead, particularly big Atlantic convoys. Well I think it took them three years to plan the landing in France, when they landed in 1945,

20:30 ’44, they spent three years just in the planning. Well it was a big show, but a lot of work goes into it, it’s all done before, it just doesn’t fall together at the last moment.

How does the navigator know the exact point at which the convoy’s going to begin turning together?

Time, it’s all done on time. You get a set time, we’d form up at a certain time, and then once we’ve formed up outside the harbour

21:00 and everyone’s in their position, then we’ll take off at a set time, and then the set time from that every twenty minutes, thirty minutes for the rest of the convoy, we’ll have it planned, you change course thirty degrees to port, thirty degrees to starboard, at a set time, and that goes right through, unless it’s altered for some reason. There’s always two convoy captains, there’s the captain in charge or the senior officer of

21:30 the patrol, which is supervising it, and one of the ships always carries a convoy captain too, with a special ex-naval personnel or ex-merchant navy personnel and he is in charge of all the merchant ships in the convoy. And navy act entirely independently, the navy have overall control, they can tell the convoy what to do, but as far as we’re concerned, they’re just over there and we’re over here, and there’s no communication or no

22:00 contact of any significance once the convoy’s started.

So the navigator would be inside his darkened …

Well again – but everything’s pre-planned, it’s all done beforehand, so when we take off, and they have a log, everything’s written up in the log, and every time an officer – there’s a changeover of the watch on the bridge, or anywhere, they might

22:30 spend ten minutes talking together, your officer going off and your officer coming on, going through the routine, what’s got to be done, what’s happened, what’s going to happen, you know, it just doesn’t – “Well ta-ta, I’m going to bed now, see you tomorrow.” No, it’s a very well organised situation.

That plan would be highly, highly, highly secret?

Oh yes. That was why often, the captain would go ashore for a briefing, convoy briefing, perhaps the

23:00 morning the convoy was leaving or the day before, but he’d be given sealed envelopes, and the first one might be, he’s not permitted to open that until we’re outside the harbour. And that just tells him how they’ve got to form up, but then he’ll have another envelope to be opened on such-and-such a day, might be two days, three days later, at such-and-such a time, he opens it up, change of plan, or different – you know, it’s all pre-planned, they’re very organised.

23:30 It’s not just haphazard.

This is when the captain would come stumbling back on board with all these envelopes, highly confidential, secretive envelopes and a gut full of rum?

Well – that’s right, and they’ll be put in a big safe and locked away until such time as they had to be opened. It’s a very silent service, they don’t tell many people what they’re doing, the navy, particularly in wartime.

On board the corvettes, were

24:00 **they small enough that the CO would have direct involvement with the sailors?**

Yes, well he’d come up and wander round the bridge, or wander round the boat and see what’s going on, and have a chat to people, depends on your CO, some of them were loners. We only had one loner, he was a pretty sick boy though, eventually he was taken off to hospital. But on the whole, you know, they were just decent human

24:30 beings. One of the great things about the corvettes, you had the ‘permanent navy’, which is standard on all the big ships, the cruisers and destroyers and everything, and they were invariably permanent navy, but corvettes, ninety per cent of the fleet was just what we call HOs, ‘hostilities only’. We were just kids who signed up for the war in six months. And although we were in the navy and

25:00 subject to navy discipline, we didn’t have the rigidity of discipline and training that went into the bigger type of ships. So life was pretty laid back in a corvette really, unless you got – well you only need one crook officer or one crook captain, and they could make life pretty unbearable for us. But no, although we were subject to navy discipline, we had to

25:30 respond to it, it was much more laid back.

Was there a CO that you got to know well, or that you had a particular respect for?

Howard Goodwin, Jim McBride on the Ipswich, he – I think anyone who served in the navy knew of or knew him, he was a fantastic skipper, he'd been in the merchant navy.

So was it Jim McBride?

Jim McBride, yes. He was a

26:00 full time merchant navy captain, who had been on the reserve, was called up during the war, and he was skipper of – captain of HMAS Ipswich when I was on board. But he is a very well known character. But the chap we had on board was a schoolmaster from Adelaide, well the captain was taken off sick, and he was first lieutenant and they made him acting captain and eventually captain. But Howard Goodwin, he was

26:30 very fair, very honest, involved in everything in the boat, and every time we had a game of football, he'd say, "I'll umpire if you like." You know, he was into everything. And he wasn't a strict disciplinarian, and did his job according to KR [Kings Regulations]and AI [Admiralty's Instructions] but only as far as he thought the ship's company needed it, supervision, but he let us go our own way a lot. He was very friendly too.

