

# Australians at War Film Archive

## George Fisher - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/216>

### Tape 1

00:35 **George, as I said if you wouldn't mind taking us on a little memory lane, short stop tour through your life, where you were born for example and went to Primary School?**

Yeah, I was born in Tasmania, in, parents are still living at Geeveston, that's where I was born, there and we shifted to

01:00 Flinders Island and the Furneaux Group and lived at Whitemark and I was two years of age, I'm led to believe and my father was the sergeant in the police, so he was stationed at Geeveston and there he got a transfer to Flinders Island. And we live there for many years. I started school there, at Whitemark at the state school and it was multiple

01:30 class, when I say multiple there was different classes in the one room in those days. And yeah I spent quite a few years there. And my sisters also, I had twin sisters, they were attending school there, they were quite many, you know about 6 years older than what I was but anyway I, we shifted from there from, Dad got a transfer and

02:00 went back to the mainland and he was stationed at different spots around Tasmania. For a period we just stayed on the island because he had a property there, a farm at Emita and he, so we stayed there for a period of time and then when we, 'cause he had to go to the mainland on Tasmania and anyway, yeah. We went, from the islands we went to

02:30 live in Launceston. But I attended other schools; I attended Blue Rocks there on Flinders Island, Wallace on Flinders Island. Anyway then I finally left, I was attending Saint Pats College for a couple of years in Launceston and that's where I finally finished my schooling, and I finished it at a pretty early age then. And

03:00 so, which was necessary. So then I, we were living there you know with Mum and my sisters and anyway I went to, I finally went to live in Queensland. I went to Cape York Peninsula to live with a family, an uncle of mine, Uncle Joe, he had the Black Cat Gold Mine at a place called Wenlock and right up

03:30 the central Cape York, which was in those days I think it was around about - the family sent me up there to learn a trade, to learn the mining and that sort of thing and anyway it was a very remote area and you couldn't access it at all, very difficult to leave there and those days excepting by plane, if the plane could get in and it was very, very remote. And I spent

04:00 quite a few years, at one stage I did leave and I knocked around Queensland for around about 6 months but I finally went back to the goldfields and then of course the war had broken out in 1939 while we were there and of course that. Actually going back to, on the way I turned 15, on the way, on the ship the old [HMAS] Canberra on the way to Cairns

04:30 from Melbourne to then eventually go to Cape York but I, then it was more or less, the Japanese were not at that stage in the war but the war broke out in 1939 and of course I was too young to go to the war etc and so forth. There were quite a few on the goldfields that did enlist eventually, went to war

05:00 and some were killed and that sort of thing, but a lot of them survived. Different forces they joined. But anyway I - we finally had to - it was like a sort of, in a way it was like scorched earth, because the Japanese were over in New Guinea there and they had come into the war.

**Can you just tell me what you meant by scorched earth?**

Well,

05:30 it wasn't actually, well I say scorched earth, it wasn't anything was burnt or demolished but most things, I remember we were burying stores and to my knowledge, my uncle and my cousin, Joe and Stan and Norm stayed on and they sort of had to dismantle everything practically, the mine, they had a big

crushing plant and boilers and god knows what. But I think the army also took a lot of them and took them away from

06:00 there. I'm led to believe that but I remember one stage we were burying petrol and other supplies there for the mill you know and so then we finally, including myself, went to Portland Roads, which was the port there, where we'd picked up the shipping and supplies came in,

06:30 to get the ship down to, south to Brisbane and or to Cairns, I think it may have called in at Cairns or Townsville, I'm not sure but it eventually went on to Brisbane. But I actually, while I was there, there was a small, I would say about a forty foot type ketch or an auxiliary type of ketch

07:00 anyway and they called in to pick up fresh water - they were out of New Guinea and they were evacuating New Guinea because I think that might have been in 19 - I'm trying to recollect now - that was around about not long after the Japanese had come into the war. But they made such fast advances you know over into Malaya and down through Indonesia [Dutch East Indies], oh it was just devastating

07:30 really.

**It was quick, wasn't it?**

Oh, it was so quick and they, the next Ambon and etc and so. So the advances they had made were very, very fast. Anyway, I picked up this, asked them could I get a lift, and one of the chaps onboard the ketch, there were about 4 of them I think, there was, they said yes. They said, "Certainly, you've got to work," and I

08:00 said, "I don't mind work, I love work," and so anyway to Cairns and it was most enjoyable. And I remember the one chap, he sort of seem to be in charge, there was Sydney Chance, he was a police magistrate apparently over in New Guinea and the other, there was another chap called Harvey, he was worked in the Timber industry there and they were getting out of New Guinea, there were two Thursday Island

08:30 indigenous people that had been pearl divers or working for the Japanese actually when they were pearl diving at Thursday Island and they'd picked them up, they'd called in and they knew the coastline and it was a most enjoyable journey in a way. It was quite interesting excepting when we got to, arrived at, the entrance to Cairns and nobody knew the channel into Cairns,

09:00 we were crisscrossing it and oh it was strange. It was fun really, if you think about you know. I remember on our journey down we called in and stayed a night at Cooktown 'cause they had trouble with the shaft in the motor to the propeller and we had to get some repairs done, and I always remember that I was asleep because it was very hot and I was asleep on the deck out on

09:30 the back of the boat and the bell rang, the church rang very, very loudly and that was Cooktown's air-raid siren and but fortunately it was the Japanese plane, a bomber, but it was what we used to call a Biscuit Bombers, the Douglas D3s but then of course the all clear went after they realise that fortunately and more than probably. But

10:00 anyway, more than probably wouldn't have missed us anyway lying there, we were the only boat there or ketch. Anyway we, yeah so I came south to Brisbane.

**Was that when you decided to join the merchant navy?**

Yeah, no it wasn't at that stage, no see I was only, I was 17 so to join any services at 17, I hadn't seen my parents for

10:30 quite several years, from when I left Tasmania. And I had to get permission from them, they no doubt would have given me permission but I hadn't seen them and didn't matter of writing and paraphernalia but I came to, we came to Brisbane. Eventually, I came down of course and then my uncle owned a house in Brisbane,

11:00 where my aunt had come, aunt and my cousin's wife Eleanor and she had a little child Jeff, he was only a baby and they came down to the home in Brisbane for safety reasons and etc. And I built them an air raid, a shelter and I always remember it was, and looking back on that time it was, I think a

11:30 weatherboard home or mainly timber structure, maybe fibro cement, fairly old place and it was high set, which they are up there, a lot of those homes at that time and I built this air raid, as I say an air-raid shelter is a big area in the ground, I forget now it was about 6 or 8 by 8 and I remember I worked pretty hard and dug it all out and put it right down and I put some good timber structure

12:00 over it, so in case of an air-raid, they would have somewhere to come down and shelter. But I place it right centre under the house, so if the house would have been hit, the poor souls would have been incinerated, I never thought of that till later.

**Well possibly they would never have been able to get out, with all the timber piled on top of them.**

I'm sure Stella [Interviewer] they wouldn't have, no. But I thought, and my uncle wrote to me and thanked me very much for doing that for them and you know

12:30 I never ever saw him again.

**Well, I bet it made them feel safe?**

Beg your pardon?

**I bet it made them feel safe?**

Yeah well, they would too with the, fortunately I have a letter there, actually my cousin, Eleanor is my cousin's wife and they live in Darwin and they're both still alive, he's well up in his mid eighties and she's eighty-two, eighty-three, eighty-two I think, and anyway

13:00 and a lovely couple. But she wrote a letter, Joe sent me a letter that she'd written to her parents at that time and she was mentioning that the, they were more probably practising you know in case of an air-raid and the lights, the searchlights, she said what a spectacular scene

13:30 and this is mentioned in, the letter was so funny, and I thought my god, good job there weren't the aircraft, you know the Japanese bombers.

**It was a real fear though, wasn't it everybody's fear?**

Yeah, well they were so close you know, that Coral Sea Battle turned them back and we turned them back, the Australians were the first. The Australian servicemen were the first to turn the Japanese and that was at Milne Bay, I think and the Kokoda

14:00 Trail, which was, the talk of it, as a very, very ferocious battlefield really through those ranges and people don't realise.

**This is such a rich story about all the business going on up in North Queensland - I'm looking forward to asking you a lot about it. I wonder if you will jump forward for me now and give me a bit of an idea about when you joined up and also you went into the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] as well.**

I did yes,

14:30 sure. Yeah, I just, I think I wanted to, 'cause I always loved the sea growing up in the Island, so I, perhaps in my mind, I'm trying to recollect back at that time that the first I knew that I could join the merchant navy or get you know on a ship in the merchant navy. I wanted,

15:00 at that stage I was only 17 right, now I turned 18 in April and I think I had to wait for a ship. Somehow, eventually came to Newcastle because that's where quite a big shipping port at that time, so I applied for a, to get into the merchant navy. I had to go in and I was a "Peggy", what they call a "Peggy" or a deckboy, that was the start of it.

15:30 All I was on deck and so I joined that and I was waiting some period of time for a ship, the Iron Crown was the ship that I eventually

**What kind of ship was the Iron Crown?**

She was a merchant ship, yeah. I just exactly I'm not too sure of the tonnage.

**Was that a really silly question of mine? If you're in the merchant navy you go on a merchant ship. I just wonder if there were different versions of it.**

No, no the merchant navy, there's merchant ships, that's the merchant fleet. And but anyway, yeah I waited, I worked out at a job and it must have been near Williamstown waiting for to get a ship and I was waiting there, I was working there

16:30 for a short period of time.

**Down in Victoria?**

No, in Newcastle, out of Newcastle.

**Oh Williamstown, New South Wales.**

Williamstown Air Force base, I think it is. 'Cause there, it was at a hotel I was a general sort of roustabout and helping there and anyway, I got a call to the merchant navy. But there's something I must mention.

17:00 This, it's very funny because I had to do a general medical check to go in. And I remember I had to do an eyesight test and there was a retired ship's captain, I'm sure he was, who came in an eyesight test it was under, if I recollect it was very dark little area, I think it was under a staircase sort of well you know or whatever it was very dark, and they had the three lights, you know port, starboard and the red, green and white

17:30 masthead light. And anyway I didn't realise at the time, I'm slightly colour-blind and I couldn't distinguish between the white light and the green one and it was so funny really, I was saying, "I think that's green" and he was looking and I actually got him confused in the end. And he said to me, "You got

me

18:00 bloody well confused now", he said, "I can't tell whether it's white or green." He said, "No there's nothing wrong with your eyes." He said, "That light is a little bit dull that green, he said you're ok." And I, apparently that was the first indication that I was slightly colour-blind.

**'Cause I imagine that would be quite a serious problem for a sailor, you really do need to be accurate at about what your looking at out at sea.**

I'm only very, apparently very, lights no problems,

18:30 no problems at all, 'tis important though.

**What about when you wife said, "Do you like my green dress or my white dress more?"**

Yeah, I don't think (UNCLEAR)

**I think all men are colour-blind when it comes to fashion.**

Yeah, they are too really. Men apparently are much more prone, women are much more better with colours.

**Apparently?**

Yeah, a lot of men are colour-blind slightly, colour-blind and they don't

19:00 realize it.

**Anyway sorry, I threw you off the track there. So you got on the Iron Crown?**

Yeah, I joined the Iron Crown in May, early May, I just forget the date. Anyway yeah, it was my first ship I was on in the merchant navy. We sailed for Whyalla with cargo

19:30 and no doubt the, I'm not sure what the cargo would have been. Whatever the cargo was, I can't actually recollect the one what it was, I know we were bringing in manganese or iron ore back. Anyway, we sailed to Whyalla and picked up our shipping, our load for the ship and cause on the return

20:00 journey of course.

**We are on the Iron Crown and I've got a bad feeling about the Iron Crown.**

Yeah, yeah we were, we were torpedoed on our return journey. On my first ship of the merchant navy and on the return journey back to Sydney,

20:30 not Sydney, I beg your pardon - to Newcastle.

**Well, there's lots to ask about that.**

Yeah.

**Was that the precursor to your decision to join the RAN?**

Well yeah, it would have been definitely, I would definitely after that, I certainly wanted to have a go back, oh there were no options there. The first, think I joined the same month, that was on the 4 June we were sunk,

21:00 torpedoed. Oh I was one of the fortunate ones to, out of a few to get off, to survive.

**Can you tell then, if we can jump forward a bit to joining the RAN and what you did as part of the navy?**

Yeah, I was a stoker, I went into the engine room because of my slight colour-blindness apparently they, I was on the upper deck in the merchant navy

21:30 learning to be a seaman, you do, but they said, "I'm afraid with your slightly colour-blind we couldn't allow you to you know be a seaman", and anyway I joined and I was quite happy because it was a very good branch of the navy. We always were proud of our branch, the engine room and the stokers. What's a stoker, they called them stokers but later on

22:00 we call stoker mechanics.

**Hard work?**

It was hard work because the last ship I had was a ship called the Po Yang, it was allied Chinese line they called them in the navy and there's an association of them now.

**Is that right?**

Beg your pardon?

**Is that right?**

Yeah, I've got the papers here down there, I'll show you.

**Ok**

22:30 **and were there any other ships you were on?**

Yeah on, was on the cruisers the [HMAS] Adelaide, but when I first joined the navy, do you want me to mention that?

**Sure.**

Right, when I first joined the navy I was very anxious to get back, get into the front line at that stage because I had lost a lot of shipmates in the merchant navy, they just didn't have a hope because she just broke her back and we were gone in a minute, just

23:00 straight down practically. So you could imagine how I felt, so I did wait for, I had to wait till September. I joined in the June, waiting for a call up, then they called for volunteers for a special force of navy at Flinders and of course I volunteered, which with many others and was called the, was known as the Assault Association, they're a commando force.

23:30 Anyway, it was a special force in the navy and it was not, it was a bit of a hush, hush but see quite a bit of secret about it, and we went to Newcastle, out of Newcastle, Nelsons Bay and we trained there. We did all types of training. Mainly, we were involved with the landing craft and trained at,

24:00 and there was an American force there too. They had the barges there too, down at Port Stephens. Anyway, yeah they, they were very, we're very proud of that association, you know the Assault Group, and they eventually, I went back to general service.

24:30 Things were not moving after we were trained and we were waiting for three ships, which to be more or less to my knowledge to be brought into service to carry the barges and troops into the landings and that type of into the warfare, into the front line. Anyway, the [HMAS] Westralia, [HMAS] Kanimbla and [HMAS] Manoora were the ships. But yeah, I went from there I applied with a lot of others

25:00 to go back to general service and do a course to get you know things, and I was very anxious to get into the fighting you know, I really had a chip on me shoulder about what they'd done to me, to myself, you know I'd survived that but a lot of me mates hadn't in the merchants. So that was it and yeah my ship, I went to the Adelaide from (UNCLEAR) went back and did a general course, general service,

25:30 and yeah I joined the, she was a cruiser.

**How long were you on the Adelaide?**

Oh I was on her for, I just can't recollect. Oh maybe 9, 10 months something like that. Maybe, I'm not sure actually...

**Thereabouts.**

Thereabouts, I would say and she was an old cruiser but a very, a very good one too. She was a good ship, I enjoyed the Adelaide,

26:00 a happy ship, and they were a good crew on her you know, a lot of them came from South Australia, Adelaide and Tasmania, and I had some very good friends but I haven't, I don't think caught up with any of them yet since that particularly lot. Then I, we took, we went, brought her from the Western Australia during the war and they paid her off in Sydney and then

26:30 I had, then I joined the Po Yang.

**And you said that was part of the allied association?**

The allied, China yeah, it's actually the information in the kit, you know allied yeah, HMAS Po Yang, the navy took of, there were six of them. They're taken over, perhaps there were several more too.

**Did they sequester those from the Chinese fleet?**

Look,

27:00 I'm not, I'm not too sure on the history of that but I think I should have studied that and give you more

**Oh that's okay**

Yeah, I think the Allied Chinese Ships, there's quite a lot of history, they're an armament ship, the Po Yang had been with the 7th Fleet and she'd been involved in the attack on the,

27:30 you know the Philippines campaign the Lingayen Gulf through there, she was in all the theatres of war and the Pacific area, that's where I was, when I was on her. I wasn't involved in the Ling Yang Gulf, I think she was mainly with the 7th Fleet then, she was an armament ship so you know, you can imagine.

28:00 I was in the engine room and she was a coal burner and we was in the theatres of war on an armament

ship after coming off the Po Yang, it was a little bit nervy at times.

**I bet. So where were you at the, at armistice, where were you at the end of the war?**

Morotai

**Ah**

In the Halmaheras they're called. Yeah.

**Like very close to the vicinity of the signing of the papers and so on?**

No,

28:30 yeah I remember that the particular night, if I recollect of that particular signing of the, not the signing of the armistice, when we got news that the war had surrendered because and it was at night because the lights, the Morotai was a big base, was one of the major bases in the

29:00 South West or in the Pacific area in which they launched quite a few, I think they launched the attack, the retaking of the Philippines from Morotai, the armada you know, the huge fleets would sort of go out, the battle fleets and bombard the area before they went in. And I think Morotai, the big air force base there and they also, the Borneo Campaigns were launched from Morotai.

29:30 So she was quite a big, a lot of activity there but yeah. And these searchlights went up and we thought it might have been another bit of, someone said the Japs had put an aircraft together 'cause there were a lot of - the island were, they were all cut off the Japanese - and they didn't to my knowledge anyway and launch any bombardments or campaigns. You know they

30:00 had, I don't think had any supplies, I think they were pretty well short of food. Anyway yeah, and we thought it was and it wasn't fortunately, it was just everything, the sirens were going and it was a great night, so yeah. And it was wonderful aboard the ship because a bit of a navy tradition all the upper deck, the officers, the skipper and the first lieuty [Lieutenants] and the engineers, etc, you know they all came

30:30 down and waited on us, on the lower deck. Yeah, it was a great party, beer came from everywhere.

**Do they call that splice the main brace?**

Don't know, no I don't think so, no I don't. Well, it possibly could be, I don't, not to my knowledge.

**That would have been fantastic?**

Yeah, I always remember that because you know normally they're on the upper deck and you're on the lower deck and of course, that's,

31:00 navy's very much tradition there and that sort of thing and you don't, oh well you do, what we say, you do have communication between the two, but there are two distinct you know areas you know. But they did come down and waited on the lower deck and we all got drunk together. Actually, it was a great night and food came and they supplied all the grog. Anyway, back to normal again the following day.

31:30 **When did you get out of the navy?**

On the 15, I think, my final discharge was on the 15 April 1946.

**Close to your birthday by the sounds of it?**

Yep, it was two days after it.

**Wow, what a nice birthday present.**

Yeah, well, yes it was I suppose, yeah.

**And could you give me a bit of an idea of, 'cause you got out quite a few months after the whole, you know the campaigns were all over. And did you head back to Tasmania?**

No, I didn't actually, no. Yeah, no what happened, why it was sort of April, we were, can I go back to that part, Morotai, the armistice and that's where they apparently - we were led to believe - they'd brought the

32:30 Japanese, the commander and chief there of the Japanese, apparently there was a, I'm not positive on this but I think there was about 100,000 of them grouped around those areas, that area, Japanese in that islands of course, all their lines of communication, I don't mean communication but supplies, they weren't really a problem. Well, they weren't a problem I don't think to any of our servicemen and services there, because they'd been pushed right back

33:00 to their homeland practically. And but I, we were actually; we came south to get rid of supplies, or what we had aboard armaments, etc and so forth. And mainly being a merchant ship we had to take supplies back to Ambon and the, where they,

33:30 what do they (UNCLEAR) Ambon, anyway it's off the west coast of New Guinea there and it was a big Japanese naval base. Ambon not, I beg your pardon, I say naval base, one of their big bases, that's where they were gonna, one of their invasion forces were coming in to northern part of Australia.

**Close hey?**

Oh, so very close and they had all their marines there and that and they slaughtered our fellows there,

34:00 that was called, our fellows, the [Gull] Force and they actually, it was terrible the shocking conditions of the POWs [Prisoners of War] went through there and what they did to our army fellows, our [Gull] Force fellows over in the airstrip and they just butchered them, but

34:30 and killed them all. But anyway, yeah we took supplies in there and that and they, and that's what we were doing - we were sort of running back with over in Borneo where we picked up some, early in the part we picked up some prisoners of war, not POWs, yeah they had been, they were Dutch women and children and brought them down to Macassar, I think it was Macassar,

35:00 no, we might have taken them on to Darwin too.

**Women and children, was it?**

Yeah, women and children yeah. It was funny, we thought they all had berri-berri, stomachs like, you know all the stomach swells right out like they're pregnant but it wasn't apparently berri-berri. Yeah, so and we stayed up there until, into 1946 we stayed from that particular time

35:30 from the sign of the armistice.

**That's a very interesting piece to talk to you about, I guess 'cause a lot of people after the war finished were just keen to get home and get on with it. But those 6 months must have been quite fascinating, because the war's never really over in a day is it, it takes months?**

Oh of course, it takes some time. I remember Ambon

36:00 especially, because Ambon being sort of flat, Ambon, they yeah the, yes it was very interesting sort of there. And I always remember there was, they told us to, there was, apparently the Japanese forces that were there had never known really a defeat because

36:30 they'd come right down through apparently Indonesia, etc and so forth and they were all raring and primed ready for the invasion of Australia and then they'd been cut off and sort of left there isolated you know. But apparently there were crack marines, etc and you know troops but and they did our occupation force, that went in, firstly they sort of, there were a lot of Japanese there and marines and they sort of

37:00 outnumbered our force - were 3 to, 4 to 1 you know, so it was some time before you know, you'd be, their attitude was I think rather a bit arrogant, I think. They sort of said to them they hadn't been defeated, they took it very hard, to accept it.

**I bet. Yes, very difficult**

37:30 **to accept they hadn't**

Yeah, I think there because I remember we had that, it was a lieutenant, a Japanese lieutenant, a naval lieutenant, we had him down on the Po Yang and on the mess deck and he spoke perfect English you know, far better and more cultured than we spoke it, and said, "How come you have such a

38:00 command of English?" And he said he'd been educated in England at one of the, oh one of the big elite colleges etc and so forth. And we said, "Well, what were your, you know, mainly your duties, what were you going to do?" And he said, "Well, I was going to be an interpreter when we invaded and took Australia", well I won't tell you what we said to him.

**Oh do,**

38:30 **do, tell?**

We said, "You old bastard, you never ever bloody got there though did ya, you know?" And I always forget that and he didn't know what to say you know, you're never bloody out there but yeah. And so but I always remember when we invaded, took over Australia but yeah. That was a, oh yeah they sort of a, they were very confident

39:00 they were going to get in here.

**Ok**

00:31 **Well, as promised George, I said I would go back and comb over your story in detail. So let's go back to the wee bairn that you were in Tasmania. And I'm interested about growing up with a father as a police officer and what that was like in what would have been fairly rural remote part of Tasmania then.**

Yeah it was quite, quite

01:00 a happy period really there. Yeah, that was very good. The early part of it before I started school, I used to you know, it was really enjoyable.

**Was it like a one cop station?**

Yeah, well there was another policeman there, I can't remember his name, but he was much older, seemed to be much older than my Dad you know. There were pretty good people there on the islands because it was much,

01:30 a larger population then, than what there is now. I think there were about maybe 1800 people that lived there, mainly mutton, birding and farming and that type of thing, which is very rural. Yeah and it was very much a sea life there, we were surrounded by water and a large group of islands around that Furneaux group. And yeah, I used to go with Dad and he had a ketch, about 35

02:00 footer, which was owned by the Tasmanian Government, a police boat, 'cause he used to, an auxiliary ketch it was, I used to go with him when he used to go down to Lady Baron, not Lady Baron, Cape Barren Island where the, there was the aborigine or part aborigine people, like and they were great people, they were great seafaring people, for some reason they had been put down onto those islands.

02:30 It was a pretty hard life for them really 'cause they were very isolated and I remember those days and you know and I got to know them you know and yeah he sort of, he was very sympathetic towards them, to what I can remember back because they used to, occasionally

03:00 they would sail up from Cape Barren, a few of them in their boats or ships that they had or ketches or that type of thing. And they'd get a few grogs into them in the pub and that sort of thing and they would, apparently had a bit of an understanding with Dad 'cause he being the policeman there, but they didn't cause any trouble at all really.

03:30 They'd only get drunk. But he used to leave the cell doors open, what I can in my mind, I can sort of picture it and throw some blankets in for them, sleep it off after because he had to go up there at 10 o'clock, closing it them, even at those days on the island. He'd say, "Righto, there's a bed for you there, so sleep it off." And they'd do that, they'd sleep it off. But if they'd come,

04:00 occasionally I can recollect they'd knock on the window and they used to call him the boss, "Boss, hey Boss, Boss", they'd say and he'd say, "Yeah right, the blankets are in there, the doors were open." He never locked them up or anything. They weren't locked up or anything like that. But they'd be gone in the morning; they'd be gone before daylight heading back down there. And yeah, so it was a pretty happy years as far as he was concerned because they all knew him and respected

04:30 him.

**I'm sorry the island where you lived was that Ferny Island?**

No, Flinders Island.

**Flinders Island, but you said Ferny before, is that the**

The Furneaux group.

**Furneaux group, thank you, sorry.**

Patsy Adam Smith wrote a book about the, and she called it the Moonbird People, it was her first book and it's all about the history of Flinders and the Furneaux group.

**Fantastic.**

She went there apparently to do a document

05:00 for two or three weeks. Five years later she was still there, staying on.

**What's so special about that particular group, what keeps them together, or what's their bond?**

Well I think they are mainly all rural, you know there's no, to my knowledge, no really great mineral deposits or anything to that extent, but it's mainly or was

05:30 agriculture and tourism. Tourism that sort of developed quite a bit you know or become very popular there. I don't think they even, they used to have a butter factory and 'cause I don't think they've got that now, they may have, I may be wrong there, but I haven't been there. The last time I went back

06:00 to there was in 1988 they had that bicentennial year for all those that had started school or gone to



school on Flinders were invited back. It was an enormous group of people went back, us oldies, etc.

