

Australians at War Film Archive

John Holman - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **John, could we start by you telling me a little bit about where you were born and where you were brought up?**

I was born and brought up in Sydney, We lived originally at Stanmore and Ashfield, during my school years,

01:00 and then we spent the rest of the time, until such time as I went to the war, at Rose Bay and Bellevue Hill. So I've had a good taste of both the western and the eastern suburbs. Living at Rose Bay and Bellevue Hill was pretty good for a young bloke growing up because I spent an enormous amount of time on Bondi Beach, which is about as good as it comes. And in later life,

01:30 I used to look back on those years at Bondi, and that was just great. It was a wonderful way to grow up. I was very happy there.

What did your father do?

My father was on the railways, and he was a Cornishman, the whole of our family have a background from Cornwall. And both my mother and he were very long lived

02:00 long lived and died at the age of seventy eight, seventy nine and my mother about eighty five. It's a good background to have when you start thinking about your own life.

What subjects were you interested in at school? Or what were you best at?

I think I was fairly lucky at school because

02:30 I didn't particularly enjoy anything, but I managed to do fairly well at school. I was usually up around the top grouping, if not around about the top always, without too much work, but I can't say I enjoyed those years of study. But in later life I have found I have enjoyed very much study and reading and research. So I guess something must have stuck, although at the time I didn't realise it

03:00 **Was the Depression affecting your family?**

The Depression did not affect our family, but I have very clear recollections of. They were just appalling times, I don't think anyone today could possibly realise how bad it was. I can remember when we lived at Ashfield, I can clearly remember people coming to the door and asking for food and

03:30 my mother would always pack them up a little parcel of sandwiches or whatever she had there. She usually said to them, "Look, I'm more than happy to do this." We had a constant stream of people doing that. I remember she always said to them, "Please don't make a habit of coming back all the time." To the great credit of those wonderful people of the time no one ever came back and imposed on us again.

04:00 But we helped, people and I have a very clear memory of the problems a lot of people had. It was very much worse. I think, than anyone today could possibly realise. There were people who literally had no food, or who were hungry.

Was it a stretch for your family to keep on providing food?

I don't think it was but there wasn't much left over in those years.

04:30 We didn't suffer, but on the other hand but I think we gave fairly freely. There wasn't much left over, I remember that pretty clearly.

Did you have any family that were involved in the First World War?

No, I did not.

When you were at school, had you an idea of what you wanted to do as a career?

05:00 Well, from a small child I always wanted to do something concerning the sea, and that developed probably fairly early on, around about the teens, in wanting to join the navy. Which I never did in those years, but eventually I did, so it worked out and I have no regrets, it was really a wonderful experience and something really that I always had at the back of my mind.

05:30 I think in the early years, I had the idea of going into the navy as a career, but I think after I started university, doing commerce I stuck to that.

What was your aim in doing commerce?

Fairly early on, I'd got a job with the Commonwealth Bank and we were encouraged to do degrees. So I went

06:00 and started a Commerce degree, at Sydney University.

What was behind your decision to join the Commonwealth Bank?

Well, I really just wanted to get going at the time, so I took virtually the first job that crossed my mind.

Tell me, where were you when war broke out?

I was living at Rose Bay, I was doing

06:30 an evening course in Commerce, I did a commerce degree at Sydney University, and you're talking September 1939. Well, I'd joined the University Regiment, as a private, about 2 years before. As soon as I could, I think it must have been about when I was seventeen or eighteen, I can remember the year. I spent quite a lot of time,

07:00 it was really a hobby, training with the University Regiment. I enjoyed it very much, I made a lot of very good friends there, but we knew war was...I had a very strong feeling war was coming. But that didn't unduly influence me joining the army, but I did, I joined the army, and I spent about two years in that before I transferred to the navy.

07:30 I think one of the factors in leaving was that I only weighed about nine and a half stone at the time, and I was in Don Company in the University Regiment, which was a machine gun company, and of course I usually got the tripod of the Vickers 303, which I could hardly lift up, let alone run up sand hills with that a pack. So I decided there wasn't much future for me going to war in the army.

08:00 Because after war had broken out there was talk of joining AIF [Australian Imperial Force], and I was told I had been selected to go to officer's training school. So I gave it a bit of thought, and I thought, 'Well, if I've got to fight a war, I might as well get a warm bed and some decent food, and where I don't have to run around with heavy loads. I approached my company commander, a fellow called Colin Grace, who was a Sydney solicitor. I don't know whether he's still alive,

08:30 a very nice man, and he said, 'Well, go for it.' So I went down and joined up at Rushcutters Bay, HMAS Rushcutters Bay, as an ordinary seaman. They had been advertising for undergraduates to come in and do anti-submarine training....training to be sent off as sub-lieutenants but they were overloaded.

09:00 So the whole of my intake from the university, and a lot of us left the regiment together, we all joined as ordinary seamen. And I must say that those that are left are still wonderful friends today. A long time being in the army together and then in the navy together. Even though we didn't see one another for perhaps years and years and years.

What were the entry requirements for the navy when you joined?

09:30 Preferably university undergraduates. They were undergraduates. There was no one who was not an undergraduate, to my knowledge. That was for the anti-submarine school. That was not...normal navy. That was if you wanted to become a sub-lieutenant in the anti-submarine school. If you didn't make it, the best you could be offered was an ordinary seaman and you could climb your way up there.

10:00 But the whole of my intake, all of us joined as ordinary seamen, and they didn't have the facilities to train the number of people who were volunteering. We all did about a year at sea after our initial anti-submarine training as ratings and my stint. And my stint at sea was on a ship called the Wyrallah,

10:30 which is a coastal steamer from up and down the north coast here. There were three of them, and they were little coastal steamers in peacetime, they were about seven or eight hundred tons each, with a couple of cargo holds. The three that were based in Fremantle when I joined them was the Wyrallah, there was the Bingara and if I recall, the other one was the Kybra ,

11:00 and they formed an escort group out of Fremantle. They were all anti-submarine fitted, pretty primitive by today's standards, but they did the job and we did a lot of patrolling outside Fremantle, mainly on the route of the troop ships going to the Middle East.

11:30 So I was there for the best part of....probably a year before I was called back and did my sub-lieutenant's training, before being posted on that. They were great times over there, we had a good life, it wasn't too testing. When we were based in Fremantle, and we all had a pocket full of money we couldn't

spend, and they were very, very good times.

12:00 Three of us from the anti-submarine school were posted to the same ship, three ordinary seaman and they remained life long friends. One is dead, Mike Solomon, he died a few years ago. Ken Margeson, the other bloke, he's very ill. So I suppose, really, I am the fit survivor out of the three of us, who became good friends and served together on the Wyrallah.

12:30 The only excitement we had there was, I remember we had drinks one night with a few chaps from the [HMAS] Sydney. They sailed about the same time as we did and we had arranged to see one another when we came back, but of course they didn't come back.

13:00 We were very lucky on that, because we weren't a long way away from that action. In fact we searched for the survivors, and one of our ships picked up the life belt and some refuse that were floating around. I often look back and think how lucky we were, the [HMAS] Cormorant was just a little bit further out from the coast from where we were, and she struck the Sydney instead of us, we weren't very far away.

13:30 That's the fortunes of war, you never quite know, what the outcome of these trips when you go out, but to us it was just an ordinary routine ship and we were absolutely astound when we heard what had happened. Such a terrible, terrible loss and so unnecessary in my view. She had just come back from the Mediterranean where she had been terribly successful against the Italians in gunnery

14:00 and so forth, and to come back and be lost by that, it's inconceivable.

How did you hear about it?

I don't think at the time we were told what was happening, I don't think it filtered down to the crew. But we knew at some time well after the event, but it was pretty staggering.

14:30 **Did you do escort work out of...**

Yes, we escorted some of the troop ships, but we were pretty slow by comparison. Those troop ships were the big liners of the times, the [HMS] Queen Mary and the Aquitania and a couple of big French boats. They were very fast, some of the ships were doing twenty knots, there was no way in the world that any escort we had could of caught up.

15:00 What we did was we went and swept large areas ahead of them. So we were out well before them and they'd just come straight to us. But I think we certainly did what we could to make sure there were no submarines about. From memory there wasn't much submarine activity on the West Coast.

15:30 I think the Germans were pretty fully stretched at the time to keep up the war in the Atlantic, because they were very short of U-boats. Well short of what Hitler had promised them, and what was necessary.

How did that period of Service come to an end? The Wyrallah, how did it come to an end?

All of us were posted back to Sydney

16:00 for our sub-lieutenant's courses. We did our subs courses and we were then posted to various places.

You were waiting?

It was just sea time for us, yes. But if we hadn't done it in terms of acceptability to the ships that were on, we certainly wouldn't have been called to do any

16:30 further courses. And indeed there were some chaps left there.

There was an element of having to prove yourself at sea.

Absolutely. They were proving periods.

Tell me a bit about the training course?

The training course for the ordinary seaman was pretty primitive, really. It was very adequate for the time, but the equipment we had,

17:00 the submarine detection equipment was very primitive by today's standards. And it was really not terribly taxing for anyone who had been doing a lot of study or who was at all intelligent. It was a relatively short course, because they trained us as a lower grade of rating,

17:30 just the ordinary anti-sub...what they called an ASDIC [from Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] operator. You would do your watch, twiddling the wheel and listening most of the time. It was comparatively simple, but you could take a higher rating later on and some did it, is what they called a HSD [Higher Sub Detector], it was more to do with the maintenance of the equipment, although we did maintenance courses but the higher ratings usually attended to that

18:00 It was very interesting but it wasn't terribly taxing. I mean, the main work of an ordinary seaman, in those days, was to help with the general work, which they don't do now. Scrubbing decks, keeping things clean, coiling up ropes. Little things that happen daily on a ship...keep the mess clean. So you do your stint in the mess and do your watch and

18:30 look forward to a bit of leave, which was very good in Fremantle. Fremantle was a wonderful place to take leave.

What was it like in Fremantle back then?

Fremantle, in those days, was a beautiful little town, nice beaches and people, very, very friendly and very supportive. I can remember. I've never been a big drinker but if I went into the hotels sometimes, which was big event for me...

19:00 And I, not me, but a lot of the chaps, were certainly in bell bottoms as we were, you would put your shilling or whatever it was across the counter to pay for a drink and the barmaids would give you change for a shilling, they would never take your money. And this was the same....my experience was very largely the same on trams and buses, they just gave us the money back. It was very refreshing.

19:30 (BREAK)

20:00 Whereabouts was the anti-sub course conducted?

Here at Rushcutter, in Sydney, HMAS Rushcutter, which is now no longer. All the anti-sub operations were transferred to HMAS Watson, after the war when the Rushcutter closed down, and the old anti-submarine rating as such, and the

20:30 single duty specialist, anti-submarine specialist officer has all gone now. In modern warfare it's all included in the work of the principal warfare officer now, and that is done at the HMAS Watson, which is, you probably know, the premier training establishment, I think, for that sort of thing in Australia now.

How were you assessed at the end of the course?

21:00 You had to do practical. You were assessed quite strongly at sea and on the trainers... They had these trainers, when I say trainers, they had mock ups in the school and you could carry out a full submarine attack on these things, it was very, very good. Of course, you were tested on this, and part of your training was to be on it all the time. And even in later years during the war and at sea,

21:30 they used to pull in, when we came into port, every now and again you'd be pulled in with the captain, AS officers, and all the ratings, would be pulled in for testing and training on the indoor setups, which became more sophisticated and much better in terms of detection and attack as time went on.

Tell me what happened after the course? When did you get your posting?

22:00 I finished the course, and nothing really happened here much in Australia. It is rather refreshing to look back on the complexity of today, from the complexity of today to what it was like then. We used to, like all ships, whether you are ashore or not it is still the ship, we used to go ashore from Rushcutters Bay Depot,

22:30 on shore leave, and we could go home every night, that meant. And you would be lined up and be told what time to be there or whatever had to be told to you. And I can remember the petty officer, just before, "Turn and dismiss, go ashore," he said, "Well, bring all your gear with you chaps," the nominated ones anyhow, and, "You're going for a trip."

23:00 I brought all my gear with me, such as I had, I had pretty well nothing, very little, really, just a spare uniform and so forth. And that day they put us on the [HMS] Capetown Castle, which was a big British troop ship that was in, and off to the UK, the Royal Navy. I think there was about, pretty well all my class were drafted straight into the Royal Navy.

23:30 There we stayed.

Why were you sent to the Royal Navy?

They were short of anti-submarine officers. I don't think many people realise that the biggest battle of the war was the Atlantic. If we lost the Battle of the Atlantic, we'd have lost the war, it was as simple as that. Churchill's only fear, with all of Germany, was that we would lose the Battle of the Atlantic.

24:00 If that had happened we couldn't have supplied our war effort. We relied upon that Atlantic trade for food, a lot of help in all respects. And of course, the war in the Atlantic was going very badly in those days, and they just didn't have the trained people to man the ships. As a result, you find that in post-war discussions

24:30 there were probably over 10% of the total anti-submarine officers operating in that massive war theatre of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and Russia and the whole of the war effort in Europe, were Australians. And all of the chaps went with me were the only Australian officer on the ships they went to.

