

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Barrymore Burke (Peter) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2223>

### Tape 1

- 00:40 I was born in Subiaco in Western Australia on May 25 1928. I remember going to school at Kalamunda
- 01:00 Primary School when I was roughly about six I think, and then a couple of years later went to Darlington State School. My mother ran the pie shop next to the school, all homemade pies and that. We shifted to Jarred Street in Cottesloe opposite Prime Minister John Curtin.
- 01:30 He wasn't prime minister then. I went to Cottesloe State School there. In 1939, it might have been the beginning of 1940, my New Zealand cousins were in the New Zealand 2nd
- 02:00 Expeditionary Force arrived at the school and they called me out and I looked up at these 6'4", 6'6" New Zealand soldiers and they said, "We're your cousins." He was later killed in Montecasino, the Battle of Montecasino. Have you heard of that?
- Yes.**
- I lived
- 02:30 just near the school on Monument Street, No. 8 Monument Street, Mosman Park. You'll never credit, I ran home to tell my Mum about the soldiers and they were marching from Fremantle and I was run over by a street cart, you know a horse and cart! Smashed my
- 03:00 bike up. I was all right though.
- That's actually really, really good detail, but for now...**
- Too much.
- Too much. Let's just skim over it. Any other schools you were at?**
- Later on. I went to war from that school.
- Cottesloe?**
- Cottesloe State School.
- 03:30 But before I went to war I worked on a farm up in a place called Corrigin. And I was also... My mother was a single mother and I was at Kellerberrin for a while at a Catholic
- 04:00 Children's Home and I was also at Corrigin farm. It was a relative. What I did, I backed his car into the back of the thing. I put it in reverse and backed it into the back of the garage. Also, I'd built a little ramp
- 04:30 out into the dam and the sheep walked off the ramp and into the dam and drowned so he wasn't too happy, so I got away before he came back from here. They were at a picnic and I came back to my mother.
- You are probably going into a bit of detail again. You can tell us all those stories.**
- I've been a bit of a devil.
- 05:00 **Okay, can you just give us a brief résumé version of your war service?**
- Right. About the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942 I was living in Monument Street, No. 8 Monument Street, Mosman Park, and in those days they only had a very slight sand track from Perth to Fremantle.
- 05:30 We started walking. A friend of mine, he asked me to go fishing with him. We got to Fremantle and started fishing and I'd never seen a ship before. He said, "The ships go..." He was a bit older than me.

He said, "Those ships go away overseas." I walked, left him and I walked around and I was used to doing things because I never had a father, see.

06:00 So I walked around to the ship's chandler and I said, "I want a job on a ship." He said, "How old are you?" and I said, "18." I was 13 and a bit and he said, "Oh yeah." Apparently at that time in early 1942 everyone had tried to leave the

06:30 ships and run to shore because the Japs were up, Sydney had just been sunk and they were bombing Darwin. I think it was about that time. But anyway the Japs were getting very close and they wanted to get off the ships because they were all getting sunk all over the world by submarines and aircraft and all that. So he said, "I can get you a job straight away

07:00 as a mess boy." Anyway I went on this ship and found that no-one spoke English. They were all Norwegians. I don't know if it was coincidence in that it was the same ship that was there later on, but on this ship no-one understood me and I couldn't understand them, but they pointed out what to do

07:30 and that's how I learnt. The captain came aboard and he said, "I can tell you're not 18. You'll have to go away and come back later." Anyway the ship's chandler arranged a job at the mission to seamen for me and I was mopping the floors and running the ice cream parlour, the milk bar,

08:00 but I used to make more milkshakes for myself. Pure ice cream, pure chocolate and then pure malt. I used to come out in boils. Bloody boils all over the place! And they used to have a tiny little closet and I slept there every night. This was about three months, 3½ to four months. It could have been longer; I forget now. Any how they used to

08:30 pay me a very small amount of money. I think it was about six or eight shillings a week, something like that.

**I'll have to intervene here.**

I'm talking too much.

**The stories are too good for this moment.**

Funny though. That's where I learnt to dance.

**Which campaigns were you involved with? Just one, two, three, four. Which ones?**

I was in,

09:00 well the first major one was up along the African coast, North African coast say from Egypt, Alexandria, Port Said, Port Taufiq around that way to Tripoli and then Algiers. That was the first lot.

**You went to Algiers?**

09:30 I want tell what happened there with a girl, but I met the prettiest girl there in history and I was only, not quite 15.

**What were other campaigns?**

Well what happened in Tripoli, I shot down a bomber

10:00 on the way there, a German bomber. We had been bombed. Well as soon as we left Alexandria we seemed to be bombed just about every day, several times a day and sometimes at night and this, I sort of had an idea what might happen. I put myself in their place. What would I do after a bombing raid? They would relax, wouldn't they? The anti-aircraft crew would relax. They would go and have something,

10:30 a coffee or something. And I said, "If I was a bomber pilot I would be attacking the straggler." And we were a straggler because we couldn't go as fast as the other convoy and we dropped behind. So all the officers... And apart from the person steering the ship and possibly an officer on watch there was no-one else on the deck. And I was up just near this gun, a machine gun,

11:00 and sure enough out of the distance came this very low flying bomber and I watched it and it dropped its bombs. It nearly hit the ship but not quite. The spray came over the stern of the ship and I was up the middle part of it. I forget what it was called. Midships, you see, with my hands just near the gun. Because what happened too,

11:30 everyone wanted to fire the gun. It was like a hobby for all sailors. They knew I was young but didn't know how young. So they were kind of strong and they used to bash you if you tried to get to the guns before them. So anyway I had my hands on the gun. It was loaded with tracers and armour piercing and the bullets

12:00 and also incendiary bullets. The plane came up and dropped its bombs. The spray came over and the pilot was revving his engine up and turning his plane like that and he looked down like that and I put, there was no other bullets in the plane by the way so it hadn't been in action before. It looked like a new plane, twin engine, and I could see the head of another man too, and I put bullets all the way along him

like that and he didn't alter his facial expression

12:30 because he was watching me all the time, so I don't know if it hit him or some instruments. It turned around and went for about half a mile and then crashed. That was the first time I had killed people. I didn't say anything to anyone. In fact I didn't say anything to many people at all because they would have got jealous for a start because they wanted... Anyway

13:00 I got to Tripoli and we were getting bombed intermittently. And on the way to Tripoli we were bombed several times. Daytime and night-time. We used to hear Axis Sally saying, "You boys on such-and-such a number ship," or the name of the ship they used to say, which was Stirlingville, "we are going to bomb the shit out of you." Something like that.

13:30 Axis Sally. Have you heard of her? You haven't heard of her.

**I'm not sure. We've heard a lot of.....**

Lord Haw Haw and Axis Sally was the woman.

**Oh I see.**

I forget the song:

\n[Verse follows]\n "Underneath the lantern\n By the barrack..."

That one. Anyway, we got...

**What was your next campaign after North Africa?**

But this is,

14:00 if you want to know about something that happened at Tripoli it was unbelievable.

**I want you to tell us, but you'll have the whole day to tell us.**

Okay. From...

**From North Africa, where else?**

From Tripoli I left the ship there to visit a ship somewhere else. The ship was bombed and I was injured. I've got a bit mark on my leg, you know. I watched the ship blow up the following day. It had been on fire all night and I watched it blow up the next day and I saw them push it towards, before it blew up, towards

14:30 the other side of the harbour and it went bang like that. I believe according to records it was the biggest explosion in the Middle East. All ships in those days were loaded with bombs, high explosives, high octane gas and that sort of thing and that was, our ship was... But I was in the hospital so I couldn't get back to the ship you see because I had this big gash.

15:00 **What were the other campaigns you were involved in?**

Okay, well they sent me back on the hospital ship Auralia to Alexandria. Previous to that I did a dems [demolitions] gunnery course. Do you know what this is?

**Yes.**

Demolition gunnery, which had entitled me to more money each week. I had the certificate until recently and I showed it to a lot of guys and they pinched it all. I've had so much stolen.

15:30 That day I saw two guys double back into the room over there and they took the New York Coast Guard pass, the certificate, the AV83, which is equipment for military, and anyway. They got me onto another ship called Thistlemuir and Thistlemuir was obviously made just for invasion.

16:00 It had big booms over port and starboard, forward and aft LCMs [Landing Craft Mechanised]. Do you know what they are? Landing craft mechanised. Four of them like that hanging off the booms, flat, then they had four on a slight angle up along the sides of the ship like that raised up, and then they had another six I think or eight on the

16:30 hulls, on top of the hulls like that. Down below decks was thousands of bunks for soldiers. So it was an invasion ship. Then they had more armament than any other ship. Unbelievable! Bristling with every sort of armaments. We had rockets,

17:00 had our own barrage balloon, we had three very heavy guns and lots of machine guns and all 20 mm like that. Dozens and dozens of them. Anyway I joined that ship and they said, "What are you?" and I said, "A mess boy." They said, "We don't want a mess boy, we want an ordinary seaman." And I said, "I'm not an ordinary seaman," and they said, "We'll make you one." So I joined that ship as an ordinary seaman.

17:30 Anyway away we went up the coast. As soon as you left Alexandria they started bombing you. We got to Phillipville. Wait a minute, on the way we got to Tripoli where I had been bombed and been in hospital

and gone back in one of the hospital ships and I'd left a Beretta, pistol do you know what that is?

**Yes.**

I'd left it

18:00 underneath a rock so I always do mad things. I dived off the ship. It was two miles off, don't forget. Anchored and waiting for all the ships to join the convoy. I'll tell you why in a second. And I said to the boys, "Don't tell anyone but I'm going to swim to the shore to get this Beretta." Anyway I didn't realise it was a long way. I finally got there but I didn't have the strength to get back and the gun had disappeared anyway. I got

18:30 one of the Royal Navy guys to bring me back in a speedboat and off we went. I'd suffered damaged to my head and ears and this in the previous explosion there so on the way up to Algiers they pulled into a place called Phillipville. I went to the 96 General Military Hospital and I looked at the thing when I was in

19:00 bed and they had gone out of the room, and they have 'immersion' and 'bomb blast'. Anyway I had a time there. The ships were all there waiting to congregate for an invasion. I didn't know that at the time and I went to Algiers. That's where I met the prettiest blonde, the prettiest girl in history. She was unbelievable! Anyway I can't say too much about, that can I?

**You can say anything you want.**

19:30 **You can swear if you want.**

Well she was unbelievable! And it was the best looking hotel I had ever been in. It was all gilt, gilt everywhere, and even bird cages were gilt! Anyway, pardon me. Anyway we left Algiers. Before that don't forget that the Germans had been there only a matter of a week before you know, or week or so

20:00 before, and there was these huge barrels as high as this house and as round as this and I heard sailors say, "I wonder what's in there?" So I grabbed a fire axe and a bucket and I knew it had to be some sort of liquor and I punched a hole in it and it was wine. Essence of wine. They must dilute it or something. Anyway I started drinking that

20:30 and it was so shocking. That's why I don't drink any more now. It was shocking. I had the biggest headache and hangover. In the meantime, the ship had sailed and we were each given a book, A Soldier's Guide to Sicily. When you go through it there was a few words of Italian, what to do, what not to do, watch the girls, don't drink the ordinary water from bores because the Germans used to poison the wells.

21:00 Anyway just before 11th July 1943 they gave us a tot of rum and four bottles of beer, small bottles of beer and this was the invasion. We landed at Red Beach which is Marsemine Beach between Avola and Stroma which is 20 kms

21:30 left on the map anyway of Syracuse in Sicily.

**I'm going to have to pause you there. Because we are going too far into the war at this stage.**

Too far.

**We are running out of tape now. We'll get back to the war. You've got all the day to talk about the war so don't worry about that.**

Back to, with all the prisoners of war.

22:00 **No we were going to go way back before the war to where you grew up. So if you want to tell us about any of your family members, like your father and your Mum, and just give us a general idea of what it was like growing up with them and where you grew up?**

I hardly remember my father much because he used to drink a lot. He was a soldier as well, from World War I. The only thing I can remember of him was

22:30 before the war anyway. We were having breakfast one day and he came and he was drunk and he'd smashed the car up, his car, and he pushed all the stuff, all the table like that. The next thing my mother left him. The same day we just grabbed our stuff and left because a woman can't live with a drunken man. In those days it was never done. The woman always left the husband.

23:00 What else do you want me to...? Oh, about my father. Well that's my father. My mother. We didn't have any money at all. I used to get about maybe one coin a year maybe. Maybe threepence a month maybe.

23:30 We lived out in the middle of the bush in Kalamunda, corner of Tralan Road and Seaview Road. We used to go to the dairy to get our milk. We had to carry water from a neighbours too, a kerosene can like this. My playmates. I was too far away

24:00 for most playmates but at Hooker's farm they had a boy there and a kid called Harry Bird, and they were my playmates. Other than that I just played with spiders and scorpions, kookaburras, blue tongue

lizards, snakes, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. We had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s right alongside the thing.

- 24:30 But there was a big tree and it had bees coming in the top and I'd noticed that. I'd read about smoking out bees and it had a big hollow in the tree. Right alongside the house it was. So I started this fire and nothing happened. The bees were still there. The fire went out but I didn't realise it had gone up inside the tree, and a bit of a wind came up and the tree collapsed,
- 25:00 killing a lot of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, damaging part of the house and knocking the tank stand out, which was always full of bloody mosquito larvae anyway. I had to carry the water for the rest of the time in Kalamunda. As I said, I went to Darlington then and my mother started this pie shop from her house alongside the school.
- 25:30 Pasties, lamingtons and sausage rolls. And there used to be a shop nearby and they all left the shop and went to us because it was fresh stuff, cooked every day. My mother was a good cook, excellent cook. Not like Maryanne now, but she's a terrible cook. Lovely lady, but she's just a bad cook. Then I used to do...
- 26:00 We shifted to Jarred Street in Cottesloe.

**Where's Cottesloe? Is that in WA [Western Australia]?**

Yeah, yeah. On the Stirling Highway, the main highway from Fremantle to Perth. I used to do a bit of work for, he became prime minister, John Curtin. Just delivering his pamphlets.

**What sort of work, just doing pamphlets?**

- 26:30 Yeah I was in the back part of the boot with the pamphlets. I used to have to fold them. He did nothing - he just drove his car and I used to run out like a rabbit to all these bloody houses. He was smart that way because he understood that you've actually got to approach people to get them to... He's a smart guy. Anyway, other jobs. I worked in a grocery after school but I used to
- 27:00 drink all their soda water. I got the sack for eating too much chocolate and drinking their soda water. I worked for the milkman too and then the bread carter. I used to sit on the cart and sometimes he used to let me drive the horse. He only used to give me sixpence and a loaf of bread for the whole day.
- 27:30 It was bloody hard work. That's 5 cents in today's money and that. And I also used to make money by getting the manure from the horses. Everyone had horses. In those days there wasn't that many cars around. I'd sell the manure to people with gardens. My mother used to make cakes and I'd travel miles selling cakes. All over the place, knocking on doors and that. We'd also sell flowers.
- 28:00 She had the best garden you'd ever struck. As soon as we went to a house, we'd rent a house for say 10 shillings a week or something like that, and she would make the entire back and front yard one big flower garden. Even into the front of the house sometimes! So we'd sell the flowers and vegetables. Cauliflowers and cabbages and things like that. One time I would have baby kangaroos as pets. They would always die. We didn't know how to feed them.
- 28:30 We used to give them ordinary milk and they'd die of diarrhoea, you see. I'd catch seagulls. Where I was the beach wasn't far away and the Swan River wasn't far away so I had the beach and the Swan River and I used to build my own canoes and go out in the Swan River. Out of just a piece of corrugated iron, seal up the each end. Put a bit of tar at the end
- 29:00 and a couple of empty kerosene cans for buoyancy and calico sheet for a sail and off I'd sail. I'd build my own surfboards, great big long ones, and I'd smash them up on the reef at Cottesloe. What else? Used to play a lot of truant from school. I'd always get the cuts [strap] all the time. Even when I came back from the war I went back to school. I got a scholarship
- 29:30 to Christchurch Grammar School and the teacher said, "You are not allowed to talk about the war. You are not allowed to drink and you are not allowed to smoke and you are not allowed to swear." I was quite nice and all the boys liked me and my job was to win races for them and things like that. I would win most of the school races, but when we came up against elite places like Perth Modern
- 30:00 School or Scotch College or Hale School it was a different story. They had pretty good athletes and bigger schools than Christchurch Grammar School.

**You spoke about some cousins coming down from New Zealand before.**

That was before the war. The war had just started. I don't know if it was the end of 1939

- 30:30 or the beginning of 1940. I was in 5th grade and I had just been, I just went into 6th grade. Mr Love was the teacher, Jack Love. And before that was Mr Hill. And they said, "There are two soldiers out the front that want to see you." And went out
- 31:00 and these huge amount of soldiers all sitting around the schoolyard on Stirling Highway and these two huge fellows. I was looking up like that. They were huge. They would have to be 6' 4", 6' 6", and they said, "We're your cousins from New Zealand." And they said, "Where do you live?" I said, "If you go down the road to

31:30 No. 8 Monument Street," I said, "just go past the horse yard there and over that paddock and you'll... Our house is up there, No. 8 on the right." Just past the local RSL [Returned and Services League], which I became the youngest member in Australia of an RSL. I joined it when I was 16 years and 7 months old

32:00 and no-one has joined it.

**Where was that?**

Mosman Park RSL. It's since been closed down of course. Where was I up to?

**About those New Zealand soldiers.**

Oh yeah.

**Did you know them?**

I remember one was Glen. I forget the other one. Anyway Glen was killed in the Battle of Montecassino in Italy. I was just near there myself later on. I went from

32:30 the place of action from Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Sicily and I carried prisoners back to Port Said and my best friend was in the Herman Goering Division. The Panzer Division you know.

**You had a best friend in the Herman Goering Division?**

I had to look after him. He thought I was 19 and he was 19

33:00 and he'd been on the Russian front. He had the Iron Cross but I was much stronger than him and at the time of the Sicily campaign I had just turned 15. I was something like I was built now. I haven't changed. I was 5' 7½" at 13 and a big boy all the time. Very strong. I used to have many fights with all the boys because I was cocky

33:30 you know. I wasn't nasty but cocky, but they would get nasty with them and they would want to fight, which I'd oblige them. Most fights. I even fought a guy that used to be able to pick up a railway line like this and lift it up and down. He'd do that. But I wore him out. I fought him for hours and hours and hours and finally he was crying and he was a grown man. About 24 or something like this. One of these huge fellows with a great big chest.

34:00 But I was quick and kept out of his way. If he had hit me once he would have killed me. I remember one guy hit me once and broke three ribs and I just had to put up. I could feel the pain and I knew it was broken.

**So when did you display an interest, how old were you when you started to see the army that was something that was attractive, or the armed forces?**

34:30 Everyone was in the armed forces. It was a normal thing. Seeing the New Zealand soldiers, there were Americans marching around Perth with twin holstered guns. American forces everywhere. So to me it was as though the American forces there were just normal. Everyone was in the armed forces.

35:00 The ships were understaffed because enough of them had had enough of the war. So many ships were getting sunk that they were nicking off to shore or just sticking around Perth and Fremantle to avoid going back to the war. I'll tell you what happened on that Norwegian ship. The first one I was on. Around about June,

35:30 or it might have been a bit before in May, I had just... That's right, it was May. I had just turned... It was May. And I fronted this same ship's chandler and I said, "I want to go back on the ships," and he said, "Look, I know you are young but I can get you a job. There is a saloon boy's job going on a Norwegian ship." So I went on there and

36:00 they accepted me. There again they didn't speak English much and I didn't speak much Norwegian. None at all in fact. The captain was a really... He appeared to me to be really old. He was probably about 50 or something. And anyway the steward was a very, he used to sort of boss him around all the time. I used to hide all the time and not do too much work.

**How old were you when you got on this ship?**

I was 14 and a couple of weeks old.

**And this was when the war started?**

Yeah. The war had already been going. This was, I sailed anyway. I've got the passport there. It says June. They wouldn't give you the exact date. You weren't allowed to in the war. But it was 8th June, 18th or something like that. "This ship will depart Australian

37:00 waters for overseas." It's in my passport. I'll show you if you want to have a look. Anyway this captain used to talk to me because he spoke English and most of the others didn't. He said, "I've had this war. I'm not going to get killed in this war. I'm going to get ashore at the first port we get to. I'm just going

to go. You are the only one that knows this," he said to me.

- 37:30 Anyway I used to have to take in his food and he had his own cabin and I would take his food from the stewards, the galley. I would come from the galley and the stewards and I'd take it in to him. Sure enough, he did. When we left. As soon as we left Fremantle. This is the first thing of the gunfire.
- 38:00 As soon as we got out of Gage Roads in Fremantle. That's the entrance. They call it Gage Roads. And they said, "You've all got to do fire the guns off." They had, there used to be biplanes in those days. Two wings. They didn't have single wings. And they towed this sort of big fluttering thing. I don't know what it was
- 38:30 but it was a big huge thing like that fluttering in the wind and each of us had a go at different guns that had been put on the ship in Fremantle. They had Oerlikons, four Oerlikon things, gun emplacements. They had a three-inch gun placed on the stern, anti aircraft, and sea and land gun,
- 39:00 and then they had a twin Hoskiss on each of the stern in front of the three-inch gun. And later on we got more guns when we went to the United States and also Alexandria. So we had to fire at this thing. For a 14-year-old boy, just turned 14, being able to fire twin
- 39:30 Hoskisses. In the case of the 20 mm you are strapped in and you can see it. It's unbelievable the feel of it! And then they towed a boat that we had to fire at the boat. That was being towed by some sort of other boat, naval craft. So we would fire on this
- 40:00 dummy boat. Really, really good feeling.

**I have to stop you there. We have run out of tape.**

## Tape 2

- 00:31 **So we are back on. How old were you when the war started?**

I was 11.

**11?**

Yeah.

**And what do you remember about that time?**

Oh yeah. This is funny. Remember I left the farm because I had smashed the car and the sheep had jumped off the thing in the dam so I got a job at Winterbottoms,

- 01:00 that was a motor company, doing petrol but that was too hard a work, and then they got me polishing cars and that was too hard a work. They had Repo and that used to stick and I used to get sore arms so I got a job then at a car sales place. In those days the car sales were only inside. They didn't have them outside in the car yard. And they had these beautiful old-fashioned cars with wheels on the side.
- 01:30 And billeted out the back of the car place was a lot of soldiers and trucks and horses. A few horses. Anyway my job was when the boss was out to try and sell the cars, but not many people used to buy them. He even got fed up! And then I used to have to clean the floors. All polished wood floors and I would
- 02:00 have to start them in the morning. I didn't do anything wrong then like smash them up. That was terrible. I didn't know what liquor was. Even though my father used to drink a lot I never knew him much and there were boxes and boxes of liquor around in the big kitchen at the back of this car yard, but I thought the white stuff was just water, bottled water and I
- 02:30 thought it might have been tea because when I was working on the farm I used to do mallee weed clearing and we'd have a bit of cake all day, cakebread. We would work from six in the morning until dusk and just a tiny break about 10.00 and midday and this is all we'd eat, a bit of cake and weak tea. No sugar and no milk. I thought that
- 03:00 was weak tea, it turned out to be whisky. I thought it was funny all these nice bottles just for tea and water. Anyway all these soldiers are eyeing off and watching this stuff and they said, "Can we have some of that?" and I said it was water and tea. "Can we have some of that water and tea?" Smarties. I wasn't so clued up you know at 13 at that time.
- 03:30 So I said, "Yeah, help yourself." And they would be singing and one went out in a truck and hit a horse. Killed the horse and smashed the truck up. They were having the greatest time and they'd all be singing and laughing and the boss would say, "What is all the noise? They are all happy all the time." And one day he looked
- 04:00 and he found some of his stuff was missing. He went red in the face and he was a copy and he used to

be gaiters and bright things to hold up your clothes. Then all the cars were dark green, dark blue or black. No other colours. And everyone wore, all the men seemed to wear pork pie hats and

04:30 overcoats and drab clothing. It wasn't modern stuff. He said, "You're fired! Get out of here!" I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "You've given away all my friggin gin away." I said, "I thought it was water and tea." So anyway, fired from that. What was I talking about?