**And apart from keeping the local Aboriginal folk in check, what does a police officer do in a small place like that? Is there really any crime?**

Oh local community, there's always a bit of perhaps people

06:30 appropriating things and getting drunk and fighting and that sort of thing. But really the aborigine people, he didn't really have to keep them, he just sort of keep them in check, they just sort of, they sort of did their own thing, you know and he had some very good friends amongst them. Like I remember their names, there were the Beetons and the Holts and the Mansells and

07:00 that chaps that, he's a barrister I think his name is, I forget. He was in Hobart and he was a real for the rights of the aborigine people, he's a descendant of one of the Mansells on, from Flinders Island you know, yeah.

**Did they have a strong connection with their colonial past?**

Oh the islands?

07:30 Yeah they did. Yeah they, the first, the book explains it, you know I didn't really know the history of it until I read her book. I say I didn't actually know the history, I knew basically the history, but she explains it, they were the firstly settled by Americans and different other nationalities after the fur seal and they

08:00 practically wiped the fur seal out or they did wipe them out. Apparently, they've regenerated down there to an extent you know they've sort of come back, they've put other fur seals back down there. But yeah they killed them off and there was big money in those I believe. But they were pretty well, there was no before his time and before it became Dad's time there. But

08:30 apparently it was fairly lawless in a lot of ways and it was the, with the, apparently what I am led to believe, the book, it's a long time since I read it but a lot of the, or some of the escaped convicts went to the islands and then you know practiced or carried

09:00 out fur seal trade and that sort of thing and but I, apparently there was a pretty wild, tough old group there in the earlier days. According to Patsy Adams Smith and no doubt it would be right, I would say because they've got to do the research and that. They used to go over to the mainland and encourage the women or the local tribesmen in the early days

09:30 on the north coast and the northwest coast and you know with sort of trinkets or whatever it may be and then shanghi their women, grab their women and take them back some of them. They treated them like sex slaves and they made them you know and no doubt they bore children to them and that's how the people, the aborigine or part aborigines - they're the descendants that lived on Cape Barren see.

10:00 And so they treated them apparently very, very harsh and they were more or less, they bore their children and they weren't, what would you say, they were pretty, pretty

**Pretty tough times**

Tough times, they were and they tell me according to that when the fur seals really, their, when their numbers depleted very low,

10:30 that the Aborigines, being from the mainland, the women were so black that they sneak up on the few seals that were left and then club them because they were forced to do that, no doubt they wouldn't have wanted to do it. But the seal wouldn't realise, more than probably it would pick out the white, but he wouldn't pick out the black. Think it was another seal.

**So what does a little boy do on**

11:00 **Flinders Island? What did you do when you were growing up?**

Oh just, oh I don't know. Well I do know, yeah we used to get around and go to school, well yeah start at school. I remember one stage, they reckon I disappeared, they couldn't find me and apparently that was before I started school, my sisters were at school at Whitemark and it was about a mile away I think, it was out of the township and up on

11:30 the sort of a hill there. And anyway, I must have decided that I was going to go to school too and I found me way to school and it was before I was, I must have been about 4 or something like that, yeah bit of a panic because I disappeared because there was a lot of water around.

**Yes, I bet that would be the first thought, he's over a cliff or?**

Well yeah apparently, yeah I didn't realise but you know what you're like when you're a kid, but how I found my way, they asked

12:00 me and I always remember that the telegraph poles, I followed the telegraph poles because the phone to the school, it must have been because of the time where I left home and the police station there and

yeah, followed it.

**Were you a fisherman? Were you into fishing as a young boy?**

Yeah I did, yes. We always had fish and Dad enjoyed fishing

12:30 and yeah did a lot. Oh the fish were just unbelievable. He told me at one stage there, one of the Blunstons I think, tried to recollect his name, his first name but anyway I can't but a horse kicked him and fractured his skull, so they have to get him into the mainland, Saint Helens.

13:00 So Dad and the chap that always helped him, old Toby boys and he was his assistant on the boat, anyway Bun Blunston I think, I'm not sure but I think it was Bun, anyway he got him aboard and put him down in the cabin, anyway they headed for, it was pretty bad weather, it was to, for Saint Helens. And on the way because they caught so many coota, you couldn't believe it, he told me he said "That the decks were awash with coota", because

13:30 the coota apparently like a bit of chop on the sea and because they had their lines out heading for Tassie for the mainland for Saint Helens. I think it was Saint Helens, yeah they just hook them in the coota and he said "They supplied half the town with the coota".

**So is it possible that living quite isolated like that, that the effects of the Depression were a little bit negligible or you?**

Oh yeah the Depression, yeah, yeah the,

14:00 no doubt you know as a child I sort of didn't, it was only in later life that I realized you know. There was no work there and things were very bad during the depression. 'Cause I think that all the butter that they manufactured there in those days down the butter factory and that, the farmers no doubt, if you owned a farm though people survived, I suppose no doubt they would have to live a lot on kangaroos and

14:30 which there's plenty of them. Kangaroo meat, etc and now it a luxury now in restaurants.

**It's a delicious piece of steak, I might add.**

Yeah, and I always remember kangaroo tail used to talk as soup, it's really delicious you know. Looking back I feel a little bit ashamed of poor old kangaroo. But they eat it now, it's a delicacy.

**It's got to be a better crop than cow, surely.**

15:00 **Now listen, when they decided to send you up to your Uncle Joes, was that a sort of a traditional decision for the boys of the family to go and learn a bit of true grit or was it financial?**

No, no it wasn't, I think I was living at that particular time, Mum and Dad were not living together, they were separated.

**Oh okay.**

Yeah, Dad was at Smithton and I was at Launceston with Mum, no doubt he was

15:30 sort of, apparently they weren't, something happened, I don't, I'm not sure what it was in the marriage situation, they did go back together later in years.

**'Cause that wasn't so common then really for a couple to split up, it did happen though.**

It did happen, oh yeah quite often but yeah. Yeah he was, that's right he wasn't, he was in Launceston, he was in charge of the

16:00 watch house there at Launceston. That's right, he was living in Launceston at that time and then he was shifted to Circular Head district, he was in charge up there. But anyway, yeah he'd went to Queensland to see his brother, Uncle Joe at Black Cat Gold mine up in Cape York and apparently they'd sort of discussed things about the young fellow, about me and

16:30 I wasn't aware of that and you know the Depression years were still on. I don't care what anybody says really because things were tough right up until the outbreak of the war, you know there's no doubt about it because you know we relied so much on, we were only agricultural really and we weren't really manufacturing country at all.

17:00 And well we weren't. Anyway, they must have discussed it and decided that I - the best spot for me would be up there and learn something, which I did and yeah, so they sent me up there.

**Had you already left school?**

Mum didn't like it. Hey?

**Had you already left school?**

Oh yeah.

**So you left school, wasn't really any work around Tasmania. I'm just trying to get a picture, you've left school and your dad's looking elsewhere**

17:30 **for you to go. There mustn't have been much work around for you?**

No, there wasn't of anything of, see I'd left school and I think I got a job working to sort of bring a bit of money in then because things were very hard, pretty hard, you know money wasn't much. But I work at, yeah a couple of jobs I worked at, firstly I think my first job was delivering

18:00 vegetable and that for a greengrocer and then I didn't like. So anyway, I got another job, it was working in a produce store and anyway that was enjoyable. I'll tell you that was funny that

**What makes you laugh about that?**

Oh this may sound silly, but you know I was only a kid and of course cricket was very much, which it is now and I enjoy cricket you know, not that I'm much of a cricket

18:30 player but we used to play cricket in the lane you know at lunchtimes see and anyway, I was very easy to no doubt convince but they said, "Oh god you're a great cricketer." You know they were pulling me leg terrible, they said, "Oh your definitely, you'll get the test, you know to the state side and you'll definitely get in George", and I believe them. And they said "They're definitely, we're going to

19:00 nominate you for the state crickets" and I really believe them and I went home and told Mum, I said, "I think they're going to select me for the State", and I was only thirteen years of age.

**Playing a little bit of laneway cricket. Oh dear.**

Oh dear, I was so embarrassed when I realised that they were pulling me leg. Never figured that.

**Never mind you might have had Sheffield [Shield] ambitions, well they might have been realised had there not been a war.**

19:30 **Lets put it that way perhaps.**

Oh no, they were pulling me leg, I was hopeless, I could bowl well, I was a hopeless batsman. But I believed them.

**Did you play with cricket balls or did you use some of the fruit you were delivering from time to time.**

I might have, that more than probably come into it too. But no, that was at the produce. Yeah, oh it was a proper cricket ball I think, a few might have been a tennis ball cause they're pretty hard.

**Tell me what your mum had to say about you heading from one end of Australia to about as far away as you can get at the other end?**

Oh, she was

20:00 very upset, poor old Mum. She was Irish my Mum, yeah. And she never ever lost her brogue, still had a brogue till the day she died, yeah. But yeah, she was very upset, but you know

**You're her baby boy going off?**

Yeah, well I was the only boy.

**What are the sisters doing at this point?**

They were living in Launceston working with Mum, yeah we were all living there

20:30 right in Brisbane street, now it's right in the, nearly the centre of the town. Yeah, they were both working and one of them was married, that's right. Irene, yeah she was married and she had a little boy, Kevin and he was, she was married pretty young. But anyway, yeah she was pretty

21:00 upset about me going but anyway I went and that was it.

**So you boarded in Launceston on the [HMAS] Canberra and**

Beg your pardon?

**Did you say you went up on the Canberra?**

No, no I didn't.

**I'm sorry.**

I went to Smithton where Dad was from there, I'm sort of trying to recollect, picture my own mind because he was in Launceston and then you sort of, next I, it must have been, that's right, he must have shifted from there and went

21:30 to Smithton, posted to Smithton and then in 19, I get, now that was, in that time, I'm rather not

confused but sort of there's certain conflicts in my mind of dates.

**Look it's a bloody long time ago and I must**

It's a long time but I do know at one stage, this is in connection with my father, he was one of the policeman, I think it was from each state they were picked

22:00 to go to England to represent, then it was the colony in King George V coronation.

**Well how about that.**

Yeah, so he was the one, I don't know whether it's one or two from Tasmania but I know he was one and he went, they took him over there and they marched there and yeah he was the representative from Tasmania. He was a very tall man, Dad, he was a big man about 6 foot 5,

22:30 yeah fairly big man, not broad but big and fairly solid, or not solid you know, pretty, and so no doubt that's why they posted him to the Flinders Island, I suppose. 'Cause you need a man of a fairly big statue there, anyway, yeah so I think it must have been after he came back from there and in that particular time saw Uncle Joe and

23:00 I went up there before the war.

**Well, tell me about the trip up there then, it must have taken a while to get from Tasmania to Northern Queensland?**

Yeah, I went from here, from Launceston I went up to Smithton and I came over with the brother-in-law, Percy Close, he was not at that time my brother, he was courting my sister, she was up there living up near Mary, they later married, and

23:30 they've passed on of course now but he went and Perc was on the water and was on the Elita May, so he said, "You come over on the Elita May." And she was a two masted ketch, I think about a ninety ton, and she used to trade from Smithton to Melbourne and bring potatoes and timber and I don't know what she returned with to Tasmania, no doubt supplies. But yeah, I came over to Melbourne on her

24:00 on the Elita May with Perc. I never forget, it was a shocking rough trip, northerly wind coming across and of course mainly under sail and she was tacking, we were tacking, oh god I was seasick. I'll never forget. Anyway, I stayed with relatives waiting to get a trip to go up on the boat to Cairns and yeah, so

24:30 they lived at Surry Hills, the McKenzies, that was Dad's sisters place, where I stayed. Yeah, so I went to Cairns and then I caught the plane to the goldfields from Cairns with other relatives.

**Ok, so they didn't just send you off on your little?**

Oh no, no, oh god no. I went up on the boat on the Canberra,

25:00 I think I turned 15 on the way up to Cairns, because they gave me a party, and I, yeah for me birthday with the other people I'd met on the boat. It was a 10-day trip it was.

**Did you think you were a bit of a man of the world at that point?**

Oh yeah I did. Oh God yeah, I'll never forget yeah, oh yes, sort of a yes.

25:30 It was enjoyable you know, I was only a young fellow and sort of a up there on my and heading north to me, it was a great sort of you know really an adventure.

**And what were your expectations of a goldmine? Did you imagine it was like a big rock of gold and you'd just go and chip away at it or?**

No, I didn't really, I don't think, I can't recollect what my imagination. I became very

26:00 interested in it, always have been. I don't know what I actually, I knew that basically where they sort of, that definitely it was a precious mineral and etc and very valuable, but that particular time on the way up, I wasn't too clued up on it.

**Well, what did you find when you got there? What did it look like, can you walk us through what a goldmine looks like then and there?**

26:30 Yeah in those days, because they're all entirely different now, entirely different. Yeah, it was you know gold was, the mine was I forget now, it was not actually that (UNCLEAR) there were other goldmines on the goldfields too, there was Larsons and Goughs had a mine there, I think there were people called Goughs, but there were about 90 people lived on the goldfields with their own project and but

27:00 yeah it was, you sort of had to reef, you know that's in reef work and it's underground sort of work. There would have been no doubt it was alluvial when they first discovered the gold and that's what you look for - surface gold which is alluvial and then they'd give you, after you'd found that you've got to look for the source of the gold to see where it's come from and that's what they were working there.

- 27:30 They, that's how, there were other goldfields there or another goldfield, one of the aborigines actually found, I think it was called the Lower Camp where she was going for water, or Top Camp, maybe Top Camp. Anyway, she was going for water and she found this nugget of gold on the surface, which is alluvial then
- 28:00 that brought in other miners looking for that, looking for the source of the gold.
- Can you give my sort of naïve and ignorant brain a bit of a kind of a visual on what a goldmine looks like then? I'm sure there's a farm house, and there's water around. I actually don't, like I think of a mine and I think of tunnels going underground and I'm sure it's not like that though.**
- Well it depends, there are open cut mines but
- 28:30 those mines there where you had a shaft down, you went down, they sunk this shaft, I think it was about 90 feet down, that's on that Black Cat Gold Mine, my uncle's mine and then you hit, you strike the reef. And you follow your reef, whatever level what that was on, about a 45 degree angle I think it was, that's what you call, they call
- 29:00 that an underlie. And then you go, they follow that reef down there but they put shafts, not shafts, they put drives in along from that reef as they follow it down, 'cause a reef can be, it's not usually very, that it depends on the width, but it can be only pretty - it's quartz and some can be bull quartz, no gold in it. Others can be patchy, can be,
- 29:30 hit a pocket of good gold bearing you know quartz and then you have, I think they are drives off the main reef which are still following the reef and you're going down, putting drives in and you had stokes and the underlies are the ones, are the main shaft down. It's quite interesting really
- It's fascinating, are these shafts big enough for**
- 30:00 **people to go down and they would go through all the tunnels themselves, so it would be all underground mining?**
- Yeah, it was underground.
- I'm a bit claustrophobic, so it gives me the shivers. But how do you at that stage, how do you use lighting to see where you're going, what do you take down?**
- Oh they had carbide lights, and carbide lamps. You'd have the carbide in the containers
- 30:30 and they give off a gas, I think they put water in there and it gives off a gas and that burnt and that gave them the light down there. I don't know whether he, it was very big mill he had, finding you know that's when I got there 'cause he'd been there quite a few years but he had a crushing plant and a couple of boilers and which I was doing boilers you know, learning the boilers and learning sharpening tools
- 31:00 and picks and all that at the mine, that's what I was learning.
- That was my next question, what were you doing there? What did he set you to work doing?**
- Oh I'm sorry, I sort of jumped.
- Oh no, not at all.**
- Yeah, that's what I general [?] my one of the parts was when we see you'd get all, I was - one of my main jobs I was what we call bracedman. At the top of the shaft you bring the dirt with the winch and the winch driver
- 31:30 and you've got to have special tickets to do that and they bring the, it was a big kibble, what they call a kibble, it was a big bucket and they send up mullock after they find the face of where the gold is and brought that in the trolleys and fill the buckets up and then you
- Mullock?**
- Mullock, yeah that's the stuff that surrounds
- 32:00 the reef itself you know, that's all the dirt surrounding it, so you dump that one, they send it up you know they'll, you got a - I'm talking - it would be all scientific now and would be entirely different. It's absolutely different now to what it was then but they'd ring and bell see and the engine driver, his name, Joe, a great friend of the old Unc's but he worked there and anyway he'd get the signal and 'cause he
- 32:30 opened the valve and the steam, the way the wind should go and she'd drag the bucket up see and I was about the top of the shaft, what we call a brace and then you've got, there's a platform and then I'd throw the doors open and the bucket would come up on the platform and when it'd got up it would be maybe 6, 8 feet up, it would drag the bucket, 'cause he'd had been driving the winch. I had no control there, I'd slam those doors,

33:00 see like that, so that would stop any dirt and I would put a hook on, whether it was mullock, I would put the hook on from that side and he'd drop it fastly see, quickly and it would go into a chute and into a truck and go out onto the mullock heap. But if it was pay dirt, see you'd get rid of all your mullock and pay dirt, you would have your other hook there and there she'd go down, you'd go the other way and it would drop into a trolley which I would push down

33:30 into a big hopper.

**How did you know at that point the difference between what was pay dirt and what was just mullock?**

Oh, they'd tell you what was coming up. You'd know yourself you know. Course they'd, I think they got rid of the mullock first you know. 'Cause when they charge, it would all sort of come out but they're experienced miners you know.

**Can you tell me a bit about the charging and how they did that and what dangers there were with it, you've got carbine lamps, whether that's explosive or?**

Oh, they're pretty careful, there was, no accidents or though later he had a bad accident,

34:00 Joe. Yeah they'd use the, what I recollect, see I wasn't suppose to be down the mine because I wasn't eighteen and you can't go down. I occasionally I wouldn't, I wasn't allowed to work in the mine, down in the mine, that's why you've got to work on the surface but oh he had seven or eight miners. I'll show you a photo of them.

**I loved to see one a bit later. But even I know things were a little less sort of pedantic about safety**

34:30 **practices then than they are now, but even a fifteen old on a brace sounds a little bit scary for me.**

Oh no, I was sixteen.

**I'm sorry, I'm sorry, sixteen.**

Yeah sixteen, and when I went back seventeen. I don't know whether I actually worked on the brace when I was sixteen, I don't think I did. I think it was only when I'd left the goldfield for a time. And then gone back again and I was seventeen but I think

35:00 that yeah, that's when I was on the brace because

**So if a miner, if one of your Uncle Joe's employees does hit pay dirt and hits, did they call it the mother load, if they find a big load then or were we talking pan handling days then?**

No, they wouldn't, you see the reef was sort of there. So they'd follow the dirt, they'd follow the, you know they wouldn't.

35:30 They have to - what I recollect of it they would sort of working it constantly and you know and they would be sending up you know they'd put the - I recollect you'd put the, they had jackhammers which the water, they weren't the wetter ones, the old ones with no water in them, the dust but you'd drill and they put the, you know occasionally I'd go down and sort of help them and they'd let me do

36:00 that but. And they'd drill the holes and put them in and you know they were proper experienced miners and then they'd fire that face of where they were working, what they call the working face and then they light their fuses and then you'd retreat down away from that area and boom. And the explosion, 'cause that would be your

36:30 sort out, you know the mullock and the good reef gold, or the reef which the gold was in and

**Was that a bit frightening the first time you heard an explosion?**

Oh no, no, I sort of wasn't, I don't think I sort of - I tell you something that did come to mind, it was when I first went down and they sort of a bit of a, they'd get up tricks and they used to do. It was very isolated and we had to

37:00 do things there and things and they said to me if you, the old fracture it was a plug of gelignite and if you rub that or handled that and touch your head here you were, oh a shocking headache it really effects you and they said to me, "Hey George throw the plug over", which is not dangerous unless the cap, the detonator's in it and, "Oh and give that a bit of a rub and what's that on your forehead?" And I scratch me forehead you see and God I wound up with this shocking headache.

37:30 I should never ever have handled it you know.

**George, that's the second time you've been stooped, I think, you're a bit of a rube by the sounds of it, when you're a young boy or people just seemed to like to have a bit of fun with you.**

Well yeah, my cousin poor old Dolly, he said one of the boys up there, Uncle Joe he had 1, 2, 3, 4 boys, 4

sons and I was there with them 'cause

38:00 they used to stir me quite a bit they said, he said to me, "Go", no that's right, he said, when I first went he said, "Go and find out, get me some steam substance", and I thought what the hell is steam substance you know, very naive, I think I'd only been there a day or two and I went around looking for steam,

38:30 so I asked a few, "Norm wants some steam substance", which is naturally water. What a dill.

**That's cruel.**

And a bloke said to me, "You go back with a bucket of water George" and I did. He said "You've got your steam substance."

## Tape 3

00:31 **To ask you about the whole scorched earth business and I'd like to hear about when the government started saying you've got to have to dismantle the mine and get yourself ready for invasion.**

Well look, I'll be honest, I'm not, when I say scorched earth, perhaps I'm wrong there because they were dismantling everything and shifting it

01:00 south, you know when I say scorched earth, it's not to that drastic stage, but they shifted a lot of stuff out, no doubt they weren't going to leave anything there for the invading forces of the Japanese because no doubt they would have made use of a lot of things there you know, when you leave things, lots of machinery

01:30 there intact and everything.

**Can you recall any conversations between yourselves and your cousins or with your uncle about what that meant because that must have been devastating being told to pack up and move south?**

Well yeah, see. Yeah, I can't really recollect much at all about that moving, it's just yeah nothing at all really. All I remember is that I was helping me uncle, that

02:00 we were at that stage digging, we buried a few 'cause a big 44 gallon drums of petrol, we dug holes and don't know how, I forget now how we dug them, we might have had machines I think but mainly by hand, buried stuff like that and all other stuff we would have buried, I would imagine.

**Can you recall what else you did bury down there?**

No, I can't really. But I think the army, see the army had moved up there and the air force had moved. I think they

02:30 were developing an airstrip at what we call the 90 miles plain, north of Coen, which is the main sort of town, besides Cooktown in Cape York. But then there was an air force base too, in right up the top end of Cape York near Bamaga or

03:00 a place called Somerset. I knew it as Somerset where the, right at the tip of the, there was a cattle station up there, that's what I remember of that part of that time was owned by the people called Hollands.

**And had you been receiving radio reports about what was going on not very far north of you with the Japanese?**

Communication was pretty poor there. The only way we could, I remember we had

03:30 the main, I think one of the main communications on the goldfield. My cousin Joe, who's (UNCLEAR) he used to - all the others did too. There was a radio there, 'cause there was no power, no electricity or anything and it was, I think it might have been hand driven or something to that extent and that's how

04:00 the, mainly the communication came in and out. That was more frequent. But the airplane, we used to have in the dry season, we had the aircraft, the passenger plane when I say, I think they were ten seaters and there were mainly dragon, what they called dragon repeds and I always remember one pilot, he was Gattenby, a chap called Gattenby,

04:30 a very good pilot, those pilots were wonderful pilots and yeah they land on the - so they bring the mail in and the mail would go out, so mainly that's how you would get your communication.

**So what did you know about what was going on in the war?**

Oh it would be radio, we'd have batteries in the old valve jobs and that but communications wasn't that and they'd only more or less tell you what they wanted to tell you, you know the

05:00 government, a lot of stuff was censored.

**But what did you know about what was going on?**

Very little, very little only when we went to Portland Road and these chaps came out from New Guinea, like Sid Chance. And I always remember, can I just mention this? I read and it was "Peoples" or one of the magazines. Later,

05:30 how I didn't realize he was a policeman just straight, but there was a big article in one of these magazines, that was well after the war, he apparently went back to New Guinea and he was a magistrate, and a couple of natives and a tribal, you know the tribal and there was a big uproar about I think he, the article said, "Hangman Chance", but I think he sort of

06:00 condemned, sentenced them to death, but I don't think they ever were executed. I think it was a tribal, it must have been a tribal fight where they you know, you kill me and I, whatever it might have been. And I always remember reading that and I got a real shock because I don't know whether, I hope that they weren't, I don't think they were, I think they were reprieved and they were, more probably

06:30 got a sentence to jail. But the papers you know they write things up sensationally and I read this, it came from Casino or somewhere like that and I, gee but I got a shock. Because he was, you know it would have been him and I don't know, but I know he was a police, he was a magistrate over there in New Guinea but they give him pretty, this headline, you know this sensational headline but I believed they were reprieved

07:00 and but he was a terrific. He was a great bloke you know, we got on, when I came he was great to get on with and I could never imagine, it was quite a shock you know.

**So if you weren't sure what was going on so much with the war or the Japanese, so what did you think was happening when your uncle said "You're going to have go George, you can't stay here, we're all moving south?"**

Oh we realised that we had to get out, oh yes we realised that they were just over

07:30 in New Guinea yeah, we realised, oh yes. I think mainly looking back, no doubt would have been the mines and that they would have been invaded, they would have got into Australia, found it you know taken over Australia.

**What did you think of the Japanese?**

Beg your pardon?

**What did you think of the Japanese?**

No very, no, I really I don't

08:00 of that particular time, I still yeah, I haven't got a - what I mean that was a long time ago but of that particular time, the Japanese, I really didn't, they were very, to me they were, how they treated our prisoners of war and that type of thing, I think it was very brutal.

**Oh it was shocking.**

It was very cruel you know and you sort of draw an image of

08:30 what the general in your mind of what they're all like, you know but that's the way they are, all of them. No doubt there's, that's a long, long time ago and

**But as a young boy then, with not much knowledge of, did you have some idea of what the enemy was, had you received any magazines or any?**

Oh yes, there was no doubt about it

09:00 they, they were pretty ferocious you know as far as an enemy was concerned, they treated in a lot of ways, I think they to my knowledge, in what I, to my knowledge as I say but yeah they were pretty brutal, pretty brutal in most cases. And some of the things they really did do

09:30 to our servicemen were very, very brutal and you draw that image from there of them you know. They in a lot of cases didn't have much compassion at all you know, there was, oh well looking at timing you know, what they did to the Chinese and they went into to China in 1936, I think and they slaughtered the Chinese wholesale there you know

10:00 what. I sort of, you sort of heard a bit about that through news and etc and so forth and that was long before they came into the war on the Germans' side you know, while the Axis side.