25:00 Like myself I was the only non-British officer there. We were spread one per ship. I think, looking back, we got the impression from post-war information that they regarded the Australian anti-submarine officers quite highly. Certainly they proved themselves to be so in their successes.

When did you know that you were being posted to the Royal Navy?

25:30 When I reported that morning.

Was that a surprise to you?

A big surprise. We didn't know where...We had no idea what our posting would be. We suspected we might be, but we certainly weren't told we were. We soon learnt that day however.

26:00 I think I phoned and told Mum and Dad. But I didn't come back for many, many years. In fact, I never came back until I came back on discharge.

What did you say to your parents when you rang?

I think I just told them the facts. I don't know what their reaction was. That was, it was quite different in those days to today.

26:30 **What did they say to you?**

I had discussed all this with them beforehand, so I don't think it was a big surprise, and it certainly wasn't a big surprise to me, and of course, that's what we all wanted because there was a certain element of adventure, I suppose, about it. And it was certainly better than being posted back to something like the Wyrallah

27:00 or doing coastal duty where there was nothing happening, terribly boring...So I think we all welcomed it. I didn't know of anyone who didn't enjoy their Service. They all did fairly well. A few didn't come back. I think by and large we were reasonably lucky. They were pretty competent blokes, the ones I knew. They were good officers, intelligent people.

27:30 **What did you pack to take with you?**

I certainly didn't take any superfluous stuff. I took pure navy. I think I had two uniforms. We had a tropical uniform, which I took. We were issued with, of all things, a ridiculous pith helmet, I think we were issued that day. We had quite uniforms for tropics...I took nothing superfluous, it was all pure navy requirements.

28:00 I think most of us threw away the pith helmets when we got around Capetown Castle. Certainly I never, ever saw anyone with a pith helmet for the rest of the time I was in the navy.

Tell me a bit about the voyage on the Capetown.

The voyage was very good, actually. We had good quarters and they were good blokes and

28:30 from here we went to New Zealand, and we took on a lot of New Zealanders. We had some Airforce blokes from here, we took on a lot of Airforce blokes in New Zealand. We took a lot of New Zealand troops, too, if I recall, and we had a very good time in New Zealand. The New Zealanders were terribly good to us, really good. We spent some time on the beaches there.

29:00 I remember one night a group of us walked over to Piha from Auckland, right over to Piha, which is a beach with black sand on the other side of the island. We went over to Rotorua, the New Zealanders, as I say, were terribly good to us. They had a lot lined up there.

What was the accommodation like on board?

Very good. It was a passenger liner, they hadn't really converted much except, I think, for the troops.

29:30 But we had excellent conditions, we had the old style cabins, and we were very well looked after. We used to sit and have a drink about eleven o'clock in grand style around the cane lounges. But we had a lot of drills and lectures and sports to keep us fit and so forth. We went from New Zealand, we went

30:00 to the Panama Canal and we went through the Canal....And the first stop was...That was pretty interesting, I had never been through the Canal, and I find intensely interesting to see how well they had done it, and the locks working and so forth. It was the first time I had seen a lot of non-Europeans.

30:30 I've forgotten the name of the town at the eastern end of the Canal...Bilboa, or a name like that maybe....They were twin towns. We were not allowed to leave the ship. A few people were given leave, but Australians were certainly not allowed ashore, nor were the New Zealanders. I don't think any of the troops got ashore. And the reason for this is that one of the Australian troop ships had gone through...

31:00 You might well understand this one, it's typical when you get a bunch of Aussies together. Anyhow, the soldiers had all gone ashore and of course the usual happened. They got drunk and fought everybody. The street vendors all had their apples and oranges turned upside down, so there was no Australians allowed ashore, nor New Zealanders

31:30 But there was terrible mayhem from those trips when they were allowed ashore. They didn't allow anyone off the ship. So whilst we enjoyed all the stories of what had happened, it didn't do us much good. I have always dined out on that story, about Australians, but the same thing happened in Cape

Town, of course. When they went there, they wrecked the place and weren't allowed there again. I must say, though,

32:00 those same Australians, I served with, and knew, and even in the army, they were the most wonderful people in the world, there is just no one like them.

Who else was taken on the Capetown Castle?

We didn't pick up anyone else, just the New Zealanders and the Australians.

Was there Infantry going across?

No, we have very, very few soldiers on there. We had a pretty full compliment of New Zealanders, and I think we had quite a lot of army there.

32:30 After we left the eastern end of the Canal, we went up to Halifax, up the coast, and we picked up a full compliment of Canadians there, the ship was very full, to take them across the Atlantic.

33:00 I remember it very well, because I was very grateful to get there. We used to have boxing contests on the ship. One of the boxing bouts, I had a front tooth knocked out, and this was broken, front teeth, I was disgusted with myself over that. Anyhow, when I got to...

33:30 I can't remember if it was Argentia or Halifax, it would be one of those two, but the Canadian Army was there in a very big way, and I got a Canadian Army bloke to fix it up for me, which he did a very good job which lasted me right through until I got back to Australia after the war and then I had them all reconstructed, as you can see. I asked this Canadian dentist to let me pay him at the end of it.

34:00 He wouldn't hear of it. I said, "I've got to do something." He said, "Go and get some grog." So I went to the ship and got as many bottles of whisky as I could, and took them back to him and he was more than happy. He was happy and I was happy. A very interesting thing happened after we left...the Panama Canal, we were steaming up, and I can't really put the position of it, but it would have been at least a day's steaming...I suppose that would probably be in a north east direction

34:30 to get to Canada. One afternoon we were all sitting around, having a drink...Sorry, it would have been about eleven thirty in the morning, and a Gold Almight crash, and everyone leapt to their feet, and never having experienced anything like this, I said, "Christ, we've been hit by a bloody torpedo!" It didn't appear that,

35:00 but then this crash happened again, and we leapt up and it was quite clear, quite a long way away, probably about six or seven thousand yards away, there was a submarine on the surface. I really don't know anymore than that about it, and I don't think anybody else knows. And it was diving and they were firing at it. Now whether it had fired at us, I don't know, I really don't know. But there was a submarine there,

35:30 it's well documented, everyone knows about it...That was my first initiation into...We had, it must have been a four point seven or six inch gun mounted on the stern of the Capetown Castle, and we had one of those Doms [defensively equipped merchant shipping] crews, I've forgotten whether they were army or the navy. I'm pretty sure navy gunners, and they opened fire on it. I rather suspect it had opened fire on us beforehand.

36:00 It was certainly too far away for a torpedo shot. It dived and we continued on our way, and that was the beginning of the real war for me, but it was an enormous surprise to hear this great bang and the gun going off at the stern. So it was a good initiation, nobody was hurt, and in due course we went back and had a drink. An easy way to do it.

36:30 **Did that change your apprehension of sub attacks?**

We were very well aware of the possibility of sub attacks because we had been schooled in it. And indeed, of course, we'd lost some troop ships, too, to sub attacks in the Atlantic. We were very well aware of it, but I don't think they anticipated submarines that far south at the time.

37:00 But the submarine really had not much chance of getting us at the high speeds we were doing. Those big troop ships, later on, always came across the Atlantic by themselves, mostly by themselves. They came at such high speed, and of course, we didn't lose any. We lost the Queen Mary by a collision, which I will tell you about later when we get to the Atlantic battle, but she didn't sink.

37:30 It was a timely introduction to the fun. It made us more apprehensive about getting across the Atlantic. After leaving Halifax with the load of Canadians...it was absolutely crammed with Canadian soldiers. We went across the Atlantic by ourselves, but at very high speed. It was very hot. Some of those ships did twenty two knots.

38:00 Very fast. A submarine would have to be very lucky to get anywhere near them. When you consider that the convoys that we were losing so much of, very frequently they had an average speed of seven or eight knots, which allowed the submarines to get on the surface at night and get into position and just pick them off when they wanted to.

Whereabouts did you disembark?

Southampton.

38:30 When did you arrive in Southampton?

Gee, you're testing my memory a bit now. do you know I never kept a diary during the war, I don't know of anyone who did, actually. I am a bit hazy on these dates...It was probably getting on towards the end of '42. The Battle of the Atlantic

39:00 was really warming up very strongly and our losses were very heavy about that time. Yes, it would have been, probably September/October, '42. It was just beginning to snow in Scotland.

What was your first move when you landed in Southampton?

We all had the same first move, and that was to report to Admiralty. I remember going up to Admiralty with a lot of my friends, and you were taken

39:30 in one at a time to a crusty old commander sitting behind a desk with a beautiful English accent that we weren't used to, and he treated you like a child. "Son, what are you doing over here? What ship do you want me to send you to?" You know, very friendly banter, he put us at ease, he was very nice.

40:00 And of course we all wanted to go to destroyers. The first thing that came into my mind, I said, "I want a home fleet destroyer." "Oh," he said. So we had a bit more joking and talk about it. And so he posted me to HMS Onslaught, an O-class destroyer with, the 17th destroyer of the flotilla home fleet. I got a couple of weeks' leave, and the same chums, we went up to Scotland.

Tape 2

00:35 We left off where you had just arrived at Southampton and went to Admiralty. Why did you specifically ask for a destroyer?

Well, I don't think we didn't know any better.

01:00 There was a lot of action in the destroyers. The destroyers were the maids of all work. They certainly did an enormous amount of work. And a lot of the chaps who came back to Rushcutter, had served in the Mediterranean on destroyers, and the tales they told us, I suppose, when you're young and silly, made it appear very attractive. But the alternative was bigger ships...or smaller ships.

01:30 You certainly didn't want to go on a smaller ship like a Flower-class Corvette, or something like that. Because whilst they were good little ships of about a thousand tons, and they did a wonderful job, it was pretty hard to keep your feet on them in bad weather....They were very bad ships to live on and conditions were pretty bad, in comparison to what you would get on a bigger destroyer of, say, about two and a half thousand tons or something like that. So destroyers were...And I don't think any of us would have been posted to anything bigger than a destroyer,

02:00 because you were looking at pure anti-submarine speciality work. So the choice was some very rough, hard little ship or much better conditions in a destroyer. I think that's probably why most of us wanted a destroyer.

What was your feeling about...

Very thrilled about it. Very thrilled. At the time I think I probably got the pick posting.

02:30 My other friends all went to anti-submarine ships, some of them went to the older class, the American destroyers, which were pretty hard going and not much value, and I don't think they lasted too long. They all came back into better ships, possibly some smaller destroyers like a Hunt-class or something like that. But to get a fleet destroyer was a plumb job, even though the O-class were an emergency class.

03:00 They were put together to be lost, in other words they were not nearly as well equipped. The armament was just as good, but they were rough ships to serve on. They had First World War four point seven naval guns, which were excellent, very, very efficient, very, very good guns, but they were relatively low angle and not much good against aircraft. They had open mountings, they weren't turrets.

03:30 And they were built purely for the Russian run, purely for North Atlantic and Arctic work. It was pretty surprising that we didn't have any heating on them, when we did nothing but Arctic and North Atlantic work. It was pretty cold and icy most of the time. So they were what they call an 'emergency class'. On one occasion,

04:00 the whole flotilla was lined up on the wharves...I can't remember what port it was now, but it would have been one of the Scottish ports and we were told by this commodore who was addressing us, in no uncertain terms, that we were all expendable, straight out. And I think they did their best to make sure we were.

04:30 They were an Emergency class, they were thrown into everything, everywhere, but they were surprisingly efficient and they did a very, very good job. But they were rough, not many creature comforts aboard, and it was particularly bad for the crew to serve in the Arctic and North Atlantic, in those ships.

I will ask you a little more about that in a few minutes. Tell me about your leave in Scotland before you went aboard?

05:00 It was very good. The three great friends who went right through up until the time we graduated out of Rushcutter as sub-lieutenants, was Myra Solomon, who has subsequently died, and Ken Margeson and myself, we all served together....we all did our courses together, and we'd all done our ratings courses together, we were all at the university together....

05:30 So it was really a wonderful thing. Well, Ken and I, Ken Margeson and myself, were posted to the Royal Navy and Sole was appointed to one of the N-class destroyers in the Mediterranean. So we split up at that stage, and I didn't see Sole again until after the war. But he had his troubles in the Mediterranean,

06:00 like we had a few problems ourselves in the Atlantic and wherever we went.

What did you do in Scotland for those few days?

We went up to Scotland to have leave, and there were Comfort Funds in those days, and they arranged for us to go and stay with people. We stayed with a Dr McKay and his wife

06:30 in a place called Aberfeldy, in Scotland, and I remained firm friends with the McKay family right throughout the war, and I spent many leave with them in due course. We had about four or five days there, and then we went to Edinburgh, and I subsequently came back to Glasgow to go aboard Onslaught, which was

07:00 still building at Fairfield's yards in Govern in Glasgow, which was the big Tyne side shipping area. But in Edinburgh I fell for one of the traps that befalls Australians who are used to the sunshine and Bondi Beach and so forth, because they had trams running along...I think it was Princes Street, the main street there,

07:30 and it was getting onto winter time and it was pretty cold and I had a greatcoat on, but in Sydney it was normal if you were coming to a stop in a tram, you didn't wait for it to stop, you jump off a few steps and go along with the tram a few steps, seemed to be the normal for young blokes to do. I think probably as you got older you waited for the tram to stop. I did the same thing in Edinburgh,

08:00 not realising that there was fine ice covering the ground. So I jumped off this tram as it was coming to a stop and of course my feet went out from under me, and I slid alongside the tram on the flat of my back in my greatcoat until I stopped. And that was my first lesson in a cold climate, that if there's ice on the ground you are very, very careful how you treat it.