27:00 **From your perspective, what makes a good CO of a small boat like that? What are the attributes of a good captain?**

It's not so much with the captain, it's what the crew want, you know, reasonable, honest. There are so many grounds for not dishonesty, but victimisation on a small boat, crew, and things, that you've got to have just

27:30 a sensible sort of a bloke that the majority of the crew like. And that's what they make themselves, you don't sort of buy it off a shelf, or read about them in books, they're just self-made men, who understand what their job is and what they've got to do, and some can do it and some just haven't got the ability to do it.

So you're saying a man who is willing and able to adapt to a crew, rather than have a crew adapt

28:00 **to them?**

Yes, he's got to remain a little bit aloof, and be distinct, but that doesn't mean he can't mix in, he's human. The more imbibed you get into the tradition and the permanent naval personnel, they get a sort of

28:30 a 'Captain Bligh' attitude in a lot of cases. And of course the captain cracks the whip. And if anyone disagrees or doesn't agree, soon knows who's captain. So no, navy doesn't make the man, the man makes the navy.

Can you say a little more about that

29:00 **that?**

Well, as I mentioned to you earlier on Simon [interviewer], we were all just kids out of school, a lot of spoiled kids, no discipline, no nothing, you know, they made men out of school kids. They're

29:30 a great bunch of mates, we have reunions every couple of years, Pauline comes along, you've met her. You wouldn't meet better men anywhere, they were just spoiled kids. I know Pauline will agree with me on one.

30:00 **And those spoiled kids make the navy?**

Well I wouldn't say make the navy, the character of the people that are in charge of us, taught us the ropes and it just carries on, that's where tradition comes into it. Don't learn it in books, it just happens,

30:30 it's the people make it happen, not books, or the rules or the regulations.

Can you draw a comparison or a parallel between that and your later experience in medicine? Is there a commonality there or a similarity of the traditions, other traditions?

Well no, I think you've just got to be human, treat everyone as equals. No-one's better than anyone else, just a matter

31:00 of we all came from the same place, we all go back to the same place. What we are here is just a part of the way, part of the journey. We're getting very

31:30 involved now, aren't we?

We are. Are you a religious man?

Yes, I go to church every Sunday. I'm not religious—

Were you as a seventeen-year-old?

Occasionally, yes most times, most times.

Did your wartime experience either enhance your faith or cause your faith to come into question in any way?

No, not really. The navy place

32:00 a terrific amount of importance on religion. Some of the nicest people I've met are religious ministers in the navy particularly. But no, I've always believed, I was taught and I still believe that this world is just too fantastic a place to have happened, I

32:30 don't think 'Topsy' just turned up, I think someone made it turn up, and I've always thought 'He's given us and given everyone in the world a lot', He's worth an hour a week just to go and say thanks. That's my attitude about religion, I don't care what religion people believe in, it's just that I'm not an atheist or an agnostic, I just can't understand how some people are. But that doesn't – just because you

33:00 go to church every Sunday, that doesn't mean you're a Christian.

How was peoples' faith played out on board? Was there space or room for that to occur?

Yes, every Sunday, a church service on the foredeck, everyone, different religions were catered for. Actually particularly in India, there was a reasonably good percentage of religions, European religions, despite the fact they were mostly Muslims and Hindus, but you know, church parade Sunday, everyone would go to church, of course people who had never been inside a church, but you got ashore for three or four hours, you got out of all the drudgery of scrubbing down the decks and washing the dishes after breakfast, church parade, you'd get away from the ship for a while. Half the chaps that went to church didn't know what they were doing there, except they got off the ship for a few hours. No, every one of them, it didn't matter what your religion was, they catered for Jews, Catholics, Church of England, it didn't matter, anyone, there was no animosity, you just had to say, "Yeah, I'm so-and-so, I want to go to church."