### **The start of the war. Was that**

05:00 **your first encounter with soldiers?**

Yeah I grew up with it. To me I thought the war was a natural thing. When you are eleven you're not that clued up so to me the life was soldiers everyone, American soldiers everywhere. My cousins in the New Zealand expeditionary forces and 2nd

05:30 New Zealand Expeditionary Force. And I made the graduation to the war through this big kid that took me fishing. I didn't have the patience to stand there - it drove me mad - so I said, "I'll walk around to see the ships going away." So I walked around and got this job with the ship's chandler. Anyway do you want me to go on from there?

06:00 **I'd just like to know that more in detail. You went fishing with this bloke and that's how you joined up, is it?**

We walked all the way from Mosman Park up to Fremantle. It was just a dirt road in those days. There were charabancs and we couldn't afford anything like that in those days. In those days too they were run by the Metro Motor Company. And we'd see the people pushing the buses out of the sand. There would be all these people pushing these antiquated

06:30 buses out of the sand and they used to break down quite easy too the old cars in those days and the buses too. The trains. They had trains going from Fremantle to Perth and they were steam trains. I can remember the excitement. We would stand on the overhead things like this and hold our breath and the steam would all go and the fumes and the sparks and

07:00 things like that. Funny. You've got no idea. I was always getting the cuts all the time wagging school and talking in class. I learned how to deal with bullies. I was never bullied in any school I went to. I seen them attacking other boys and I noticed they were generally

07:30 thickset boys. They seemed to be quite normal other than that. They were tough-looking boys. Either they were tough or they were tough looking because they were big. This boy once, his name was Jim Barnes. Something like the thing, but his name was actually Jim Barnes.

08:00 And he lived in Jarred Street on the Stirling Highway and he had a very rough old house and his parents I could tell were a bit rough. Anyway he said to me, "I'm going to bash you up and if you cry I won't do it. Come behind the reccy hall, the recreation hall." So I went back there and he says, "I'm going

08:30 to bash you up unless you cry," and I went 'bang' and hit him right in the snout. It started to bleed and I said, "No more bloody bashing up the other boys." Don't forget I was only about twelve. They start early these bullies and unless you stop them they continue through. The bullies are the cops that beat up people and the criminals and gangs

09:00 that beat up other people in life. They've got to be stopped. Finally they eventually become dictators. Bully boys in power, ultimate power.

### **Why do you think it is, you beat up the bullies so theoretically you could have become the bully of the school if you wanted?**

Never, never have.

### **Why didn't you become one?**

09:30 I've never started a fight. If a person approaches me and I can see that this road, as I said I was very quick and I would beat them to it, but I've never also found if I was getting on top of them physically I would let them go, and sometimes they attack behind my back. The Arabs used to do that in Egypt. I used to fight them and next thing they would be

10:00 they would shake hands and then turn your back and they would attack you from behind with a stone or a stick, you see. What else do you want to know?

### **So the day that you decided to join up it was a spur of the moment thing or...?**

Oh yeah. I did it straight away because I used to do everything straight away. I've had

10:30 many sort of different things. Because of my war experience after the war I went on to the drink a bit and couldn't keep a job. I had about when did I come back? I forget when I came back. Oh yeah, January '45 and then I went back to school

11:00 for a bit and then I had a couple of lost years and then I joined the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force]



in 1947. Then I stopped in that for about a year and a couple of months. I've got the discharge there. But it's people ordering me around. I never liked that and they refused to confirm

11:30 my rank because of not being too partial to taking orders and so I got out of that. And I just said, "I'm not doing anything. I want to get out." They said, "You can't get out. You are in the army." So I just did nothing and they used to try and order me around and I just refused the order. So they let me out of the army with a disciplinary discharge.

12:00 It wasn't dishonourable - they were just glad to get rid of me I think.

**The day you joined up, so you were fishing and you said, "Off we go to the ships around the corner."**

My mate did catch a fish but I just, I probably was what do they call? Not hypersensitive. Hyperactive. I was a bit hyperactive because

12:30 I liked to do things all the time instead of just sitting around. That was not my thing. I wanted to play some physical sports or something like that. Climb trees, go swimming, sail in the Swan River in my little homemade canoe or in my little homemade surfboard down at the beach. That sort of stuff. I built my own boats and my own surf skis

13:00 and my own little trailers and I would trailer them down. I had a good time and my mother was always glad to see the back. She had very sharp eyes and she would say, "Have you been to school today?" And I would see this flicker way in the distance and it might be Glide Street, Cottesloe, that went right down to the, I forget now, or New Street

13:30 and I would turn out to be her. "I saw you walking down towards the river," because she was always out baking cakes and making these flowers ready and she had her own customers. For me to get a little bit of pocket money, which was very little, threepence a month, I would have to sell these flowers and sell these cakes and travel. One day I'll tell you I was, this is when we were at Kalamunda

14:00 we lived alongside people called Thoroughgoods. They were very wealthy people and had a big mansion. They looked down from the top of our hill in the bush to this huge mansion. There was swimming pools and fountains and stuff like that, and over the other side of Kalamunda I would go through hills and bush were EC Price. They owned apple orchards. They owned apple orchards anyway

14:30 and they were regular customers so I would take a cake. They always ordered a special cake. One day I couldn't resist, there was a big tunnel. I looked in and I thought, "I'd love to look in there." Anyway I took my clothes off because there was water at the beginning and I would have got wet. You'll never credit but I was only nine at the time or something like that. And it seemed to

15:00 go on for ever and ever and there was bloody redback spiders and all this stuff and I was getting a bit worried about this. And anyway I got to the other end and there I am standing in the nude with a bloody cake at the other end of this huge tunnel with water going through. It was about this deep I suppose. It was a big frightening, especially with all these bloody cobwebs and spiders. You could see them, giant ones you know.

15:30 I know I turned up with practically nothing on at this lady's place. She was very wealthy. The Prices had, I forget now, apple orchards. They owned all these orchards and she paid me and she was looking like this at me in the nude. And I get there and then I

16:00 had to go over the top of this hill and get my clothes and walk back home. I'm talking about big hills. In Kalamunda it is all hills. Big hills.

**Just stop for one second. Back on and...**

Before the war I did a bit of tap dancing. I liked that because there were plenty of girls around with little skirts and

16:30 I also learnt at the Andre Drummond School of Dancing in Perth too. That was before the war. I had a little bit of money. Remember I worked at that little car place before he sacked me. I went dancing a short time but it stood me in good stead because wherever I went in the world I didn't like smoking. I tried it a bit but I didn't like it. It used to make me ill.

17:00 I didn't like drinking a lot too so I used to go skating. For example, if I was in New York I went to, what do they call it? That thing in New York? The skating rink? I forget anyway. I used to go skating in New York, ice skating. If I was in Alexandria I went

17:30 to the Astors Skating Rink in Alexandria.

**When you before the war dancing with the girls, what were the girls like back then?**

What were they like? They seemed to like me a lot. Oh yeah, I always

18:00 I always got a long very well with girls. The prettier they are they seem to be the better, because I think girls that are not so pretty get a bit frustrated and slightly depressed because they are not pretty. That

sort of thing. A lot of boys are

18:30 not frightened but they don't like to approach pretty girls, but I found that they are the nicest ones to talk to and they still are. I went to a dance the other night and I danced with the prettiest girls in the place you see. Probably about four or five, no more than that, about six hundred people and they had an average age of about 30

19:00 and there I am going on 77 and jiving. I can jive and chuck them over my head and everything. I wear them all out. "Give us a break, Peter." I go from one to the other because I'm reasonably fit. I love dancing.

**Were the attitudes of the girls that you knew in the 1940s different from the girls that you knew in the 1970s**

19:30 **and whatever or...?**

No, even when I came back from the war I always used to get stacks of girls. No worries at all. Never any worries. They used to attract me and I used to attract them sort of thing.

**Were their attitudes to life different and their feelings to life in general?**

Well the main thing with all girls was have some fun. I've always found that.

20:00 They don't like, they put up with a dull person if they've got stacks of money or something like that but generally they like the combination of reasonably handsome man. As long as he likes to go out and have a bit of fun and spend a bit of money. Everyone knows about that I suppose. Of course that's exactly what I like doing, see. I liked dancing.

20:30 A friend of mine has a new Mercedes and we go out with him every time. We go out about once a month I suppose. Averages once a month I suppose. And he drives. Otherwise it costs a bit of money to do these things so it would take a hell of a lot of money in taxi fares to go to some places

21:00 if you had to go. When we go we go to Altona, to Taylors Lakes, a place in Frankston, Dandenong and Melbourne Town Hall. All places like that.

**When you joined up you were only 13.**

The first time, yeah.

**Can you take us through...**

13½ it was.

**Can you take us through in detail how you were actually were able to join up when you were 13 ½?**

21:30 This guy took me fishing and if I had seen a ship I hadn't noticed it, and all of a sudden we were in Gage Roads fishing and I was frustrated fishing. He was catching fish and he had told me about going to sea. He was an older bloke, several years older than me you see, and everywhere

22:00 were soldiers and sailors and airmen. Everywhere, you see. So I just walked around to this ship's chandler. I think, it wasn't Lyn, it might have been a Lyn company. Later on the funny thing was when I got a scholarship to Christchurch Grammar School in Claremont,

22:30 Stirling Highway, Claremont, one of my friends was Buddy Lyn. They had a big two-storey house in Mosman Bay and I only lived about quarter of mile away but in a small house in... What's the name of the street?

23:00 Anyway it was a smaller house just near St Hilda's Girls' School you see on... I knew a lot of the girls from that school there too. I won't tell you what used to happen. The girls used to call it 'my house'. My mother used to shoo them off and this is after I came back from the war and she said, "You've got to study," because I was getting this scholarship and it was free

23:30 at this expensive grammar school you see, but they expected me to pass my exams and one of the things they asked me was, "What were you in before the war?" and I said, "I was in fifth standard. I had just passed onto sixth." They thought I meant fifth form, which is a lot of difference, and they put me in fifth form, which is about five standards higher, and of course I didn't know

24:00 anything about it and I had been away for nearly three years of the war. It was very hard I can tell you. I was always getting the cuts almost every day and some of the poor boys they would be very weak looking and I was very strong and, like a man in a boy's, like a man's physique in a boys' school. So I used to take the cuts for them.

24:30 The teacher would say, "You want to take it. All right you can take it." So I would get the cuts and my hands were all blue with the cuts because I used to get them every day. Very sore. Anyway three of the people that were in this grammar school were unbelievable. One of them, I've got his

- 25:00 name down there. He's a writer in one of the newspapers and he was the queen's secretary. That was one of them. He became the queen's secretary. And another was a famous trumpeter that became Professor of Music at Monash University and another was the head of the leftist party
- 25:30 in the socialist party. What do they call it? Socialist left in the Labor party and they were some of my classmates. I remember this funny thing happening. They used to eat behind and when the teacher wasn't looking they used to eat their sandwiches and this kid was saying something to me and throwing something at me so I grabbed his hand and pushed the sandwich and the teacher is looking and I
- 26:00 look around and here is this big sandwich sitting in his face. Oh funny! This other kid that became Professor of Music. They are well-known people. He used to play his trumpet like this, especially when the teacher was out, otherwise he would do it without any sound. It was funny.

**Why did you join the navy and not the army or the air force?**

I joined the merchant marine. Well I couldn't possibly

- 26:30 have got away with it. They are not that stupid. Even though I looked older. I was very strong. I was never, I was beat once in a fight and that was at Snowy Hill's gym in Brisbane and this guy. I was fighting for money
- 27:00 and he was older than me, much older and he looked very tough and I was belting the shit out of him and what he did he went back like that and I missed him with a thing and he just put out his fist and that was the last. I came up fighting and everyone had left the ring. I had been knocked cold so I gave up the fight business. That was funny.
- 27:30 **What was training like when you joined the merchant marines?**
- The merchant marines? They trained you in gunnery, all the different sorts of guns. I went to Montevideo. That was the first city. All was blacked out, all of Perth. Once it turned dark you couldn't see anything and you had to walk everywhere and no buses.
- 28:00 The unions kept everything from happening on Saturday and Sunday, and after 6.00 p.m. all the pubs were emptied. You weren't allowed to drink after 6.00 p.m. There were always sly grog shops of course. Same as the gambling and that. You weren't allowed to gamble at all. They didn't have the TAB [Totalizator Agency Board] or that stuff. I forget what it's called.
- 28:30 The SP [starting price] bookie. They would know all the wealthy people. The wealthy people were the dentist and the SP bookies. They were the wealthy people and the big business. I went to Montevideo. That was my first port of call and I couldn't believe everything was lit up and girls everywhere. And in those days the police had swords,
- 29:00 big long swords, and they would slap girls on the bum when they obviously knew they were talking to people from another country. Obviously I wasn't brown like they were, the South Americans. I was white. Anyway I had my first intercourse there with about eight girls. The scragged me and I accepted it. I met this paper boy and he said, "I'm English,"
- 29:30 and he was as black as, very black. And I said, "Have you got any girlfriends that you can introduce me to?" and he threw the papers away. This is true. He threw them back to the newsagents. They had newsagents out in the street and he said, "I'm going." I said that I would pay him something if he'd introduce me to some girls and he introduced me to all these girls. They were beautiful, they were, and they scragged me you know. Anyway left there
- 30:00 with whole boxes of chocolates and things. You get them so cheap in Montevideo, Uruguay and out in the harbour, the river plate was the Graftspeer. You could see the superstructure sticking out of the water and there is a German sailor around with postcards of the sinking of the Graftspeer. They sabotaged the ship so it wouldn't fall
- 30:30 into Allied hands.

**Was it dangerous at all this early trip?**

Yeah. Between Cape Horn. I went around Cape Horn twice before I was 14½, which is unusual. I remember a seeing a guy getting write up because he had been around once when he was 18. I had been around twice when I was 14½. Just

- 31:00 past. When we left Fremantle the next closest port of call was Montevideo. That's when the old skipper said, "I'm getting out." But on the way there two things happened. We saw a submarine's periscope and the gunners crews all opened fire on it, including me. I was on the gun and next thing the periscope was withdrawn and disappeared That was one thing
- 31:30 that could have been dangerous. We don't know who it was, probably an Allied ship, Allied submarine. The next thing was I saw my first snow. I saw the stuff coming down and I was in the steward's place and I said, "What's that?" and he said, "That's snow," and I raced up and there was bloody snow! The seas were mountainous, mountainous, and the ship was rolling and you know what happened? It had three pistons this ship and it was built in 1918

- 32:00 and one of the pistons had cracked and they had put out a big sea anchor. An enormous thing just before going around Cape Horn. And I looked in the engine room and here's this engineer swinging on a thing like that and every time he approached the piston he would swing when the ship rolled. He had this huge spanner which was about this big to fit a nut about that
- 32:30 big and he would grab a hold and try and loosen this bloody nut. He was a very strong man, a big strapping guy, and he eventually got that. I only saw him working but he probably had other guys down there. And eventually he got his piston out and they had other pistons alongside, about three or four others spare, and they must have put that new piston in. And meantime these enormous seas and things like that.
- 33:00 They got the ship going again and around we went and around the Horn. Where did we go to from there? We went to Montevideo. That's where the old skipper, he grabbed his bags and said, "I'm off." He told me. He said, "I'm going now." Then it was only then that he told the first officer, who also qualifies as a captain, so he moved up one rank and the first officer took over the captain. He was a good looking young guy.
- 33:30 Very nice looking. Very fluent in English and he was a good violinist. He used to play that all the time the same tune. He tried to learn others but that was his main one. It sound all right. Anyway he would always say, "Takk ver mat," which was 'thank you' in Norwegian. A very pleasant fellow. And we went from
- 34:00 Montevideo then across to it was called White Man's Grave or Freetown, and you weren't allowed ashore. Now this is a habit of mine that when I wanted to do a thing I'd do it you see. So, "I've got a toothache," and I didn't. They said, "You'll have to go ashore," and I said, "All right then." We went ashore in what was called a banana boat because Freetown in those days had nothing. All you could see was dense jungle
- 34:30 and you could hear lions roaring and all that sort of stuff. So the first thing, I'd never seen a lion and I wanted to get ashore. They said, "You can go to the dentist and while you are there see if you can pick up some magazines." The sailors wanted to read something you know. I went ashore in this banana boat and it had round things full of bananas. That's how they used to bring them. I used one later on. I'll tell you what happened. In those days Freetown was
- 35:00 one street. Now it's a huge metropolis I believe. One street. Not paved, just very muddy. Very muddy in the rain and what appeared to be trees everywhere and all these shanty things all the way along. Everything was junk. Shanty town.

**We'll just stop. We're back yeah.**

I left the ship on the banana boat. They used to call them bum boats, the banana boats.

- 35:30 They used to bring fresh fruit and vegetables over to the ship, probably to the ship's chandler. Anyway I went down this muddy street and there was kids playing with monkeys. There seemed to be monkeys everywhere. Jumping out of the trees and running down the street. And so I went to the dentist and of course he found out there was nothing wrong with my teeth. But while I was sitting there I was the only white person there. Even the dentist was black, but this old albino
- 36:00 was sitting at the doors looking at me and she had pinky eyes and you could see the veins coming out of her black skin but it was white. Everything was white and pale and you could see these red veins and these eyes. She was quite pretty. She had a nice figure and she was looking at me like this and I was getting uncomfortable. Anyway I got as many of these magazines as I could carry out of this dentist place. They were supposed to be for people to read I suppose,
- 36:30 written in English too. I get outside and walk down the muddy road and I thought, "This place is hopeless. I won't get any fun here." I saw this boy throwing this monkey by the tail. A little marmoset like that. So after he had done that a couple of times. It was probably his pet but to me he was being cruel to him. Anyway I had an old leather wallet with no money in it because
- 37:00 they knew I was young and they wouldn't give me any money in case I threw it away. They were like a guardian to me, and then the first officer became a guardian to me. I said to the boy in sign language, "Swap." So I got the monkey. At first he was quite happy because there was monkeys everywhere, all over the place. I got this monkey and it promptly bit me. I used to
- 37:30 grab it by the tail and hold it and then it seemed to quieten down. I found out what to do. Rub salt in their gums and it stops them biting. Anyway I got on the banana boat and came back and the second mate is looking over the ship like that because we anchored off the shore in Freetown. It had no harbour at that time. He said, "What have you got there? You can't bring that monkey aboard," because apparently they had been quarantined and if you went to,
- 38:00 for example, a British port of call or an American port of call you had to pay a payment in case the monkey disappeared in the thing and they would confiscate the money. I think it was 50 quid, which was an enormous amount of money in those days. It was like \$50,000 or something like nowadays, I don't know, but an enormous amount of money. Anyway I said, "Yeah, I'm bringing it aboard. You're not going to stop me."

- 38:30 As I said, I did what I want anyway throughout my whole life. I got the monkey and I went like that and it jumped and over the thing and on the ship and then I got one of these bananas. After they had taken the bananas out they had big things, round, made of leaves and things like that and some sort of bamboo I suppose and I put it to one of the...
- 39:00 What do they call it? Hulls, the top of the hulls. They put water over the top of the hulls and then canvas over to stop the water from getting it and then clamp to the deck on the outside. Anyway I nailed that there and put a little front in it and I used to... But alongside the monkey's house was this
- 39:30 ferocious cook, bad tempered cook and he had sharp blazing eyes. They were blue eyes and was blonde all over and well built and a terrible temper. He always seemed to carry around a knife or a chopper and he didn't like the monkey and he didn't like me because I used to have get the orders from the steward. I didn't like waiting around and the ship was always rolling
- 40:00 and I would have to carry the stuff and the steward would be telling me to hurry up with the food and he didn't want to hurry the cook and he used to get very nasty with me. Anyway the monkey was just there. He used to walk around the engine room and get his feet all dirty and he'd go into the officer's and engineer's cabins and put his feet all over. They used to call me in and say, "Look what your bloody monkey has done."
- 40:30 And there would be all little footprints. And the captain too. He'd say, "Look at this. Look at the bloody..." you know thing on the table. What do they call it? Tablecloth. Then another guy would say, "Look he's pissed on my bloody clothing," because the monkey would piss and shit all over the place. And then you'd look up and he would be along the rig. He loved it. He used to be everywhere because I
- 41:00 used to feed him well. I went out one morning to feed the monkey and looked in and couldn't see anything because he always used to hide in there at night-time. I stayed in there. During the day he would be everywhere annoying the sailors. And anyway, I quickly noticed the fire iron. Do you know what the fire iron in a ship is? It's a bit of thing with a curled up thing and it balanced in the middle with a round thing so that
- 41:30 when the ship rolled it always remained straight. They had these huge cauldrons to put on them, not so that they didn't tip over when the ship. The ships used to sometimes go over like this. Anyway I noticed one of those missing.

**We'll just have to stop for one minute.**

## Tape 3

- 00:39 Anyway I noticed the firearm missing and the monkey missing because he was usually around at that time of the morning to come and get the bananas I pinch out of the stewards' room. He would eat all the can, anything canned I'd eat, and something very special the steward would make for the captain I would nick, and he'd try and get me and he'd make a swipe and I'd be too quick and he'd never see me. I'd hide in different parts of the ship.
- 01:00 He would get over it. He was bad tempered this steward. A huge man, a huge Norwegian. He caught me once and fair dinkum he knocked me from here to the thing. I was quite strong but he was, some of these Norwegians are very tough people. They were, what did they call them in the old days? Vikings. Yeah, Vikings. Anyhow I said to the captain who I was pretty close to, "That bloody cook has thrown my monkey
- 01:30 over the side because there is a fire iron missing and my monkey." I could see that he knew about it and he said, "I'm very sorry." And I said, "I'm going to fight him." He said, "I wouldn't advise you to do that. He's very bad tempered and got knives and things." Anyhow I said, "I ought to bash you," and I went close but he made several sort of things with the chopper and I moved away from him.
- 02:00 Anyway so we left Freetown and we joined a big convoy. In those days it was probably about 1943, '42.
- Just before we get to that. Just before we get to joining the convoy. The captain knew you were young so why didn't he turn you in and why did he keep you on board?**
- They were desperate to get
- 02:30 people. The crews were deserting as soon as they got to what they considered a safe place. Australia was considered to be a safe place. Ships were getting sunk in large quantities, including the Sydney and merchant ships all around the coast. I'm not sure but I think there were 30, 40 or 50 ships sunk. Maybe 100, I don't know but quite a lot of ships sunk around. But it got worse as you approached
- 03:00 the American coast and any part of Europe and the Middle East was the worse part because the Germans controlled all the air space over the Mediterranean Sea. It was shocking. They just attacked at will and at that time the Americans had planes over there. They got over there pretty quick. Not much is

known but they had their planes over in Egypt at the end of 1942.