08:30 And it was a lesson I really needed because we had ice on the decks of Onslaught a great deal of the time. So I became very wary about anything that had ice under foot.

You first saw the Onslaught when it was still being built?

Onslaught was about two months off commissioning when I joined her, about six weeks off commissioning her.

09:00 The captain had joined and some of the officers had joined and we were billeted ashore in the boarding houses, which....were not too bad. So we used to go down and report on the ship and try and fill in the day doing nothing. We'd go home about three o'clock and potter around Glasgow and wait for the ship to finish. Probably a month, probably a month I stood by her, during which time the captain

09:30 and most of the officers joined and the crew were starting to be drafted there. When she was released from the dockyard we had all the dockyard trials, they must have lasted weeks. Full speed ahead, full speed astern, and we would go out everyday and come back every night and get everything rectified. And we'd have most of the full crew aboard then and it was a question of settling down and getting the ship in order.

10:00 When that was completed we went straight to Scapa Flow, which was the home fleet base, the base of the British home fleet.

Was there a ceremony for launching the ship?

No, nothing at all. There were a lot of ships being built in Fairfield yards. We had a cruiser, the [HMS] Anson was being fitted, one of the battleships,

10:30 several destroyers, it was chaotic. We were being bombed at the time. Germans were dropping bombs at night. None of them affected us much, luckily, but I think they must have been aiming at us. The bombing was very interesting. I recall being ashore at the time we were building and Glasgow

11:00 had been quite heavily bombed. I was just doing something in the city of Glasgow and these great crowds, and the streets cleared, and the King and Queen were there. They had come up to see what was

happening and to say good day to everyone. They were just marvellous, they were just marvellous, they were walking in amongst the rubble with all the people. I didn't see them walking in the rubble

11:30 with the people, but there were many photographs. They stayed a long time just talking to the women at the front door of their house, and the people, and they were wonderful people. King George VI was a good man. He was navy. We subsequently saw him in the home fleet a bit.

12:00 I was terribly impressed with it. But they were there a long time, with those people, and there were bits of smoke about still from the bombs and the rubble...But it never hit us in the dockyards. The only other time I was bombed in a dockyard was in Hull, once or twice. We were in dry dock and I was terrified. It was the first time

12:30 I had really been terrified of bombing. because I was the officer on duty, there was pretty well nobody on the ship, just a few of the maintenance crew, because we were dry. And we got very heavy bombing raids in Hull about three nights running, and I just had this phobia that the ship would fall over, because we had the big...We were

13:00 stabilised by the big wooden beams just on the side of the ship. And I had this vision that if these big stanchions, these big timber things were blown away, we would just fall over. Because if you looked over the side of the ship, it was a long way down to the bottom of the dock. It was the only time I felt really frightened about the bombing. But that was considerably later.

Did the bombs come anywhere near the....

13:30 No. I'm sure they meant to bomb the targets, but they were a long way off. In Glasgow they bombed all the working class housing areas, which was pretty sad. But they did a lot of damage.

Were there air-raid shelters at the dockyards?

No. They had nothing there that I knew about.

What was the procedure if there was an air-raid?

Well, there wasn't any, that I knew of. I was in the dockyards and I didn't...

14:00 I was never on the ship at night when the bombs were falling, I was in the boarding house, and I don't think anyone there knew anything about bomb shelters.

Tell me what the crew was like on the ship? What was the makeup? Were they all...

They were all Poms. In Britain there is three manning depots. There is Chatham, which is the Thames manning depot...

14:30 If I recall there was Portsmouth and Devonport. For some reason I can't tell you, everyone used to say, "The best ship you can get a Devonport ship." That was the manning depot. We were a Devonport ship from the manning depot from Devonport. And being of a Cornish background, I was quite happy about this,

15:00 but it really didn't make much difference to us. They were very good. I don't think you could fault them. We had no cases of anyone backing out or backing down. Several of the blokes had been sunk on other ships. Several of our officers had been sunk,

15:30 and ships destroyed, and they had come to us. We had a top class ship, top class officers and a top class crew. I couldn't fault them. I got on very well with the crew, but they had a terrible time. Their conditions were almost beyond description.

16:00 Tell me about the conditions aboard the ship then? Your first impressions?

My first impressions were they were pretty spartan, for the crew mainly. I had a double bunk which I shared with...

16:30 whoever was there at the time, mostly a midshipman. But a lot of the time it was a double bunk for myself, it was adequate. It had no heating device that I remember. They were pretty standard navy at the time I think, although I think some of my companions who were on

17:00 a different class of construction like, perhaps, the Ms or the Ts, I think they had much better facilities than we had. But I found it quite good, really. I used to sleep right over the port propeller, which didn't please me much. Terribly noisy, always noisy, whenever the ship was moving. And of course you got excessive motion

17:30 right down over the propeller, particularly in bad weather. I've actually been flipped out of the bunk to hit the bunk above, and you come back again, because tends to flex, and if you are right at the very end of it, you get maximum flexing. A destroyer will flex front and stern.

Tell me what that means?

18:00 Well, it means that it bends, in shore parlance. If you are in very, very heavy weather, the stern might tend to flip sometimes if it buries its head very heavily, at high speed, in massive waves. It's like hitting a brick wall. The stern will tend to flex and throw you out of your bunk, which has happened.

How did it compare to the Wyrallah?

18:30 Well, there is no comparison, because I was in the mess deck on the Wyrallah. The mess deck wasn't too bad there, it was fairly well fitted out, and a smaller ship, much smaller ship. My quarters this time were officers' quarters, which were nowhere near the mess decks. The mess decks on the Wyrallah were in the centre of the ship. The officers' quarters in the O-class were in the stern, which were like a lot of the destroyers of the time, which might have been all right in peace time,

19:00 but with the heavy conditions of wartime, it could be uncomfortable. And I found at sea that sleeping right over the propellers was not....not the best of conditions, but you get used to it after a couple of years. The slightest change in propeller pitch would of course wake you up and you wonder why,

19:30 and you tend to be apprehensive as to why you've suddenly increased speed or reduced speed, or something like that. Most of the time when that happened all your fears were allayed because the alarm bells would go and you would be racing up to your action stations. That's what usually caused big changes in propeller speed.

Tell me a bit about the captain?

20:00 My captain was a fellow called Joe Selby. I had enormous respect for him. I think he was typical of the very efficient British Naval career officer. Joe was full time navy, he was a commander, a very senior commander. And immediately before he came to Onslaught he was in command of a Tribal-class,

20:30 and I could be corrected on this, I think it was Mashona. And he been in the Bismarck affair and coming back from the sinking of the Bismarck...The ship's coming back and he was just coming around towards Northern Ireland, in the Atlantic, and the German Airforce mounted massive attacks upon them, as you might imagine. Mashona got a bomb...I'm pretty sure he told me he got a bomb down the funnel, he got a bomb down the funnel, which blew them apart.

21:00 Very heavy losses, but being on the bridge he survived, he got a few weeks' leave and new uniforms and so forth and was posted as captain of the Onslaught. I don't think you would ever find a better captain. He was efficient, he was a good man and he did a marvellous job, I felt very safe with him. He was always very courteous to me.

21:30 He didn't tolerate fools. He'd do his block sometimes. But I found him a top captain. There weren't many captains who weren't good, but there were some, and we knew the ships...But the majority of them outstanding. The quality of the British Naval officer was so high.

22:00 I had enormous respect for them. Certainly by the time a bloke got to captain, he was pretty good and you felt very safe with him.

Did you ever find yourself making comparisons with the Australian and British Navy?

I wasn't in the position to do so because I had never been in a real navy. In the Wyrallah, we had Merchant Services officers and a Reservists officer, so that I was never in a position to make comparisons.

22:30 And I never had any action in the Australian Navy. But my post-war experiences with the Australian Navy and my subsequent experience of the Australian Navy, with the Australian officers, they were absolutely outstanding. Permanent officers in the Australian Navy, they were a breed apart, they're very efficient, top class blokes. And by the time they get to

23:00 second-lieutenant to commander, they have been pretty well weeded out. Very good, I am very closely associated with them now because of my association, the Naval Welfare Officers Association, of which I am president. I have a lot to do with the present day navy, and the present day officers, and I find them outstanding.

Tell me when you first set out on the Onslaught,

23:30 **what was the purpose of the first voyage?**

We steamed up to Scapa Flow to what you call work up, that is usually a three to four weeks intensive training period where you test all your guns, you get your crews in their proper action stations, you fire your guns, you fire torpedoes, you test everything on the ship, you have night- firing and anti-aircraft firing...And you go through all you exercises,

24:00 get all your guns, iron out all your problems, get to know one another. It's a period of intense activity before you go into action, before you were put on to proper escort duty or fleet duties. These big fleet destroyers like Onslaught, they had a dual role. They were fleet destroyers, which means that they went out with the fleet,

24:30 and they also did a lot of escort work. That is, they were the close escort for the big convoys, so they were there to tackle surface forces and aircraft and submarines, anything that came along before you

could get the cruisers and the battleships up into very heavy action. So they were the maids of all work.

25:00 We had only been going for about a week and as usual things weren't all working, but we got a few of them repaired. But before long, certainly before we fully worked up, there was a shortage of destroyers. Onslaught was sent out to escort the [HMS] King George V on....I have forgotten where we were going.

25:30 But I would rather think we would have been the big backup force for the PQ17...I don't think I knew at the time. But we were steaming northwards, up the Iceland coast on a very dark night with enormous seas, and on the screen...There might have been as many as five destroyers escorting the King George V.

26:00 And I didn't know what happened, it was my first trip frankly. I knew something was wrong but I wasn't told what was wrong, but I subsequently found out that [HMS] Punjabi, one of the destroyers on the screen were on heavy zig zagging, and if you zig zag the wrong way, or a little bit late in zig zagging, and you've got a heavy ship behind you, you run the risk that...If he turns and you don't,

26:30 instead of going like this...If you don't turn in time and he turns and you're still on the wrong course, you run the risk of being run over. And that happened several times during the war. And the King George V ran over the top of the Punjabi, and pretty well chopped it in two, and we lost by far the majority of the crew there. The King George V was damaged.

27:00 So that was my initiation at sea. From then on we did quite a bit of fleet work, that was our working up period...In fact, we didn't have any. We were just too short of ships.

Tell me what fleet work entails?

That was fleet work, escorting a battleship or a cruisers, because whenever they'd go to sea, they didn't usually go by themselves. They usually took a destroyer

27:30 destroyer screen with them, who screen them and they come along behind. That is usually an anti-submarine screen, but it's also pretty useful for an anti-aircraft screen and for additional fire. And also, if they go into action it is usually with heavier ships, and the destroyers are pretty well needed, not only for gun fire but for torpedo attacks.

28:00 That was the initiation in fleet work, but I did a lot of fleet work after that. But subsequently we did mostly escort work on the Russian convoys.

Tell me what your typical daily duties were on fleet work?

On fleet work? Well of course, you kept a watch, which was four on and eight off, unless you were on defence stations,

28:30 which was four hours on, four hours off, yeah, it was pretty heavy going. With ordinary fleet work of four on and eight off, there was always work to be done, there maintenance on all the equipment, which you were always involved in. I had quite a bit of paperwork that I had to do. My captain usually referred paperwork to me,

29:00 which I had to do. At one stage, I had to act as paymaster aboard, which was quite heavy when you're keeping watches and you don't have much time. There was always the need to get a bit of sleep during the day, if you can, and your main meals and your divisional duties. There's no spare time on a ship, you're pretty busy all the time on cruising stations.

29:30 In fact, you can become very tired, if you can't get that daily kip.

Was fatigue a real problem on the destroyers?

It was an appalling problem. It wasn't so bad if you could get into a routine on standard screen work, that is fleet work,

30:00 but on convoy work it was appalling, I just got to the stage, many, many times, you can't think properly. You're so absolutely worn out and tired your mind starts to become numb. And if you're standing up and you're very cold at the same time...I really think it is a serious problem of efficiency and danger. The officers were absolutely worn out, but so were the troops.

30:30 The captain, we used to call him all hours of the day and night. He was on the bridge most of the time, he had a pretty bad time. Fatigue was an enormous problem. Sometimes you used to think....I got to the stage where I used think of lying on Bondi Beach, just being warm and relaxed and I used to just crave to get some sleep.

31:00 Just getting into your bunk, feeling terribly tired and worn, the alarm bells would go and you'd be back up again.

Was there an element of homesickness in that, do you think?

Yes, no question. Not all the time. I used to crave for the warmth. I found it very hard going in the snow and ice, terribly cold and wet conditions.

31:30 Yes, I used to get homesick at times, but you'd get over it. It was a spasmodic thing that used to come and go like general conditions, just general Service conditions.

What communication did you have with your family?

None. I used to write them letters now and again, but I didn't get many letters from them.

32:00 I got letters, but not a lot of letters. But the fleet was very, very good on mail. They really tried to get it to us all the time, and they didn't always succeed. But it was letters, I never ever spoke to them. I never had the facilities to speak to them. But I got used to it after a while.