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34:30 **Was there someone who could lead ceremonies on board?**

The captain always has, it's the prerogative of all naval services, the merchant navy, the tradition over the years, the captain is responsible for religion on the vessels, he can even conduct marriages, burials, anything at all, he has a legal right to act as an ordained

35:00 minister. But none of them abuse it, I never heard or met anyone that abused – that is a captain or anyone, abusing it. The bigger ships would have their own chaplain, their own chaplain on the boat, and again they'd come from all religions, just depending what ship didn't have a chaplain at the time, but it didn't make any difference what their religion was, just the ship's chaplain,

35:30 and they'd conduct whatever service was appropriate at the time.

We spoke to a gentleman the other day who was talking about the army being a great equaliser, you know, he was saying that you could come in with bigotry but it couldn't last for long, you know, whether it was peoples' race or their religions and those sorts of things, you couldn't hold on to those hang-ups for very long, you had to get on and work as a team. Was that a similar experience to what you had on small ships?

36:00 Well, you can't live, particularly in confined places, with people for any length of time, if you hold any malice or bigotry or non-conformist sort of attitudes, you've just got to go along with the crowd or you very soon get blackballed and – no, I never struck anyone who was in any way objectionable or difficult or unliked on the ship.

36:30 I suppose they all fell over the side late at night, never found them.

I have heard of that occurring …

No, it never happened on our boat, but there's always cases of people slipping overboard at night, oh yes, in fact it's traditional. At least Captain Bligh used to do it openly, he'd just keel haul them in mid daylight.

37:00 **That I guess raises the question for me of homosexuality as well, and how that was either dealt with or perceived on board, was that something that was discussed?**

Well, it's something that people were aware of, but in all my Naval experience I never had any witness of any or even

37:30 knowledge of any experience that was going on. People talked about it, there were people who were a bit odd, but I'd say they'd confine their activities when they were ashore by themselves, they didn't try and – nothing was imposed on anyone, or nothing was – physically anyway, it's just impossible to find any private area, eighty blokes in this room, pretty hard to go and hide somewhere with a couple of mates, isn't it?

38:00 **When you say people talked about it, what do you mean?**

Well, no more than normal conversation. It wasn't a big matter of discussion at all.

Is it in the Kings rules and regs?

Oh yes, oh yes, all the rules are in there, what you can do and what you can't do. I think any service, I'm certain every service, you know

38:30 sodomy and that sort of behaviour is just intolerant, you know, shoot them at dawn, shoot first and ask questions later. No, I know the world's become a little bit more tolerant in recent years, but no, the rules haven't changed. I don't think they have, anyway.

Could I ask you, in terms of counselling,

39:00 **this is in the context of talking about the chaplain, was there someone not for formal counselling like psychological, but someone for the sailors you could go and see and discuss your problems with?**

Well, as I mentioned earlier, some time earlier, every Naval establishment has apart from duty watch that you serve on the ship, they have divisions, and

39:30 each division has its divisional officer, and he's supposed to be the father confessor if you've got a problem.

On board the ship though?

No, well there'd be our divisional officer. I think the only problems that I'm aware of, that ever came up with people, particularly married people with young children, a family and wife and that, and compassionate

40:00 leave because of sickness or you know, death in the family and things, that was always a problem. And someone to go and talk to, you know, you're out in the middle of the ocean five days from anywhere, and you get a message your wife's dying or something, that caused problems to some people. There was – the system went, yes, they could approach their divisional office and discuss it and he could take it to the captain and act on it. And there is someone there, but as I say, we were just

40:30 young kids, we sorted out our own problems, that was the impression I always had.

Was there a bosun on board?

A bosun?

Yes.

Oh yes, every boat had a bosun, yes.

What sort of role would they play?

The seamanship conduct of the boat, the boat's seaworthy, the ropes are all neat and tidy and coiled up, and the paintwork's right, and all the brass work's done, and just the routine cleanliness, a housekeeper, you'd say.

41:00 **Who then is the main link between the sailors and the officers?**

Sorry?

Who's the main link between the sailors and the officers?

The coxswain.

The coxswain?

The coxswain, he's usually a chief petty officer, and usually a permanent navy – you know, he's spent a lifetime – came in the navy as a boy at thirteen and he's been there for the last fifty years, sort of thing. But he's the policeman on board, for want of a better person. He does –

41:30 the midshipman or junior officer is sort of the captain's secretary, he does the routine paperwork, but anything related to the ship's company as opposed to the paperwork of the captain, the coxswain handles all that, he organises all the watches and all the divisions and leave rosters and everything, he's the chief organiser.