**Well, I guess the reason I'm asking, I'd like to know about your departure from Wenlock and the Black Cat Mine**

10:30 **and that sort of unique sort of tale of getting from the northern areas of Queensland down towards Newcastle where you joined the merchants?**



Oh right yeah. Well, we went to Portland Road from the goldfields that was, but my uncle stayed on and Joe and the cousins and that, they stayed on there.

**So what was that like there, staying on and you are aware of this threat, this enemy threat that might come through? Were you worried that they'd be overrun by the Japanese?**

Well, yeah we

11:00 were, but there was army there, there was air force there only just south down in Wenlock and that type of thing. We didn't realise, I don't think I realized the seriousness of the whole thing, when I say seriousness of it you know, I hadn't been in a war situation before you know, I was only young and you've got a different, later on an entirely different outlook on things and an

11:30 attitude towards it but they were there and we were here.

**Why didn't they let you stay on at the mine then, why did they make you go?**

Because I don't know, he said to me "Well, you've got to sort of go". It was only Uncle Joe and Joe, my cousin and Norm and don't know about Stan, I think Stan might have, no Stan stayed on too, he's a couple of years older than me, but I was only what I might have been, what - I was about 17 then. But

12:00 no I was, no they said, "You've got to go see." So and get the boat down to, more than probably to get the Aunt and Eleanor and you know my assistance there.

**Oh you travelled with his wife and one of your cousins?**

Yeah I did but I caught this other, at Portland Roads cause they were waiting for the ship from Darwin and I was actually down there long before they, I think I was there before they got there in Brisbane.

12:30 But they came down, there was a passenger ship coming and it come from, it traded between Darwin and Brisbane and carried passengers and cargo and that type of thing you know. But anyway, yeah they arrived down there quite safely. But it was evacuation, I don't know about, look I don't know about the civilian, probably leave from Cowan, no doubt women and children and

13:00 everything would have got out of Cairns. Because they'd declared the Brisbane Line, they'd given half the, the government at the time, I think they decided that they declare it the Brisbane Line, let the Japanese in, have them occupy half of Australia.

**Yes, so Joe was definitely on the Japanese side of that line and I'm**

Oh well, north good. Yeah.

**Was he a bit peeved about that?**

Who Joe?

**Uncle Joe?**

13:30 Well I don't know when they declared the Brisbane Line. I think that might have been later, declared the Brisbane Line. But I don't know how he felt about that at all really. The cousin of mine there, he volunteered, you know he joined, he volunteered for the services and that sort of but he, they

14:00 wouldn't, very you know, they were very particular you know. They knock you back on minor things for the services and the early part of it when they got a little bit more of flexible, later on when things were not too good but yeah he'd had meningitis, not meningitis some problem, a sickness Joe as a young fellow and apparently

14:30 they knock him back on that and he couldn't get into the services. That's the cousin that wrote the book, 'cause Joe's about 84 now and he was very peeved about it 'cause he wanted to be in the army, in the services fighting, so the manpower grabbed him because he was pretty well, he had all his Steam Certificates by the age of 21 and he was I think it was either Queensland or Australia, he was one of the youngest men to hold all of those certificates

15:00 by the age of 21, so manpower grabbed him and that section, they used to grab particular

**And what about you, did you have plans at this stage to join up, did you have any ambitions to join the navy or the merchants yet?**

Oh yeah I did, yes. Oh yes, that was my intentions, but my intentions were to see the parents first, you know. But on the way through of course, though

15:30 I eventually after Brisbane and digging the air-raid shelter and then heading you know bye, bye to the family and I came south and I joined the merchant navy, I got into the merchant navy.

**First of all at Point Cook when you heard the air-raid sirens going, is that the first time you've heard an air-raid warning?**

Where was that?

**In Point Cook when you**

No, Point Cook, that's, here isn't Point Cook.

**Sorry, it is**

16:00 **to, I mean Cooktown.**

Cooktown, yeah sorry about that.

**Sorry about that Point Cook, Cooktown when you got in the DC-3s.**

No, that was, the air-raid siren there was the church bell ringing, yeah that's the first time, but it wasn't a siren you know like the air-raid sirens.

**Were you frightened, was your heart in your mouth, did you think the Japs were coming?**

Oh no, no you sort of, as I said I

16:30 hadn't had any experience of a wartime experience at that stage you know. There wasn't any panic or anything. It woke me up. And the bell, I was sound asleep and there was a - really Cooktown is a very hot spot, so you can imagine I woke out of a slumber and yeah what's going on. Somebody had mentioned if you hear the bell ring that's our air-raid siren, warning

17:00 you know. And of course I thought it was a bomber but it, fortunately it wasn't. Yeah and went back to sleep again.

**So obviously not too concerned at that point?**

No, not really, no I thought, well it was a Biscuit Bomber and the all clear went and but things got a little bit different later.

**Now did you get back to see your mum and dad before**

17:30 **joining up or were you interrupted?**

Yeah before I joined the navy not the merchant navy.

**Not the merchants?**

No, the merchant navy, as it said I joined the Iron Crown in Newcastle and swept awhile and coming back but they, I was very proud of my service, well in the navy too, but very much so in the short period in the merchant navy.

**Well tell me what you have to do**

18:00 **when you join up? Like you've mentioned before the medical. But what else did they ask of you when you joined the merchant navy? What did you need to know or?**

Not really, no. That's as long as you were prepared to work. And you could work your way up.

**Did you need special skills to get in?**

No, not really, sort of like a - you learn those skills aboard. And whether a peggy or a mess deck, all you do is clean the quarters and you do that for 12 months or so and then you move along.

18:30 But you learn your trick at the wheel, and up at the bridge and steer the ship, which I did a few times.

**So in Newcastle when you go to join up, what you just give your name and your details and they sign you in and give you a uniform?**

No, no uniform just civilians yeah, the skipper has a uniform no doubt, if they, I don't know if they supply them or the Captain McClelland he, I think, I don't know, I can't recollect whether he wore his uniform or not.

**So did they give you any gear at all, like a jumper?**

No, no, you have

19:00 your own clothing you know, and it's a civilian force, it's only in about the last five years it's been accepted by the, I think about 5 or 6 years as a service and by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

**Well, it's a tricky position to be in because you're a target and you're carrying supplies or food or anything valuable, but you don't really have much of a chance to defend yourself.**

19:30 You did, although it wasn't to any great extent, you know, yeah I was in the gun crew on it 'cause the apprentices or whatever the chap what's a name, Billy Rushgrove, he was a, been, he had my job the previous year. He'd had twelve months and then he moved up, he was an ordinary seaman, whether he'd been on the Crown, I think he was on the Crown too at that time. And he was

20:00 another one, there were quite a few of us that were in the gun crew. We had a four-inch gun on the stern, mounted on the stern, just above the quarters, you're not allowed down below the quarters.

**Well look, take me through joining up then and getting onboard, there was a bit of a wait I realise but first of all, did you feel like you were on your way, you're on your way to what you wanted to do?**

Oh yeah I did, yeah well I did, that what I wanted to be on the water and when I got in the gun crew, I'm there and

20:30 that sort of thing. And I realised in my, a lot of people didn't realise you know that what the merchant ships, see the merchant service were percent, I'm lead to believe, I have the book there written by the previous Secretary, Keith Oliver about the merchant service but mainly overseas or the Atlantic, and Britain and Russian convoys

21:00 percentage wise they lost more people in the merchant service than in any of the other services. That's what I've been told, and lead to believe, percentage wise. An enormous amount killed and the risks were pretty, pretty, you were pretty vulnerable and anyway, you know I no doubt

21:30 realised that. But I loved the water and I wanted to get on it and I wanted to get into it and so that's why my parents were in Tassie and I was my way, so I got in there, 'cause I would have to get their permission at 17, that's what I was lead to believe but I, after when I was 18 I could join meself and which I did.

**So did you not need your parent's permission to get onto the merchant ships then?**

No, I didn't

22:00 no. It was considered and it was a civilian occupation at the time.

**Okay.**

People didn't realise that you know the vulnerability.

**Did you realise?**

Oh yeah I knew at sea, there was definitely a risk because

**But joining up did you realise?**

In the navy or

**No sorry, joining the merchants did you know when you joined the merchants that you were going to be so vulnerable?**

I realise there was a danger

22:30 there. I did in my own mind but I thought, well at the time I didn't see it to any great extent at that particular time, no I didn't to be quite honest. But naturally with a gun sitting on the stern of your ship and you being in the gun crew and etc. You, the men there, they're not there for no reason, they're there for defending and if you're going to be attacked

23:00 and you're at sea and you realise that you're a part of the force you know.

**Well tell me a bit about being a deckboy and a peggy, what did they make you do and what order you have to do it in?**

Oh, it's just cleaning the quarters and getting the food from the cookhouse [interruption]

23:30 **Okay, yes you were going to tell me a little bit about what the day in the life of a peggy gets up to on a ship?**

Oh yes, just general cleaning the quarters and making the bunks and sweeping and cleaning the whatever. I can't recollect the showers or toilets or that down there but no doubt they were there and had to be cleaned and you had to clean the mess deck and wash up after they've,

24:00 you got from the cookhouse, the food and you know generally care taking you know, doing a bit of well not a bit of it, but that kept you going all day but also you did your gun practise, gun training, we had a demes gunner, naval gunner aboard ship. Mostly merchant ships did have and they sort of taught us

24:30 and he was quite an accomplished gunner, (UNCLEAR) in Tasmania anyway - came from Hobart, anyway yeah. So you had gun practise and all that and then your trick would take you up and you'd have your trick at the wheel you know with whoever the, one of the officers, second mate or third mate or first mate or the skipper or somebody would be at the wheelhouse you know. And of course you'd have to learn the

25:00 navigational sort of thing, the navigation, steering the ship and handling the tiller and the sea and it, watching your compass and keeping her on your particular course, all of that type of thing. You had to

learn the compass and all, the north, and south and east and west and 360 degrees and 190 and 45s and where nor-west is and all that type of thing you know.

25:30 **How many deckboys are onboard?**

I think there was one, look I can't, I've often thought about but I think there was another one for the engine room and that part of the quarters, you know. So I think there was two.

**And who did you answer to?**

Oh, you answered to the people that employed you. Scott

26:00 Fells was the shipping line, no doubt the skipper was the boss but you came down the line, and mainly the Job Steward was the union representative, if things weren't in order and he'd tell you know, you've got to do this or there's been a complaint, you haven't been doing that. So you were told more or less what to do and you were shown what to do. Nobody ever, I think Bill showed me. He must have been on there before, yeah.

**So when you get your turn at the wheel,**

26:30 **is it a formal arrangement or informal? Do they say, "George, come up here we're going to give you a bit of a go at this today," or is it planned?**

Oh no doubt, I can't really recollect to be quite honest, I think it's, no doubt it's sort of planned, it's part of job learning, you know your learning of it.

**And what about the gun then, how many lesson for example, would you**

27:00 **get taught over and over how to use the gun?**

Yeah, we were initially, no doubt. I forget, I can't recollect very clearly at all because we never fired a shot in anger to my knowledge.

**In practise did you shoot some out of it?**

Well, we definitely must have yeah, we definitely must have, 'cause you'd have to you know because of, too you know when you needed it, but we'd had no chance because the time we were hit, she'd broke her back and went down in two halves

27:30 and she was gone in a minute.

**And about how many men are onboard?**

Actually on that, there was including the demes gunner - there was 43.

**And who are, who do you get to be mates with onboard? Are you mates with everybody or do you have to limit your friendships to the lower end of the spectrum?**

Oh no, no the merchant navy is different to the navy, there's no much, to my I've always very much

28:00 admired the merchant navy and that type of thing, what it's like now I, there was only small crews on these ships, they're all digitally controlled by computers, in those days it was all manual. But that's why you had such big crews. But you sort of got to know, being peggy you got to know all of the, most of them aboard, you know. But how well

28:30 it depends and how much contact but my mate on there, he lost his life, he went with her. Billy Rushgrove from Newcastle, it was a big family there, the Rushgroves. I did meet all the rest of the family, when I joined the navy and I was up there. And we were at Nelson Bay just out of Newcastle. But so, know he would have filled me in with a lot of things and what to do and go about things

29:00 but he was my, we used to go ashore at Whyalla and that when we were there. And aboard ship you know when you finish your duties, washing up and everything and we used to sit up in the mess and talk and yeah we were quite good. There was a chap there and I think he was the union rep, I think his name was Jack Davies, I'm not sure but somehow in my mind, and he was a great story teller,

29:30 and he used to fascinate me and we used to listen to him telling all these stories you know, but he lost his life too.

**And where does the name peggy come from? Why is it a peggy?**

I don't know. I absolutely don't know. Officially you're known as deckboy and that would originate from way back in the sailing days etc. But I don't

30:00 really, obviously it's an abbreviation.

**Well tell me then, you say the ship broke its back. Can you tell me say the preceding events leading up to being torpedoed?**

Yeah, well we were the second one, to be torpedoed on these coasts, the second merchant ship. The

Iron Chief was torpedoed on the 3 June 42.

30:30 Rumour went around the ship that we, there was a submarine, that she'd been torpedoed, so naturally and we knew that Sydney harbour had been raided by those 3 midget submarines and that they had destroyed two of them and one of them they never ever found. So we were aware there were submarines,

31:00 or a submarine or what it was about, but it was definitely submarines but yeah and but you don't think you're going to be the next, we had no idea but we did know that. Well I heard that of course, no doubt the skipper and the other would have known more much sooner you know. But look I'd never been in a situation

31:30 where you were accepting, well no not, I hadn't been in a situation and you don't sort of realise to a great extent hoping that it doesn't, you don't realise what it's going to be like or what happens and it happens in a split second.

**Were you asleep or awake?**

No, I was awake.

**And was there any warning?**

There was no

32:00 warning, none at all. There would of, not that I was aware of, nor I don't know whether the others, no doubt about the, those that should have known the operators, the wireless operators and everything like that, and the skipper and everything. Because there was a ship, I think it was called the [HMAS] Barwon, was attacked by a Japanese submarine in the same area as we were attacked, torpedoed. But it fired a torpedo

32:30 at them and apparently went under their ship and exploded I'm lead to believe about 100 yards off the ship. But she wasn't damaged and she happened to escape.

**So when it hit the Iron Crown do you recall just hearing or feeling the hit and thinking god, what was that?**

Oh God no, it was a torpedo, it's just an enormous explosion, just whether it was one or

33:00 two but I should imagine it would have been one because we were very heavily laden. I'm told we had about 7 feet of freeboard from the water level to the deck, so she was very heavily laden; it was like a rock in the water. I'm lead to believe, and it's true I'm sure that there were two ships, the worst to be on was an iron ore carrier

33:30 or an oil tanker given the wartime situation under attack because an oil tanker, well would have been definitely worst because of fire and oil and god know what but as far as sinking was concerned. So we were gone, no doubt, about a minute from the impact.

**What emergency procedures go into, do you know you're overboard straight away?**

No,

34:00 I didn't actually. I, everything happens all at - you're not expecting it you know, you're not expecting, irrespective of you know, you don't know, I didn't, we didn't know or I didn't, the Barwon had been attacked off Gabo, it was in that area, Mallacoota area there and anyway, yeah it - just a huge explosion.

34:30 This huge impact, no doubt it would have pushed us sideways too, I should imagine, but anyway.

**Did you get to a lifeboat or were you just in the water?**

No, we had no lifeboats, we never had time - she was gone. I, there was another chap, I was talking, I'd been to the cookhouse, which was a midship, if had happened five minutes before that I would have no doubt,

35:00 wouldn't have been here because I was right over, approximately she hit at midship - is under the bridge and I'd come back down to the mess decks. I was talking to a chap and I don't know, somebody told me later, he couldn't swim but he knew, I don't know if whether he was from the engine room or where he. And he was of course much older than I, but the shock of the whole thing,

35:30 there's this huge explosion. Anyway, I always remember I said, "Go for the deck." I didn't know whether, what was happening, whether it was a shell or what would it have been you know but then I said the next thing come into my mind, "Get your life jacket", 'cause that's more or less we must have life jackets drill and I said "Get over",

36:00 I don't know what I said to him, I must have said something to him, "Get off" or "Get over" or "Get your lifejacket", but I never ever, poor soul, I never saw him again. So I dashed, I wasn't far from the, I rushed down to the after quarters of the ship and there was crewman, I would say at least 20 of our crew complement aboard the ship was there. There was waiting and no doubt all,

- 36:30 I don't know whatever they were doing, those that would have been off watch too would have been resting but they were all, what you know. It's all sort of, yeah in my mind I remember seeing them and there was a chap there, he said, "George, what's happening, what's torpedo?", you know, I had no doubt then because I realised we'd been torpedoed. I said, I must
- 37:00 have said to him, "Get out, get out quick", and I grabbed the life jacket. And I remember I pulled it and it caught on the wire, there seemed to be wire over the bunk and I thought don't panic, don't take it, lift it out and I did and fortunately I slipped it over me head and I never had the, and I rushed for the galley - get out, get out, whatever - I don't know, recollect clearly what I said but no doubt I would have said something "Get
- 37:30 out" because they said, "What's happened, what's happened, what is it?" and I would realise anyway, nobody to my knowledge and I'm sure they didn't 'cause I was the last one - the steps were horizontal, were coming up to horizontal, never realise, I would not have gone down after a life jacket, I would have realised that the ship had broken its back. But she was going down and yeah I come up those stairs and I always remember
- 38:00 the fourth engineer, which he and I became very good friends, poor old Bruce, I think he's still alive, he's in a home and he's got dementia and he remembers nothing and he said to me once, he said 'cause he went straight over, he said to me, I've never seen a bloke fly but he said, "You know you come out of those", whether he, I think he was pulling my leg here, he said, "You were flying, you come out of
- 38:30 there horizontal, the stairs coming out of the after quarters."
- I believe it.**
- Yeah, you don't really; you know you're young and pretty agile and I got the jacket on. Anyway, I went, ran along the deck and stuff was coming down, sliding down the deck and I got a whack in the back and in the cold water.
- 39:00 I remember, I always remember this, there was a life raft, there was one on either, on the centre of the midship quarters there they, there was two, two of the crew trying to get one of those off, get them off and I'm sure, well I say I'm sure but you never
- 39:30 can be sure. But I reckon that one of them there and it was a very brave thing, a heroic thing really that they were trying to do, they were not, maybe in their own mind that was helping them, you know to save, we've got to have somewhere to get on but they were getting, trying to get this life raft off and of course they just disappear in front of my eyes and they went down with the ship. But I think one of them would have been the demes fellow, I really do because of these
- 40:00 overalls you know.

## Tape 4

- 00:33 **Can you recall the feeling of hitting the water?**
- Yeah, actually I can, it yeah it, as I said, I don't know, I got the life jacket on and I went, I've got a recollection something
- 01:00 hit me, I don't know what it was and I went down on the deck but I certainly got up quick smartly and over the side but to hit the water, no I can't to be quite honest. But I got caught in the suction and the life jacket saved me. I couldn't get the cord done up but I had it over me shoulders but
- 01:30 it was ripped and I had hold of it like that and it must have ripped off, lucky it never broke me neck, it could have broke me bloomin neck hitting the water but it must have impact and hanging on to it, up. I thought I'd had it, I thought well this is it, I'm not going to make it 'cause it was like being in a washing machine, there was iron ore and everything and the water was all red and next minute I, no doubt if I hadn't of had it I would of you know, I would of
- 02:00 drowned, I would imagine 'cause a lot of water had been caught in the suction of the ship and the yeah and that was it, I broke surface and I was, I might have got a mouthful or two of water but
- And red iron ore I guess?**
- Yeah, oh god yeah.
- Can you recall, you said it went down so quickly, it broke its back, can you recall what that looked**
- 02:30 **like from where you were in the water?**
- Well, I sort of thinking the forward section when I sort of came out briefly I'm trying to recollect what it

really did look like, when I say what it looked like the forward section seemed to slip away like that and because it was about midship she broke,

03:00 it sort or disappeared in front of - I can recollect that, yeah just on the disappearing you know and then we were going to down with it no doubt and but I don't know there would have, in the after-quarters where they were because they would have been trapped there,

03:30 down there, they couldn't of got out. Whether some of them I don't know, I should imagine the water would have blocked off any air but there would have been perhaps an air pocket there somewhere in the quarters, which unfortunately would have pulled, everyone would have froze and been trapped there, really being a shock and I don't know whether that would happen, but I know in a mining accident that did happen and

04:00 they were caught.

**How far away were you from the boat when you surfaced?**

Oh I was right there with it, I must have, the boat went down and I must have been dragged down with it, with the suction but having the life jacket and you know a mate of mine who's now in, he's gone up to Queensland he'd be, Johnny Stone, he was on the Iron Knight

04:30 in '43 when she was sunk and the same circumstances, saved his life. We'd become very good friends, John and I. And he was a peggy on the Iron Knight and he actually had hold of a flare and the flare must have had a buoy you know, one of those buoys or some sort of a floating device and 'cause he

05:00 grabbed hold of that when the Iron Knight, she went quickly too. And he grabbed that and he said that saved him, he got caught in the undertow and that brought him to the surface and saved his life similar, it's amazing, isn't it, that that sort of happens and yeah. So yeah that, I would say, definitely say you know pulled me up to the surface yeah.

**When you came back up again,**

05:30 **has all of the ship disappeared by this stage?**

Oh yeah it had gone, oh yeah.

**And there were a few men still?**

There was 5 of us survived.

**Could you see them all straight away?**

No, there was, the four of us, there was 4, there was a couple, Bruce was, there were three, no one, there was - I'm trying to think. There was

06:00 2 from the, no 3 from the engine room believe it or not, 3 from the engine room survived. There was Bruce Miles, there was the chap they call him "Donkey man", I think and for what reasons, they sort of look after the, I'm not too sure, he wasn't a fireman or in the, he looked after some other equipment there, that's

06:30 a sort of a nickname see, I think it might be the water system or something to that extent. There was Bruce and there was a trimmer, and to my knowledge he couldn't swim, he was hanging on to a plank and we got him to with us, there were four of us on. We finally got together

07:00 and we got onto this structure, it was a part of the wireless operator's cabin, it was timber and it kept us partly afloat, it saved us floundering in the water and swimming and yeah we and the - course I was the only one with a life jacket there and that sort of thing. Anyway, one of the chaps as I mentioned, he had a broken collarbone,

07:30 the other chap was telling me, he said he'd come from the engine room just minutes before the torpedo attack to get I think tea or coffee or something from down below and he was on the deck going to the cookhouse, it must have been on the - we were hit on the portside, so the starboard, so and he straight over. Apparently he grabbed

08:00 the plank and some debris kept him afloat and he survived.

**What time of day was it, do you recall thereabouts?**

Oh it was about quarter to five.

**So getting towards sunset?**

Yeah in the June, of course you know

**The water freezing**

It wasn't, actually very fortunate that it wasn't rough day 'cause that, where we were

08:30 off Gabo, that is one of the worst parts you could be ever caught in a storm, that's where all those yachtsmen were (UNCLEAR) I think was 8 of them in the Hobart Yacht Race, the seas there are ferocious. They reckon it's as bad as Cape Horn there, but we were fortunate it was a good day and

**So with you the only person with a life jacket, did the men need to cling to you, did they have**

09:00 **to hang onto you?**

No not really, no, no I had the - I didn't have it on after the, 'cause I could swim, I could swim before, I could what's a name walk I think, I was, think dog paddling I was going to say. Yeah, I learnt to swim around Flinders Island being around water.

**You're an island boy?**

Hey

**You're an island boy?**

Yeah well definitely, that was the first thing you had to do, yeah so

09:30 anyway, we yeah, that was

**So how long were you in the water together than before**

I'd say about a few hours, I'd say two to three hours I would reckon. To my way of thinking we were in there for some period of time.

**And did you all stay together?**

Four of us did, yeah the four of us did. We sort of huddled together on the, this

10:00 sort of - Bruce Miles who was the fourth engineer, how I know it, 'cause he said it was definitely the wireless operator's part of his cabin, 'cause he went with the ship, was killed. But he, 'cause he was a good friend of his and Bruce said to me, "No, that was definitely the wireless operators", he said to me recently, you know before he got the dementia and that. But yeah that sort of kept us half afloat, but

10:30 we were pretty cold, I'll tell you.

**And in shock I am sure?**

Yeah, more than probably were at the time, yeah. Oh the poor chap with the busted shoulder too, he was in pain.

**How did you keep each other going in those few hours? What did you say? Did you talk?**

Yeah, I can't recollect what we were talking about but we were sort of more than probably in a bit of shock, no doubt but it got dark and whether anybody else was in the water

11:00 and we, I don't think so.

**Did you see bodies come up, floating bodies?**

No, I saw none of that.

**So it took the whole lot down apart from the six of you?**

Well, I don't know whether, see I can't, no I never saw any other one, and other person in the water.

**What about debris from the ship?**

Yeah there was a lot. See there were, oregon planks were the hatch covers then, and there was a lot or oregon planks wash, floating around, no doubt, I think we might have, I don't know,

11:30 I can't recollect having one of those. See there was a chap there, he was a seaman but he wasn't with us, it was only when the ship that was coming up, SS Mulberrra, a British ship, a fairly big ship about 10,000 ton I think. But they hove to, you know and put the lifeboat out to pick us up. 'Cause there was a flare burning,

12:00 in the water it was pitch dark, I don't know if there was any moonlight at all.

**Who had the flare burning in the water?**

A couple of flares must have broken loose from the boat, from the Iron Crown. I don't know, how they came to be because they light automatically yeah.

**It's quite visual, isn't it?**

Yeah, 'tis very visual, fortunate that would have saved us, they would have found us.

**How long would they burn for, those flares?**

I don't know really, I reckon it could be quite some time.



**So you can see each other quite**

12:30 **clearly?**

No, you couldn't, they're not like the flares in the sky or anything, they're only on the surface of the water. No, you wouldn't, that was quite a little bit away from us. I can recollect, there was two at one stage but whether there was two at the final stages, I don't know.