32:30 You get used to Service conditions, it's the same day in day out. Particularly at sea, it's just a question of getting through it, and you get used to it. You become almost like...a robot.

When did you first begin utilising your anti-sub skills?

33:00 The day I joined the ship. I supervised some of the installation. I went all over the gear...I spent a lot of time in the compartment, during building. The compartment was in the bottom of the ship, right at the very bottom of the ship, and the gear was raised up and down from below the hull of the ship.

33:30 So I spent a lot of time down there. It was quite interesting. And I had a very, very good HSD [Higher Submarine Detector], a bloke from the Royal Navy, a fellow called Leading Seaman Britain. He was a small, bald, headed bloke of a very young age, no sense of humour, but pure gold. A top bloke. I had enormous respect and liking for him.

34:00 And we did all the Russian work together. And he got a decoration on my recommendation for some of the work he did. I can tell you about it. We were being very heavily bombed in a very heavy submarine area and the gear was bombed,

34:30 the bombs disrupted our gear, it wouldn't operate. So I told him to go down and look at it. To get down there he had to go through all the decks. He had to open and close all the water tight doors behind him, if anything happened he was in a steel trap. So I sent him down to have a look, and I felt a bit guilty about this, because I knew what he was up against.

35:00 I said to the captain, I said, "Sir, I would like to go down and see Able Seaman Britain, see if he's okay." So I followed him down, and he didn't come up for about an hour, so I followed him down. And I did the same trick, through all the water tight doors, slamming them all shut again. I finally got down there and here he was working away, quite calmly. You get terrible concussion at the bottom of the ship, you don't know what's happening,

35:30 the guns are going off and the whole ship shakes. So he was down there with all this, locked up in this steel little cabin. I stayed and had a yarn with him for awhile. I couldn't help him much, he probably knew more than I knew, anyhow. So we had a yarn and he said he was okay, so I left there and wound my way back up

36:00 through all the water tight doors and the decks back up to the bridge because I was the only anti-aircraft control officer at the same time, you see, So I said to the captain he was okay, but the captain... he knew how bad it was. He called me later and asked me about and I said, "I think you've got to do something about it." He got a mention in dispatches for it, which he deserved. They were top blokes. I've got no complaints with the blokes. I was never let down by any of them.

36:30 **Was the anti-sub equipment your responsibility?**

Yes. By this time we had very sophisticated, advanced equipment, to what we had out here. I mean, our lives depended on the anti-sub equipment. The submarine Warfare over there was intense. As I told you, if we had lost the Battle of the Atlantic, and we nearly lost it three or four times...

37:00 But you've got to give the Canadians and the Americans the credit they deserve. I doubt we would have pulled through without them. The whole of the Canadian Navy was involved in escorting the ships a certain way across with anti-submarine and other work. The Americans, when they came in, were very good, but I don't think they had the old lifetime skills that we'd had,

37:30 but they were very good. Without their efforts we would have found it very tough going.

What did you mean by the lifetime skills?

I think we'd been brought up on anti-submarine warfare out here. The British Navy and the Australian Navy, the British had always been well aware of the dangers of submarine Warfare.

38:00 And my personal impression was that the Americans weren't. I don't think they had the same background on submarine Warfare as what we did. They were a bit isolated from it over there, but we weren't. But they caught up in due course. I think the burden of the Battle of the Atlantic on submarine warfare was certainly on the British.

You said the sort of equipment advance a lot, did you have to retrain when you got there?

- 38:30 Well, no, not when I got there, I was straight into Service, but we'd trained on the best equipment that was available here in Sydney. When you go into a new ship, there's usually new things, but we soon learnt them. But we did, we had attack training facilities there on shore in Glasgow,
- 39:00 and we went to that...the captain and all of the anti-submarine group on the ship. So yes we were, we were trained right up to it. And I could bring myself up as the installation proceeded, which was....I was pretty familiar with it. But it was good equipment and stood us in stead, it was great.
- Did you always feel confident you were across the maintenance and supervision of the equipment?**
- 39:30 I was very confident of that. I had no trouble with that at all. We really had no problems with the equipment, it was very reliable and very sturdy and did a good job. A couple of bombs nearby would usually blow something out of kilter, but you usually find where it was. We never had anything that was...We had some pretty near misses. But there was nothing we couldn't get going again.

Tape 3

- 00:34 **Tell me where you were doing most of your escort work?**
- Mostly from Iceland to Murmansk. The convoys would....The ships for any particular convoy, and I'm talking on the Russian convoys at the moment,
- 01:00 would finally be assembled in one of the big fjords, mainly on Satis Fjord, or from Glasgow, so that....Perhaps the convoys would not always be assembled in Iceland, but they would certainly all meet either off the coast of Iceland or in Iceland, to be picked up by the escorts from Iceland.
- 01:30 They'd have local escorts across to Iceland if they needed to. But we would usually...the escorts would usually pick up the convoy. We would come out from Akureyri or the Satisfjord of Hvalfjord, and then escort the convoy right through to Murmansk. Depending on the size of the convoy, and the time of the year, and
- 02:00 the period that it was during the war, the escort would vary. We did do quite a bit of heavy work in the North Atlantic towards the end of the war, which was very effective....But towards the end of the submarine war, the Battle of the Atlantic, really...
- 02:30 The fleet went into the Atlantic in what they called hunter killer groups with small aircraft carriers, say three or four destroyers, and incredibly successful. It really broke the back of the Germans towards the end of the main phase of the war. In fact, it was so successful, and my figures may be wrong, but it was in the region of sinking about ninety U-boats in three months
- 03:00 from the large number of groups that came out, comprised of the Home Fleet and small carriers working together with long range aircraft, submarines could be spotted and disposed of.
- I would like to find out a little bit more about the conditions as you found them aboard the ship.**
- 03:30 **For example, what sort of equipment did you have to take on board with you?**
- When I joined Onslaught, I had an oilskin that was given to me, I had my greatcoat, which I didn't wear aboard the ship because that was the only warm stuff I had. And really, quite frankly, apart from a duffel coat which was issued to me when I went aboard Onslaught, I had no warm clothing at all.
- 04:00 This was a major problem on Onslaught, we just weren't properly equipped to do the job we did. I'm not too sure how we survived, quite frankly. I had an oilskin, which was useless, I had a duffel coat, which I made use of, but we had no real comfort until the American Comforts Fund started sending very effective warm clothing to us.
- 04:30 I got some very heavy long socks, I got some beautiful big boots that kept me warm, all from America, Comforts Fund, we used to get big boxes sent aboard from the American Comforts Fund. I had a big arctic outfit with full furs, that's the photograph there. We were properly equipped, but not by the navy. I think they just didn't have the gear to give us.
- 05:00 And it was a terrible problem, especially for the crew. They had to pile on their jumpers, duffel coats and oilskins, but they never ever had proper arctic clothing. And we were never issued with any, except from what we got from the Comforts funds. I felt very sorry for the crews around our guns, the guns crews, when they were closed up, because
- 05:30 they were not turrets, they weren't in turrets, they were open mounts. We had four four point seven Naval guns, very effective for the First World War, but they were deck mounts and the water sloshed around underneath the shields. The decks were icy for the gun crews, and they really had a very bad time. They were totally unprotected. Some of the other ships, like the M-class and the T-class, had

heated turrets

06:00 with much better guns, were much better off. The crew, in particular, had a very bad time.

Did this affect the morale of the crew at the time?

It certainly affected their health. Their morale? I never detected any morale problems except everybody was moaning all the time, that we wanted to get the war over and we would do whatever was necessary to get the war over.

06:30 But I don't think morale ever cracked, not up north, anyhow. One of the reasons for that was, I think there was so much action and there was so much going on, that no-one really had a great deal of time to sit and think, or work it out too much. Those destroyers, in the early years, were non-stop. It was "Watch On, Stop On." At sea, we were busy all of the time, most of the time, we had very little spare time ever,

07:00 very little leave, and the conditions aboard were appalling, particularly for the crew. The heating was non-existent, their clothing would have been wet a great deal of the time, they would certainly would have been cold. We had gloves issued to us from the Comfort funds and they were absolutely essential if you were exposed outside, outside the mess decks or outside the covered in areas,

07:30 because as soon as you got a fair way north where you got a bit of real cold, if you didn't have gloves on, and you were thrown against a bulkhead and you put your hand out, the steel was so cold that your hand would stick. If you pulled your hand away quickly, the skin would remain there, and it was very difficult up there to get the wounds to heal. So there were a lot of problems like this that had to be considered.

08:00 But my personal experience was, yes, that if you had gloves they were wet most of the time. It was nearly as cold as being without them except you had the protection of not touching cold steel.

What temperatures are we talking about? How cold did it get?

I must say I don't know. I don't ever recall taking temperatures, but it would have been around freezing point,

08:30 a lot of the time. Once you get up past Bear Island north of Norway...you're right in the Arctic Ocean. The convoys used to like to go as far north as they could, towards the ice pack, because it was further for the Germans to come, particularly so for aircraft.

09:00 You don't want to be sitting on the Norwegian coast simply because it's warmer. So most of the time we went as far north as we could, consistent with fuel and time spent at sea and speed and stuff like that. So most of the time it was pretty cold. I would say 50% of the time that I remember, the ships would have some form of ice, icing on them,

09:30 and that made conditions very difficult. But that wasn't the main problem. The main problem was the arctic gales and the very bad seas. And I can only speak about Onslaught, but friends of mine tell me it was just as bad on their ships. But the waters, the heavy seas got into the mess decks. How? I don't know. But the mess decks were in an appalling mess,

10:00 they seldom had less than a couple of inches of water, icy, filthy black water, in which these chaps had to live until they could get the water out. They had to eat and sleep in those conditions. A lot of the time things that would drop into this water would be soaked, and they had to live in these conditions. But it wasn't always full of water but my recollection of it was,

10:30 was for a lot of the time there was water sloshing around the mess decks. I don't think they got much ice built up on the deck heads because of the number of bodies in there which would keep the temperature up, probably a little bit more than my cabin. A lot of the time we were up north, I would have ice forming on the deck head of my cabin,

11:00 which kept the cabin pretty cool, but that wasn't the problem. The problem was that when you got back down into a warmer climate down towards Scapa Flow, the ice would melt and it would drip down onto the bunks. If we were lucky enough, and we'd thought about it, you might have covered them with something, but most of the time they were just wet, or damp anyhow.

Did this lead to health problems with the crew?

It led to a lot of problems on the mess deck, yes.

11:30 At one stage I remember on our ship, and I can only speak for ourselves, we were losing several ratings per trip. They seemed to develop a galloping sort of chest complaint, and I'd heard talk of the fact that several of them died from some

12:00 galloping consumption type of complaint which would no doubt would have been brought on by the condition on the mess decks. Of course, there were a lot of people above decks, too, particularly the gun crews and the people on the bridge, they had a pretty bad time of it. Particularly in heavy weather, because we were shipping a lot of water up there. And the water,

12:30 if you were punching into heavy seas, depending on the wind, you would get a lot of very heavy spray, and a lot of time that spray was half frozen when it hit you. You must remember that we had open bridges in those days, which meant you were standing in the elements. You had to be out in the open, everything was visual. The director tower was out in the open, they were getting the full blast of it up there.

13:00 There were a lot of people that suffered a lot of hardship.

The captain was copping the worst of it?

Well, the bloke who stood on the bridge was copping the worst of it, and it would have to be the captain. But of course, a lot of the time the captain could stand down below in the protection of an awning sort of a thing. But the captain had the worst of it, because he was always on call, he was on the bridge a great deal of the time. At least when he got a bit of a chance he could go off the bridge

13:30 and have a sleep, which he did, because he was up a great deal through the night. You'd be lucky if you had a good captain, and I had a good captain.

What about keeping balance on icy decks? Was that a problem?

Well, you can't keep your balance on an icy deck. This is one of the problems with the construction of these ships. If you are going to go into climates like that, in battle,

14:00 that is in combat conditions, you don't want your officers trying to scramble from the aft quarter of the ship up to the bridge and director towers and wherever the things might be because your decks are icy. So we had to rig up running lines. We had a big steel wire line with a piece of rope with an eye on it attached and knots that you could hang onto...The only way we could get along the deck in any form of sea conditions,

14:30 heavy sea conditions, would be to hang onto this and get yourself along the deck. But on many occasions I'd been hanging onto this piece of heavy rope with the knots in it with your feet off the deck as the ship was rolling, with water sloshing across the deck. Many a time in non-icy conditions, I've been soaked

15:00 trying to get up to the bridge, with the deck going under, or one side going under, or an unexpected wave coming across the deck or something like that. The conditions were very bad for that. I think most new construction ships, or post-war construction ships, have got all officers' quarters and most crew quarters in the centre of the ship where you've got the least movement, and you can get to your action stations much more easily than you could

15:30 by bringing your officers from all the way down aft. So yes, it was very bad, and of course we lost people overboard.

Tell me about an incident where a man was washed overboard?

I never witnessed anyone being washed overboard, but we assume they went overboard, but on several times coming back from Russia

16:00 in very bad conditions, men just vanished. I'm speaking of up to two or three men per trip, sometimes, which is very heavy. It wasn't all the time, but there were selective times.

