Australians at War Film Archive

Andrew Aberle - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **So whereabouts did you grow up, Andy?**

In East Fremantle, I was born in East Fremantle and I lived there till I married.

What was Fremantle like in those days?

Of course, a lot quieter than it is now. It was always a busy port, it

01:00 was the main gateway of course, to Western Australian and to Australia, for that matter. And so I guess we grew up familiar with the port and what happened there, and it was sort of exciting I guess at times, when you saw ships coming and going, the times that you might be down there. The wharf was much more accessible in those days, but it was always a very busy place. And in the old days

01:30 when ships used entirely different cargo working methods to what we use today. The area in which I finally spent my working life of course, was shipping and I suppose it provided everything around Fremantle.

Did you manage to watch ships go in and out, just as a bit of a past time?

Yes, at times you would yes.

02:00 I attended Fremantle Boys School and of course that's right in the, or was right in the heart of the city, and it's no longer a school, long time, those days are long time gone.

Is it still there now?

Still there, oh yes, very historic building, really. And it was a school very early in the life of the colony. And much

02:30 later, the Princess May Girls' School was built alongside. Yes, that was where everybody gravitated if you wanted to, well you had to go to high school. And all of the surrounding areas, Fremantle itself, North Fremantle, Beaconsfield, South Fremantle, East Fremantle where I lived, all those primary schools, fed

03:00 students into Fremantle.

Would you go into Perth at all, or would you stay in Freo [Fremantle]?

Going to Perth was a big event, and you went by train or bus. There were bus services on both Stirling Highway and Canning Highway, being in East Fremantle, we caught, in the early days, the south suburban omnibuses operated.

03:30 But more often than not, you would catch a tram, because trams operated and the Fremantle Tramway System was a separate entity to the one in Perth. And you caught a tram into Fremantle into the railway station, and then you caught a train. That's where all the big shops were, if you had some special business, you know, it was something really

04:00 important, it was usually in the city, Perth. Doctors had their rooms in Perth, so different to today, where of course the place has grown so much, but also the services have gone with it. They didn't exist in the old days, well not as efficiently as they do today. I think we had corner stores, supermarkets didn't exist,

04:30 you went to the grocers and they attended you behind the counter. You'd be sent down to the local grocery store with a list, before you left you'd ask Mum if you could have a penny to spend, you may or may not get the nod on that, if you had one last week. So you'd have to be content with that. But you'd have a list, but when Mum's went themselves,

05:00 the grocers would help, when she was asking for things. She would, I guess, study things and he might

suggest something or offer something that she didn't ask for, so grocers did a fair bit of marketing, I suppose, or salesmanship, if you like to help ladies make up their minds about what they wanted.

What sort of other chores did you have

05:30 **around the house?**

Well we were expected to pull our weight, I was one of four kids, three boys and one girl. And we lived in a big old house, which still stands in East Fremantle in Hamilton Street. The blocks there were very big, I think something like thirteen hundred square metres and they're still

06:00 that size, so it was a big yard. And we used to be expected to pull weeds at time and keep the place generally tidy. But I don't recollect having too demanding a work schedule, school seemed to be the dominant activity.

What did you father do?

He was actually a plumber by trade,

06:30 but he gravitated to the wool industry, and he was a reclasser, a wool classer and he worked for a firm in Fremantle, who took wool that had been roughly classed, and classed it to a more refined condition. And he, well all of my lifetime, that's where he worked until he retired, he worked until he was seventy or

07:00 so, he lived till he was ninety one. He was a veteran of the First World War, he was on Gallipoli and he was in France and he was decorated in France. And so we grew up with a connection with army service, and as kids, we were conscious of the fact that he and his friends had served. Of course, that was pretty well par for the course for the First World War. He was

07:30 in a gymnasium when he was a young man, and there were one hundred and four members, it was the St Paul Anglican's Church Gymnasium in Beaconsfield. And of the hundred and four, ninety eight joined the army, four joined the navy, and two were medically unfit. So that was pretty well the ratio of things in those

08:00 days. First World War was horrific.

Did he tell you anything about his experience?

Didn't talk a lot about it. I found a diary of his after he died, of the year 1916. And you weren't supposed to keep diaries, I mean that was the case in the Second World War, too, you know, they were seen as potentially useful to an enemy. But they all did, and

08:30 a little small scribbled pencil note, it's an incredible document, which recorded the withdrawal after Gallipoli, and then moving onto the Somme and the dreadful, dreadful battles in the Somme, and what life was like in the trenches. He was a stretcher bearer. Because when he was a young man, out in the back blocks of Jandakot,

09:00 on the Peel Estate, south of Fremantle, he was out shooting with a friend, and a shotgun discharged in the bush and he had two toes shot off. They were out there, somewhere out near Bibra Lake or beyond, with a horse and dray or cart. And his mate got him into the dray and it was quite

09:30 a long journey into Fremantle Hospital. He always recounted that they got as far as the Beakey Pub, which was an old pub at the time, my Dad never drank actually, he was a teetotaller all his life. But they got to the pub, and the poor old horse just about had it. And the publican had transferred them to his little horse and sulky for the rest of the journey to the Fremantle Hospital, which wasn't far.

10:00 So when he came to join up, they said, "Oh you'll never make it with two toes missing." He kept pestering them and they said, "Well if you'd like to go and do a St John Ambulance Course, we'll take you into the Army Medical Corps," which he did, joined the Army Medical Corps, 12th Field Ambulance initially, I think he spent

10:30 most of his time in the 4th Field Ambulance. And you know, went to Gallipoli and then into France. And so much for the missing toes, and of course, he was a stretcher bearer. And as I say, that record of the year 1916, I don't know what happened to the other years, unfortunately, but that's enough, it's a very moving document. He describes how many carries they did on the day, and

11:00 how they went out with a white flag today into no man's land to bring in wounded. And how they brought in a Fritz [German] today, who they still tended. And yes, it was horrific times, and it was for his service and a specific act in those days that won him a Military Medal.

What was the act?

The citation,

11:30 I have it out there, reads for bringing in wounded under heavy fire. I just forget the exact location.

Cause that certainly takes a lot of courage.

Well, they did it every day. It was such a grinding, relentless thing for such a long time, dreadful. But he didn't talk in great length,

12:00 he met up with his old mates, and they talked about happy times, their recollections. He lost his best mate, killed alongside of him, and I'm called after him, named after him, his mate was Andy. And I repeated that experience, I suppose, in the Second World War. My brother, my older brother was lost, and my eldest son is

12:30 named after him.

How did your brother lose his life?

He was a mid upper gunner in a Lancaster bomber, he was shot down over Berlin.

How did you find out about?

My Dad wrote to me while I was in New Guinea, Port Moresby. And that would have been the hardest letter he's ever had to write, sit down to write to me and tell me. Initially Doug, like most

13:00 of the casualties, he was listed as missing, missing in action. And as time went by and the information filtered through, via the Red Cross and its connections on both sides, the details emerged that the plane had been hit, all seven of the crew took to the parachutes, but the skipper who was an Englishman and my brother

13:30 didn't make it. The other five were taken prisoner, and that's where they got the information from. Yes, so I was away at the time, which was very hard on everybody of course, especially Mum.

Were you close to your brother?

Yes, it was pretty hard, it took me some time to write a nice long full letter to him, because we used aerograms,

14:00 which was a technique that they used to photograph letters one single page, that you could buy from the post office. That way they got a lot more through, they were condensed, I'll show you one later. And this long letter I wrote to him, came back to me a couple of months later, because it reached there after he'd gone. So that was awfully moving.

14:30 **Heavy emotional stuff.**

Yes.

Well just going, rewinding again, we were talking about your childhood before.

We got off the track.

Yes we did. But it was a very interesting track there. What was school like?

Well, I often comment that it was sort of so different to today. Different in the way, the free and easy way, I guess, that we went to school. I mean, your Mum took you the first day,

15:00 and that's probably about the only contact she had with the school, unless you were ill and she had to write a note or something, or you got into trouble and the headmaster wanted to see her, or something like that. Cause the kids in the street sort of looked after each other, and you walked to school, I mean there was none of this being dropped off and picked up. Mind you, I understand the situation, because as grandparents, we help out, or have done.

15:30 **Car pooling.**

Yes. But yes, they were happy days, I mean you had good teachers and bad teachers, we got the cuts quite a bit. I can remember in about grade five or standard five, as we used to say in those days, I got forty one cuts in the course of the year. And I wasn't

16:00 particularly bad, it was sort of routine, and you'd come home, your Dad would say, "How did you get on today?" and you'd say, "I got the cuts." "Oh, you probably deserved it." Nobody went rushing off and complaining that your child had been brutalised or anything, and that was par for the course, nobody complained.

And what would you get the cuts for?

Oh, I suppose, if you weren't paying attention, or you threw something

16:30 at somebody, or I don't know, maybe you were a bit cheeky in a response or something like that. And I don't know, they weren't, people sort of overreact too often. You hear some irate person being interviewed and saying how a child has been brutally dealt with by some teacher, or other. They would just get you out the front, held your hand out

17:00 and they gave you a couple of whacks with the cane. I don't believe anybody finished up twisted and that sort, a menace to society for the rest of their life, because their first grade teacher gave them a few cuts. But I guess it varied, some teachers perhaps used it more than others, anything serious, I guess

was

17:30 referred to the headmaster. But the school I attended in East Fremantle, the Richmond School, was relatively new, I started there when I was only five. And we never could work it out, but I was with a group of five other fellows, and we caught up to our siblings who were a year ahead of us, and

18:00 nobody could ever explain how that occurred. I was born in December, and somehow or other, they sort of snuck us into the next year or something. But anyway, throughout my school life, I was in the same year as my older brother Doug, who was sixteen months older than me. And several of those in that group of six, were in the same boat, had either a brother or a sister in the same

18:30 year, who were, or should be in the next year. But as for actual school days, I guess the learning was different, it's all been revolutionised today, of course, with modern information techniques, and so on. Schoolyard was all sand, I don't recollect such a thing as P & C, I can't recollect

19:00 it being referred to. Whether people were busy getting on with their lives, I was born in 1924, so it was sort of depression years, life was pretty hard for a lot of people. We were fortunate as a family, my Dad continued to work, he wasn't out of work. But lots of kids, I know,

19:30 families were in fairly dire straights at times. But you weren't terribly conscious of it as a child, it was more adult stuff. And I don't remember anybody starving or anything like that, I think people got by.

Was the reason why your father and your family was all right during the Depression, was because he was a plumber?

No, he wasn't practising as a plumber then.

Oh, he was wool classing.

20:00 He was wool classing. And I guess it was something that kept moving. He was a foreman in the business he was in, so maybe that gave him some sort of protection. But as far as I know, in our particular circle, times were tough, but I don't recollect anybody being destitute.

20:30 I mean everybody wore your older brothers clothes, or your older sisters clothes, clothes were handed down, because families were bigger generally. My wife was in a family of eight, and we were four, which was fairly average size. The family next to us, there were ten I think in that family, but they were a lot older than us.

21:00 But the actual daily routine of going to and from school, as I said, the kids in the street tended to look after each other. If a new child went to school, the Mum had confidence that the other, older children in the street would sort of keep an eye on them. You sort of walked to and fro in little groups,

21:30 the older kids of course, just as they are today, didn't have a lot of time for young kids, but at the same time, they kept an eye on things, and you could rely on the older kids.

Well it certainly sounds a lot more community minded than what it is now?

Well yes, I guess so, because you played with one another and you played in one another's yard.

Just pause there for a second while the phone rings. That's all right. So what sort of subjects did you like doing at school?

I was always pretty good at

22:00 sums, as we used to call them. And at spelling, I mean they were pretty basic subjects. I suppose arithmetic, spelling, geography, it wasn't a terribly wide range. I liked practical things, but I don't believe we

22:30 did anywhere near the sort of practical hands-on things that children do today. It was, I guess, we all felt there was no question, it was sort of preparing you to go out and earn a living. I don't recollect being exposed to the relatively modern ideas that prepare you to be a better citizen, or prepare you

23:00 to live a full life in a big, wide world. I guess your general feeling was preparing myself to earn a quid where I can. And I wasn't enamoured with the idea of staying on. Your initial target was to get a Junior Certificate, which was a, the first step after nine

23:30 years, after 9th Standard. You went from there into Leaving, for two years, but there weren't many high schools around that went beyond 9th Standard. I think Kent Street High School and of course Modern School. As far as I know, they were about the only two schools where you could do a leaving, some of my contemporaries went on

24:00 to become doctors and lawyers and things like that. But I couldn't wait to get out of school and go to work.

What sort of work were you thinking of doing?

I didn't know, I had nothing particular in mind, but my Mum happened to know somebody in the State

Shipping Service, an influential person like the boss's secretary.

24:30 And though they were contemporaries after the First World War, rang and said, well both my brother and I were leaving school, was there anything doing there. She said, "Well as a matter of fact there is," and I went down and was interviewed, and I got the job.

How about your brother?

25:00 He went in a similar direction, he joined the Shell Company. And it was from there, well in both cases, we went from there into the service.

Just before we get into that bit, did you play any sport?

Yes, not in an organised way at school, we were exposed to tennis, football. As a matter of fact,

25:30 one of my teachers in high school in eighth, seventh or eighth standard, was Jerry Dolan, and he was a famous Western Australian footballer and coach, and his favourites were boys that played football. I wasn't much good at football, I tried soccer and I tried tennis, but I wasn't a great success at either of those,

26:00 in school, I later played hockey.

Did you learn to swim at any point?

Oh swimming of course, everybody learnt to swim, and my Dad was a long distance swimmer when he was a young man. He used to run from Beaconsfield across to Point Walter, dive in and swim across to Claremont, swim back and then run back to Beaconsfield.

26:30 And he used to train people at long distance swimming. And I could never swim like he could, but he taught us to swim, but we also went to school swimming classes at South Beach, which in those days had a jetty or a pier sticking out and a shark proof, we used to call it the shark proof. It was a fenced in area, connected to the jetty and

27:00 went out to a corner and back to the beach. And there were change rooms and that sort of thing, it was quite a social gathering place, South Fremantle, or South Beach as we called it. And that's where we were taken by tram, and we used to catch the tram, you could get a tram ride for a penny, from East Fremantle into

27:30 Fremantle, and transfer to a South Fremantle tram, on a transfer ticket, it cost a penny. Adults paid thruppence, and their tickets were red, children's tickets were white.

Did your father do any boating, considering he was such a good swimmer?

We always had boats and Dad and his mates were very

28:00 knowledgeable about the waters out from Fremantle and Cockburn Sound and Garden Island. In fact, after the First World War, they couldn't settle down like a lot of men can't, had the same feeling myself later. They all went down to Point Pirren and camped down there for some weeks, or months, some of them, before they could actually

28:30 face civilian life again. I recollect him talking about those days, and of course they used to include Garden Island in those activities. And in fact, they used to rowboats from Fremantle, or perhaps Woodman Point across to Garden Island in the easterly on a summers day, in the morning. And then when it was time to come back, if they'd camped over

29:00 there, they would wait for a good strong south-wester, and row back. But, always had a boat in the river and we learnt about boats and fishing outside, and I could tell you some great stories, most of which are true, about catching a lot of fish.

Sorry, so you're a bit of a fisherman, then?

Oh yes. And the river of course, was a great focal point

29:30 for us during the summer. We had canoes and later dinghies, and we knew all of East Fremantle, as far as Preston Point, and of course Port Walter, we crabbed and caught prawns, we had great times in the rivers. And of course, swimming was absolutely essential.

30:00 Your parents didn't have any worries about you, because we were all pretty good in the water.

I'm just wondering, can you still crab in the river?

Oh yes, nowhere near as many as there used to be. We used to go down to Point, Preston Point, we used to walk down there from East Fremantle, it was only a mile, a mile and a half, something like that, carrying a kero tin.

30:30 And on a nice moonlight night, you could crab without a light, you could pick out the big ones on the bottom, because the water was so clean, and the bottom was clean, free of seaweed. So you could catch crabs galore and cook them in the river water in the bucket, and eat them there on the beach. And that

31:00 prevailed for quite some time after the war. The war of course, made a difference to a lot of things. But as kids, it was pretty good to do all that stuff.

So what was your job like in the, I can't remember shipping. I was going to say boating, but it's not, it's shipping.

State Shipping Service it was called. It was a state instrumentality

31:30 as the name implies, and it was formed in 1912, to provide a link with the north west, a reliable link that is. Private shipping companies had in fact, operated on the coast in the early days, pioneering days. But their service was unreliable, it was, it was driven of course by profit.

32:00 Ship owners have to make a quid to stay in business, and of course the demand was very intermittent according to seasons, it's tidal waters, all sorts of problems. And private operators did what they could, I suppose, with the limitations of having to survive financially.

32:30 Til it got to the point where the population up north sort of made it clear to the government, that they couldn't stay there unless they had some sort of reliable means of getting supplies in, because there were no roads. And little communities were developing along the coast, driven by things like the pearls of Broome for instance. And of course, the great pastoral

33:00 developments in the Kimberley, further north. The Pilbara was developing with cattle and so on, but they weren't connected. There might be a rough old track, but there was no way you could take stuff north by road. Sea was, in fact, the only way, and State Ships started out, tiny little ships and in fact, it became a lifeline, and it operated

33:30 very efficiently in that role and expanded and did all sorts of special things during my lifetime with it. And for eighty two years, or something like that.

So, all the supplies that the company that you were working for was shipping to the north west, was it shipping south as well?

Yes, originally State Ships, or State Shipping Service as it was, or State Steamships it was originally, because they were steamships, but gradually

34:00 as ships became motor vessels instead of steam, they changed the name to State Shipping Service. And during my time we sort of change it, because I was in the marketing side later, we changed it to State Ships, which is what everybody called it, anyway. But originally, it provided a shipping service from Fremantle, all the way north up to and including Darwin, and

34:30 south, right around up into the [Great Australian] Bight. And they were very rough, tough times, and people, communities were isolated all along the coast, the whole of the state. And little ships that went around the south, in mountainous seas, they were real tough sailing them, and they landed the cargoes and took wool and stuff off, in the ship's boats,

35:00 yes, it was pretty rough going.

Because right the way around the coast of Western Australia is pretty rough seas.

Well, north of course, they're subject to cyclones in the season. Most of the time, especially during the southern winter, is fairly placid up there, in fact it's great stuff. And in fact the tourist trips up there, and I sailed in a passenger ship for some time as a purser, the tourist

35:30 trips up north were very, very popular, this is long before the glamorous things happen up there now. So, I joined State Ships in 1939.

What were you actually doing there?

I was office boy, oh yes.

And what would you have to do, as part of that job?

Well I was on a bike and principal, or

36:00 one of my principal jobs was delivering paper all over Fremantle, collecting things and going from the office, which was just off the wharf, to and from the ships on the berths in Victoria Quays. And of course, it was two months after the war had broken out in 1939, I started in State Ships a week before my fifteenth birthday, so I wasn't quite

36:30 fifteen. And two months after the war had broken out, so of course, so the port of course, was a pretty turbulent place, because ports of course, are a vital part of any war operation. And even though at that time, of course, we were a long way from the European war, nevertheless all sorts of restrictions applied immediately, security wise, and so on. You had to have a card

37:00 to get on and off the wharf, identification. And of course, you felt pretty important on a bike, racing to and from the ships with messages and paper and all that sort of thing. And of course, a cargo working systems were the old systems, that is to say, ships principally use what is known as a union purchase

system. And cargo is handled piece by

37:30 piece. It was made up into slings of cases or crates, bags. A sling is laid down on the deck, and the bags are all placed on it, and they build up a pile. They bring up one end of the sling and pass it through the other, belt it down with waddy, and lift it up. So you may recollect

38:00 having seen that in the old days yourself, cause it's not that long since it was phased out altogether. But cargo was worked at about seven tonnes an hour, in each of the hatches. Today of course, it's hundred of tons or tonnes, and in containerisation, and that's made a huge difference. But in those days, the port was busy, there were

38:30 ships on every berth, all the sheds were flat out, and State Ships played its part along with all the other activities in the port, the overseas ships, the big passenger liners that came in, in those days, and of course the trade interstate, from WA [Western Australia] to all of the interstate ports. But we specialised in servicing the north, and we called ii at Geraldton, Shark Bay,

39:00 Carnarvon, Onslow Point, Samson, Port Hedland, Broome, Derby, Wyndham and Darwin, and those names roll off my tongue as easily as they did all those years ago. But they were pretty exciting times, because shipping is a twenty hour a day, seven day a week industry and it just keeps going, and ships have to sail on time. And working in the office,

39:30 it was imprinted on your mind indelibly, that ships can't be held up, because the paper isn't ready, that's not an excuse. And the paper had to be aboard, so of course you worked all night, or long hours anyway, to get the paper ready so the ship would be ready to sail.

How much paper would you give to a ship?

Well, a manifest,

40:00 which is a list of all the cargo on a ship. Some of the State Ship's manifest used to be fifty and sixty pages, great big forty line pages, with every single jolly thing that was on the ship, listed. And clients would order, say a station up north, like say, out the back of Birdie,

40:30 would order their monthly supplies, or before or after the wet season, huge supplies to get them through. Might be fifty bags of flour and twenty bags of sugar, chests of tea because tea was in tea chests, we didn't have tea bags. Bags of potatoes, onions, pumpkin, things that would survive in

41:00 the heat up there. And then of course all things to run a station, all their stores, timber, machinery, fuel, all those sorts of things, all taken up by sea. So you would have a manifest from a supplier like say, Burns Philp or J and W Bateman in Fremantle, who were very big shippers to the north.

41:30 The Government Stores Department, they shipped stores up to places like hospitals and schools, Public Works Department. Government stores would ship a lot of cargo every voyage, trucks and graders and things to blast their way through the rough country up there, making roads and things.

Sounds like everything from the smallest stuff to even the biggest stuff.

Yes, all sorts of things.

42:00 **That's a lifeline.**

Limited by what.

Tape 2

00:31 Well, I think I was saying how State Ships was a lifeline. And I guess as a boy, that wasn't particularly obvious, but as you got older and more involved, especially after we all came back and settled down, it was pretty clear that the north was just so totally dependent on it.

01:00 It was designed I guess, to lose money, it sounds a funny thing to say, but the potential was never there for it to make money, because basically they needed more stuff carried north, than there was to come south. And when all the great developments and the fruits of all the efforts over the years

01:30 started to take shape and be felt, that is to say the Pilbara boom and the discovery of all of the different ores and minerals and so on, and what's developed since, you can see how they needed stuff to make it all work, but the products all went overseas. So it was a one sided thing.

02:00 Also it was a way of, in my view, a very efficient way of subsidising people who lived up there. If it's lost money, then it was money well placed if you like, to help people survive in what were pretty difficult circumstances up there. Because they didn't have air conditioning, and of course, they didn't have refrigerators in the early days either, went in there with cool guardy safes and things.

02:30 So they needed all the help they could get to stay there.

Yes, it's a pretty harsh environment to survive in, even today.

Yes, that's right. If you wander off the track up there, you're in trouble.

So what was your role in the shipping, as a fifteen year old?

Well I think, as a boy it was a matter of, as I said, doing jobs around the office, learning the business. And I remember the old chief clerk said to me,

03:00 "Now, you learn to be a good shipping man son, and you'll have a special skill that a lot of other people haven't got." Now he was the old school, he wore a tennis shade and he worked on a bench that sloped at time, and he had beautiful copper plate writing, very colourful writing style, it was beautiful. But that was something he

03:30 impressed on me, and I also learnt at that very young age, that shipping was a very fragmented business, and as an operator you didn't directly control all the things that were involved in the operations.