**And no fire in the water or?**

No, no there was no fire. But it was, it all happened so suddenly because

13:00 Jimmy, I don't know whether Jimmy Murdoch, Jimmy, he was, we had a Captain Murdoch, he's our vice president of Merchant Organisation Services, I meant he was on the Iron King and they were actually, no doubt would have been after the Iron King too, she was near heading south. And

13:30 he said, he and another apprentice there were apprentice, the John Lowry, who also wound up a skipper with the merchant fleet with the iron boats later but they were heading south and no doubt they were aware, that's what Jim was saying, they were aware there were submarines around. But they,

14:00 he said "That he, they were just looking to", they were more to the mainland, I never saw them until after we were in the water but yeah he said "All of a sudden they were watching the Iron Crown" and he said, "You were just wham and you were gone", he said, "Just a huge explosion."

14:30 They never thought there were any survivors.

**It was lucky they saw the whole thing happen?**

He saw it happen. I've got a

**Why didn't they come over a pick you up?**

Beg your pardon

**Why didn't they come over?**

Oh they couldn't, no. Oh no, they were laden with stuff called two ole, I think its called, and it's a highly explosive stuff, if they'd have hit the Iron King they would have still been going. They wouldn't have come back to earth by now. But you know, but he said "They

15:00 didn't think there were any survivors at all" and they were too [?] sure if they were going, they actually, they let off, they had their gun, he was a sight setter Jim, he's a hell of a good bloke Jim, become good friends and he said to me, I met him on the old Wattle down here years and years, only a few years back now and he said "I couldn't believe it". He said we,

15:30 he said you know, "Just an enormous, by the time that it settled it was huge", he said "You were gone, there was no ship, there was nothing there" and he said "We didn't really, you know we were well away from youse". But anyway they opened up, they had a four inch gun, and he was a gun setter, the sight setter and anyway they dropped a few, fire a, because apparently the, we didn't see the submarine

16:00 but it surfaced, the submarine, it must have as soon as it copped us it surfaced not being aware that there was an aeroplane, a bomber out from Bairnsdale patrolling the coast and 'cause but Jim said "That they fired some shots off from their gun, from the four-incher because they wanted to keep it below the surface and you know nothing they could do for

16:30 us, they wanted to get away, well naturally". And he said they let you know, but the bomber dropped a couple of bombs on them and they thought they had destroyed the submarine but they hadn't apparently. And yeah.

**Were you able to see any of that or was that much after?**

No, no we were in the water, no we were in the water. And I never saw the submarine and I didn't even know, we could hear the

17:00 what was going, you know the bombs, they dropped a couple bombs from the Lockheed Hudson and the force, with the gunfire from the Iron King forced the submarine to submerge. See they would only do about, there were very large submarines, one of the largest of any of the services in the world, they're about oh 2 and a half thousand toners I think, but they're about 4 knots I'm led to believe about 4 knots, submerged. So

17:30 keep them under the water and they can't catch you. See she could do, he said they, about 10 knots the Iron King but on this particular day they got up to 12 knots getting away. There was smoke bellowing but they thought they had destroyed the submarine and the Mulbera later came up and they asked them.

**Tell me about being picked up by**

18:00 **the Mulbera, I mean, I bet by this stage you're beginning to think you're going to perish out**

**there?**

Didn't know whether we'd be, you know you just hope for the best and yeah

**Did you just dogpaddled the whole time?**

Oh no, we, yeah we sort of, we were sort of half in the water, the timber kept us partly in, didn't know we were partly afloat, we didn't have to dogpaddle, what I recollect anyway but to get there we did.

**Can you recall, I would imagine you would become extremely**

18:30 **thirsty, with all that sea water, and you'd probably taken a fair bit in.**

No, I can't recollect it with thirst but I'll tell you a thing, this is funny really. I don't know who it was, I think it might have been the trimmer, no the other chap who had the broken, the engine room staff bloke, he seemed to be, he was from Newcastle but he was a much older man you know, he was a few years older,

19:00 perhaps in his twenties, or perhaps early thirties, to me at that time seemed old. He said, "Whatever you do hold onto your water, he said don't urinate, he keep it in", he said "Even if you had to hang onto it, keep your body warm" but I don't know where he got that theory from.

**Did you try it?**

Oh yeah, definitely. I was busting there, no doubt. Oh dear it was so funny, I

19:30 recollect that he said don't, so anyway, yeah we survived but had very little clothing on.

**What did you have on? What were you wearing?**

I had long pants on and I think I only had a shirt. Bruce, all he had on was underpants and singlet, he was, we were frozen. Frozen.

**So when the Mulbera is coming along, and you can see, when you can see**

20:00 **her is there this sort of sense of that you're going to make it now and I've heard of people who just get really tired at that point, when they can see that there?**

No, I can't recollect any of that, we were so sort of - what happened was this, the air force seemed to, whether it was the same aircraft or not, or whether it would, no doubt wouldn't have been, I don't, more than probably a relief aircraft from Mallacoota because

20:30 there was a big airstrip, that was a big airfield, that was a secret base there at Mallacoota and that plane would have been no doubt, perhaps, well it might have been a relief plane that stayed with us but the aircraft when it got dark we could see the aircraft circling and staying in the area and that was a great sense of security for us in the water there and

21:00 we had hopes that we'd survive. But you're not to know and then we could, later, 'cause that was all sort of darkness you know, ships weren't any lights at all, it must have been, there might have been a moonlight night, I can't really recollect that but anyway that seemed to come onto the horizon and came towards us and the flare in the water, no doubt the aircraft or the bomber

21:30 that had dropped the bombs on the sub.

**So walk me through what happens when the Mulbera hove to and picked you up?**

Well it's just that apparently, we're lead to believe they told us that the skip, the pilot of the air force plane and that he said that they'd believed that they'd destroyed the submarine and requested that they hoped would they pick up survivors and they must have agreed or probably skipper

22:00 and officer, you know no doubt they must have had quite a bit of war experience cause the war had been going on over in Europe there from '39 and this was in 1942, so no doubt they would have survived. That ship actually, she hove to and there were lights visible from the ship and they put out a life boat and found us cause no doubt we were yelling and carrying on but the light, the flare and then

22:30 they got us into the lifeboat and we heard a faint voice somewhere out there in the dark. It wasn't we'd got there, it was the other, the fifth one to survive he was hanging on to a plank, he couldn't swim, he'd hung onto that plank, we'd got him, but he was frozen, we were just about that then, yeah they were wonderful to us, never figure the way they

23:00 treated us, they were just wonderful.

**What did they do when you got in?**

Oh they got us into salt baths, these big baths you know 'cause she was apparently a cargo passenger ship and she traded prior to the war, traded between Bombay and Liverpool I think it was, so yeah, oh they treated us royal you know and fed us and put us in big boiling hot baths and thawed us out a bit

23:30 and you know, terrific.

**Were you suffering exposure at that point?**

Yeah I think we were, yeah we would have been no doubt 'cause you know but they rugged us up, really they were just wonderful, that was on the Thursday and I, just so lucky that they didn't get attack to you, know no doubt the submarine must have been damaged a bit.

24:00 **So what do, what happens for you when you realise you're safe again, you're going to make it?**

Oh just an enormous relief, you know I just, in me mind I wanted to get back and have a go at them doing it you know, but that's why I joined the navy but yeah.

**But in those hours when you're back on the Mulbera and you're fed and water and you're safe and warm again, do you get time then to**

24:30 **think about the men that had gone?**

Yeah you do yes, I get even sort of now you know, you think that it could have been you there and that sort of upsets you a bit, you know, I just emotionally, yeah I sort of, but no doubt as you get older you sort of get a bit emotional about things you know but.

**But you must have shocked to pieces at that point?**

I don't recollect, yeah it must have been pretty harrowing

25:00 but perhaps the older ones were worse than I was, you know younger I think you take things better but no doubt we're all, we were suffering with shock and exposure, we all had shock and exposure, no doubt about that.

**Did you always feel that you must have been like under some lucky star?**

Yeah, yeah it a, funny that yeah, you just don't understand why you survived and the

25:30 others, somebody, and the others didn't you know. They would have met a terrible death, those that were trapped and I remember Bruce told me, he said why he was in singlet and underpants, he was ready to get, hop into the shower, 'cause being the fourth engineer he was at midships and you know they had cabins you know and the chief engineer, which is a great mate of Bruce's you know, he was a great fellow and he was in the shower, so he would have been trapped in the shower room. He was just

26:00 ready to go into the shower as soon as the chief engineer had vacated it and that's how he, he got whacked and he was straight over the side, Bruce. But he was yeah, but they were, the one thing I do regret cigarettes came from everywhere. The first time I ever smoked in my life was then and of course.

**Was it a good cigarette?**

Yes it was, see that photo over there.

26:30 **Yes.**

That is Bruce and I on the deck of the Mulbera in Sydney on Saturday the 6 June and we've both got cigarettes and on the puff and that was taken by one of the papers in Sydney.

**Well I think the QUIT Campaign would forgive you for that.**

Cigarettes, yeah, yeah oh yeah, it's done a bit of damage to the old lungs but yeah, no doubt about that.

**So the Mulbera**

27:00 **put you down in Sydney?**

Yeah she brought, yeah on the Saturday the 6 here, we got in early in the morning. I, no doubt we, I think she was a ship that could get up a few knots I should imagine being a big ship, I reckon they would have put straight out to sea from there, take the course. I don't know it's just my theory, whether they did or not I don't know. But because of, she would have got

27:30 well out to sea into deeper water and away from the coastline, she would have been safer.

**What do you, what happens for you when you get back? You've lost your ship and you've lost the men you were sailing with, where do they send you if you're part of the merchant navy, is it organised enough to do something with you?**

No, they didn't really, they, I'm trying to recollect. I went back to Tasmania, whether they paid for the ship's passage

28:00 I don't know, I can't recollect that. Scott Fells was the company but they're no longer in existence.

**Well I know of a fellow who went down in, he was a navy man and he went down and that he was given some compensation for sinking, he was given survivors compensation, was there anything like that in the merchants?**

No, no that was only considered a civilian force during the war, only up and

28:30 they accepted Veterans' Affairs [Department], merchant navy fellows in recent years.

**So you're just basically out of a job?**

Yeah, I was out of a job. They did write to me and say they had another ship but I'd joined the navy by then. The first thing I did, I joined the navy on the way through Melbourne.

**Are you old enough by this stage or are you still just under?**

Yeah, I was 18.

**Okay.**

On the 13 April.

**Well, tell me a bit about going back to see your family before joining the navy?**

Yeah,

29:00 I went to, straight to, not straight, I stayed with some friends of people that the parents knew in Oakley for a, we came down firstly from Sydney, I think the following day after we were billeted to a hotel and you know we were very well looked after there. And they shipped us back,

29:30 no doubt one of them came from Newcastle and he went back to Newcastle, he would have gone back earlier. But we came onto, two from South Australia, three from South Australia, I think it was and I was Tasmanian, oh well I haven't seen these people for years. So I went back to Tassie, back to Smithton but on the way through I joined the navy. I had to you know,

30:00 went into Alder Fleet House and joined up and had to go through a bit of an examination and education and school you know that sort of thing. But anyway, I got passed, that's how they said, well your eyesight is a little bit colour-blindness, so you know you can't really go on deck but well you know as a seaman you have to go down the engine room, which is a great branch of the navy and I didn't think at the time you know engine room and you're down there

30:30 and you get blocked you know, you're had it you know. Anyway, I went back to Tassie.

**Yes, well I've got a question for you though, I understand why you would like to join the navy and you know have a bit of a shot back at those that had just taken all the men but have you got some concerns then, about having survived once you sort of know where you need to be to survive again?**

Yeah, well that's right but I suppose it did sink in you know, it did

31:00 affect my thinking at that particular, I thought, but I just wanted to be in the navy and I wanted to get back in and really have a go at them you know.

**Did you tell them that when you were joining up? Did you give them reasons why or did they ask?**

Oh they sort of, I remember he was a lieutenant commander, I think he was in the navy and 'cause the merchant navy, I don't know what they're, they're two different sort of services entirely, and merchant navy is much more, you're more,

31:30 mixture between the upper deck and the lower deck and it's a different sort of, you know which is great. I loved the old merchant navy you know, they're sort of attitude, very brave people I'll tell you, irrespective of, so was the navy too everybody but they sort of you know practically, not defenceless but they go in there and that's it you know,

32:00 it's enormous and so many have lost their lives. But more or less a sitting duck if you were attacked. But ...

**So when you joined the navy did they give you a uniform straight away?**

Yeah, oh yeah, odds of the round ring you know with the round hat and the real tights pants and the tight jacket, yeah I was on the lower deck, I wasn't PO [Petty Officer] or a kellick or,

32:30 I was what they call a first class stoker and

**So when you went home to see your family, were you already in uniform then?**

No, no I went over to see Dad, it was a Smithton, my Mum and Dad and my other sister. My sister, she had unfortunately passed away, one of my twin sisters, died of tuberculosis unfortunately, very sad. They didn't have the drugs in those days to cure them, like

33:00 I think it's stricter biason or something is, isn't, I think, I don't know I might be wrong there but I, but they later discovered something but poor soul Irene and she had, but Mary was there, my other sister and mother and father. And Dad was in charge of the Circular Head district there and yeah, went back

to see them and I joined the navy and they said "Well, are you going to wait for a call up?" and I had to.

33:30 Veterans' Affairs wrote to me while I was there, it wasn't Veterans' Affairs, it was the Department of, anyway the same thing, I forget what they call it, repatriation and they said "Did I want to make a claim?", and they said "To go along to a doctor", so I did. A Doctor Packman and he examined me and he said, well he'd put me down as I'd you know talked to him and the shock and exposure, but whether they've got any record of

34:00 that I don't know.

**But they did make offers to you that as a merchant navy man?**

Yeah, I can't under, yeah it's funny that because I did have that letter, I remember my Dad said to me "Now you get along and see the doctor, you have been suffering with that no doubt".

**But that was years since you've seen your family though?**

Yeah, it was about from the time I was 14 until I was 18 then, it would be 4 years.

**And what a change in you, you've gone from a boy to a man?**

Yeah,

34:30 oh god yeah, I'd become an adult.

**So what did your old ma say when she clapped eyes on you?**

Oh the poor soul she was so. Oh she cried and, but she thought I'd been killed, at the initial stage you know, 'cause I hadn't seen them or anything and then she knew I was alive and oh she was elated, bless her soul, yeah. But she always you know she said to me, the Irish are very, she was very superstitious and she

35:00 said to me "Georgie", she called Georgie, she said, "You'll never drown at sea", now I always recollect, as a child she said that to me and I said "Why do you say that Mum?", and she said "Well, you were born with a veil over you", so I can never understand that, but I do because I was apparently born as a caesarean birth and

35:30 at that time they called it a veil over you or something you know but she always said that "You'll never drown at sea". And that still stays in my mind. I hope she's right. But you know up till now she's been correct, but if I was going to drown I would have then, wouldn't I and consequently further the navy, etc and so forth and I've always loved the sea.

36:00 **Did they hear about the sinking of the Iron Crown?**

Yeah, it was apparently yeah it was pretty well publicised but it wasn't mentioned the ship, it was the second ship, I've got papers of, I'll show you after, but the Sydney Morning Sun and the I think it's the Herald

36:30 or the Daily News I think, anyway they've got second ship sinks at, is torpedoed and that sort of thing, it's got the headlines on the Saturday morning and the headlines in the Sydney papers and everything and how many were killed and all the names of those that were killed and photographs and everything in there.

**And as part of the merchant navy, did they bother to let your parents know or because it's civilian is it not arranged?**

I think they would of,

37:00 yeah I more than probably spoke to them by phone or something or they would have let them. Dad would have found out anyway.

**And what did your dad make of his lad, who he sent up to the mines and has come back a bit of a hero and a survivor?**

Oh yeah, he was really elated, he was elated no doubt, he was very pleased to see me alive, Oh I loved me Dad and I'm sure it was reciprocated.

**And what did they both think of you then, joining up to go and do something even more dangerous perhaps?**

Oh I don't know

37:30 really, I suppose they were proud, that I did it, yeah. But yeah, I can't recollect what they said at the time but I was in it and I was going to join the navy. I joined it, I got called up in the September. I think it was around about the 9 September or something, I got called up down to Flinders and then I volunteered for a special force.

## Tape 5

00:31 **George, I'd like to start off with, one of the things they like us to do is to get what they call word pictures,**

Yeah sure.

**descriptions and so forth. I would like if you could describe the Iron Crown for us from stem to stern? In as much detail as you can?**

Yeah, it's a little difficult in this respect, see I was only on here for a short period; it was the first

01:00 sea trip on her.

**That's okay, just what you remember?**

Yeah what I remember of it and actually when you're on a ship you don't see the ship as if you're, I as what I would looking at a picture of but what I recollect yeah, she was fairly old ship, built about 1921, she, the tonnage on would be about

01:30 3 and a half, I think was 3500, around about that figure, she had from the bow, a normal bow type of ship, a merchant ship and she had hatches forward and aft of the midship quarters, the bridge was a midships, the officers, the captain and third and first,

02:00 second and third mates and the other members of the crew, which are ships right, etc were billeted to my knowledge midships, the cookhouse was a midships, a little aft of the quarters, or between I think the bridge and there was another set of quarters where perhaps the

02:30 engineer and etc and so forth, the boatswain quartered, then there was a hatch after that section and there was the mess decks, the engine room and the seamen's mess decks and then I recollect rightly

03:00 that there was a hatch and then the aft quarters of the ship where we were all billeted as far as the crew, like seaman and engine room staff and that type of the crew were billeted down there.

**What were your quarters like?**

They were quite of the times; I think they were quite good.

**Can you describe them for me?**

Oh, I can't really recollect them,

03:30 **This is a test.**

I'm not sure, my memory is.

**Well, how many were there to a room, the room that you were in?**

We weren't in rooms, I can't recollect rooms. I've got a feeling in my mind that there were double bunks, one on top but I could be wrong there too, there could have been. We seem to be a big quarter and sort of, I don't know

04:00 and quite honestly as I said, I was only on her for a period of, might have been 6 weeks or so, on the Iron Crown, and as I said voyage to our first was to Whyalla and return journey back to Newcastle.

**Where was the gun place on the ship?**

That was placed above the aft

04:30 quarters, there's a deck above there.

**And what sort of gun was it?**

It was about a four inch yeah, a four inch gun, no doubt it would have been a pretty old design too.

**Did you say you were part of the gun crew?**

Yeah part of, yeah.

**Can you describe how many guy were, how many men were in the gun crew and what their roles were?**

I can't really recollect how many were in the gun crew, but I would imagine there, I know there was the demes gunner, which is the naval gunner

05:00 attached to the merchant ships, there was myself, there was the other young fellow that had been, the Rushgrove, Billy Rushgrove he was one of them, there was couple more, I think there could have been about four or five, I'm not sure on that though, I

05:30 can't still recollect how many exactly, how many was in that cause it was only that short, I was only a short period of time I was in the merchant navy.

**How long was it exactly? It was only a few weeks, wasn't it?**

Yes, it was about 6 weeks I think, five to six weeks, it's on my discharge certificate there. So I went from there straight into the navy practically. The Royal Australian Navy.

**Did you, did it live up to your expectations,**

06:00 **the navy in that short period, did you think?**

What the merchant navy?

**Yeah**

Yeah it did really, yeah. I'm always, I was very proud of the time I was in that and to have survived on a, that little, that tragic incident. Yeah, but it was, I would have perhaps like to have stayed in it. But I wanted

**Are the traditions of the merchant navy very, oh you only had a few weeks there as a young lad, but**

06:30 **do you think they were much different to the military navy?**

Oh yes, there's quite a bit of, there's more, but it's still a sea service and so yeah, no doubt about it they're still similar things but it's more of a different. What might I say, but my short period, yeah a little bit different. In the navy you're very,

07:00 more or less with the navy its, we always say KR and AI, Kings Rules and Admiralty Regulations and you know you're on the lower deck and there are so many different grades in the navy and you're the lower deck and you know and there's the, so many different ranks and there's, kellicks, which is leading

07:30 seaman or leading signalman etc and then there's POs and then there's chief POs and then there's acting warrant officers and there's warrant officers and there's sub lieuts [Lieutenants] you know, the whole rigmarole is so, really it's so complicated to it, to the way merchant navy is sort of merchant navy is more,

08:00 to me is more what might I say, seems to be more simpler and there's more, it's more, it's a civilian occupation, there's you know, there's more liaison between the skipper and the ordinary crew, and the officers and the ordinary you know, they'll sort of mates or good friends and that sort of thing you know. Yeah, it's a different structure, but it's still, they're both good, they're both

08:30 good you know, but it's different but both spend their life on the sea.

**I'd like to ask you a question about the time just before you went on the Iron Crown, when you were working in a bar in Newcastle. Which, was that a port?**

I think, well look the hotel, I wasn't serving in the bar as a general sort of roustabout, I think I did used to serve in the bar now that I come to recollect it.

09:00 **I'm just wondering was there much, were you learning much more about the war then, having come down to Newcastle from Cape York, were you learning thing you hadn't heard before about the war?**

Oh yes, well I knew, oh yes well I knew we were very much under threat and only for the Coral. Look, the Battle of the Coral Sea which was fought I don't think, either ship, Japanese Navy or the American, Australian Navies and

09:30 perhaps British Navy perhaps took part, it wasn't much ship to ship activity, it was mainly all fought from aircraft carriers and aircraft. It was a naval battle, the first naval air battle in the war, or one of the first anyway, well definitely out here and that defeat of the Japanese stopped the invasion of

10:00 Australia, no doubt. But also the, as I mentioned before our defeat of the Japanese that forced them, came into Milne Bay we ambushed them and pushed them out again and the Kokoda Trail and Buna and Gona were heading for Moresby and the battle yeah, those few things that turned it.

**Were you hearing about those when you were down there in Newcastle**

10:30 **waiting for your ship, were you hearing news you hadn't heard before?**

No, not really, no. No, to be quite honest I wasn't greatly aware of that. It was fairly, pretty strict censorship on what was you know you had to keep the morale of the people up and

**When you were sailing in the Iron Crown on that first trip up to Whyalla and**

11:00 **back, you were part of a convoy or were you by yourself?**

No, we weren't; no, we were just sailing singularly, convoys weren't in Australia on Australian waters, weren't a part of the set up at the time.

**So you say the Iron Crown was the second ship sunk, was that the second ship sunk in Australian Waters?**

I'm just trying to recollect there

- 11:30 on the east coast. I don't know about the Australian waters, no it wouldn't have been 'cause two were sunk down near Bass Strait, the Garanchi [?] was cut in half and sank off Portsea, she was a navy ship, she got split in half but that was complete you know, that was an accident
- 12:00 by one of our ships. A troop ship actually and it couldn't go over to it apparently but the other two were sunk by mines, the City of Rayville and trying to think, was it the Cambridge, it might have been the Cambridge, I know the City of Rayville was one.

- 12:30 **What I'm wondering is, were you feeling vulnerable, did you think you know, I wish we had a warship with us or did that not enter you heads at all?**

Not me personally at the time, no. No, I was concerned because I thought well you know what, I hadn't been involved in a submarine attack but yeah I was a little bit concerned no doubt but just hoped that it wouldn't happen.

**Were there**

- 13:00 **watches for enemy ships or for submarines or anything like that?**

Possibly could have been from the, see I wasn't aware of that at all really, my job was to get the scraliers as we called it, the food from the cookhouse and the cook said, "Peggy, you're a bit early come back in 5 minutes", I was the top and I moved from there down to there and just talking for a few seconds and we copped it.

**It's amazing how tiny little things,**

- 13:30 **little accidents and so forth make all the difference?**

Oh definitely, yeah, yeah my word they do, no doubt. Getting back to the other ships, those other two ships were sunk I think in 1940, Cape Otway, down in Bass Straits and they were sunk by mines.

**Would they have been German mines?**

German mines yeah. Germans apparently laid the mines there.

**Gee, they were busy, weren't they?**

- 14:00 Yeah, from no doubt they would have been armed merchant cruisers or something that laid the mines. They were the City of Rayville and the Cambridge, I'm sure it was. It was and the other two ships that were sunk in Victorian waters were the Iron Crown and the Retsina [?], was very close to where we were.

**George, I might get you to read out this, tell about this plaque and then**

- 14:30 **if you could read out what's on it,**

Oh righto.

**that would be great?**

Yeah, I always wanted to do something about commemorating the fellows, the shipmates that were went down with the Iron Crown, so I thought for years, especially later in my life.