Is that across a group of escort ships or...

I don't know. I know of one survivor, my friend Ray Williams, who was in [HMS] Meteor, he didn't do as many trips as I did, I don't think,

16:30 but they lost blokes, too. We'd sometimes be a couple of blokes short and the only guess we could make was that they had gone overboard. No one was ever reported overboard, man overboard, whilst I was on any ship, but there was still people missing. I've heard authoritative accounts

17:00 of at least one officer being washed overboard, and being washed back again by the next wave, from another ship, which I'm sure could easily be quite right. Because you get a terrible wave wash on these ships, they tend to curl round and come back up again, and if you go overboard and you're lucky, you could easily get washed back again. I heard of the

17:30 first lieutenant of one of the ships, this happening to. But in my experience...I've nearly been overboard myself, on a couple of occasions, but I've never known it on my own ship to be...But we've lost men.

They were just reported missing?

Yes.

The assumption is...

Well, no one knows anything, usually.

18:00 I don't suppose it is past the realms of possibility that one or two were chucked overboard. I'm not suggesting they did, but when you just miss blokes like this, you've got to be open to all possibilities.

Conditions on those mess decks were pretty rough. I don't think that any description could really describe how bad the conditions on the mess decks were. How people survived there, I do not know.

- 18:30 This is not me saying this. There's several books been written, and they describe this much better than me. In fact, They describe them in the most horrific terms of human survival on the mess decks. The food was appalling.

What was the food like?

Oh, terrible, absolutely terrible. A lot of the time, you know, you would go for very long periods with no food, because

- 19:00 you'd have to put the galley fires out....And if you were up there, don't forget you had very long periods of daylight, and if you were under attack, you wouldn't light up the galleys to get any warm food, and there wasn't any cold food available most of the time, so you would go for very long periods with nothing. If you could get someone down to the galley in a lull you might get some hot chi or tea or something like that...But the food at sea was not good.

19:30 **What was on the menu?**

For breakfast I think we used to have what they called 'Train Smash,' that was tinned tomatoes on toast, and you'd make a meal of toast and that

- 20:00 or some tinned form of...some tinned stuff. You wouldn't be getting bacon and eggs, unless you were in very, very good conditions. You had all your cooks closed up and the galley going....I can remember having bacon and eggs, sometimes, at sea, but mostly it was pretty simple stuff.

- 20:30 At lunchtime you would probably have some cold beef and potatoes, or something like that. For tea in the afternoon, you'd always have bread and butter, bread and jam, something like that. And then the evening meal might be...if they had any, maybe some soup and meat, if they were able to cook it. It was pretty bland diet.

- 21:00 It wasn't that good. But it was enough to sustain people. We had no complaints with it at the time. We had stewards and cooks and they did their best, they were good blokes, I had no complaints with them, they really tried. I think the troops probably did worse than we did, having been on the lower deck myself and seeing what we had here in Australia,

- 21:30 which wasn't that good, I think the troops over there probably did it much worse.

In between trips, where was the boat....

Scapa Flow, mainly. We went back, in between trips, we would usually get a two or three day turn around period, during which we would clean up the ship. We would go to the oiler,

- 22:00 we would get fresh ammunition, we would go alongside the store ship and get fresh food and supplies. If we were lucky, we might get ashore to have a beer at one of the canteens ashore, but that was it. There was no leave between trips, and as many trips as possible had to be fitted in because

- 22:30 we were so short of ships and there was so much work to be done. When the ship needed a boiler clean, which it did, they all needed a boiler cleaner, if you were lucky you would go down to Rosyth, or to one of the British ports where they could give her a boiler clean, and you'd probably have three days leave there, and then straight back again. But I didn't have any leave from Onslaught

- 23:00 except for heavy repairs or boiler cleans. That was the only time I got off the ship. I had a game of football once at Scapa Flow, one day. We played another destroyer and it was the worst game of football I ever had. The ground was full of rocks and...But it was very simple, and you'd have a few beers.

- 23:30 Leave was pretty well non-existent, unless you got smashed up, so everyone hoped that something would fail or you would get a major default, you would get back to the mainland and you'd certainly get leave then. I mean you got leave whenever it was possible, they were very good that way. But it never worried me unduly. My attitude? I wanted to get it over as soon as I could, and that was the attitude of most people I knew. "For Christsakes, let get into it and get this thing over."

24:00 **How long were you on the Onslaught?**

Just under two years. There was a remarkable attitude in Britain, and in the Royal Navy. I got there just after Dunkirk, some time after Dunkirk, and the people were still shaken about that.

- 24:30 Things were very grim with us there. We were hanging out with insufficient means of fighting the war, really. There were the raids on London. People having a very bad time, very severe food rationing. Our losses in the Atlantic were staggering, they were so bad and they were mounting. And there was a real prospect

- 25:00 that we could lose the war. And not once did I ever hear anyone complain or express a view that we could lose the war. But in fact, looking backwards now, we were very close to losing it when our supplies were drying up in the Atlantic. That is why Churchill said that the only worry he ever had in the whole war

25:30 was that we would lose the Battle of the Atlantic. So to that extent, the Battle of the Atlantic was the key battle that had to be won in the war, and we finally won it.

At the time on one was speaking about the possibility of losing the war, but was that something that you were thinking?

No, I don't think we knew, the ordinary person knew, how bad it was. We knew we were terribly short of ships.

26:00 We knew we were losing a lot of ships, I'm talking Naval ships. We knew our losses were terrible in Merchant ships, but I don't think any of us realised that these losses could cripple us. No one ever, on the Onslaught, thought that we could ever lose the war. I never thought we could lose the war. I thought it was going to be a long war...And I think that certainly on Onslaught,

26:30 the only thing I can speak about, the resolve on board the ship, everyone got tougher and tougher. There was no doubt about it, they couldn't wait to get their hands on the Germans. It was really getting them down to the degree that...When survivors came aboard, you had to be careful or the blokes would have probably killed them. It was a very bitter war up north.

Did you find that hatred increasing?

Oh yeah, yeah. I could tell you a couple of stories that would just turn your hair on end.

27:00 Tell me about an incident where the German survivors were pulled aboard the ship?

I can tell you a better one that. We, after one serious incident where we had where we sank this other ships, we were engaged with this German ship...unfortunately most of them died.

27:30 A lot of them went into the water, and we pulled out about, maybe six or seven, because we weren't going to stop to pick them up. And by sheer chance one of them was the captain of the ship. When we pulled them aboard, we had to stop the ratings from attacking them. I am sure some of the blokes would have killed them if they could.

28:00 A couple of them were very badly wounded, arms blown off and things like that. So we laid them out on a mess deck table and did what we could, but they died, so we put them back overboard. The rest of the blokes had to be protected, there were pretty few left at that stage. I think there might have been six or seven of them.

28:30 And we put the captain down in the cabin opposite me, in the aft flat, and he was a big tall lanky bloke who obviously hated us, really hated us, and he spoke very good English, abusing us. We put him down there, we had to protect them. We put this bloke down in the first lieutenant's cabin, next to the captain's cabin,

29:00 which was directly opposite my cabin, and we put an armed guard on him. We gave this bloke, a Londoner, a big tough Londoner, we gave him a rifle, a fully loaded rifle, and told him to make sure no one killed the prisoner. I was in my bunk asleep during that night, and we made off at about twenty five knots, the weather was pretty choppy,

29:30 it was enough that you to hang on. It would throw you off balance if you didn't watch it. So I woke up...I can't tell you the time...I'll take a stab at it, at about two in the morning or so...It was night-time anyhow.

30:00 I woke up with shots being fired. And I just couldn't believe this, so I leapt out of bed with all this awful screaming and shots being fired, so I leapt out of bed, and went outside my cabin and here is this AB [Able Bodied Seaman] chasing this German captain round and round a big pump we had in the after flat. The captain was screaming out at the top of his voice for help,

30:30 and the bloke was trying to kill him. What had happened was that the sentry had forced the lock on the door where the German prisoner was and fired two shots at him, missed him, both of them went into the bunk. The captain leapt out and pushed this bloke out of the way and into the cabin flat. Well the only way out of the cabin flat was up a flight of steep stairs, which wasn't an option for him with a bloke firing at him, so he went around and around with this bloke chasing him and firing at him.

31:00 So we finally...Another bloke came out of another cabin and we finally got this sentry to see a bit of reason. We took the gun away and locked the bloke back in the cabin... So it just gives you a bit of an idea of how the feelings were. The German captain didn't go much on it, but what could you do to punish the bloke?

31:30 I mean he was a Londoner, he had been bombed in London. The worst case was, we had in air-raids once, a Heinkel 101 landed in the sea near us, it crashed landed, but the two occupants managed to get out of the aircraft, they were standing on the wing, and we decided we would pick these two blokes up,

32:00 if they could get to the net easily, we weren't going to stop. So we steamed over, the ship was fully closed up at action stations, and it so happened I was in one of the wing Oerlikons at this stage....Again,

the Londoner, we had a Londoner who was on one of the wing Oerlikons twenty five millimetre, quick firing....And we steamed over to pick these blokes off the wing.

32:30 We thought we would give it a quick go, we might get them up. We must have been about fifty or sixty away when this bloke opened up on them. And of course they disintegrated. I was hanging on around the waist of this gunner, who was just one of the ordinary seamen on the ship, and there was nothing I could do to stop him firing, and these blokes just disintegrated. So we just continued on our way.

33:00 It was pretty bitter. And again, you see, we said, "What do you do with this bloke?" His house in London had been bombed and...he might have lost family from what I can gather, but they weren't feeling around, these blokes. And we got the same from them. These blokes were pretty bitter.

So what did you do....

33:30 Nothing. Nothing to either. What would you do? They were good blokes, good crew members. I've never regretted nothing was done. Mind you, my captain wasn't in love with them, he'd just lost a ship to them.

To the Germans?

Yes. He got a bomb down through the funnel of his ship, previously.

34:00 **What was the captain's reaction to incidents like that?**

"It happened. Let's get on with it." You don't stop to think too much when you're under air attack you know, you get on with it.

Does something like that have to be reported or is it just...

There was nothing reported. I have no doubt other ships had similar problems.

34:30 I haven't compared notes on those things. I go on my own. You keep these things to yourself most of the time.

What were your feelings towards the Germans when you were in Australia?

I can't stand the bastards.

Is that how you felt at the very outset of the war, when you were...

No, I'm talking during the war, and post-war.

35:00 I reckon that they weren't made to pay dearly enough for what they did. They paid very, very dearly, very dearly, but I don't think they paid enough.

What would have you thought would have been adequate?

I have very strong feelings about it,

35:30 you probably wouldn't want to hear them. I think we all felt the same. Certainly my single friend who's left now from the Russian run feels the same way. I think we're pretty reasonable and sensible blokes. But they gave us a pretty rough time up there. I mean, in PQ17, we lost...I think it was twenty seven or twenty eight ships, they massacred the lot of them.

36:00 We got no one back from those ships pretty well. Now okay, they had an open go but...It was pretty tough going for them, for the blokes we lost. I don't have any soft feelings for them. I think they gave everybody a hard time.

36:30 I think they got an awful retribution from the Russians, and indeed from us, when the tide turned. But you know, they were the ones that started it.

When they did start it and before you had gone to RN [Royal Navy] were your feelings as intense?

No, I had no experience of them. I didn't know what to expect.

37:00 We're terribly removed out here from what was happening over there. You'd read the reports, all slanted of course, but I think you've got to experience these things yourself and make up your own mind.

What were your feelings about the German enemy while you were still here? Before you went overseas.

I don't think I had any feelings on it, really.

37:30 I think it was just a job to be done, I'd been drafted and I was quite happy to go and do what I had to do. But once you start getting bombed in port, and the devastation, and you hear the reports of the blokes coming back, and you start losing your ships and so forth, you take a different view of things. You get a very hard attitude. We had another case where

- 38:00 there was some pretty harsh punishment dished out to them, and I think one or two of them felt some compassion, and I felt a bit bad about that episode. But by and large, it was them or us. They were pretty rough on us. But they had a job to do, I suppose.
- 38:30 They were more robot-like than we were, I think. It was all what the Fuehrer says. I had a talk with one bloke, a German bloke we rescued once, a young bloke on board, like ourselves at the time, and he was so arrogant and full of hatred, you couldn't believe it. He virtually dressed me down,
- 39:00 and said...It was incredible how arrogant and rude and aggressive he was. So I just walked away and left him, and he went ashore with the rest of them in due course, but it taught me a lesson.
- What was that lesson?**
- He had incredible hatred for us,
- 39:30 so I developed the same. So did most of my people, and certainly my captain did.