Well what were the dynamics in the office?

Well the dynamics in the office were, I guess, fairly normal, office boy, junior clerk, clerk, that sort of progression.

04:00 It was disturbed in my case and those immediately above me with some tiers, because as men came of age, they all joined up.

What were you thinking as you approached that age?

Well I guess I felt it would be joining up, conscription came in and fellows were going into the

04:30 reserve services. And principally the army, and so I felt the navy was more my cup of tea.

Well it was an area you were familiar with, working in shipping.

Well that's right, and during those times as an office boy, and being on the wharf a lot, as distinct from being in the office, because you were about the place, you had to go over to the

05:00 wharf, pick up papers from the sheds and from the ships, you saw the big fleets of ships passing through Fremantle on their way to the Middle East, taking the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] over there. And great big ships like the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth, too big to berth in Fremantle. And some other big ships that we never ever saw previously, I can remember a beautiful passenger liner called the Andes, it was an

05:30 enormous thing, and it was on the Europe to South America run, ships like that you didn't normally see.

I presume the Aquitania as well?

Yes, all the well known cruise ships, they all showed up at one time or another. And of course, they were escorted by fairly heavy cruisers,

06:00 mainly cruisers, some destroyers, but heavy escorts to get them across the Indian Ocean.

What was the atmosphere like on the wharf, and around the harbour city?

Well there was a fair, you were conscious that there was a fair bit of secrecy about things, although the troops did in fact get a break, many ships anchored outside here, they bought them ashore in

06:30 all sorts of craft, cause a lot of them. Ships like the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth carried a lot of men. And of course they swarmed ashore and went to Perth, and got up to all sorts of antics, and you know, there was a bit of fun at times. I can remember, I think it happened more than once, when some diggers picked up a baby Austin and carried

07:00 it up the steps of the GPO [General Post Office], and left it in the public space up the top. And of course, people growled about it, but these blokes were getting up to high jinks before going over to what was a pretty solid campaign throughout the Middle East. But as I said, the, there was a separation I suppose, between the naval

07:30 activities and troop ships and so on that could berth, and the ordinary day to day operations in the port, that kept going, people like State Ships kept operating. And of course we were carrying troops and war supplies and so on up north as well, although it hadn't cranked up in those early days, to the extent that it had to later, when the Japanese came in. But yes, as I said,

08:00 we worked pretty long hours and you felt that you were doing something pretty important.

What was the atmosphere like in Fremantle?

Well the place was blacked out, all of the glass was taken out of shop windows and they were all

boarded up, it was pretty gloomy at night. In fact, it was never really, we used to say, it was never ladies country, there weren't too many girls worked down around

08:30 the shipping areas. Cause you can imagine in those days, there was a lot of troops, lot of sailors and people around the ports, it was pretty much men's work, there were a few ladies, one or two ladies in the Port Authority or the Fremantle Harbour Trust, as it was then called. And on the telephone and secretaries and so on. But most of the ordinary office work was done by men,

09:00 young men, coming on. There was all sorts of funny stories, the wharf boys had a lot of humour about it, and you learnt that. The wharfies themselves, they had nicknames for things, and people and so on. And you learnt about that, really early on. There was a lady on the switchboard at the Harbour

09:30 Trust, and in those days things were pretty stringent and there weren't a lot of public telephones, and if somebody needed to make a phone call, they would have to go to the shed clerks' office and seek permission. And the lines were generally barred, so the only way you could get out was go through the switchboard, and this lady used to cross examine people. And she became so well known in that regard,

10:00 they called Aspro, because she had no effect on the heart. That was pretty subtle I thought. But you know, they had names like London Fog, he seldom lifts. And of course, after the war more modern titles like Perry Mason [detective], handles one case a week.

10:30 Or the Judge, always sitting on a case, things like that, they were very clever. But I mentioned previously that in fact the nature of shipping was such, that you sort of had to grow up in it, to really know your way around. Because it was fragmented, the Port Authority handled the cargo on the wharf, a different stevedore, in our case we did it ourselves,

11:00 actually loaded the ships. There were tele clerks, there were all sorts of transport operators around the place, it was a great conglomerate of all sorts of different activities. And a person unfamiliar with it, coming along, would be totally confused.

What was it like on the streets for quite a young boy, a fifteen year old boy

11:30 **in that time?**

Well as I said, I guess office boys very quickly learnt their way around the town, you rode your bike for about, I guess a mile, a mile and a half in each direction westward and southward out of Fremantle, delivering things and picking up things. And you scuttled about the place the way you see people on bikes

12:00 these days, you knew shortcuts, you could duck in an alleyway and save time. But the town was pretty busy, the trams were still operating, and you know, the port itself was pretty cluttered, but I guess life was fairly carefree.

Fremantle has always been a working class city until recently

12:30 **it started to transform. What was it like on the streets, the city is full of hotels and bars. What kind of things did you witness that you mightn't witness today, that you hadn't witness as a person til that time yourself?**

I think it, in that respect, I guess it hasn't changed a lot, as you say, it's now more sophisticated.

13:00 During the war, it was certainly dominated by servicemen everywhere, but life went on. There were, I guess the place itself physically, was different in that there were verandas with posts holding them up, those things were gradually done away, and they developed the cantilever system of holding up

13:30 the verandas. But as you know, or may know, the city of Fremantle is itself, I think the whole city was declared worthy of preservation. And as a result, the actual facades and the way buildings look, are the way they were in those days, most of them have been preserved, and I think that's a great thing. I know modern

14:00 users of those buildings at times find them difficult when it comes to air conditioning and so on. You walked a lot more than you do these days, I suppose, I rode my bike from East Fremantle into Fremantle, all over the town.

How did your life change from leaving school to entering the workforce, outside of work hours?

Well I guess you didn't have as

14:30 much free time as you did when you were at school, but you still met largely with the fellows around you, from your own street, if you like. We started to play sport, I started to play hockey with the Fremantle Hockey Club, and I joined the East Fremantle Tennis Club, and we went there on weekends and played tennis.

15:00 We also, as I mentioned previously, spent time at the river together as teenagers. But also, most of the young blokes joined the Volunteer Defence Corps, the VDC.

Sorry, I might just have to remind you of the mike there, Andy.

Sorry.

That's all right. You were saying something about the VDC.

VDC, Volunteer Defence Corps, it was the

15:30 Australian home guard, if you like. And it was run by the vets from the First World War, who taught us basic army stuff. We learnt parade ground drill, we learnt how to handle a rifle, how to handle, learnt about how they operate anyway, Lewis machine guns and Vickers machines guns. There were

16:00 units conveniently located around Fremantle, in fact our crowd met up the end of my street, in what was originally a much smaller East Fremantle Oval. And it occurred on Saturdays or Sundays, or both, I can't recollect now precisely, but we did learn a lot of basic stuff. And we did some manoeuvres, they took us out into the bush,

16:30 out places like Mount Pleasant and so on, which of course is now wall to wall houses, in those days, it was just bush. We practised with three ten single shot rifles, I think they were left over from the Boer War. You pulled a lever down and dropped a cartridge in the top, pulled the lever back up, just one shot. But we also did what we felt was worth,

17:00 something that was worthwhile, and that was our particular unit, East Fremantle, was assigned guard duty on the Fremantle Railway Bridge. And our group, as part of the overall Fremantle network, we were assigned Sunday nights. And we mounted a guard throughout the night,

17:30 and there was a guardhouse each end, and you went down there. The old blokes more or less, I guess did a lot of the work when some of us couldn't wake up, because we'd have been over at Leighton Beach on Sunday afternoon swimming, in the summer, and the old blokes would do our tricks for us, if we couldn't stay awake. But we did it pretty conscientiously, and I can remember

18:00 some funny incidents there. We did it for quite a time, well I did until I joined the navy. But the tricks were two hours at a time, and you sort of were either mounted one end or the other of the bridge, and you did a regular pattern of walking across the bridge, meeting in the middle. We had tin hats, because people on

18:30 trains used to throw things at us, coming past. We had forty four Winchester repeaters, the sort you see in the cowboy movies, with the pump action. Used to go ker-lung and make quite a noise, and eight slugs down a magazine, which was underneath the barrel. I can remember one old fellow one night, who apparently had been on holidays or something

19:00 and I was on the North Fremantle side, and it was something like two o'clock in the morning, and he was apparently a night watchman or something. And he came along, out of the darkness and I heard him coming, and I called out, "Halt, who goes there." He just kept coming. I did challenge him a couple of times, didn't get a response.

19:30 Finally he was right under my nose, and I clunked this rifle, and it made a terrible noise. And the poor old chap, frightened the daylights out of him, and I explained, if you're going to come along regularly, you've got to be prepared to be challenged. We sort of settled him down and helped him across the bridge, he was going to work, and I can remember

20:00 ever after, he would come along, dragging a stick along a picket fence, which was alongside the little track that led to the approach to the bridge. And you could hear him coming half a mile away, dragging this stick along and making as much noise, and he'd call out, "Are you there guard?" There was no doubt he was a friendly soul, he wasn't the enemy. When the big troop movements

20:30 took place, they used to give us a bit of curry if they happened to be in the vicinity, they'd come along and make a terrible racket, making their way back to a ship. And they'd shout out, "Turn out the guard," and of course, we'd all jump then. And they'd have a chat with us in the middle of the night, we thought they were heroes of course, and they were. I can

21:00 remember one night, one bloke turned out the guard, he said, "I reckon there's someone swimming, making their way toward the bridge." And he'd conjured up in his own mind the idea of some terrorist or, we didn't use the term in those days, infiltrator making his way through the water,

21:30 and he had a vision of this fellow with explosives on his back, or something like that. And you'd, could hear the noise and a puff as he was breathing. And he called out corporal, and several of us went up on the bridge, we were ready to shoot this intruder. And it got closer and closer, and finally of course it passed under the bridge, and it was a big porpoise. That was about the only excitement

22:00 we ever had.

He was right about something.

Yes.

Something was swimming in the water.

And somebody fired a shot one night accidentally, and turned out just about every guard in Fremantle, I remember that, we had to give an explanation to why a rifle was discharged. But it was good training, and as I said, you learnt the basics about parade ground drill, and the old blokes of course, were very funny, recounting their own

22:30 experiences, which was only twenty years previously, you know. In later years, you sort of realised it was amazing how we went through all of that terrible turmoil, and dreadful, dreadful four years of fighting in the First World War. And within two decades, Germany was at it again, it was amazing.

What can you

23:00 **recall about some of those old guys?**

Mainly that, as I said previously in the case of my father, they didn't talk a lot about the bad times, they talked about funny things that had happened. And in the talks they gave us, they gave very practical information. For instance, if you've got a job to do, say

23:30 you're posted to guard something, these are the things to sort of look out for in the night. Don't feel limited, I can remember one fellow saying he was a British, an ex-tommy, a British soldier, where perhaps maybe things were much more rigid, and they weren't encouraged to use initiative. And the

24:00 bloke was posted in guard in front of a shed or something, and that was his post and that's where he stayed, and somebody broke in the back of it. Something like this, I can recollect him giving that as an example, and saying, "Well look, when you've got a job to do, well then within limitations, see what there is to do, and feel free to sort of do what you think is right in the situation."

24:30 I guess that was Australian trade if you like, diggers have always been praised for the fact that they've shown initiative and they're very enterprising, one of the great attributes.

You mentioned that these old guys had an interesting sense of humour. Can you recall any humorous incidents?

Oh not particularly. I can remember a fellow, I won't mention his name, but

25:00 he used to be the fount of all knowledge and somebody would say, perhaps we were doing parade ground drill, or we were in some exercise, and somebody would say, "Does anybody know where this is, or that is, or how do we do this or that?" and they would always say this fellows name, "Charlie Porridge knows." And I can remember him, he always used to respond,

25:30 "Charlie Porridge does not know," which was sort of in keeping with their own philosophy of never volunteering for anything, being cautious. And it sounds silly now, but it used to raise a laugh. I suppose what I'm trying to say was, there was, they took the task seriously, but there was a light heartedness about it, which is what you realise later,

26:00 the tray that sort of served them so well in the First World War, and the Second World War, for that matter too.

Did the Volunteer Defence Corps have a strong following?

I guess most of the returned blokes, in fact, were involved, that were fit enough and so on. As far as I know, most of my mates got involved

26:30 and yes, it was an adventure I guess for us. Have some fun and handling weapons and things, you sort of thought it was something pretty special.

Short cutting your way to the action.

Well not really, I don't recollect us every being determined to repel the enemy if they arrived. But obviously did a good job, and it was a useful network. And there were all sorts of novel things too.

27:00 We raced pigeons my Dad and I, as a boy I said to him, "I'd like to get some pigeons," and he said, "Oh well, lets get involved in some quality stuff," and he happened to know a fellow who raced pigeons. So we went along and learnt a bit about how pedigree birds are bred and raced and trained.

27:30 And so acquired some good stock ourselves, and we raced pigeons for some years, and when I went away, he continued to do that. And several pigeon lofts were in fact involved in the communication system. Our loft was in fact, part of a network where pigeons were used to carry messages, with a little capsule on their leg. And you could write a lot of

28:00 information on a cigarette paper.

Is that what you used?

Pardon.

Is that what you used?

Yes, you could write all sorts of stuff.

What sort of messages were sent? Commonly sent?

They were exercises and you would take a basket of birds out in the field, my Mum was part of the system. If Dad wasn't there and I was out with a group

28:30 somewhere, and pigeons, write a message. And we had a telephone, everybody didn't have a telephone in those days, but she could telephone the message through or Dad could, if I was out, the one letting the birds go.

Had Japan entered the war before you enlisted?

Yes.

What was? Oh sorry.

Japan entered the war at the end of 1941, and I joined up in '42,

29:00 in August.

What was the feeling here at home in Perth or Fremantle, about the threat of a Japanese invasion?

It made a big difference, it changed the scene completely. It bought it close to home. I often say to people today, it's probably hard for you, folk like you to realise what it was like,

29:30 when the whole country was at war. We've had the experience of Korea, the Vietnam War, these more recent experiences with the Middle East campaign, but they were sort of incidents compared with total war, world war means world war. Every country in the world wasn't involved, but a large part of the world was. And the whole of the world in terms

30:00 of you know, the geographic location of activity, the war was all over the world. And of course that was reinforced when Japan came in. You see, my Mum had to make blackout curtains, all the homes were blacked out. There was an air raid

30:30 warden system in place, and they would monitor blackouts, it was taken quite seriously. Street lamps weren't on, cars had dampers on their headlights, and there was a slip, which showed a tiny patch of light, immediately in front of you. And as I mentioned previously, all the glass was taken out of the shop windows and they were all boarded up, there were no lights anywhere.

31:00 So all of that was already in place, because of the European War, but somehow or other, at that time, there was a feeling that it was a long way, it was over there. When Japan came into the war, it was on our doorstop and it all happened so quickly. Their onslaught was massive and it was very successful,

31:30 and they swept south, through South East Asia, starting with Pearl Harbour, as you know. But simultaneously with that, was their invasion, the Malaysian peninsula and heading for Burma, and of course India was one of their targets, but they never made it. But they came throughout the islands, and that was one of their weaknesses in the end, or proved to be a weakness, they just couldn't support

32:00 it all, they moved so fast. And of course, America responded, they had the power and resources to do that. But initially that first onslaught, really hit us right between the eyes. And I can remember an official of some description, I don't know whether it was a councillor or somebody like that, in a gathering in Fremantle,

32:30 addressing people on one occasion, I can't remember precisely what it was about. But I can remember him saying, "It happened in Singapore, and it can happen here." Because Singapore was impregnable, never fall, but of course, it was just swept away, like all of those other so-called fortresses up that way. And as you

33:00 know, they returned at Kokoda in Papua, which is when they started to run out of steam. But our first feel for the war, came with the, in the case of Fremantle in particular, all the craft, ships and boats,

33:30 anything that would float, people were using to escape. And we saw all sorts of strange looking vessels that we never ever saw previously, little coastal ships, little ships that plied the waters, all round the islands. Some were luxury things, private yachts and things, some of them were beautiful little craft, some were little tugs. But they all made their way

34:00 to the north west coast, and they worked their way down to Fremantle.

They had all left Asia, had they?

Pardon.

They had all come from South East Asia, had they?

Yes, they were people who were, in some cases, had the money or owned a craft like that, or could buy

one, or pay for a passage on one. Some of it was orderly, in the case of State Shipping Services, our ships were diverted

34:30 from the coast, or in fact Darwin, across to places like Ambon to bring away people that were escaping.

That's interesting, I haven't heard of this exodus before.

Oh yes. State Ships was involved, as I said. Prior to that actually happening, State Ships had already been involved, the Kalinda

35:00 one of the state vessels, on a normal voyage heading south in November 1941, just prior to the Japanese master. The ship's master was instructed to proceed to an area off Carnarvon, that there were lifeboats adrift, there had been a battle at sea, and he was instructed to do what he could to pick up

35:30 these boats. And of course they were the survivors from the Kormoran, after the battle with Sydney. Kalinda picked up one lifeboat, it had twenty one German sailors in it. She was in a position to do that, because she had some soldiers on board. So they were able to lift the boat out of the water completely with the twenty one sailors in it, and place them under guard aboard the ship. The Kerin,

36:00 a blue funnel ship that was regularly on the run between Fremantle and Singapore and other South East Asian ports, she was in the vicinity and she was sent to do the same thing. Her master wasn't game, they found a boat with German survivors and he took it in tow, and towed it into Carnarvon. But the Kalinda landed those twenty one sailors

36:30 in Fremantle, when I was office boy.

Did you witness them landing?

No I didn't, I wasn't there at the time, I don't know why. The whole thing was very secret. Even though our ship was involved, it was very hard to find out. And not that you actively sought to find out details of something like that, you just knew that something very special had happened. Of course, it was tied up with the sinking of the Sydney, and

37:00 stories like that, didn't come out until after the war was over. Of course, I subsequently sailed in the Kalinda as a purser myself, well after the war.

What was your reaction to hearing that the Sydney had been sunk?

Well I guess it was just another event, because we were being fed information, of course, about all the actions over in Europe,

37:30 about things like the Hood being sunk by the Bismarck, they were great stories. We used to listen to broadcasts, Winston Churchill and you know, I can still remember it as a kid, he used to make the hair stand up on the back of your neck, because he had a way of speaking. There was no way Britain was going to lose the war,

38:00 and we will prevail. And even though disasters like the Hood being sunk by the Bismarck, because eventually the Bismarck was sunk too, but it took a hundred and forty three ships to get her in the end. But you were aware, and that sort of information kept coming out, because all the action in the Middle East was going on.

Again though, for that to have happened so close to

38:30 **home.**

That's right.

And for a ship of that scale to have been lost in those circumstances, it must have been quite threatening.

Well very little came out at the time, but you were conscious that something terrible had happened. And of course it wasn't until much later, that the detail came out. Of course, it was only a month or so later or less, that the nips [Japanese] came in, and bombed Pearl Harbour. And then within

39:00 months, they were on our doorstep and a State Ship was sunk in February 1942, the Koolama, a beautiful, beautiful passenger ship, our best ship, she was bombed and sunk up north. We knew about that, but a lot of the detail didn't come out until well after the war was over.

Whereabouts in the North West was she sunk?

Up off Cape Londonderry, which is near Wyndham.

Were there passengers

39:30 **on board?**

Oh yes, she was making a normal service voyage up and down the coast.

What was her regular route?

Fremantle to Darwin and back. And she had already been involved on a previous voyage, on one of those evacuation exercises I spoke about, going over and bringing people out of the nearby islands. Yes, so a flight of Japanese bombers

40:00 came over and bombed her, the master put her ashore. The North West coast, as I mentioned previously, is subject to severe tidal movements. Have you been up there?

Yes.

You know how the tide rises and falls. In the case of places like Broome, Derby, ships sat high and dry at low water, you went in on

40:30 high water, and the tide was anything up to thirty three, thirty four feet, rise and fall. So putting a ship ashore and knowledge of where you could do it safely, was second nature to the master of Koolama, and he beached her, even though she had some major damage, bottom

41:00 blown out in one part, they managed to patch her up and get her on up to Wyndham. They got passengers ashore, and set up a camp, and the actual exercise in getting people away from that remote beach, was a real saga, which is not terribly well known. The chief officer, who subsequently was master of the Kalinda after the war, managed all

41:30 that, they got them out by luggers from nearby mission station, in the ship's boat, and some were taken out by sea plane, others walked overland through that harsh country.

Sounds like an incredible feat.

It is.

Were there any casualties?

Yes, there was one casualty unfortunately. The ship made its way into Wyndham.

42:00 and… End of tape.

Tape 3

00:30 **We were talking about casualties with the passenger liner that was sunk.**

Yes, there was only one and I think I explained that the actual evacuation of the ship, the setting up of a little community on the beach and getting them all away over a period of several weeks, was a wonderful piece of organization, given the remoteness of the area and so on. The ship made its way into Wyndham,

01:00 using just the engines just to steer her, because her rudder had been put out of action, and that of course, in itself was a masterpiece of seamanship. She was alongside at Wyndham when Japanese planes came over and everybody was ordered off the ship. They felt that she was a prime target and anybody on board, wouldn't stand much

01:30 of a chance. It was the ship's pumps that were keeping her afloat because she was so badly damaged, and with the engineers ordered off and the pumps not attended, they stopped and she founded, and rolled over on her side, alongside the wharf. And she lay there throughout the war, and they made an attempt to raise her after the war,

02:00 they got her up, but she rolled over again and spilled all the air out and drifted on the tide off the corner of the jetty, and that's where she lies today. If you've ever visited Wyndham, you look out to the seaward corner of the jetty, and you can see the ripples, passing over the Koolama.

Was that pretty big news at the time?

I beg your pardon?

Was that pretty big

02:30 **news at the time, was it in the papers?**

No, not a word mentioned at all, like the Sydney incident, there was very little known about it, until after the war.

So you only knew about it, because of your close connections within shipping?

Yes, and there again, office boys or junior clerks didn't share in all the knowledge. See the whole operation of shipping all over the world, was very secret, all messages were in code.

03:00 All shipping movements were very much closely screened and naturally, the enemy was looking for unprotected shipping to sink. And quite a few ships were sunk around the Australian coast, especially after the Japanese came in.

Was it a very social time, with the starting up of the war? Did

03:30 **social life change in Perth?**

Yes, as teenagers we, I guess once again, were conscious that war's on, I think I mentioned that total war involves everybody at all levels. Teenagers though, although I don't whether we were really aware of that term or used it. We managed to

04:00 find things to do, we went to dances and we had a group that we grew up with in our local vicinity. We didn't go terribly far afield, East Fremantle. The movie theatres kept operating in the suburbs and I think, well certainly the early

04:30 part of the war, the open air theatres kept running too. You may or may not know that the idea of open air films isn't new, Western Australia in particular had a network of open air theatres. Each suburban theatre had an open air one attached to it, nearby. And most of them were designed so that the equipment could be showed

05:00 indoors and turned about and projected through a side wall to an open air situation. And they were called garden theatres, the premium seats were deckchairs, and the less salubrious seats were the garden type hard wooden seats. And of course, they were a great social gathering point, and people went to

05:30 the flicks on Saturday night and sort of, young blokes sort of eyed the girls off.

In the dark, that's not necessarily.