- 15:00 What can, I don't, what will I possibly do, I've got to do something, where's the best place to put it? I did think of up top of the banks of the Hunter River where there's a nice cenotaph there and where they have a service each year for merchant ships and merchant men that lost their lives and a couple of the iron boats that, their plaques are there
- 15:30 and those that lost their lives etc. They were iron boats, we were, the Iron Crown was only on charter to BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] by, Scott Fell owned it. Anyway, when I visited Newcastle I realised that there's nothing mentioned about the Iron Crown and of course I, she was gone and forgotten and so through a process etc and so forth. I did
- 16:00 approach BHP and I didn't approach the managing executive of the company or anything like that but I did call in there one day and I thought, I wonder if they would assist me in financially in doing this, what I had in mind, a place in something in Mallacoota because it was somewhere that I reckon in my mind when we were looking towards land, we were out there on that wheelhouse,
- 16:30 and a few of us and we could see the coastline there and we could see Gabo Lighthouse, which was not that far, that was the lighthouse and later on that was Mallacoota, which I learnt was Mallacoota and I



thought, well that's where if anything goes, it's got to go there. I tried many, I'd written to the what more of less the

- 17:00 progress association there or the historical association and etc, but they were very, very helpful, but I was sending them papers but anyway they didn't seem to be making much progress and they approached BHP and they said well look unfortunately, the lass I was talking to she said "Unfortunately, we can't because it was not our ship, it was only on charter".
- 17:30 She said "You can write to the managing directors a request and see if they'll assist you in that sort of thing". And I though no blow it, I'm not going to do that I'll do it meself. So which I set out and I finally I did, at a great deal of cost I suppose but I thought well blow it, otherwise they're forgotten see and
- 18:00 so I got a company to make A-1 plaques actually, did a very good job and their costing was very, very reasonable, exceptional and they did a very good job and it's down at Mallacoota but anyway, I had it here in that back room for about 8 months, 7 or 8 months and it didn't seem to be getting away because I
- 18:30 didn't know where to put it down there or anything like that. And then I don't know how it came about but a lady and her name is, she's a journalist and she writes apparently articles for the Sun, her, I'm still, her name was Jill Fraser and she wrote a story and she asked, she rang me here and she was very, very about the Iron Crown
- 19:00 and the sinking of the Crown and anyway, I don't know whether it was ever published, I don't think it was but she told me that she had taken the paper, the article that she wrote. Now she said to me, I told her what was happening and I didn't seem to be getting anywhere and it's amazing, she said "You leave it to me" and she said "Ring me back or I'll ring you back in a couple of hours".
- 19:30 And she did and she said, "George", she said "Contact this number or what's a name, Wes Emmett, the president of the Lions Club", and he was just absolutely a great, great fellow, and the whole family. And he battled, Wes to get a rock from Gabo Island and for some reason or another he couldn't get one, or one large enough because this is about
- 20:00 very big, it's about 2 feet or 1600 by about 1500 and he couldn't get one but he was determined to get it there and he pulled every you know, he did everything he possibly could and finally we laid, he got the concrete, things were delayed a bit, but then he turned, he really wanted it there, Wes
- 20:30 and finally he said to me "I can't get it for some reason or another, they don't", I wrote to the council at Lakes Entrance and I forget their names and everything now, but Mr Hack was one of them anyway, he said "Look, we can, we'll put it in concrete", I said "Right", he said "Where", I said "I've got it here, I'll bring it down", he said "Right,
- 21:00 I'll organise that", he did the form work, he and his son, Wes and his son, Wes Emmett and his son formed it, I hopped in the car, put the plaque in and away I went and I got there at half past three and he'd all nicely concreted and everything, it was in the concrete by half past four, quarter to five, and that's how he worked
- 21:30 and he really was fantastic, only for him, I think I'd have been still struggling. And we were there at 11 o'clock at night trowelling off the edge - that was Wes. Now he, great family, great fellow but he's no longer president at all, but I don't think he lives there now at all but that was it and then we, but it is great
- 22:00 and we had a service there and a dedication of the plaque and that sort of thing and I did it off my own bat and I thought well I'm going to do this and I paid for it anyway.

**Good on you.**

So that was something and the RSL [Returned and Services League] down there is, were very helpful and what's his name, I forget his name now, the president doesn't sound very good, does it?

**That's all right.**

It's just and it was a great day there.

- 22:30 I've got photos of that particular day and yeah and they so that's what this is. I'm sorry, I'm raving on.

**That's all right, if you could read that for us now?**

And this is what the plaque reads and I had help from a very, very dear friend of mine and assisted with the helping, putting the words around but generally it was what I envisaged and its - "In Commemoration

- 23:00 of Captain and Crew of the S.S. Iron Crown 1922 - 1942 on June, the 4th 1942. The S.S. Iron Crown carrying a cargo of manganese ore was sunk by the Japanese Submarine I27 with a loss of 38 lives, 5 men survived the torpedo attack, South Southwest of Cape Howe at 4.45
- 23:30 pm and were rescued after several hours in the water by the S.S. Mulbera with strong support from a

RAF Bomber patrol. This plaque honours the memory of the 38 men who went down with the ship and whose graves lie east towards the horizon from this point. May they forever rest in peace. The merchant service was under relentless attack around the Australian coastline and between

24:00 June 1942 and June 1943, 13 Japanese submarines operating off the east coast resulted in the loss of 22 allied, of which 12 were Australian owned with the loss of 194 lives. Killed on the Iron Crown were Captain McClelland and the other crew members were Anderson

24:30 A Anderson, S. Bartlett, R. Bennett, S. Bockerhan, D. Byrne, F. Chamince, D. Conway, R. Coster, D.J Daragar, J Davies, Ferguson, Giles, Griffiths, Hand,

25:00 Hay, Inall, James, Jobson, Kanuther, Kanavas, McCaren, McDonald, McGregor, Miller, Ormiston, Poulton, Quinn, Rushford, Sanderson, Scott, Smith, Smithes, Stewart, Sutherland, Taylor, Taylor and Tracey. Survivors George Fisher, Neil McKelvie, Bruce Miles,

25:30 J. Roach and A. Sebastian. That's it.

**Thanks George.**

Very good.

**It must have put a few ghosts to rest when you had that plaque put up.**

It did, it did John, [interviewer] very much so yeah. That was a very, one of the most commemorative days perhaps of my life, or in recent

26:00 years anyway of the support I received from the Merchant Navy Service, Merchant Mariners, Returned Merchant Mariners, which I'm a member of and fortunately I attend a meeting every month up there at, but they were great, Cam Watson took me down, called here and picked me up, he's the president of

26:30 it, he's a Scotsman and he took me down that and they, oh it was really, really terrific. I, yeah they're closed, I don't know, it wasn't the whole school but it was the senior classes and they closed for that period of time when the commemorative service was going to go on

27:00 being conducted anyway, also they planted a pine tree that was from Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Cove. And Anzac Cove pine, I've got a photo of it in recent years and it's growing really well.

**Great**

Yeah and that was the same dedication day and terrible lot, I reckon half of Mallacoota got there that day, and there was

27:30 the children and had some very good articles on it, very proud, very proud. It's there at the cenotaph.

**Well let's talk about the RAN then? The Royal Australian Navy? We've only got 10 minutes to go for this tape. Just very briefly,**

28:00 **did you have an instant hatred for the Japanese after that?**

Yeah, I think I did, yeah I think I did. Or very much, or very strong dislike. I think we had to psyche ourselves because of, well they were our enemy.

**Was that something you think people built up, you know like you rev yourself up to do something, do people build themselves up, build the steam up then they could go out and**

28:30 **take part in the war or did it just happen like that?**

Yeah, I think it was either you kill them or they kill you and that's what it is. War, I think war is terrible. I'm very much opposed to it now and would have been then but still it's either you survive or they survive and you know they carried out some terrible atrocities,

29:00 things in China and prior to coming into the war and what they, you know I think you stop them or they stop you and that's what it was, it's a shocking thing when you think of it, you know another human being, it makes you shudder now but when you're younger, you sort of, it's only survival, isn't it,

29:30 you've got to fight back and we certainly fought back ferociously no doubt, but I feel that in the navy, I often feel for soldiers and perhaps that really do have, I didn't ever have the conflict where it was man to man type of thing. I don't know how I would have

30:00 felt if you had to kill a, well no doubt I participated in getting rid of the enemy as far as.

**Do you think in the navy and perhaps in the air force too, you're not so much killing men as blowing up machines, whether airplanes or boats.**

Well you're killing people, yeah the air force, an enormous amount of people were killed in bombing raids and god knows what

30:30 and no doubt in the navy, you know in sea battles between fleets and battleships.

**Do you think of it as, like you don't say we killed 300 men today, you say we sank a battleship?**

Oh god no, no.

**You think of it as a machine, don't you?**

Yeah you do, yeah you gotta do a job and that's what you do, you gotta protect your, you know what I mean your not, you're fighting for your nation, you're fighting the,

31:00 you know your women and your children and your, for your whole country, you know that's your psyche, not, I can't really explain it fully, I don't think, it's just the way you think at the time. But wars are terribly shocking, there's got to be another solution than wars.

**Oh yeah.**

Why people kill each other and even in

31:30 recent times it's terrible you know.

**Well, what do you think of the Iraq war?**

I don't agree with it, I definitely don't, I don't agree with what happened and I think it has caused and will continue to cause so many problems that I just, that is my,

32:00 there had to be another way of solving problems than going in and just you know, I just couldn't understand that, I still can not understand that because that wasn't in my estimation, that was not necessary, what has happened there. You know what you see and what you understand

32:30 on that conflict, that had to be, you know

**Do you think war is only justified in defence?**

Now that's something I've got to, only justified, yes. I look, well that's what you do, you defend, I don't think we, you know why should you go

33:00 and attack another nation for perhaps a reason that you don't agree with you know and that's what I believe in my own mind, I'm not saying whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong but in the Iraq situation it's definitely to my way of thinking and what I can understand about it, it's oil, it's just that they don't agree with the

33:30 political power that was or the political system that was in their particular country you know. I've tried to read as much as I possibly could about it and try to understand Iraq and that sort of thing and I just, my belief is that should not have, there must be another way about

34:00 obtaining those, the outcome.

**Just quickly in the last few minutes of this tape then, having been in World War II, on the heels of that came the Korean war and then 10 years after that comes Vietnam, as a returned serviceman what were your thoughts about the fact that we were going to war again and again and again?**

Yeah I look, I have feelings that

34:30 yeah I, they're not conflicting feelings but I just believe in this is the way I feel. Wars are definitely the last resort of any disagreement or the way to approach, I think there must be other solutions.

35:00 War is definitely the last resort, to go and declare war or to have a war on another sort of a nation. There's you know, there's some things that are justified and other things that I believe are not justified, you know I can talk for hours on the subject but with the Vietnam war, not the Vietnam war, I'm sorry with the Korean war,

35:30 yes it, that conflict was being what going on for what fifty years is it, you know what I mean, there's an enormous amount of and yeah it's, I knew people, you know friends of mine that had fought in that Korean war and I think it was the unknown war

36:00 it was called, wasn't it?

**Do you think it affects men to fight in a war that people forget or people think we shouldn't have been there?**

People think we shouldn't have been there?

**If people think we shouldn't have been there or they forget about the war, do you think it affects the return servicemen deeply to think that nobody cares about that war?**

Yeah, I think that, yeah I do think that about Vietnam. I think that for some reason or another

- 36:30 why we were, that Vietnam war I do believe was not necessary, that's just my opinion on it. I feel that because as time has proved it wasn't, because it was the belief that it was, what do they call the domino or the, they thought that it was the
- 37:00 stepping stone of communist aggression etc and so they proved so wrong. That we were involved with America and 'cause America lost that war in Vietnam and I lost, a lot of our fellows were killed there, and what has been the solution there, it has just the destruction, it's terrible is the civilian, what happens, my way of feeling,
- 37:30 it is if you're there, the people that are fighting the army, navy or air force, you at least, you have a defence, you have, are equipped with your defence but there are women and there's children and there's old people and you know they're absolutely defenceless, that's what I really feel and they don't tell us all, what happens in a conflict

## Tape 6

- 00:32 **Just to clarify things George, how old were you when you actually joined the Royal Australian Navy?**
- I was eighteen.
- And you don't have to be twenty to join the navy, do you?**
- No.
- Where were you waiting, once you joined the navy were you called up instantly or were you waiting for a call up?**
- No, I was waiting for it, well I joined in June and I was, waited for the call up
- 01:00 that was in September.
- Were you with your family in Tasmania during that time?**
- I was, yes.
- What did you get up to during those 3 months of?**
- I worked.
- On?**
- Yeah, I worked, I was helping people that, Beacons were their names and he had trucks, he used to do transport work, timber and also potatoes and I helped them there for a few months,
- 01:30 yeah.
- What was life like in the middle of the war then in Tasmania?**
- Pretty good.
- Did it not [?] as much affective rationing?**
- Yeah, yeah I can recollect I think coupons. You got some coupons for sugar and for tea and different commodities, I can't clearly recollect how many
- 02:00 were involved, you know so many coupons for different items.
- Was there a noticeable lack of young men around?**
- There was very much so. Yeah, we used to comment about that.
- What would you say?**
- Oh, Yeah
- We're all adults, we're all adults here.**
- Well Tasmania, well you really you know, it was a good place to have a holiday really, you know you used
- 02:30 to go home on leave and yeah, a big lack of men. You'd go to a dance there and the girls would be dancing with the girls, you know there would be such a lack of males.
- So in that case then, I guess you were never short of a date then, were you?**
- You always had company, yeah definitely. Yeah but perhaps not so much on the mainland but you know
- 03:00 but Tasmania in particular, well I thought anyway, and so did the other mates and that.

**Did you have a special sweetheart or were you playing the field?**

No not really, I wasn't there long enough cause I was just got home for a few weeks. You know the one when we came into Melbourne here or into the docks with the Adelaide to embark to Sydney you know. I think we had a couple of weeks'

03:30 leave but when we came back aboard to the ship they said, no it was before we came back there was a what's a name notifying that those that were on leave there for another week or a fortnight, I think it was because we were going to Sydney to pay the ship off.

**When you said, I just want to pick up on something you mentioned a minute ago and when you were in Tasmania for that 3 months period before you**

04:00 **got called up and you said you had with this very wicked kind of smile on your face, when I said were there many, was it noticeable that there were no men, you said, yeah, we said a few things about that, what sort of things would you say?**

Oh just the lack of males, you know, there were so many girls around. I suppose we were only young and really, you know there was plenty of dancing partners and partners if you wanted to go to

04:30 a picture show or if you wanted to go out or anything like that. Yeah and it was quite noticeable really.

**Did you notice a change at all in the girls, were they becoming more independent, do you think?**

No, I didn't sort of, I didn't notice that at all no, they were you know perhaps the same as anywhere else.

**Did you see women and girls doing jobs that normally you wouldn't expect them to do?**

Oh definitely yeah, there was the land army and that type of thing. I think there was doing work

05:00 that they normally, they wouldn't be doing you know. I think yeah that was definitely for sure.

**Do you have any particular memory of like for the first time seeing a girl driving a truck and think what the, what's going on there?**

Can't really remember, I more than probably would of. Yeah, I would have, I would say. More than probably at the time if I did see it, yeah I would have.

**Okay.**

You know we sort of,

05:30 perhaps we accepted it because we had WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] in the navy and that's when they started to come into the land army girls and that type of thing, yeah we used to...

**So when the call up came,**

Yep

**what did you take, what did you take from home with you, what did you pack away that you wanted to bring with you?**

Oh very little, very little I think, I had just enough clothes to

06:00 wear over and cause when you got into Flinders or Cerberus, it was a naval uniform and I don't know what. I think I left my clothes, don't know I might have sent them home I think, I can't recollect.

**And you, mum being a good Irish Catholic girl, she didn't give you a Saint Christopher's Medal or anything?**

No, no, oh no, I wasn't such a good Catholic boy as Mum was

06:30 a Catholic lady. Or though, I think she might have thought, though she may have, look I might have been telling a fib there, she may have given me a St Christopher's medal.

**Did you have any lucky souvenirs or any lucky superstitions or charms of your own that you might have had with you?**

No, there was only that one when I said, mentioned before that she said, "You'll never drown at sea you know", and she sort, you know I remember that,

07:00 that's about all, no.

**So was that a thought that you dwelt on often, that your mum said, "I'll never drown at sea", and you felt comfortable with that?**

Oh not really, you know you hope for the best, you hope that you know you survive. You just hope for the

best, if your time was up it was up.

**So arrival at Cerberus then, naval uniform putting that on for the first time, how did you feel?**

Oh quite good yeah,

07:30 yeah it was what we call the purser-y you know, you called it, we called it the pussa.

**Why pussa, why that?**

I don't know really why it's named, sort of a pussa ring, it was a naval issue, but once you got out of Flinders really, they give, you know your jackets were a bit slack and your pants were a bit big and you have the old navy and you had to put it square on your head. But we used to have what we, and they accepted that to

08:00 tiddly the uniform and we'd get them tailor-made either Melbourne or Sydney. It was Johnny's up in Sydney just in George Street, they used to make the tailor, tailor-made they'd be tight fitting and all the jazz or rig that you like, yeah.

**What was that tiddly, describe your tiddly uniform to me, what did it look like?**

It's exactly the same as the pussa uniform that they issued.

**Well what does that look like?**

Beg your pardon.

**Well what does that look like?**

Exactly, well

08:30 it just, oh with the seven creases in the pants, the wide bottoms, there's an interpretation of the seven creases, is it the, I forget now the interpretation of them, the seven, but it might come to the memory. I think that mainly why your stuff was reasonably close fitting really, was that maybe when you went

09:00 overboard that wouldn't drag in the water so much. It's all sort of, navy's all tradition, a lot of it I'd say is tradition. Sort of passed down and the black silk you were around, you've got your collar with the stipes, there'd be three white ones with a blue collar. Apparently, that was on their uniform back in perhaps Nelson's days and Drake's days, etc because they used to tar their pig

09:30 tails, the sailors and to stop the tar from getting on the jacket, that's what I've been told, if you believe that.

**Is that right? And what's the black silk, what's that?**

That's in mourning for Nelson.

**And what is it, is it a tie or?**

No, it's just a silk that goes around and I forget now how it ties or finishes here right down, yeah it goes around underneath the collar and round there and then there's the cord, that was, I

10:00 think originally there was a white cord that goes around too, that was originally for a whistle, apparently they carried a whistle. But you've got a bib that sort of went around here, it was a white bib with blue stripes and I try to think

**What was that for?**

I don't know more than probably to keep the beard off the, 'cause you can imagine those ships in those particular times, there wasn't enough water to drink let alone wash in.

10:30 It would more than probably stop the beard from rubbing over here.

**And George, did you have to wear all this palaver everyday?**

No, not really.

**What was your working uniform like then?**

Oh it was just shirt what I remember, no it was overalls that's right, I'm sure it was a blue type of overalls. That was a sort of an issue, you know they give you a reasonably good issue.

**What was the issue, what did it consist of?**

Oh

11:00 god, I can't recollect now, it was a few of each, the ribbons and oh you got shirts, yeah different combination, overalls not bib and brace, combination, yeah quite a bit of equipment, boots I forget how, now how many of them, we got at least a couple of pair

11:30 of boots, or shoes, I think you got shoes and you got boots and socks and hankies, they give you all that

is required.

**And how was, were you training at Cerberus or did you go somewhere else to train?**

No, I trained at Cerberus.

**And what did the training consist of?**

Oh, marching, a lot of marching, assembly's and it was pretty hard there. When we first went in

12:00 we, they were pretty tough on you. You don't seem to get a, you didn't in those days and of course no doubt war was on and the rationing etc, but you didn't seem to get enough sugar or tea or tucker to eat. But I suppose you're young and pretty hungry and that sort of thing. And everybody's battling to get the necessary things, you know. But you got enough to keep you going but no doubt you'd have a big appetite because you were drilling and doing,

12:30 oh rifle practice and all that type of, a lot of sport there too then

**What did you do sport wise?**

A bit of football and a bit of everything you know what year, tried a bit of soccer, and a game or two of rugby, didn't go too good there, you know big fellows.

**What about sea craft? Did they teach you much about sea craft?**

Yeah, we did do quite a bit of, down in the,

13:00 not a great deal though, we weren't aboard ships see, give you a little bit of, a lot of classes and that sort of thing and instructions and

**In terms of like in navigations or how a ship works?**

No, not navigation, what I can recollect, it wasn't. They had, otherwise it was oh just general of what you would be, see with the engine room you don't do so much rope work when you go to Flinders

13:30 but more so if you're in the seaman or go through different course. But they called for volunteers, I'm sure, yeah I was volunteered for a special course.

**And that was while you were at Cerberus?**

Assault, while I was at Assault, oh not Assault, at Cerberus, and so I joined that, I volunteered to join it.

**What did they tell to you, when they asked for volunteers, they said volunteers for what, what was?**

Well, they didn't tell us, it was more or less the same for

14:00 a commando force and of course commandos you can picture up in your mind and I thought they were going to send us up into the islands into the front line sort of things you know.

**Yeah**

Get stuck into them but or over to where the, you know that part we went in off Darwin there, Indonesia occupied it and then they had elections you know and they wanted to ...

**Timor**

Timor yeah, we thought, cause

14:30 we had a commando force in there.

**So when you volunteered for this force, what did it actually turn out to be?**

Well, can I explain it, in my, really it is just about equivalent to the SAS [Special Air Service] is now, you know our special service 'cause we were trained, pretty highly trained, like we did a commando's course, small arms fire, bayonet practice and went through all of that. Yeah, it was pretty physical.

15:00 **What does a, like you said a commando course, apart from small arms training and bayonet practice and so forth?**

Unarmed combat, yeah.

**Tell us about unarm combat training?**

Yeah, what I remember, there was quite a bit of, you know physical type of thing, boxing and all football, rugby more so there and everything and small arms. Yeah, they taught you a certain amount of unarm, you know to grab and

15:30 whatever and bayonet stabbing, we used to have bayonet practice and it's up there.

**Do you learn things like, sorry to interrupt but do you learn things like how to grab someone**

**and break their neck, that kind of thing?**

I think we more than probably did, I can't recollect that though. We did even being in the engine room, we were billeted in these huts but what we used to do with barges, we had these British barges at the start,

16:00 they called them Elkas, I think they were called Elkas, they were steel ones and they, we had a, they were pretty much better protection on those small ones than there were on the American ones. They had a little 2-V8 engines in the after part of the, no doubt the British used them a lot in the invasions overseas and Normandy or prior to that but there'd be these V-8s

16:30 and you'd be closed in, down in this little cabin in there. The coxswain, he had protection steel all around him, he used to drive and then he'd carry vehicles or he'd carry troops and 'cause the noise were unbelievable, they were there in that little engine room and you'd signal down full forward or full astern and what they would do is take the troops straight in onto the beach, because we did a lot of manoeuvres there and be

17:00 laden and down would go the front gate, she would go in full bore, sea running and then drop off your load and wham slam here into reverse.

**Oh you're down in the little engine room on that boat, with that forward and reverse**

Yeah on the Elkas. But with the, then the American ones (UNCLEAR) and they were marine ply, about half inch I think.

**The whole boat was marine ply?**

Yeah their ones were.

**Was that heavier than the steel or not?**

No,

17:30 much lighter, and much faster too. But for the coxswain he stood right up on the stern and oh very high sort of there and I actually never went in on any of the invasion forces like into Borneo or anywhere else with those but I should imagine he'd be still standing up there pretty well, pretty good target.

**What, half an inch of marine ply like at stopping a bullet?**

Not

18:00 to good, I don't think but it was lighter and faster and felt much faster. I don't think, oh I suppose a lot of them did get killed or blown up or that sort of thing. But they'd be laden with troops. They had landing craft personnel and then they had landing craft vehicles and then they had the bigger ones, huge craft too really and we did all that.

**And so you were working with, were you working with Americans there?**

18:30 At Nelsons Bay yeah, there was a contingent of American marines, or servicemen, navy fellows.

**How did you find the American servicemen?**

Oh we got on, some of them we got on well with and other ones we didn't, I suppose it's like, yeah there was always a little bit of controversy, I suppose. They didn't fully understand us, I don't suppose; it's only natural in a lot of ways. Yeah,

19:00 there was a lot of good fellows amongst them. We had an, 'affy' at the depot there; yeah we had a wet canteen and you know you'd drink a bit of beer and that there. A lot of them used to, them come over and get into the beer; our beer was a bit stronger than theirs.

**Still is.**

Yeah there were quite a lot. There were some as I said, there were good ones, same as our blokes.

**How long were you at this training?**

Oh I must have been there

19:30 about 9 or 12 months, no I think it was 12.

**And you asked to be transferred out, didn't you?**

Yeah, well a lot of us did because there were thousand there, I volunteered for it, there were thousand there and coming from a situation, you know from what I come from with the merchant navy and the Crown, you know I wanted to get back in and get a ship

20:00 or get back into action. I felt that nothing was happening, there was a lot of, not stress, but I felt a lot of unrest because we were pretty highly trained, we were pretty fit but nothing was happening, well it didn't seem to be at that stage. You know the war was going on and it was a lot of big conflict, big



battles going on up north and we sort of wanted to get

20:30 into that. And we knew that from the thousands there was not going to be that many that would be sort of chosen, whether I would have been or not, I don't know but anyway I thought, oh blow, I'll, a lot of us, there was heaps and heaps of my mates, Stan Gray and Curly Gerard and Kenny Rogers, all those fellows that

21:00 applied for to be redrafted back into general service.

**And did that happen straight away?**

Yeah, I think they were pleased that, you know they knew how many were going to be selected for the ship and they had more than probably for every one that was selected there was two more to take their place, you know.

**So where did you go from there?**

I went back to Flinders

21:30 and Flinders Naval Depot.

**And how long were you there for?**

Oh I don't, just enough time to do a new course, a general service course.

**Were you getting a bit frustrated by now, just doing training for a year, well over a year?**

Oh no, that wasn't long training down there, no. Another mate of mine that went back with us, was Stan Gray, good old Stan been, I think he's buried down here at Sandburs,

22:00 Frankston, but he died many years ago but he went back with us, and he picked up one of the destroyers the [HMAS] Napier, but I went over to Western Australia and picked up the [HMAS] Adelaide, the cruiser.

**How did you get across to Western Australia?**

Oh this is an interesting story.

**Do tell?**

Yeah, it was in a goods train, with palliasses, you know with straw in the palliasses and on the,

22:30 it was just carriages, in closed carriages, they carry goods in. Oh there was army and that sort of thing on it, it was a long journey too.

**How many days at that time?**

God, I don't know, it was about 6 days I think, it was a fair while.

**So just in like steel carriages?**

Yeah with wooden floors.

**They'd get pretty hot?**

Oh they were yeah, oh it wasn't too bad, the heat in them didn't sort of worry us that much, by sleeping on those palliasse cause

23:00 they were a bit rough, but I think I'm right in quoting this, that the back of the train, there were two carriages, first class carriages and they were just in front of the guards train that they have on the back and you know they were rumour and they reckon and I think it was right, they were POWs [Prisoners of War], they

23:30 were Italian officers and they had them in first class carriages. Yeah, somebody said there are

**What did you fellows think of that at the time?**

We thought it was a bit of a joke, you know but yeah, but whether that was correct or not, I don't know, but they did have those.

**But you're stuck in an empty box basically, all day and the train's rattling along, what do you do?**

Oh we stopped, you know you'd stop for your meals and that

24:00 sort of thing, oh yeah they sort of look, they always fed you pretty well in the navy, you know there was, food was good and conditions were pretty good excepting when you first went into Flinders, tucker was a bit short. But when you went back to Flinders, ships company it was real good, you know it was a different story all together.

**Okay, so 6 days in a steel box**

Yeah

**cursing these Italian officers?**

Oh

24:30 no we weren't, oh no we didn't curse them, we thought good luck to them, if they want to put them in there, well you know you sort of, you're pretty naïve, you know you sort of, no I wasn't annoyed with them, nor were the others you know. But we thought it was a bit of a joke, but I never saw them actually but they tell us or whoever it was somebody had seen them and said yes,

25:00 they're Italian officers, they're POWs and they were taking them over there. But I don't know, don't definitely quote me on that but I'm pretty sure it was tho.