Tape 4

- 00:34 **I would like to ask you about your impressions of Iceland.**
- Iceland could have been a very nice place. It was very well developed in the Valefjord, and a little place called Seydisfjord and Acklevery. They seemed to live a very good life.
- 01:00 They had shops of fashion, I went ashore several times, and they had well stocked shops of fashionable goods. The people were extremely smart, most of them I thought, and well dressed. I thought it was a very sophisticated society of good looking people, most of whom spoke English,
- 01:30 but who obviously detested the British and the Americans. I'm not sure just how we came to get the bases there, but they certainly had no love for us. They would speak to us in the shop, and they would do the business with us, but there certainly was no friendliness. It was a bit distressing. It was the first time I had ever come across a situation
- 02:00 where the people would look at you and you knew they didn't like you and they never spoke. Subsequently, we learnt that their preference, I think, in friendship lay certainly other than with the British or the Americans, but they didn't mind taking our money. They were not in a position to object because of the massive forces we had.
- 02:30 It was a very pleasant place to me, and I think you could have lived a very nice life there, and I think they lived a very good life there. They had good harbours...so it was a nice place.
- Had you suspicions about the local sympathies at the time?**
- Yes, it was very obvious they had no sympathy with us, at all. But, as I say, I don't think
- 03:00 they had much choice, so I think they made the best of a bad deal. There may have been some people who were friendly towards us, but by and large it was a pretty cool reception.
- So what opportunities for recreation were there on Iceland?**
- On Iceland? The short answer is none. I went skiing with the American Army. At one stage you could go and...
- 03:30 The Americans had a big...it must have part of their army ski-based army there, and I went and saw them at one stage and they fitted us out with furs and gear, and we did a bit of playing around in the snow there for a while, but we weren't very good at it.
- Was that your first encounter with American serviceman?**
- No,
- 04:00 I had met them at Argentia in Halifax, and they weren't particularly friendly either.
- Why was that?**
- I don't know. I think there was an attitude of looking down on the British, the 'Limeys' as they called them. I got the feeling that they were coming in to rescue us from the evil and that we were helpless and we knew nothing...That was the impression I got. But I changed my attitude later on,
- 04:30 when I had more to do with them. I had quite a lot to do with the Tuscaloosa, which was subsequently the [Argentinean cruiser General] Belgrano, which was sunk by the British submarine in the Falklands War. They were terribly good to us and we got on very well with the American ships at Scapa Flow. We used swap ship visits and got on extremely well. In fact, a very close relationship, very nice people. And

they were very kind to us.

05:00 If we were short of anything and they could do so, they would just give it to you, for free. I enjoyed the Americans, I think they are very nice people. I think they're naïve and so forth, but overall I think they were very nice people, and I couldn't speak too highly of them with their war time co-operation. And the ones I have known post-war have always been very nice, good people. In fact in my pastoral activities

05:30 I used to have quite large sheep and cattle interests and my partner was an American broker from New York. So I've had very, very satisfactory relationships with the Americans.

I am interested in your impressions of the environment of the Arctic in general.

It was a very harsh environment. It's very harsh because it's very isolated.

06:00 It's very unpredictable. And depending on what time of the year you go there, it is unfriendly, because it is either too dark or too light. It's an environment that perhaps northern Europeans find quite acceptable, but to the southern English and myself, it was something you had to get used to. If you were there in the summertime

06:30 you would get the part of twenty hours of day of really good light and four hours of...a bit less of twilight. So you put up with twenty hours a day when you could be picked off pretty easily. It allowed very long flying hours for the Germans, enough time to come back and attack and get back to Norway and refuel and come back again, which happened.

07:00 Wintertime was probably more depressing. You don't want to go up there in wintertime, if you can avoid it, because the ice pack comes south and that's not good for your convoys. It's a hostile and unusual environment. A lot of the time you've got an arctic mist...It's an unreal existence. If you've got a smooth sea, or even in moderate seas

07:30 you can look out into an eerie misty existence, which might give you visibility for up to three or four miles. But whatever you see in the mist is a little way away, it's distorted, it's something you don't get in the more southern latitudes. But it can be absolutely violent in the arctic gales, the water can be half frozen when it hits...

08:00 You know if you get a really big gale and if you're punching into it...If you're driving into the gale, into the massive seas they get there, you get an awful lot of water over the ship and this can do a lot of damage and make it very uncomfortable for everyone. But I don't think the seas there are any worse than the seas we struck in the Atlantic, which are pretty terrible.

08:30 The North Atlantic seas can be just as bad. I think one of the problems is it's so cold. You don't seem to be able to get warm, especially if you've got open bridges where you're standing out in it. I mean you can get a little bit of protection on the bridge, you can step down behind a glass screen, but most of the time you've got to be up there with your face in the wind and so forth. The Arctic is not really the place to be for that.

09:00 But over a period of time, I developed a strange fondness for it. I rather liked the white shores I saw in Spitsbergen, and a lot of it is picture card stuff. When you'd go into Murmansk or Kola Inlet, the steep shores on either side would be covered in snow and it was something you don't see, normally, in other parts of the world.

09:30 I didn't find any worse, frankly, than the Atlantic, except it was very cold. The seas were very often rough. But on PQ18, which was the worst time I'd ever been at sea. we had smooth seas, like a sheet of glass pretty well. Which meant it was a lovely day, and it meant the Germans

10:00 had ideal flying conditions, and everyone had ideal conditions for what they were doing. So yeah, it's different, vastly different.

Were there any other natural wonders that had an impact on you?

The Aurora Borealis is out of this world. I've written about this since. But you get that ionised atmosphere...you don't get it every night...

10:30 But there is really no description for the playing of the...and the colouring of the lights. It's like a massive stage. I've seen operas and tragedies on the stage, where you get the flashing lights and all colours, all over the place, and Aurora Borealis is the nearest you're going to get to that in natural conditions. But it can go for hour after hour after hour,

11:00 of an ever changing, magnificent sky. And it almost light enough on many occasions to read large print by, and you don't get tired of looking at it. I've never seen the Aurora Australis down south, but I understand it's not quite as good. But anyone who's seen the northern lights have never forgotten it, and I saw them for a long time, on and off.

11:30 They're really spectacular and very, very beautiful. That was one of the bonuses of being up there. And standing on the bridge, you get a pretty good view. I think anyone who hasn't seen them would be staggered, if they could see them in their own natural beauty. I have seen photographs, seen films and I have heard descriptions of them, but nothing, nothing matches the original.

12:00 Anyone who has seen them, I think, very privileged. I had a bird's-eye view there for... several times.

What was different about working in the North Atlantic?

Well, the North Atlantic... We went into the North Atlantic on two or three occasions to bring a heavy hand and assist.

12:30 The time we went for three months, it must have been in late '43, when we had a massive blitz on a U-boat. We usually went with three or four destroyers and a pocket aircraft carrier. And the whole of the Atlantic areas were covered. We had the North Atlantic there for about three months. And during that period,

13:00 I've read since, it was one of the worst periods ever recorded in the history of the Atlantic. The seas were mountainous, I've never seen anything like them. On several occasions, I really thought the ship would roll over, we were so heavily heeled. The flying conditions were appalling. Nevertheless, we stayed there, we still flew, we lost aircraft shooting over the front of the carriers.

13:30 I've seen, over my full period of the war, I've seen several aircraft go over straight over the front of the carriers, straight into the ocean. I don't think we ever got anyone back. And it was appalling for everybody, everyone cold and miserable. They had these, very long range

14:00 reconnaissance aircraft by this time. The German Airforce was pretty well under control, so the U-boats [German submarine] had no chance. And even though the weather was extremely bad, that blitz went on right down to the Bay of Biscay, I think. I think we knocked off at least ninety U-boats in a very short period of time. And to my knowledge that was the first time we had ever put the resources into the Atlantic waters.

14:30 They had the resources, they had the skills and it really broke the back of the German U-boat Warfare. We had been improving, the Merchant losses had been improving, and that really was a magnificent contribution towards the end of the war, and because of that there were less U-boats in the Arctic.

15:00 By and large it's very hard to tell how many boats they had in the Arctic. I would assess that on probably most of the convoys that I was on, there could have easily been about fifteen U-boats, which wasn't unusual to be assigned to a convoy. You wouldn't have them with you all the time, but on the course of the convoy

15:30 you might have had several of those keeping up with you, because they were only slow convoys, probably eight knot convoys or something like that. I think on one occasion we had more than that, our estimates. But the North Atlantic is something you would never forget, because it is really bad when it gets going. And they had a particular period of really bad weather, which, as I say, I've read about it, but it was bad enough to...

16:00 **Is that when you were in....**

Onslaught, in Onslaught.

Tell me, what was your action station?

On the bridge as anti-submarine control officer. From memory, we had the navigator, the captain and myself, and then we had the gunnery control officer behind us in the director tower.

16:30 The first lieutenant had control, he was in control of the X and Y guns going, and then you had your communications officer. So usually there no less than three officers on the bridge in action.

How would the call to action be delivered to you?

The alarm bells. On the bridge there was one switch,

17:00 and once that was pressed you had the most strident alarm gongs went out, right through the ship. They were really quite penetrating, and there was no way you wouldn't hear them. They sometimes struck terror into you... fast asleep and you'd heard the alarm gongs, and you had to get out of bed. Certainly up there...

17:30 most of us slept fully clothed all the time because you wouldn't have time to get dressed. You had to get up to the bridge, or wherever you were going. The bloke next to me, the gun control officer, had to get up there with me, along the decks. You had to get to your action station. If it was bad weather outside, you had a bit of a problem, sometimes, getting up to the bridge. But the alarm gongs would certainly shake you out of a deep sleep with a great sense of foreboding.

18:00 You don't press them unless there is a reason to press them.

Who was responsible for pressing that?

Usually the captain. I don't remember the alarm gongs ever being pressed except on the captain's permission. On a couple of occasions, I've run down to his sea cabin and said, "So and so said..." And sent "Press the alarm gongs." He wasn't taking any chances. He'd go to action stations

18:30 rather than wait until he got up to the bridge to see what is happening.

So you arrive on the bridge, and what did you do next, if you are called to action?

Well, I would concentrate on the anti-submarine side of it, because more than fifty percent of the times it would be for submarine contact. For anti-aircraft Warfare, I would be in charge of short-range weapons,

19:00 because the gunnery control officer had the main armament, but it wasn't much good. We couldn't elevate above forty degrees. So it wasn't much good against high flying bombers. But we had a lot of torpedo bomber attack, so we could have a go at them. And the Germans suffered quite heavily, frankly, in aerial attacks on PQ18.

19:30 I don't know whether we ever shot any of them down, but we do know that a lot of them never reached base. We do know their losses were quite heavy between the convoy and getting back to base.

You were manning the gun?

No, I remained on the bridge.

When you said you were in charge of the anti-aircraft gun, what did that actually mean?

Well, we had a four barrel pom-pom behind the bridge, so you could give him instructions. Most of the time it was, "Open fire at will,"

20:00 certainly on torpedo bombers, and the same with the short-range Oerlikons...We had one on the bridge and two waist gunners on either side, we had six of them, and a four barrel pom-pom, that was our short range weaponry. And there wasn't much you could do with that, except to give them their target and they all knew pretty well when to open fire and were all fairly experienced blokes

20:30 after the first trip. Then the captain always had something for me to do, some inquiry or tell someone something.

Tell me about the anti-submarine equipment that was in front of you. Could you describe that for me?

We didn't have forward firing equipment, that came later on.

21:00 When it came to the Pacific War, it was a more advanced anti-submarine ship. The ships in the Home Fleet only had depth charges, so we never had Squid or Hedgehog, which were the more modern weapons. And I don't know of any other ships, fleet destroyers, that had it, because our main armament

21:30 was up fored, four point seven guns, and I don't think there was any space for it, it would have needed a major refit to do it. So we only had depth charges, which were quite effective, they sank quite a lot of submarines with depth charges. Of course, it was about that time the hedgehog was coming in, which fired an elliptical pattern about three hundred yards ahead of the ship. We were sinking bombs with fins on,

22:00 the theory was that if you had done your homework properly and you operated your equipment properly, that at least one of these bombs on this large elliptical pattern would hit the submarine as it was steering within that large elliptical pattern. Hedgehog was quite effective, but the next weapon after that was Squid, which was a twin mortar based set-up. And that was very similar, it was

22:30 forward throwing water bombs which exploded at certain depths, not necessarily on contact. And that was very effective, too. Some of the ships, I think, would have been equipped with Squid at that time, but there have been big improvements since then.

If you were called to action stations because of the threat of a submarine and you're on the bridge, then what would you be doing?

23:00 The first thing you'd do is have a look at the situation report, in other words you go straight into the AS [ASDIC] cabinet, which is on the bridge. There is a special cabinet there, in which the ASDIC [Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] operator sits. So you usually poke your head in there and have a look and see what he's doing, and perhaps have a few words to him. There was always, when I was on watch, I always had the loudspeaker on. In other words, every transmission

23:30 was relayed by loud speaker at a moderate level to the officers of the watch. And I think most of the officers had the same thing. Certainly up there, we had it on most of the time, it was the captain's decision. A lot of people found it a bit irritating, but I listened to all of that, so if it's not on, you switch it on and you listen to what he's talking about. If he's got a contact, you can pretty well tell from experience if it's a submarine or not.

24:00 If it is a submarine, then you're closed up for that, you have all the pins removed for all the depth charges, which you don't normally do because you don't want them rolling around. You really conduct your attack from there. You tell the captain what is happening, sometimes you give them a course to steer. If you have a very experienced captain, he will steer his own course.

24:30 If you've got a very experienced captain, he will also tell you from the sound, there were few of them,

but you can tell the submarine is coming towards or going away, you can get a course for the submarine, and if you're a bit lucky, an estimated depth. So all this is relayed to the captain and he cons the ship into the correct position for the firing of the depth charges.