Tape 7

00:31 **We've talked a little bit about traditions today, but I wondered if there's any particular ceremonies that happened when you crossed the Equator or anything like that?**

That situation only occurs once, the first time I crossed the Equator was on the troop ship going to Colombo, and because of the situation we were in, being in a convoy, there was no activities

01:00 were allowed. They were all cancelled. But later on towards the end of the war, we were operating at a place called Manus, north of New Guinea, a little island, Manus Island, and we used to do anti-submarine patrols practically every night, go out and steam up and down, and Manus is almost on the Equator.

01:30 So in the course of a night, zigzagging, we were in the northern hemisphere so we probably crossed the Equator about twenty times every night we were out on patrol. So we never got round to doing anything about it. But on some ships I have seen it, yes, it was quite a procedure, old 'King Neptune' coming aboard and going through his tricks. But no, I never actually was involved,

02:00 I've seen, I witnessed but I was never involved in any 'crossing the line' services.

When you say you witnessed it, what happened? What did you see?

I wasn't very impressed, I thought it was overdone in the sense that the physical harm and damage and abuse that was given to the people on the receiving end, they were tarred and feathered and shaved and dunked in

02:30 sea baths, canvas swimming pools sort of things they rigged up on boats. No, I thought it was a very – it was out of hand, it was overdone a bit. Not against the tradition, but the way I saw it carried out I thought it was a little bit unnecessarily rough.

We talked a little bit before about working on the Equator and how hot it is, I wonder if you could just paint more of a picture of life on

03:00 **board when you're on the Equator and it's just so hot? Like how do you cope, how do you get things done, how does it make your job more difficult?**

Actually at sea the heat never really worried us, and the climatic conditions around the Equator, or equatorial area, very calm seas,

03:30 you rarely get rough seas, you don't get cyclones in the equatorial region, it's on the peripheries of those areas that you get them. So it's all invariably calm, you're most underway so you always get a sea breeze. The worst thing of the lot though is ships would break down at night, and that means everything was closed, the whole ship was locked up, fifty or sixty people asleep in an area like this,

04:00 the air would get a bit 'fuzzy'. We used to just sleep on deck, we'd just take our hammocks up and lay them out on the deck, and sleep on the deck at night.

Why did everything have to be closed up?

Wartime. See if you ran light, that's one thing, the ships were black out. But the other thing was ships are just a lot of rooms controlled or isolated by watertight doors,

04:30 and a submarine strikes, the first thing happens the ship will sink if the water gets in, so it was a routine, the whole ship would be closed down at night, not only no lights, but all the watertight doors and everything, so there's no air, no ventilation. It used to get pretty fuzzy down on the mess deck at night, so everyone used to go up and take their bed roll and just throw it down on the deck and sleep on there. And the other thing is,

05:00 you might get to bed at nine o'clock, well you're up again at half past eleven to go on watch at midnight, and then you'd get back to bed again at four o'clock in the morning, and they woke you at half past five for doing action stations, because night and morning at dawn and dusk, we had action stations was standard routine, and always has been on ships. Everyone turns out at their action station, so there's not much time for sleeping.

05:30 **What about during the day? Obviously the heat on deck must be unbearable when you're in the Equatorial region?**

No, I love it, always like it. Don't like cold conditions, I like tropical. But as I say, at sea the air

temperature's basically the water temperature, and the water temperature's only about twenty-six, twenty-seven

06:00 degrees the majority of times, so that's the air temperature, and it's quite pleasant. Never affected me, no-one ever seemed to be particularly concerned about it.

How big a problem was – if at all – was dehydration?

No, those sort of things – the lack of fresh food was probably the biggest – just eating tinned food mostly, and I think everyone missed their fresh food, vegetables and meats and things.

06:30 **What tinned food would you have?**

Bully beef, and when you sick of that, you'd have some more bully beef. And there was always another tin of bully beef, if you wanted something more.

What could you do to the bully beef to try and dress it up a bit? Like did you have …?

Some of the cooks weren't bad, they used to make – mix it with a sort of – with damper, you know, you'd have damper streaked through with sort of

07:00 almost like a pie type of thing, just made a damper, flour and water.

Is that what was called the tiddy oggy?