Oh well, there was always interval, and time before. But our parents went regularly every Saturday night to the movies, and had the same seats for years, years and years and years.

Could you reserve seats, to be your own?

Yes. And I can recollect at Christmas time, that the owner

06:00 would invite them as guests, they didn't pay. It was so much a part of their life, and of course, it was the hey day of movies and Hollywood and all that glamorous stuff that you sort of half believed it, what you saw.

Busby Berkeleys? How about dancing, did you do a lot of that?

Oh yes,

06:30 the local dances were very popular. And of course, it was the swing era, and we were all addicted to swing, we knew all about the big bands. Today when I hear people talking about the modern bands and the young folk know all about them, who is doing what, we were just like that, but we knew all about Tommy Dorsey and Benny Goodman and

07:00 Glenn Miller and all those big bands. And we knew about the soloists and what they played. Big Band Swing was what we grew up with, and I'm still addicted to it. Or Dixieland, like Louis Armstrong and all those other great Dixieland players, that's real music.

What sort of songs were popular at the time?

The Andrews Sisters, anything they sang, "Rum and Coca Cola," a lot of the songs

07:30 were related to the war, once the Americans came in, of course. "Drinking Rum and Coca Cola," we thought that was a fun song, but they did wonderful arrangements in the beginning for instance. And they sold, I think they were one of the first recording groups to sing more than a million copies of "Apple Blossom Time." And that was featured in a film called, "Buck's Privates" and I've got it here, and it featured

08:00 The Andrew Sisters, and of course it was about the early days of the American's involvement in the war. And of course we always said the Americans won everything they ever got involved, they won the whole thing, nobody did anything else. But they were experts at producing films highlighting the American achievements. And "Buck's Privates"

08:30 had Abbot and Costello and The Andrew Sisters, and they sang "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" in that, I've got it there. I've got several masterpieces, but singers like Perry Como who was with the Miller Band, and some of the early recording artists who later went on, had the lifetime of fame,

09:00 Bing Crosby of course.

Did American big bands come to tour Australia, or?

No, we never saw them here, but we certainly saw them in New Guinea when I was there.

Well that must have been a bit of a thrill for you.

Yes, great. But there were some very capable local bands. You mentioned dances, we used to go to dances at Masonic Hall in East Fremantle, that was a great

09:30 gathering place. And in Fremantle itself, the old Vic was a great place that we used to go, we didn't go too far afield. And there was one out, in my case, out at Petra Street, you know, within two or three miles of home. But Friday and Saturday night dances, it was great. And we did all the old time dancing, barn dance and the Boston two step, we learnt those.

10:00 We had, in my case, I think the war had started it certainly was around about that time, we went to Mrs Johnsons' dancing classes, over near the Fremantle Monument, she had two daughters and they used to teach us young fellows how to dance. Everybody of course, hoped that Mrs Johnson used to get hold of you, she was a big lady

10:30 But everybody hoped the daughters would take you in hand. They made a great contribution to all of us learning to dance, and we did learn at school, we used to have school dances, but they were very well organised and well chaperoned if you like, we used to go into Fremantle Town Hall for that. And the dance band of the day was a fellow called Ron Jenkins,

11:00 and they were very entertaining and yes, we had a lot of fun at dances.

Did your social group comprise of other people you worked with at the shipping company?

Not a lot, some of my contemporaries were East Fremantle fellows, in fact three of four of them, because we took on an office boy every year.

11:30 It was partly driven by the fact that somebody was going off the top. When I say off the top, when they reached eighteen or so, they were joining up. So they kept feeding office boys in annually. And a fellow from up the other end of my street followed me, and I followed a fellow who lived in the next street to me. And he in turn followed

12:00 a fellow who lived several streets away, all from East Fremantle. So it was sort of a bit localised in that regard, and we did things together, we were on the river together and we sailed boats and we went crabbing and fishing and things like that. And as we joined up, we all went in different directions, quite a few of them went in the navy. And we kept in close touch with them, certainly as young

12:30 fellows.

At what point did you join up?

When I was seventeen and nine months, I decided the navy was for me.

Was there some sort of a recruiting drive to get people into the navy?

No, navy was all voluntary, army conscription was in place at that time,

13:00 and fellows automatically went into the army, but a very high proportion transferred to other services, principally the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], that's what happened in my brother's case. He preceded me of course, he was sixteen months older than me. But I decided the navy was for me, and I knew that wearing glasses was a limitation in terms of what I could do.

13:30 But one of my seniors in State Ships, had gone in and he had a commission, because he had sailed as an assistant purser in one of the passenger ships, and I think he also may have had his Leaving, I'm not sure. But he was seen as being sufficiently qualified to be offered a commission, so he went into the Pay

14:00 Corps, he was paymaster and that was an area that oversaw administrative functions, including supply or stores. And the ratings, you know, the actual sailor level that did the work, were supply ratings or writers. Writers were the scribes that kept records and so on.

14:30 And I happened to see him, he came into the office one day, and he said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "I'm going to join the navy." He said, "What do you you'll do?" and I said, "Maybe they'll take me as a stoker." I don't think they would have, actually, cause I think my glasses would have fogged up. But he said, "Would you like to try out as a scribe?" and I said, "Well I hadn't thought of it, I didn't know about it," you know, you didn't know a lot about it. He said, "Well, that's the way

15:00 to go," so he recommended that, and I think he might have also recommended me, and the recruiting office was up in Perth, so I went up and applied. And the prerequisite was that you demonstrated some ability to keep records and that you were good with figures, because the supply area, in

15:30 fact, required people to be able to order things, account for them, do figures. Because I had the office experience, and I had my Junior, I'd passed my Junior Certificate, the only subject I didn't pass was French, and I only kept doing French because Dad said you never know with all these people coming out from Europe, there's bound to be some French girls come out, it might be useful.

16:00 **All about French girls, is it? I like the sound of your dad, he sounds like he's got a sense of humour.**

I can remember doing badly in the French exam, I wrote for, or interpreted some French narrative that was read to us, I think. Something about a mouse in a lifeboat, and I remember

16:30 comparing notes with one of my fellow students, and I said I couldn't make out how the mouse got in the lifeboat. And he said, "I don't know what you were talking about, there was no mouse and there was no lifeboat," so I knew I hadn't done well. But picked up a smatter, which I've used subsequently. But I digress. I went along and

17:00 apparently I looked OK, and writers and supply assistants, they were the titles. Because we had to have perhaps something addition in terms of qualifications, we got paid a little more, and we wore a square rig, that's to say we wore a cap and a double breasted jacket with six buttons. And we got, I'm not

17:30 sure, I think it might have been seven pence a day more than sailors. But because I was not a man, I was a boy, you're a boy until you're eighteen, and the indication of that, is that you're class two and you go in on probation in the supply and writer area. So I went in as a Supply Assistant, Probationary Class

18:00 Two. And of course they say it to everybody I suppose that joins the navy, it was pointed out to me by an old chief, "Laddie, that is one of the lowest forms of marine life." We had quite a few ex-British sailors, they had them in all the services, that had migrated out between the wars. And of course, their

18:30 skills were needed and called on for training. So we had this old chief in the stores area, and he used to talk like that, chief petty officer, Starling was it, something like that. But anyway, I decided to apply and I was accepted on probation, and went through with the group at the recruiting office at Perth. It was

19:00 Perth railway station I think, somewhere there. And…

Are you going somewhere differently to other recruits who are joining the navy?

No, we are all the same, anybody joining up, you went in, in different departments. And I can remember being treated with great respect by this old, gnarled old petty officer and recruiting officer, lieutenant,

19:30 both of whom probably were sort of long retired from the service, and come back to do these jobs. The petty officer kept calling us gentlemen. "All right, you're now approaching a very important decision in your future, you've decided to join the navy and we've decided you're acceptable. And

20:00 we require you to sign a form, which we," we completed this form, where you swear allegiance to the King, King George the Sixth, king and country. And then you reinforce that by taking the oath, gentlemen this way, and gentlemen this and gentlemen that, there was about

20:30 twenty five or so of us. And we all signed the forms and he collected them all up. And he said, "All right, the final requirement is for you to take the oath, so everybody paying attention and raise your right hand." We had up til then been gentlemen, but we had just signed the form, and, "Everybody raise your right hand," and there was one fellow

21:00 in the front, and he said, "How many right hands to you have, laddie. It's not the one with the wristwatch with it," and somebody said, "God, we're in the navy." I'll never forget that. I mean one minute, we're gentlemen this, and. So we all took the oath and that was it. Report to Leeuwin and we had basic training

21:30 there. Most people were trained in Melbourne, the deck people, like able seamen, ordinary seamen, everybody started as an ordinary seamen, of course, and stokers and people like that, most of that training was carried out in Melbourne. In my case, supply and writers that went in with me, we were trained at Leeuwin, we didn't go to Melbourne.

22:00 **Well what was Leeuwin like?**

Well Leeuwin was newly built. At the beginning of the war, the navy had an establishment down at the bottom of town at Cliff Street, over towards what is now the fishing boat harbour area. But they took over what was a playground for us as kids, a beautiful grove of big white gums, down there on Preston Point, we used to walk through there

22:30 when we went crabbing. And of course, I went down there to find, well I guess I say to find, I knew that they'd built this huge naval establishment very quickly, and it was set up for training and for administering all naval affairs around Fremantle. When I say all navy affairs, the bulk of things, because there was a lot of signal stations and other communication facilities and all that sort of business,

23:00 down on the wharf and closer to where the action was, or the activities were. But of course, went in and you were kitted up, and you did, I think six weeks basic training.

What sort of uniforms were you given?

You were given your full kit, you were given your number one gear, which was

23:30 your blue uniform. You were given a number two gear, which was the principal difference was you had red badges on your number two gear. And your number one gear, you had gold badges. We were also given, I think it was called a number four, a white rig, but we never wore it, it was sort of traditional, a

24:00 summer rig with a tight collar. I don't recollect ever wearing that. You were given a complete set of gear, underclothes and all, shoes, socks and everything. Including a hammock, you were given a basic hammock plus the clues which are the cords that attach to it, and the ropes on the end of it, and you were instructed on how to make that up. And the huts

24:30 that were built down there, had rails overhead and you slept in hammocks in the huts, getting ready to sleep in hammocks at sea. And you went through the sort of basic training you would expect anywhere, parade ground work, turning out at six in the morning and going through a lot of military type stuff.

25:00 You start out as a pretty ragged old outfit, and after a few weeks, it's amazing how it comes together. Mind you, there is some pressure applied. We had a petty officer who was a PTI, that is a physical training instructor, and he had these t-shirts, short sleeved and even in the middle of winter, he would be

25:30 down there at six o'clock in the morning, and the crowd would say, "He makes me sick, because he's like a piece of sprung steel and he's jumping out of his skin, and he'd say good morning gentlemen." And people that were tardy, they copped it. "Slept in this morning, did we? Well I think we need waking up, like a short job around the parade ground, and keep those knees up, and stand up straight."

26:00 All of those things, you know. And of course you might have had leave the night before, and some of the blokes got back late or whatever. But you gradually learnt that it was, you were doing something important and of course, the, and it was like the same in every service. There was some uncomfortable facilities that they're disposable to make you conform. Of course one of the most important

26:30 was peer pressure, and it was a very subtle thing. They'd say, "OK, we're going to get this move right, and we are not going to breakfast until everybody gets it right." It's the simplest thing, the simplest pressure to apply because the bloke that is being tardy, or being sloppy or not applying himself, is holding

27:00 up the whole show. So of course his mates immediately say, "Put your brain in gear," and that worked in wonders. And in fact, you made it your business to get it right. And he actually had, what he called a combined intelligence and physical test. He'd say, "At the order son, you'll spring to attention, left turn,

27:30 left turn, take one pace forward, take one step back, take one pace right close, about turn, stand at ease.." Of course, everybody's doing this, and he'd say, "Very amusing." And you're finding yourself following the bloke in front, because it's all happening in a split second, and it was a very clever technique,

28:00 because he said, "All right, look, listen and decide for yourself what you're going to do, don't follow the bloke in front." And so you gradually learnt that I've got to get it right for myself. And there again, cause when he said everybody's got to get this right, you sort of finish up, after five or six weeks, you're jumping out of your skin, you're saying I'll get this right. And then for the last

28:30 week he said, "Every morning, we will have this routine," and he rattled it off. "At the order son, you will spring to attention, take one pace forward, take one pace right close, take one pace left close." And he said, "We will get it right and it will be absolutely perfect and at passing out parade on Saturday, you will be perfect. This will be one unit, because I am on parade too, and I

29:00 am being tested, and I am going to impress my superiors." Aren't we. So you sort of become, you become one and you want to do it. So you sort of learned early, it's important. So you learnt to rely on one another, you've got to get it right. And also that there's not a lot

29:30 of room, for doing your own thing. And I guess through the ensuing four years, you sort of learn that somebody gives an order, and you're expected to carry it out. I can remember blokes in the army saying, they would say, "Sarge [sergeant], I think." "Now son, one thing we need to get straight, you don't think, I say and you do, because somebody told me."

30:00 That's not to say there isn't room in a good team, to say, "OK what do you blokes think?" when you're invited to contribute, you can. The navy, I guess was no different to the other services in that regard, but a ship operating or any sort of thing taking place, you, if you are trained in a

30:30 certain area, you're expected to do it in a regulation way. So then we, in my case, I was trained through all the various sides of naval supply or store keeping.

And how was that different to what you'd been doing before?

Oh well, it was orientated of course to the operation of ships, either the work was either related to what happens in a ship or on shore.

31:00 The basic system in ships was and I guess it's still the same, the ship had a certain complement of a

crew, and to keep that crew well fed for a period, and in our case it was three months, she carried a certain supply of food. And also to keep the ship running for three months, independent of any other sources of supply, apart

31:30 from fuel, she was expected to be self contained. So the ship's needs and the needs of the crew were your responsibility. And of course, shore bases that supported operations had big stores that had what ships needed, to keep going. So as ships ran out of things and needed top ups, you were there to ensure that

32:00 they got what they needed.

So would you be in charge of the stocks for the big stores, as well as the ships?

Yes. The role of supply ratings, in my case, stores ratings, was across the whole gambit of it. And in fact, my first posting was to Port Moresby, HMAS Basilisk, which was a very big base, and a big centre

32:30 for the push. Because by the time they reached Port Moresby, the tide was just starting to turn, the Japanese onslaught had been checked on the Kokoda Track, and Port Moresby was a base for the thrust north again for Lae and Salamaua campaigns. As far as the army was concerned, and to get the army there, you needed ships coming and going, and of course, escorts, escorting

33:00 the freighters. So I was drafted, that was the term in the navy, to HMAS Basilisk after I'd been in about six months, in training.

So you'd basically just spent six months in training in Leeuwin?

Yes. And I learnt all the other aspects, we also ran the clothing store, you learned how to kit a man up, and we had a long, long counter, and the first thing

33:30 you gave them, was a kit bag. I've still got mine, great big heavy canvas kit bag. Opened it up, and in their civvies [civilian clothing] and they hold their bag open and they work their way along the counter. And you say, OK, there's some basic things like, I can remember brushes. You used to say, "Brushes, shoe polish, shoe." No,

34:00 Brushes, shoe, anyway there were two brushes, there was one to put the polish on and one to brush it up. Shoe polish, shoe brush, brushes tooth, brushes clothes, and they just went plonk, plonk, plonk into the kit bag, they were the same. And then they'd say, OK, what size shirt

34:30 do you wear. OK bang, try this. So many shirts, so many singlets and all that. What size shoe, try this, and so on, and it worked to the end. And that was your kit given as I said previously, the hammock and the clues and things and you'll be instructed how to make that. Next.

So how long would it take to get through this lineup?

Oh not long.

35:00 The fun started when the WRANS [Women's Royal Australia Naval Service] came in, because I was in the clothing store when they first started coming in.

Hello, well this sounds like a good thing for a couple of blokes to be doing.

Well the funny part was, we found the, what size shoe do you take? Well if it's a so and so, I take this, or if it's a this, I take that. Well you'll need this, size whatever, and I don't know. Gradually we got

35:30 girls trained, and when they came in, they handled the girls. But I'll never forget, I was in the clothing store with this old chief, I was still only on probation, cause we were doing that sort of stuff, while we were doing the parade ground stuff, too. And I was working behind the counter, and I ducked under the counter, and he said, "Here, where do you think you're

36:00 going," and I said, "I'm going to the heads," toilet. I'd been in a month, and I knew all the navy terms. He said, "You get back behind the counter there," and I said, "I'm going to the heads, want to go to the toilet." He said, "You get back here, you're in the navy now, and you will regulate your bodily functions to your stand easy time," I've never forgot that.

36:30 Later on, I realised if I'd been in longer off I'd been fully qualified, I would have told him to jump in the lake, but after, up in the mess the crowd all said, "He can't do that," and I said, "He did." I'll never forget it, it was quite funny, yes.

You were terrified of your own bodily functions for a while, until.

Yes, you will regulate it, you're in the navy. But yes, so

37:00 as I said, you were gradually trained along with all that parade ground stuff and so on.

How did the graduation go?

Oh it went well, yes, well done, well done petty officer. And congratulations lad, I'm sure you'll all do well, that sort of thing, I can remember. I can also remember when I completed

37:30 my probationary time and I turned eighteen within a week of one another, I went to the admin office and the petty officer said, “I think we’ll make your.” You had to request to be promoted or to be endorsed or to pass something or other, you had to request to have this put on your record. Some

38:00 achievement had to be acknowledged officially, and you did that by applying for it to happen, having done all the preliminaries and passed tests and so on. And the chief, this petty officer said, “I think we’ll make one application of this. We’ll say you apply to the commanding officer through your divisional officer, to be promoted a, from supply assistant probationary class two, to supply assistant probationer, I forget which

38:30 came first. And b, to be promoted from supply assistant probationer, to supply assistant. And so, of a morning there were captain’s request men and defaulters, and request men were heard first, and this took place in the drill hall. And it was all very formal, you were in

39:00 the hands of the master at arms. The master of arms in the navy is something like regimental sergeant major, he is the senior non-commissioned officer, and he takes charge of the whole thing, and it’s all done by numbers. And your request is read out, “Supply assistant probationer class two Aberle F4496 is applying a,” and that’s read out.

39:30 And of course the captain’s there and he’s got his officers on either side of him, and he sort of confers with his officer on one side and then confers with an officer on the other side, and they’re all nodding. And he said, “Request granted, it’s a very quick promotion lad,” I’ll never forget that. And master of arms says, “Request granted, double away,” and off you go.

40:00 Defaulters wait til last, or are kept til last, and they go forward with their cap with, yes, they have their cap on, but when you step forward to have your charge read against you, it’s off caps, you hold your cap behind you. And the tradition was, understood, that was done and the

40:30 escort who is with you, takes the cap off you, so you can’t throw it at anybody. If you are a real bad lad and you get detention and I tell you, that’s another story, the detention barracks in Fremantle, that was a fearsome place. If you, in fact, sentenced to time in detention, the escort when he hears that,

41:00 takes your tally off, the cap because you no longer belong to a ship, you’re in detention, he keeps your tally. Tradition. But in my case, that happened that way, and I was a supply assistant.

So pretty chuffed with yourself.

Then a couple of months later I got staffed to Port Moresby.

I’ll just have a pause there, because I know we’re coming to the end of the tape,

41:30 **and swap tapes.**

Tape 4

00:32 Even shore establishments like Leeuwin, that’s, was HMAS Leeuwin, of course no longer is, all of the shore establishments around the place have a name.

Was HMAS Basilisk a shore establishment?

Yes. It was a big, as I think I explained a big base, because Port Moresby was such a busy port

01:00 as the main gateway to the southern part of New Guinea, Papua New Guinea with a lot of ships carrying cargo and troops. And of course, a lot of escorts seeing them safely across the Coral Sea, from Townsville or Cairns or Brisbane. And the navy, a draft

01:30 as it was known, or a posting in the navy, differed a bit I guess from the other services, especially the army. Usually the army moved units as a whole, in other words the fellows that you were with, that you’d done training with, that you’d exercised with and spent a lot of time with, you moved as a unit. With the navy,

02:00 more often than not, you were drafted off as an individual to join a ship or to take up a position somewhere. And that happened in my case, I was posted from Leeuwin, HMAS Leeuwin to HMAS Basilisk. And that was a long long way in those days, because movements were all by rail across the country.

What was that journey like, Andy?

Oh troop trains.

02:30 Well actually, it was relative luxury I think the first time, because there was only four of us to a, sorry,

eight of us to a four berth carriage. So it was two to a bunk, and we slept end for end. In other words, you had the other fellows feet under your nose. And it was the

03:00 days of the broken gauges all around the country, so you were constantly changing trains, you took a train from Perth to Kalgoorlie and you'd change trains there onto the Nullarbor trip. And generally at each of those changes, they took the opportunity to feed you and perhaps give you a bath,

03:30 provide the opportunity for you to have a scrub, before you changed the ongoing movement. And of course, I, as I say, was the only supply rating heading all that way to Port Moresby on my own. I'd never left WA before, I'd certainly never seen any of the eastern states places, and that was a fairly formidding prospect, travelling all that

04:00 way. I forget precisely how long it took, well over a week to get as far as Townsville initially. But you met different people along the way, all going in different directions. For up, part of the crowd that left Perth, and the troop train consisted of army, navy and air force, part of them would leave in,

04:30 even Kalgoorlie, Adelaide. All along the way, people were getting off and others were joining. And I as an individual, Aberle 4496 was destined to go all the way to Townsville.

You were in for the long haul.

The long haul, yes. Of course, quite a few of the fellows left Perth with a cake that Mum had made, and certainly

05:00 in my case, Mum made a cake, this will last you a while. In fact, the cakes lasted about twenty four hours, something like that. By the time you shared them round. And of course the interesting thing about those train trips was that the stops were geared to the requirements of the locomotives, mostly steam, well I think they were all steam trains. So when the engine

05:30 needed coal or water, and that's when they fed you. And they had flat top cars in the actual train complex and with an army cooker, mobile cooker, mounted on the actual carriage. And they used to detail off sections along the train, to be mess cooks for that day, help the cooks that were mounting the cookers.

06:00 And they would prepare the meals in the open, and when the train stopped, pass the dixies over the side, put them down on the side, generally in the desert situation, outposts like Cook or Zanthus or something like that, way out on the train line. Word would go,

06:30 out of the train, everybody out of the train. And that was the standard rule, that was one way they minimised thieving. If everybody was out of the train and all got back in the train at the same time, because there were some light fingered people around, so you had to be careful. But I can still remember, the navy

07:00 this once again was tradition, it was always given preference, it was seen as the senior service, still referred to as the senior service. Australia had a navy before anything else, it was British navy and it was here, and it may still be the case in Britain today. But the senior service.

How did troops from the other services view that?

They always gave us real razz [good-natured teasing].