Did Captain Selby did he have those skills?

25:00 He was moderately skilled. We didn't sink any submarines, we did an awful lot of submarine attacks. I'm sure some of them were not submarines....But we never really got a firm enough contact to say it was a submarine. Our main role in Onslaught was gunnery and torpedo attacks.

25:30 We carried out several torpedo attacks, our main armament was torpedoes. But we certainly carried out several submarine attacks, but I'm not sure we ever had a contact firm enough. For instance, I never heard any hydrophone effect from the submarine's propellers. I have heard firm contacts coming off a submarine's hull, but I never got it clearly enough to say that I thought

26:00 we ever had a decent submarine contact. I have had several underwater contacts that could have been submarines....

What is the difficulty in interpretation?

The quality of the echo, the speed of movement of your contact, whether you've got hydrophone effect, whether it's altering course and whether it appears to be altering depth.

26:30 Because you will get a very good submarine echo off a shoal of fish. A shoal of fish will give you a good echo.

How do you ultimately tell the difference?

A shoal of fish might break up, a shoal of fish might be more woolly. You'll get a very clear...I won't say a metallic sound, but a very clear echo back from...if you can get broadside on, a broadside hit on a submarine, because you send a sound beam out that is reflected back from the side,

27:00 if you can get it broadside on a submarine, you've got a very, very clear ping. And if that submarine maintains that course, you will get a steady chart reading on it. You'll know the course, and very often you will get a hydrophone effect from the propellers, depending on the speed he's going. If he puts on a burst of speed to get away from you, usually you pick up a hydrophone effect. But often when they hear the pings, they will go deep, go very, very slowly

27:30 to lessen the hydrophone effect, and try and get stern on to you. So instead of you having a nice big target, you've only got a little woolly target which is the stern on, or maybe even head on, but mostly stern on to try and...Probably he can go a little bit deeper and go two or three knots to try and get away.

So if you detected that sort of activity that again would?

This all indicates that you've got a submarine. But there is some water that has very heavy temperature gradients.

28:00 Now this bends the sound beam, and tends to give you false results, and very misleading readings. Now up there you used to get temperature gradients, which made it very difficult to get clear readings sometimes. We didn't sink a lot of submarines in the Arctic, and I think that's probably the reason, the shoals of fish, temperature gradients,

28:30 and the fact that most of the time we were distracted with surface or air action. But there was a lot of submarine activity up there, and they did lose submarines up there.

What would detecting a whale do?

You can often mistake a whale for a submarine. In fact, that's one of the problems. I don't think we ever...Sometimes you'd pick up a whistle from a whale,

29:00 but you can also pick up a whistling sound from a submarine, sometimes, from the movement of their hydroplanes and things like that. So really, it comes down to a matter of experience...And the other thing is, you usually know if there are submarines in the vicinity. Now we used to get very good reports from Admiralty who knew exactly what was happening most of the time. We knew that within certain lines

29:30 where the submarines would like to start their attacks for instance, we always knew we were fairly safe, reasonably safe when we got five days out of Iceland. And we used to be fairly accurate on this. The submarine attacks usually started in the more confined waters of north of Bear Island, relatively confined because of the ice pack and the Russian coast,

30:00 relatively confined in the Arctic Ocean. We usually knew from Admiralty reports and their brilliant information that they picked up from cracking the codes and so forth, how many submarines we might detect and expect. But my recollection is that it was not unusual to have anything up to twelve or fifteen on a decent convoy.

30:30 **Submarines?**

Yes. They wouldn't attack all at once, they would be spread out along the route. They never adopted the tactics up there, to my knowledge, that they had in the Atlantic where they had pack attacks. It was more isolated attacks up there. I never came across...I've come across attacks from four or five at once, but whether it was the concerted, skilful tactics that they had

31:00 in the Atlantic, I don't know. I don't think it was. But we've had three, four, five at once, and by that I mean....They don't all come in at once, but you know they're there and they would probably be spread out over ten miles around you. Then you get the brave bloke who would come to the surface and steam straight down between the lines of the ship, on odd occasions.

31:30 But usually it was either damaged, or there was some reason for it, they weren't silly enough to do that. But certainly they'd come, get ahead of the convoy and come down between the lines after firing, because the destroyers couldn't get at them there, and by the time they got into the wash of all the convoy, it would be pretty hard to get a good fix on them because of the stirred water. The beam would break up, your detecting beam would break up.

32:00 It was a favourite place for a lot of the experienced submariners to steer under the convoy or in the wake of something to confuse the operator.

The training that you did in the equipment, I am interested how thorough that was, and how much you found yourself learning on the job when you got there?

I found the training was very good.

32:30 I don't think that a great deal of more training would have helped us much. You've really got to get out to sea, you've got to sit there hour after hour, just listening. That's all it is, just listening. Unless someone sees a submarine on the surface, and that frequently happened. You'd see a submarine on the surface and you'd know where it dived, so you'd steam over to that position and you'd have to start looking for it.

33:00 But with a beam length of only a bit over two thousand yards, in a fan shape, say, from fifty to fifty degrees ahead of you, fifty degrees either side of the ship, or sixty degrees either side of the ship, you had a pretty fair area to sweep. And if you weren't on that line, covered by that, the bloke would be away. It depends on...how far away he was when he was sighted.

33:30 The other thing in destroyers was convoy work. Your job was to look after the convoy, to get those ships in if you can, so you don't spend hours chasing away from the convoy unless you've got a firm contact, then you stay with it until you destroy it. So you don't go off on wild goose chases, you've got to get back into station, otherwise you'll have left a massive gap through which something may come. Because you've got two destroyers

34:00 out chasing something which, really, has no intention of attacking, all it wants is to get you away, whilst you're running into three or four more up ahead. So it was a fine balance of allocation of resources, and that was always the captain's decision. But Joe Selby used to always consult me and we would have a talk about it, but he was of the old school, he wanted to get back on station and

34:30 make sure that those ships were protected. Because once you put a submarine down, he really then had to get away from the convoy, come to the surface at night, well away from the convoy where he couldn't be detected, get ahead of the convoy by a day or so of steaming, where he couldn't be seen on the surface, and then get into a firing position up ahead again.

35:00 It was such a slow convoy, he could probably do fourteen knots on the surface and charge his batteries at the same time. So unless you could keep them down, they always had the chance of getting up again.

Tell me, when you were doing a watch listening, just tell me about where you are and what your equipment looks like?

The only time I was listening was at action stations,

35:30 because the rest of the time I was on bridge and I was off the watch. I had a dozen other things to do than worry about listening for a submarine, listening to the ASDIC pings. After awhile you get experienced at your listening and you don't know you're listening. I'd be doing all my other duties, but as soon as there was a slight variation in tone, or some slight variation in any manner,

36:00 it would immediately impinge upon my mind. So to that degree, I didn't have to worry too much. Now, the others officers of the watch were in the same boat, I think, except they wouldn't have had the experience on picking the quality of the ping that I did, I'd been trained on it. When at action stations, then I would do nothing but concentrate on that.

36:30 I'd be watching the recorder, and there was a marker onto a piece of paper, I'd be watching that. I would be trying to judge course and speed with the ASDIC operator, I would be trying to judge depth, I would be trying to work out what he would be thinking and I would have to know what the captain wanted to do. Whether to get back or whether he wanted to keep going as long as we could....

- 37:00 We always stayed with a contact long enough, until we could classify it as submarine or otherwise. If ever we classified it as submarine, we always attacked it and waited with it until we either lost it, or it broke up. Several cases it broke up, which might have indicated a heavy shoal of fish.
- 37:30 But we always attacked whenever there was the slightest doubt.
- The pings are audible across the bridge?**
- Yes. They have got quite a melodious tone, and when the transmission goes out from your underwater transmitter, which I showed you, when a beam of sound goes out,
- 38:00 and it goes out like that, you see, and if it hits something the echo comes back, which is picked up by the sound recording equipment, in the equipment under water, it. That is then relayed up, relayed through all of the acoustic equipment to the bridge. So you listen. Everybody on the bridge, if it's switched on,
- 38:30 and it usually is, can hear every transmission going out, every single transmission. It goes 'ping,' it trails off....And if it suddenly goes 'pong' you immediately listen. But otherwise it's just hour after hour, or maybe day after day, of monotonous ping. But it was never ever turned off, in my presence, unless
- 39:00 we had a reason to turn it off, or the captain got sick of it, but it never happened, really.
- Who was responsible on the classification of whether something was a sub?**
- The anti-submarine officer.
- That was your decision?**
- Yes. Well, the captain's decision on everything is final but if I said, "Non-sub, sir," I don't know of any captain, unless he was an anti-submarine specialist himself, which some of them were, would bother following it.
- 39:30 **Was that a responsibility that you took particular pride in? Or was it pressure, or...**
- I just took it in my stride because I was very sure of myself, I really knew. I was very sure, very sure.

Tape 5

- 00:34 **I just want to go back to the period around the outbreak of war. I just wanted to get a sense of the significance of the Empire to you as a young man in Australia at that time.**
- I don't think I had any firm ideas about it. There was a great feeling at that time that Britain was the home. People used say they were going home, even though they weren't British. I don't think I ever felt very strongly about that.
- 01:00 It was so deeply imbedded into our psyche that we always had British governor generals and usually British governors, and everything was British. But I don't think I was under any spell as to racing off to help the mother country, or anything like that. I think that I was in the army...I just thought it was probably the thing to do at the time, without any firm convictions.
- 01:30 **Did you make a distinction in your own mind about the defence of Australia versus the defence of the Motherland? Was one of those motivations stronger for you in your enlistment?**
- No, I don't think so. I think that I was always very keen, and I still am, on the defence of Australia.
- 02:00 I felt that looking backwards, as far as one can at this distance in time, I think I felt that if anything did come against Australia at that time, then I would want to be in it rather than not in it. I probably felt that by doing this, this would be the best thing for Australia. But I don't think there was any great feeling that I wanted to race off to protect the British, although I have enormous respect for them.
- Did your feelings or respect for England,**
- 02:30 **for Britain, change as a result of your Service with the Royal Navy?**
- Well yes, I had enormous respect for them. When I left they really put up a magnificent show. The Royal Navy must be one of the great institutions. It's very good.
- Did you experience any prejudices in the Royal Navy towards dominion personnel?**
- 03:00 Yes, I did. I was the only officer on board Onslaught, and I detected the same feeling right throughout Britain, and that is that we were inferior beings, and that we were somewhat privileged to be able to go and do all this. I never subscribed to that view, it wasn't something that worried me much, but it was very firmly planted in their mind that anyone from Australia was not certainly as superior as they were. There's no doubt on that.

03:30 **Did you come across many other dominion personnel from Canada or South Africa?**

I came across personnel from Canada, yes, who actually served on Onslaught for very short periods.

In the lead up to the war, I was interested in how aware you were of the broader politics. Had you been following Germany's or Japan's expansionism? Were you aware of the threat?

04:00 Yes, I was very aware of what was going on in Germany, yes, I was very interested. I think it was a logical thing, probably, to want to join up because Germany crept...one after the other, first Czechoslovakia and finally Poland, which of course tipped her over.

04:30 **You said your father didn't fight in World War I, but did you have any significant mentors or people in your life that had fought? Were there any influences on you who discussed....**

No, none at all. It was purely personally.

Do you recall any sentiment towards...negative towards the Germans as a result of World War I, was that a....

No, no, I didn't...I didn't pay much attention to that.

05:00 But I did have a very negative sentiment to them, post-World War II.

What about Japan? Did you have concerns in the years leading up about their expansionism?

No. Well, of course, there was the Manchurian incident, which received wide publicity. I thought it was possible that Japan would, sooner or later, look down this way. I think I felt that sooner or later we'd some problems with Japan,

05:30 and I felt that I should be in the Services because of the way the whole world was shaping at the time. I really expected, of course, that if anything happened to Australia, Britain would be out here coming to our aid.

How did you respond then to Japan's entering the war in December '41?

It was a great shock when it came of course, the way it did. Pearl Harbour was something straight out of the blue. It was a great shock.

06:00 But I didn't feel that I had to rush out and do anything. I thought that we would all be adequately looked after in due course.

What about the falling in Singapore? Did that confidence or faith in the British fleet...Was that damaged by the loss of Singapore?

Well, we had some terribly incompetent people running the navy,

06:30 from time to time. We also had some incredibly competent people. For instance, Admiral Dudley Pound, who was first order of the Admiralty, was a very sick old man, bordering on senile, and he made at least one terrible blunder on PQ17. I felt that when we learnt the fact on Admiral Sir Don Phelps,

07:00 who brought this squadron out to Singapore, it was just appalling that they would have appointed him, because the man was so out of touch he didn't know what he was doing. He knew all about air power, but he said air power can't have any effect on battleships. Of course, the Japs just came straight out and sank the two battleships off Malaya. It was terrible, just appalling. And I blame Churchill for this, because Dudley Pound

07:30 was a very close friend of Churchill's. I think that Dudley Pound was a Yes Man for Churchill, and he certainly didn't want anyone like Andrew Cunningham there, whom he got in due course, because Andrew Cunningham was nobody's Yes Man. I think they were pretty incompetent at the top, not at operational level.