**So six days later you're in Perth?**

Well six, it might be five days around about that.

**That's fine. And did you go straight to the Adelaide?**

Yep, I think, I don't think we went to the depot, more than probably might have gone to the depot first

25:30 and then.

**Can you tell us in much the same way as you did with the Iron Crown but perhaps in more detail 'cause you spent more time on here, what the Adelaide looked like, take me on a tour of the ship?**

Yeah, she was a good ship, it was a lot better looking ship for a battleship than what I thought. There's a, if you ever go into Duckboard House in Little Flinders Street in the city here on the wall there's a

26:00 plaque, up stairs, it's the Naval Association, it's like a museum there. George Ashley is the, he's the secretary but he looks after the things and there's one of the Adelaide and one of the actions out there, she'd had a bit of a battle with one of the, taken the ship but that's before I joined her and she was quite a good looking ship. She wasn't a modern, built in about the 19 early 20s but she

26:30 didn't have enclosed turrets with the guns or anything. I think she might have had 6-inch guns on her, very good gun crew. She was a yeah nice you know good looking ship you know like a cruiser, the early model wasn't like the [HMS] Nelson or anything like that. But yeah, good boat, happy ship. I liked the Adelaide.

**Well, take us on a walk along the deck from the stem to the stern,**

27:00 **what are we going to see?**

Well what, through the Adelaide. On the deck no doubt, I can't recollect walking on the deck that much, unless you come onto the after-quarters where the, what do they call that? There's a particular name for it, I forget now but there was a tunnel running through her down below and that went right from the bow, from under the bridge no doubt, right to the, down to the

27:30 quarterdeck I think they called it. Where you had to put your card in and sign on. Yeah but that was one of my duties there when action stations was what they call damage control, if I wasn't on duty in the engine room. When it went action stations I had to lock the doors and if you got locked there you stayed there.

**What was your, could you tell us again what your action stations role was?**

Where they were?

28:00 **Just tell us again what your action station was?**

Yeah well, it was in one of these, through that tunnel, so that you could access it and you could go right through from stem to stern on the Adelaide, but there were doors. See all those ships have got water tight compartments, so if they hit in one section they won't sink, so you just shut that section off and it floods and that's it. So my duty was in the compartment if she was hit too, we never got hit there, so

28:30 it would have been to make sure the doors were locked, they were all closed off anyway.

**Working below decks you know in the back of your head, don't you, if you're hit, there's a good chance someone is going to shut the door on you?**

They were shut, John. So that was your job, keep them shut.

**Tell us about as a stoker in the boiler room, I take it?**

Yeah that's right.

**Describe the boiler room to us, 'cause that is where you spent most of your time?**

She was an oil

29:00 burner with big boilers, trying to [?] a lot of fires on them, and big fires and you know you've got a petty officer and chief petty officer, I think about how many boiler rooms she had, Adelaide, I can't recollect how many she had, I think it may have been about three.

**And what's in a boiler room, what do you see?**

Boiler, they're all compressed not say compressed, there a lot more pressure in the boiler room than what there is

29:30 outside, so you go in through two, you go in a door and then there's an airlock, you shut the door behind you and then you open the other door, so you don't open them together.

**Oh right.**

'cause it can cause problems in the engine room.

**Why is there pressure in the boiler room?**

Well the force, the fires, to keep the fires in the fireboxes,

**Oh right.**

under the boilers you know. 'Cause you can,

30:00 you know you can, they're working from the bridge, the engines and the engineers that may be a lieutenant or sub lieutenant or engineer are in there, you know they've got to like they'd say right up so many fires or down so many fires to keep the steam down, or you know you're working pretty hard there when you're

**When you say you're working pretty hard are you shovelling coal into these burners?**

Oh no

**How does that work?**

Oh no, they're oil

**Oil?**

Yeah, they've got oil. You've got to be careful sometime, you pull them open, they can

30:30 get what you call a backflash, the flame will come out, that's why you've got that more pressure there to keep that fire in there, so you learn to work those door pretty well.

**You'd learn that pretty quickly, I reckon.**

They'd say, "Up two", and you'd bang, bang, and

**So what does 'up two' mean?**

Up two fires

**What does that mean?**

Well there might be, say I'm thinking how many fires on the boilers, there might have been two boilers, I know on the coal burners there was three fire boxes in each of the boilers

31:00 on the Po Yang, but I think there were a few more and if I recollect right there were a few, so you might be having 3 fires going, 3 fire boxes going on the boilers but there might be six, so he might yell out "Up one" or "Down two", they know how many to get that extra lot of steam, so you shut 2 down or you set two going,

31:30 set two more going see or one.

**And was it always really hot in there?**

Yeah it was pretty warm, but it's not that hot, not bad, you know you're flat out, you're going all the time, you know your mind's watching what the signals are coming through and what you've got to do.

**And what were your duties in the boiler room, what would you actually have to do?**

I was just a stoker, watch those fire boxes and furnaces and do what they tell you to do.

32:00 **The first time you set foot on the Adelaide on another big ship, did anything in your mind go are you sure you're wanting to be doing this after being (UNCLEAR)?**

Not really, don't know. Well you've got a lot of sort of there with you, no doubt you feel like you've got a lot more protection and you feel you're prepared for something that is your job.

**Did other men ask you and say what was it like, is it think sailors talk about?**

32:30 What's that?

**Like on a ship would they ask you what it is like to be on a ship that sunk and?**

No, not that I recollect.

**Is it bad luck to talk about things like that on a ship?**

No, not really. Oh no, talk about oh general things, no I can't ever remember it, I think they knew but never remember it being mentioned much. It's a sort of a, it's a everything's going on around you all the time, what I mean the ship's getting torpedoed and

33:00 blowing up, and sunk and that. It's something that's happening and there's men on the battlefield getting killed all the time and so at that particular time, it seems to be later in these years now that these things, you sort of think about them more, than what you did back then. And other things you

33:30 know, you had families to rear and all of this stuff of course.

**What were your quarters like on the Adelaide?**

Pretty good, pretty good. Food was pretty good

**Hammocks or bunks?**

Beg you pardon.

**Hammocks or bunks?**

Hammocks. Used to swing the old hammocks up, it was good to, I enjoyed the hammocks.

**You like them, they're comfortable?**

Yeah, and you sort of, you swing them up forward and aft, you know the roll of the ship wouldn't,

34:00 you'd no doubt sway with the, in the hammocks they sort of lie there and the ship may roll

**I always thought it would be opposite, I thought you'd string them a beam, so that you got rocked but I guess you'd be going head to toe and you wouldn't want that?**

No/ this is a roll, really I reckon that makes you sick, that's why it's the, that movement doesn't make you as sick, as seasick as what the roll does.

**How did you cope with seasickness, did you get much of it?**

Yeah I do, even now I

34:30 actually, talking myself I'll tell you about the, we went up to Harvey Bay there, oh last year, mid last year. We went and had a look at the whales out there on Harvey Bay, you know out Fraser Island. Yeah, I got seasick. I wasn't, I didn't bring anything up but I couldn't eat me lunch, they'd put on a nice day, you know on those cruising boats and yeah, I got sick.

35:00 **With my experience on boats, which isn't huge and on ships, all of sudden you're sicker if you're below decks?**

Yeah it could be, yeah.

**Because when that horizon and all the walls start pitching up and down, that's when I start to feel sick.**

Yeah.

**Is it the case of the boiler room in a rough sea, you'd be much more likely to be sick than if you were on deck?**

Don't know, no I don't think we got sick in the boiler room see, probably in the navy

35:30 you're on and off the ships but if you hadn't had been to sea for a little while, the first day I'd get a little bit squeamish, I wouldn't possibly be bringing anything up, but things churned over and wouldn't eat that much food, but the following day, your body settles down or your stomach, you seemed to go all right, well I did. On occasion, it would give me a bit of a headache I think, I don't know why

36:00 it was more so in the tropics.

**You got sicker in the tropics?**

Beg your pardon?

**You got sicker in the tropics or you got?**

No, just a bit of a dull headache occasionally, sort of come on. Not that there was any sea at all, the seas

up there sometimes you know mid year in the dry season, it can be as calm there, like glass you know seas. But you could get caught in a

36:30 cyclone, which I didn't, never did, it would be a bit rough.

## Tape 7

00:30 **Yes, about the dryers and there were washing machines onboard too I believe, would that be right?**

On the Adelaide?

**Oh on some of the ships, was that on the Adelaide?**

There could have been too, I can't recollect them on the, these were the, we use to have doymen [?] or fellows that did the washing and you paid them and but I used to do my own. And but yeah they said, "Oh Fish, there's a dryer, why don't you put them in the dryer instead of wringing them out?" I put them in the dryer but they didn't get dry,

01:00 it was only a spinner but I wasn't [?] realise I thought flamin thing they're not drying and I had it going for any hour.

**Did they have you going again?**

No I think a lot of it was like that I think; they said it was a dryer.

**Well thinking of the cricket selectors and the steam substance, did anyone try to pull the wool over your eyes on the Adelaide?**

Oh no.

**Too smart for them then?**

Beg your pardon.

01:30 **Too smart by that stage.**

Oh yeah, that was only on the goldfield, when I first went there really. Yeah many years prior to that.

**What was your nickname, in the navy?**

Oh I never had a nickname really. But the Fishers were called "Bugsy", see in the navy all the Whites were "Knocklelights" [?] and I'm trying to think of other names but yeah, but I'm led to believe, nobody called me by that name, you know "Bugsy" or yeah, why I don't know it hasn't got a very nice connotation to it, Bugsy does it, it sounds like you're a bit grotty or something you know.

**You sound like a gangster I guess?**

Yeah

**I wonder why they didn't call you "The Fish", given that you were sort of near the sea and?**

Oh no, they didn't, just called me George, that's it.

02:30 But at school they called me "Fishhooks" and "Hooker" and god knows what, you know what kids are like. But, not in the navy.

**Now it can't all have been hard work, there had to be some time off, so how did you spend your R and R [rest and recreation] onboard or what little you may have got?**

Oh you got shore leave, you see we'd be on watches - a four watch, a red watch, port, starboard

03:00 it could be, I forget the other watches, but it could be four watches, could be, oh other watches you know, I'm trying to recollect it.

**How many on and off is a four watch?**

Four watches, what would it be, it would be 6 on, that's if you're on duty but if you're in port, 'cause that's at sea but

03:30 from what I recollect, but in port, there'd be port and starboard. See if you were port watch, well you'd be on for perhaps 24 hours and then you'd be off for 24 hours and away you'd go, etc.

**So before leave what did you do for a bit of relaxation onboard, play a few games?**

Yeah cards, read, write letters, yeah

04:00 when you're at sea.

**Any Two Up?**

No, not aboard, no. We used to play a bit of housie or bingo, that was a navy game.

**What about Crown and Anchor?**

Crown?

**Crown and anchor?**

Crown and Anchor yeah that is, I think that's another name for housie, I think isn't it, or is it?

**Was there any illicit sort of bit of gambling going on onboard that the captain didn't know about?**

Oh yeah, you'd play cards for money, yep.

**And was that**

04:30 **just**

Some play, crib and some play poker and euchre and that sort of thing. You had a lot of time to kill if you weren't on duty.

**With the gambling did the captain just turn a blind eye?**

Oh yeah they just, yeah they don't worry, they don't, you've got to occupy yourself and that but oh just general things, you know you're away and you could be away for quite some time. Same with

05:00 any of the services I suppose, you get homesick.

**What about shore leave what sort of fun did you get up to there?**

Now

**Now we're talking?**

Oh yeah, it was always good, yeah I enjoyed it, terrific. Go dancing, I loved dancing, not that I did a great, oh yes I did always go to a dance, mainly we used to go to dances, to find ourselves some company and etc.

05:30 **Is it true that is, you're in the navy you need to know how to dance?**

No, not necessary, no. No, I've never heard of that. It is very handy 'cause that's where you get company and

**Well speaking of the company where was the best place for company?**

Oh I don't know. Perhaps just about anywhere in Australia or

06:00 Australia, though Tasmania, well that's Australia of course.

**Well some people don't seem to think it is.**

Sorry Tassie, yeah.

**Any fond memories of particular places because of particular company. Notice the way I'm hedging my questions here.**

Yeah, Sydney and Newcastle yeah, they were very good. I made some very good friends there.

**Any girlfriends who you left sort of crying on the docks, wishing you were coming back?**

I hope not, who knows, you don't really. You often wondered don't you,

06:30 yeah. But that was it you know, with a sailor's life, the war's on yeah. But I don't, I hope not anyway. And I don't think so.

**Well we believe, or so we've been told that if a lady had her choice between an infantryman, an air force officer or a member of the navy, she's likely to choose the navy fellow.**

Oh are they?

**Did you not find that?**

Oh no. We sort of yeah, well what of, the sort of the general thing was that if the girls particularly liked, you know say you like navy fellows or they sort of liked the uniform perhaps and the person that was in them, I don't know what came first. But yeah and that was their choice, they looked for the company, for the navy

07:30 or if they liked the army, they look for the company of the army. See sometimes they didn't want to have

much to do with the navy.

**When you're on leave, did you find that the women during the war, had a little bit more front about them, that they were capable of talking to you and asking you for dances perhaps or did that not happen?**

No, not really, no. Not that I, I don't know I can't recollect that at all really.

**So who put**

08:00 **on the dances for you when you were on leave?**

I think they were, there was something like, they'd be privately run, you know they'd be nightclubs, there'd be, there was always a place for servicemen in Hyde Park in Sydney, which you could go to at any time really, Sunday afternoons, etc. Newcastle for instance there's

08:30 Tyrell Hall, there was the Albert Hall and which is still there, the old Tyrell Hall. Yeah, I was there last year they had the service for the merchant mariners there, that's coming up this weekend actually.

**And when you're coming into leave, you know you've got leave coming up. Is there a bit of geeing up amongst the fellows before you get leave, is there a bit of you know kind of competitive talk about**

09:00 **girls and how you're going to manage to take them out and so on?**

No, not that I, no I can't remember

**Unless you call that like a room talk or something?**

Yeah no, perhaps if you had a girlfriend say in Sydney or in Newcastle or something, you'd look forward to seeing them, I reassure you but no, I don't think they sort of, there were a lot of married men too, young fellows got married fairly young and they're looking forward to seeing their wives and

09:30 their girlfriends, they might be engaged or their going

**Well, what about the fellow who aren't engaged and don't have any girlfriends, I mean in terms of tin tacks, brothels must have done a roaring trade for the navy?**

I don't know to be quite honest, I really don't know.

**You never visited one?**

No I didn't, really.

**You sure you're just not being modest in the company of a female?**

No, no, look if I had of I would tell you, yeah true. But,

10:00 how can you put it, I never found it necessary, you know what I mean.

**Should I read into the sub agenda there, you didn't find it necessary because?**

You always could find company, the girlfriends, you know you'd always get, and yeah well naturally it would lead to, in most cases it would lead to

10:30 a relationship maybe, whether it be short or whether it be over some period of time, etc and so forth you know. But I never, not what I ever recollect.

**Well taking that line a little bit further, where and how did you meet you wife and how did you court her?**

I met my wife, yeah, I met her at a dance, up there at exhibition buildings up in, not Flagstaff, the gardens you know in the exhibition buildings, they used to have a dance there. Yeah, I only knew my wife 5 weeks before we got married.

**Were you on leave that whole time?**

Yeah I was on, yeah

11:30 **That is a whirlwind marriage?**

No, I, yeah it was a whirlwind courtship.

**But I guess for those days it perhaps wasn't seen as usual?**

No, that was after the war.

**Oh it was after. Oh okay.**

But before I got out of the navy. We were married, I got out on the 15th and I think we were married on the, my birthday on the 13th. I got out, I think we were married that week prior to getting out of the

navy.

12:00 **Was there any particular reason why it was such short courtship?**

No, not really. No, there was no reason she wasn't, there was no reason there at all, she wasn't pregnant or anything like that.

**I wasn't even going to suggest any of that, but I suppose one might have thought that.**

No, yeah we decided that was it.

**Speaking of which did anyone say gosh, is she you know, is it a shotgun wedding?**

Yeah I think the parents got a bit of a shock.

12:30 But it was a big family; she'd been in the air force herself. She'd just got out of the air force and I think, we were still young and a bit restless and she didn't, I don't think wanted to go back home, but anyway we sufficed. But yeah, it lasted what 25 years, she died in 19 when, god 1971.

**I'm sorry**

13:00 **to hear about that because that's a long time ago.**

She died of cancer, brain tumour.

**So she was a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force]?**

Yeah, she was a WAAAF, yeah she was in for a couple of years.

**And did you know when you met her, that she was the one?**

That's a good question, I don't think I could, I really loved her. But it was, yeah she was very, I haven't got any photos here,

13:30 I think the boys have got them and their families of their mum. Oh there more than probably would have some of them. Yeah, she was lovely, she was very attractive and yeah she was lovely, oh yeah of course I loved her, yeah. You know you sort of, what might I say yeah, it was a whirlwind set up and we didn't, she really

14:00 didn't want to go back to live at home and I, well I was in Melbourne, I wasn't in Tassie, I think my sister and the family got a bit of a shock but that was it, I've got a mind of my own so and I was 21.

**Well I guess the war certainly made, got people to make up their minds quickly?**

It did, yeah. But anyway, there you are 2 lovely sons, there they are and there's all me grandkids there, see them, that was for me birthday.

14:30 **A swag.**

That's the eldest fellow there, oh I'm sorry.

**Well I suppose I should wheel this conversation back and talk about what ended your time on the Adelaide?**

Oh well they paid her off, to my knowledge.

**I was asked about that expression, that expression paid her off, paid off the ship.**

Decommissioned her, yeah.

**Why do they call it paid her off?**

Well I don't

15:00 know why they call it, there must be a specific term for it, I must find that out, myself. But yeah, decommissioned, the navy would say decommission, I suppose the same with the merchant marine.

**When they decommission a ship, what happens to it while the war is still going?**

I don't know

15:30 what happened to the Adelaide.

**They wouldn't rip it apart and use the scrap metal for?**

No, I don't think so. I don't, whether they just left her there until after the war and sold her as scrap metal or possibly could have, yeah.

**Okay, what happens to the crew then? You got sent to the Po Yang.**

Well I got sent off the, now I'm trying to think there, I think we all, yeah we all sent, you know they'd be



16:00 a skeleton crew on of course for a period of time. We were tied up or anchored over near Cockatoo Island or naval, not Cockatoo, Garden Island so yeah and I went to Penguin or Balmoral and was drafted there and the wait for a draft for another ship, while I was there I sort of,

16:30 we did boom, what they call boom patrol. It was, a lot of the ships were taken, luxury launches and that were taken over by the navy, they were pleasure craft before the war and we used to do a sweep across the entrance, they had a big boom gate net across in the harbour and as the ships came in, the merchant ships and the battle, navy ships and that, they

17:00 opened this boom gate, this great net to let the ships in you know, so wide then we used to, one of the jobs was you'd be 24 hours on and 24 hours off and you had to go across with depth sounding gear, what they call sweeping across there. You were just sounding to make sure that those submarines weren't following the

17:30 merchant ships in or the navy. They wouldn't be following the navy. See that's apparently how the Japanese submarines got into Sydney Harbour

**That was my next question, 'cause the net had been across evidently and then they must have opened it?**

The opened it to let - apparently that's what I were led to believe and I think that it's correct, that's how they came in. I think somebody said that they saw or heard one got tangled in the net

18:00 and never made it. There is a theory that that happened but they only discovered 2 of those midget submarines, which then destroyed. But they followed the merchant, apparently a merchant ship in.

**Tell me a little bit more about boom patrol then, how would you go about doing the depth charges?**

No, we weren't on depth charges, depth sounding

**Sorry, not the depth charges, I get so tangled up sometimes, depth sounding.**

Yeah to make sure there was nothing. You know when

18:30 they'd go in, we'd make sure we would [?] across because they were pretty fast launches, go swoop across that channel where the ship had gone in, there was nothing, no you know you'd sort of, you'd, not that I work on them, I think one of the seaman worked it or the chap whose particular job on that, might have been the skipper.

**Can you give me a bit more info about how you do that?**

Yeah that's, apparently they shoot a beam, it's like fish finders,

19:00 you know the fish finder on boats, where you locate the depth, they sound they depth and what's down

**Is it sonar?**

Yeah it would be sonar, yeah and then they pick up any object that shouldn't be there and they pick up the size of it, so you know, they brought that in as soon as that happened, the midget subs.

**So what would be your job on patrol, what did you have to do then?**

Oh, I was in the engine room look after the engines. That was my job.

19:30 Do a bit of cooking too because there was only a few of us on them. And yeah, they were good little ships.

**Could you cook?**

Yeah, I learnt to cook a bit in the navy.

**Well the navy taught men how to do a lot of things.**

Yeah we, you can always, usually navy fellows are pretty capable, ironing and washing. Oh yeah, I've always bucked in.

**Well I thought that's maybe why the navy was a bit of a good catch for a woman too, because she could hopefully get a few meals out of her hubby a bit later on down the track.**

Yeah, I do

20:00 a bit of cooking there, yeah oh quite a bit. I don't, you know I bash up a feed, I eat pretty well.

**So it was a bit of time between the Adelaide and the Po Yang?**

Yeah,

**And how many of you from the Adelaide were sent to the Po Yang?**

Oh I was the only one, yeah.

**Is that unusual?**

No, not really, we all get drafted in different directions.

**Did you have a chance to say**

20:30 **see you later to the fellows or did you get no chance?**

Can't recollect, we more than probably said, "Hey, see you later fellows", and yeah we more than probably did or they might have gone to other ships before I got a draft and you know we would probably have send offs but you know you'd be at the depot and wet canteen there, and have a few old beer and

**Bit of a knees up?**

Yeah, definitely.

**Did the fellows on the Adelaide**

21:00 **talk to you about your experience on the Iron Crown?**

They more than probably at the time would have, yes.

**They would have listened to your story and**

Oh yeah, I don't think it was as I sort of mentioned before because some of those fellows had been through action themselves you know. Well, one of my good mates, Frankie Donovan, he was on the [HMAS] Voyager, I think it was the Voyager or one of yeah,

21:30 Voyager was a destroyer and he's see, Frankie was at [HMAS] Assault with us and he was a real good mate of mine, don't know what happened to Frank though but after I left there but yeah he'd been, god he'd seen a heap of action, I think he was on the, I think the Voyager got sunk off out off Malaya or somewhere like that and yeah a lot of them had been through action and seen a darn sight more than what I had you know, I just

22:00 happen to be at the wrong place at the wrong time and survived it, so you know, I didn't, you know my action stations at the war, I was in the theatres of war in the sense of those thoughts but I wasn't in any great sea battles or anything, you know what I mean.

**You probably paid your dues a lot earlier on.**

I did I suppose just with the sake of

22:30 being in as I said the wrong spot at the wrong time and that sort of thing, yeah but I did my bit I think.

**I'm curious to know how, just you from the Adelaide gets sent to the Po Yang? How big is it?**

The Po Yang, she would be, I don't. She was much smaller than the

23:00 Crown. I would say around about 3000 toner between 2 and 3, she wasn't a big ship.

**How many crew, thereabouts, ball park figure?**

Oh, now you've got me.

**Fifty, a hundred?**

Oh no

**Thousand?**

No, no there'd be. Oh that is a good question, I don't think I can answer that accurately. Perhaps there was, I suppose there would be

23:30 what, trying to recollect, they'd be say put down say maybe 20, 30

**So it was quite small. That's kind of - it's not a test. I just want to, for my notes for what we're talking about. So okay, that's small, that's quite an intimate crew.**

Yeah, it is really, good crew, pretty tough old crew too.

**Now the smaller a crew gets does that mean the more the work is shared around?**

Yeah it is really.

24:00 Well you did know it other, see on a big ship like the Adelaide, which is a light cruiser but you don't seem to get to know the fellows, you only know your immediate mates and that sort of thing. But on the smaller ships you get to know each other much more, like with the Fairmiles which my mate Johnny Stone was on, well you know it's a much more, they're a rough ship to ride on at sea but the crew get

- on, you know the skipper is one of the boys and they're all, well
- 24:30 you've got to be that way, only a lieutenant or something and anyway, yeah because it's a smaller ship and you all buck in and he tells me, you know he loved the Fairmiles, but he didn't like them at sea.
- That's part of the Chinese fleet.**
- Yeah, allied Chinese.
- Are ships or can you tell where they're from, like did it seem like a Chinese ship to you?**
- Yeah, it was only a
- 25:00 cargo ship, yeah they're only and some were work ships like the Wang Po and that they were workshop ships.
- But I guess what I'm asking, like a Japanese car looks different to an American car. Does a Chinese boat look different to an Australian boat?**
- No, not really, not the ones that we were on. Like the Wang Po, the Po Yang and the Yu Nan they were just normal looking passenger ships,
- 25:30 cargo ships.
- And the other question is for a long time I guess a lot of Australians wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese or so on**
- Still can't.
- Chinese, Japanese, Siamese knees please whatever that rhyme is. So was there any sort of concern sailing on a Chinese boat?**
- No, not really, oh no, god no. She was fairly, although it was a coal burner, it wasn't a oil burner, it was a hard ship to fire,
- 26:00 really hard work on that ship.
- Did it make the work twice as hot and twice as dirty?**
- Oh yeah, yeah the bunkers we had to, yeah that's why I think I've got a bit of a problem with my lungs, you know I take one of these puffers, the cigarettes wouldn't have helped them but when you're coaling ships and you're in those bunkers and shovelling the, and everything's black you come out with coal dust and it get into your lungs and
- So how hot is it down there?**
- That's not, that's not the bunker, down in the boilers room, yeah it gets very hot
- 26:30 and we only had natural draft, no cooling system or anything in there.
- So how hot would it get?**
- Oh god, on the equator we crossed the equator many times
- No, I mean actually down in the boiler room.**
- Oh it would be over 100, I suppose.
- So if you were doing that and you were sailing, were you sailing north around the tropics?**
- Oh yeah, yeah up in the equator and north of New Guinea and
- It just punishing**
- Yeah tough old work, but I always loved the
- 27:00 heat, some of them used to really get, used to really worry them, some of the young fellows they'd send up. You know a couple of them came up, well after I joined. Some of the other ones had been on her at season but I sort of liked the heat, being in Queensland and that sort of thing, living up there in the tropics. I'd got acclimatised to the tropics because I'd only spent a small time down here
- 27:30 and then when I went, came back from Queensland, from Cape York I was there and then came back down south and then back into the tropics for years again. So I was acclimatised at the tropic and that's why I didn't find it so hard on the coal ships in the, on the equator and up in the warmer climates.
- So take me through your duties then and what you'd need to do to keep the ship turning over?**
- 28:00 **Oh just firing the boilers, there the engine room crew, you know the, because she wasn't a fast ship, she wasn't like a naval ship, it was a navy ship, they'd taken it over but mainly it was an armament ship, the Po Yang, it carried armaments and that, which is a bit of a hair raiser when you think of it, looking**

28:30 **back.**

**Make her quite a target?**

Oh yeah. Yeah they used to put us right away, you know out there I remember when we was at Morotai they'd shove us away out the back, away from all other shipping in case we got whacked you know or not. Yeah but anyway you didn't think of that.