- 03:30 The air force guys and the British were gradually building up their strength but they spent the majority of their time with aircraft attacking Europe and attacking the convoys and that. Anyway I left Freetown minus the monkey after a while. He disappeared. I knew who took it. And we joined this convoy and don't forget a three piston engine
- 04:00 in this warship. About 4,600 tons it was. It couldn't keep up with the convoy so we were always left behind so the same thing happened. The ships were getting sunk everywhere. I used to look out. I'd hear a ping which is the, sound travels quicker in water and I'd hear this ping and I'd rush out on deck and the ship was exploding in the distance because by the time
- 04:30 you got the torpedo to hit the ship, that was the ping and then it got inside and then the big bang. I'd hear and I'd run up like that, like a rabbit, and where the ping came from was the port side or starboard if it was this side, and look straight over and there was the ship exploding you see. It would lose way immediately and disappear.
- 05:00 What we had as cargo, this was the only time we had an ordinary cargo. It was wheat from Fremantle and it was much needed in the European theatre in the British Isles you see. We were getting in this convoy and they left us behind so we were going along very slow, but while we were with them they were getting sunk. I think the Germans thought it wasn't even worth
- 05:30 wasting a bloody torpedo on that little ship because it was like that. It was known, I've got a friend who was a Norwegian captain. He's here in Australia and he was on the ship. He was on it in 1945 and I was on it in 1942 and he said, "That was the worst ship I'd ever been on for rolling and diving into the water."

**Would people get seasick with all that?**

Yeah, I used to. It rolled so much

- 06:00 that to walk up from cabin I had footprints on either side of my cabin. I used to do it for a bit of fun, getting bored you know. It was terrible. And the Norwegian food is not the best. Fischgeboler, fish balls and fruit soup, and they had strange sort of things to what we eat you know. Anyway we got up around Orkney Islands and it was getting very
- 06:30 cold and wet and windy and everything like that. We went to a place called Hull in Yorkshire and as soon as we got there we were bombed, and we were bombed every day there too by the Germans. I met a beautiful girl called Dulcie Barran. I remember her address - Holdernside Road, Yorkshire, England. Pretty as a picture and she was with a sailor and he was on HMS Eclipse which was a destroyer. I saw her once more
- 07:00 later on and she said he was killed. The ship blew up and was torpedoed around the Orkneys too. No survivors. They always just disappeared with no knowledge of what happened except it just disappeared. Anyway we left Hull and headed for New York. That was the destination but in actual fact we went to Sydney, Nova Scotia, in Canada first
- 07:30 and I had a card and I used to show it to people and say, "That is Sydney, Australia," because I had never been to Sydney, Australia. It was Sydney, Nova Scotia. That was a very drab. There was all smoke coming out of the coal mines and coal burning. It was a very dull place.

**Before we head there, just a few questions. The captain knew you were under age and so on. I think you mentioned he made you a ward of the captain.**

I think I was a ward, yeah. I'm only

- 08:00 guessing this.

**And that's what enabled you to legally have you on the ship is it?**

That's right, yeah. And anyway...

**So you get your own cabin and...?**

I had a very small cabin. If you go like that, that was it. But they had a radio operator. He was a grubby Englishman. He never used to wash but he was good at his job of being a radio operator.

- 08:30 I don't know whether they got a new system later on but he disappeared and he had this lovely cabin. Very lovely, with its own shower and I just moved in. Even the captain and the steward said, "You can't just take that over." I said, "I'm taking it." It had beautiful brass fittings. Apparently it was used as a passenger thing. This captain that I know,
- 09:00 the Norwegian captain, that was his. He was put on as a passenger to go back to Norway, Oslo, and he said that was the same cabin. I said, "I'll tell you all about it. It had its own toilet and bathroom and all these beautiful brass fittings and solid mahogany." Beautiful it was. It was even better than the captain's cabin. It was meant to take a passenger, fee paying passenger in peace time.

09:30 Anyway we went to Sydney, Nova Scotia, and then we went to New York.

**Just before we go there, there are more questions. For a young guy from Australia and you are suddenly being to South America and now you are in England, what was the experience like for you to travel to these places?**

Wonderful, yeah wonderful. I wanted to get ashore and I went ashore in every place whether they said you could or not.

10:00 I always did what I wanted to do throughout life. I was always glad to get back to the ship because you got used to the rolling of the ship and you couldn't actually, when you got ashore you couldn't walk straight because you are used to the... You are actually worse when you got ashore. It looks as though you are drunk. It's funny, especially on a ship like I was on which was known to be the worst bloody ship

10:30 that was rolling that sailors had ever known. It just had the name. The Stirlingville you see. Anyway we went up to past the Statue of Liberty and towards where they... What do they call it? Where they get the aliens coming in? Immigration, immigration thing there

11:00 and they photographed us. They photographed us in Montevideo in Uruguay, the first port of call. I wondered why and then I found out why. The photographs were sent ashore to be put on port of New York postcard passes and I had a description of me. That was one of the things that got pinched from me about 12, 13 or 14 years ago. Anyway

11:30 in New York they put on more guns so we ended up with another gun on the bow. I don't know what it was but a bigger gun and I wasn't interested because I liked the Oerlikons, the 20 mm, and they put on some more of those and we left New York loaded with very heavy bombs down below. Great big bombs,

12:00 aerial bombs, ammunition and then arms and then on top of all that high octane gas in jerry cans, thousands of them. So it was a floating bomb the whole ship. A floating bomb. It was very dangerous. We left New York around about I think it was about November

12:30 1942 and we headed for the Panama Canal because we were so slow that no convoy would accept us. We were a jinx to them.

**I'll just stop you again. Lots of questions here. It's great stuff. Just one technical thing. What's the difference between the merchant marines and the navy?**

The merchant marines is the civilian fleet. Years ago they used to be the same years ago

13:00 like in the 14, 15, 16, 17, 18th century and then they made it the British Navy, which became the Royal Navy. And then they had certain people on board that were part of the Royal Navy and then they made wholly the merchant navy and wholly the Royal Navy. That sort of thing. We had on board with us at all times we had Royal Navy gunners

13:30 and we had army gunners as well. They were the ones that made sure the guns were in perfect order for us to fire and they were on the big guns that we had at the stern and the bow. They were the ones that were the gun layer, they were the gun layer, and had people who knew how to fire from elevations and apply things like A line.

14:00 I learnt all those things later on. I had a gunnery certificate which was stolen too. I did a course in Sidibish off Alexandria, offshore from Alexandria. The certificate said I finished the course in April 1943, 1942 sorry. Anyway we went from New York to Guantanamo Bay and we picked up a whole lot of US [United States of America] marines and

14:30 soldiers that had to go to Panama Canal. The United States had taken over the whole of Panama and built the canal as you know in 1907, and so we went to Colon, Balboa. The captain jumped off. He got off the ship at the beginning and he said, "I'll see you at the end of the thing." That's what he said to me. "I'll bring you back a souvenir." I didn't realise what it was. It turned

15:00 out to be a pair of girl's panties. Funny. And all the way through the lake system in the Panama Canal I saw these crocodiles on the artificial lake created by the locks, and the wash of the ship used to wash right over the crocodile and they used to just go like that. There were thousands of them you'd see because it was very tropical place and they used to thrive there. No-one bothered to kill them in those days.

15:30 There wasn't the thing for shoes and handbags made out of crocodile skin until about the '60s. So the crocodile just thrived. There were hundreds of them just up along this artificial lake. Anyway at the end of the, on the Pacific side of the Panama Canal the captain said, "Here's your souvenir," and he tossed me this

16:00 pair of girl's panties. He was good looking, our captain was. Anyway we left there and don't forget we are by ourselves. No convoy. We were too slow for the convoy. The quickest we could do was seven knots. Most convoys went at ten knots and over so all the way around the hard way. We went down the coast and around Cape Horn again, bottom of South America, and over to Cape Town and then

16:30 from Cape Town we went to Durban and I was there when that girl was eaten by a shark at South Beach

in Durban. And each time I met girls, by the way. I loved girls. I always had a good time. From Durban to Port Taufiq in Egypt.

**We'll leave you at Durban for a minute.**

17:00 **I've got so many questions. Firstly, what was life like for you on the ship with the other sailors and so on? What was the comradeship like and so on?**

There wasn't much because well I had my own cabin. I was like an officer but wasn't an officer. And I had the best food in the ship.

17:30 If I didn't get it I took it because I would go down and I knew where all the canned fruit was, and in the huge refrigerator they had for the officers and the captain. I would fill up. I had really a good time. I didn't work much because the steward had to catch me to get me to work. He had a job of it because I was too fleet of foot.

18:00 Funny.

**How did you fit in with the other guys, being younger than them?**

As soon as I came aboard the ship this guy said he was Canadian from Toronto in Canada. It turns out it was Toronto in NSW [New South Wales] because I looked up his thing and I could look at all the captain's books and things;

18:30 his log books and things. I've got part of a Norwegian log book from that day. I've got it here but it's a copy of it, the original log book, you know. It's out on the table there. Anyhow I got to around Cape Horn and I got to Durban.

**But when, sorry. We will just leave you at Durban for a minute and go back over what you've told us. When you reach England**

19:00 **and Yorkshire and so on and you have time off, shore leave, what would happen on shore leave?**

In the case of Hull I went to a pub called the Three Tongues where I met this sailor with this Dulcie Barran. A very pretty girl she was but her boyfriend had to go back to his destroyer, HMS Eclipse, which as I said the ship disappeared and was believed to be

19:30 torpedoed or struck a mine you see. So I was left with this beautiful girl and she was unbelievable! As soon I got to her house there were air raids all the time. We had to go to this air-raid bunker at the back of the house. It was a two-storey house and I'd just started cuddling her and everything like that and there was a huge explosion and she said, "The house has been hit!" We went outside and part of

20:00 the rear of the house not far from the air-raid shelter had been demolished by a bomb. Other houses had been damaged. That became, when I was ashore, that became the pattern. I treated bombings as if they were just a normal thing, and later on the V1 and the V2 rockets and the missiles just a

20:30 normal thing of life. I became quite accustomed. I wasn't frightened of it. I'm sure I wasn't. I was just wondering if it would come near me and I could get out of its way one way or the other. And I used to be pretty fast. I saw something coming near me I would run like bloody hell and I think it saved my life a few times. I got through the war. Anyway.

**What were the people like in England at that time under these**

21:00 **bombardments?**

The first time I went there all you could see was everyone was in uniform. There was hardly anyone who wasn't in uniform. The young men, the young women, the old women, the old men. They were all in some sort of uniform. Heavy blackout. Once it became dark you could only tell by the sounds. You know, you hear a lot of singing and you knew there was a bloody pub there and you just stagger in. Or you used to ask

21:30 an air-raid warden. There were air-raid wardens and they would say, "Just go down there a hundred yards and you'll find a pub." They were very friendly. They used to be very friendly to sailors because they used to know that they could get cash for butter, coffee, sugar, soap and of course

22:00 nylons. They were the main things. I remember selling, I used to get for 22 cents a carton of Lucky Strike or Camels or whatever it was. 22 cents! Don't forget US. And you'd sell them for 5 pound sterling and the cops, I would always sell it to the police because you know they wouldn't try and bash you up and get the money back off you.

22:30 "Quick give it to me," because they would save up. We used to sell them for five quid, which was a lot of money in those days. It still is. 2½ times what an Australian dollar is. Everyone was happy in the war or they appeared to be. Even though the bombing was going on almost constantly they were still happy. And when I was there in Hull, Hull was getting bombed every night



23:00 without fail. It was pretty close to the Germans from Norway and probably Germany and Holland and those places, Belgium. South Beach. Oh yeah, I said to one of the sailors, "How come this girl was eaten in the harbour here? There are no sharks here." And he got a bit of, he was a cook I was talking to. They had changed cooks. The bad tempered

23:30 one had got off on one of the ports. New York, that's right, and the other cook was friendly. He chucked a piece of offal into the water and as soon as it was there three or four tiger sharks went like that. It was unbelievable! They were fighting for these bits of meat. I was going to go for a swim in it too because there were nice fish in the water. Running quick and boxing and

24:00 swimming. I was an excellent swimmer, which saved my life a couple of times.

**We'll get to that definitely. When you crossed from England to America.**

United States. I saw a few icebergs. We had to go up that way and then we went to Nova Scotia and the United States.

**Was there a threat of U-boats [Unterseeboots - German submarines] in that crossing?**

Yeah a lot.

24:30 We went in a convoy there and they kept pace with us this time. They didn't like it and I know they used to always complain and we would hear their engines revving and you could see the propellers coming out of the water a bit, and they were just going slow whereas ours was chugging like mad to keep up with them. These ships, huge ships, warships and aircraft carriers.

25:00 Sometimes a big aircraft air carrier, but often they were converted from a merchant ship. They were a merchant ship and they had a runway put on an angle like that. That's what they used to use. I don't know if they had it on or did they? I'm not sure because it was so long ago. Where was I?

25:30 We headed then up towards the Middle East and we went to Port Taufiq.

**I'll just stop you there but because I think you are going to think of something else. When you are crossing...**

There were several ships sunk anyway.

**For them to slow down, what was the importance of your ship?**

26:00 I don't know to tell you the truth. I know they had something that they were taking from Britain to go to New York but I really don't know what it was. It might have been some specialist sort of thing that they couldn't get in the United States. I remember them unloading but I wasn't that interested in that. I was more interested in firing the guns and getting my pay in kroner, which is Norwegian money, girls

26:30 and eating. New York. I had these boxes stacked high with chocolates and I had that many cherry pies. I used to love cherry pies and that's what I got in New York. Radio City is where I used to go skating. Radio City.

**Were you worried at all about the crossing to New York, from England to America?**

Well I didn't particularly like the cold. Later on I could remember I was

27:00 offered a job to go to Russia and I declined it. Instead I accepted... I was also offered another job to go to Sweden and I declined that. I accepted the job to go to the invasion of Europe. They didn't say where it was and that's where I came in contact with the Americans later on because it turned out

27:30 that I was, they said, "Take this job. You would be the only British subject." They used to call us all British subjects. On my passport it says 'British subject', not 'Australian'. I've still got the passport. It was one of the things that wasn't pinched. I don't know why. I've had so many things pinched. I had a German helmet that was pinched, an incendiary bomb that was pinched. The tail of incendiary bomb that was pinched. Eight or nine

28:00 hundred-year-old glass from Westminster Abbey. I pinched it and it was pinched from me here. Belts. I used to make belts, Arab belts of leather, and I would put all the regiments of the Italians and the Germans around it. That was pinched. All the photos of the captured Germans we had. A couple of Germans I killed - I took the papers of one of them -

28:30 that was pinched.

**When was that? When was that all taken from you?**

In Australia.

**How many years ago?**

Starting from '45 when I got back from the war up until 13 years ago. Something like that. A lot of stuff. Borrowed and not

29:00 returned. Even know a couple of guys know that I'm pretty sure have got it. They know things about you that no-one else would know except were on these documents that were pinched. The AB83, which had my medals on the back, entered on the back. My New York Coast Guard pass with the date I was there.

29:30 The gunnery certificate. All these sorts of things. All very important documents. I blame my wife but I know what happened. I had them all out on the table and was showing them to these guys. There were four of them and as I came here I saw two out of the corner of my eye double back and pinch the most important documents.

**That's a shame, isn't it?**

It is.

**Just one more thing. On the crossing of the Atlantic**

30:00 **just you said you lost ships in the convoy. What was your reaction when a ship went down?**

I just got used to it. I even got tired of running up and down at the click of, the first click of the, the sound speed was greater in the water and you would hear the 'ting'. Something like striking the ship with a hammer and then I knew what side it was. If the ting was there it was that side and if the ting was there

30:30 it was that side, and I would run up on the deck like a mad. Just something to break the monotony. The ships just going through the water and you just getting over being seasick again, because once you go ashore you get seasick again, but on this ship you were forever a little bit seasick because it rolled so much. It was the worst ship that I had ever been on and it was known throughout the world as being the worst rolling ship.

31:00 **When you had time off in New York, do sailors have little groups they go in like the drinkers, the smokers, the womanisers?**

Yes. We used to go to the USO [United Service Organization]. I went, on that particular time I went to Jack Dempsey's bar and I was sitting there and I looked up and I wondered why people were looking above the door, and above the door as you enter is a thing. Do you know what it was? TV [television]! They had TV

31:30 in 1942! Yeah, we didn't get it. I was one of the first TV salesmen in Australia. I worked for David Jones in Sydney and I got a job through this British TV engineer who came out from England and he didn't know much about TV engineering. He said, "I've got this little book and I'll find out. I'll get you one of the books for selling TVs so you know all about it." Know Your TV or something like that. And then he arranged to help me get this job as

32:00 head of the TV department in David Jones in the '50s.

**What was the reaction to the television in 1942?**

Well I wasn't sure what it was. I don't think it had a name. I used to just look at it and I was mainly introduced to the pretty girls about the place, but everyone seemed to be looking at the door and I looked up and saw this one like that. About this big you know.

32:30 I remember these, there were four girls there and they turned out to be airline hostesses and they said, "Are you lonely?" and I said, "No." They were very pretty. Airline hostesses in those days had to be beautiful. I don't know whether they still are because I don't like flying. I've seen too many planes come down. But these girls said, "Come and stay with us." There was no sex involved. There was sex involved with me, but they didn't

33:00 want any. I was in a bed with three of them. One of the girls slept over there. It was this huge king-size bed and as soon as I came to really good spots they would brush my hands away. I was only 14½ even then when I was in New York the first time.

**So they were treating you like a boy when you were thinking like a man?**

That's right, yeah.

33:30 It was funny. I met this girl called Bubbles. I had been walking with this US sailor and he was in the United States Navy, and I saw this girl with pretty blonde hair sticking out of a cap and had 'Bubbles' written on her back and naturally, because he, I'm very, I've always been very pushy. Not pushy. I wasn't

34:00 frightened to do anything. I would just do it and the girls liked that. They don't like a person who is retiring and shy and all that. That's, when I go to a dance I kiss about 20 girls you know and dance with about 20 and they all like it. The boyfriends are like this so they get a bit jealous. Even now at my age, and I'm old.

**Did you get into trouble with guys in New York?**

Oh yeah.

34:30 It's an amazing thing. Have you heard of The Curse of the Mummy or The Mummy's Curse? Well the

first one of those came out at the movies too and guess what? It turned out to be 500 cinemas or movie theatres. I didn't know this and I went to this place. I didn't know where I was but I saw the The Mummy's Curse written up. So I went in

- 35:00 there and I come out and when you come out of a movie theatre in a strange city you don't know where you are. And I saw this big tall person and quite a chunky person and they were looking at me. I had strange clothes on. I had South American clothes on. I had got stuff in Montevideo, Uruguay, you see. And so I walked up to them. I thought they were being friendly you see. I said, "Can you tell us the way back to
- 35:30 Eerie Basin in Barge Canal in Brooklyn." They said, "We'll show you." They took me down this lane "It's down this way." The next thing one put a knife to my throat and another one had a gun and they said, "This is a raz." Whatever 'raz' means in New York. I think it means a hold-up. Anyway just by sheer luck the same passport I had, you know the one that I was talking about that I've got now?
- 36:00 They dropped, they pulled all my stuff out and put it on the ground and they found out that I had very little money and I had a watch, which they took, and a ring, which they took. I got it from a guy that just said, "Hot stuff from across the bay," and he just went like that. He only gave me a sharp look at it. I bought the thing anyway and it turned out to be worth nothing. The watch was quite a reasonable one and they took that anyway.
- 36:30 I said, "Do you mind if I pick my passport up?" and remember I saw I was like a rabbit to run. I was very quick and strong and I picked this up and ran like mad. I don't know what their intention was but they chased me and I went up to a group of people and they refused to help, about eight or nine people. They said, "See the copper on point," and I went to the cop. In those days they didn't have traffic lights. It was just, you know, and let the traffic go.
- 37:00 I said, "These guys have robbed me!" and I had blood all coming down. They had put their hands very hard over my thing. These guys ran up and said that I had attacked them. The cop knew what they were up to and there is so much crime in New York. There still is I suppose. He said, "You, you two guys piss off. You talk to me. Go down to the
- 37:30 23rd precinct or 31st precinct," I forget which. I get down there and get in there and there's another sailor there who had been robbed by some woman he had been screwing. And I heard the detectives talking because I told them I came from Australia and I heard them say, "He says he's from Australia but he looks like one of the local boys." I said, I yelled out, "No, I'm not! I'm from Australia!"
- 38:00 Anyway they put me and the US Navy sailor in the back of this old Ford, '40 Ford, and we went around and we couldn't find them. He said, "How do you expect us to find them? There are 500 movie theatres in New York." The guy couldn't find where he was screwing this girl who had robbed him so they kicked us out. And I was walking along back to Brooklyn to get
- 38:30 to the navy base there where the ship, where his ship was, and my ship was back at Brooklyn. Do you want me to go onto Port Taufiq?

### **We'll just finish this tape in New York.**

I went skating there in Radio City.

### **What sort of drinking culture with the sailors?**

Everyone used to drink very heavy in the merchant marine except me. I tried it and I just didn't like it.

- 39:00 It was like smoking. I found there is better things to do, like girls and a bit of dancing. I used to love dancing and jiving and waltzing and all that stuff. Ballroom dancing. As I said I still do it about once a month.

### **Did that put you on the outer a bit with the other sailors, not drinking?**

They thought I was trying to be too good for them but it wasn't that. It was just that

- 39:30 I wanted and had to keep fit because when they were drinking they also get very dangerous. Don't forget all the deck crew all carried a knife for ropes and they use the thing. In Montevideo, for example, two of the sailors, I went ashore with them to a nightclub. I did a bit of dancing and they couldn't dance but we had
- 40:00 some nice girls with us. Now they were getting drunker and drunker and the girls, they seemed to like me and they didn't like them. Two huge Norwegians. About 6' 4", 6' 6" high. Very strong, very tough Vikings you know. Anyway they said, "We are going out to fight." So I followed them out and I couldn't believe it! One guy had his head all damaged. He spent six months in hospital. The ship left him in Montevideo in
- 40:30 Uruguay in South America, and I was 1946 I was on a Norwegian tanker called Andersjähre, motor vessel. Andersjähre anyway. And this guy came up to me and I saw all the scars on his face and he said, "You were on the Stirlingville?" and I said, "Yeah. You were left at Montevideo. What happened?" He said, "I spent six months in hospital." He was a nice fellow but in the drink

41:00 they are different. They are like wild animals, Norwegians, with the drink. Like a lot of Australians. The Vikings are worse. They are quite dangerous with a lot of drink.

**We'll stop there because we have finished that tape.**

## Tape 4

00:31 **Panama Canal.**

The beginning or the middle or the end of the Panama Canal?