07:30 We were the smallest group, mind you, mostly they were soldiers, but it was navy, army, air force. Air force bought up the rear, because that was the newest service. So they'd say, "OK, navy up here, head of the queue, navy up here." And of course, you might only be in a troop train of a hundred men, there might only be twenty navy. And of course, as you walked up to the head of the queue, they given you the

08:00 razz all the way, in a good natured way. But you had to have your own fighting irons, that is to say, you were expected to have two plates, knife, fork and a spoon, and a cup. And you went along the line, and as I said, these dixies had been passed over, and they had blokes there dishing it out. So you just put out your plate and they went bang, bang, bang, whatever it was, stew,

08:30 cabbage, spud, and sweets might be tinned fruit and custard. And then you were supposed to juggle it and walk past dixies that had tea black, tea black sugar, signs on them. Tea white, tea white sugar. And you just dipped in your cup in these dixies and you went and found

09:00 a possie [position] and sat on the dirt and ate your meal. And then they'd give the signal, OK reboard the train, and you were able to wash up your stuff, they had big troughs there. And load all the gear back on, and away you'd go. And I can recollect the timing for the meals wasn't anywhere near what you'd expect, you might get breakfast at six o'clock in the morning, lunch might two o'clock or

09:30 something, and then tea again at five, depending on the convenient stops for the engine. And that's why the cakes disappeared in twenty four, because you had all these young men pretty hungry. So, that was quite an experience and as I said, changing trains at Adelaide, Melbourne, Albury, there's a days change there when you moved into New South Wales,

10:00 and so on. And always where possible being fed, but you didn't get enough baths, you didn't get access, you were pretty scruffy by the time you got to the other end. But one place I can, I'll never forget, we arrived in Sydney and I had met some sailors along the way who lived in Sydney. And of course Sydney was a focal

10:30 point, Melbourne for training and Sydney for, I don't know, relaxation and so on for sailors, everybody knew about Sydney. I certainly didn't, never been there. And of course, you get to Sydney, and they say, they knew all about you, the communication and the advices and so on were pretty efficient. They say, "OK, you're moving on, you're going to Basilisk, so your train will leave tonight."

11:00 And I don't know, I had ten hours or something to fill in, in Sydney. Because Sydney at that time, the 9th Divvy [Division] blokes had just come back from the Middle East, the Yanks [Americans] were there in force, and there was friction. Because the diggers had been fighting along time, and the Yanks had been pushed out of their locations up north.

11:30 And as we always used to say and it was a common expression, "They're over here," it started, "They're overpaid, they're oversexed and over here," cause you know, they were well paid compared to us, and well fed, we found later.

Did you see any tensions flare?

Not a lot. I can remember an expression,

12:00 the battle for Melbourne which was apparently some ding dong scuffle at one point, between diggers and Americans. I don't believe it ever reached problem proportions, it was a natural resentment on the part of the Aussies.

How about yourself, how did you feel about them?

I found them interesting, because they spoke a different language. We'd only heard Americans talk on film,

12:30 when you met them live, it was sort of interesting, they all had different accents and so on, and of course, I guess, there was something about, they were seen to be another world, a glamorous part of the world. Mind you, they were pretty ordinary, a lot of them. But I came out of the railway station, the RTO, Railway Transport Officer, said, "OK, report back here." And I didn't know a thing about Sydney,

13:00 and some of the blokes that I travelled with said, "Look, I've only got a few hours," or, "I'm joining a ship," or, "I live up country," and they were giving me a few clues. But one of them said the place to head for is the camp comfort facility at Hyde Park in the heart of Sydney. Go there and you'll have a scrub and they'll give you a feed and you can write a letter

13:30 and you can read. And I come out of the railway station, and I was standing there, I must have looked like a stunned mullet, Sydney, the heart of the universe, throbbing with all these people and all this action and things happening. A young bloke away from home the first time, and I said to a digger there, fresh back from the Middle East, I said, "It's been recommended I go to Hyde Park."

14:00 He said, "Come with me," and he called a cab, and he said to this driver, "Take this bloke to Hyde Park," and he said to me, "It'll cost you two bob and no more," because the word was the cabbies would take the long way around with the Yanks, because they had plenty of money.

Take a sip of water, Andy.

14:30 Yes, talking all the time. Singers, singers throat. We sang a concert yesterday in York. It was pretty good, too.

What venue?

It was a Church up there, a very historic Church. It's a daytime chorus I sing with, Southside Harmony, we do all the daytime gigs. We go around nursing homes and that

15:00 sort of thing, it's a good little chorus. Anyway, to get back to the story. This digger said, he said to the cab driver, "You take him to Hyde Park," and he said to me, "It'll cost you two bob and no more." And he took me straight there, because I know now it wasn't far anyway. And I went into the camp comfort place, and I must have looked forlorn

15:30 and lost, because this wonderful lady, everybody's Mum, she just sort of greeted me with open arms. And I said, "I understand I can have a shower," and she said, "Come with me son." I'll never forget it, just wonderful. And I guess that brings me to the sort of things that Mum's did.

16:00 You know, you didn't realise, I guess, until you actually went away, what it was like for Mums. Because it was close for me, because my own Mum, and my brother was lost later. But you know, it was there and it was free, if I remember rightly. You had a shower and a meal, and you could write letters and

16:30 there was something to read, and if you wanted to know anything, if they could help you in any way, they were just wonderful. Anyway as I say, I continued this way with these journeys on different trains til I finally got to Townsville. I forget the name of the depot. Brisbane is Torrens, not Torrens. Anyway,

Townsville had a name, HMAS something

17:00 or other, and it was a focal point for navy personnel, for ships that were in fact doing escorts from the northern Queensland ports across to Port Moresby and other places in New Guinea. And they said, “OK, you’re going on to Port Moresby, and you’ll travel in a corvette.” And so for a few days I was there,

17:30 and got caught up with all the local things that were happening, and eventually I was put aboard the corvette, I think it was HMAS Bunbury. And it took about five days or so for the crossing to Port Moresby and it was very rough. Because it was a convoy and she was playing her part, and it was my introduction to

18:00 service at sea in the navy. And corvettes, I learned later, are quite small by warship standards, they had a crew of between eighty and ninety, and I don’t know how many passengers there were, there were certainly more than me, perhaps half a dozen going to Moresby. And they just put you on board, I don’t even remember the details, because we sailed fairly quickly. And the

18:30 weather was turning sour, the convoy was formed and we were doing escort work on the outer side, or the outside of the convoy, you know, escorts sailed to provide a net around the convoy, with their Asdic and their radar listening out and watching. And the escorts invariably zig zagged, and in

19:00 zig zagging, the situation with regard to the weather and the sea and where the waves are coming from, it changes. One minute, the sea is coming in on the port side, the next minute it’s coming on the starboard side. Because we’d no sooner left port, and I was sick as a dog, I wouldn’t have cared if I’d fallen over the sea, because corvettes are very rough. We have a

19:30 phrase on the bottom of our logo, which says, “They would roll on wet grass,” and they would and there were other terms like it, roll on wet grass, or damp flannel. They were very lively to use a more official term, and passengers were just shoved in there, I don’t even, to this day, remember where I slept. I certainly didn’t eat anything much

20:00 for the crossing, but it was real sloppy, I can remember being in the waste of the ship, that’s the part where the, there’s a fore deck, you drop down to the after part, which is lower, and that’s the waste. And I can remember hanging onto a stanchion there, being sick over the side, and the ship was zig zagging. And it was OK when she was zigging, but when she zagged, it turned and the weather was coming straight at me.

20:30 And some bloke said, “You’d better come away from there mate, you’ll go over the side,” and I wouldn’t have cared, gee it was rough. Finally reached Port Moresby, busy, busy place, and somebody was there to meet me. And the whole place was moving of course, it does for some time, until you got your sea legs, and I was glad to be on hard

21:00 soil. And of course, Moresby was just another world. The Japs had in fact, been turned. When I say turned, they’d lost their impetus, their air superiority had been lost. There was still some bombing, we were bombed periodically,

21:30 their main targets were the air field which were a bit removed from the port, occasionally we saw them. And at night, observer planes came over, but they were very, very high. And it was still a full alert situation, and I went into a

22:00 very, very busy situation in the stores area. The whole idea was that Moresby was gearing up for the push back north as far as the army was concerned, ships were bringing in troops and stores, all their heavy equipment, all the gear they needed. And of course, keeping the naval stores up to scratch with the gear that ships would need to keep running, the escorts, that was our

22:30 task. And so I was in the naval store area, that’s the hardware area, we also had a big section with the all the food, to replenish stocks in ships as they needed them. But I, the whole of the eighteen months that I was there, I was in the naval stores or hardware side of things, and we carried everything a ship could need to keep running.

What was your introduction to the role?

Well I was taken

23:00 to the quarters first of course, and initially we lived in houses that were slightly out of the town centre, overlooking a beach or a bay. It was fairly heavily foliage, sort of jungle, but they were private homes that had been taken over.

What kind of homes?

Well, they were

23:30 fairly substantial and they’re like the homes you see in Queensland or the Northern Territory, a tropical home with a void underneath. And the actual area was a sloping site, so the houses sort of sat on, against the hill and the part that sort of stuck out, had a void under it. And they closed those in, and I

24:00 was in that bottom part, it was designed originally for aeration and for the movement of air to keep the house cool, but also to store things in it's original role, but they turned it into quarters for us. And enclosed it with flywire, because the mozzies [mosquitoes] were very bad, and you had to take immediate precautions against

24:30 malaria, we started taking Atebrin as soon as you got there. And worked immediately, six and a half day week. And we worked six and a half days most of the time I was there, it was that sort of pressure, it was very long hours and it was hard work. The place had, from a point of view of the navy establishments,

25:00 they were, they had to set it up from what had been previously a fairly small operation, to build up, to cater for the growing requirements in terms of replenishing stocks for ships and so on, which meant that they had to set up new systems and new stores. And the paperwork had

25:30 as I recollect it, hadn't been done well at all. In fact, I can still see a tea chest that all the papers had been thrown in, and so it took some sorting out. And strange as it may seem, areas like store keeping and so on, ran in a very orderly way, and you had to keep good records and you had to account for everything.

26:00 **What was the daily routine in the stores, Andy?**

Well you, as I said, you worked six and half day week, and you had breakfast early, and something like seven o'clock you were taken from the quarters, which were slightly away from the town centre itself. The complex had several of the houses that I've described, perched on the side of the hill, and one of the homes had been turned into a mess hall for us.

26:30 Officers had quarters nearby, as well. Gradually they built, and I can show you photos, they built dormitories, new, for us. And they were much more orderly and located more conveniently to one another. But those early days, things had been put together very quickly.

27:00 For instance, the toilet facilities were in fact, open boxes, just out in the open. I think the one in the centre of the town might have had a bit of a Hessian fence around it, but people going past on trucks could look in. And the one down near the stores, where we were, down near the wharf, they were just boxes with a panoramic view over the harbour, nothing around them at all. And I can remember,

27:30 one of the officers, the naval stores and administrative offices were a short distance from us, down at the wharf area. And one of the officers, he used to come down because he liked the view, to use the toilet, or thunderboxes as we call them, or the natives called them tunderboxes. But they were in fact a hole in the ground, with a row of

28:00 box, or a continuous row of boxes with a hole in them. You put lime, I think it was, in to keep them sweet, and they were amazingly hygienic. But people would go past one while you were meditating and throw things at you. And for number ones,

28:30 for urinating, they had a, I remember on the way to the mess hall, there was a funnel type arrangement, just off the track, if you had to use that. Things were fairly primitive. One thing that was important and it was drummed into you, as I said, from day one, was take your Atebrin and tuck your mosquito net in.

29:00 We did have bunks, we were comfortable in that respect, cause there was no air conditioning or anything and Moresby was hot, but you tucked your mosquito net, you got into your bunk and you tucked it in, from the inside. Two reasons, one was for mosquitoes, and the other was for rats. Rats were very bad. If you happened to get a package of goodies

29:30 from home, like a cake or some biscuits or something, you always took it in with you at night and had it under your pillow. In fact, the rats were so bad, that they would get into everything, and one of my mates had some friends in an army unit, and he was a younger bloke

30:00 than me, because I was all of eighteen, he must have been a few months younger than me. And he went out to meet these blokes, and they had in fact, either made some jungle juice or they had got hold of some beer from somewhere. And he came back, or his mates brought him back to our camp, or quarters, stoned out of his mind, and

30:30 he was a big bloke. We got him on his bunk and he just dropped like a log. We tucked him in, but we couldn't tuck his feet in and they were sticking over the end of his bed. The best we could do was tuck the net in around his feet, and hope for the best as far as the mozzies were concerned.

31:00 He woke up in the morning and he said, "Ow gee," he swung his feet off the bed and put them on the floor, and he said. And we said, "Some head, hey?" and he said, "No, it's not my head, it's my feet." "What's wrong with your feet?" he said, "I don't know, they're sore." We had a look at them, and during the night, the rats had eaten

31:30 all the hard skin off the bottom of his feet. And I can still see that picture, all the little teeth marks on the bottom of his feet, and they'd been so tidy, they went along and took the little bits off each of the bottom of this toes. And here and there, they'd bought a little bit of blood and he probably moved involuntarily, and they moved onto another section, but it was the tidiest thing. We reckoned

32:00 he was an eighth of an inch shorter. He went down the sick bay and got some stuff on it.

It's a wonder he didn't wake up.

Well, as I say, he was thoroughly stoned. Yes, they were terrible, and they were bad down around the wharf area, of course, particularly bad. So we worked long hours, I can remember working at one stage three days in a row, we couldn't go back to the quarters there was so much to do.

32:30 We might have gone back to eat, that's right, we did, but we didn't sleep, we just went back and got a meal and went back down to the wharf, or back to the stores. Oh about two thirds of the way through that stint, it was night time and I was leaning back in a chair. And I had my hands behind my head like this, and there was a shelf

33:00 just behind me, and I must have leaned back far enough, with my hands to be close to this shelf. And I dozed, and next thing I woke up, and a rat had hold of that finger, I can still remember, it was that finger. And I whoosh, bought my hand forward and threw him against the wall, whack. Cause nobody ever saw a small rat, it was a big, it was

33:30 gigantic, it was like a cat. But it gave me such a fright, I had no trouble staying awake for the next twelve hours or something, they were really bad. But Samwell, my very good friend, number one boss boy with whom I worked, local native Papuan boy, a superior boy who was mission trained to read and write, he hated them and he made traps

34:00 for rats. We had rat traps of course, but he wanted to catch them live, and he experimented making traps, sort of, the simple ones where he had a little box and a lid, lever action. With the handle coming back this way, and a wire going through a hole at the back of the box.

34:30 He put bait on that, when they took the bait, it would release the trap and it would close. Initially of course he didn't make it heavy enough, and they would push it open. Then he put a weight on it, and it was too heavy, they would gnaw through the wood, so he gradually worked out a way that he could catch them. But he wanted them alive, because he used to drop them in the kerosene tin with

35:00 half an inch of kerosene and drop a match in there, it was terrible. And that lasted a short time, because one rat jumped out on fire, because it was covered with kerosene and it was on fire, and it run in under one of the stores, which had a wooden floor. And we all rushed outside and just waited, waited for the place to go up. Fortunately it didn't,

35:30 but that was the end of Sam and his treatment, his brutal treatment of rats, but he justifiably hated the sight of them. Otherwise he was a lovely man, he was a very good friend of mine.

What other difficulties did you have in acclimatising to Moresby?

Well, as I said, it was hot and dusty when it

36:00 was dry. When it rained, it had the blackest, thickest mud you ever saw, stick to your boots and just sort of seemed to mount up, you sort of were an inch taller. When it rained it was very heavy, roads were tracks in lots of cases where we had to go, picking up stuff. Sometimes we supplemented our stores, for instance, fuel in drums, we went to the army,

36:30 the major army deployment. They deployed stores of fuel in coconut palm groves, or other forest areas, and they dispersed them on pallets, amongst the trees or the palms. And they would retrieve them with the,

37:00 a really tricky winch system. They had a winch and a drum system at a central point, and it had a wire that they would direct with pulleys through the plantation. And they could drag a pallet through, between the trees, it was quite tricky.

37:30 And often we would go out to these places to get a truckload of drums of fuel or kerosene or turpentine or methylated spirits, diesel oil, things like that. And this was quite a business at times when the roads were so bad.

38:00 Samwell was, as I said, a superior boy, he was a superior boy amongst this peers, but the war situation had totally disrupted tribal life. And the maintenance of some sort of order amongst the village people, was pretty tricky stuff. You've possibly heard

38:30 the term, ANGAU, Australian New Guinea Administration [Unit], and they somehow or other, maintained order. Because naturally, these tribal people have animosity amongst themselves, tribal groups or village groups, they don't

39:00 get on, especially some from remote places. And I found that a fascinating experience, seeing these natives who were displaced and to find someway of occupying them, we used to be able to draw on them, for work requiring a lot of hands, and Sam was the one to work them. And he spoke

39:30 the native language which is Motu, he taught me to speak it too. He called me, which was the standard expression for Europeans, taubada. Tau is master and bada is big, taubada. I was eighteen mind you,

Samwell was thirty or something, but I was taubada Andy. And I would,

40:00 we would have to go out to one of these places and get stores, maybe it was timber or something like that, often it was fuel. And we would ask for half a dozen natives, one of these situations for displaced natives, and they would send a truck load, because they had so many of them. And when I first met them, they used to frighten me a bit, just

40:30 the look of them. With bones through their nose, their ear lobes hanging down in two pieces. They used to decorate themselves by piercing their ear lobes, they probably still do, and gradually make the hole bigger, nothing like the piercing of today.

41:00 And some of them not only had a reasonable size hole, would perhaps carry a piece of newspaper in there, but they would use to make a cigarette with bung twist, they were called bungs, it was, it sounds a pretty derogatory term, but they were always referred to as bungs. And it was really irresponsible I suppose, but nobody thought too much about it. They were

41:30 given bung twist, which was a very raw type tobacco, I can remember it, sort of in a black stick like, must have been very bad for them. Sometimes they made smokes with newspaper and bung twist. Other times they made special smoking devices out of a piece of bamboo, which they would cut off a joint, and

42:00 put a hole in the bottom. And put the tobacco in that, and

Tape 5

00:32 **Before lunch, we were just talking about some of the natives and some of the, the fact that they were still very, very primitive in the area that you were in.**

Yes, that's right. Looking back on it, it was still the protector era, when New Guinea was protector of Australia, and Australia's care generally. You know, the sort of

01:00 what's the word, anyway, they were still very much used to the system of master and local inhabitants, being the workers sort of style. Things are very different now of course. But I did, as I think I mentioned previously, enjoy the experience of meeting them and especially meeting somebody like Sam,

01:30 here, who taught me a lot in more ways than one, and was a good friend to me.

Well what did he teach you, do you think?

Well as I say, he taught me to speak the language, but he also taught me, he had a soft side to him. He was seen by his fellow regular boys in the team that worked for us, and around the navy establishments

02:00 and so on, Sam was seen as a leader. And perhaps because of his training, the fact that he could read and write. For instance, the other natives used to bring, ask him to mind money for them, and he had a box in which he kept the money. And when somebody gave him, for instance, a ten shilling note, Sam recorded it in a book,

02:30 the actual number of the note he gave him. That turned out to be a very useful device, at one point. Because Sam was called to give evidence in the case of a boy who, in

03:00 fact, broke into Sam's box and pinched the money. He was a younger fellow, and I'll always remember the occasion, the district administrator with the Royal Papuan Constabulary, who were the native police force, very, very well trained and I would have thought in the colonial days,

03:30 a wonderful support facility for them. They were navy blue shirt and navy blue well, I don't know whether rami was the right word. Sam called the longer thing they draped around themselves, a rami, from the waist down, but it was a skirt or a kilt, which had a red border on it.

04:00 And they were bare foot for the most part, but they were very conscientious in the way they conducted themselves, and carried themselves. They were always military smart, and they had ranks like the military, they were a lance corporal, a corporal or a sergeant in the Royal Papuan Constabulary. And they were

04:30 well trained, and Sam reported one night, that his box had been broken into, so the police were called, the Royal Papuan Constables came. And Sam was called to give evidence, because they arrested a boy who they found with money on him. And Sam went around to the hearing,

05:00 and he asked if he could have a new rami, and we had stocks of cleaning clothes which was about a metre and a bit wide, I suppose. And I remember we cut a special length for Sam to wrap around himself, to wear at this hearing. And he came back and he told me, he said the administrator, the DC, district commissioner

05:30 said to this boy, "Where did you get this money?" He said, "Oh I sold a soldier a piece of tortoise shell."

And he said, “Oh, did you know this soldier?” he said, “No, I’ve never seen him before.” He said, “When was this?” and he said, “Oh, it was such and such a day.” “What time?” he said it was five thirty or six

06:00 o’clock at night, or something. And he said, “Would you recognise this soldier again?” and he said no he wouldn’t, it was too dark. And Sam said the constables laid into him, because he was telling a lie, he said it was too dark at six o’clock at night. And so the telling evidence was, Sam produced his book with the numbers, and of course the numbers of the notes were there, that he’d recorded.

06:30 And the idea was, if somebody wanted to get his money back off Sam that he’d been minding for him, he’d give him the exact note, he would check the number. So there was no argument. So this fellow was taken off and went into the native compound, I forget what his sentence was, and he was away for some time. Came back and rejoined the group, I never saw any real

07:00 sort of hard feelings, except I did feel that Sam probably gave him some of the worst jobs around the place, some of the dirtiest jobs, but he was accepted back into the group, he’d paid his debt to society, and hopefully learnt a lesson. But he was a gentle person, and he was anxious to learn, and sort of learn about our

07:30 life and so on. And on one occasion, he made special arrangements for my mate and I, to visit his home village. And to do that, he had to get special permission, because we never saw any of the local womenfolk at all, they were well and truly, sort of closeted in their villages.

Was that a policy of non-fraternisation with the locals?

Oh yes, I think for their own benefit.

08:00 They kept to themselves, and they were still natives in grass skirts, the girls, with bare tops. But Sam took me there and I met his wife, and his brother and his wife, and took some photos with the local village belles, I’ve got them there. That was a very special occasion, the one occasion in eighteen months that, that happened. And when we arrived,

08:30 we had to report to the local constable from the Royal Papuan Constabulary, and he checked we had an authority to say we could visit, we must have borrowed one of our trucks. I think we had to be out the place by five o’clock, and at five to five, I remember him coming to us and saying, “Sir, it’s five minutes to five, it’s time you considered leaving.” Very respectful.

09:00 That was a special occasion, and I saw a lot of them, I thought that they were a fine force of men. And one occasion, one of our blokes was out walking one night near where we lived, and the roads had quite a crown on them, and deep ditches on either side, to take the water, just near

09:30 where we were, the ditches were quite deep. And the barracks, the Royal Papuan Constabulary was nearby, and they used to take a walk at night. And they didn’t just slouch along in untidy groups, they walked one behind the other in an orderly manner. This fellow that took a walk, was a nervous type, he’d been there quite a

10:00 while, and there really was a condition that you could develop, and that was we used to say that people were troppo, they’d been there too long. And he was a nervous type anyway, but he told us afterwards, he was walking along, and he didn’t realise, he was walking towards a column of these fellows coming towards him. And he said out of the night, he looked up and he saw these grinning white teeth, and

10:30 white eyes, he got the fright of his life and took a swing at this big chap, missed him, because he stepped back, and finished up in the ditch on the side of the road. And two of these big fellows bought him back, and they said, “Your friend has had an accident, sir,” and they were so gentle, you know. I thought they were great, we didn’t have a lot to do with them, but they were just there.

11:00 And the actual natives, the coastal natives respected them. Sam was always proud of the fact that he was a coastal boy, I sent a photo of him down to my sister, and she wrote back and said, “I think you have a very good looking black friend,” and he said. “You tell your sister I’m brown, I’m not black, I’m a coastal boy.” And I often thought of that afterwards, and he was, he was a lighter shade.