**Okay yes, so you're quite a target.**

29:00 Well, I think you seemed to be.

**I don't suppose you get a choice whether you're going to go on and sail a boat that's going to be full of explosive?**

Oh no, that's your draft. Oh no, you didn't refuse, well you wouldn't do that. No.

**So do you try and disguise a boat when it's?**

No, we had no camouflage. I think some of them didn't. Yeah, there were sort of painted grey or sometimes that

29:30 battleship grey, I think we were painted battleship, I'm not sure, I can't remember but yeah it was all right. You didn't really think, see by the time I joined the Po Yang, went north into the theatres of war, etc. Well, there's the Borneo Campaign and the Philippines Campaign, but you didn't, see the Japanese were long lines of communication -

30:00 they were cut off. See that's what they used to do, the Americans and the Australian forces. You know they'd take a particular apple like the Solomon Island or something like that, then they'd be cut off from their line of communication, then they'd put the in, the Australians, they'd go in, you'd bombard hell out the beach heads and the perimeter of the war area, the battle, the landing areas

30:30 and then they'd secure that and then they'd isolate them see so, they'd run out of food and ammo. No doubt they fought for pretty ferociously and that but what I'm led to believe and told the army 'cause that's sort of pocket them up there see and move on to the next one, so you can imagine there'd all this other group left behind, these Nips cut off

31:00 on these other islands, etc. And no doubt they couldn't get supplies to them at any great extent but you didn't think of submarines much at all in the area, but no doubt there would have been, probably just lucky to get through them.

**Now, I just want to interrupt you there if I wouldn't mind because I haven't finished what I was going to ask about the Adelaide, because you've gone from such a big ship to such a small ship, so your occupation or your time off must have been spent differently. But I can't help noticing you've got**

31:30 **a bit of a boxer's nose?**

Oh yeah, I had it busted a couple - yeah I did a bit of boxing, not a great deal, no Cassius Clay.

**Cause the navy's a bit famous for its on ship boxing rounds, are they not?**

Yeah, it was something you, yeah we sort of enjoyed it. Yeah I had a few, couple of fights mainly when I was in the Assault at Newcastle

32:00 there. But they're only 3 rounders.

**So do you do it for money?**

No, oh no, we're sort of amateur.

**But I mean as there's, if there's gambling going on, you know 5 to 1 George Fisher's going to beat?**

They might have bet on us, on the side. I think I might have lost them money. But no, at Morotai I had a few fights there actually.

**How does it come about, does somebody say, "Hey George, we reckon you're going to be**

32:30 **pretty good in the ring, we'd like to see you have a go." How do you get chosen to go in for a bit of a few rounds?**

I'll tell you briefly, I'll tell you the story. My nose, sort of a - when I was a kid before I started school on the island, we were over at the tennis court, I might have been only 3 or 4, there was no doctor on the island, it was very isolated from the - one of the kids there, I forget his name now, and they had one of these rollers and he was standing on top

33:00 of it and they had a steel thingo and he said, "Fish", or something like that, "Look out," and I did and he went whack. I'll never forget that and it hit me across there, me nose.

**So it's got nothing to do with boxing?**

No, that was the start of it and it apparently bent the septum etc and so forth and of course I was screaming and my nose was never ever set or anything see, I could never, me, it must have done

33:30 damage to the tendons, the dentist told me that and you know he did it, you know what kids are like. But that's how it sort of got pushed there but you'd get whacked by the, I didn't really get damaged in the boxing ring at all, I made sure of that. I lost a couple of teeth, or the enamel off them. 'Cause no mouth guards or anything you know. But anyway, yeah.

34:00 **Perhaps they thought that you looked like a boxer, perhaps that's why people took you on?**

Oh no, I enjoyed it really. You really, what I was going to tell you from then on getting back with the colour people, next door where we lived in Launceston, we were only kids, the Holts, Wally, Pat Holt, he was part Aborigine Islander from there or his parent were and he was a very good, Pat was a pretty good fighter, he was pretty well

34:30 street fighter and he used to do a bit of boxing at the ring and quite a, but Wally was his brother, he was the same age and the same size as me and Pat was a few year older and he used to in the backyard, 'cause we lived next door to him in Brisbane to him and he used to get us there with the gloves on and get us going see. But we were pretty well even matched and he taught us, he used to get us there and he was so interested he taught us, etc. Yeah and so I

35:00 sort of took an interest in it there, it's a good sport, never got hurt in the ring or...

**What, not losing, you didn't think losing teeth**

Oh only a couple of teeth.

**that would hurt?**

An American Negro did it in Morotai. A bloke by the name of yeah, Joey, Joe Brown I think it was, yeah he let a big uppercut go and I had no mouth guard and I move back and the, felt a spray

35:30 of enamel in the face. 'Cause he'd knock the bloke, he'd knock the bloke Tony Ryan, he's an air force bloke, Tony won the, they divided them up because a lot of the Yankee Negroes were quite good fighters back in the states. There was one bloke, Arthur Wind, God he was you know a class above anything there. But yeah and he knocked Tony out actually, and I thought well he's not going to bloody knock me out.

36:00 Anyway but Tony went on, he won the welterweight title there.

**But what about you, you were standing on the sidelines watching his form?**

Yeah, and I thought well, Tony certainly improved, he was just unbelievable. I had a round the matches up there and I thought oh god I don't want to fight this bloke, but anyway they said

36:30 well that's it, so I did, I though you bugger, you're not going to knock me out, that's for sure. So I kept out of his road, well I said kept out, I sort of kept him at his distance, he was a big puncher. He wasn't much of a, he was a reasonably good boxer but he was more of a fighter you know.

**So if you're not making a quid, what's the appeal going in and getting your head kicked in?**

Oh, you don't really, you don't really, it's a, unless you're ill matched, you don't

37:00 really get hurt. You get hurt out in street fights and that, you know when people get the boots into you and you know they kick you when you're down. But in the boxing ring you know it's not a, it's a good, if you enjoy it.

**Is it more of a show, than a sport?**

Oh no, no, no, it's a sort of, you get rid of the, you feel, you know you feel quite good after

37:30 it really. And you don't become sort of enemies, you become more than probably good friends after it and you sort of respect each other and that sort of thing. And anyway he was quite neat.

**So did you become sort of mates with Joe Brown?**

Oh no, no it was different. The Negroes were sort of American Negroes, you know he was quite a nice bloke, but they were terribly segregated really, the Americans, the

38:00 Europeans or the white Americans, the Negroes were put away back, you know. But anyway, I went on and I had about half a dozen fights there and enjoyed every one of them. I always remember the last bloke I had, at an air force base and we got the best fight of the night. But he was a terrific bloke, yeah it was only 3, 2 minutes but it was stinking hot, but anyway we must have put on a good show.

**Do you just fight in your uniform?**

Hey

38:30 **Do you fight in your uniform?**

No, no just, he never had any boots on, neither did I and just a pair of shorts and singlet on, you know and he give me as much as I gave him but anyway, apparently they thought I had a few points in the lead and..

**What about gloves?**

Oh yeah, we had gloves on.

**So they'd just send them up from supplies somewhere?**

Oh no, they had a big sport depots and everything, you know equipment and that. Americans had a lot of equipment, they'd let you, they were very good like that.

39:00 Anything, they'd let you have it. No, they wasn't, they weren't lousy. And yeah, so anyway we got the best of the night and were out at the tent getting changed and you know we were good mates and Bob Taylor was his name, I remember and he said to me, "God I'm not fit, I haven't trained", and I said to him, "Thank Christ for that, otherwise you would probably give me a bloody good hiding." But he was a bit all right you know. And I never

39:30 forget that yeah, a good bloke he was.

## Tape 8

00:37 **George, on that note, all the girls love sailors, blah, blah, blah and all the sailors love girls, so without incriminating anybody or using any names or anything, would there be a big charge off the boat for the local girl house?**

Not to my knowledge, no.

01:00 I doubt more than probably some of them did go there, I don't know, but not to my, none of my mates went there, not that I knew but Rose Street, I think it was Rose Street, all the brothels were right in front of railway station in Perth, it was funny really the red light district, you get off the train.

**Straight off the train, straight in on the job?**

If they wanted to.

**So the ship's doctor wasn't consumed with a lot of cases of fellows getting the itch?**

Oh venereal disease or anything, no not that I know of. But there was something more than probably did get some form of venereal, like gonorrhoea, well you certainly didn't advertise it nor did the doctors.

**I'm sure they didn't advertise it. It's not piped around the ship.**

02:00 I can't, I knew of any of my mates, if they did well they certainly kept it to themselves.

**Do you think on the whole you were pretty innocent bunch in that respect?**

Very close?

**Very innocent - were you in that respect?**

Innocent, oh no I don't think so.

**So you did have a time then, with these dances and so forth with the young ladies?**

Oh yes, oh god yes, dancing and meet them and then

02:30 they'd take you home.

**Would you put the line on them, I'm going into battle tomorrow I might not come back, I might never have another time with a young lady? Is that what you would say?**

Well they tell me that was a good sob story, that one.

**They'd tell you. So what else did they tell you?**

I think some of them, I don't know, but I'm lead to believe some of them did believe it to.

**What other things would some of them say?**

Oh I don't know.

**Come on, we're all adults**

03:00 **here, George.**

Yeah, I realise that. I don't know they, well it's only human, it's only natural yeah god, yes. I think a wartime situation, I think it's, I think that morals a little bit, when I say morals, I think the attitude towards that is a little bit more relaxed than what it is in certain

03:30 other times of in peace time you know.

**If nobody's sure what tomorrow will bring you know.**

Well that's right.

**You don't want to die not knowing, do you?**

Well definitely not. That's for sure. You're only human you know, you're at the prime of your life.

**I'm with you on that George.**

Well physically, god. That is, people don't sort of sometimes they think,

04:00 oh gee what did you do, they used to when we were at sea, they used to, no doubt they used to put bromide I think into the diet and of course that would keep you pretty

**Did it work?**

Well I don't know, but it had to, it must have for the time you were at sea but otherwise you know

**To keep your libido down.**

Yeah, I think it more than probably did.

**Did they give you lectures about the evils of fornication and all that sort**

04:30 **of business.**

Fornication, no that wasn't, not mentioned, venereal disease was mentioned and if you were in a strange port or anything like that. Especially, even during the war in the islands and that or after the war you know you could always, you know the skipper or one of the officers would give you a spruiking that in that particular area a lot of venereal diseases were known to exist around there

05:00 and so you avoided any contact physically with whatever's going there. But yeah that was like there was always the, what's a name - condoms and that were readily available even then.

**Did they give them to you on the ship?**

Yeah, you could get them on ship, yeah get them before you go on shore, it they want a bit of, but

05:30 they, you know there was pretty widespread use of them.

**Thankfully.**

Yeah, well that's right yeah because you sort of, there was a lot of, I suppose some, it was like all times there was venereal disease, I don't think it was to the extent

**And pregnancy as well, you don't want to get a girl pregnant in every port, do you?**

No, well who knows.

06:00 You know they sort of, no doubt there's a lot of pregnant girls left behind. But how would you know they sort of, you know it was just a close acquaintance or just a short acquaintance or whatever it may be. A lot of the mates perhaps did meet their wives or their future partners and they had families

06:30 to them and from then and this, there's heaps of you know, heaps of lovely girls and plenty of good companions and you'd meet them at dances and they'd take you home to their parents and you know they'd treat you really terrific the people.

**It must have been a great feeling of like being one big community?**

Yeah it, yeah it was. The navy was very, as

07:00 I said I wasn't that long in the merchant navy but aboard ship I felt part and parcel and I enjoyed that companionship there. But with the navy we were a very close-knit navy. I don't think you could get it anymore closer. You never ever get to know a person more than you did aboard ship and you were at sea and you were more or less there 24 hours a day you know, your companionship, you're working together and you're sleeping in the same

07:30 quarters. You're eating together and everything, you know showering and etc and so forth, 24 hours a day. And know you'd meet chaps that you're better mates with than others and so that could go on for months and months, 6 months you could be away.

**What was the longest you were away without making port?**

I think on the Po Yang, yeah from the time I joined her, I think

08:00 oh well, we made ports plenty of times, not excepting Darwin back to Australia. Yeah, onto the east coast was 1946, I think we got there.

**Let's talk a little bit, we'll leave the ladies alone for a minute**

Oh yeah, definitely

**we'll talk about Adelaide. HMAS Adelaide, were you mainly patrolling off Western Australia at that time?**

Yep, in the Indian Ocean, north

**What would be a patrol,**

08:30 **how long and where would you go?**

Oh, once we had a trip, brought an American submarine back that had been damaged.

**Did you tow it back or escort it back?**

No, no under her own power, but couldn't submerge because they were pretty vulnerable, if they can't submerge. Yeah, we went up south of Timor there, I think it's the Timor Sea and brought her back down to Fremantle. There's a big submarine base in Fremantle. Americans had a big base there. Yeah, brought her back safely,

09:00 poor crew they had a rough trip too, pretty rough weather.

**Did they keep all the crew on the sub while they were being towed, being escort back or were they mainly with you?**

Don't know, they could have, I should imagine they would because they were a pretty close escort, they weren't very far behind us.

**And was most of your work on the Adelaide as escort work or were you working as a lone ship?**

Oh no, we went to sea quite often

09:30 but I say quite often, no at one stage there I can sort of tell it now, course we did and I'm sure we trained those mariners that went to the Singapore and raided the harbour of Singapore when the Japanese occupied it and blew that shipping up. Now I don't know whether they were the first lot or the second lot that went. The second lot were either killed or beheaded

10:00 I just, I don't know. But I know we were there at Exmouth Gulf, got a plaque there now for them, training them.

**Where's Exmouth Gulf?**

That's on the West Australian coast; I think it's up above Geraldton further up.

**And you were involved in training them?**

Well the ship was. I can remember it was a top secret, there was no, it was all hush hush and there was nothing there right, really I think it was Exmouth Gulf.

10:30 I'm a little bit vague on, I'm led to believe it was Exmouth, when I say that don't really definitely quote me on that one but and these little, like little canoes they were submerged and put, put, put coming alongside and they were putting no doubt something onto the hull of the Adelaide, of the ship they weren't alive, they weren't explosive or anything, but they were more than probably the same type of thing but

11:00 practising, to deliver mines on the ships and then they'd go away, you'd watch them, we'd see them you know if you were off duty and it was good weather, we were there for about a week maybe more.

**And the job of the Adelaide was just to stay there as a ship and to be approached by these guys?**

Yes, for training.

**And were your crew on deck involved in trying to spot them or anything?**

Oh no, no, no they were, but it was all hush, hush and we weren't to

11:30 **When you're in a hush, hush thing like that do they make you sign something?**

No.

**What do they tell you then?**



Just that it's not to be mentioned, 'cause that's mainly with anything, anyway in a war especially in the navy. Where you were going and what you're doing.

**Loose lips sink ships?**

Hey?

**Loose lips sink ships?**

Loose lips sink ships, yeah. Well, we never talked about it or anything like that. But that's where I think they trained. I don't know whether that was the last, that was, I think that

12:00 would have been the first lot that were successful but may have been the second. But if it was the first they all came back safely. Sunk a lot of shipping, they went up in the Krait.

**They went up in the?**

On the, it was an old Japanese fishing boat, I think it was called the, it's in Sydney in Darling Harbour called the Krait.

**Oh yes I know it now. So with the Adelaide did you make much contact with**

12:30 **any Japanese submarines?**

No, none, none at all, no.

**Japanese aircraft?**

No, no, not that I, no, not to my knowledge.

**So there was the constant threat wasn't there until later in the war that they thought the Japanese might do something off Western Australia?**

I never heard of that.

**They were patrolling on land weren't they as well in West Australia, thought there might be a landing there or something? Or**

13:00 **am I mistaken?**

No, I never heard of that. No. I know up in north Western Australia, like Broome, they bombed Broome, the Japanese,

**That's probably, I think that's what I'm thinking of.**

Yeah, well they apparently, there are still wrecks of the aeroplanes, there were flying boats, they brought these when they evacuated the Dutch of New Guinea, or Dutch East Indies and Indonesia it is now and brought the,

13:30 mainly the women and children and they're all ready to take off, flying boats in the morning and they come in, apparently they were getting information sent over, so they came in a bomb them and strafe them. The wreckages are still there, there were over 90 killed.

**Did it become frustrating for you that you weren't actually actively engaging the Japanese? After being sunk you said you wanted to get in**

14:00 **there and do something.**

Oh yes and no. We were doing, that's all you can do. You've got to go where you're told, you've got to do what you were told and that's all I could do, I couldn't do anything otherwise. Yeah, you're in there, you're a part of it and you're doing your bit you, know you could have been what, on say the Australia or one of those the Aussie,

14:30 the Australia, the old ghost ship she got knocked a lot, they never sunk her, they set out to get her and tried many times. Yeah, the Kamikaze got into her and everything.

**Was there a regular route you patrolled up and down the West Australian coast or was it different every time?**

No, not really, I, we'd only go out when we were called out you know

**So why would you be called out?**

Well I don't really know.

15:00 We'd just - I didn't sort of have any information on that. Maybe it would be, oh a particular reason, escort reason or it would have been some report that there was something out there and yeah we'd go on out, we had to go out. But that was with the submarine and one sort of, perhaps she did do a bit of a patrol, I'm not sure. But I know we used to go to sea quite often, type of thing

15:30 you know.

**It must be quite a different life, being below deck as to above decks, you can't really see where you are, can you, you don't?**

Not if you're in the engine rooms,

**yeah**

But if you're on duty and that's where you're working, but you don't think of that. You mind is, you're too occupied, you know in doing your job and listening what your orders are and what you've got to carry out,

16:00 so you know you don't need to make too many mistakes, or any mistakes, you know you're going all the time.

**How is the navy, do you reckon different to say the army or the air force? What makes the navy different?**

Don't really, look I couldn't, 'cause I wasn't really, you know I never had experience and I would imagine that it would be similar sort of social life, you know with and there'd be still

16:30 sort of a very close knit community amongst the servicemen, you know they're very much in the war scene, you very much depend on your mate for your well being and safety and that which is true. I should imagine the army would be very much so because they were in much closer combat or conflict and if they were in, you know

17:00 fighting and they'd be coming up against the individuals themselves, whereas with the navy, not only on perhaps certain circumstance we either sunk or that sort of thing and they dragged you out of the water or whatever but they, be similar I would imagine perhaps but under different circumstances.

**When you're out at sea on a ship**

17:30 **is there a relaxation in formalities in terms of ranks and saluting and so forth. In the same way as like when the army were in New Guinea and they were in action, they weren't saluting each other all the times?**

Oh no, no.

**Is it the same at sea?**

I think so, it's, the ranks are still there, you know it's very much formalities with the navy and yeah you had to, you weren't saluting. I can't

18:00 recollect saluting on the ship. It's only ashore that you sort of salute but you approach, you call them sir, the officers, etc and so forth. They might call you by your surname, you know Fisher or Jones or something like that. But you know most of them were pretty good, occasionally you would get one that was a bit of a snarler but in most cases there, after all they're only human and they had to carry

18:30 out their orders and whatever.

**What about navy traditions, crossing the equator, did you celebrate that on the Adelaide?**

No, not on the Adelaide we wouldn't have cross the equator, up into the tropics but not across, on the Po Yang yes, but no, it never got ordained or christened or whatever you call it. No, I'm sure I didn't

**What would they do in that ceremony, do you know?**

I don't know really. They sort of do it more

19:00 in peacetime than wartime, you know they wouldn't have much time for that in wartime, I don't think. It's a different sort of a approach to things, you know. I think peacetime those old traditions are carried out more, but certainly it didn't happen to me.

**I think you're lucky sometimes, it can be a bit embarrassing, can't it? What they do to you?**

Yeah it could be, yeah could be, yeah. I think there had been a few embarrassing,

19:30 depends you know on the individual too really, but some of them go overboard.

**Were you even in trouble in the navy, were you ever on a charge?**

Oh often, what they call a, yeah most of all the navy fellows were.

**Well what would you be in trouble for?**

It's called WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s or is it WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Oh no.

**Did you say something about WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s?**

Yeah but get detention, it's not WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, no detention. You know you might get jenkins

20:00 for a fortnight or you might get stoppage of leave or.

**What's jenkers?**

Oh extra work and you can't go ashore and you've got to work after your normal working hours and that sort of thing.

**And what would you do to have earn such a wonderful thing as that?**

Oh you didn't have to do much. You might I don't know, you might come back late or something like that. You might sleep in instead of,

20:30 you might have had a heavy night the night before and slept in or whatever be on shore leave, yeah oh different little things, they were only sort of minor things but you'd get put on a charge and caps off.

**What's that?**

Front up to the jonty or the first lieu or whatever it was and he weighs you, what we call weight you off and so you could be 7 days

21:00 stoppage of leave or jenkers and 14 days, whatever it may be. Oh it wasn't anything that would knock around too much, because a bit of extra work, you have to do a bit of cleaning. I just forget but anyway the main thing is you couldn't go ashore. That be at the depot or on a, it didn't matter much, I remember once I was on the Po Yang

21:30 and I forget now what it was. We were at a place called, oh Wewak, in New Guinea, there was a lot of heavy fighting there at that particular time when we called in there, must been with supplies. There was, I think they were mopping up there, the army and that sort of thing. A few of the boys went ashore. I couldn't because I was on stoppage of leave, quite a few of us and I can't even recollect what it was about

22:00 but I have 7 days stoppage of leave. Well you can imagine in a theatre of war, and who would want to go ashore at Wewak anyway. Orbuk [?], but that was a forward base there, army base and you know apparently some of the boys went ashore and they said, well there were still a few Nip's bodies around, from where they had been fighting and that sort of thing, and been killed. And there was a lot of bombing going, yeah they were taking Wewak at that

22:30 particular time and so stoppage of leave meant nothing, you're better off staying aboard then going ashore, we were anchored off.

**On that note on going ashore, it's harder in the navy for fellows. 'Cause I know fellows in war love souvenirs and in the army you get lots of souvenirs, 'cause there's lots of badges and swords and guns around. But what about in the navy 'cause you're not, you don't get souvenirs of a ship that sunk, a ship that sunk is just gone, isn't it?**

Too far down to get souvenirs.

23:00 **Did you have any souvenirs in the war, anything like that?**

I did have a Japanese sword.

**How did you get that?**

Oh I got that after the war was over. At Ambon, a lot of us souvenired them. They had to dump all of their arms, they had to get rid of, to make them get rid of all their arms, their guns, their swords their everything, the Japs. They had a quite a big

23:30 marine, pretty well fortified Ambon, say fortified, that was one of their main bases till they were cut off and that's where there, one of their invasions points it's not far out from Darwin, you know north of Darwin. But anyway, we all sort of got swords and different things like that. But that's what I have and the sister and brother in law had it for years, I don't know what happened to it.

**What were they like, those swords, were they beautiful or were they just like?**

24:00 Yeah, the one I had was quite good, more than probably got back to Japan I should imagine because years later they were asking people to hand them in, they were you know paying. I don't know what Mary and Perce did with theirs 'cause I gave it to them and that was it. It was suppose to be a ceremonial but you'd have to take the handle off somehow and have a look that way and you can see what was. I just

24:30 forget how many, so many jewels or whatever it was. But otherwise no, I didn't have anything else, 'cause that was the only chance we had of getting anything. I don't know what the other fellows had.

**Let's go on the Adelaide when you said it was decommissioned in Sydney?**

I think so yeah, decommissioned or paid off, that's what I was lead to believe, they told us that, that's what they

**Did you take her to Sydney?**

25:00 Yeah I was on her, yeah we all were, rejoined her, I think we were at Williamstown.

**What's that feeling like when you, you know you say goodbye to a ship and it's gone?**

I, like the old [?] Ad's, so I suppose I sort of missed her a bit but just another ship, I wasn't on her for years, you know like it had become home. Some of the fellows joined their ships and stayed on them during the war right through, or nearly right through. See

25:30 I, when I first, if I hadn't have joined the assault group, the commando force, one of the volunteers, most, all the others of the class that I went in to the navy, at the beginning all got a draft to the [HMAS] Shropshire. She was a cruiser, yeah she was a cruiser, so they all got a trip over to the UK and

26:00 picked up, they fitted her out and gave her to the Australian Navy, the British Navy, so there and she saw quite a bit of action right throughout the Pacific.

**Between the Adelaide being paid off and you being on the Po Yang you said you were on some small ships for a while?**

Yeah, they were only sort of just sweeping across

26:30 the entrance through the boom, the net, the gate

**Sydney Harbour?**

Yeah, getting into Sydney Harbour and just to make sure that nothing else was following them in.

**And what year was this?**

Oh that was about, that was in '44, I think.

**Late '44 would you say?**

Oh I don't, possible could have been, I don't know whether it was late, yeah it must have been

27:00 somewhere around then.

**Were you thinking that was the general feeling, that the Japs are now being pushed back and that**

Oh yeah

**and the war would close?**

In most yeah, they were getting shoved right back to their home island, you know Japan, heavier fighting was going, oh there was quite still a lot of fighting like Borneo and Balikpapan and Tarakan and all through there and yeah there was still a lot of fighting much further south.