**I mean when you first got there on your way to Durban.**

Okay. Well the captain said to me, "I'll bring you back a souvenir when I get to the other end. I'm going to get off here and I know a girl here

01:00 and I'll bring you a souvenir." We went through the manmade locks there. Lock Miraflores it's called. There are a lot of crocodiles, alligators they call them there, up on the, hundreds and thousands there are of them. You would see a hundred of them in just a few hundred yards and the wash of the ship used to throw the waves onto the crocodiles. They used to just go and they were all happy and fat and eating their heads off

01:30 and this was 60 years ago, over 60, 62 years ago and we got to the Panama Canal and the captain said, "I'll bring a souvenir back." There's Balboa, Cristobal and another one. I forget now. The towns you know. Anyway at the end of the Panama Canal he said, "Here's your souvenir!" and he threw girl's panties in my face. He was

02:00 very good looking, very attractive, this captain. And we went down to the end of the South America. We couldn't go in convoy. No-one would take us. We were too slow you see. And we went around the Cape. The second time before I was 14½, and then headed for Cape Town. We went to Cape Town. My mother lived there for a while. She was the daughter of a mining engineer from Australia doing

02:30 mining there and then Durban. She was born in Uitenhague in South Africa and while I was at Durban a girl was eaten by shark at South Beach and that's when I didn't believe there were any sharks where I was, but you chuck in a couple of bits of meat and three or four tiger sharks. Great big ones, not small ones, giant ones tearing it to pieces this bit of meat.

03:00 That's what they do to human beings. They drop them down. Then we left Durban for the Middle East with a cargo of heavy bombs, very heavy bombs. 1,000 pounders and I think a couple of 2,000 pounders. 1,000 pounders and 500-pound bombs. They were the smallest bombs. I was watching them load up in New York.

03:30 **500-pound bombs!**

500-pound bombs, 1,000-pound bombs and 2,000-pound bombs. Then we had all shells, you know what shells are?

**Artillery shells.**

Lots of those. And then on top of small ammunition, and then on top of that machine guns and all that sort of thing, and then on top of that right up to the hull jerry cans full of aviation gasoline,

04:00 that's high octane gas. Very explosive stuff. So the slightest heavy bump the whole thing would go sky high. Remember when I said what happened in Tripoli and Libya? It happened a little later from this. I was visiting this ship and I got on board and just as I got on board you'll never credit, another air raid, and then I heard 'arrrrr' and then I heard 'bang, bang, bang, bang'

04:30 and apparently one or two struck the ship. I don't know whether it was one or two but at least one and lucky for me it was further up. I was in a slight companionway. You know a slight companionway? A small passageway. And I ran like hell and I heard someone yelling out, "Poisonous gas!" and I looked around and I thought the destroyers were laying a

05:00 smokescreen but it was a different colour to what I was used to. Instead of grey it was a yellowy colour and I and other people thought it was poisonous gas, but we didn't have any gas masks. I'm not sure whether I was in the bow or the stern but I got into the end of the ship wherever it was. I think it was...

05:30 I'm not sure. But I got onto the rope. You know, one of the ropes that were hooked up. Being a high explosive ship they wouldn't put you right on the wharf. They took you out so that if the ship blew up it wouldn't blow the wharves to pieces. They can blow up just by themselves sometimes, just by a slight knock or something. Anyway I went down but the ropes were very thick and to get your hands around you can't hold on for long so

06:00 I dropped down and I did this. See this one here? You can see a mark there.

**Yes, yeah.**

It used to go right halfway through and I dropped in the water and I must have hit something. I don't know if it was another wire rope. We had what you call a springer going out and or it could have been a rat thing to stop the mice coming on board and the rats. I dropped in the water then I noticed that

- 06:30 a lot of the fuel had leaked out of the ship I had just dropped out of and it was on fire, and it was all spreading out into the harbour. But where I was it didn't come near me, possibly because of a current. I got up under a... This is Tripoli I'm talking about. This happened later on. I got up underneath a jetty, came up
- 07:00 and started walking and looked back and saw that the fire, the ship that I used to be on, my own ship that I came on. I was visiting the ship that got hit by the bomb. It hadn't blown up yet and I saw that the fire was coming up the sides of the ship that I came to Tripoli on. And I kept on walking and a sailor came up and said, "Have you had a look at your leg?" I felt it more squishy than the other one but I didn't think of any... It seemed to be a bit warm.
- 07:30 There were two squirts of blood coming out. One slow and one a bit quick, the artery and the vein. Anyhow he said, "Come with me to RAP [Regimental Aid Post] station," a first aid station. I went there and they put a temporary bandage on and I went to some sort of hospital which seemed to be in the heart of Tripoli but with a view of the
- 08:00 half a mile away of the wharf where the ships would be. My ship that I came to Tripoli on was over in a new part and the old part was the ship that I had been visiting and had struck a bomb or a bomb had hit it and that wasn't on a wharf. It had been pulled further away because of the high explosive nature of the cargo. Then I was...
- 08:30 I heard the doctor say, "Do you think his leg will have to come off?" and I yelled out, "You are not taking my leg off!" So they sort of talked about it and then they sprinkled it with sulphanilamide, no antiseptic, no penicillin, nothing you know. It was quite a big cut as you can see. See that? But it doesn't look it now. I can't see it very well.
- 09:00 I was like this looking over. I got bored easily. Don't forget I was hyperactive. And I was like looking over towards the harbour and I could see that the tugs had pushed it to the side of the harbour and it was up with dozen of other ships that had been attacked and set on fire and they had pushed them out of the way and it was still on
- 09:30 fire. There was things going up in the air all the time like that. All the ammunition. But just as I was watching the thing blew up like that.

#### **All the ships?**

All the windows shattered in the hospital and it was half a mile away! They reckon it was the biggest explosion in the Middle East. They reckon anyway. Whether it is I don't know. So anyway. That was that. But I'll tell you what happened. When I got to Durban from [Port] Taufiq

- 10:00 I went to an open-air theatre and as soon as I arrived there German planes arrived and they started strafing, but they missed us, but they were very close to us. And we just went back to watching the theatre, open-air theatre. We left Taufiq and we went up the Suez Canal, the Port Said where I took that photo. That one there. The one
- 10:30 in civilian clothes and I did the merchant navy dems course, ack-ack gunnery course.

#### **With Oerlikons was it?**

Oerlikons, Hoskisses, Lewis, Marlins, three-inch, four-inch, 12 pounder. I qualified for a gun captain for a 12 pounder. Do you know anything about guns?

#### **Yes I know a little bit.**

A 12 pounder is the noisiest gun

- 11:00 ever made they reckon. Enormous noise it makes when you fire it! So I used to try and get off that and get back to my 20 mm because I liked those. Then I... In charge of us at the gunnery were the Northumberland Fusiliers. The 'fusiliers' meant gunners
- 11:30 and all that sort of thing. I used to go to this Astor skating rink in Alexandria and I met a beautiful French girl. She was so beautiful and I used to take her home. She lived in Stanley Bay, which was a suburb of Alexandria, and I used to go home with her in a tram. And her grandmother was always with her and the grandmother used to say, "Kissin, kissin, kissin," which is French for "Kiss him,
- 12:00 kiss him." So we would be kissing there on the tram home to Stanley Bay. It was only two nights because I had to be ready to go and then they... We had all this ammunition and high octane gas for the troops so we left Alexandria and we headed for Tripoli. They never give you orders
- 12:30 until you are out at sea. I used to be one of the first to know because I was very pally with each captain you see. He said, "Tripoli," and I thought, "Oh God!" because the Germans were still there in the city or

being driven back to the sea by the 8th, the British 8th Army you see. Anyway I get there and

13:00 tied up and I noticed the ship with another boy, a deck boy that I had been skating with. So I thought, "I'll walk around and see him." And when I got around the ship was out as I said from the wharf. I think I got out by a sort of a pontoon reaching out. And it was getting unloaded onto lighters and the lighters were being taken right away from the town because

13:30 they were so high explosive. We were doing the same but we were over at another part, a new part of Tripoli. On the way up. I'll tell you about the German plane. Did I?

#### **So after Tripoli what happened?**

Well on the way to Tripoli I shot down the plane and there was no-one else involved in it because no-one else noticed.

14:00 We were a straggler right behind and they had all gone off because we had just been attacked. So many times, all the way from Alexandria attacked all the time and Axis Sally used to tell us when we were going to be attacked. She would say that, "Ship number so-and-so..." A couple of things, someone bowled a grenade at me and I just ran around the corner and ran away from it and it exploded around the corner. The other thing was I met this beautiful girl.

14:30 She was about 17 standing outside this building and she was really pretty. Italian girl. So I went up to her and don't forget the Germans are just a few kilometres away and I said, she couldn't speak English but you know what you're doing any country in the world that you go. Anyway she said, "Previous jig jig

15:00 German offizia, German offizia." So she was previously with a German officer. She cleaned me up. She was amazing this girl. She was probably forced into prostitution because the Italians were getting forced out of Libya, especially Tripoli, and they had built the whole place up.

15:30 The Arabs did nothing, nothing at all, but the so-called western powers like Germany, France, Britain and the United States and Italy went into all parts of Africa. This is in the late 1800s. After 1850 they built up places. Instead of living in abject poverty the natives at least earned a living.

16:00 They built up cities and businesses and that, and of course the war destroyed a lot of that. All the Benghazi, Tobruk, Tripoli.

#### **Can you describe what Tripoli looked like?**

The buildings appeared to be nice. I'll tell you another thing. This was a little bit interesting.

16:30 You see I could still walk. It was just a little bit painful so anyway I'd heard from, I saw a couple of New Zealand soldiers around and remember that I told you my cousin was a New Zealand soldier. I said, "Where are you billeted?" and he said, "Out at Castle Benito aerodrome." Named after Benito Mussolini you see. And I said, "How do you get there?" and he pointed out where to go to get an army truck

17:00 going there. They go backwards and forwards taking supplies. One of your things have collapsed down again. Anyway I got a truck going to Castle Benito aerodrome and I found my two cousins: Glen, and I forget the other. Cousins you see. They couldn't believe it! The last time they saw me

17:30 was two years before and I was a little boy at school, eleven years of age, 11½ years of age, and here I was at war. I stayed overnight with them and I remember in the morning there was this much ice over all the water and you were only allowed one

18:00 thing of water, container, and you had to wash, shave. You didn't have to have your cups of tea. They had that in great big containers. They threw all the tea in and the powdered milk and they brew it all up and that was your cups of tea. I had some food there. I spent about a day with them. The cabbage was all dried.

18:30 The egg was all dried. The potatoes were all dried.

#### **Dried egg.**

Dried egg. Dried potato, dried cabbage. Snap frozen and desiccated it was. Desiccated. It tasted all right. Bully beef. They always had Bully beef and biscuits. That was more or less. With the eggs they made everything out of them. Scrambled eggs,

19:00 custards. It was beautiful. All the eggs came from American, United States. They had a big black eagle on it. I forget the name of it.

#### **So what did your cousins say to you?**

They couldn't believe it was me! It was unbelievable! And then I had to go. I was told that I had to join this hospital ship called the Auralia and go back to

19:30 Alexandria. I told them I had to get back and so I left and then after the war I found out that Glen had been killed at the battle of Montecassino in Italy just near where I was.

## **Montecasino.**

Montecasino on the way to...

### **Is that the Gustav line?**

Anzio up that way, up from Taranto. I think it was up that way yeah. Anyway I went on board.

20:00 I was taken aboard this hospital ship. They also had troops going. They are not supposed to carry troops but they were apparently using it as part of a troop transport back to Alexandria. They had their guns with them and they used to, we weren't attacked but we were overflown by German planes. And they used to have their rifles

20:30 cocked and ready to fire and they would sit with them on the deck like that. They, it does work because I noticed they just killed an American on an Australian aeroplane. Don't forget the planes in those days only flew at about 100 miles an hour. Now they fly at 350-400 miles an hour. Takeoff speed for one of those Hercules is 140 miles an hour

21:00 so they go twice as fast as the old one. Still, one bullet from a rifle can still kill something. Possibly even bring down a plane. They were bringing down Blackhawk helicopters in Iraq. Anyway we get to Alexandria and I was fit enough to be discharged from the hospital ship and

21:30 I went to the Fleet Club. Have you heard of that?

**Yes.**

That's in Alexandria. That was the biggest ex-servicemen's club in Alexandria. Usually by sailors, that's why they call it the Fleet Club, frequented by sailors. While I was there notice I have a little cut there. It's only a little one but it was bigger at the time when I had it done,

22:00 62 years ago. 61 years ago, sorry. There was blackout all through that part of Egypt and I never went to Cairo so I don't know what was there, but Alexandria was blackout. I went to up to my room and I thought, "I'll have a bit of a sleep." And

22:30 there was a group of, they used to call them British sailors I think, they call them Royal Navy now. They were playing cards there and one opened the shutters and I heard someone yell out, "Shut that bloody window!" from down outside. They had a gunnery emplacement there and

23:00 he wouldn't shut it because he'd had a few drinks. So I went and shut it and then he opened it again and just as I went over again there was an explosion outside. Just an explosion of shells. They were firing them off the anti aircraft because there was an air raid on. This bit of glass, it went everywhere and this one bit hit me just there. So I grabbed a hold of this sailor and I said, "I ought to punch the shit out of you!" I just shook him.

23:30 And he appeared to be apologetic so I forgot about it. Don't forget I was 14½ going on 15 and this guy was about 20, 21, something like that.

**So you were in Alexandria for this period. I want to know, the next thing was obviously the invasion of Sicily. Tell us how you got involved in that.**

I left the hospital ship and then I had

24:00 to report to the British naval authorities. They ran everything in the Middle East in those days. What was it called? It was a combination of army, navy and air force that handled everything so I was under the navy part of it. They said, "You have to go to this ship called Thistlemuir,

24:30 SS Thistlemuir," and I said, "All right." I said, "I'm only a cabin boy." And they said, "They've only got an opening for an ordinary seamen so you'll have to be it." I got paid, I was supposed to be paid a bit extra because I'd done the merchant navy dems gunnery course in Sidibish

25:00 outside Alexandria. And I went on board and one of my main jobs was pumping the water up to the captain's cabin, which was way above the rest of the superstructure in the middle of the ship. Bloody hard job because you had to prime it, prime the pump and then pump it like this.

25:30 Don't forget I was just over 14½. It was quite heavy, bringing it back. Probably 50 below or more than 50 m below, right at the bottom of the ship, right up to the highest part of the ship. Just behind the, where do they steer the ship from? I forget now.

**I know what you mean, yeah.**

26:00 So anyway the bosun was a huge man. Some sort of Scandinavian; I think he was Danish. He liked me, he was a nice man. He was huge. He was like a big giant gorilla. It's easy look at this and he'd go back and forth but he had muscles on his arms like this. But he had pity for me because as I said I was only a 14½ year old boy and I was having great difficulty doing this.

26:30 That was my main job that I can think of. Other thing was just chipping the deck and a bit of painting. That sort of stuff and on the guns. I spent most of the time on the guns because the second you left

Alexandria they started firing at you. The Germans would fire at you trying to sink you in some way or another, either by mines, torpedoes or bombing. Mainly by bombing in my case

27:00 anyway. And anyway we left Alexandria and the first port of call was Tripoli but we didn't go in. We were about two miles off. There seemed to be hundreds of other ships there. As far as the horizon you could see ships and they were all heading towards Sicily, Algiers, that area and that's where I said

27:30 I was going ashore to get this Beretta that I left.

**You told us that story.**

So I dived over the ship in a pair of underpants and swam for half a day. It's a long way away. Two miles that's a long way and even though I was a good swimmer there was a current there as well, and it was quite difficult and I was exhausted when I landed ashore. I went to the place

28:00 where I thought the gun was and when you've got a big long pier of rocks after about three or four months they all look the bloody same. Anyway I gave up trying to look for this bloody gun. It was a lovely pistol too, and I went to the navy authorities, British navy authorities and I said, "That's my ship right out there." They didn't say anything. They just consulted an officer and next

28:30 thing I'm in a speedboat and heading out back towards the ship. Just as I got there the bloody thing was up anchoring and away. Anyway we headed towards Algiers and just before Algiers I must have been a bit funny in the head. When you've got PTSD [post traumatic stress disorder] or war neurosis and this sort of thing. And anyway

29:00 at Phillipville they stopped the ship. The whole convoy stopped to. Not because of me but they all stopped and they used that time to send me ashore to the hospital because I must have been doing strange things. I don't remember but they sent me ashore and they took me up the hill in an army truck with a big red cross on it to this 96 General Military Hospital in Algiers. That's what it's called, a military

29:30 hospital, and put me to bed. And I'm lying there with nothing to do and I grabbed the papers at the end of the bed and it had, 'Immersion, bomb blast'. Bomb blast is like shock, shellshock, so I must have been exhibiting some signs of shellshock. And anyway I left there. They wanted to keep me by the way.

30:00 I wasn't very interested in stopping there so I went back to the ship. They took me back to the ship and we proceeded to Algiers. I met that beautiful girl. She was unreal!

**What was her name?**

I forget her name. I've never yet seen a more beautiful girl. She was better than Marilyn Monroe and the most exquisite thing you have ever seen in your life. Unbelievable! I've had hundreds of girlfriends,

30:30 hundreds and hundreds, but unbelievable! We went to this hotel. It was pointed out by some British soldiers there you see and they said, "Speak to the maitre de of the hotel," because they were just running it as a hotel but actually they had these very high-class girls working upstairs for anyone who had the money. And it cost a lot of money in francs, Algerian francs you see, French francs.

31:00 France controlled all that area. Libya was Italy and mainly Algeria was controlled by the French, but when the British got there they controlled it. They took over. That's where I got those great big vats of essence of wine and knocked a hole in with the fire axe and got a bucket

31:30 and started drinking that. Never knew anything for three days. We were off to Sicily and I was out of my whatever. I was drunk I suppose. And I remember going up on deck and we were going very quietly about 11.00 at night on 11th of July 1943. We had been issued with this

32:00 Soldier's Guide to Sicily. I knew what was on. They had given the tot of brandy and the four beers that they give you before all the big things because they expect you to die or get injured and if you're half drunk you don't know what's happening. It was like.

**Did they give you alcohol before the invasion?**

Yeah, to sort of lull you.

**What the night before?**

About four hours before.

32:30 Anyway when we get to the beach, I was at Red Beach, Marsemine Beach it was called between the Avola and Stroma 20 kms or 20 mile left of Syracuse. Do you know where Syracuse is? You heard of Dante's Inferno? You've heard of Hades Inferno.

**It doesn't ring a bell.**

The middle of the earth where the devil is supposed to be and it was just like that.

33:00 Everything was blowing up and everyone was dying and everyone was getting burnt. The ships were blowing up, they were on fire. The Germans were hitting with everything you could think of. Bombers,



fighters, machine gun fire, everything you could think of. It was just one mass of fire and that went on for 4½ days and 4½ nights.

### **While the invasion was taking place?**

Yeah, yeah

33:30 and we had these LCMs like this on the big booms, the flat ones straight away into the water. The boom is about this far away from the water and the straits can be pretty rough but it was pretty calm. The middle of their summer you see. And then the ones that were on an angle. They were like this on the ship and they dropped them down into the water too, and they were loaded

34:00 with 8th Army troops, 1,500 of them. The British 8th Army guys. And they went ashore. With them was royal marine commandos and mine operations. They were commandos as well. By the way, before we left Algiers I got the wrath of one commando. They are supposed to be good at everything.

34:30 He had grenades, a .44, commando's knife and everything like that and that hampered him, and anyway he tried to chase me and he couldn't catch me. Anyway I ran to the water and I love to swim and I just dived in off the wharf and around the ship and here he is following me. I don't know if he had taken off all his gear, holster and all that. .44. And anyway,

35:00 .45. He chased me right around but I was too quick for him. I just got out and ran off. Later on in the ship he was watching me but he didn't attack me then when we were back on the ship.

### **Why did you get into trouble with the commandos?**

I don't know. I forget. These guys when they do this excessive training they are on knife edge. They are like guys on steroids. For example, a friend of ours who drives around in a new Mercedes,

35:30 he goes to a club down here, a sports club at the Point, the Adelaide Club. A guy of 24, all built up. But they build up so much tension through over exercise and that he dropped dead on the way out of the club three or four days ago.

### **He was 24 years old?**

24 years of age, yeah. This is what happens. Too much tension. Tension kills you. Tension can cause cancer, can cause blood

36:00 clots, can cause brain damage, heart trouble, all sorts of heart trouble. So in Sicily is the forerunner of what happened in Normandy. The LCMs that we had, we had about 12 LCMs - landing craft mechanised - and I went ashore manning a gun on one of those, but I got off and didn't come back for a while you see. I walked, this is in the invasion of

36:30 Sicily you see. I walked as far as I could. I always used to go by myself if possible and I walked along the beach for quite some distance. It might have been four or five kilometres.

### **Was it clear by that stage?**

No but I never, when you are young and stupid you do stupid things. There was a lot of barbed wire and things like that but I got onto

37:00 over from the sea and it appeared, what I remember you could see ordered orchards. It was either olives or citrus trees, I forget now, but I thought I remember seeing citrus fruit, oranges, lemons and things like that. I saw this German soldier. You can tell by his uniform, a whiter khaki than this, very white, and they are very distinct long boots as well

37:30 like the panzer divisions and things like that. We knew there were panzer division troops there.

### **Herman Goering panzer.**

Herman Goering panzer and SS [Schutzstaffel] grenadier panzer division too. We knew they were there and I saw this guy. I had a rifle with me. It was a parachuters' carbine, but I liked those. I had one in Normandy and I swapped it for a grenade

38:00 and I thought, "If I can just use this guy for target practice if I could get close to him." I saw him heading off at a slight angle. It's always good to cut them off. It's like hunting an animal. I haven't hunted many, but that's what you do. If you see them going along there you chase them like that. You cut across and try and cut them off you see. Anyway I went down to where I thought he was

38:30 and couldn't find him. I don't know if he had come around and cut off somewhere, I don't know, or whether he saw me coming. But I thought I was being very concealed myself and everything like that but I couldn't find him so I just went back on the ship. The Germans concentrated everything on trying to stop

39:00 the Allies from getting ashore. The British, American.

### **Were there heavy casualties of the Allies?**

Oh yeah. It was a lot worse than Normandy. They say it wasn't but it was. As far as I know it was. For example, on the way from Algiers to thingamy. When I was out of my stupor each ship we had, every one of the ships had their own barrage balloon. Do you know what that is?

**Yes.**

Our ship had more

39:30 firepower than a cruiser, a light cruiser. We had rockets. Do you know what rockets are? They are the ones that go whoof. We had those. Then we had every available bit of space. We had Oerlikons, 12 pounders, all these huge guns and all the way along. It was unbelievable! And anyway

40:00 what was I talking about? I forget what I was talking about now.

### **The invasion of Sicily.**

Well on the way to Sicily we all had these barrages balloons and during the night I was hearing twang, twang all from different parts. The ships were all very close. No lights on and going very slowly so they didn't make a noise. The harder you hit the more they get picked up by sonar on the submarines

40:30 and also by aircraft can see the wash, the fluorescent wash. All this twanging and I get up on deck and I see these huge bombers, four-engine bombers going very low. They almost seem like they were hitting the mast and they cut down, there wasn't one balloon standing. There was 3,500 ships heading for Sicily

41:00 and every one as far as I could see there wasn't one balloon up in the air. All cut off. It was dangerous for the planes because they are very big planes, but each one of the lines had a high explosive about this big wrapped around it. It was meant to pull off and quickly wrap itself around like a wing or a propeller or something like that so imagine the damage done to the plane.

41:30 Now each of those aeroplanes was carrying bombs and sometimes they tow gliders packed with troops. And I heard that 150 troops were dropped into the water before Sicily so they just drowned. With the heavy gear they just sank straight away.

### **Allied troops?**

Allied troops, yeah.

### **How did they drown? What happened?**

They were supposed to be dropped in Sicily but often the pilots either they get

42:00 frightened.