11:30 But when I left, the day I left, he came running, running towards me. And he was crying. I never saw him again of course. He was just great to work with.

Sounds like you had a particularly special friendship going on there.

Yes, there were others, some of

12:00 them were chiefs in their own tribal structure. I remember one called Umi, he was a little fellow but he was a chief, and he used to go walking of a Sunday afternoon, that was the only time we had off, we worked six and a half days. And Sunday afternoon you did your washing, or your dhobiing, as we called it. And

12:30 we, because we were in the stores, we had a dinghy and we decided to take it out and try our hand at fishing. And it had been in the shed for some time, and when we took it out, it was a timber boat, clinker built, and of course, it had opened up, and took a fair bit of water. It was seaworthy, we had to keep bailing.

13:00 When we came back, trying to drag it up the beach, it was quite an effort. And Umi came along walking with two of these big fellows, great big men from, they weren't constabulary, they were normal village fellows, working around the place. And when they got dressed up on Sundays, they would put frangipanis in,

13:30 they had bands on their arms, or on the calves of their legs, and they would slip frangipani flowers in, or stick one in their hair. And these two great big men with him, and he said, "Hello taubada, are you pulling him in, or taking him out, the boat?" I said, "We're trying to get it out, Umi," and he just gave these two big fellows an order, they came down and they picked it up just

14:00 about, one each side, and carried it out. I'll always remember that, thank you.

Very helpful.

Yes, no trouble.

What sort of other things would you do, when you did manage to get that half a day off?

Well, we did, in addition to that half a day off, we did in fact get, at night we would see movies and we saw several big bands,

14:30 American big bands came through.

Well, whereabouts?

Well they would stage shows in a cleared area down below us. They'd build a temporary sort of a stage, but, and you would sit on dehydrated food tins. They nested, they were a khaki colour, and for storage, they nested

15:00 one inside the other. So you started out sitting on one level of dehydrated food cans, and as it got further, you could get them up higher. But I can remember Harry James' band came, and their star attraction was Gary Cooper. Lots of actors,

15:30 of course, were multi-skilled, but I think all Gary Cooper ever did was act, because he was very famous. Is that sort of before your time?

Yes, I know Gary Cooper.

Tall bloke and spoke slowly. And it was the corniest contribution to the show you could imagine. There was a compere come comedian keeping things going, a couple of girls singing, because they were the highlight, everybody

16:00 wanted to see them in action. But he prepared the audience for Gary Cooper's appearance. Now Gary Cooper is very tall, so he had an offsider, and he said, "When Gary Cooper comes on, say to him hello lofty, is

16:30 it cold up there?" Really hokey [corny] stuff. And he kept reminding this fellow through the show. Gary Cooper came on quite late, and he came on and he looked just like he did, the part he played in the movies, tall and High Noon, one of his famous, where he played the sheriff.

17:00 And he came out, very tall and he was introduced, and of course the crowd gave him a huge reception, and this other fellow came on, and his mate's giving him the nod to say his line. But before he could, Gary Cooper said, "Hello shorty, is it hot down there." And that was it. I kid you not. He

17:30 sort of stood around and waved and said something, and said good luck or something, and that was Gary Cooper. But we had two or three big bands come through, and we had an Australian band, Jim Davidson and the ABC Dance Band came. We also had, when it was convenient or the right time of the year, we had concerts were put together. Because

18:00 lots of talented people were in the services, people that could play instruments and could sing. And I can remember going to a concert in the actual town which was pretty well organised. There was a newspaper that kept running, and they put out, I forget whether it was weekly or daily or whatever, but a newspaper called Guinea Gold,

18:30 where they kept you informed of what was going on. And this crowd sponsored a concert, and it was a real great show, a great lineup of different talented people, in fact I've got the programme there, I'll show you. But one of the performing groups was Padre and, what was his name, the archbishop,

19:00 he was a bachelor and he died years and years ago, I'll remember it in a minute. He had a choir, there were several dance bands playing, played Dixieland and that sort of music, from all the different services, it was really great. You asked what we did, I had a cousin,

19:30 Phil Aberle who was in the air force and he was stationed a mile or so from me, and I would walk over and see him, or he'd come and see me on Sunday afternoon. Before I went up there, we had already learned that his brother, John Aberle had been killed in Singapore, in defending Singapore, he was in the 2/4th Machine Gunners. And they were

20:00 part of that hopeless effort to stem the Japanese flood tide, and he was killed there. And another cousin, we'd already heard that he was missing, presumed dead, he was in another group in the islands, one of the independent forces that were cut off, it was subsequently confirmed that he was lost too, two cousins. And they were gone before I went to New Guinea. So Phil's brother,

20:30 had been lost, so I used to see him. His mother passed away also, while he was up there, so it was a bit of a sad time for him, but it was a family link, so we used to meet when we could.

Where would you meet?

Either his quarters or mine.

And what were your quarters like?

Well, as I mentioned previously, initially it was

21:00 a closed in underneath part of a house, and men slept above in what was originally the home, and we were in this enclosed portion underneath, with a wooden floor above and no lining. So if they happened to be out at night, and you were in bed, you could hear them walking about. And

21:30 you could hear them going to corners, or to a room, you could hear the clump, clump, clump, hear them sit on their bed, and then you'd hear clunk, as they dropped a boot. And then there might a delay and, I remember one night a bloke a few bed along from me, you thought you were the only one awake. He shouted out, "When are you going to drop that other bloody boot,"

22:00 I'll never forget that. But after a while, they built new dormitories for us, which were just a bungalow type thing, but they were specially designed with sort of air gaps top and bottom, and fly wire. They were all comfortable.

So it got a lot less primitive a little way along.

Yes, and I mean compared

22:30 with what some blokes had to put up with during the war, we were pretty comfortable, and we had a good mess hall. They used to, on the Sunday afternoon, there was always a parade, or divisions as it was called, you got dressed up, and a Church service. And of course, at divisions, you would be informed of what was happening, what was going wrong, where we were slipping and where we had to pull our socks up, and all

23:00 that sort of business.

Would it be casual, or would it be really formal?

Oh no, that was formal, you had to get dressed up, scrubbed up and put your good gear on. And it's funny you know, you learn things about men in the service, it's a very levelling experience. You learn that everybody has strengths and weaknesses, and when you're in a team

23:30 situation, you adjust to those things. And I remember one fellow, he was a stoker and his job was along with others, to maintain and keep a boiler going, to maintain hot water for all sorts of services in the camp situation. And

24:00 he achieved notoriety on one division, we were given our usual report and were harangued about something, we could do better here, there or everywhere. They said OK, we'll go to Church service, so the

24:30 orderly petty officer of the day said, "Right-o, fall out Roman Catholics, and the other lot, over here." And that happened and there was one fellow left on his own. The petty officer said to him, "Didn't you hear, sonny?" It was the stoker lad,

25:00 he said, "Are you a left footer, or one of the others?" he said, "I'm neither." He said, "What do you mean you're neither? Are you a Protestant or a Catholic? Which lot do you belong in." He said, "Neither, I'm an agnostic." He said, "Do you know what the word means," he said, "Yes, I know what the word means, I don't believe in anything."

25:30 And the master, we had a master of arms, he came over and said, "What's going on?" He said, "This bloke reckons he doesn't belong to anything." He said, "Come on sonny, you must be one or, what did you put down on your forms?" He said, "I didn't put anything." Of course, by this time, the first lieutenant says, "What's going on over there?" and he said, "This bloke reckons he doesn't belong to anything," and of course,

26:00 we're all looking on, and he was a very, very quiet fellow who rarely engaged in conversation and kept to himself, but seemed sort of happy and content. Anyway, to cut a long story short, they said, "You'd better go over to the galley and tell the chief cook you've been sent over to do something, peel spuds or something." Every

26:30 Sunday, that's what he had to do while we went to Church parade. And of course he became famous,

everybody wanted to talk to him. It turned out he was born out in, on the rabbit proof fence, his Dad was a dogger and maintained the fence, and his Mum, they camped out there. He

27:00 was an expert in bushcraft, he could track and he told us wonderful stories about finding people that were lost, and he knew the aboriginals. And you know how you thought well now, if ever I was lost in the desert, I wouldn't want the first lieutenant there, and I wouldn't want the commanding officer there or that petty officer there. The bloke I'd like with me, would be him, because he knows all about it, and he'd bring me out

27:30 alive. Oh yes, saved quite a few people doing a perisher. So you sort of learn, well, everybody has something to contribute. I can't remember his name, but I do remember at the time, you thought, well really, he was so quiet and didn't push himself forward, but that's what people are like that have that background. And so it was sort of an example of

28:00 what you learn as you go along.

Did you respect him for being able to stand up and actually declare that he was?

Oh yes, gee, brave thing to do. I mean it would have been easier to go one way or the other. So, that was really an eye opener, it was something that stood out. But yes, we managed to keep ourselves

28:30 amused, but work dominated everything.

Do you think it helped actually having that religious part on the Sunday? Do you think it helped you cope with what was going on around you?

What part did you mean?

I mean some sort of connection with spirituality?

Oh I think, it depends on your background, I suppose, I was always raised going to Church, and I went to Sunday School,

29:00 and I was confirmed in the Anglican Church, I don't know that I thought a lot about it, but I guess you got a message that was helpful. As I said before, I went up there, I knew that one cousin had been lost and probably a second one. Oh, and another close mate who was also missing, he was in the merchant service, and his ship had been lost, and he was presumed lost too.

29:30 And of course, it was whilst I was there, at the end of 1943, that I received a letter from my Dad to say that my brother was listed missing in the first instance, and later that was confirmed. And of course it was reinforced when my last letter to my brother came back to me. And.

Were you aware at the time that Bomber

30:00 **Command had such high incidences of?**

No, we didn't know. But strangely, another mate who lived a few doors up, he was killed the day after my brother in Bomber Command, over Germany. Don't know the details of Jack. Yes, that sort of bought it home. And of course, your thoughts were centred on home.

30:30 The thing was, I guess, the whole time you were away, you knew you were all right, you knew where you were, but Mum's didn't. They had no idea, and there was always a delay, although the mail was pretty good. When you were in an established situation like that, our mail came through within a week, as a rule.

How many fellows did you have on that base?

Oh well, there was a

31:00 big staff, there were hundreds, hundreds of men really, and a bit staff in the stores area, because it was a big stores place. It was also of course, a big signal exchange situation, and big port war signal station there. There was a boom defence establishment, with a boom fence across the entrance to the harbour, and a gate

31:30 and that had to be opened and closed every time a ship went in or out, so there was a big crowd in that area. Not a lot of ABs [Able Seamen] and that sort of thing, but there were boats and things, so I guess generally it would have been a bit heavy, or heavier than normal in the areas of the store keeping and the stores maintenance and so on.

What would be an average day for you doing all the

32:00 **stuff in the store?**

Oh well you were receiving stuff in from ships that were discharging cargo, not all destined for us, but a lot that was, and we would go down the wharf and get that, bring it up, unpack it all, check it all off and stow it away. You would be issuing stores to ships that came in, that came along with a requisition for replacement stuff. On the food side, they were doing the same sorts of things, constantly

32:30 turning over perishable stuff like potatoes and onions and pumpkins and so on, they all had big racks, they used to turn them over, because in the tropics they didn't last long, but it kept them elevated off the group and the air helped to stop them going off quicker than they would normally.

Was it a really big cement building or something, that you could store everything in?

Concrete,

33:00 no wooden floors and timber framed places, with iron sides, nothing terribly posh. Some stuff was stowed outside, and that's where the natives came in. Sam, he was very enterprising and he could, with the natives, he could shift anything. I remember when we had two big Hall Scott petrol engines,

33:30 and they must have weighed over a tonne each, in great big boxes, sealed pine boxes. And when they were delivered, the weather was fine and we put them on gluts, but it was in the depression and a lower section of the ground. And when the rain came, water started to build up in this corner, and I said to Sam we've got to shift those.

34:00 And we didn't have a crane at our disposal at that time, we got some boys and Sam got a railway line, he put it on top of the box, and we made two straps around the box, sitting on gluts, which raised them off the deck a bit. Ran straps around it, and he

34:30 got a big team of these boys, about ten each end of the railway line, and they picked it up. The railway line was a rigid rod and they picked it up each end, and they could carry this whacking great thing. I mean they didn't raise it high, but raised it enough to walk it away, singing as they go. Leader bloke sort of sings out something,

35:00 I can't remember, "Lorabada, lorabada, lorabada," and boom, they all move. That used to fascinate me, I thought it was wonderful.

Takes a bit of grunt to move something like that?

Oh yes, well, there was a lot of them, he used to be giving them what-o, and taubada, Andy was standing there, looking serious. But

35:30 so, as I say, it was a very busy time.

How did you store all the paperwork? Because I can just imagine that there's just paperwork going everywhere with, ticking off and checking?

It was all done by hand, and we had it all in files and racks and so on. And there were a couple of permanent fellows there who had been in the navy for a long time. And it was interesting, it was never highlighted but it was obvious, the distinction between the perms and the

36:00 reservists, or the rockies we were called, you were in for the duration. The perms were permanent servicemen, who were in there before, and they were invariably very well trained, very efficient and very reliable. And two blokes came up from down south, and the interest was it was a punishment draft, I believe they had

36:30 been up to petty officer, I'm not sure certainly they had been leading hands. And they were, a couple of characters, they were always into something or other. For instance, they got all the ingredients up, because they were in the stores, and they made their own beer, cause it was dry, the place. And, but they came up, and

37:00 as I said, a lot of the paper was in the jolly tea chest, and they tipped it out and in space, I don't know, the shortest possible time, they'd sorted, they had the whole filing system all set up and everything was running. And then of course, they, you sort of looked up to them, they were good. But you wouldn't want to follow them, they could get you into trouble.

What was the beer like?

That they made?

37:30 I didn't drink beer myself, but they reckoned it was a good drop. They used to put it into demi-johns, earthenware demi-johns that were used for pusser's limes. Pussers is a name, a word for the navy, and limes was issued to ships, and that was once again a tradition

38:00 going back to days to prevent scurvy, lime juice. So empty lime's jars were ideal for bottling this beer they made, and they used to put it down, store it and when one of them fractured, it was really. And it was obviously a fairly

38:30 potent drop.

Well what were they fermenting in order to get the alcohol?

They got, see because, once again because of the stores, they got the ingredients, they got the yeast sent up with some hops, and they bought a little.

So it really was beer, it wasn't rocket fuel?

Oh no, it was beer.

Was that difficult, not having alcohol on the base?

Yes well, it did cause difficulties for some people, because I can remember a bottle of beer

39:00 would fetch twenty five dollars, twenty five shillings, that's one pound five shillings, it's a lot of money in those days. Let alone bottles of whisky which some used to try and work shifties with some of the cargo ships that came in and out regularly, they'd try and work something. But it always backfired, and they would try and do a deal with somebody and end up getting into trouble. I remember one bloke,

39:30 he was going to make his fortune, he got a couple of bottles of whisky or something, and he arranged to sell them to some dubious American gentlemen and came back very chastened, because instead of money, the bloke produced a pistol and told him to clear out. So for the most part, it was completely dry.

How about the Americans, what did you think of

40:00 **them in New Guinea?**

Well as I think I mentioned before, initially, when we met them here before going, you sort of were interested in them and the way they spoke and so on. But you realised that they were no different to us and they made mistakes, and there were also lots of also-rans that took orders and got up to all the same sort of things

40:30 that servicemen do everywhere, I suppose. Getting out of work if they could, and all that sort of business. They tended to have better tucker than we did, that was fairly well established, they got paid more than us. And you got a general impression that they were fairly sort of wasteful, they sort of left things behind and so on. I can remember one outfit

41:00 pulled out and left a truck on the wharf. After it had been there for some time and nobody claimed it, our lot got hold of it and we just painted it grey and it was ours. But there's no doubt, of course, they had the might and they had the manpower to shift and once they geared up and you know, were in full production and

41:30 in full flight, if you like, they were a very powerful force.

One to be reckoned with.

Oh yes.

I know we're just coming to the edge of this tape, so we'll pause and change tapes. About fifteen seconds away from the end of that one.

Tape 6

00:33 **Did you correspond much with home while you were in Moresby?**

Yes, I guess I was fairly conscientious, I was aware, especially after news came that Doug was missing, that it was important to write to Mum as frequently as I could. Probably could have done it better, but as I think I mentioned,

01:00 it took a little while to fully realise that we knew we were OK, we were well and we were in good nick and well fed and so on. But people at home didn't know, didn't know what was happening, whether you were in good health or whether conditions were bad or whatever, you could describe conditions carefully avoiding

01:30 stating things like where, precisely where you were and so on. But it was terribly important to keep in touch, and that was reinforced when news came that my brother was lost. So yes, I think I was pretty good in that regard, and my sister and Mum wrote to me, and they kept us posted with what was happening at home. And as I think I mentioned before, they were involved in things, and they were part of the war,

02:00 too, my sister was in the local AR, yes, air raid precaution, ARP, you know, they all did things that made a contribution. The main thing was to let them know that you were OK. And in a fixed situation like that, the mail went through. But you also were conscious of the fact that anything you wrote,

02:30 was being censored and read quite thoroughly by one of your officers. So it sort of tempered it a bit at times, depending on what you wanted to say to people, especially writing to girls.

Were you writing to anyone?

Yes, I had a girlfriend, I guess, before I left, and we corresponded

03:00 fairly regularly, but I certainly wrote to my sister as well, and odd ones here and there might write to me.

So you had a girl in every port.

No, not really, because I hadn't been to too many ports, hadn't had a lot of opportunities. But certainly knew quite a few girls around my old haunts. And they were all interested,

03:30 because all the fellows were away, and they used to report on what they'd heard. And that sometimes where you would find a piece cut out, oh heard from Bob the other day, and he's now on HMAS something or other, and that might be cut out. And you used to think gosh, I don't know whether that would convey anything useful to the enemy, but you were conscious of that happening. And you saw it, all of your

04:00 mail had a stamp on it that it had been censored, any photographs that you sent through, they were all stamped and approved by the censor, and you can see it on some of those snaps I have.

How long were you in Moresby?

Eighteen months, and there was no messing about, you didn't get any leave, you were sent there and you just waited until they said it was time for you to go home. And I was called one day, and said, "OK, you're going home." By then,

04:30 I had studied and passed the exam for leading supply assistant, so I went away as a supply assistant, and came back with a hook on my arm, which is the indicator of leading hand.

What does it look like?

It's a hook, I'm sorry, anchor, so I came back to Leeuwin with a hook.

How did you get back to Leeuwin?

05:00 Well, once again, you travelled on your own, but you were issued with a warrant, and I've got it there, and that's an incredible story, I'll tell you about that in a sec. But they issued a warrant, you went out to one of the ships, it was called strip city. You got, they took you out there in a truck, and you just sat, you registered with the administrative control,

05:30 the airport control or the airstrip control. It was an American run airstrip, but all sorts of aircraft used it. "OK Aberle," he called me Aberle, lots of people, cause I've spent my whole life correcting people, it's Aberl or a-berl or anything, it's Aberle. And the reason, I'm sure that the Americans picked it up easily, was that the

06:00 Everly Brothers were famous singers, that was the era when they were prominent, and that was the same spelling, except with E instead of A. So he said, "OK, just take a seat." And I can't remember, it wasn't a very salubrious waiting room or anything, and some people would go out and spend all day sitting there, and nothing was going in the right direction. But after a few hours,

06:30 I was called up by this bloke, and he said, "We've got a seat for you, there's an Australian DC-3 going down," that's the old, very common aircraft, a lot of them are used all over the world. They had seats along the bulkhead, and you sat and looked at one another, and they used them for parachute jumps and for dropping supplies into places in the jungle. That was another

07:00 way that things were distributed, that we. A lot of what we, in fact, supplied, a lot of that was sent to remote places around the case, it was taken by small craft, some coast watchers and people like that, we sent supplies to them around the coast. But sometimes drops were made for these aircraft, but the passenger accommodation was seats along the bulkhead, with your back to the

07:30 actual wall of the aircraft. You just put a little lap strap on. And so, I was delivered to Brisbane, and made my way home, once again by troop train.

How long were you in Brisbane?

Just a couple of days probably, until they could get me away on a

08:00 troop train. Because I had, well they knew all about me, I was going home to Leeuwin for leave, and that warrant that was issued, in fact, was a warrant for me to travel from Port Moresby to Perth. But once I got to the mainland, then came under the control of the navy, and of course I was in the normal transport movement and I was just shifted from one troop

08:30 train to the next.

Do you recall what was happening in Brisbane, while you were there?

Not particularly.

What was the atmosphere like?

Beg your pardon?

What was the atmosphere like then?

Well it was still very much a busy, I mean it was like Moresby to some extent, a lot of movement of people, and a very busy port. Sydney was the same. Lots of support activities,

09:00 because there was lots of training areas in Queensland. The Canungra jungle training school was there, and men had been trained for jungle fighting, was in Queensland. Different states specialised in different things. For instance here, over at Garden Island, they specialised training men for Z Force, for fighting behind the lines, the enemy lines, the fellows that went in the

09:30 in canoes into Singapore Harbour and sunk shipping there. A famous West Australian, Jackie Sue, his lot were trained there, they were dropped behind enemy lines. That, Garden Island specialised in that sort of thing. But anyway, as I say, it was very similar, I can't remember precisely

10:00 whether, I think that's the one, I came home on a cattle truck, cattle wagon across the Nullarbor. And they were stock transport wagons that were pressed into service, and they put palliasses, that straw bedding on the deck of it, and they put twenty men into each wagon.

10:30 There were, there was a door at alternate ends, so two fellows could sit on the doorstep and there was a window on both sides, at the right height for a horse's head, and two or three men could look out there, on both sides. So we worked to roster, we took it in turns sitting on the step, or looking out the window, or lying on your palliasse.

11:00 Your gear was sort of, I don't know, dumped in the corner or something. But they moved a lot of men in the cattle trucks. It was pretty comfortable, stopped for meals as we did when you were travelling in salubrious second class carriages, eight at a time.

How did you occupy yourself during the journey?