27:30 But they'd been pushed back you know, or cut off really, I think anyway.

**What would these small ships do that you were on, you'd say they would just sweep up and down the boom.**

Yeah, just enter the sound device, I think they called it ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] gear, then it sort of picked up any movement

28:00 down below of ships or whatever's submerged coming in behind the merchant. But that was after the Sydney Harbour raid by the Japanese submarines. So to make sure that there weren't going to be any more raids that what they, sort of put those, they'd taken them over from the, Sydney had quite a big luxury craft, you know the people that could afford them had these,

28:30 I think one was called the Esmeralda but whether they were commissioned as a navy boat or not, I don't, I suppose they might have been.

**Were they like motor yachts?**

Yeah, they were cabin cruiser perhaps some 40 foot long or to that extent.

**Were you happy to be on them, or did you want to get back?**

Yeah they were quite good, 24 on, you'd do your time on 24 hours and you know work through, you used to do your turn at cooking and that sort of thing.

**What were you like on the pans?**

Oh don't know,

29:00 I think they all survived. But you did your, my place was driving the motor then, they used to, the diesel or petrol motors or V-8s or something like that, and mine was, being a stoker was part of that. They later called the stokers, stoker mechanics. So that was my part of that and yeah it was good.

**So did it involve learning about the**

29:30 **engine, being a stoker?**

Oh no, we did that course, I did a mechanics course at Port Melbourne, when I first joined the Assault Group, they trained us there. And that's another part of the training with the Assault because of the barges. The V-8 motors, that was one course I did on those and a basic course on those and I got reasonably good marks too, I think on that. Because I've always enjoyed sort of mucking around with mechanics. And

30:00 what else yeah, and then we did, when they swapped over to the Americans barges were, Hallscotts [?] were petrol driven engines and Greys Marine were diesels were another one they used, they were a much bigger engine and far more powerful.

**And when you came off the small boats on the Po Yang, were you a bit disappointed you were back on a merchant boat, did you want to go back on a battleship?**

30:30 It didn't really worry me. Oh I would have preferred a destroyer, no doubt or another cruiser but I might have been perhaps lucky there, I don't know 'cause like the Australian, Aussie, she got caught with a, up in the Philippines there were a lot killed on her and she was badly damaged but they never sunk her, the Lingayen Gulf, I think it was

31:00 'cause the Japanese were employing the Kamikaze and there were those suicide bombers and the aircraft, they were pretty hard to stop them. And yeah, a lot of the boys got killed on them and cause I just, trying to think, no that might have been, yeah one of them went on a working party

31:30 from [HMAS] Penguin there, I think it might have been the Aussie at one stage, she came back from one of the big battles up there and god she was badly damaged you know, a big hole in the side and apparently one of the mess decks - bomber come in, fighter and through the side of her.

**Did you talk to anybody off that ship about what that was like?**

Yeah, 'cause a lot of them got leave you know and just the working parties on

32:00 her, yeah they sent them home for leave, with the stress.

**What did the fellows say it was like being under a Kamikaze attack?**

Oh it was pretty stressful, I would imagine that it'd be, oh god yeah, yeah that wouldn't be very, very nice at all. Somebody that's hell bent on, irrespective of what, you know that was their mission,

32:30 if they're going to die, well but before they died they would want to get you, you know. Pretty hard to stop a human bomb coming, isn't it, you can imagine? Yep, they had to blow them out of the sky before they got there, otherwise...

**So the Po Yang were you mainly carrying armaments on that ship?**

I can't, I think more than probably we had a gun, I cannot, I've thought

33:00 about this, I can not remember a four-inch gun, there would have been I'm sure on the stern of the ship but on the, you know where you've got storage areas and I don't know whether, I've often thought and I can't recollect ever seeing a gun there on that, but there was no doubt there was small arm's fire and there was Oerlikons and that type

33:30 of thing.

**What's a Oerlikon?**

They're a, I don't know what mm shell they'd be. They are mainly a small arms fire and that sort of thing. There are like Pom Poms, it might have been a Pom Pom we had to

**What's a Pom Pom?**

There are usually, mainly used for the, 'cause they go pom, pom, pom, they're aircraft cannons, they're used mainly with aircraft. And

34:00 so were the Oerlikons too, they put out a rapid, rapid fire, you know with aircraft coming in and that sort of thing. I think possibly we did have, I can't recollect a gun on the stern at all.

**And what cargo were you carrying?**

Well, we were an armament ship which we would be carrying armaments and supplies too, no doubt. We were carrying them after the war but she was with the 7th Fleet before I joined her

34:30 and she was in the Lingayen Gulf battles and that sort of thing, the Po Yang, she come through unscathed. That's what I'm told anyway and according to what I can read. We were mainly with the corvettes and frigates when I was on her.

### **In convoys?**

No, we weren't in convoys a lot. We were a couple of times, we were in convoys. We were

- 35:00 one stage there, they must have, they said we were going from New Guinea into the Halmaheras or up to Morotai, there we were in a convoy at that stage, but at other stages we weren't, we didn't seemed to be in convoys. But they, we carried a fair bit of armament. Carried it as supplies for other corvettes and

### **And what was the port you worked out of?**

Different ports, different ones yeah, they were

- 35:30 Madang for a while and Milne Bay and went into Rabaul of different other areas and parts of New Guinea and up at Morotai and over at Borneo and we weren't in the Port of Borneo because the Japs occupied Borneo until pretty late in 1945.

### **Did you come under fire at all?**

No, not while I was on her. No, we didn't fortunately.

### **Yeah, very fortunate.**

Yeah,

- 36:00 yeah we didn't, no we never came under fire.

### **Never any scares?**

No, only once, oh you sort of more than probably didn't concern the others to any extent. But it was me, I remember I was on watch in the boiler room and I think we were in convoy and we were north of heading for Morotai and it must have been a bit of a signal or a bit of a scare there with a submarine or something, anyway the corvettes or whatever escort,

- 36:30 I forget now what escort, maybe corvettes or a couple of destroyers or whatever, it wasn't a large convoy but it was reasonable and they were dropping the depth charges you know and patlers [?] were being dropped and you could hear them, you know boom, boom, the old depth charges makes a bit of a noise and it went through me mind, I hope they don't see us. But they didn't and everything quietened down,

- 37:00 it might have been just a false signal they got, but they weren't taking any risks. But they, you know with a convoy and we were not a fast ship at all you know. You know for a ship reaches, that's why navy ships, that sort of thing I'm told, a chap, a friend of mine too, he's an elder gentleman there, he's a perm in the Pommy Navy

- 37:30 in the RN [Royal Navy]. And one of his, later in his career in the navy, he was a torpedo specialist and that sort of thing. And he knows a lot of, we often talk about them but apparently over about 17 knots a submarines can't beam in on the ship because of the speed of the ship in the water, they can't judge, by no doubt that would have to be a very fluke shot but that's why

- 38:00 the bigger ships with more speed were quite capable of getting away from the submarines.

### **And what speed could the Po Yang do?**

She could only do about, I don't know 8 to 10 I think.

### **So you would have no chance in the world, would you?**

Oh no, no, there were a small, there were convoys of course, see that's why the big convoys like Q-boats, the [HMS] Mary and the [HMS] Elizabeth and that, yeah they do upwards of 30 knots or 32 or 35 knots high speed and

- 38:30 that's why they survived the war, because of their speed. You know a lot of times convoys had to scatter and not here but, not to my knowledge in Australia or though we did have, they formed convoys on the east coast but over the Atlantic, the convoys to Russia and that sort of thing. They just have to on occasions

- 39:00 scatter and so the bigger ships would take off the old Mary and those, give her full power and away they go. So they weren't really worried about submarine attack because they had too much speed.

## **Tape 9**

- 00:31 **George, where were you for VE [Victory in Europe] Day?**

VE Day, I was in Melbourne, yeah I was in Melbourne.

### **And what happened on VE Day for you?**

Oh gee, I'm trying to recollect. Oh, we got together a lot of mates and I think we marched in Melbourne, did you say

01:00 VE, that Victory in Europe, oh wait a while, I beg your pardon, I'm thinking of VP [Victory in Pacific] Day. I think for VE Day, I was away in the islands up in the Pacific. That was in, yes I was on the Po Yang.

**Was there much celebration?**

We, no doubt would have celebrated aboard, we'd have said wonderful you know and

01:30 with the victory there, yeah I would imagine.

**So then for VP Day, how come you were in Melbourne, what was the story there?**

Well, yeah they had a, I'm just trying to, when you say VP - see VP Day, VE was Europe that's right and I would have been I, sure of I was on the Po Yang, that was

02:00 yeah, that was in, when was that?

**That was, was that July or June '45 - 8 May 1945.**

Yeah, I was on the Po Yang I'm sure and we were in the somewhere up in New Guinea or Morotai or somewhere like that. But with VP Day of course.

**That was August '45.**

That was August, yeah I was at Morotai, that was when I was saying those searchlights of course, but then there was another

02:30 VP Day and that was in Melbourne and that must have been a general, whether it was the second one because I remember there was a big assembly and a march in Melbourne and that was in '46.

**Could that have been the first year anniversary? That would have been the anniversary of it, I dare say.**

I would imagine, no it wasn't the anniversary no, no, cause I remember that. That was the first

03:00 one that I'd seen in the city. I must enquire about that, I remember because I had some mates with me, me other mates Stan Gray, we'd more or less been right through the war except from the last part of it, at Assault and on different areas. He was there and there were a couple of blokes from the 9th Division, Stumpy Graham and oh there was quite a group of us, and that.

03:30 And I think there were marches through the city and celebrations but no doubt there would have been celebrations but no, I was at Morotai on the Po Yang of course.

**What changed because obviously there is no more war to fight, so what do you do?**

Oh we sort of had a boiler down at the time, we celebrate that night, they come down from the upper deck and waited on us and everything, but it was a great night, we all got together you know

04:00 the upper deck and the lower deck and the in between decks and everything you know and we all got pretty sozzled everyone. So it was all back to normality in the morning excepting for a hangover and so we have to get the boiler and I don't, I think we were told try to get into Ambon to pick up POWs, prisoners of war but

04:30 we didn't, we had a boiler and so we had to get that back but anyway we, eventually we did get to Ambon. As soon as we got that back we, no doubt, well you don't know, you go where the ship's going and of course you're on there and where are we going we weren't up anchor and away we went, headed I think it was for Darwin

**Did you pick up POWs on the way?**

No, one of the, it was one of the either [HMAS] Westralia or [HMAS] Manoora,

05:00 [HMAS] Kanimbla, one of those ships went in there and picked up the POWs, it was a very, very sad occasion too, they were emaciated.

**And you came straight form Morotai then back to Darwin, did you say?**

Yeah, I think if I recollect and then we went back to Ambon, 'cause we were at Ambon quite a few times, we stayed up there for about another 3 months. There, at Ambon, back to Morotai over to

05:30 Balikpapan and picked up some, they had been prisoners of war, civilians I think, they were Dutch women and children.

**What were they like these civilian internees?**

They looked pretty, we didn't have much to do with them, they were on another part of the ship, but we noticed, you know that all of them had beriberi and they weren't too good. I think we brought, they back

to Darwin, now that I come to recollect.

**Did they look like they were overjoyed though to be free at last or were they just drained and?**

Oh no, no,

06:00 they had been at Balikpapan and it had been freed for some time, Balikpapan and they'd been kept there for a little while you know because they had to sort of feed them up and get them strong enough to travel, so I've no doubt they would have been overjoyed at the time.

**Tell us about the time that you came across that Japanese sword, were you involved in the Japanese handing in all the weapons at that time?**

Yeah we, no we weren't, apparently the army controlled that and the

06:30 forces that were there before us there at Ambon, the occupation forces that took over cause they got all the prisoners of war out.

**Were you a witness to it happening at all?**

Not that I recollect, no there was, there's a huge pile down near the pier or the jetty, we were tied up to there and we were loading supplies there and help bringing them in and that sort of thing but you could see it, they were all sort of, actually I had a,

07:00 an occasion, there was one of the army fellows that one of our, I don't know what division he was in the army, he was down loading supplies and all that sort of thing. He was a sergeant I think and he said he'd been in the light horse before the war and I'd grabbed a 303, apparently the Japanese brought these 303s

07:30 and that with them and why I don't know but they reckon they'd come from Malaya when the Malaya fell and Singapore, why they brought them there I don't know. But they had a number on them and I always remember he was on the mess deck and we were talking to him, he was a great fellow and chatting away and that sort of thing. And I made him a cup of tea and he said "Some of those guns are pretty old" and I said and he said "I was in the light horse" and he had a look at

08:00 the one I had you know, we had to dump them ashore when they found them. But he said "I was in the light horse before the war, the permanent one" and he said "There are no two guns with the same number", he said, "I had that rifle before the war". I don't think they had too much equipment in Malaya our fellows you know, I don't know, from that he said "My God, that's an old gun", whether that's

08:30 right or not, they have the same number I should imagine.

**What do they look like; I'm imagining these piles of weapons like just a big pile of swords and a big pile of rifles?**

Yeah, there was a hell of a lot there, they were pretty well armed I think.

**What other things would be there?**

I know the town was flattened. The township wasn't a very big township at Ambon but it had been pretty well bombed and they'd got stuck into it

09:00 but the air force I think but they seemed to be still pretty, what might I say, unscathed the Japs excepting for our POWs and they treated them.

**Did you see any of the captured Japanese at this time?**

Yeah they were about. They used to have them down aboard, had as working parties.

**Would you go and like have a look at them?**

Oh yeah, we were in control

09:30 of them and tell them what to do, oh yeah we had them working.

**Was there any sort of revenge, people giving them a whack or giving them a kick?**

Yeah, I did strike that at Morotai, we were there and they brought these prisoners of war from Balikpapan or over in Borneo and there was a chap

10:00 I become quite friendly with him, he was a nice bloke he was a Ghurkha and his name was apparently, you know he was a Mohammad because he was Mohammad de Usef, always remember his name and he gave me his address and it went for about that length somewhere in India and he always wanted me to visit him, he said "You come and visit me after the war, George". I never ever did but he'd been a POW and

10:30 his head, he kept his head pretty well shaved but there were little sort of like half eggs over his head, where they used to belt them with a cane or a stick, the Japanese guards you know. But he was there as a witness to war criminals and then brought them over and they brought them out from the mainland of



Morotai, from Borneo then they have them and they brought them out working

- 11:00 on the ship, coaling ship actually they had the Japanese, their coaling ship and they used to - two of them in the baskets and dump them into the

**And what were those Japanese POWs like, were they very dispirited and crushed men?**

Oh, they didn't say much, they didn't say much. We didn't, there was no love lost, but he hated them intensely because

- 11:30 something they'd, I think it was his brother, but he said, I always remember, he said, provos they were or guards, they weren't provos, that was a mistake, wrong, guards, Japanese guards but he said "There were a bloody lot of them at brutal [?]" but I think they did something to his brother and that's why he hated them actually and we had to restrain him

- 12:00 a lot of times, you know I said "Oh no, no", but yeah if he had been allowed, I don't think there would have been any or not too many of them got to the trials, he said "He treated them very, very brutally" but.

**Is this where you first started to learn about the Japanese atrocities?**

No, it was, see we, to my,

- 12:30 I'm trying to recollect, it was only after the war, you know the armistice had been signed and everything, all of these things came out because the prisoners of war had been released. See prior to that we hadn't had any sort of insight into what had gone on in the prisons of war, because they painted a pretty picture, you know they said I fed them

- 13:00 well and did this that and the other, no doubt but that's only me, that's my and I think it was general knowledge but it's only these brutalities and the atrocities and that sort of thing that were carried out during the war that came to light after the war. See they tried to cover up a lot like at Sandakan and that long march, see there was only about 6 survived there.

**Yeah that's right.**

And they didn't want those things exposed but they were.

- 13:30 So I wasn't aware of it anyway.

**So how did you come to have this Japanese lieutenant that you mentioned earlier on onboard, the one who spoke English?**

I think, yeah that was at Ambon and that was a working party that was down aboard and he was in charge of them or I don't know and he came down on to the mess deck and we were surprised he spoke perfect English, well educated and lieutenant and

- 14:00 so we got talking to him

**Tell us about your conversation with him?**

Yeah, we just said "You speak good English" and ask him perhaps, I can't recollect more than probably asked how long he'd been there and etc and so forth. And we said, he was going to be a, we said "What was your role in the whole of this, etc and what was your?", we knew what his rank was and that and he said "He was going to be an interpreter when they

- 14:30 invaded, when they took over Australia". That was his main job, his one there. And then he didn't bloody well make it anyway, you know. So a few harsh words too. And went off like water off a duck's back. He said well, you know you speak perfect English you know, etc and so forth and he said, oh I think he was attached maybe.

- 15:00 See the Japanese navy were trained, taught by the British navy before the war, you know earlier on the part when long before the Chinese invasion and all that sort of thing, but he said "He'd been educated in England" and oh he knew all the rules and regulations and some college, Eton College or Cambridge, I think he come from a pretty wealthy family.

**Did he tell you any more about the Japanese intentions**

- 15:30 **for Australia?**

No. no. I can't recollect, there was quite a lot of us there.

**And what did those Japanese prisoners think would happen to them then?**

Don't know. There's a movie called Blood Oath, Brian Brown took the part as a barrister trying the Japanese at Ambon, it's quite a good movie, I don't know if you've seen it, no, it's a good one, it's worthwhile seeing.

- 16:00 To my knowledge, my way of thinking it's a pretty accurate report on it but then about the [Gull] Force. But then Ambon was, just recently I found out, well there was about who

16:30 the soldier was that, apparently one of the soldiers there at Ambon when the Japanese captured it, he apparently wasn't prepared to be taken as a prisoner of war so, he headed bush back into the hinterland or whatever it might be and he carried on apparently a quite a bit of a, this was out of

17:00 a, what we were told there the folklore, or what this little fellow told us and they had like a poem but he sang it on the mess deck, this little Ambonese kid and the chap, anyway they finally got him and he was shot but he carried on a bit of a guerrilla warfare against them.

**Was there much of that going on, do you know?**

I don't know, but he was the only one and to them he was a hero.

**To the Japanese?**

17:30 No, to the Ambonese, yeah.

**So were they pro-Japanese, the Ambonese?**

Oh no, no well not to my knowledge they weren't, no I think they were sort of, I don't know how they felt. No, there would be some that would be pro and some would be very much anti.

**So at this stage were you itching to get back home and demob or did you want to stay in the navy?**

Well, I certainly wanted to get back to the mainland but

18:00 I didn't want to stay in the navy. I don't really know how I felt about that.

**Can you remember the demobbing experience then when you got back and the ship was paid off?**

Yeah, the voyage back, yeah that's right. That was uneventful excepting we stuck a, never hit a mine but there was one

18:30 off the east coast up off Cape York, off the Peninsula there and we gave that a bit of a bombardment and got rid of it. But any ship that had hit it would have been still going, it was a fairly big rig, it was a magnet spot. But otherwise that was up there, called into Townsville there for a few days and what else, yeah then we came eventually down and

19:00 must have called into Brisbane and finally to Sydney and moored there and propped there for a while and then they decided that was it.

**And what did you think?**

Can I tell you getting back to, I've never heard this story since and I didn't, it was like Doolan or

19:30 at Ambon, this soldier and there's a chap, we had a big reunion, a salt reunion, it was a 10 day one just recently and one of our shipmates and I was telling him about it because he goes - he's been back to Ambon, just about every, he hasn't been back recently because of all the conflicts there. "He went back 8 times", he said to Ambon. He said, he told me his name and I've forgotten it and he said "Yes", he said, "Of course",

20:00 he said "I know the story".

**Of the Japanese guy in the jungle?**

No, Australian that carried out his own guerrilla warfare.

**Oh sorry, now I get it.**

Didn't want to be taken as prisoner of war. He said yes, he lives over at St Leonards or St Arness I can contact him, I must find out and get more information. He said yes I'm like you, I've never heard anything more about it, they killed him finally but I think he got a few of them. Yeah I never heard

20:30 and he said "Yes, I know". Anyway.

**Yes, I've heard stories of Japanese fellows not surrendering at the end of the war but I've never heard that one before about an Australian guy not surrendering when they came to Ambon?**

And he carried out a bit of guerrilla warfare himself.

**Good on him.**

Something like a Doolan or some Irish sort of a name, yeah, but he knew the story better than I, only a little fellow told us and he said "Oh, to him he was a hero". And then written a poem

21:00 and he could sing too the little bloke, he was only a kid.

**So Sydney demobbed, what does that feel like when it's all over for you?**

Oh good, well the war was over and wonderful peace at last.

**What did you think you might do with yourself?**

Oh at that stage I just wanted to get back home and see the parents.

**And how was that when you got back home?**

Oh good yeah, oh yes they were

21:30 quite happy that I survived the, and most of the other ones I knew had survived. A lot of mates and.

**Did they notice a big change in their boy?**

Yeah, I think I'd grown up quite a bit by then. Yeah but yes, oh yes certainly. Definitely. Yeah, I think we were all very pleased

22:00 that the war didn't keep going.

**And what did you do after the war?**

I was in the building trade.

**How did you get into that?**

I did a bit of study and a bit of a course and

**Did the navy help at all in?**

No, no the navy didn't no, the government had a rehabilitation course and yeah.

**What's a rehabilitation course?**

Oh just a bit of training and that sort

22:30 of thing. There was a, yeah I, and they sort of subsidised it, so I stayed in the, I wasn't in it for a while after it, I worked around the different sort of jobs. I came back, I never went to Tassie, I came back to Melbourne and it was what might I

23:00 say, yeah there was a sort of, because there hadn't been much building going on during the war and that sort of thing. They, we weren't really a manufacturing country at that stage, we had slipped back we'd come, we were mainly rural, you know dairying, wool and wheat which we were mainly

23:30 producing then. But we'd been a very good producing country and other things and secondary industry but we seemed to have slipped back again I think.

**I think we have. Did you find after the war that your experience on the Iron Crown and the sinking would haunt you? Did you have dreams about it?**

No, not really. I thought, at times I get sort of upset when I sort of think of it.

24:00 Yeah, maybe as you get older you get more sentimental that sort of thing, a bit more emotional I don't know. I've often, yeah often thought about you know times now as I get older I often, I think about that, and that's why I put that plaque down there and they've been very good, down at Mallacoota and commemorating and the local people there. They've put chairs in

24:30 and a lovely rose garden. They're really taking care of it. But yeah but that's a part, that's a very sad part of my life, perhaps. One of the saddest.

**And how were Anzac Days for you. Did you find you wanted to be part of that?**

Anzac Days, yes. Yes, I usually, last Anzac Day we led the march in the city and we the Assault Association

25:00 1 Able Group Commando Force and yeah, so we all, it was quite a good gathering from all over Australia, Western Australia, what's left of us anyway. And here we marched down three of the ships Westralia, Kanimbla and Manoora, yeah it was a terrific day really and getting the honour of leading the march,

25:30 which was great and so otherwise I usually, I'm a member at Rye, I'm a member here at Frankston, I'm a second member at Rye and I usually go down there to the dawn service. I usually march there, but I didn't this year because of our commemorative 10 days we had of a reunion.

26:00 **You had a 10 day reunion this year?**

We did have, yeah.

**Who was that, the Assault?**

The Assault Group, the Assault Association.

**Where was that 10 day reunion?**

In Melbourne here, and they stayed at the Marriott Hotel, we got a special deal for them, they were very good there and but I didn't stay there cause being you know locally but went to all the functions just about, to the dinners, we had a welcome dinner and then we had a farewell dinner and we had trips down the peninsula and

26:30 oh to the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

**When you're all together is the talk of those times or do you talk of present times?**

Oh yeah, a lot of them talk of times and talk of what's happened since and all that type of thing you know. Yeah of experiences since. We got old men, there's a big 60 year of more and

27:00 between a lot of them. See they've had a lot of reunions around Australia, the Assault and they were formed in 1988, well there's plaques all over Western Australia, I don't think we've got one in Darwin but up at Newcastle there's one and Alston, Tasmania and Adelaide, so they've all sort of, I haven't been to any other reunion but this one I made it my business and did

27:30 and I really enjoyed it.

**Good. Were you able after the war to talk to your wife or your kids about the war?**

Yeah, oh yeah they knew quite a bit about it. Yeah, my grandson, Luke, I've only got one grandson he's in the photo there, but he wanted to march with me at Anzac Day in the city.

28:00 And I wanted to take him, but when Bruce Ruxton was president here in Victoria, for some reason, I don't know why Bruce got it into his head, he didn't want the kids to march and he requested they shouldn't march. But for some reason and I'll never ever been able to work it out, because he definitely wanted to but I wasn't prepared to take him in and then have him embarrassed

28:30 in saying well you can't march, so I didn't and I regret that but they can do it now.

**Will you take him now?**

I will if I'm still around and I'm still walking and everything's right. But he's sort of gone past that stage now, this was a few years back and I regret that and I just, it was a wrong decision, a very wrong decision and I know my, he thought why he wanted to impose that. But I didn't want that embarrassing situation where he

29:00 you know, I would have got rather annoyed about it I think.

**Do you think other men felt the same way as you?**

Oh yeah they did, there was a lot of feeling there about that, but it's permissible now, permissible I mean and thing is they're more capable walking that distance, much more then, than what we were.

**Well, they carry on the tradition as well, don't they?**

Of course they do, yeah.

**Which is important.**

Makes a big difference, you know they can wear your medals and

29:30 which they'll, if they want to go in a march 'cause we'll pass on, so yeah they sort of can do that, go in. Get them interested now you know, it's not that celebrating war, it's just you're commemorating the thought of your mates that are with you and the mates that have gone, you know. I like, I enjoy the dawn service, which is

30:00 really a moving occasion you know.

**It sure is.**

Yeah terrific, yeah. Sometimes people get the wrong impression about Anzac, there are people that do, they think you're commemorating war, or but you're certainly not, you're just saying you're only thinking of those that fought in the war and lost their lives. It's just a service

30:30 for them you know, that you don't forget what they've sacrificed.

**That's right.**

Yeah, that's they way I feel about it. And I think most of them, they do I know that for sure.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**