### **Were these airborne?**

Yeah.

## **Tape 5**

00:31 **So continue Sicily.**

I hadn't had spaghetti and the like before and I was walking up this cobblestoned... Very average houses in those days in Sicily. Made of mud brick in different colours and small sort of streets. And I saw a young lady with a baby.

01:00 She called me, "Bambino," meaning I was a baby too. And she said, "When you grow up you'll be dangerous." I knew what she meant. When I grew a beard. There was nothing to shave. "When you grow up you'll be a dangerous soldier." She said,

01:30 "Do you want mangari?" and I could see what she was doing. She was grinding tomatoes and she had cooked this lovely spaghetti and, "I'll give you some of this." And I thought I was very nice of her. I went back to my hell. It was shocking there. I never stopped. The whole time we were there, which was 4½ days, they bombed us continuously.

02:00 When we arrived it was shelling and machine gunning, bombing and they were still bombing. They were attacking from all over occupied France, Italy and other parts of Sicily and even possibly Germany, I don't know. Unbelievable it was. A lot worse than Normandy you know, and anyway alongside of me there was a ship that was hit in three places.

02:30 It was called the Allenbank. I would still like to know what happened to it and whether it sunk. It was on fire in three places. I could see three places you know. Then I had PTSD or war neurosis and I decided I had too much. There was this Allenbank on fire in three places and the noise was so terrible and don't forget I had PTSD

- 03:00 or what they call bomb blast thing, and I had that for a further probably ten years after the war and apparently I've still got it now because I spent five years in Heidelberg until only about two years ago now. I became sort of
- 03:30 so distressed that I considered suicide and I just wanted to get away from all the noise of the battle, so I went to the stern of the ship and didn't say anything to anybody, and just hung there, and put then by one hand and then both hands and I looked down and I hate heights. This is quite a big ship I was on the Thistlemuir,
- 04:00 a merchant cruiser, and I pulled myself up and I thought, "I won't do that." The heights and then with all the noise and then thank goodness after 4½ days, 4½ nights, the ship pulled its anchors and we discharged all our commandos and troops and left them with the LCMs, and they apparently went and did all their running around
- 04:30 and we went back to the Algiers and got more troops there, and this time there was half British and half French native troops. The I forget what they call them, they had big blankets around them and covered up heads. They had this tall fellow who had been Charles de Gaulle. I don't know if he
- 05:00 was or not but they kept him separate all down the stern. There is always about 20 people all the way around so I don't know who he was. They reckon he was Charles de Gaulle but I don't. Anyway we left and went back to Syracuse and previously we had gone up to Syracuse because I'll you what happened. There was,
- 05:30 you know what a silo is? A wheat silo? Yeah. They have outside ladders going up on some of the silos. Now the ladders on the silos can be blown off by gunfire or bombs or that, but up on top were two anti-aircraft batteries. And I looked up and I spoke to a couple of soldiers and they said they had been up there for five days already.
- 06:00 We were there for 4½ days before we moved up to Syracuse and I said I could see them walking around and they were looking down. They were a long way up and in those days there was no helicopters to get them down. And there was elementary ones, but I never ever saw any used. And anyway I went back to Algiers.
- 06:30 First of all we dropped POWs [prisoners of war]. Remember I told you we had Herman Goering division guys and we had to take charge of one? The officers, we used to look up there and they were drinking with the officers on the ship. They weren't treated like prisoners. And we had about 2,500 Italians POWs. They weren't treated well at all. I hope you're not Italian.
- 07:00 Anyway you are Maltese then, are you?
- Yes.**
- I've had a lot to do with Maltese. This guy was, we were standing up on the deck and his officer was up there drinking occasionally glancing down like that you know, and he was in the SS panzer division which were a very tough outfit. Very,
- 07:30 what do they call it? Indoctrinated with Nazism. He was, the soldiers that were with me. One had won the Iron Cross on the Russian front. Only young guys. Only 19 he told me. He had Iron Cross, which is like the Military Medal, Military Cross, and it's hard to obtain because officers get a lot but men get very little at all of these decorations
- 08:00 but it's still the same now. Half of these medals... The guys are getting these French medals. I fought in four different French positions and I was ashore normally. I know guys that are getting that didn't even go ashore. They were off the shore, admittedly they were off the shore but they weren't on shore where the real trouble was. Anyway we went
- 08:30 we dropped them, we tried to drop some of them at Haifa. They unloaded some of the Italians but they wouldn't take the Germans because all the Israelis were very frightened of the Nazis. Oh yeah, it was called Palestine then. We got off at Haifa and I caught a bus service to Jerusalem.
- 09:00 In those days it was there was nothing there but all dusty, dirty, tiny little shapes. Something like Italy and western orient gentlemen, wogs everywhere, and they were the friendly. The guys that were the trouble were the bloody Israelis. They were the one that were killing the British Palestinian police you know. Killing a lot of the Arabs too because they wanted to take over the whole
- 09:30 place. They finally got their wish through the United Nations. But it was by force. Anyway I got off, what's the capital of...? I went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Statue of the Virgin Mary with all the jewels and that over her and this monk with the cloak around his head and he was watching like this and I thought,
- 10:00 "A bit of fun! I'll bolt over!" It was only about this high I suppose, like this you know, and I was just getting over there and this guy said, "Hey, get away from there!" So I got back over and then I went through the, that was the church. I went up to the Mount of Olives and you won't believe what I did up there. I didn't mean anything but they had these 3,000-year-old olive trees and they

- 10:30 used to sell bits of the olive trees in the streets, and there was no-one around and I saw some of these monkey people around and they weren't watching me and I looked like an innocent boy you see. Anyway I grabbed this twig and I split the olive tree. This 3,000-year-old olive tree! I just pulled the twig and it split. It's so old you see, so I pulled it off, broke it off. And I saw
- 11:00 this guy running down towards me. And the grove of olives where it is, it's quite a steep drop to outside this wall. It appeared probably about 8 ft or 9 ft to where it was because they use all that area as a fort. The Arabs have used it previously. So here's me running with this close on half a tree, it was about a third of a tree at least. One of these
- 11:30 three thousand-year-old olives. And I threw it over and hung and I thought, "This is going to be the end of me! I'm going to break a leg!" But I dropped and then I grabbed this tree took it back and no-one believed me. Because it wasn't in a little packet marked 'Leaves from the Mount of Olives'. They actually weren't from the old olives, they were just from the trees around, but I had the real thing and no-one would believe me.
- 12:00 That was really funny. So anyway we left Haifa because they wouldn't take the Germans. They only took some of the Italians. And we went to Point Said and the last thing I saw of this little guy that I had to look over, he was a corporal, he gave me his photograph by the way, which was stolen in this room like I told you about 12 or 13 years ago.
- 12:30 That's when I was in the height of depression, war neurosis and I didn't know what was there. These guys took advantage of me and took lot of stuff and anyway, he turned around and waved and saluted and apparently they took the Germans and Italians off to help salvage the ships out the Suez Canal that they had sunk themselves. Before he went remember I said the officer
- 13:00 on the bridge and this young guy was talking to me and he said, "When we win the war" - very, what do they call it? Positive. All German troops are. Even if they are losing the war they are positive because they had been indoctrinated so much. And he said, "When we win the war, that officer will take revenge on my family because I'm getting friendly with you.
- 13:30 I'm not allowed to get friendly with any of the enemy." So I said, "Take it from me. You won't be winning this war." And then this officer was looking like this as if to say, "I'll get you for this later on." So the officer was all important in the German military forces and the soldier was all right, but the officer was like a king and they are
- 14:00 generally a member of the Nazi party and these guys were very important. The panzers were the front line of all the German troops.

**How different were the POWs to the guys you were serving with? Did you talk to them much?**

Another thing, when we were at Sicily when they were coming on board there was a bit of commotion. I don't know what happened.

- 14:30 There was a sergeant in the American commandos and he just pulled out a gun and shot the guy dead. He actually got the battalions, his own mates, to chuck him over the side. But he was very dangerous this fellow. Whenever you see a guy with gingery sort of hair, keep away from him. They're hot tempered and bad tempered and generally
- 15:00 they seem a bit, they usually get completely out of control. I saw him and I thought, "I'm not going near him." Later on he gave me his commando knife. I used to use it to throw at a wooden... The steel was so honed it was made of the sort of steel that snapped. I threw it once and it snapped so I threw it away. But I steered clear of that guy. He was dangerous, I tell you.
- 15:30 All these commandos, combined operations and airborne troops, specially trained troops, very dangerous. Even when they come back from the war they are so highly geared that they are liable to attack anyone. They are like wild animals, like a wild tiger. Worse than tigers.

**And this guy was just shot?**

A lot of the guys thought that, I was, yeah.

**And he was just cleaned up, was he? The guy you are talking about was just shot?**

- 16:00 Yeah. Shot by this sergeant. I'd say a paratroopers. And he just pointed it. He was God and whatever he said the Germans and Italians had to do because he was in charge of the group that was sending the prisoners back to Egypt.
- 16:30 Anyway we went back to Algiers and picked up another cargo of the same sort of stuff. Tanks and that sort of stuff and went to Syracuse this time and I looked up the thing, there is no movement. This is about, originally from when I knew they had been marooned up there by gunfire
- 17:00 and I said to some of the soldiers up there, "What happened to them on top?" They just starved to death. So these crews of batteries up there just starved to death. There was no option. There was no way you could get stuff up there in those times. Commandos had ways of getting up cliffs but going up a straight silo with no ladders was impossible. So anyway we unloaded some

- 17:30 of the stuff there and we went with other ships to Corsica, a place called Corsica. When we got there we were shelled from the cliff tops and every time we were attacked by aircraft, mines, shooting mines. I shot one and blew it up but we were blowing up all the time. At one stage
- 18:00 we were going near the Straits of Messina and there were many, many mines everywhere. We were exploding them by fire. Sending our fire with a rifle. Anyway ships were, it was on that run that we lost in two days about 3,000 men. I'll give you an idea of how many men it is. It's more than a combined total
- 18:30 of Korea and Vietnam put together twice, so you've got some idea of what the losses were in the Mediterranean. One day I would hear the bang, the hammer thing on the mine, and I'd race up and saw the ship blowing up. That was one day, say it was the Wednesday. The next day not a lot was happening except maybe the aircraft but the Thursday I was like this and I was watching. You get mesmerised
- 19:00 by the water when you are going in a convoy like this. They go zigzag you see. This ship had just gone like that and was straightening like this and I had a full view of her and all of sudden she blew up like that, and it had what we had on, about 1,500 troops. It used to have the commodore, but just by sheer luck you'd never credit the commodore had come to our ship about two
- 19:30 days before. Not one survivor. One guy floated by about 50 yards from me and his face was partly blown off there and he had his hand up and he said, "Please help save me." And I didn't say a word and I looked up and down the ship and there was no-one else around. There was no, you know what a buoy is? There was nothing around where I was. If I'd gone down and thrown him one I could see that he was just about gone anyway. He'd never have been able to swim
- 20:00 in the sea towards this buoy so I just forgot about him. There was no survivors at all. I don't know about the other ship. I don't think there would have been there, but this particular one. When I saw it going up like this. I could see legs, bits of bodies, whole bodies, everything, hundreds of up and all blown up into the air and tiny little bits of wreckage everywhere. Nothing much more
- 20:30 than about that big.

#### **What were you first thoughts when you saw this happening?**

I was used to it. It was just another thing. When you have just come from Sicily and coming from Tripoli. It had been a graduation from spotting the submarine approaching Cape Horn, the bombing in Hull, the convoy from Sierra Leone

- 21:00 that we dropped out of and that year that was one of the worst years, 1942. We were losing hundreds and hundreds of ships. The British alone lost 2,900 ships! I've got the thing there. The head guy just gave me a copy of it. 2,900 ships! Unbelievable! Well if say 100 were sunk from each one
- 21:30 there was 290,000 gone you see. That's just crew not counting soldiers that they carry, sailors and that. We had more lost than any other branch of the armed services. The army had 1:29 casualties, we had 1:4 and the airborne service had 1:4 and the commandos had 1:4 in the same sort of thing there. Where was I up to anyway?
- 22:00 Corsica. I can tell you a few things about there.

#### **Just before we move onto that. Seeing the ship go up and bodies' parts. How does that impact on you as an individual?**

I just think of it a lot. That's probably what has perpetuated war neurosis with me. I sort of think, "How the hell could so many people lose their lives in just seconds?" There's just one big thing

- 22:30 and the explosion would go from about 200 metres or something like that. A huge explosion. It just goes like that and everything up in the air and every sort of piece of thing you can imagine just seems to go up there. There are pieces of everything and then there is nothing left. In the water, what's there? A few bits and pieces of wood and a few floating bodies and this one guy that went by me you see.
- 23:00 It was unsettling at the time but I sort of got used to it, but I think about it quite a lot.

#### **Uncontrollably thinking about it?**

Uncontrollably. Mainly at night-time. Sometimes I'm affected by it. I can cry or I go completely dull but I don't know what's going on at all. That's why I don't drive a car now.

- 23:30 I get my wife to drive and I sit alongside of her. It's bloody terrible driving with me but she's better than me because I go dazed and dull.

#### **Did it have an impact on you at the time or did it take years for it to come?**

Well at the time,

- 24:00 don't forget I already had PTSD or war neurosis, and it was a bit more shock because who would see close on 3,000 men killed in two days or three days? It was unbelievable! And especially me because I was always on the lookout for this stuff. For some reason I had an idea of what was going to happen and

I seemed to be

24:30 in the place to watch them because I hadn't work, so I would spend my time watching ships doing other things and blowing up and I would have seen dozens of them just disintegrate. I had the knack of knowing where to look once. The older ones took no notice but I knew what you hear that 'tang' and which sides it's on I would be up straight away and I would be ready to go up

25:00 straight up. "Where is it? There it is!" and bang, it would explode. Unbelievable!

**In a way, when you run up and see this happening, I don't know, was it entertaining or good to watch or why did you run up there?**

It was horrifying. It sort of transfixed you. You had to look and you had to look and wonder what happened to that guy.

25:30 But I knew he wouldn't have survived. In fact I'm positive he wouldn't have from that ship which was a commodore's ship and the commodore had shifted to our ship. It was like what made him shift? I know why. I reckon, you know how I told you we were blowing up the mines? He probably thought the first shift in line... It's common knowledge that the commodores have the first ship but sometimes they are in the ship in the

26:00 middle and back. The Germans would have got to know this and he probably changed because the Germans seemed to get the information about where we were going, when we were going, what convoy and even the names of the ships. They used to say it over the radio. "Dear sailors. Don't fight. The Germans are your friends. The Germans and Italians are your friends. Just go back to your wives and families otherwise we'll kill you. That ship number so-

26:30 and-so. We are going to attack you tonight at so-and-so." And sure enough, right on the spot they would. Anyway we get to Corsica.

**Just a minute. When you are, it's very important for the archive to understand the horrors of war really, but when you are seeing this happen is there thoughts of it**

27:00 **being close to you and it could happen to you?**

Oh yeah. You are only thankful. Things that go through you head quickly but one of the things is, "Thank goodness it's not me." You never think it's going to happen to you. Probably those guys on that ship that were on the port bow thought the same thing. That was number one. We were number two. P2 was our number and we were

27:30 made then P1. Anyway we got to Ajaccio and Corsica and we were being shelled and there are lots of children on the part of the beach where it was and I was given the job of going up there and just staying and watching while these

28:00 African and French troops went up into the hills to silence the guns with that mysterious man. Anyway, I saw a shed down the end of this particular beach which was clearly visible and I put Peter Burke, WA in '43. I wrote it on. The second time I've done any vandalism and I probably shouldn't have done it.

28:30 In red paint I put it on. It was like a big shed. There are a couple of other unusual things happened. While I was with all these children I felt sorry. "Mangari, mangari." No, they were speaking in French sorry. I forget what it is in French now. It meant they were hungry and I never saw any adults apart from a little one that I'll tell you

29:00 about in a second but all these poor children. Very small and very hungry. You see them, they're emaciated looking. So I went onto the ship and I got as much food as I could and I took it back to them, including my own food that I was supposed to eat. I was there at the same spot where I could watch the ship and watch the land. It was like a point duty and I saw a man walking forwards. It was the first adult, Frenchmen I thought, and I thought

29:30 he looked like a fishermen because you always have to figure out what they are and shoot them if you're not sure. I was especially prone to that. I would shoot a person first and worry about it later on because I was very young. Anyway he came closer and I said, "What do you want?" I knew a few words of French but I've forgotten it now. I used to know the words for hungry and food

30:00 and everything. And anyway in a clear voice he said, "I'm captain so-and-so." I forget what his name was now, "of British Army Intelligence. I require to speak to your captain." And I said, "All right." And I looked at him because he looked like a Frenchmen. A bit of a moustache, long hair, a French cap and a fishing basket.

30:30 And I said, "What's in the fishing basket?" and he said, "It's a radio," and he showed me it was a radio, short wave radio. I said, "What have you been doing?" and he said, "I've been on this island for two years and transmitting." But he wouldn't tell me much. He said, "I'm a captain in the British military intelligence." So I took him up and that was the last I saw of him. That was that. And when I got off duty,

31:00 I must have been asleep. Obviously some of this mightn't be in the proper context, but I'll just tell you

the good bits or what I think are the good bits. You know who is born on Corsica? Napoleon Bonaparte you see. Later on I went to Jamestown in St Helena, not on that ship but the Thermistocles when I was going home to Australia on the bride ship and I met a beautiful girl in Jamestown, St Helena but I'll go on with the thing in Corsica.

31:30 I knew that Napoleon Bonaparte was born there and that he had a mansion up in the hills and, there wasn't even a donkey around. No donkeys, no way around except walking. And this mansion was up on the hill where he was born. He was in French possession even though the Italians owned it at one time or another. I got up there and it's empty but loaded

32:00 with furniture and each piece of furniture had ivory. They used to do things in pure ivory in those days because it used to be cheap, not like it is now. 'Cette piece furniture'. Cette piece was French for "This is a piece of furniture". 'Cette piece furniture of Napoleon Bonaparte'. So I thought.

32:30 Go again.

**Yes. Napoleon Bonaparte.**

So this 'Cette piece furniture Napoleon Bonaparte born whatever', and I thought, "This would be a souvenir." Nobody believed me that it was from Corsica and from Napoleon Bonaparte's house. Anyhow I had that for years and that disappeared. I painted my name, a bit of vandalism on there: P Burke

33:00 1943. It was in August 1943 it was from memory and...

**What was the actual piece of furniture?**

I think it was a bed but I'm not sure. It was sort of wired on and I took the one that came off easy. They had little holes in them but it was pure ivory. Real ivory.

33:30 But it was just saying what the bit of furniture was. And I went back to the ship and we'd we go to then. I went back to Algiers then. I think we went back to Algiers and then we loaded up a lot more troops. 8th Army troops because they had to get out of North Africa and onto

34:00 mainland Europe and we had 8th Army guys again. About the same number, about 1,500 and the same thing as soon as we left port. They didn't bomb Algiers. They must have had some sort of, they used to make little deals between the French commanders and British commanders and German commanders and all these sort of things. The same thing - bombing,

34:30 torpedo and mines - and we headed for Italy then see. Now Italy was invaded on 2 September, August or September and we got there in October, the very beginning of October, and we landed at Taranto. But the Germans were still there because

35:00 the Allies had landed at just before Rome there, Naples and Anzio and what's the other place? One you mentioned it. Anyway we'd landed opposite a place. What's the name of the place? Anyway we were at Taranto which was the biggest naval support of the Italians

35:30 and they made some sort of deals with the Italians then, even though we were still fighting with the Germans, and there was this very fort-like opening. Large enough to fit a couple of warships, big warships, in at a time but very high. And along the whole parapet right along on both sides were Italian marines standing there watching up with their hands on the butt of their gun and paying us a sort of a salute but letting

36:00 us know that there is a possibility that they would attack us, but they were frightened to I think. Our ships had an unbelievable amount of arms on them. Unbelievable these invasions ships that I was on! So many machine guns and heavy guns and rockets and all this. Every sort of thing. We could have blown them up straight away

36:30 and killed the lot of them. So anyway we sailed through at about 8 knots and they are watching us into shore. I saw a lot of two-man submarines there, midget submarines. I went in quickly into one and got out quickly. It was too closed in for me. I don't know how they do it.

**We'll just stop for a minute. Okay.**

We arrived at Taranto and went through these huge manmade

37:00 concrete sort of things. Apparently it was a submarine base and the biggest Italian naval base they had for the Italian base and a submarine base as well. We were attacked there a few times, on the way there several times. There the Germans had retreated and they had retreated up the, on the left side, the port side,

37:30 there was heavy fighting all along. On the right side because of the mountainous country there wasn't as much fighting. They were still there but they were retreating gradually up at a slower pace because they were being driven this way and being forced very gradually up the right-hand side. So there was actually Germans on both sides on the hill of Italy and they are also on the thing and they are coming on an angle like that. And if they had been stopped of getting past

- 38:00 what do they call it? I mentioned that place where my cousin was? That place anyway. They were trying to get past Naples and Anzio and all those places so they wouldn't be trapped, cut off that sort of thing and I remember going to also later on to Ancona. The Germans were all the way along there but it was so mountainous
- 38:30 they couldn't retreat properly, but the Australians managed, they had a little aeroplane thing to land aeroplanes up in the mountains. It's unbelievable! I was in Ancona and I heard Australian voices behind this little hessian bag separating us in this little café and there's four Australian air force guys! I couldn't believe it! You wouldn't even be able to get there because when you look around
- 39:00 all you can see is mountains all around like that. It's like the Cattagut. Do you know the Cattagut? It's where the ancient rivers had sliced out huge bits out of the land.

#### **Glaciers?**

Something like that, yeah. There is no way you'd think and I said, "How you'd get down here?" and he said, "By a truck along a mountain road." Jesus, it would be terrifying just to land

- 39:30 a plane and terrifying to go by truck just up and down the mountains there. So anyway we left Corsica.

#### **This submarine base that you went into.**

Taranto. That was in Taranto. We are in Italy now. That was the third invasion that I was in but I was in a bit later in this one. I was in D Day in both the others and Taranto was

- 40:00 about a month after the actual landings in Italy you see. The first landing in Taranto.

## **Tape 6**

- 00:32 Lots of mountainous country. Anyway what's the name of the place opposite? There is a place opposite. Where I was in Taranto. I forget the name of the place but it's about 20 or 30 miles away and that was bombed

- 01:00 when we were there and 19 ships were sunk. It was the most sunk apart from Pearl Harbour in the whole world in one area. The Germans just wiped out everything. It was their own fault. They were getting so cocky, the Allies, that they used to keep their lights on to unload the ships and all the time and the troops and...

#### **At this stage did you think the tide was turning in the war?**

- 01:30 We never thought of anything else. All the Allies as far as I know were very positive, optimistic. We never once thought that we weren't going to beat the Axis. Never once. I never and I never heard of anyone else that did. What was the name of the place opposite us?

- 02:00 Anyway some of the ships were carrying mustard gas for storage in Italy in case of the Germans or Italians used it they would use it back in retaliation and the men were horribly burnt. There were 200 of them affected by gas and when they went back onto hospital ships it affected other men on the crew.