Sleeping, talking, tucking into passing

11:30 scenery, which there wasn't a lot. I remember on one occasion a bloke got sick, it was hot and he got sick of himself smelling, and he decided that when the train stopped to take on water, he was going to snatch a shower. And of course that wasn't on, and on that occasion, I don't think they fed us. But anyway, he got out and he soaped himself up, and

12:00 was enjoying himself when the train started to move. He ran after us and jumped aboard the train, and in running through the red dirt, he had the soap all over him, he was turning red from the feet up. Copped some flack from everybody. He was a soldier, I think. Navy was always in the minority. I mentioned

12:30 how we used to be called up to the head of the queue to be fed, and on that particular trip, we were changing trains at Albury, and I had equipped myself with what we used to call a chief petty officer's mug, a big one, like a miniature little jerry really, they were. And I had the

13:00 others, the two plates and the knife, fork and spoon and this big cup. And they called us, "OK, navy, up here," and we were passing the soldiers, everybody was hungry and dying to eat, and they were giving us what are you. And I'm going along with this big mug hanging off my finger, only the handle parted company with the mug, it crashed on the platform, on the concrete platform. The other soldiers

13:30 thought it was the greatest job in the world. But funny how things come back to your mind. As I say, it probably took about the same length of time to come back from Brisbane, or a bit shorter than it did from when I went to Townsville. Came home and we were all yellow, Atebrin turns you yellow, you can always tell when somebody has been in the islands, cause it turns

14:00 you yellow. And so it took a little while for you to get back to your normal colour. But I had a few months rest in Leeuwin, and I was on the staff there doing things. I think the highlight of that, that was the summer of '44-'45, and it was during probably January, February, that the, they had the huge

14:30 fire on board the ship called the Panamanian, she was in Fremantle on North Quay, loading wheat and flour products, big ship. And she was fully laden, almost ready to sail, and somebody was doing some repairs on the foredeck, I think with an oxyacetylene torch. It was a hot day and the

15:00 housekeeping around the ship and under the wharf wasn't as good as it should have been, and there was some oil slick on the surface. And the sun was shining on the oil slick, and it was smooth, and this person was working when an oxyacetylene torch, and a bag that was nearby, a bit of hessian, caught fire. And he just threw it over the side,

15:30 it landed on the slick and the whole thing went whoosh. And the surface of the water was on fire, it caught fire underneath the wharf, and the ship caught fire, and it was a horrific fire. Burnt for several days and every jolly fighting aid around Fremantle was turned out to try and put it down. And I went down

16:00 with a crew, and actually held a hose on that, and it was the most frightening thing. They had battened down the hatches to try and smother the fire, but the fire had spread right throughout the ship. And as I

said, she was fully laden, and she was red hot, the

16:30 hull was red hot along the wharfside. They'd been pouring water onto the ship and down whatever orifice they could to get it down below, but decided they would have to open up the hatches someway, they couldn't take the hatch lids off. The State engineering works sent

17:00 men down, and they had a protective, mobile protective shield which they wield towards the ship. And a welder worked through a hole, he had protective gear on, and we played a hose with a light spray on him to keep him cool, and he cut a hole in the ship's side, a circular hole, which was

17:30 almost complete. It was hanging on by about half an inch at the top. And as he cut the hole, you could see the inferno through the crack that he cut. We kept the hose on the ship's side incidentally, to try and cool it enough for him to work. And then they backed away, and they called for three or four hoses to put

18:00 full power on this plate hanging down, and we pushed it in. And of course, momentarily, the water poured in and you could see the inferno, the hold was almost full to the top, there was a slight void above, and the whole thing was alight. The water poured in for a few seconds, and then suddenly all this steam come out of the hole.

18:30 And so they worked in that fashion, and eventually got the fire out, but in the meantime the ship settled on the bottom and started to list outward, pulling the wharf with it. And the wires became bar tight, as we say, they're so tight they're like a straight piece of steel, but they were pulling the wharf. It was a very, very frightening situation. And there was a

19:00 terrible row, because there were two submarine fleets in Fremantle, Fremantle was a very big submarine port. And there was an American mother ship with a big fleet of subs around it, which operated into South East Asia from Fremantle. And there was a British mother ship, Maidstone, and she had her own fleet. And they were supposed to

19:30 be, I think it was on a two hour level of readiness to depart the port in the event of an emergency. And apparently there was some terrible row, because it took them time, took them quite a while to get rid of their charges alongside of them. Cause they had the fleet of subs around them, and get the ships off the birth and get them out to anchorage, because

20:00 this fire really looked like the whole jolly port was going to go up. Went down the next day with a team, and we recovered a lot of our gear, we took a lot of hoses and pumps and things down there. There were several fire engines burnt. There was a New Zealander cruiser on the side on Victoria Quay, and I think, if I remember rightly, one man was lost, they sent a party over

20:30 there, and he fell down the hatch, something like that. But that was an incident that sticks in my mind while I was home.

Sounds like a fairly dramatic incident.

Pardon?

Sounds like a dramatic incident.

Yes, it was a very big fire. And because it was wartime, it didn't get a lot of publicity, but it was written up in the RSL newspaper a few months ago. And of course,

21:00 the ship was, well it was a write-off, I can't remember exactly what happened, obviously she was towed away, and I don't know whether she was lost or scrapped, I can't recollect what happened to her. But after some time, Fremantle was also a big maintenance base for corvettes, a lot of corvettes were based in Fremantle, and there was a floating dock in the middle of the harbour, where ships

21:30 could be taken out of the water. You know the system with the floating dock.

No.

It's like a big open ended floating building with no roof, in other words a base and two walls, this is in simple terms. And it can be submerged, so the actual hull,

22:00 the actual body of the craft, is a big flat hull. And that takes on ballast water and it can lower itself. In the walls, I'm using simple terms, it's got voids and tanks that can, you can control how far down it goes. Of course it goes down in the water

22:30 and a ship floats into, or makes it's way into the floating dock, is positioned, that's the dock masters skill, he gets the ship into position, places it there. Then the floating dock pumps out the water and comes up, and in coming up, raises the ship with it, that's how they work. And so there was one in Fremantle and the corvettes used it a lot. But

23:00 I was eventually drafted to one in Fremantle, HMAS Inverell.

Just before we move onto that drafting, Andy, what was, how did your family greet you when you got back from Moresby?

Well of course, my Mum was very, very glad to see me. And of course, it was very emotional meeting Mum. Because Mums never recover, you know, at the loss of a son like that,

23:30 for the rest of her life. Mum was, well it affected her, put it that way. I called my eldest son Doug, after my brother, and in some way, that was something of a consolation to her. But yes, it's a very savage blow

24:00 for that to happen. And by the end, I'd also learned that my mate from two or three doors down the street was also lost. So you know, that was my brother, two cousins and two close mates, gone.

What was your morale like, at that time?

I beg your pardon?

What was your morale like at that time?

Well you know, when you're young like that, you're saddened of course, you

24:30 don't sort of realise the enormity of it until later, you come back to normal life, and you go on living a life like I've had, a wonderful life. You just wonder what life might have been like, if they'd have survived. And of course, you're busy catching up with friends, everybody was sort of supportive and

25:00 sympathised with you that your brother had been lost. And of course the worry was that I was going to go away again, which wasn't helpful for Mum. But, and also there's something about carrying on I suppose, and when you're young, I don't know why, but you seem to be able to take it

25:30 better than, perhaps when you're older. That's maybe a, just my own sort of subjective impression. But anyway, as I say, eventually this draft came and I joined the Inverell.

What was that posting?

A corvette, there were fifty six

26:00 Australian corvettes, they were all named after Australians towns. Small ships, they're, I think their proper title was AMS, armed minesweeper. But they were ideal for patrol work, for escort duties, they could do all sorts of minesweeping, they could do survey work, they could do landings.

26:30 They had the four inch gun foreward, a Bofors aft on the X deck, it was called, but it was the same deck as the foreward deck. And then on the wing, each bridge, they had an Oerlikon, twin Oerlikon, a four inch and the Bofors. Carried about thirty depth charges, so they could load a ten charge pattern

27:00 for a submarine strike, and they were very versatile little ships. They weren't high speed, they had reciprocating engines, and they had power for towing anything, and for doing minesweeping. And this particular ship, Inverell, had a wide range of mine sweeping capabilities. And

27:30 we left Fremantle and headed north, and picked up a convoy off Norwest Cape, which consisted of two big floating docks, that were being towed by sea going tugs. And escorted by frigates, and it was a British convoy. Things had improved to such an extent in the

28:00 in the northern conflict against Germany, that they were able to free resources to come out and join, they formed the British Pacific fleet. And these ships were coming out in support, or these floating docks, they were bigger than the one in Fremantle, great big things, looked like a huge warehouse floating along, and these big sea going tugs towing them.

28:30 And British frigates had escorted them across the Indian Ocean, and we picked them up off Norwest coast. But we no sooner took over the job, than one of the tugs broke down and had to go to Fremantle, there was a spare tug, I think. Anyway, the convoy kept going, but it was quite slow. And we called up, the two frigates had headed for Fremantle, or started

29:00 to head for Fremantle, for R & R [Rest and Recreation] for their blokes, they got called up and said, "Hey, we've got a problem." We sorted that out, and we kept going with them, and we escorted them from Norwest Cape up to Darwin, it was a very slow voyage, sometimes only making about two knots or something like that. And of course, we were just plodding around the place, you were doing anti

29:30 submarine sweeps, and aircraft lookouts.

What was your posting on board the Inverell?

Well, there were two supply blokes in a corvette. The other fellow was from WA as well, we were both leading hands by then.

How do you qualify to be a leading hand?

Well you pass an exam and you have the necessary experience. And as I

30:00 mentioned, I was leading hand when I came back from Port Moresby, so I had my hook. And because I

was, I'd spent most of my time in the general store, the naval store side of things, in other words the hardware and so on, I sort of gravitated to that side of things, in other words, looking after the ships needs. And he had in fact,

30:30 had most of his experience on the other side, on the food side. So he tended to look after that side, you were both trained in both areas, and you could relieve one another, like when one had leave, like stepped ashore for the night. Both of us were rarely ashore at the same time, one was on duty, the other was ashore, if you had leave, which

31:00 happened after it was all over. You didn't have anywhere to go, up in the active areas, so he was, what we called the grocer, and I was the nut and bolt merchant. And I had a store, which had five thousand items and bits and pieces that were designed to ensure that

31:30 ships keep running for three months without having to restock with anything, except for fuel oil, because we used to make our own water. And she had a crew of eight five. And as I say, there were fifty six of them, HMAS Inverell, and Inverell being a big town in the north of New South Wales. But there was a HMAS Broome, Geraldton, Fremantle, Bunbury, Kalgoorlie,

32:00 all of the eastern states towns, Whyalla, places like Bendigo, Ballarat, I've got the list there.

You'd be doing pretty well to remember the whole list, I think, off the top of your head.

Well any prominent town in Australia pretty well had a ship named after it. And she was a happy ship.

What was the relationship like that you had with the rest of the crew?

32:30 Well, we were essentially day men, we didn't have to keep a watch, unless for some special reason. At one stage for instance when we went north to Morotai, we went through waters that were considered to be particularly, you know.

Hostile?

Hostile. And, so they doubled up watches, and we added to the lookouts.

33:00 Although I wasn't a great success, because of my glasses. That's another story. So, he had a regular pattern, ships are divided up into messes, and the mess deck in the corvette was very crowded, I've got a photograph there I'll show you. And on the main mess deck,

33:30 there was four messes, each had about sixteen men in them. There were sixty four men on the main mess deck, and there was another small mess in a lower hold, that went down from the mess deck. Our stores were in, what was called the PO's [Petty Officer's] flat, cause the POs, the petty officers and chief petty officers, they had a mess at a level below. And people like the coxswain and the buffer

34:00 or the bosun who ran things, they had a separate cabin. Officers' quarters were down aft, they had cabins and slept in bunks. We slept where you could. If you could find a place to sling your hammock, you could put that up. But there just wasn't enough space to hang hammocks, so people slept on the settee. I put two stools together,

34:30 at one stage and spread my hammock on them, the mess deck stools, and I slipped that under the table, actually. Very, very crowded. But in rough weather, of course, it was pretty hopeless trying to get your head down, the hammock is always the best spot, cause a ship swings around a hammock, you're stable in a hammock. The hammock comes up around you like a cocoon,

35:00 you only have one blanket issued, you're warm as toast in a hammock. Wonderful. You had to be able to lift yourself into it, I couldn't get into it, but you took hold of a rail, swung yourself up and got in, I mean, it was designed for young men. Being in stores, somehow or other I managed to get hold of a camp stretcher, and I tried that in different places. It was like

35:30 that, it was quite difficult, and there were favoured spots, the settees were favoured spots, and the blokes who'd been there longest, they'd bagged these spots, you couldn't muzzle them out of it. But somehow or other you managed. Tucker was pretty good, we had a freezer and we could carry about a tonne of frozen meat, so that we could usually have a meal, a meat meal at night,

36:00 that didn't come out of a tin. Lots of the food was, of course, dehydrated being in tins. But we had a spud locker on deck where you carried, if you could get hold of them, potatoes, pumpkins and onions, keep them up there, and they lasted longer. Very pokey stores, the food store was down underneath the vittiling office,

36:30 vittiling it was called. And it, you went down through a manhole and his chair sat on the manhole, the legs on the chair were only that high. It sat on the manhole, if he wanted to get down to this store, he took the out of his office, took it outside the door, open the dogs on the manhole, they're the butterfly things that hold the dog down an

37:00 opening. Open that up, had to get permission at sea to open up things like that, had to go up to the bridge and ask, "Can I open this space?" and they'd say, "Fine, open it, keep it to a minimum, inform me when you've closed it." And when a ship departs, departed port, the pipe was standard. Close all ex

doors and valves and lower deck

37:30 scuttles, and hands to your station for leaving harbour. The pipe was close anything below water level, make sure the openings are closed, and scuttles are portholes, you had to put the heavy clamp down on the inside. And you were dependent on the air that was pumped through the ship.

38:00 And in rough weather, and in hot weather, that was, got pretty stuff, because you had blackout curtains across the alleyways where you walked in from the waste. You went through a light lock, pulled the curtain across, pulled it back behind you when you stepped into a dark space, then you pulled it across and moved in, pulled it back again. You always went through that procedure, so that you never let light out.

38:30 Of course, nobody was allowed to smoke on deck or anything like that, at sea at night in wartime conditions. But in the tropics of course, just up on deck, yarning and walking and so on, was the best place to be, before you turned in.

You'd been on a corvette before you were posted. What were your impressions, when you were posted to a corvette? The ride you had earlier didn't leave you feeling very well?

39:00 Well I knew, everybody knew they were rough, and I had a lot of experience in boats, still got seasick. And even when I was, years later when I was a purser when it got really rough, got seasick. But you learn how to manage it, and you learn how to carry on, you learn what's good for you, lots of people full of advice, you know. What you need to do is this. Some people say you've got to have

39:30 something in your stomach, well that never worked for me, and I don't think it's good advice. And you know, you can get really crook, and I mean it sounds awful, but you can be sick until you bring up green bile, that's when you're really empty. But once I was empty, I could function. If I took food in and it was still rough, I'd be crook

40:00 again, but you gradually got used to it. And they'd say fresh air, that's what you need, well gosh, we'd be going into a blow, word would go round there's heavy weather ahead, and you'd go, I'd go up on deck, or out in the waste and breathe in nice fresh air. Starting to catch up with me, so I'd get up on the outer deck, and get up there and

40:30 take in this wind straight into your face, and all of a sudden you're sucking in all the fresh air you can, still get crook, but you carried on, you had to, and most blokes could. Lots of people didn't get sick, and you had to be really, really crook before they took you off, some men just didn't get over it. If you can't take, you've got to do something

41:00 about it. But they really were quite rough. But you find a corner you can crawl up in, and snuggle down.

Doesn't sound very comforting.

Well no, it wasn't designed to be. But you made do and you didn't whinge, because everybody was the same. But as I say, she was a happy ship and we got along quite well, and our

41:30 relationship around the place. My action station was in four inch ammunition supply, and my mate was the same, but he was actually down in the magazine, and I was at the next level. And they would call down for a certain type of ammunition, and he would select it in the magazine, it might be high explosive, HE, or AP, anti personnel,

42:00 or ack-ack, anti-aircraft. DA, direct action, all different types of.

Tape 7

00:40 **After that music rendition there, we were actually talking about your action station there on Invernell.**

Inverell.

Inverell, sorry.

Yes well I sort of had a fairly rude awakening to that, because we left Fremantle the ship had had a refit, and so we did

01:00 what was called evolution, in other words, a shaking down. A new crew, had twenty six new members, West Aussies had joined her, I don't know whether they had all been drafted to her, but twenty six out of the eighty five were West Australians. And of course, we hadn't been to sea before, and we went outside Rottnest in May, an early winter storm, and did this

01:30 shake down, and we did all these exercises, getting collision mats over the side and pulling them back in again, and going to action stations, all the guns were fired and so on. And I always remember when we were at action stations, the buffer came round shouting, and I said, "Chief, I'm going to be crook,

can I go up top and be crook?" and he said, "No, you can't you dill, you be crook where you are, and clean it up after,"

02:00 so I did. It wasn't very pleasant. But the idea was, it was sort of ant like system, the order would come down of what they wanted, and my mate would select the shells from the magazine, pass them to me, I'd put them in a trough with a ratchet system, and you pushed the shell up in the trough, and it went click, click, click, click, up to the next

02:30 level. The bloke there took it, and he put it another trough and it went up, and it came out on deck to a hatch, and then from there directly to a gun. When the gun started firing, because you're all clamped down, the air system picks up the cordite fumes and pumps them back down through the ship, that was pretty smelly. But, so that was the drill there. As I say,

03:00 I was telling the story of our boys up north, and accompanying these. Gee. Accompanying these floating docks, we finally delivered them when we got to Darwin, or passed them onto somebody else, because we were destined to go further north. As we entered the harbour, the drill normally when you were a convoy, you delivered them safely to the door

03:30 sort of style and you run back down the line, and the ships dip to you, they had, delivered them safely.

Cheers, thanks a lot.

And then you were in a dry run back past them again, get in before them. And as we were making our way across Darwin Harbour, a corvette already there called up and said, "Challenge you to water polo." And of course, it wouldn't have done not to accept

04:00 a challenge, so we said, "Yes, you're on," I suppose the officer of the watch or the skipper. So we'd barely anchored, and pipe came up, "Following fall, lay aft, and listed all these people who were unconnected," I was a supply bloke, there was a couple of

04:30 ABs, there was a signalman, there were some telegraphists. And we all laid aft, in other words we reported to the quarterdeck. And the midshipman, who was the sports officer was waiting for us, and we said, "What's wrong, what have we done?" and he said, "You haven't done anything yet, but congratulations, you're all in the water polo team." We said

05:00 that's great, nobody knew anything about it. We said, "How did you cotton on to us?" and he said, "Well I went through the, your records, your service records, and I got all those that have got against their name can swim good," so all the can swim goods were formed into a water polo team. So we said, "How do you play?" he said, "I don't know, I haven't got a clue either." So we

05:30 pile into the motor boat, and the ship that had challenged us was a couple of hundred metres away, or a couple of hundred yards in those days, and we get there, and the coxswain of the motor boat said, "When do you want me to come back?" And the midshipman said, "Don't worry, we'll swim back." We said, "What about sharks?" and he said, "Oh, I don't believe that's a real worry."

06:00 So anyway, we get aboard this ship and it turns out, to cut a long story short, the first lieutenant was a, the captain I think of the New South Wales water polo team, he was a champion swimmer, and he had the whole ship organised into water polo teams. He said, "We're tired of swimming and playing one another, so we thought we'd challenge you lot, so we said, "Well, you'd better tell us something about it." So they had, there's a normal boom

06:30 that goes off the side of the ship, to which boats moor when you put your motor boat in the water, this is like a stick sticking out with a stay either side of it, holding it. And it's got a safety line on it, and you can walk out and you go down a ladder and get into the boat. Well that was one end of the court, and they had another one rigged out further aft, and that was the water polo course or,

07:00 you know, field. And so they gave us these brief instructions, we dived in and went great guns for about five minutes, because you swim like mad you know, trying to get hold of the ball, shoot it down the other end. We did no good at all, and it's a very, very rough ground, like they grab hold of you and pull you under. And

07:30 we had a couple of turns each at doing the swimming out, everybody then wanted to be the goalie, because the goalie stays back. And the goals were instead of a fixed net like they have in a proper water polo pool, they had these sticks hanging off the boom that was, that went out from the ship's side. And you sidled over to one of these sticks and

08:00 tried to hang onto it, instead of treading water, you're supposed to be treading water. And they'd say, "Hey, that's not allowed." So in the end, everybody wanted to be goalie and try and have a rest, but after about ten minutes they woke up it was a pretty fruitless exercise, and called us out of the water, thankfully. And then demonstrated how to play the game, because we were totally stonkered. And they said, "How are you going to get home, when's

08:30 your boat coming?" and the midshipman said, "Well I told him not to bother." And they said, "I think we better take you home," which they did thankfully. But that was our introduction to inter-ship sporting contents. We also had a brief interlude ashore where we took a party ashore and played hockey against an army team.

Where was this?

At Darwin. And

09:00 they had a mascot cocky, one of those white corellas of which there are absolutely millions around the place up there, which was squawking and screeching all the time, and it got on our nerves. The hockey game was going OK, but one of our blokes sort of nonchalantly threw his stick in the direction of the cocky, and happened to strike it, which

09:30 achieved a direct hit. And it didn't kill it, but it looked pretty untidy, and of course, we thoroughly blotted our copybook, and they decided to call the game off.

You took out the mascot.

So we headed north and we were posted to Morotai, which was a big base to the east of Borneo. And we caught the

10:00 last couple of months or so of the Borneo campaign, the Australian 7th Division landed at Balikpapan and Tarakan, and we escorted convoys from Morotai across.

Could you follow the news of what was going on in the war?

Yes, well you got the news, and when you got to Morotai, you became part of the American information services. Because at Morotai, we had

10:30 "Station WVTL, an affiliate of the Far Eastern Network, fourteen eighty on your dial. In just a few moments, short wave monitoring facilities, WVTL presents the latest news. WVTL provides nine newscasts daily, and up to the minute highlights in the home town. News flashes from world battle fronts," and

11:00 then they'd play big band swing and music, and special requests for different men. And GI Jill would come on, and she'd talk to us troops with these messages, special greetings from family and so on, particular ones, I don't know how they managed to get on it. But she would always close with, "This is GI Jill

11:30 saying, good morning to some of you, good afternoon to some more of you and to the rest of you boys, good night." GI Jill. But it was lively stuff and kept us posted with what was happening.

Well you certainly sound like you heard a lot of it?

Well Morotai, as far as the navy was

12:00 concerned, was totally afloat, we never went ashore there. All of the big supply ships were at anchor, the fuel was taken from a tanker, ammunition from an ammunition ship, all my stuff, stores, came from stores ship, the Wang Pu. They were mainly formerly Chinese ships, there was Ping Way and Wang Pu, all funny names like that. And when you

12:30 were inward bound after been to Tarakan or Balik [Balikpapan], you came in and called up and said, "This is what we need," and you'd go alongside, they'd give you a time, or if it was suitable come straight alongside now, get your stuff before you went to anchor. Or they may say well look, there's your outbound convoy, get your fuel and go and catch up. We didn't do a lot of it because it was just the last couple of months, we

13:00 did other bits and pieces. We were assigned for a short time, patrolling between the islands, the nips were withdrawing all of their outlying posts, where they could. They did what was termed island hopping during the night, they tried to hop from one island to another under the cover of darkness using all sorts of craft, barges and launches and things.

13:30 We tried to intercept them, we sank one barge one night.

What happened that night?

We went to action stations, challenged this craft in the night and they didn't up with a satisfactory answer, so we sank it. Went over the area the next morning and there was a bit of flotsam and jetsam around, and then we were about to leave the area

14:00 generally, and somebody spotted a bloke in the water, he wasn't far from an island, he'd been swimming all night, and we picked him up, he was wounded. And actually, I guessed we saved his life, cause we took him on board, and landed him at Morotai where he got medical attention.

This a Japanese bloke?

Yes, photo of him there somewhere. But that was a bit of a diversion I suppose, because

14:30 thousands and thousands of islands, you often hear the comment that Indonesia is just a mass of island, a high proportion of them uninhabited, and some of them are just a vegetation covered rock, sticking up out of the water. You couldn't land on some of them, they're the top of a mountain. Pretty, beautiful,

especially on a flat placid

15:00 tropical day, beautiful. We had other odd jobs, I remember an American freighter had run aground on a reef and we went and tried to pull her off. Bits and pieces like that, but we came in. Oh, over at Tarakan and Morotai, I got ashore on a couple of occasions, I needed to try and get some stores

15:30 from somewhere, and those were really horrific campaigns there. And the Australian diggers, you know, they met very fierce resistance, the Japs had well and truly dug in. And it was a very costly campaign.