The tiddy oggy, see the tiddy oggies usually had jam in them. Again they were a type of, well damper, they'd be mixed with jam, jam drops.

Did you ever come across the double tiddy oggy, which had meat on one

07:30 **end and jam on the other?**

I know there was a tiddy oggy, it was like a pasty type of food, with meat in it, but mostly we used to refer to tiddy oggies as jam-filled type of damper, whereas the bully beef damper was more regarded like a pie type of thing.

Was there different kinds of food for action stations?

Yes.

08:00 coffee – cocoa was a standard food day and night in the navy, didn't matter how hot it was, what time of day it was, bit like – if you're on watch at night, it'd be two o'clock in the morning you'd be kye time, we used to call cocoa kye, you'd send down to the galley to boil up the kye. Kye consisted of coffee –

08:30 cocoa in tinned milk, concentrated gooey milk, you'd put the spoon in it and the spoon had to stand up straight, that was how strong it had to be. But no, that was very, very popular. Standard naval routine was the kye, on watch at night particularly.

09:00 We never went hungry but the food used to get very monotonous.

Did you ever – what can you tell me about Tokyo Rose [Japanese radio propaganda host]?

Never heard her. We were at sea most of the time and we were on radio blackout, that included civilian sets, because any radio, can't play on an aeroplane

09:30 because they not only receive, they transmit a signal, so you weren't allowed that type of radio on board, because of the radio silence we always used to maintain. So I don't remember ever hearing Tokyo Rose. I heard a lot about her, people talk about her, but I don't think I've actually heard her on the radio.

Do you think she had much of an impact on the sailors that you heard talk about her?

The Americans seemed to be very impressed with her, or dis-impressed, one or the other. The Americans used to talk about her

10:00 a lot. But Australians, we didn't see a lot of Australian service personnel, the air force, rarely if ever did we see anyone, and similar to the army, we had nothing to do with them and most of our time was spent as I said with the British Navy, operating from their bases with Royal Naval

10:30 personnel. We're a lonely crowd really.

Were there ever any times when you had British sailors on board your ship at all?

No, not as – occasionally you'd get an odd – someone would go off sick, we'd have a critical engine room personnel or a signalman or something,

11:00 so we'd get a replacement, it might be a Royal Navy chap. But normally they only lasted a few weeks till they got a replacement from Australia or from some Australian vessel. No, the tendency was to try and isolate countrymen in their own group. But often we'd tie up alongside English ships and go aboard

them, particularly if – medically as I mentioned earlier, if you had to see a

11:30 doctor invariably if someone was sick, there'd be a British warship in the harbour that would have a medical officer on board, so you'd go across to see the doctor. But apart from that no, there was not a lot of communication. We were a lonely mob, really. We did our own thing and that was it.

What was your impression of British sailors? I've heard a lot of jokes made about them, that they were not quite as clean as the Aussies. Is any of that true?

No, you live in England for any length of time, I

12:00 don't blame them for only having a bath once a week. But we used to have a bath every day and a couple of swims, you know, it was just a different lifestyle. And they didn't have the educational or the social living behaviour, the Australians had a much higher standard of – both educationally – they didn't seem to have the

12:30 intuition and the individualism that the Australian service personnel had. They were all right, we used to tolerate them, but we'd always remind them that they needed a good bath, they all smelt.

I was wondering if you ever had any pets on board?

No, they weren't favoured, because of the varying situations they were in. But we had a little monkey

13:00 on the east coast of Africa, we picked up in Mombassa I think it was, for a while. But it was always a bit of problem even back in those days, in wartime days, we were completely on the move, we were going from country to country and area to area, and even though it was wartime, customs don't like pets being transported around from go to woe, so it was never encouraged and some places, you know, if you came in and they

13:30 saw a pet on the boat, it just disappeared, they just put it in a bag and took it ashore.

So were these inspectors, were they navy personnel or were they …?

Usually customs personnel. Even though we were in the navy and we didn't have passports for anything, we used to – had to have clearance, what they called 'critique'. Critique is a situation where you go into any foreign port, the ship has to be inspected by customs officials and a doctor, to see you haven't got any plague or

14:00 infectious diseases on board and everything, and even though it was wartime and it was all a bit laissez faire, there were still bureaucrats, you know, in these places, doing their job, and some of them as soon as they saw a pet they'd just it into a sugarbag and off it went.