#### **So it was transmitted from the guys who**

- 02:30 **had it?**

It was a gas but it is passed on very easy just by the slightest touch. I forget the name of the place but it was just near us you know. We were bombed but we weren't hit. That's what happened at that place. Bari. That's the name Bari. B-A-R-I. There were 19 ships sunk and in just the one air raid and altogether I think about

- 03:00 close to 400 crew lost their life and I don't know how many servicemen like army, air force.

#### **Can I just ask you? Was it known at the time that it was mustard gas?**

No. They didn't know. They thought it impossible that it could happen because it hadn't been used since World War I. Apparently they had stockpiled it in England

- 03:30 and this was part of the stuff that they had brought over from Egypt to put it in Italy in case the Germans they started to use it. The Allies wouldn't but the Germans might have. Anyway we...

#### **So when did you find out it was mustard gas?**

I heard at the time and didn't believe it and it was confirmed lots of times after the war.

- 04:00 Not a lot of people know about it but it was confirmed amongst service people that were over there.

#### **Do you think it would have been used?**



By the Germans in desperation, possibly.

### **Not by us?**

If they had used it we would have used it straight away of course. That's what happened in World War I. The Germans started using and the British and Americans started using it straight away in retaliation you see. What happens someone starts it

04:30 and the others carry on.

### **Just on this issue, did your ship ever carry maybe not mustard gas but other dangerous products like that?**

Everything was dangerous. The ammunition, the bombs, the shells, the high octane gas, the tanks, the fighters on the thing with the wings taken off and wrapped closely to the fuselage.

05:00 All sorts of mechanised things, mechanised armoured cars, jeeps, motorbikes, all this sorts of arms and ammunition.

### **Did it feel dangerous carrying these products?**

I was used to it. I'd done it since 1942 so it was just a normal thing.

05:30 We used to watch other ships like as I said blow up and I never thought it would be us. Here's another thing in the Sicily invasion the shrapnel was that deep on the decks, and I'm not exaggerating, it was that deep. And in the scuppers around the edges it was that high and I couldn't believe it! And I used to skate across the deck like that. I could skate and if you didn't, and I was a skater,

06:00 you had to just sweep it and sweep a path away from it. And the boys used to be so, the boys especially on the guns away from where they were sleeping, used to be so frightened of the amount of shrapnel coming down. It was all our own stuff going up and coming down on top of them you see. It wasn't from heavy shells. Even now and again you would get a bit but it was generally a bit about

06:30 this big and that was the average size, but pretty sharp. Now my uniform, what I used to wear was an Africa Corps helmet with two life jackets on and a pair of shorts and gaiters. Like the British Army uniform, that was the army uniform, and a belt and a lot of people didn't know what you were. When you had to go anywhere you had to look like as though you were

07:00 a soldier you see, so you wore that. And anyway twice I was nicked. Twice. Somewhere there and the one that was here. That one there was stuck in and I never got it out and I've seen the log books and never any reports of any injuries. The only thing to elude to the war is 'beaches Sicily'.

07:30 I've got actual log books of two of the ships that I was on and it just says 'Corsica' see, and 'Taranto, Italy'. But it doesn't mention the war at all. That's a funny thing.

### **Can you just explain?**

I was pulling it out with a pair of pliers. I was frightened, well I wasn't frightened but I didn't want other men pulling me around because they were bloody cruel. I thought they might hurt me worse

08:00 than it was hurting so I just persevered with it and I had a pair of pliers and then I just pulled it out and I put a piece of elastoplast thing was on it. I knew where all the first-aid stuff was, a cabinet and a little bed and all that sort of stuff. I had my own stuff which I used to use when I got a slight cut

08:30 I used to just put it on myself. I never reported it because they don't enter it in the merchant marine. If you get the slightest cut in the army or air force it's all over your record but we could be, I was wounded four times. Once, twice, three times, four times and no record. Nothing at all because they didn't do it. No record at all of these things in the merchant navy.

### **Can you just explain quickly**

09:00 **how your own shrapnel ends up on your own ship.**

Well they explode in the air. You can have a clear blue sky and they start bombing and there is so much steel thrown up, steel. It's often not steel. It's often a mixture of aluminium and something else just to make it harder and when they explode like that. A lot of it's steel but mainly I found most of it to be

09:30 alloy. That comes down. Once it goes up and explodes it has to come down. We always had shrapnel but in Sicily it was that deep all over the ship and the scuppers that deep. In the merchant navy you won't get any photographs of what happened. We were the only ones that were forbidden to do it because we all went through so much fucking hell.

10:00 The army, navy and air force were allowed to do it but we weren't allowed to take anything. We had more casualties than anyone else. The army in 1:29 and us 1:4. Us never mentioned. Very few medals. This is nothing. If I had been army and air force and been where I was I would have had about 40 bloody medals. VCs [Victoria Crosses], MCs [Military Crosses] all this sort of business. Anyway we left

10:30 Taranto.

**Italy, yeah.**

Yeah we left Italy and we went then to Casablanca and we tied up alongside a French warship. They had been attacked and sunk by the British and Americans when they landed in North Africa on the other side of Algiers on the

11:00 Moroccan coast opposite Gibraltar. Before that we stopped in at Gibraltar but didn't go ashore and then we went across to Casablanca and we weren't there very long. We went to I think it was up near Liverpool and up the Manchester Ship Canal and

11:30 another unusual thing that happened. I had never seen this happen before. We had been in so many invasions, three, two in D Day and in Italy and we had been in so much action that everyone knew this ship called Thistlemuir. It was a well-known ship in the navy, army and air force in the merchant marines circles. When we went to Liverpool Harbour they had fire boats with their water

12:00 going up in the air on either side and every ship in the harbour pulled their horn. We were going in and we had been hit a lot of times. There was damage to the superstructure and up around the bow of the ship, not much to the stern. There was so much damage done from minor attacks. We had been

12:30 smashed and all this sort of stuff and they knew what we'd been through because of the flags we hoisted to say where we'd been. The honour. It's the only ship I've seen it done to. The water by lots of fire boats, tug boats and the hooting of all the boats in the harbour until we sailed into Manchester Ship Canal and then

13:00 what was the name? That's where I got off, somewhere near the Manchester Ship Canal. I forget what it's called. I left there and caught a train to London because London was the life where I wanted to be. One of the first things I did was go to Australia House and the Boomerang Club underneath,

13:30 and they used to sing 'Waltzing Matilda' there all the time and drink coffee, free coffee and waffles. They used to send you to, billet you out. They sent me to one place and I arrived there and that was in flames so I went back so they sent me to a place in Barnhurst in Kent. It was an Australian family with two daughters so I loved that.

14:00 That was the start. They were still bombing but they were also sending over V bombs, V1s and V2s which had the rocket, and these girls didn't seem to have any fear. They were Australian girls by the way but they were marooned there by the war. Their father was a professor or a doctor or something like that, doctor of science. And you could hear the rocket,

14:30 the Doodlebug, and the other one you would hear Sssssssssssssssss until it hit. But the Doodlebug, that used to make a sound and then all of a sudden it would stop and then you'd hear Sssssssssssss. If it was right in front of you, heading for you and it stopped up there, you were dead and everything around you for hundreds of yards. If it was up here and stopped, everything was hunky dory. It would land

15:00 over there and that's what the girl used to say, "Watch this!" and loving it. I was ready to run off from its path. You could see where it was coming from and you could see where it was heading and you would just run off to the right or the left and if you were quick enough you would get away from most of the blast you see. You would lie flat down or get behind a tunnel or under a bridge. That sort of thing. Anyway we used to watch them go and land like that. A huge explosion. Unbelievable.

15:30 The fact that there was an awful lot of special explosion and a hell of a lot of damage.

**When you said you run that this way and duck and lie, was that taught or was that something that...?**

I did it because I was fleet of foot and I had to. I was a survivor. I was a great survivor. What I went through in the war and came back practically unscathed is amazing, isn't it? I was still having trouble with the war

16:00 neurosis and all that so they sent me to a place just near Brighton. I'm not sure if it's called Southwick. I'm not sure. But it's just near Brighton because that was the main railway station and they sent us off in a bus, a small bus, and it was like a rest home and possibly a hospital because they had a huge red cross

16:30 on a white background. And if you were ambulatory or anything, in other words able to walk around, which I was, you had to do work there. I hated work and some of the jobs they got us to do was in the freezing cold. It gets cold there in the winter and ice in the cauliflowers and cabbages and things like this

17:00 and they expect you to cut them off. It was getting raided every night. Not by Doodles [Doodlebugs] but by German aircraft. They were raiding the hospital and one day I got up and I walked over and just after there had been a bombing thing and there was this huge crater as big as this whole house. Down below there is I could see hundreds of

17:30 unexploded bombs. Not hundreds but dozens and dozens and all smouldering but way down. About 30

or 40 ft. Apparently the whole crate had fallen out of the Germans' aircraft and instead of coming out electronically or how they did it – I don't know how they did it – but the whole crate had fallen out. Another time they called me 'Curly' because I had curly black hair and they called a guy that was with me

18:00 'Bluey' because he had red hair. Bluey and Curly, do you know those characters? We pinched the... The guy was in there, some sort of performer, and we cycled into town. I think it was Southwick but I'm not sure. I get mixed up with Sussex, Essex, Wessex and all that sort of thing. It was just near Brighton and anyway the night we went there was a huge air raid. These bombers were mainly

18:30 incendiary bombers and I brought back a whole incendiary bomb which I exploded and made a hole in the roof with a nail and then I had a tail fin from another one. But wherever we went he used to like fish and chips and drinking more than me. And anyway I was walking down this street and the entire street was on fire. The entire street and in a country town that was I don't know.

19:00 There was a couple of air-raid wardens and they said, "Get off the street you silly fool!" And I was sort of dulled with all this bombing that I'd had. I had war neurosis and I didn't know it except the authorities seemed to know it but to me I seemed to be reasonably okay.

**What were your symptoms with this war neurosis?**

19:30 Just dull, dull all the time. Sometimes falling over and bumping into things. Sort of nightmares and jump like that. What do they call it? I forget what they call it. There is a name but I was very, very...

20:00 I thought I was going to die all that time. I thought I was going to die physically, not because of the war but I just thought I was going to die.

**What was you said that the authorities, you didn't know but the authorities did and they sent you to Brighton.**

You see I had been in Tripoli and they knew there was something wrong there. Alexandria. Remember Phillipville just outside Algiers

20:30 with the 98th Military Hospital. It was called Algiers but Phillipville was the port before it. Then when I got to London they sent me and they sent me to this place anyway, and what they were expecting to do for me I don't know. I forget what they were giving me it was so long

21:00 ago, but what I remember is the traumatic parts, the bombings and things like that. I remember walking down and the entire street was on fire on both sides and this range warden, what do they call them? Fire warden, saying, "Get off the street!" Like police with warden things. And I took no notice of him because to me I was

21:30 invincible and I was dulled to all these things and so used to it I took no notice. Seeing fires down both sides of the entire street was nothing. Anyway.

**Did they put you in hospital or did they give you...?**

I was already in hospital then. I was in hospital when I came back to Australia as well and recently of going to, I spent five years of going to

22:00 Heidelberg Military or Heidelberg Repatriation [Hospital] from about half way '97 to about 2002. I still get medical treatment. I go there about once a week to a doctor but I don't tell them much. For a start they don't know much about it. I don't know much about it except that I feel dull, dazed in alternate times.

22:30 Always thinking of the war. I feel I love the war but I hate it. That sort of thing. I can't go on aircraft. I feel so, I've seen so many, I must have seen hundreds of them shot down. On the convoy we had these converted merchant ships and you'd see them crash, you would see enemy aeroplanes crash. You know you are just fed up with aircraft and ships too. I don't like any form of travel except my car.

**23:00 How did they plan a treatment for this?**

Well what I've had a lot of time in Australia exercise and doing something because I always thought of the war and still do, especially at night-time. It seems to hit you more at night-time. I can't sleep just thinking of the war for three quarters of the night and that sort of thing.

23:30 You just feel you want to scream and that you are going to die and you want to die. That sort of thing. And you've got to use all your wits to stop doing it. A lot of the guys commit suicide. That's what you've got to watch. Some of my friends I can't believe it. They didn't appear as bad as me and next thing they are dead. They shoot themselves or

24:00 take excessive tablets and that. Anyway I left this place.

**Just a couple of more questions about it. It's very important stuff. Do you think what you saw affected you more because of your younger age?**

I haven't a clue, honestly. I think it affects everyone in the war. I think it possibly affected me less

because I was in so much trouble

24:30 compared to a lot other people. Some people just don't believe I was in these places. They just don't believe it and I don't blame them because I look young and fit and they're old people because they joined up ten years later than me. That's the difference. I'm 76 going on 77, they are 86 going on 87 nearly 90 you know. That's the difference. So instead of being

25:00 13 they were 23 or 24 or heading for 30 or even more.

**How did you see the other guys around you coping with it?**

I never saw, as far as I know any sort of coward seen anywhere, although I thought I was a bit of coward wanting to drop of the ship at Sicily after 4½ days. I had just had 4½ days and nights of continual hell. It was the worst

25:30 noise I had ever heard in my life, the most thunderous roaring and screaming of people and the fires on these ships. It was enormous.

**What term did they use to describe it back then?**

What I call it Dante's inferno. Hell. Hell.

26:00 I'll go on to Normandy if you like.

**Just a couple more questions. What we have found interviewing people is that normally the World War II guys don't really feel like talking about getting counselling and they are very reticent, whereas the Vietnam guys it's practically a way of life for them. At later wars they**

26:30 **recognised war neurosis or whatever you want to call it?**

Well they didn't know much about when I had it. Remember I said it was called bomb blast. There was one that was called war neurosis you see. When I came back to Australia they put me in hospital because I was crying openly in the street and I couldn't stop myself crying and the very thought of anything to do with the war. So they put me into

27:00 a, I was going to get to that later on when I came back to Australia. Keep going, will I? That's a noise from over the road there.

**Hang on I'm hearing something. Okay.**

Okay. Anyway I got fed up. Whenever I decided to do anything, whether I was in the armed forces, the 2nd AIF, I just said, "That's it. I'm not

27:30 doing anything else. I'm going." And I used to do it. I always did what I wanted to do and not what people told me to do. Sometimes I did when it was to my advantage. Anyway I was pretty shrewd that way. I generally learnt what was good for me and what wasn't good for me. If it wasn't good for me or my future health I didn't do it. That sort of thing.

**What do you think about the World War II guys who laugh and joke?**

28:00 Good luck to them.

**And don't take seriously getting counselling?**

They don't take it seriously?

**Yes. We offer them a pamphlet and they laugh at us.**

If they need it and they know they need it they should take any advice from the medical guys. They should watch what they take. I take Aropax 300 mg tablets a day.

28:30 That's 900 mg. But I advise them not to take Aropax because that has an effect on you I believe. I don't know about some of the others. I've only had the one tablet. I've tried other doctors all through the, when I came to Heidelberg which gave me stuff which seemed to make me worse. I'd be screaming out.

29:00 Didn't know I was in a continuous nightmare and didn't know what was happening at all. I would bring down my partner, my first wife, for example. You know, ladies I was with I would sort of infect them with it. They were driven off their nuts by me. I had to get away from them because it would make them bad.

29:30 Anyway I left this Southwick place because I said, "That's it. No more coal minings for me. No more getting bombed every night and walking down fires on both sides of the whole village." I don't know where the people went. I only saw this one guy and I finally get to when I was happening and the fish and chip shop was still going and I said, "What have you got?" She said, "We've got no fish." And I said, "Well what have you got?"

30:00 and she said, "Chips." And I won't tell you what I did. I said, "Batter that." No, no I didn't. But I did actually say that. Here I found Bluey and we get on the bike and go back. He had a big bottle of stuff like this and it was foul stuff, this English beer. Bloody terrible! It tasted like wheat vinegar

- 30:30 and they drink it warm! They don't have cold beer! Anyway we had to survive on that bloody stuff and I took it back because I had to get what little clothes I had and I don't even remember getting that. Some things are a complete blank but I must have got them because I arrived in London with Bluey back again and we used
- 31:00 to go to the dance in Hammersmith. A few dances and then we told... We were registered to go to either Russia on a Russian convoy, Sweden to get ballbearings and fast torpedo boats, or go to the invasion of Europe you see. We had our things stamped that we were ready for anything like that except we had the right of refusal. We had to
- 31:30 accept one and refuse the others. I don't know what Bluey did but I lost contact with him until later on when I came back from Normandy. I chose the invasion of Europe and they had some sort of a mark they put and they gave us extra rations. What happened then? One day they said to me,
- 32:00 "Go down to Liverpool." He's laughing his head off at me. "Go down to Liverpool. There's a ship there waiting for you." I said, "Oh yeah." "I hope you like it. It's an American ship." And I said, "Oh yeah, that's lovely." It turns out I was the only Australian on the ship and they called me 'Kangaroo' Burke. Anyway I got on that and they didn't know where they were going
- 32:30 but I was the only one who knew I was on for the invasion of Europe. The captain might have known. But anyway away we go and in fact we seemed to go as soon as I got aboard we were casting off the ropes in the next couple of hours. So I just made it. They said that I would just make it if I went quickly, otherwise I would have had to go back and get another ship I suppose. Anyhow we headed to Boston and there I got a Z number. Do you know what a Z number is?
- 33:00 Z424802. That's for wartime members of the US Coast Guard that were attached to the merchant marine. So I had that and then I had my lifeboat ticket. I got that in Boston as well. I signed on as a utility man. That's to do anything you know. The
- 33:30 what do they call the person? The steward, the head steward was a guy who liked me. Later on I gave him a whack and he got rid of the powers he gave me. They have huge powers, the steward on a ship.

**Can I just clear one thing up for me. You're in London and you say, "I want to be in the invasion of Europe," and then they sent you to Boston. Is that right?**

Yeah.

**So you had to go to America to prepare?**

To prepare. Yeah, that's right.

34:00 **Okay.**

It was a liberty ship built in something like 3.8 days in the Kaiser shipbuilding yards in Brooklyn. Anyway I arrived at Boston and I've got all my papers and I had an American address and I even started a bank account in US dollars there and everyone thought that I was American because being so young they couldn't think that I was anything else. They just issued the papers as if I was an American.

34:30 I've still got them. Have I still got them? No, I'll tell you what happened. This is real funny. I sold them when I came back to Australia. So I went to the US over there and I met a senator's daughter and her address was 32 Bird Street, Worcester, Massachusetts. And I met her there and she asked me to stay the night. I don't know if I stayed the night or not. She was a lovely girl but I was just more interested in putting in an address in the United States for all my papers. I had my seaman Z number,

35:00 my lifeboat ticket and this second cook's ticket. I wasn't a cook. I didn't know anything. I knew an egg from a potato and that's about all you know. I was a utility man doing anything and anyway that was the lowest job on the ship, the utility man. One thing. I was the only guy on that ship who had seen action and I had seen two years of it in the North Africa see mainly, and the Mediterranean, other

35:30 parts. They didn't give me exit papers. That didn't apply to US ships. That only applied to British ships. I never went on a British ship as far as I know. I was supposed to get more money than anyone else in a similar rank, which was ordinary seaman, which is second lowest rank you can get. So we left Boston.

**So while you were in Boston, what training**

36:00 **did you do?**

Nothing there. We went to Barge Canal where I had been before. Remember I told you I had been there before? There they put more guns on, much more guns. It was something like the ship I was on that was in the invasion of Sicily so I knew what they were preparing for. And we had on 9th Division and amphibian boys.

36:30 Sorry 4th Amphibian Division boys. And we had a few. I don't know why they sent them but a few airborne. Guys from the 82nd Airborne and I think there was a few from the 1st Airborne. As far as I remember. I know that there were airborne guys on there with different things on their,

- 37:00 you know like that. See what I've got there, the invasion of Sicily force. Anyway so we had all these extra guns and I told you about Bubbles and this American guy, except that actually happened when I was on the American ship as an American sailor. I got mixed up with the time.
- 37:30 In 1942 I was walking with these American sailors, US sailors and officers in front, and I said, "You can have him." I knew I could get in. He was quite and shy and he was from Ohio and I used to get Ohio mixed up with Utah and Omaha. It took me quite a while and also because I was dazed.
- 38:00 I had war neurosis you know. Anyway we were heading back towards the landing in Europe.
- Just at this stage did you know where you were going to invade, what beach you were landing? Did you know any of that?**
- No, nothing at all. On the way they were giving us all sort of stories. Confusing stories. They said we might be invading in the top part of Italy, southern France or go through
- 38:30 Spain. All different things. I don't think they even mentioned Normandy. Later on they said it might be up. Anyhow we go to Belfast and Ireland. Loch something or other. I can't forget the name. There I saved an American sailor's life. He fell over. They were playing - they play a lot of handball - and I saw him tumble over and I looked over the side and there he is struggling; he couldn't swim you see.
- 39:00 He was yelling out, "Help!" and everything and I looked around that there's half a million soldiers and airmen, commandos and that watching him. There were about 500 ships there, all warships, watching him including ours. So I just pulled off to my underpants and dived in and I had a buoy and I pushed that in front of me and it's a very cold, quick current. About an eight knot current. It was quicker than the first ship I was
- 39:30 on so it was a fairly quick current and I pushed it to him and he said, "You've saved my life. You'll get a medal for this," because in the [United] States you get a medal for those quite easily. You can get the Purple Heart for wounds but I wasn't wounded with the Americans otherwise I would have got four of them you see. But they lowered a ship and the officer said, "You are not supposed
- 40:00 to swim over the side," because I had said, "We just wanted to go for a swim." I don't know what they thought I'd done but I saved the guy's life and he told them that I had saved the guy's life and anyway they got us on board and they wanted me to fine me for swimming overside. They said, "Look at these..." They had things on the wall 'No swimming' because you would be shot. They were frightened of the frogmen and all that with warships around all over the place, aircraft carriers,
- 40:30 battle cruisers, merchant ships all ready for invasion. We had all these 'ducks'. Do you know what a duck is? A DKW [?] amphibious vehicle. They are about 60 ft long and they carry about 30 troops or something like that or a light tank or armoured vehicle or a couple of jeeps, three jeeps or something like that. And we had eight of these on board.
- 41:00 They were strung out a bit like in Sicily but allowing for the weather close to the sides of the ship, not like they did in Sicily which were much quieter waters. The channel was a bit choppy.

**We'll just stop there because that's the end of that tape.**

## Tape 7

- 00:31 A friend of mine, they are both ex merchant marines and they both had an average of about 30 rifles each in the shooting gallery. They are both okay though.
- Okay. Well we won't mess with them, will we?**
- He's a tough man. He was the master-at-arms on the ship. He was like the ship's policemen.
- Right we are recording now so we'll have to change the subject. All right, Normandy invasion. Tell us**
- 01:00 **your story of that.**
- We leave Belfast about four days before D Day. We go down the coast gradually. It has to be controlled because there are about 5,000 ships involved. 5,500 ships. They didn't tell us we were going to Normandy. In fact they kept on telling us we were going to the south of France. Up until we reached the
- 01:30 [English] Channel area they still said that, and then all of a sudden they switched around to go to the port side or left side. We arrived I don't know, it was close to D Day but I don't know how close. It appeared to be like Sicily to me. We had the warships shelling great big shells. You could hear them
- 02:00 going over but we couldn't see them. I thought I saw them a couple of times but they're pretty quick. They are big shells, great big shells, 20-inch shells or 60-inch shells. And then I saw all the parachutists dropping just like Sicily and Corsica and those places and Italy. Enormous volume. They sort of block out the whole sky there are so many of them, parachutists in different colour

02:30 parachutes, items that might be men or equipment of some sort. I don't know what they were. They were in different colours. Anyway they were going ashore from our ship and about the sixth day after we arrived I thought, "This is it! I'm going ashore!" They left lots of clothing items on board and...