What evidence did you see of that when you were there?

Well, all the damage and the sort of fortifications that they had to overcome, because we were sort of out of that sort of thing, you didn't get involved. And

16:00 in terms of actual encountering enemy resistance to what we were doing, there was very little of it, because they really were drawn, at a pretty quick rate where they could, a lot of them, of course, were trapped, and we subsequently found that to be the case. Because we came in from Balik

16:30 on the 15th of August 1945 from a run, we'd taken a convoy over there. Came back in and we went alongside the supply ship, the food supply ship, and the drill there, as far as my mate and I were concerned, that I would receive food stuffs, check the order off

17:00 as the stuff was landed on our foredeck. The crowd, the whole of the ship's company would gather around, pick up, like ants, pick up bits, take it down, right down to the lower hold and he stowed it, because he had to know where he put it. And he had to move the old stuff forward and get the new stuff in behind it, and tiny, tiny pokey hold it was. And so we went alongside and the process started, and we were listening

17:30 to station WVTL and they were playing big band music and requests and the latest news. And suddenly. Prior to that, we'd heard about some special bomb that had been devised and had been dropped, one or two had been dropped on Japan. This sort of came out of

18:00 vague bits and pieces of information. You didn't have any detail, but you had the feeling that something was about to break. And whilst we were lying aside of her, it came up with a news flash, "The War is Over, Japan has capitulated."

18:30 Well, the first sling of cargo had just come aboard and landed on the deck, and I was checking it off, and it had flour and sugar in bags, tea was always in tea chests and other crates of food stuffs, canned goods and so on. And there was some yeast, a small parcel of

19:00 yeast for making bread, hard frozen, that had to go to the freezer quickly, because it was tropical, it was hot. But the weather changed like that up there, it was right on the tropics, right on the equator and you'd get these sudden downpours almost daily, very, very heavy rain. And blow me down, as soon as this message came over, the crowd went mad, the ship's company they all went tearing about the place,

19:30 most uncharacteristic, because they were always great when we were getting stores, everybody hopped in, you did it quickly. And you had to, because they wanted you to clear off and get away from the ship's side so another ship could come in. And of course, the crowd just disappeared, and it started to rain, and here I am, trying to check this stuff off, rain coming down, flour and sugar getting wet, the bags,

20:00 and the yeast getting wet. And of course, as soon as the water got on the hard frozen yeast, it started to disintegrate. I didn't know what to do, so I tried to drag the bags of sugar and flour in under the wings to the bridge, all the deck sloped aft, at least that would have been some shelter against the rain. Then I

20:30 didn't know whether, what to do about the yeast, and so I scurried down to my mate, I thought I'd better go and get him, and between us we could do better trying to get this stuff out of the rain, cause there was very little shelter. And when I got down there, he was coming up out of his hatch, and he said, "What's happened, it's all stopped, nothing's coming?" And I said, "The war's over and the crowd have gone mad." He said, "Great." So we get up there, honestly, what a schmozzle,

21:00 trying to get this stuff, first thing was to get this yeast down, which we did and we got out of anyway. Got all these wet bags of flour and sugar down. And the crowd came the next day and apologised, "Sorry we let you down." But the thing was, for months after, he was taking these bags out of his hold, and they were the shape that he put in there, they all had hard crusts on the outside.

21:30 Most of it was saved, and you know, I can recollect on occasions at my Probus Club for instance, people ask to try and recollect what they were doing precisely when word came the war was over, and I say I'll never forget, it sticks in my mind. We got over that and that was the 15th of August, well it was some weeks before a formal surrender was signed

22:00 in our area.

Were you still in that particular area?

Pardon?

Were you still in that particular area?

Oh yes, in Morotai. And Morotai was the headquarters of the Australian Army, General Blamey's headquarters. And the Borneo campaign was directed from there, and that's where, subsequently the surrender was taken from the Japanese 14th Army.

22:30 And I've got a memento of that there you can see. First thought was for POWs [Prisoner of War], Allied POWs, and recovering them. And we had heard about terrible things like the massacre at Sandakan we used to say, and of course they say Sandakan now. We'd heard about the diggers that were lost,

23:00 and stories were coming about Burma Railway and so on.

How did you hear about that stuff?

Well, I don't know, these snippets of information come your way.

Just wonder if it was broadcast on the news?

Oh no, you didn't get that sort of detail.

So it was more blokes talking to blokes?

Well the news we were picking up was mostly American of course, and American slanted. What interested us mostly was the sort of

23:30 recreational stuff and so forth, the music and so on, the big band music and so on. And of course, the, what the former British possessions and so on, they didn't feature much in the American news, it was all what they were doing and where they were going, which was the main thrust of course. But the main concern was recovering allied prisoners.

24:00 And a convoy was formed including Inverell of about six or seven corvettes, and we were sent down to Ambon. The purpose was to try to recover the prisoners, because it was known that a lot of allied prisoners were held on Ambon. And they didn't want to antagonise Japanese,

24:30 because peace and the surrender wasn't finalised, they were still sort of technically at a state of war with them. And it was a hairy thing, because the senior officer was an acting commander I think, and he was in the, I think it was the Burdekin or the Bundaberg one of the corvettes. And we all got down there and the whole convoy

25:00 stood off the island, and the senior ship made its way into the harbour of Ambon, I think it is. Quite a big harbour, we didn't go in, it wasn't us. She went in flying a white flag, crowd were at action stations below deck. I don't know whether she had her guns

25:30 trained down or not, showing that she was not offensive, and she kept calling up. Cause there were emplacements on the outer side of the island too, we would have been observed, all the ships lying there, waiting to see what would happen. The idea was we would go in and take the prisoners out first thing. And she made her way across the harbour, calling up all the time, and got no response. And she was in, you know, an enemy

26:00 stronghold. And apparently some time, it was quite a fair way, and finally the nips came up with something to the effect of, "What are you doing here?" And they said, "The war is over and we've come to take charge of allied prisoners of war," and they said, "We know nothing of this, and you should leave." And it was a pretty tense situation, and

26:30 they persisted, the CO of the whole outfit, the commanding officer, the fleet commander, kept trying to get through to somebody, and they came back and said, "We know nothing and you should leave." And so discretion was a better part of valour, and they in fact turned around and left, and we all went back to Morotai. And that was

27:00 of great concern, but they felt it was the best way to go, they didn't want to antagonise them, because they thought they might do something drastic with the allied prisoners.

What were you actually doing at the time?

Well we were waiting with this group of ships outside.

Were you just sort of watching what was going on?

Well you couldn't see, I mean, the radio blokes could hear what was going on,

27:30 and they were, well you got it later the story, everybody throughout the ship didn't get it, because it was all pretty tense. And of course, we felt it was a bit of a flop and we sort of failed, waiting to help these fellows. But another fleet went down subsequently, when it was insured that the nips had been advised. And when you read the surrender documents, and so

28:00 on there, you realise. And when you realise also that how it dispersed and scattered, and how in disarray their communication systems were, they couldn't in fact, convey messages or relay instructions to their people. But once they got, or signed that document, I'll show you, there was no question about

what they had to do. But we were then

28:30 sent across to Borneo and we came under the control of the GOC [General Officer Commanding] of the 7th Division along with another ship, Barcoo, a frigate, to be used for occupation and POW recovery duties.

What did you think about being used for that purpose?

It was the most moving time of my service in the navy. Because

29:00 we had a few little jobs to do around Balikpapan, we were sent up a river because the nips had hid a little freighter, up the river, loaded with fuel. We went up and our blokes, we went along side of it, and our blokes ran a steam line across and raised the anchor, and we brought her back down, put it on a wharf. It later caught fire mind you, it was pretty much a waste of time.

29:30 But then we escorted a group of small craft and landing barges from Balik down the coast, the east coast of Borneo to Bandjermasin, which is a big town in the south east corner. And they went down to occupy that place, we didn't go in there, we just saw them safety to the entrance. I don't know whether it was a question of draft and we couldn't get in, I don't know. But we, and strangely enough a bloke

30:00 I know well, who was in the 7th Divvy, was in that crowd, and we later learned, years later, gosh was that you lot that escorted us. And then we went back up to Balik and we were signed, together with Barcoo and two or three other small ships to go down and occupy Macassar which was a big town,

30:30 a big city in the Celebes. To take charge and to release the prisoners, ensure the prisoners were released and see to their welfare. And the convoy set off, oh we took on board Australian soldiers, 7th Divvy fellows, Barcoo took some too. And that was a bit funny, because they sort of saw you from a

31:00 distance, troops ships, most of them, and cause we were, it was the tropics and all you ever wore was shorts and sandals, we didn't know thongs in those days. Someone got hold of the local sort of things, but you wore sort of leather sandals.

You were pretty casual then.

Oh yes. Well it was hot, and cause they came aboard with all their battle gear

31:30 and their hob nailed boots, and the decks were steel. Of course, when the ship started to roll, apart from not feeling terribly well, it was very awkward for them, we felt for them actually. Once again, we had to cram them in, I don't know where we bedded them down, but we tried to make them as comfortable. We didn't have as many as the Barcoo, we didn't have the capacity to take a lot. But we put on a meat meal

32:00 for them at night, and they said, "Crikey, how long has this been going on," we said, "All through they war." They said, "Oh, this is great, but I tell you what, you can keep your meat meal, we'd rather be on dry land." But it was quite funny. But it was sort of good being out with them, but.

What had they actually been doing, before they got on war?

Well they had been in the landings at Balikpapan and Tarakan.

Right.

Fighting

32:30 the Japanese forces there. And sort of an example of the fact that it was difficult for the Japanese to get the instruction out to their people that the war was over, or that their people obeyed the commands, one renegade Japanese major or something, took five hundred men and headed inland. And it was some time, like a couple of months before

33:00 he was tracked down, and they went into Dyak country, to the headhunters, and they gave them pretty short shrift, they were pretty fearsome people. Because a lot of diggers, well not a lot, but some Australian personnel were landed behind the lines and worked with the Dyaks, before and during the campaigns there. And with intelligence operations,

33:30 and there's a wonderful story about those fellows, they did tremendous work. But Japanese in the Borneo area, of course, were bought into compounds as they surrendered, and then some of those troops were, in fact, under a brigadier who I think was in charge of the whole operation, this convoy with the troops on board, headed for Macassar.

34:00 And Macassar, we understood to be heavily mined, the approaches, but there was no question the Japanese there had been well and truly advised that they were coming, and they were instructed to release the prisoners of war. And to tend to them.

Were you mine sweeping on the way through?

Yes, we led the way but as we approached, we had ordered ahead that any Japanese naval

34:30 facility there were to come out and meet us. And they sent several craft out which our crowd supervised

and rigged up with mine sweeping gear, but they did know a channel through, but we didn't trust them. So we sent them ahead and they swept a path for us, we swept as well, we had all of our mine sweeping gear going. We had the normal contact mine sweeps going, which is a wire that goes out at right angles

35:00 to the ship and it's carried by a float, and it's held at a certain depth with a kite under the water, something like the flukes on a windmill. And it's amazing, your ship is going along, and the wire stays at right angles, it picks up the wire of a moored mine, and conducts the wire down to a clip, to a jaw down the end, with clips and mine

35:30 floats to the surface. We didn't encounter any, because they took us on a track that they knew was clear. But we had that running, we had our acoustic mine device running, which was like a cement mixer with a giant hammer inside it. When it ran on deck, you couldn't hear yourself thing. But that was run under water, that was dragged

36:00 under the water, and the big hammer hammered away, and it made a noise louder than the ship's engine, and it set them off before you got to them. That was the principle of that one. And we had the magnetic mine wires trailing aft, where our ship, all ships were degaussed, that is to say they were demagnetised and wouldn't set off a magnetic mine.

36:30 They countered the magnetism of the mine, and we trailed wires aft, supported by floats and fired a charge down, and an electric charge down into water, and if there were any electric mines there, it set them off. You sailed safely over them, but set them off with a charge. Didn't encounter any of them, they were probably a bit too sophisticated for them. We've got everything running, and the nips out in front.

Pretty exciting stuff for you.

Oh yes, but we were

37:00 on deck with our Mae Wests [life jackets] half inflated, that was the navy life belt, Mae West, went around here, and you half inflated, you just blew them up, and they were a simple device, they just clipped like a brassiere and you blew them up. You never had them full, because if you jumped into the water with them fully inflated, you might break your neck, the drill was you half inflated them. So we were ready to go over the side

37:30 if we hit anything, but we didn't. And we approached the harbour and retrieved our gear and the nips went on in, the Barcoo the senior ship was behind us and of course, naval tradition, senior ship always enters harbour first, and of course we'd done all this clearing and made it safe, and Barcoo sailed past. Thanks very much. Bit of fun, because we chiacked one another.

38:00 But I don't know whether I can tell you this story. When we came alongside, there was an incredible scene, the Japanese had well and truly received instructions on how to behave and what to do. They had opened the gates and the prisoners were free, and they had been given some shorts and a shirt.

38:30 The Japanese, some Japanese troops were lined up on the wharf in platoons. The prisoners were walking amongst them, and the civilian population was there as well, all on the wharf. As we came alongside, the Japs sprang into action, ready to take our lines and make us fast.

39:00 The prisoners were all British sailors from several cruisers that had been sunk in battles, Java Sea battles. And I think some may have also been survivors from the Repulse and the Prince of Wales, big ships that were sunk. And they wouldn't let them touch the lines. They were weak and they say,

39:30 with the help of the local people it made us fast, you know. Couldn't believe it, we couldn't. And of course we prepared a meal for them, got out all sorts of special things, put this

40:00 big roast dinner on at the mess deck, and found special things, you know. Went to the little canteen we had, it was about as big as a toilet in the corvette and bought some lolly bars and things, and invited them on board. Cause we helped them come on, and took them into the mess decks

40:30 and sat them down, and of course, they couldn't eat anything. It was all too much. And said, "Well is there anything you would like," and they said. Sorry.

Why don't we just pause there for a second, I know we're on the edge of this tape. Must have been

41:00 **an amazing thing to see.**

Tape 8

00:33 **I think when we stopped, you'd taken some POWs on board, and prepared a meal.**

Yes, they came on board and we put this lovely spread before them, and they couldn't eat it, we didn't realise that's how they would be. They asked, we asked them if there's anything you would like, and they said, "Yes, a slice of bread and jam." And of course, they hadn't seen bread in four years,

01:00 they would have eaten rice. And Japanese don't, or didn't eat bread in those days, I don't think they do today, very much. The bread in South East Asia generally, was a nonentity. So a slice of bread and jam, straight bread and jam, which was all they wanted, and of course, that was easily done. And they just wanted to be with us,

01:30 and the fact that the navy came to rescue them was just wonderful, they couldn't get over it, they were navy men. Talking to a fellow up on deck, he just wanted to sit on the bollard, the bollard is what fasten ropes to. And I remember him sitting there, and just, he said, "I just want to be here."

02:00 And you didn't know what to do to sort of help, but I placed a lolly bar in his hand, his hand was like that on his, resting on his thigh, I put the lolly bar there and just looked at it, didn't even close his hand on it. It was very moving. And he told us about life there, it was very hard. But they had

02:30 made friends when they got the opportunity with the locals, the locals were as helpful as they could be, they gathered where they could sort of feeding them, perhaps through the wire. And of course, once they got out, the locals made a huge fuss of them, once again, they gave them a lot of things they couldn't perhaps eat. But the main thing was, they wanted to see us, and see Australians, white men.

03:00 And he told us that after the action when the cruiser he was in, was sunk, one of his mates was a bandsman and in those big ships, cruisers had a band on board. And of course they doubled, some of the bandsmen doubled as buglers, they played the signals

03:30 over the ship's loud speaker system, they would play a bugle call for a certain action for people to gather, or for stand easy time, or something like that. And his most precious possession was his trumpet as a bandsman. And he said they could never explain it, but when he went over the side of the cruiser and the nips picked him up, he was still clutching

04:00 his trumpet, and they let him keep it, and he played it in the camp, apparently, for them. And we gave them, when I saw we, our officers gave them a white ensign, and the next day, they went back up to the camp, and they ran up the colours, the flag. The officers were there and everybody, we weren't there,

04:30 it was quite a select little group, mainly with the POWs themselves, they ran up the white Henson. And it was a very telling moment for them, because he related that to us, cause it, no that hadn't taken place. That's right, he told us this story about how the bloke played the trumpet and we heard subsequently that the bugler or the trumpet player, played the colours while they ran it up.

05:00 Well the next development was that ship, the Maidstone that I referred to that had been in Fremantle during the big fire, she had made away with her submarines up into the Pacific. Of course, as soon as the show was over, she was a big ship with a lot of capacity and so she was applied to bringing POWs out of places. And we heard that she had been sent down to Macassar,

05:30 and we kept it, I gather, our officers kept it to themselves pretty much until the last minute, and advised them that Maidstone was coming. She was too big to berth and didn't want to trust her coming down through the passage anyway. And we took them on board, and the Barcoo the same.

06:00 We loaded all these POWs and that was the most chaotic scene, because the locals came down with presents. The dominant present was a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK or chicken with a leash on its leg, one leg. They were inundated with gifts of bananas and things like this to take with them,

06:30 but the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s were the thing. I think we also had a couple of goats and a monkey, they brought these presents down on board. We kept the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and processed some for our own use, but we took them out through the minefield to the Maidstone, which was laying outside, along with the Barcoo. We went alongside the Maidstone and of course, real British sailors,

07:00 when I say real British sailors, their own kin, as distinct from Australian sailors. And unfortunately our old man, our commanding officer was a very good seaman, but I don't know whether the ships were swinging at the wrong time, but we came alongside very hard, we came down hard. And he, the skipper of the Maidstone,

07:30 announced over the loud hailer, "I say old boy, we'd like to take you home with us, but don't come right inboard," it was a bit of a crack at our skipper, and we felt for him. But they sent some, because they were a maintenance ship, they sent specialists aboard to have a look at us to see if there was any damage, and there wasn't. The main thing was transferring these men onto the Maidstone, and they handled them like babies.

08:00 And as the ships parted, pulled away, it was a still tropical day, very flat, calm, the water was like a mirror. The Maidstone was a big ship, corvette was quite small, and the bugler got as high up in the Maidstone as he could, and he played "Stardust,"

08:30 I'll never forget that. There wasn't another sound, just this beautiful rendition. And everytime I hear that, I fall apart, but it was tremendous. I don't know what his name was, but he was a wonderful trumpeter. That's the last we saw of them, they brought them down here I think, and they were transferred and shipped home fairly quickly from Fremantle. We

09:00 stayed there for two months, cause the diggers that we took down, marched ashore and took charge in Macassar. And they said, “We’re here,” to the nips, “And we want the Governor’s residence cleaned out, we’ll be back here at eight o’clock in the morning to occupy it, the show’s over.” There was something like forty thousand Japanese still under arms in the area, fortunately they didn’t give us any trouble. Well everybody

09:30 was pretty wary, but they were pretty docile, but I don’t know what happened to them, they were obviously shipped out, or went into transit camps until they could be moved out. They were, pardon me, they weren’t as high a priority as getting the POWs out and trying to restore order. And of course the thing was, at that particular time, the Indonesian

10:00 people had decided there was no way the Dutch were coming back to occupy the Dutch East Indies. And they made their presence felt immediately, there was all sorts of frictional fighting amongst them, because as you know, the Indonesian nation is made up of hundreds and hundreds of different sort of tribal

10:30 island groups. And so there was some fairly tense scenes and situations. The brigadier sent troops to the power station, which of course had been one of the Japs main devices for telling the locals how well

11:00 they were going in the war. And of course, he went to the radio station and said, “We’re here, the war is over, we’ve come to help and we don’t want any trouble. I don’t want any Australian harmed. If any Australian is harmed in any way, you’ll never hear the end of it.” And the diggers went back on a war footing for a short time, showing a very strong stance, they weren’t going to have any nonsense.

11:30 And because it was so darn hot, we of course, very quickly decided sleeping on deck was the best place to be, but they said, “Look we don’t think that’s a terribly good idea, this is the troops, you’d better sort of lay low for a while,” so we didn’t need to be told that a second time. We lay there for two months, and we were the communications headquarters, and worked with the army, until the

12:00 occupation was near complete and established, and I assume all Japanese forces were accounted for, and all their equipments, arms and so on, had been surrendered. We weren’t involved in that sort of thing, very much. But we did get ashore, and we played some sport, we played a cricket match, they reckoned it was the first cricket match,

12:30 ever been played in the Dutch East Indies. A couple of games of Australian Rules football and some soccer, they played a match against a local Chinese team. So a little bit of that fraternising went on. It was quite enjoyable, everybody of course was itching to get home, we were very pleased when we got the order.

13:00 We were very fondly farewelled, once again, they bought all sorts of presents down, fruit, more chickens, we did a run down the harbour at full speed and fired out guns, which apparently caused quite a fuss in the town, they thought the war had started again. We went back up to Morotai, picked up a couple of sea-going motorboats, and towed

13:30 them all the way down to Thursday Island, which was our first contact with the Australian mainland. Made our way down the Barrier Reef, and on the way an edict came out from Navy Office, that all the ships, especially the corvettes that were named after Australian towns, were to go to, or as near as they could get to, the town they were named after. Well nearest we could get to Inverell

14:00 was forty six miles up the Clarence River, to Grafton in northern New South Wales. And we arrived there in December of 1945, and we had a wonderful week of hospitality there, and they made a huge fuss of us. Because their own menfolk were just trickling home, and some of our blokes had a higher priority, I was single, any married men were

14:30 fairly quickly released. But you couldn’t just say OK, the war’s over, you can all go home, ships had to be load up, jobs had to be done, all sorts of tidying up and that sort of thing.

How did you celebrate VJ [Victory over Japan] day?

I beg your pardon?

How did you celebrate VJ day?

Nothing in particular, because things went on. As I say, it was

15:00 imperative that things be done like getting the prisoners out, so apart from the fact that you could not worry about blackouts and things like that, you stayed pretty well working full tilt. And that happened all over the Pacific, there was lots of things to do by way of accepting surrenders and taking Japanese prisoners and brining our own people out, all those sorts of jobs.

15:30 **And what was your reaction to the news that the atomic bomb had been dropped in Japan?**

We thought it was a good thing and the war was over. And I still today, I know it’s a fearsome thing, fearsome weapon but I think most men who were involved at the time, everything is relative. You know, you can say the invention of the machine gun and using a machine gun against, say,

16:00 primitive warriors with spears, was you know, a dramatic difference in terms of capability and so on. The difference with atomic warfare of course, is the dreadful spreading effects, and effect it has on the environment and all that sort of thing. And nobody endorses it at all, the decision to use it in my view, and I think in most people's

16:30 view at the time, it was the right decision, because it stopped the war. If you'd have had to take Japan with conventional weaponry, the loss, the allied losses would have been very high. And Japan would have suffered possibly more losses. You can compare it, for instance, with the European campaign, and the horrific

17:00 bombing that was necessary to subdue Germany. And when you consider the loss of life and things like children and innocent women and children die in say the atomic bombings, it's not unlike what happened in Britain with the indiscriminate

17:30 bombing. Whole schools blown up and so on. And as I say, the war stopped, it stopped dramatically within days.