When you did have these pets on board, how did the animals cope with life at sea?

No problem, no.

Any funny monkey

14:30 **stories or cat stories?**

No, they were just – they'd eat anything of course, but anything edible you wouldn't leave lying round, it'd disappear very quickly. Apart from that, with a monkey on board, you know, a bit of chocolate or anything like that you left lying around, for sure you could turn round, it had gone.

Were pets on board good for morale?

I don't think it had any effect really.

15:00 No, we had a pretty hectic sort of a life, and we didn't really have time for those things, we had more of what we considered more important things to do. No, I don't know of anyone who was upset that we didn't have a pet on board, or anyone went overboard about having a pet on board. No, it wasn't part of our lifestyle.

HMAS Toowoomba, what kind of ship was that? Could you describe her?

15:30 Well I spent more time in Toowoomba than the other two vessels I served in. It was a happy ship, had three captains, the first one was good, he went off sick, the second one was hopeless, he went off sick, fortunately, and the last one was this Howard Goodwin, the school teacher from Adelaide who was 'wavy navy' as they call it, reserve navy, and Howard was very good value.

16:00 **What kind of ship was it?**

Toowoomba? It was another corvette. They were all – the three vessels I served in were all the Bathurst class design corvettes. But Toowoomba was – yes, we have reunions regularly, I usually wander round to the table and have a chat. The Ipswich people we know better, I spend a bit of time with them, but we always go to

16:30 reunions, we always sit with the Toowoomba table, they're a great bunch.

Is one corvette the same as another, or do they …?

Structurally yes, and the ship's company too, similar, most of them are just wartime children that have volunteers for the navy. No, everyone will tell you that served on the corvette, they're all different, you know, every

17:00 ship was different, but when you bring it down to bread and butter, they're all the same, it's just the people that live in them, some mix better than others, and you get to know some better than others.

When you moved over to Toowoomba, you went from being an ordinary seaman to an able seaman, is that right?

Well, promotion to that stage was largely based on time. If you were under eighteen, you were an ordinary seaman second class.

17:30 After you were eighteen, you became an ordinary seaman, automatically, which mean an extra two and sixpence a day, I think, wages, that was always handy. But then after you'd been a minimum, I think it was nine months as an ordinary seaman, you could apply to sit for an exam for an able seaman. And that meant more pay, so naturally everyone did that, and

18:00 although I don't think anyone ever failed, but a few of them were told to go back and study up a few things a bit more.

So how much more money – I mean do you remember what your wage was when you became an able seaman?

Something around six shillings a day, which is the equivalent of sixty cents a day now. Wouldn't go far, would it?

Can you just tell me a little bit more about your time around Burma, at Chittagong? Could you describe

18:30 **Chittagong for me?**

Very hot and very muggy, rainforest and wild bush country and teak, right down, no beaches, very poor, the people are very poor, no development of any significance, although Chittagong is a city, it was just a native

19:00 village really with a lot of people in it. Very basic war facilities, we didn't go ashore there very much because it's terribly muggy, it was right in the middle of the wet season, and there was nothing to do when you went ashore there, you couldn't go down the beach, couldn't walk round the town and look at the shops, and you couldn't – it was very primitive. Calcutta was a more established town, you could always find something to do in Calcutta. In its own right

19:30 Calcutta was a very pretty city, probably the prettiest of cities, Bombay is just another big city, Colombo, but no, it's a very pretty town, Calcutta.

Did you find your first time going to Bombay and Calcutta, did you find it quite confronting, the poverty?

No, because we had experienced bits of it in other places we'd been to before we arrived there.

20:00 The poorer areas of Calcutta were certainly I suppose eye-opening might be one thing, somewhere you wouldn't enjoy living in, but everyone seemed reasonably happy, despite all their woes and problems. I guess you tolerate what you're used to, and that's all they ever knew, so they just kept living that way.