**Like what?**

03:00 Full uniforms. All sorts of things, troopers' boots and all this good stuff. They spoil the guys that go into action in the invasions. They give them good equipment and plenty of it and in the American forces they hardly lack for anything. It's not like the British forces or the Australian forces where if you get into trouble you lose something. The Americans it's so what? Just go to the Q-store [Quartermaster's store] and get some more.

03:30 Anyway I had the helmet anyway. We were issued with the American military helmets and I got hold of the uniform and I had the paratroopers' boots and I went ashore as a 4th Division soldier with the full knowledge of them. They were quite happy and they thought it was great fun to have me with them.

04:00 **Was this the 4th Division?**

The amphibious division. They called them the 4th Division.

**American army?**

We knew them as the 4th Amphibious Division and their job was to, what was it? Their job was to go in Utah Beach, which I was in. Omaha Beach went up to this big cliff. I think it was called Cap de Hoc but I'm not quite sure. Ours was, Utah Beach was after that.

04:30 I went ashore on this duck and at the time it was pretty rough and the duck was filling with water and so they pulled it up on one end and I was up at that particular end so I was more or less hanging on an angle like that. They got rid of the water. They pumped it out and put it back in the thing, pumped the rest of the water out because it was very rough,

05:00 terribly rough on that particular day I went. And we went past a liberty ship that had been blown up on the shore. That's how you can tell Utah Beach from Omaha. Utah Beach this ship was washed right up on the shore in the storm. I went along there and alongside of that liberty ship which was right up on the beach and the crew were still going around as if they were still on the shore.

05:30 They were kicked off once they got rid of their equipment and stuff. They had pipes going into the sea to get rid of sludge and all the junk I suppose. Anyway especially the captain of the ship said, "No-one's allowed ashore. Occupation orders that no person

06:00 from this ship is allowed ashore." Of course I had already been ashore in Sicily, Corsica and Italy and I wasn't supposed to be ashore in Freetown and that was my motto. I did what I wanted to have a bit of fun. My sort of fun, which wasn't a lot of people's fun. Go up the sand dunes which had been levelled in a lot of places by what do you call it?

06:30 Bulldozers. And I passed rows of bodies for a start and then rows of ammunition and rifles and machine guns and that sort of thing and what's called a Goliath tank. Do you know what that is? Well it's the only one I've seen. It was the only one brought back which was the one that I got by the way and I thought, "I'll get that when I come back." I wanted to go to the front line but I didn't want to

07:00 go. Anyway I hopped on this duck and sort of talked to... Suppliers were around and they said, "You can take what you want. You take all the rifles and machine guns you want. You can take the little tank too." It was full of high explosive but I didn't know that. A little electric tank, Goliath tank.

**Can I just ask you a few questions? Can you firstly describe to us what a Goliath tank looks like?**

07:30 It looks like a World War I tank with the sloping thingamies like that, yeah sloping. Straight here and straight here but sloping and just like a big tank but a miniature one. It's about from here to that wall and it's driven by an electric motor, a couple of batteries, heavy-duty batteries, and they load it with high explosives on both sides and then it is radio controlled. It has a lot of wires,

08:00 a lot of wires in there but there wasn't the signalling part to make it work. You know, attached to it. They had been cut off probably by the Allies to stop them blowing up I suppose. Detonate and all that. I spotted it and I thought, "Boy what a beaut toy to play with on the ship, plus all these machine guns." There were all these sorts of machine guns and American rifles, Garand and things like

08:30 that. I had a carbine with me. Not the one that snaps in half. There is one that snaps. I had the one that was all together in one piece and I chucked that in the pile and I picked up a Garand rifle. I hopped in a truck and I said, "We are you going?" and they said, "The front." I said, "Where's the front?" and they said, "It's about half way to Cherbourg." I thought "Will I go there?" and I thought, "No, bugger it."

09:00 I wanted to get back to Australia if I could and, "If I go there I'm bound to be killed or something like that." I thought that I would try for something a bit simpler. I went along for a while and I noticed these sort of tapes and signs which said 'Mines' and I forget what it said but meaning that it hadn't been

- 09:30 explored. It had been bypassed. That area had been bypassed. They would always do that. They would jump from one spot to another and leave the enemy there. So I remember I had had a go at a German soldier in Sicily and didn't get him. I thought that with a bit of luck I might get this one because I had a Garand rifle, which is a very good rifle. So I said to the guys,
- 10:00 "Get me to hop out of this truck when we get to a place that hasn't really been gone into by the troops." They said, "Up here," because the drivers had been driving backwards and forwards taking troops up to the front line. They dropped me off at this spot and they said, "Wish you luck," because they thought it was a great joke. But I was serious. I wanted to bag a couple of Germans you see.
- 10:30 So anyway I went into the, reasonably bushy and all along that area by the way was swamp land and the Americans had when they after they got the bulldozers to it they had had difficulty negotiating it before that. They had dunes where they wanted to cross the swamps. They pushed the sand into the dunes. There was
- 11:00 huge amounts because they had these huge caterpillar things pushing it in and do you know that stuff is that they put on landing strips to land on? They had these sort of things and they had tanks that just came up and laid it like this and they made beautiful roadways. They did that and you would look on the side and there was water here and a bit of earth and water here and a mound of earth and that went on
- 11:30 for about three or four. About four lots of water before it stopped and became reasonably flat. And apparently the Germans... It had been raining and it had actually flooded the area and they had prevented the water from running away by blocking it somewhere. The Yanks were a wake up to all this. They had photographed the area all before and they had their bulldozers
- 12:00 push the sand in and make a roadway over it. So anyway I've got a sore throat from talking too bloody much. Hoarse throat in fact. I get off the truck and I got into the bush and I thought, "I've got to get me a few Germans," and I never thought of anything happening to me and I knew that I would get some. I knew
- 12:30 also, it was common knowledge that they were older soldiers. They wouldn't be as quick as me or as alert as me because I was a boy just turned 16. I'm fit now! Imagine what I was when I was 16 and a bit! Yeah. Anyway I went further into the bush and I was just about getting
- 13:00 a bit of sick of it. I thought that I would go to the front line for a couple of days and then come back and I saw these Germans up ahead about 400 yards and I remember I had been on the farms and that. You always go rabbit shooting. It's a natural for an Australian who's out in the bush areas. Always, "Can I have a loan of that .22? Can I have a loan of .303?"
- 13:30 Anyway and I had been to a gunnery school in Sidibish just outside Alexandria in 1943. I knew how to apply aim off and all that sort of stuff, which I didn't know before when I was hunting rabbits, but you know how to allow for drop of the bullet and allowance for wind, allowance for movement. All that sort of thing.
- 14:00 It's called. I forget what I said now. What's it called again? It's called lay off or something like that. I forget now. But anyway I spotted this German. He had a rifle so he could defend himself. He was fully dressed in a uniform so he was a target anyway of anyone who was on the other side.
- 14:30 I regret shooting but I shot him anyway. I took his belt. I took his papers and I had them in this room there until they were stolen so I know what he looks like to this day. I saw the picture of him and his family but I destroyed them straight away. He appeared to be older. He was much older than me obviously because I was only 16, but he appeared to be about 40, 42, 43 something like that. I'm not sure but he certainly wasn't
- 15:00 a young man, young fighting man. Anyway I took his helmet where I shot him too. Later on I was fined for washing it in the sink. I was actually fined for washing a dirty German helmet. There was a part of his skull and brain and blood, full of blood in the mess sink on the liberty ship. I thought, "This is good. I'll just go for a bit more."
- 15:30 And I got a bit lost. I was coming, remember I said there was a lot of water everywhere and I saw, I suddenly came across in the distance, a long distance. He was a long way away. I'm talking about a mile, maybe a mile and I saw a man and he was in the nude. He was washing you see. I don't know if he was washing blood. He didn't have any uniform so I don't know what he was. I thought,
- 16:00 "This is how stupid you are in your youth." I thought, "I won't get him but I'll have a shot at him anyway." Never credit I applied all the things. Aim off it's called. Aim off, allowance for the bullet to drop and allowance for any slight movement. I thought that if he moved I would miss and I aimed for his head but apparently it hit him in the neck and his head dropped like that.
- 16:30 The bullet must have gone through his vertebrae there somewhere. His head dropped and he disappeared. I never went near him because I was a bit ashamed about that. He had no rifle and he couldn't defend himself. No uniform, so he could have been a Frenchman for all I know. So I've never, over these long years it doesn't matter because it would be lucky if any relative's alive but during the first part I was very, very worried about telling anyone. It's like murder, wasn't it?



- 17:00 Close on murder. Anyway I had these papers and the belt and the bloodied helmet of the first guy and I got back to this pile of armaments and the little Goliath tank and I said to the guys, "Give us a hand." They had like a little crane there and we put, they had these big, about as big
- 17:30 as this room, they tie the ends together and lift them all up. For putting goods on and off the ships and they helped me put it all one. The arms in one and the next one the little Goliath tank and put it on the duck, on a duck, and off we went. And we get to the ship and away goes the arms and the machine guns
- 18:00 and rifles and helmets and all that. And I took a few off the bodies that looked like they were all right and not covered in blood. We went on board the ship and everyone was looking down because I had been the only one game enough to get off because they were all frightened. When you are controlled by the US Navy it is very strict. They are very strict. It's not all this
- 18:30 baloney that supposedly happened in Vietnam where they wore funny hats and go around smoking stuff. That's a lot of baloney. They might do it but get caught and they are immediately shipped out. That sort of thing. It was very strict and always has been in the US Navy. A lot of stricter than British forces and Australian forces.

**You think so?**

Oh yeah.

**Just the navy or are you talking the whole lot?**

No, the whole lot of the armed forces. They are very strict.

- 19:00 The navy is more stricter than anyone and they controlled the coast guard that controlled us you see. The US Coast Guard discharged me you see. I was discharged on the 19th July 1945. That's only a month after the invasion of Normandy you see. So pretty quick. That was because I got fed up with it. So I put up all the rifles and machine guns and uniforms and things and then I
- 19:30 fixed up the lifting up. We have our booms that we put over the side of the ship to lift things up and the little tank went aboard. I get up and all the arms and ammunition are gone. All the uniforms and things. No-one is around the place except a few engineers and they are looking at this, I saw them undoing the sides and it's full of high explosives. This is what I was charged with: endangering the ship,
- 20:00 going ashore without the captain's permission, going on an invasion day without the invasion authorities. I forget what they call it. Washing a dirty helmet in the mess sink. They had about five charges against me. I thought, "I'm getting sick of this." To me it was a bit of fun but to them it was a crime,
- 20:30 that sort of thing. So anyway I come aboard and I can't take the bloody what's-it-name with me. I had the German helmet and some papers. There was a bit of blood on the papers. I think I chucked the papers away and I kept the photo and I kept the helmet and then what happened then? Oh yeah, the officers used to everything
- 21:00 on the sly. Remember I said that I used to fight all the crew but I used to do it for exercise. I used to love doing it. To me it was just playing. I was only a kid and that's what you do, you play around. They were trying to kill me and throwing me up and down and trying to hurt me with punches but I would keep out of the way because I was quick. Lots of time I would just play with them like that with the hands instead of punch them.
- 21:30 Anyway all these charges. Next thing they were so strict on anything that there was a US Coast Guard cutter there and they arranged for me to go aboard. I think it was on the 16th of June 1944. That's ten days after the invasion of Normandy. That was pretty quick wasn't it? So I go on there and don't
- 22:00 forget my age is supposed to be about 19 or 20 by that time. I knew they would get me out of it because the minimum age you could join at that time was 18. Hayden knows about this too because he used to get in trouble and he got away with it too. That's why I wanted you to talk to him because he had some good stories too. He was in the invasion of some place, Okinawa, and he was close to the invasion over in Italy but he just missed out.
- 22:30 He was just up the road from me. Anyway they led me in and these officers were standing there. They sent me in and they marched me in and I was in an American uniform. They said that I was charged with this, this and this. I forget what they were but amongst were those and whenever I get charged with anything and they want to punish me
- 23:00 of course I don't want to take it. I just want to go away from them. So they went through all of it and they said, "This is not very good." They were organising a disciplinary hearing in the US forces. I said, "By the way, I've just turned 16." They said, "Wait outside." I think they believed me straight away because I looked reasonably young even though I was big. I was
- 23:30 about 5' 10" and I was the same weight now. I haven't changed much in the 60-odd years. Anyway then they called me back in again and they said, "You have got two choices. We want to help you. You've got two choices. We know you are young and we know." I was the only man on the ship by the way who had previous action. I had two years' action, especially some very bad spots in North Africa and different

- 24:00 spots along the Mediterranean. Anyway these are the two alternatives. To go to the United States and not to go back for one more year on a United States ship, and the other one was at the nearest Allied port of call, and I chose that. I don't know what the port of call was. It might have been Plymouth but some port opposite...
- 24:30 Did it say on my discharge? I forget. It doesn't say the place, it just says the day - 19 July 1944. I took that and wherever it was I landed I said goodbye to the crew and said, "I wish you luck." Later on I read in an armed forces thing that it was the only Goliath tank that landed in the United States and it came off a liberty ship in Utah Beach and it was my little tank that they got
- 25:00 there, and all the boys on board got machine guns and rifles, German machine guns. They were good guns too. Anyway I caught a train to London and I was there for a while driving them mad at Australia House in London because I was getting fed up and I was tired and I just wanted to get home to Australia and they said, "We'll send you on the first available ship."

**Before you go ahead about London.**

- 25:30 **We'll get back to that. I want to ask you. Utah Beach. Was that well defended like Omaha Beach?**

It was defended by older guys and some youngs. I believe some Hitler Youth but I didn't see any. It was by older guys, what we call about 40, whereas in Omaha Beach

- 26:00 it was defended by some Hitler Youth. But I saw in a news thing that this guy was ten years old in the Hitler Youth and he shot six Americans at Omaha Beach at age ten. Was he telling the truth or was he telling a lie? But why would he say it? There must have been some reason so it might have been true. That sort of thing. I saw on a newsreel.

- 26:30 It's quite possible because they were taught to kill when they were six years of age, the Hitler Youth. Anyway.

**So it wasn't heavily defended?**

Not as much as Omaha. The reason Omaha was to stop there was because it was closer to Germany and also there were some pillboxes there that weren't destroyed by the Allied bombers. They were tough. The Germans when they make anything

- 27:00 make it good and tough, and they were after intensive bombing they still remained and after intensive shelling. There are warships shelling all the time. All this time going on they are shelling. The shells are coming over and landing in different spots that have been picked out by paratroopers or other army personnel sort of thing. Another thing they had higher cliffs than we did. Not much but

- 27:30 a little bit higher. Enough to cause a bit more pressure. They had to get rid of the barbed wire and the obstacles. We had the obstacles all these things everywhere and you know but the engineers had cleared all that so we could go straight ashore in a spot about from here to the other side of the road.

- 28:00 On either side of that if you went near it you were doomed. You would get shot to pieces there the craft or whatever it was. Ours was a bit flatter and possibly even a bit more organised and older troops to fire against and that's about all I can think of.

- 28:30 **Was it heavily defended would you say?**

Reasonably but not as well defended as... Here's another thing. They had guns on this Cap de Hoc cliff, see, and the American troops had dropped the commandos and they found that they had shifted the guns back about two miles. That would have been used against us mainly because it was at the end of the Omaha and the beginning of Utah. Utah was much smaller and it was in a

- 29:00 cove sort of thing, and if these guns had been borne we would have been. You see Hitler told them to do that, withdraw the guns back two miles and they had to do what they were told or they would have been shot. It was a dictatorial country. A bit like Saddam Hussein's Iraq. They were held up there for quite some time and once you are held up the Germans got strength and they pushed forward some reserves.

- 29:30 I don't know if they had any panzer divisions there. Further along in Sword, Juno and Gold [beaches] they had quite a bit of resistance there as well. I think Utah Beach had the best run of the lot. That's what I reckon anyway.

**What was the preliminary artillery bombardment like from the ships?**

Well there is very heavy stuff going over. You can hear it. A hell of a boom and then away it goes. That was sort of behind us and they were shelling over the top of us.

- 30:00 It was going a long way, 20 miles and don't forget where we were in Utah was just a cut off to the right almost immediately. St-Mer-Eglise was about twelve miles away and you could go as far as that as that and then it just cut off to the right, and St-Mer-Eglise eventually caught up with guys from Omaha Beach.

**Was Carrington front of?**

30:30 **Carrington? Yeah. That was around about us. I think that was on the way to, I'm not sure. I know it was somewhere in the area but I'm not sure.**

**What were you told to expect? What did the ground crews tell you, the American troops that were going to go in?**

When you go into these things every invasion I've been in. I've been in three of them and there could have been another one you know.

31:00 We expected the worst and then settled for the best. Sicily was hundreds of times worst than Utah Beach was. Corsica wasn't bad. It probably wasn't as bad or about even with Utah and Italy was much better because the Italians didn't want to fight you see. They didn't know what to do. They

31:30 probably would have heard the news that the Allies had landed up in Salerno and the other place up there in Italy and they knew that they could be cut off and gradually destroyed so it be a sensible thing for them to give up, especially with the Germans were moving away from them. There was a lot of Italians in New York that made them very friendly towards Americans and the British.

32:00 What else? Oh yeah.

**You went on the shore line and the beach you said you saw a lot of bodies.**

I didn't want a lot to do with that because they were getting a bit, you could smell them a bit. But there were a few fresh ones there so I got a few uniforms. I sent them up with that pile of ammunitions and arms you know.

**These were German bodies?**

32:30 Yeah.

**So there wasn't many casualties for the Allies?**

There was a lot of casualties, but some of them that were landing there, counting Utah and Omaha we lost 4,000 the first two days killed, and about 40,000 wounded or a bit more. By the time they reached Germany they had lost 100,000 killed and about 11,000

33:00 missing believed killed. They had just disappeared and been blown up. You don't get anything. The unknown soldier and close on a million wounded.

**They are the American losses?**

Just the American losses, yeah.

**That is enormous!**

Anyway I was back in London and I went to the Palais Dance and I said, "I want to get home to Australia." I used to put on a bit of an act. But really I would ask them for things like chocolates and socks

33:30 and jumpers. Bloody freezing.

**Are we going back to London now?**

Yeah.

**No. I've got to stop you from going back to London.**

Don't you like London?

**No, I like London but I like Normandy more, actually. When you were actually touched on the shoreline and you went inland. Tell us about the things you saw? What was it like?**

I saw a lot of bodies, a lot of bodies.

**All the way through?**

Oh yeah, a pile about

34:00 this high, 6 ft high, right along. Mainly German bodies. I saw a lot of coffins so they probably had a lot of Allied troops in them, mainly Americans. I was totally with the Americans. Omaha was the same thing too. And then the Canadians, the British and the French and the Norwegians. They had Golden Sword Beach, which I don't know anything about. They apparently had it pretty easy too.

34:30 The worst one was Omaha Beach because they were trapped by these pillboxes on top and they were supposed to have been... and by fresh troops that were coming quickly when they realised that Omaha Beach were under pressure. They were all destroyed eventually.

**How did they break out of Omaha Beach from what you heard?**

35:00 Well just sheer manpower. They were massing on the beach and they had no where to go and they either had to get out or die there so they just had to overcome all their fear and get out. It's not fear. You are just stunned and don't know what to do. I don't blame them. See when I was thinking of committing suicide in Sicily. You figure up

35:30 and if you make the wrong move you are gone forever. I might have lived but I would have been in the water having to swim ashore to a very dangerous beach that was being bombed and that wasn't good for your health. That sort of thing. There again if I stopped there I might have ended up like the Allenbank alongside us, on fire in three places. I don't know.

**You obviously were keen to see what the front was like?**

36:00 Oh yeah, I loved it. I sort of was, I wanted to get into fighting. I didn't have any fear of it as far as I know. I know people say you get fear. I didn't appear to fear it. I was anxious to do something different all the time.

**Did you see the front as adventure?**

Yeah. To me I wanted to go, but I didn't want to go.

36:30 I wanted to get back to Australia but I always thought I would be killed. I never thought I would get back to Australia.

**You said that you hitched a ride with the Yanks.**

Up towards Cherbourg, yeah.

**Up towards Cherbourg. Now**

Bypassing all the parts that they bypassed. They just pointed out that they hadn't been in here yet or hadn't been in there and that was about three at least areas within about

37:00 twelve miles. How far the front was from there I don't know. It might have been another two miles.

**During the whole day you were there, what was happening around you in terms of military activity and noise?**

Where I was. Doing what I was doing, and trying to hunt the enemy.

**What I'm saying is was there constant movement?**

On the roads you could hear the tanks going up and down and that but

37:30 I got away from that and went in towards the sea again, and back towards there was swamps and heavy bush and that.

**All by yourself?**

Yeah, looking for the enemy. There was Germans there. Everyone knew it but they didn't know what sort of Germans, how many, and there mightn't have been any Germans at all. There mightn't have been any but I discovered a couple anyway.

**Did the Americans take any defensive preparations for that or positions?**

Did they?

**Yes.**

38:00 The Americans had done that all the time. They just ignore it because they have got so much firepower that if anyone started being enough to trouble them they would annihilate them. They had flame throwers, they had a thing to crush to brush to exterminate them. Bomb the shit out of them if they wanted. They had fighter bombers ready to call on the telephone to lay

38:30 waste to the thing with napalm and all that sort of thing. They would have no hope. Flame throwing tanks and men with the flame throwers. They had no hope. They were overwhelming, the Americans were. I was amazed myself. I was used to dealing with the British and they were overwhelming with when you see around as far as you can see in the Sicily and Italy with ships

39:00 as far as you can see on the horizon closely going forward to their final destination. Absolutely amazing you know.

**The areas you were travelling through, was there much destruction?**

No. There didn't appear to be because we didn't go near, well I didn't anyway. St-Mer-Eglise was there. We knew about that. We knew the paratroopers were there and were still,

39:30 as I said you could still see the paratroopers where they had been. Everywhere you look there would be a clump of there, and then one or two, and then another clump. Everywhere. The Americans had attacked from straight over and also around. They came over Spain. Spain allowed them to go over and I think they allowed them to go over there and they came in from the other way,

40:00 from the other side and they dropped paratroopers from that way as well. Up near Cherbourg and that way. They were overwhelming. Unbelievable. The ships. Who can build ships in three or four days? I think they built about 4,000 but I'm not sure. It might have been 10,000.

**Well we'll have to stop we are out of tape.**

## Tape 8

00:30 I'm in London aren't I?

**No we are almost there. I was going to ask you, yes one more thing. You have probably seen Saving Private Ryan?**

Yes I've seen that. One little shot of that was of Utah Beach by the way. It shows the ship up on the beach like that. So that must have been original war film taken 60 years ago.

**How far was**

01:00 **Omaha Beach from Utah Beach?**

Just alongside it. The other side of this point.

**So how far? A couple of kilometres?**

From where I was about 500 metres. Roughly 500 metres.

**That's pretty close.**

Yeah, yeah.