What was your understanding of the atomic technology or the capability of the atomic bomb?

Very little, we didn't know, but we knew it could do incredible damage. And all that started to come out, gradually learning about it, and

18:00 hearing about it. But as for the philosophy of whether it was the right thing to do or not, there was no question, it stopped the war and maybe saved fifty thousand allied lives. I've heard some people say that really may not have been as bad a price to pay, as living, as unleashing atomic bombs.

18:30 But that to me is a pretty wishy washy response, I mean it was a new weapon and it was used, I think it was the right thing at the right time. But nobody would want to see it become, well, the world would disintegrate if it became in common use. Everybody now knows what a dreadful thing it is, I guess that practical demonstration

19:00 could be seen as beneficial in that respect, I suppose, in hindsight.

So what were your expectations on getting home to Australia?

Getting home?

Well just getting back to mainland Australia?

Well I guess everybody was looking forward to being discharged, but you accepted that you couldn't just walk off. Inverell did all sorts

19:30 of jobs. After our wonderful week at Grafton, where incidentally I sang in public over the radio for the very first time in my life, I sang "The Old Music Master" by Hoagie Carmichael, in a competition. A bloke came down on board and said, "We have a concert every Wednesday night, and because you crowd are in town, we'd like to build the concert around you," I've got the programme there.

20:00 "And is there anybody that can perform?" and we had a couple of very accomplished pianists and a bloke played the saxophone. And they said, "What about singers?" and they said, "Aberle sings," cause I used to walk around the ship singing. "Put him down," and I said, "Aberle doesn't sing," and they said, "Yes he does, put him down." I went into a competition and it was the old fashioned community

20:30 sing-song radio broadcast type function, which was sponsored by a radio station and most of it was broadcast. The audience of course took part and did community singing, and in the middle of it was a competition. And I was placed in this competition and I won it. The voting was in the house, and

21:00 was also phoned in or written in by people listening, because all the surrounding rural community would have heard it, you see. My prize was qualification to sing in the final, and I said to them, "I don't believe His Majesty's navy would approve of my coming back to Grafton to take part. I wonder if you'd be kind enough

21:30 to award the first prize to the young lady who came second," a pretty little girl who sang "One Fine Day" from Madame Butterfly, I remember that, lovely voice. We went back up to Brisbane.

I was wondering if you could give us a short rendition of?

You probably don't know that song, have you ever heard of it.

I don't recall the title, but it sounds familiar, I'm sure I'll be familiar with it once I've heard a rendition.

\n[Verse follows]\n

22:00 "One night long ago by the light of the light of the moon,\n

An old music master sat composing a tune.\n His spirit was souring and his heart full of joy\n Went right out of nowhere stepped a little coloured boy.\n Jump at Music Master, you want to play that rhythm

faster,\n You'll never get it played it on hippy cat hip parade.\n You've got to tell your friend

22:30 Bay Dolan\n

A Mister Reginald A Coven\n They're going to be the same as you,\n or they're going to be corny too.\n Along about 1917, jazz will come upon the scene\n and then about 1935, you'll be into swing, boogie woogie and jive.\n You'd better tell the big broadcaster,\n you're a solid music master\n And you'll keep posterity that's a bit of advice from me.\n Well now the old music master simply\n

23:00 sat there amazed as wide eyed and open mouth he gazed, and he gazed.\n

How can you be certain little boy, tell me how\n Because I was born he said, a hundred years from now.\n He rocked that spinet and disappeared into the infinite,\n Up until the present day, you can take it from me\n He's right as can be.\n Anything can happen away, yeah."\n

That's great,

23:30 **quite a precocious choice, wouldn't you say.**

Yes, that's sixty, nearly sixty years ago, I've been singing ever since. Yes, that was great fun. Went back up to Brisbane, and did all sorts of things. We took an old tub out, we were supposed to sink it in deep water with some ammunition that was

24:00 unserviceable. Loaded ammunition on the tub, it was a mishap, it sank in the channel and that was quite a kerfuffle, that was all sorted out. We were then assigned to work with the Light, the Lighthouse Service, the lightships that served the Australian coast had been working flat out during the war, and obviously hadn't

24:30 had time, or they hadn't been able to relieve them, to slip them. A ship has to be shipped regularly to be maintained, the bottom is cleaned, new anti-fouling put on it, and a big refit was necessary for the light ship. So we became the light ship and we had at His Majesty's expense, a first class cruise all the way up to the Barrier Reef, calling at every light up through the Torres Strait

25:00 to Torres Strait Islands, and called at the communities there. And went right out to a place called Bramble Cay which is a, a cay is a little sand island, quite close to New Guinea. We called at every light, we had engineers, lighthouse engineers on board, and they serviced the lights. So we went ashore at places like Daydream Island, which now of course is a very expensive holiday resort, and swam

25:30 there. Went to these unique places, put fishing lines over the side, and saw the people in the islands up there, Thursday Island, Friday Island, lovely places. And they were a delight to see, and I guess that made it all worthwhile. Eventually came back, and the ship was, along with others,

26:00 scheduled to be laid up, and of course, being stores, laying up was quite a lengthy process. All the gear had to be taken ashore, it all had to be accounted for, so I was in the last little group of about six or so people in Inverell that finally wrapped her all up, the last of the paperwork was done, and we were all shipped home.

What was that moment like?

Well that was a strange feeling, you sort of felt,

26:30 something had been part of your life, not only Inverell but the navy as a whole, and you sort of, in taking things ashore, all the stores had to be landed and accounted for. And she was empty and walking through her, she echoed, the men had gone, she was all beautifully painted up, and ready to go into mothballs. And you sort of felt that was your navy experience

27:00 going into mothballs, including your time in New Guinea.

It felt symbolic, did it?

Yes I guess so, looking back on it. And I came back relatively comfortably to Fremantle.

Not in the back of a cattle truck?

No, not tack con, I think we might have only had four men in the compartment, coming across the Nullarbor, and that was relatively comfortable. There was six of us,

27:30 because it was nearly twelve months after the war was over, and we'd all come from different directions, all single men that had to stay for one reason or another. And it was funny, when you came to a place where you were going to stay any length of time, you had to complete what was called, it was labelled, this is not a will, it was actually a next of kinship.

28:00 They knew you were in the area, but you had to complete this little form, to say that you were Aberle, you were passing through, and this was in the event that something happened to you, getting knocked over in the street or something like that, extra confirmation of who you were. So we arrived back, and of course, it was petrol rationing, but

28:30 my Dad had made a special effort to be there with the car. And a long term mate of mine from East Fremantle, Laurie who I was subsequently best man for, he was sick but he attended, and I were in this group. And the infliction normally was that you would be told to go down to Leeuwin the day of arrival, complete this sheet and then they would say,

29:00 "We don't want to see you for another day or two," something like that. And so we said, "Look, we're all old hands, we know that filling out that sheet down at Leeuwin is only a formality, lets all agree we won't report this afternoon as instructed, we'll report tomorrow morning." First thing in defiance I ever did in the navy. And we agreed

29:30 as we parted in Perth. And Dad drove Laurie and me home and also another person, and of course we went in the next morning and there's the master of arms at Leeuwin, waiting for us, recording, Smith fifteen hours adrift or whatever it was. We were supposed to report at 1500 that afternoon that we arrived, we got in at nine o'clock in the morning or something, you can have

30:00 a few hours off, but report to Leeuwin this afternoon. And of course, we were, whatever it was, fifteen hours adrift should have been there at eight o'clock, or we reported at eight o'clock. Aberle fifteen hours adrift, Smith fifteen hours adrift, Jones fifteen hours adrift, right you're in personal lieutenant's report. So we line up and the first lieutenant refers us to captain's report, and captain said, "Now,

30:30 six very experienced sailors, all come home for discharge, you know the drill, and this has been going on for some time, and it's going to stop with you men." He said, "We can't have this, I know you haven't got long to serve, but it's going to stop with you men." And so he said, "Let's see

31:00 what is it today." "It's Thursday, Sir," somebody said to him. He said, "All right, then go home for lunch on Saturday." And I remember the master at arms said, "Two days, two and two." Oh that's right, he said, "Two days stoppage of pay and two days stoppage of leave." And the master at arms said, "Two days, two and two," that was the term, about term, double way.

31:30 So of course, I had to go and ring up Mum and say, "Look I won't be coming home, I'm just being confined to barracks." She said, "Well we've got your twenty first birthday celebration planned for Saturday night," because I'd had my birthday, oh, seven or eight months before. Big event, I got to have my twenty first birthday. But I said, "I'll be home Saturday," so that was my last

32:00 two days active service in the navy, confined to barracks and my pay stopped for two days, and all six of us were the same. We had the weakest excuses of course, under the sun, and nobody believed it. But they didn't record it on our record, we came out with a clean sheet. And then of course went through the process of being discharged, couldn't face up to going back to work, like a lot of men, so I went in and reported

32:30 to State Ships where my job was secure, and I found all sorts of reasons. Anyhow, after about six weeks or so, I finally went back to work.

What was your reluctance to return to work?

Well, a bit like the feelings you have when the ship closed down and was packed away, it was a very significant time in your life, it was

33:00 four years you had taken and used in an unusual, unexpected way, you could look back on it as a wonderful experience. Of course, and feeling so fortunate that you'd come through it all in tact, coming home, going back to work, you realised of course, in my own case. A lot of people didn't have have or feel as much

33:30 loss, or know as many people who were casualties or were lose, as I, and to me it was very real, having lost my brother, he wasn't there to go back to work, wasn't in the house. And in my letters to him, and his letters to me, we talked, "It won't be long, we'll be back home doing what we always did," of course he never came home. We had leave

34:00 together on my last, no on my draft to New Guinea, we fluked leave, he was home from Melbourne the same time I was. And another bloke, one of our crowd, three of us were together, and Dad loaned us the car and Doug did the driving, and he was a bit of a harum scarum

34:30 driver. I had got my driver's licence, because Dad said, "That'll be handy, why don't you get your driver's license, you never know when you might need it in the service." I went into Fremantle traffic office with him, and the constable sitting at the desk said, "What can I do for you?" And my Dad said, "Oh my son needs a driver's licence," and he said, "Can he drive?" and Dad said, "Yes, I wouldn't have bought him in, if he couldn't." And he wrote out my driver's licence,

35:00 and that was the test. I was in uniform, so I never did pass the test, I don't know whether I would today, I think I would. But, so we had this time together, it was marvellous. A funny incident sticks in my mind, we had been knocking around Perth together and I think I went to a dance at

35:30 the Embassy Ballroom, that was the big ballroom in Perth. And I met a lass there, and she told me she worked in the railways near accounts office. And of course, three of us were knocking around Perth, and I talked about this pretty girl that I'd met, and I said, I said to her I would go and see her, call on her, you see. And I don't think she took it seriously for one minute. But the three of us

36:00 turned up at the accounts office at the railways, and it was one of those mass typing pool-type situations, a row of, the girls were in rows, desks one behind the other. And probably, I don't know, there might have been forty or so girls in this great big space, and there was a supervisor in the glass office, up behind them.

36:30 And I went to the counter, and some girl said, "What can we do for you?" the three of us were there, and I said, "I'd like to see this lass, is she working here?" and she said, "Oh yes." She went down and spoke to the girl and she was a fair way back, and she got up and walked all the way down the line, and of course all the other girls were having a shot at her, her face was like a neon sign, it was the cruellest

37:00 thing. She came up, I never saw her again, she was probably glad she never saw me, a terribly thing to do. But you know, servicemen, you were a bit reckless I suppose. But yes, that was it and I went to back, and I stayed at State Ships for the rest of my working life.

And when was it that you met Gwen?

I knew her family, in fact her mother brought me into the world, she was a famous

37:30 midwife in Fremantle.

Small world.

She always said she gave me my first bath, my mother-in-law, a wonderful lady who was widowed with eight children, and built a nursing home, or a maternity home and bought thousands of children into the world, or helped bring them into the world. And we met

38:00 about 1947, not long after the war, we became engaged in 1949, Gwen went into teacher training and she was posted to the country. I then, as part of my training in the merchant service, in shipping, I was posted off to sea as a purser in a passenger ship, and I served a term there and came ashore in 1952, and we were married.

38:30 In the interim I'd bought this block, and set about building that garage down there, and we built the place, the term was self-help, which meant you used tradesman, but you did as much as you could yourself. And it was an interesting time, and looking back, it was probably a decade

39:00 before Australia had got back anywhere near a normal supply situation. And this is what I mean by the whole nation being focused and devoted to the war effort. You couldn't get bricks, you couldn't get tiles, roof tiles. And the drill was that you put your foundations down, this is the old fashioned stone foundations, you could get the stone, it was plentiful, limestone,

39:30 and there were tradesmen to do it. But you then placed an order with a brick company, if they would take it, and I waited ten months for bricks before there was a supply of bricks for me, and they came out and made sure your foundations were down, before they accepted the order, ten months later your bricks arrived. And I got a brickie, and he worked alone, I did what I could, I ordered the roof timbers and we used them for scaffolding,

40:00 and I did that sort of stuff of an evening, under his instruction what he wanted in place for the next day, he had a labourer with him, built the house on his own. I then went on and pitched the roof, did all the carpentry in the house, did all this stuff, built that fireplace and put all the floors down, doors and cupboards and so on, it took three years. Took the first baby home to the garage,

40:30 it wasn't as posh as it is now, but we had the light on, and we had the water running up to the mortar box which is up the corner of the house here, I used to cart the water down in buckets. We had an ice chest, and I bought the stove, or we bought the stove that we were going to use, then we had a concrete three trough wash top set up, so we could do our

41:00 bathing down there. It had a wooden floor and we had it divided into two sections, it had a little shower recess in the corner, and we had a bucket on a pulley, and one kettle of hot water and three kettles of cold water, and we could both have a shower.

Sounds like early pioneering stuff.

It was, yes. We went from there gradually built the place, expanded it, put that lean to portion on the back, and we gradually

41:30 modernised it, kept it up to date.

And you've lived here happily ever since.

Yes.

We're just getting the wind-up there Andy, so we'll just change tapes and probably wrap the interview with a few more minutes of tape, if that suits you.

Right.

41:45 – tape ends.

Tape 9

00:31 **You were mentioning Andy that you spent quite a lot of time in the shipping industry. What sort of roles did you take on throughout those years?**

Well I served in every aspect of shipping, really. I, as I said started as an office boy, came back as a male clerk, I guess I, I spent a lot of time in the

01:00 personnel areas, I was paymaster for a long time, I was an industrial officer. Industrial officer in waterfront areas was pretty demanding, because it was very dispute prone, it was notorious for stoppages and that sort of thing. I guess that was an area that was pretty demanding. But I served as a purser at sea, and I

01:30 found that very interesting, that was a very interesting, varied job. Purser, you know, you're the ship's administrator, you're the master's secretary, you are responsible for entertaining passengers, you work with the chief officer down the hold, this is how it was on the norwest coast. You helped supervise the loading and discharging of cargo, you sort of run the bars and ensure that they make a profit. You didn't have a minute to

02:00 spare, it was flat strap all the time.

Do you think your time in the navy really helped you with jobs like that?

It really did, I was pretty much seasoned I guess, when I finally went to sea with State Ships. But it was a different kettle of fish, I was an officer then, of course, and that was a different life. And during that time, I was engaged to Gwen and she was away down the country, so when the ship was in Fremantle for four or five days,

02:30 I would jump in the car and go down south. So all that was quite interesting and exciting. When we married in '52, as you know, we went on from there, finishing off the house and having a family of four. But shipping changed so dramatically, today of course it would be unheard of, I guess, to serve with one

03:00 company for forty five years. But they were forty five different years, and the principle changes were in the actual physical nature of shipping, the disappearance of the old cargo handling systems, and the streamlining and development of container relations. There is no truer term than container revolution, because it changed everything about shipping. And you see it in the port, you see the

03:30 old cargo sheds dead, no longer used, not needed. And the development that's occurred, in the case of Fremantle, say on the North Quay, with big disbursal areas for disbursing containers. Because a ship wants to discharge them, reload and clear out, leaves everything behind in the boxes. The boxes are dispersed all over the town and you see huge stores of them, there are millions of them all over the world,

04:00 and they are standard, twenty foot long, imperial feet, twenty imperial feet long, by eight by eight, that's a standard box. And I can't see how they'll ever be able to change that, so its one hard and fast imperial measurement that I don't believe they'll ever be able to change, because there are millions of them, and they were all interchangeable, and they're identical, they fit on trucks, they fit in railway wagons, they fit in ships.

And if you change them, you're got to change the vehicles

04:30 **that carry them.**

Well that's right. So, but and of course, the norwest was a special case with the things that I described previously, like the tide reports. But of course, I saw great changes in the north of Western Australia, the Pilbara boom, which we all know was just so dramatic, what was normally sleepy little places, transformed.

What years did the boom happen?

In the

05:00 '60s, whole new towns appeared. Pardon me.

Grab a glass of water if you like, I don't want you choking.

And of course, the Ord River development, we were proud of that, we carried all the heavy gear up there for all of those things, had a big fleet of nine ships at one stage.

05:30 And then other highlights were Cyclone Tracy in Darwin, wiping up Darwin, which was a big part of our operation, we played a big part in rebuilding Darwin.

Just getting materials.

A lot of West Australian gear went in there to rebuild Darwin, and of course a marketing bloke, I enjoyed that, and I finished up Marketing Manager. And for the final

06:00 decade, I was heavily involved in developing a trade between WA and Tasmania, I went down to Tasmania quite regularly, every couple of months. We moved all the paper products out of Tasmania, newsprint for WA newspapers, they used to bring three thousand tonnes a month, and fine papers out of the north. We used to bring Edgell's Frozen Goods, because the ships could carry

06:30 refrigerated components. And that was very interesting. We carried grain back there in boxes, we called in at Bunbury and picked up the almanight sam and took it down to the north of Tassie, we called at Burnie and Hobart. And we also put the ship into Melbourne and lifted product out of there for Pilkington's, we carried glass, glass travels very well by sea.

07:00 Carried stuff for Uncle Bens, the pet food manufacturers and they have a big factory up at Albury, Albury Wodonga, so all of that was very exciting. And it was sort of pioneering stuff I suppose in a way for us, and I enjoyed that. It was pretty demanding, I was very happy to knock off, but it was good to me, I had a good life at State ships, and of course, I've enjoyed a very

07:30 comfortable retirement. And I don't believe there is any truer phrase than the one coined by Mr Albert Facey [writer] after the First World War. I believe a lot of fellows of my vintage would have, use the same expression, that we've had a fortunate life.

What do you think you learnt most about your war experience?

Well I think you learned that everybody has a part of play,

08:00 like the story I told you about the fellow in Port Moresby who stood up for his rights, and turned out to be skilled in an area that you would never dream of. You learnt also to make allowances for people, because in a ship company's in a tight little community, you've got to get on. You don't have to like everybody, but you've got to recognise that everybody has got something to do, and can contribute, it's the only way it will work.

08:30 And you can't sort of be vindictive or anything like that, because you're all part of a team, you depend on one another. Not that I was ever in any emergency situation like lots of blokes that would have had, seen more action than I, but at the same time, you get things done by working together.

How have you spent Anzac Day over the years?

Anzac Day is a big day for me, because

09:00 as I mentioned previously, my Dad was a veteran, a true veteran of the First World War, and Anzac Day was important to him. And he started taking us over to the Fremantle War Memorial in 1930, we used to walk over from where we lived in East Fremantle, and I've been to the dawn service at Fremantle, every year since 1930, every year

09:30 that I've been here. The years I was away of course, I couldn't, I attended elsewhere if I could. When I was pursing, at times of course, I was up the coast, or on the road as a marketing manager. But every year, and we still do, we went in April this year. My two daughters and one of my sons and my grandson comes too, so we're carrying on the family tradition. I believe it's important to remember,

10:00 to commemorate what men have done, and I hope that it's carried on. And I'm pleased and gratified in fact, by the interest that young people are taking. And I think also that not enough is made of the contribution made by the women folk, the mothers, the wives, the sweethearts, sisters, girlfriends.

10:30 They contributed in a great way by writing even. Some of them knitted things and the blokes in the tropics might receive a balaclava, but they did things to help in one way or another, and they were just there. I attended a corvette reunion, when I say a corvette, at a reunion of members of the Royal Australian Navy

11:00 Corvettes Association, of which I'm a member of the WA branch. We attended a reunion in Canberra back in March, and Mrs Vale, the current Minister for Veteran Affairs, I thought she was lovely, she spoke very nicely. Of course, everyone talks about the corvettes and what a great job they did, a few people know about them, you know. Perhaps in the street you mention a corvette, and somebody talks about a motor car. But

11:30 she was very pleased to see so many ladies there, cause being a member of the Corvette Association, automatically entitles your wife to membership too, so Gwen's a member, she's an associate member. And she said it's lovely to see the ladies here, because it gives me an opportunity to recognise and comment on the role played by ladies during the war. And of course, no-one is more acutely aware of that than me,

12:00 having seen my own Mum, and what she went through. So I think that's wonderful, and the girls that stayed behind did lots of jobs, they worked on the farms. And of course, the girls in the services, they did all sorts of jobs, and today they're doing even more. But just playing the parts they did at home, like the lady that greeted me in Sydney,

12:30 I just thought that was wonderful, and lots of them were unsung, unheralded. It just, it's so important that we remember that, and I guess it's all part of what I said at the outset, it's hard for people to grasp what it's like when the whole country is at war. And as I said, that's borne out when you realise after the show when you're trying to get on with your life and you can't build a house, because the country hadn't geared itself up

13:00 for a civilian type existence. Now today of course, you have wonderful choices and a wide range of everything.

It's certainly changed so much over the years. Anyway, Andy thank you so much for talking to us today, the archive. You've been an absolute delight.

Well isn't that lovely? It's a pleasure, because I believe it, it deserves to be recorded. As I said, my contribution in terms of

13:30 a war effort, I guess, was pretty mundane, but you were there, you were available and you were ready, and a big slice of your life, at the time. You know, your teen years, which we didn't experience. We went from school to work and then service and back to work. But we're not,

14:00 I'm not critical of young people today.

Good.

I think they do pretty well. And there's a lot of pressure on them, they have wonderful things we never knew, access to so many wonderful tools for learning and they're so clever. Eight year olds can tune your telly [television], video, or can

14:30 sort something out on your computer in two ticks.

With that in mind, what would you like to pass onto kids of today for future reference.

Well, you hate to sort of sound like some old philosopher and some old wise fountain of knowledge, but I guess, some of the basics don't change, families are important.

15:00 And I know that's difficult to maintain today, because structures are different, and we accept that too. But it's important I think, if you can, to stay close to family. But it's also important I think to maintain friendships if you can, that's also sometimes difficult. Because times are changing at

15:30 such a rate, I was only saying earlier, that we learn that the only constant thing in life is change, but what is constantly moving, is the rate of change, things change so fast today, you just can't keep tabs on it. But it's nice when my grandchildren are here and I can make them a piece of toast over the fire, or show my grandson

16:00 how he can light a fire on a rainy day in the bush by going to a black boy and taking them the part underneath that's always dry, you can always light a fire in the bush. A few things like that, you think, oh well, I don't know, it may not be needed, but you do have a few things up your sleeve, I guess. And the other part that I said earlier, was trying to see some worth in everybody,

16:30 or accepting that everybody did have something to, most people have something to contribute.

I think that's a wonderful thought. Thanks very much Andy. And we'll just.

INTERVIEW ENDS