20:30 **Can you just talk me through now, where you were, what you were doing when you heard that the war was over?**

Yes. I was on the bridge, on the helm of the boat when the – I remember the radio operator came up to the bridge, they'd sent out a

21:00 clear word, message, to all vessels, which in fact was in clear, because everything used to be in code, they used to have to code it and transmit it and decode it and everything. He came up and just handed this radio message in clear language, you know, 'Cease hostilities against Japan, maintain all

21:30 wartime precautions against surprise attack'. That was just sent out to every ship, 'cease hostilities against Japan'. That was it. We were on passage from Manus Island to a place called Morotai in Halmahara, which is down south of the Philippines,

22:00 at that particular time. Yes, I remember it quite well. And the skipper broke naval regulations that night, he issued a bottle of beer to everyone at the evening meal, and we were still at sea, couldn't do much about it, but somewhere along the way everyone always had a

22:30 pair of civilian gear or some sort of shirt, or a pair of shorts or trousers which was definitely not uniform. So everyone was walking round the ship in some sort of civilian clothes, doing their watches and things. It all went over as a big laugh, everyone was happy about everything. But there was no

other way of celebrating, it was another three days before we got into harbour, by the time we got into

23:00 Morotai, we thought we'd be there for a while, we just refuelled and off we went to Subic Bay in the Philippines and across to Hong Kong in China. So we never had any time to celebrate it.

Did you find it hard to believe that finally it was all over?

The suddenness of it, yes, you know, we all realised that America was going to win the war,

23:30 going to lose a million or a million and a half troops doing it, but everyone had a twelve months time limit on it, but when they dropped the first bomb on Hiroshima everyone was walking round the ship going, "What's an atomic bomb?" sort of thing.

What did you think at atomic bomb was, and what effect it would have?

Well some of us had studied physics at school and had some idea what the impact –

24:00 but the devastation that it caused, none of us ever realised it till months later when we got back to Australia and saw photos and things of the devastation it caused.

After you saw the impact of it, what were your thoughts then, and what are your thoughts now about the use of atomic bombs in war?

Well I'm all against war, to start with, unfortunately, nothing's

24:30 ever solved by a war, but there's only one way to convince some people. But things aren't right, so that's the only way man has been able to solve it, is by going to war. But no, I'd like to see it banned for all time, but if you're reasonable, look at the history of the world, there's always been wars and there always will be, as far as I can see.

25:00 But I'm all against it, I think anyone who ever served in the services will agree with that. I don't think any sane person would agree that there's any future in it. But no-one's come up with a better answer yet.

How long did it take for you to come back to Australia and get discharged?

I got back to Australia in

25:30 about January or February, '46, and I got discharged on 30th May, '46.

Did you have any idea what you'd do with your life?

Oh yes, I'd made up my mind as soon as the war was over, when I was still in the navy, and said I'd go back to school and go to university. That was hard work. I did – see I'd

26:00 left school very early in the piece, time-wise for schooling it was Intermediate class, the equivalent of – I didn't even finish year ten. To get into university you had to matriculate which means year twelve, so I had year ten, year eleven and year twelve to repeat or to do, and

26:30 they said, "It'll take you three years." I said, "I'll do it in three months." So a few arguments about that with the powers that be, the High Commissioner of Rehabilitation or something. Anyway I did my own thing and I did three years schooling in three months, matriculated, and applied and got into medicine, went to university.

27:00 **So you eventually finished university and you became – followed in your father's footsteps and became a doctor. I was just wondering, in terms of your career – you've had two careers, what was more satisfying or rewarding on a personal level? Your career in medicine or your career in the navy?**

Life, enjoyed it all. The only thing I never enjoyed was some of the schools I was sent to. Not the schools, but some of the

27:30 teachers. Some were excellent, the majority of teachers I had were excellent, but some of them, no way.

Was there anything from your years in the navy that helped you in your medical career?

Well, I think so, much more mature, much more tolerant of things, behaviour. No, there's

28:00 nothing wrong with naval schooling.

Did you find it hard to settle into civilian life after your navy time?

No, I was too busy, studying, and that was the day I graduated, wasn't it, we got married, we didn't have a cracker to our name, so I had to go and get a job and go working, then we had family and –

28:30 it just never stops. Just kept going.

From your medical career, what's a highlight for you? What's the thing that you're most proud

of?

I enjoyed medicine, but medicine's become terribly pigeon-holed now, everyone

29:00 has their own discipline, you're just a surgeon or you're a physician or – everything's pigeon-holed into just a simple discipline. When I did medicine it was – you did everything, you delivered babies, sewed people up, did a bit of surgery and everything, it's all changed now, medicine's entirely

29:30 different. I wouldn't like to be doing medicine now, not the way that it's practised, or the way it's regimented. But I don't think I know any disgruntled doctors, they all seem to be quite happy in it.