**So could you see what was happening from the ships?**

No, no. I heard about it. It was looking very grim and they were saying they were pulling out

01:30 but they, all I would say I never saw one bit of cowardice. Everyone just went about their job. They just did their job, which was getting the troops and equipment ashore and as soon as they all got it ashore. We took prisoners and stuff back to England you know and as soon as they did that off and loaded up again. But I didn't load up again. I just said I wanted to be out of it. I don't know what happened

02:00 to my liberty ship after that. I was discharged and then a month after the invasion and July 1944 and that was it. I forgot about it.

**And the last thing was the noise?**

Yeah, yeah.

**When you are on the ground can you explain what it is like because you had all these battles going on?**

You could hear,

02:30 you could hear to the front of you, and noise crumpling and crumpling and banging all around you like that. But roughly about, it was past St-Mer-Eglise so it must have been 15 or 16 miles away. Past where I was at Utah. Carrington was around there too and there was a bit trouble there too. They overcame them mainly because

03:00 they were an older type of troops. The Americans were fresh and eager to go. They are not, the Americans. They have got so much good equipment and so much ammunition to use they overwhelm all the other forces. They are much more equipment and much better equipment and those sort of armaments.

03:30 The German Tiger tanks and the Mach IV tanks, they were better than the American tanks. The Americans overcame that after a while. They had heavier tanks. The Germans had the finest original equipment but not enough of it. They were just overwhelmed. They had the best troops too but they were overwhelmed. Most of them, four million of them, had been killed up until the time of the invasion,

04:00 of the best troops. They were left with the Hitler Jugend [Hitler Youth], which were fanatical fighters. I watched this guy and he said he was ten years old and he killed six Americans and I quite believe him. But the people would have brushed him off but I tell you what, they were absolute fanatics and they would do anything at ten years of age.

**Were there any specialised units that you came across when you were in the Utah Beach**

04:30 **area or just outside?**

I forget. I don't even remember the one, the guy that I got his papers off. I forget. I don't remember.

**Well before the invasion started were you sure that this would be a success? What was going through your mind before the Normandy invasion started?**

Whenever you are in the taking the initiative you always felt positive

05:00 because you were taking the initiative so it never entered your mind. The only part I heard was about Omaha Beach. I heard a rumour several men. I wondered why they were looking a bit, you know, and I said, "What's wrong?" and they said, "We're pulling out of Omaha." But it never happened. They did what all good soldiers did and fight on and a lot of them got killed. They got over that obstacle and blew up the pillboxes and

05:30 spread inland and then it was too late. The Germans had held their reserves back and it allowed them to get ashore. Hitler had given the order not to be woken at anything and that had allowed the Allies just to get enough ground to make them impossible to stop from then onwards, and even a fortnight afterwards he still thought that the main thrust of the invasion would be from up further.

**Calais.**

Calais, that's right,

06:00 because that was much closer. He was hoodwinked by the Americans mainly by keeping special so-called armies based in England ready to come across, and at the same time they were landing troops in the unoccupied France so they had a grip there. It would have been impossible to stop them.

**In southern France?**

In southern France, yeah. I didn't know anything about that until I was back in London but that's what happened.

06:30 The push when they were going where I was up at the front, that took about a fortnight. I think it was a fortnight. It might have been three weeks. And by the time they got there the Germans were very highly skilled and they had blown up most of the ports and then they probably surrendered. They put up a bit of a fight but in the end they surrendered. There again they weren't real fighting troops.

07:00 Then once Cherbourg was going it was very hard to stop the Allies. They were pouring in troops like mad.

**Did you ever seen German tanks?**

Yeah many knocked out ones.

**What sort of tanks were they?**

I saw tanks everywhere but I don't think I would recognise them as enemy. They were just tanks. I used to see them rumbling around all over the place in Sicily you know.

07:30 **What about in Normandy?**

In Normandy, oh yeah, lots of...

**German tanks?**

Hundreds of them. I don't know whether they were German tanks because we used to see them from a distance. They were either going out, fanning out all over the place. Trying to find ways of getting through the swamp areas. The Germans had let water in. Dyked up things so the water built up. The Allies took care of that after a while but it took them a

08:00 while to find out where they were dyking them up and all that sort of business.

**Ever seen the Tiger tanks?**

No. Not right in front of me. I was never looking for them. I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in having a bit of excitement. I was always thinking of home and getting back to Australia and just thinking what I could souvenir most of the time.

08:30 Getting in a few, I hoped I would get in and kill a few of the enemy without getting killed myself. I wanted to get out of it after a while. It just bored me and I knew what they would expect when I got back to the ship. The normal charges thrown at me so. Go back to London then?

09:00 **London, okay.**

I immediately saw Stables, he was the West Australian Commissioner and Lord Bruce he was a haughty sort of a thing. He wouldn't see anyone. He always said, "See my assistant." I generally got a hold of some boxes of stuff, Red Cross parcels and something like that. Sometimes you get a bit of

09:30 an announcement and you sneak it. They found out my age you see. They verified it and they said, "We'll get you home. You will be the first one repatriated as a distressed British seaman." So anyway one day I

just about, going to go to Europe as an UNRO driver – United Nations Reconstruction Officer.

- 10:00 I got my 3 ton army driver's licence driving along The Strand with another guy putting it into gear and he said, "You got your licence." I'd driven a bit on the farms when I was a boy. Anyway so I was ready to go on that. I always had alternatives. I've always done with every job I've ever had in case I was going to be sacked I was ready or organised to
- 10:30 take another job somewhere else. I had to look ahead. I'm a Gemini you know. They are always optimistic and always look ahead, pretty shrewd people. So I had the option of going back to Australia on the next available ship or go to Europe, and that was quickly coming up because they were starting to organise things and they would ring me up and get me to go to the despatch place and tell me what
- 11:00 I had to do and gave me all the papers and all this sort of thing. Like a passport thing to go to Europe and I thought, "I don't really want to get this involved with it again." So anyway Stables rings me up one day and he says, "It's Mr Stables here. Go to the West Australian Commission House and get this ticket and you can go on the Thermistocles
- 11:30 a Blue Star Line." I think it is a White Star Line but I'm not sure. He said, "It's a bride ship, if you don't mind that." And I said, "I don't mind that at all." So I get down to Liverpool and here's this old ship there. It was a liner but a pretty old looking liner full of brides. You know, British brides. A few of Australians but mainly British brides. I was the only, oh there was a couple of
- 12:00 priests and I sort of attached to them in a way. I was in one room and they were in another one and we had our own little bathroom-toilet thing. Anyway on the way back I had plenty of fun. The brides sort of liked me. I would sit in the deck chairs and I would be the only man and they would be looking at me and thinking, "Lucky
- 12:30 devil." These girls they were interested in being sexy but not having sex with me you know. They were doing handstands over me and sitting on my lap and cuddling me and kissing me and asking me to wash them in the bath but no real sex. I arrived back at Sydney. I kissed the wharf. It might have been Woolloomooloo I forget now. I kissed
- 13:00 the earth and I thought, "I'll never leave Australia again." I got a troop train across the Nullarbor and saw Daisy Bates and we were stopped by floods. The whole Nullarbor was flooded in that year. It was January 1945 and then there was a plague of frogs before we got to Kalgoorlie. The plague of frogs and the train's things wouldn't go because it was too slippery – frogs. So they had to put sand and clear all these bloody frogs. The frogs were that deep
- 13:30 all over the place because of the water you see. They come out of their under the ground. We got down to Mosman Park and I had my big bag on my shoulder and another bag I think and I just walked down to my house from Mosman Park station and walked to the house. And my mother had shifted from Monument Street to Kalgoorlie Street, that's right.
- 14:00 That was number 8 as well. It might have been ten. I walked in. She was a brunette when I left and she was white hair with worry because I had never written to her. I had sent a miniature microfilm from Algiers through the military authorities. She didn't get it, apparently. She might have got it and didn't know what to do with it because it was something that America might have or the British but Australia didn't have any way of processing it.
- 14:30 She said, "We've you been?" and I said, "I've been in the war," and she said, "Don't tell me bloody lies." And I told her. I had a new stepfather. I had a few of them. But he was called Hughey. He had been in World War I at Lone Pine and won the Military Medal. He looked at mine. I had about twelve of my own by then. He got me a job at the sugar
- 15:00 mills up past monument building. There was a lot of sugar mills up there. These bags of sugar were pretty heavy at about 100kg. I was quick but being a youth. I was only 16 years 7 months when I came back from war and they put one of these things. They push them onto you and you are supposed to carry them off.
- 15:30 They put it, I don't know whether it was on back or whatever it is on tray top train truck, it was a tray top. I fell over the back of it and I think the sugar things stopped me from hurting myself. Hughey took me back after I was revived because I was knocked unconscious to the house and then he said, "You can't go out." We had a bit of a fight with him
- 16:00 and he started to have a bit of a go at me so I just whacked him a couple of times. Too quick for him. Then I thought, "What am I going to do?" So I went to Perth Boys' School because the government said they pay for me to go through school, rehabilitation. They said they would pay for me to go to university, university admission course, you see.
- 16:30 But I had to get my matriculation and so I started with Mr Blue was the headmaster of Perth Boys' High in 1945 and I was in the gym because I liked to just, playing with boxing and gym with the boys. I was the same age as them but just much stronger. Anyway this guy came at me and said,
- 17:00 "Hey Burke, I've heard you've been to the war." I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'm the Christchurch Grammar School Headmaster. How'd you like to go...?" He had been a boxer or a wrestler and he had something

wrong with his throat. "How'd you like to go to a Grammar School?" I said, "I'd love to but I couldn't afford anything like that. I just get a small allowance from the

17:30 government." He said, "Don't worry about that. I'll speak to the teachers and get back to you next week." Anyhow he came back and said, "We'll supply you with everything. You've got to try and get through the exams and we'll put you through and get your matriculation by the end of the year. What are you in?" and I said, "Fifth grade." But in actual fact they put me in fifth form, which is a lot of difference, about five standards difference you see.

18:00 I went to Christchurch Grammar and they said, "No swearing, no talking about sex, no talking about the war or women." That sort of thing.

#### **Even the war?**

I wasn't allowed to drink or smoke so I had to stop drinking and smoking, so they put me off straight away, that. My job was to run, swim, box everything for Christchurch Grammar School

18:30 and I forget the name. The German master. I took German. I think I might have switched to French. They used to call him Herr Schmidt and he was always talking to me about the...

#### **The war?**

The who?

#### **The war?**

Yeah the war, especially about the Hitler Youth and the German forces and everything like that because he was right into everything German, that's why they called him Herr Schmidt.

19:00 His real name was Smith. I used to get the cuts nearly every day without fail. Here I was I'd been to the war nearly three years and I was getting the cuts because I would say, "I'll take his place." "I'll take his place." And they used to really lay them into you. That's before the war and after the war I'm still getting cuts. My hands were all blue and yellow and red because they had been hit so many times.

19:30 At the end of the year they said, "We will put you through for a matriculation." Don't forget I still hadn't told them that I was in fifth grade, not fifth form, and they were trying to push me through probably because they were getting sick of paying for me you see. They still had to pay the fees to the masters at Christchurch Grammar School in Queenscliff Drive, Stirling Highway, Claremont, West Aussie.

20:00 The headmaster was Barry Jupp. That was his name, Barry Jupp. And the guy that was in charge of me, I forget his name, but he was a nice fellow though. And then there was gym master. He was pretty good too. I used to win all the endurance races and come second in most of the sprints and second and sometimes first in most of the swim races.

20:30 I had this tattoo here that looked a bit out of the ordinary from a...

#### **What is that tattoo?**

Egypt 1942 written on here you see. The other thing, I joined the school cadets and I was the only cadet in Australia to have medals. And I used to wear my cadet uniform, which is the same as the Australian Army. No, I won't tell you a couple of things. I don't fancy the queen so much. She's

21:00 okay, but I sort of like Australia to be Australians and you guys are probably the same, are you? That's right, he doesn't say anything. Anyway they put me through this matriculation and you'll never credit I passed in English, biology and physiology and hygiene. I failed in French. I'd switched over to French because of Herr Schmidt. He always wanted to know all the propaganda.

21:30 And I failed in chemistry and applied mathematics. So passed in three and failed in four. So I got fed up with that. I used to get fed up quite easily in anything. Throughout my life I just change. I've had good opportunities and just pass them up. It had gone into 1946 and there was a ship leaving, a Norwegian tanker leaving

22:00 and I just left school. I walked out and never said anything. That's what I do you know. I joined this Andersjahre. As soon as I got on board as a mess boy. Remember I told you about the sailor that had the fight in Montevideo in Uruguay with all the crushed face? He said, "I know you. You were on the Stirlingville. I left you in Montevideo." I said, "I remember you. Jesus!" He had cuts

22:30 and looked out of shape a bit. So I was on the Andersjahre and off I went and this time I went to Abadan in the Persian Gulf. You know, Euphrates and the Tigris River. Up through there. Iran on one side and Iraq on the other. I still can't remember whether it was Iraq or Iran. And then I went to, I think it was Liverpool again but I'm not sure. It might have been,

23:00 not Hong Kong. What do they call the place? Glasgow, but I'm not sure. Anyway I left. I went back on a ship called the Australia Star, which is either a White or Red or Blue Star liner. I forget which, as a passenger again. It was good in those days. You just relax and take your time and lay back. Anyway I got back to Australia and I went back to Christchurch Grammar again. I went back to Christchurch Grammar again.



23:30 They accepted me again. That's what I used to do.

**Did you find it difficult to settle? I mean psychologically ?**

Oh yeah, impossible. Just impossible. Maybe three months or four months I was very desperate. I was used to doing things and travelling around and doing something exciting. There were very mundane things of stopping at school. Anyway I went back to Christchurch Grammar again and then I met a guy who said he was a major in the army. He turned out to be a sergeant major.

24:00 He said, "Join the 2nd AIF," so I went and joined the 2nd AIF. So here I am back in the infantry in the 2nd AIF. I joined that in '47 and I was in that for about a year and two months. I got a bit bored, something like that. I was an instructor and greeter, instructing recruits you know. I just got bored with it and I didn't like the officers ordering me around. They were jealous of my medals

24:30 because none of them had hardly any at all, and they used to lie too. They would tell me lies so one day I said, "I'm getting out. I don't want to do it any more." They said, "You can't get out. You are in the Australian Army." Anyway I just refused to do anything and I got out anyway. Then what happened? I went, I caught an aeroplane to Adelaide and then

25:00 another aeroplane in Melbourne and tried to start a business there. It didn't work so well so I went to Sydney and I had a fruit juice business there. I would have been one of the first ones to start a pure fruit juice business with pineapple, orange and grape juice. We used to, my partner was a Greek and he was squeezing the

25:30 oranges and all that with a machine and I would be selling them. I sold to everyone. Everyone in the street wanted to buy my gallon of thing for a shilling I think it was, a gallon of juice. The problem was it had no preservative and it used to go off in the hot weather so they'd grizzle at me about that, but they still bought more off me. I suddenly thought. I was one of the first ones to start a franchise

26:00 I suppose too. They didn't have fruit juice in those days, not fresh fruit juice. So I was setting up in the north, south, east and west and sold them off at 500 quid each. That was an enormous amount of money in those days and I got the money and I had a chauffeur-driven car for a while and then I started selling jumpers and twin sets and all the women would buy the sizes

26:30 smaller than what they are. They would come back in the next couple of weeks and they would say, "These don't fit me," and you could see where they had stretched them, and of course I couldn't give them their money back. So I got fed up with that as well. What happened then?

**Psychologically, the PTSD, what affected you? Were there any specific memories that you would think of or still think of**

27:00 **that sort of somehow affected you?**

Well one of the reasons that I used to give up everything that was something to do with it. I couldn't, I was, I couldn't stand being in the one place all the time. It was sort of driving me mad. It was very hard. So getting in the windfall of that 2,000 quid was a lot of money so I bought an Oldsmobile and I just said,

27:30 "I'm going to drive up to the top end of Australia and live there." And I took off up the, it was more or less a dirt road in those days, the highway up to Queensland. I got to Cairns and I thought I'd go a bit further. Is it still on, is it?

**Yes, absolutely.**

I got to Cairns and then I thought, I said to the

28:00 people in Cairns, "Is there a road out to Darwin?" and they said, "Yeah," and I went out there and it ended in a cliff top. It appeared to be about 100 ft or something. And I saw a guy selling fruit and vegetables door to door in a little truck and I spoke to him and I said, "I'll

28:30 buy that from you." I ended up buying that from him and sold the Oldsmobile to someone else. I mightn't have sold it. I forget what happened. I had this Ford truck thing with a sloping trays and I put my trays on with all fruit and vegetables and sold door to door in Atherton, all around the Atherton area. I started a little café there, a little restaurant. That wasn't much good. Got in a partnership

29:00 with a woman and she had a Bill of Sale against me. She wanted her money. With the Bill of Sale you have to pay the money straight away or they take the assets, so I knew she was going to take it so I hopped in the truck one night and threw in a few of my things and drove in the truck down the Gilles Highway from Atherton. Fun, isn't it? What did I do then? Sold the truck in Townsville and caught an aeroplane to Sydney

29:30 and I met up with a guy from New Zealand so I still had a bit of money. I caught the Wanganella to Auckland and started a business there. Fruit juices like I had before in Sydney and cordials and stuff like that, but New Zealanders are hard to get money out of. They'll buy, you can sell them anything but it's hard to get money out of them. They would pay me up and then say they'd put it off until next week. So in other words

30:00 I wasn't getting anything, just half of it back each time, so I thought that was no good. I booked on the Monawai to Sydney and told all the, I made sure the creditors equalled the debtors and I got them to meet at Auckland Chamber of Commerce and I was on the Monawai waving goodbye to Auckland. I had a bit of fun.

30:30 What else?

**The dreams and stuff.**

That's right.

**You said something about the dreams coming back to you. How bad were the dreams?**

Oh yeah, that was happening all the time.

**How did you deal with it?**

I just dealt with it. I had to. What can I do? I used to go to doctors and they would say, "Take this," and they used to give me different stuff and it seemed to make it worse. So when I first came back from the troop train

31:00 they put me in hospital in Fremantle and they also wanted to put me in hospital before I went on the troop train in Sydney because I was crying. And they said, "You'll get over that once you get home to your Mum." Anyway the Fremantle Hospital I was sweating like mad. I used to sweat like mad and it was very smelly sweat too! It would be pouring off me! Unbelievable with all these nightmares and stuff like that

31:30 and I said, "What have I got?" I heard them talking and they said that I had Malta Fever. They asked me if I had had ice cream in Malta. I said, "Well I only saw Malta from a distance." They said, "You've got Middle East fever," and different types of fevers. Undulant fever. That's the one that they settled on because I might have ice cream in Egypt. Bloody

32:00 polluted ice cream. It wasn't that at all. It turned all along it was this PTSD business.

**Would you say the memories of the war are the strongest memories you have?**

Of course. They are the only memories I think of all the time, especially at night-time. Yeah, they are the strongest memories.

**Even now?**

Oh yeah. It sort of fascinates me all the time. What

32:30 I went through was all so exciting. Nowadays nothing is exciting unless you get into a fight or something like that or nearly get run over some bloody thing like that.

**Okay, so you stayed in Australia for pretty much the rest of your days.**

Yeah. I ended up coming to Melbourne. I got my first wife pregnant and she was 17

33:00 and I was 30 so I had to do something. So I started selling fruit and vegetables door to door like I did up at Atherton Tablelands but there wasn't enough money so I met this car dealer. No, I went to a place in Toorak first and I sold real estate. I sold four houses in the first week and I said, "Where is the commission for that?" and they said, "You don't get

33:30 paid for the first three months." I was desperate. I had a wife expecting a baby and no money coming in for three months, only a little bit for a car allowance. And I thought what was the best thing? I asked a couple of car salesmen and they said, "The best thing is motor cars, finance or real estate." I tried real estate and I didn't know much about finance so I went to the biggest dealer, who happened to be Emmanuel Car Sales. Have you heard of him?

34:00 Emmanuel Car Sales. Emmanuel Margolin. Anyway they made so much money, as much as a bank manager in those days, you couldn't get in. The salesmen would fight you to get you away from the place because they were making good dough. Anyway I went there and I met Emmanuel and on the way up I met a guy called... Jesus, what's his name?

34:30 He ended up working for me and his daughter married my son and between them it cost me \$1.5 million because he did me out of in today's money it would be \$600,000 or more, and his daughter just parted from my son and cost him \$750,000 plus a business. So quite a lot of money involved in that one family.

35:00 Anyway it happens, and just shake your head and go, "That's another bit of life, isn't it?" Losing \$1.5 million, isn't it? So anyway he was there, what was his name? Robinson, Don Robinson. He lives at 3 Fig Street, East Melbourne, and he's very sick now through smoking and drinking too much coffee. If you smoke it knocks 15 plus years off your life,

35:30 plus you lack fitness and gradual deterioration of your brain, your lungs, your heart. 400 or 500 different things go wrong with if you smoke. You've got to give it up if you smoke. See that bloke, see how healthy it looks?

**That's me.**

That's you. Sorry. So give it up because it will kill you and an agonising death with emphysema

- 36:00 which you will get. Besides no-one likes it, especially girls. Girls don't like people who smoke too much and the combination is they don't like it at any stage. They like someone who will look after them and be happy and go dancing and preferable not in discos, a nice girl. Anyway I worked for Emmanuel. My first week's wages was three times that, after tax by the way, was three times that of a bank manager, my first week's
- 36:30 wages. I said to this Emmanuel when I met him. Don Robinson took me up and introduced me. I said, "I've never sold a car before except my Oldsmobile up in Far North Queensland. Put me on anyway and if I don't sell more than two of your best sellers forget it I don't want any money." He said, "I believe
- 37:00 you will." He was a Jewish guy but he pretended he was French. Emmanuel Margolin. Emmanuel, is that Jewish or what? Margolin is Jewish anyway. He's gone over and he's got a helicopter and Rolls Royces and an animal park in the Blue Mountains. Anyway I worked for him for a year and the big recession. Recessions come as soon as
- 37:30 the socialists or labor government get in you get a recession and then the liberals build it up and then the socialists get in and labor people generally outnumber the liberal sort of people by about 51% to 49% generally until they get smart and then they put them in again. Then they get sick of the liberals and put Labor Party in again or the greens and democrats or the Labor Party or the
- 38:00 socialists. Down it goes again. This is the economy. Up it goes and this will go on for ever and that's what's going to happen this time if they are not careful. Anyway it was in this recession 1960-64 when everything collapsed. The banks went broke and everything was collapsing everywhere. All the finance companies went broke too. Only a couple of them survived. Anyway I was left. I bought a house
- 38:30 in Brighton, East Brighton, for 6,180 pounds, which is about \$12,000 and a bit now, but it was 40-odd years ago and it was about 1959, '58, '59 and so I was paying that off very quick and I had a war service loan on that too and
- 39:00 I thought, "I've got to get into something that's making me money that I can't get the sack," because I was a bit, I was a good salesman but I got on people's nerves because I was a bit jumpy. That sort of thing. It was through the bloody nervousness and being in the war all the time and I couldn't help it.

**I've got to ask you one question because we've almost run out of time. We have a minute left.**

- 39:30 **Is there anything that you would like to say to round off the interview or for the historical record that you haven't said? Anything at all?**

I used to run American auto sales over here. It was the biggest sale of American cars in Australian history and I did that about 13 years ago. I'm married again and retired on a war pension. And that's it.

- 40:00 **That's it?**

That's it.

**Nothing else you would like to add?**

I'm just a shy country boy. Very delicate.

**Thank you very much for your time. Good on you.**