What's the most positive thing that medicine gave you on a personal level?

30:00 You meet a lot of kind people, and a lot of thankful people, and like everything, it's the good times, the bad times, but no, yes, I was quite happy practising medicine.

And what's the best thing you take from your time in the navy?

30:30 Mateship. And the tolerance of people, how you get seventy or eighty people, just pull them out of the air and chuck them into a lifestyle, stuck together in a steel can for months at a time. They all mixed in and joined in and

31:00 made fun for everyone.

Do you need a war or do you need to be in the services to have the full mateship experience? I mean have you come close to that in your civilian life with mates that you made outside of the service?

No, I think basically it doesn't matter what you're doing, as long as you've got the right attitude towards life in general, whether you're in the services or whether you're just a civilian or whether you're a doctor, or whatever it is, it's just your

31:30 attitude, and the attitude of the people that you're involved with.

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

Yes. I think it's the best thing that ever happened to Australia, if you can call war experiences. It's a night of the children, they've got something now

32:00 to be proud of, the way the youth of Australia have got behind Anzac Day, I think it's part of the growing up of the country, it's one of the best things ever happened to Australia.

What's it for you personally on Anzac Day though? What's that day about for you?

I have 'rum and milk', I'm not allowed to have milk, and I don't like rum.

32:30 But no, the dawn service, a couple of mates, we go along. That's very moving, very impressive. Waving the flag as we march down to the Cenotaph at eleven o'clock in the morning, go down the pub and have a few beers and a game of two-up. It's become

33:00 part of the Australian lifestyle, I think it's great, because it's – the effect that it's had on the young generation, I think it's fabulous.

Are there particular people that you think of more than others on Anzac Day that have really touched you?

No, no, not anyone in particular,

33:30 it's – it brings all – well, there's always drop-outs and non-conformists, but as I say it's given the people of Australia something – bringing them together, it's making better citizens out of it all,

34:00 they realise that it's just not a place to live in.

I wonder why there been more interest in Anzac Day in terms of young people in recent years? Do you have any views on why that might be the case?

Well, I wouldn't say view so much as ideas, and they're only rough ideas. But see we live in the best country in the world,

34:30 there's not many people who'd disagree with that, that gives them something to hang their hat on and say, "Well this is one of the reasons it's the best country in the world." Because the story of not only Gallipoli but the Australian pioneering spirit back to convict days,

35:00 it's something they can hang their hat on and be proud of.

Do you think there should be more education in the schools about you know, the military history of Australia? Do you think people appreciate you know, the men and women who've served their country? Is that an important part of education?

35:30 I suppose Rome wasn't built in a day, you can't build a country out of bricks and mortar overnight, and this is why I'm a traditionalist, you've got to have tradition, you've got to have things for people to look up to, and admire and respect. This is why I think Anzac Day is probably the best thing that ever happened to Australia, it's

36:00 given the younger generation something they can say, "I'm an Australian, I'm proud of that." That's just my own idea.

I guess just moving on from that, is that part of that sort of history I guess, the reason why it was important for you to speak to us today? On a personal level why be a part of this

36:30 **archive? Why is it important to you?**

I've always believed that you get a lot out of life, and you should always put something back in. A lot of people, particularly the mates I served with in the navy, put in a lot for me and I feel that I'm giving something

37:00 back for their effort and their friendship, for everything they've given me. That's just my way of saying thanks, thanks mate.

Are there any final words you'd like to say Dick, or anything that we haven't covered today that you feel is important?

No, I think

37:30 what I just said sort of sums it up. Mateship, friendship, that you build up over the years and the attitude that you can always put something back, not just take everything for granted, and show your appreciation by

38:00 helping other people

So if your grandchildren came to you and said that they wanted to join one of the services today, what would your advice be?

Best news I've ever heard. They're good grandchildren, they're well disciplined, well behaved, but the life, mateship, friendship, discipline,

38:30 just smartens up growing kids. A bit of smartening up never hurt anyone.

Well thank you so much for sharing your life with us today.

Thank you very kindly, you've been very gracious. Are you going to have that glass of wine now?

Well, I suppose, I'll have a little glass, yes.

Yes.

INTERVIEW ENDS