When Singapore did fall and there was this incompetence

08:00 **being illustrated, did you have any fears for the safety of Australia, or did you maintain that faith that the British would be able to defend it?**

No. Once Singapore went...Of course, you must realise that we didn't know a lot about it at the time, the facts came out later on. I was appalled at Singapore going, just absolutely appalled, because it should never have happened and we didn't think it would happen, but when the facts were known,

08:30 then it was just straight out incompetence again at top level. This was borne out by the comments of Rommel at one stage, about some of these top British appointments they had, and he said if that he could have an army composed of Australians and New Zealanders,

09:00 with German officers, he could beat the world. He didn't have a great opinion of the British officer.

Did you have access of the news of the advancement of Japan down through the Pacific?

Oh yes...Well, only what we got from the press.

So you were aware of New Guinea and all that sorts of goings on?

I was aware, but I certainly didn't have any detail.

09:30 Was there any sense of frustration at wanting to, perhaps, be using your skills more directly in defence of Australia?

No, I thought it would be adequately looked after. I had been at war for a long time, at this stage, and I knew the capacity of America, and I knew that we were getting stronger. So I really didn't have any doubts that long term we would get rid of the Japs, but I thought they would probably get much further down into Australia than they did.

10:00 Could you tell me now about the incident you were talking about with Admiral Pound and PQ17? I think you were referred to as one of the worst wires or cables that has been sent in the Royal Navy....

I think that it's widely publicised that it was the greatest disgrace the Royal Navy has ever had. Dudley Pound was the first order of the Admiralty,

10:30 and PQ17 was something like twenty eight ships, with very heavy escort. I was, as I said before, I was with the screen of the [HMS] King George V going up, as part of PQ17, so I wasn't with the convoy on PQ17, but I was part of it. But somewhere along the line, there must have been something that made

11:00 Dudley Pound think that there was a big German battle fleet going out to clean up PQ17. There was no real evidence of this, and indeed all his staff officers were of the view that even if there were, there was sufficient numbers to deal with it. Dudley Pound, on the other hand, however, and this seems to be very well documented,

11:30 he had a fixation that the Germans would decimate the British covering force. So against all advice he withdrew all of the Naval escort from this convoy and left it totally unprotected. And he sent out a signal which effectively said that the convoy was to scatter, every man for himself, and for the British forces, the Naval forces to proceed westward,

12:00 proceed westward. In other words, get right out of it. Even the commanders on the spot were very doubtful....Well, they were staggered at the whole thing.

Were you on the bridge at the time that the cable came through?

I was not aware of it. It didn't affect me, because we lost King George V on this accident, and I think we went back to Scapa Flow about the time all this was happening.

12:30 So I really knew nothing about it. I don't think any of us knew what really happened. But we met some of the chaps who had come back again, and they were said they were absolutely, totally ashamed, that everybody in the navy was ashamed of it. Because when the covering force withdrew all the escorts, there was a big group of German submarines, probably about fifteen they reckon,

13:00 and they just picked these ships off one by one, and we lost about...I could be corrected, about twenty ships in the space of about a day and a half. And to my knowledge they didn't get any of the crews back, certainly none to my knowledge. I think the Germans were so absolutely appalled at what they were doing and what had happened. There is a record of one German commander coming to the surface

13:30 in a submarine, and there some blokes in a boat and, I don't know, he might have given them something in the boat and pointed to the nearest land, which was probably the ice pack. But it was terrible, we lost the lot, which is still unbelievable.

Were the convoy aware that they were being abandoned? Did they have the opportunity to...

14:00 Well, I don't know, but if you're in a slow moving Merchant ship, a convoy of about eight knots, and you see all your escorts turning and going and not coming back, you're are going to be pretty apprehensive. Because they'd been given the order to scatter, so they must have known that there were heavy German units in the vicinity. But the Merchant boys would have thought, 'Oh, good old navy, they're going out to engage the enemy.' Well, that's the only thing they could have thought. In fact, the escorts were all withdrawing, and left them there, left them to their fate.

14:30 Dudley Pound suffered a stroke shortly after that and he very shortly died after that. But it was a lesson. You don't want sick old men running your armed forces.

And do you fee that incident was symptomatic of the great losses that were occurring in the British fleet at that stage? Were they that desperate for ships?

These were all Merchant ships, we lost no Naval ships.

15:00 But his desire to withdraw? To remove the risk from the Naval fleet?

I think it was beyond anyone's comprehension why he did it, because the general view, post-war, the

criticisms I have read, were that the British forces were quite able to look after anything the Germans could have thrown at them. Because we had heavy ships, we had covering forces.

15:30 We had forces there. I think the general view is we could have pretty well dealt with the Germans, but we didn't get the chance. There is no doubt there would have been...But the interesting fact is, there were no German forces, there weren't any, they never came out. So the whole thing was a debacle, and the original information was never confirmed. That's why they kept on saying to him,

16:00 that there was no need for this signal. But he brushed all advice aside, of all his experienced staff officers....

Let's seize on the example that you gave of the German submarine captain coming up and passing some food and pointing directions. Were there any other significant examples, in your experience, of a humanity winning out in the face of war?

No, certainly not.

16:30 Not really. I don't remember any chivalrous actions at all, in my whole experience, quite to the contrary.

Did you ever have a sense of empathy in that both fleets, or both sides, were fighting ever a common enemy of the conditions and the sea...

Only to this degree, that if our guns were iced up, we knew theirs were, too.

17:00 But it was unlikely that they would come out into those conditions and be there, because they could go home so easily. It was just something you accepted. If the weather was bad, it was bad for them, too. And if you had to fight a battle, it was pretty tough going on both sides, if that's the case. But they didn't stay at sea very long. The Germans were under strict orders from Hitler not to get engaged and lose any ships.

17:30 They stuck to that pretty rigidly, because they were simply removed from their command if they didn't. As I said before, I don't think it was cowardice on their part, I think it was probably incompetence on Hitler's part that he never, ever learnt how to use a fleet.

You mentioned before that you did have a great deal of respect for the German hardware, they had some very impressive ships...

18:00 They were very good. I think that anyone would have to agree the quality would appear to have been much higher than ours. They really had an impressive fleet at the beginning of the war, very impressive. But we whittled it down...But the Bismarck was probably the finest fighting single unit in the world, fighting unit in the world.

18:30 But we had a force of numbers, and we managed to get it. If it hadn't been for one hit near the propellers by one single Swordfish [aircraft] with a torpedo, she could have well have escaped the whole of the British fleet.

Did that respect extend to the German seamen, the German personnel?

Yes. They were very highly trained and they were very competent.

19:00 And post-war records indicate that they were very keen to get to sea and deal with us. But they were never ever were able to have their own way, they were always under Hitler's orders, who was more concerned with preserving his ships, because almost every time they went out they lost one. But then, so did we, but he didn't want to lose any, because maybe he couldn't replace them as we were replacing them. Of course, later on we had the Americans to help us with ships, generally.

19:30 They were very efficient, their gunnery was excellent....And their submarine command was just superb. They were very, very good, there's no doubt on that.

What inspired the decision to pick up German survivors or not to pick up German survivors? Do you recall the circumstances surrounding your picking up of the captain....

Yes, well there was one overriding factor.

20:00 We didn't stop to pick up German survivors, because we didn't stop to pick up our own, most of the time, because you couldn't afford to be stopped in the middle of the ocean. You didn't know where the submarines were, you didn't know what other ships were around. Although, we always had a bit of an idea from Admiralty reports, but it takes a long time to pick people up out of the water, they separate very rapidly, and in most cases they are almost too weak to...

20:30 That Arctic water, you only needed probably three minutes or more, and you lost all power to climb up scramble nets on the side. So it was a very long process to try and pick up survivors up there, so you don't want to hang around. But you usually tried to pick up people, if they were right beside you. One big action we had, we had to leave most of the Germans in the water,

21:00 a pretty fair number of them...But you can't stop hanging around picking up survivors because they scatter so quickly. And you certainly wouldn't take the time to lower the boats. You'd get the hell out of it as fast as you can, you don't know what else is around...

So you knew if you went overboard that was pretty much....

If you went into the water and you weren't fished out very rapidly,

21:30 you wouldn't get out, because the temperature of the water was very close to freezing. You would often get the ice crust on top. I went into the water once in Iceland, by mistake, and I couldn't tell you the pain of going into that icy water. It was just as though there were

22:00 thousands of needles being stuck into you, all over your body. It happened that we were at anchor in one of the fjords in Iceland and there were very heavy winds. And the motor boat was on the boom and it was bouncing so badly with the waves, even in the fjord, that it snapped the boom and there was a seaman out on the boom

22:30 and he fell into the water, and I thought he'd go. So I had my greatcoat and everything on, and I went out on the boom and the ladder was still hanging down, I went down the ladder and hanging onto the ladder into the water and I grabbed him. We got him out. I was only in the water temporarily, up to about there, and the pain was excruciating, with cold. So I can understand how these things...

23:00 You couldn't survive long, no one survived very long. And you didn't survive very long in a boat, either. The conditions were terrible. We were right in the Arctic Circle, you know. Most of that was all in the Arctic Circle.

Were rescue at sea or man overboard drills even practised? Were they rehearsed?

Never had one, never even had one. I don't think it was because you weren't going to do it, but I think we were so busy on other things that we...

23:30 Man overboard, if you were going to....pick up someone, you'd usually lower a boat, and you don't have time to lower a boat or recover a boat up in those waters. You didn't have time in wartime, too risky.

I want to ask you, again, about the vanishing crew and when people would disappear. Were there any formal investigations into that sort of thing?

24:00 **Or was the wartime environment such that they just had to be....**

I certainly never knew of any, but of course I knew other ships that lost blokes too, blokes used to tell me from other ships that they'd lost someone. Ray Williams, who just lives up at Killara here, he's the only Australian officer from the Arctic who's alive now, as myself. He lost blokes overboard.

24:30 Certainly something would have been done and said and reported about it. You'd make enquiries on the ship, nobody knows anything, so what can you do? You can't go back and look, so you just keep going.

Were there ceremonies or rituals that were followed at the loss of a crewmember, whether he was lost overboard, or...

Not to my knowledge. If anyone died aboard you, had to bury them at sea. We buried a few Germans at sea,

25:00 we always buried them properly. You would put them in the canvas bag and sew it up and put a shell at the foot, and give them a proper Christian burial, we always did that, and just slide them over the edge. We'd stop engines for that, just for a couple of seconds, that's about all. Maybe thirty seconds, but no more.

Did you lose your own crew members to illness or disease?

No, funnily enough, we didn't.

25:30 We used to put blokes ashore pretty regularly at Scarpa Flow when we came back with all sorts of things wrong with them, get replacements for them, get new crew members. But not a lot. The blokes were pretty tough you know. The old Poms, when they get going, they're pretty hard to knock off. They stood up to it very, very well. Everyone did....

Did you yourself contract any illnesses from the harsh conditions?

26:00 You used to get body rashes through not bathing, and crook food, yes, I had that, but there was nothing you could do about it. I went to hospital when I finally left Onslaught, to try and rectify it, but it never really cleared up until I got back into warmer climate. You get all sorts of little ailments,

26:30 but the best you ever got was an Aspro or two...We had a doctor, a very good one. We always had good doctors, they were very good. We had a sick bay and I think we only had about four bunks in the sick bay. So there weren't many places to go to if you got crook. You just had to go on.

You did have cooks and stewards on board?

Yes.

Other cooks that we've spoken to for the Archive

27:00 **talked about this working round the clock, twenty four hours a day, nine days straight. Why was it that food was often so sparse for you on board?**

It was only sparse when you were at action stations. Now, if you've got a battle that goes on for five days like PQ18, in the long hours of daylight, you're closed up, at action stations, maybe for five or ten hours at a time,

27:30 with a break for cup of coffee, that is the type of thing I am speaking about. The other time you didn't get any food was when the weather was so bad, I mean so incredibly bad, that it was beyond anyone to really do much cooking in the galley. The weather up there was bad, the arctic gales...they were pretty savage when they came, and we got plenty of them. But otherwise,

28:00 you ate fairly normally, except I never found the food much good.

You mentioned PQ18, could you describe for us that convoy and the battle that ensued?

PQ18 was the most heavily escorted convoy ever to go to Russia. We'd lost a lot of ships. Previously, we had lost PQ17,

28:30 and the Admiralty was pretty determined to push this one through at all costs. Because Churchill was under tremendous pressure from Stalin to get equipment to them. So from memory, PQ18 was about thirty Merchant ships, and we must have had close to fifteen, I'm guessing, fifteen or more big fleet destroyers,

29:00 we had a small aircraft carrier in the middle, we had a couple of submarines in the middle of the convoy, for what it was worth, our own submarines. We had rescue ships tailing the convoy, so some people would have some chance of being picked up. They were small ships that Germans wouldn't bother about. We had a special anti-aircraft cruiser, the Scylla, as the command ship in the centre of the convoy,

29:30 and we had the usual screen of...usual cruiser squadron fifty miles behind the convoy. If I recall, there were two cruisers and about four destroyers with that. And then about another hundred miles behind that, there would be the battle squadron, there always a battleship and maybe another cruiser and about four destroyers. And the reason for that was the close convoy escort

30:00 had to fight off anything that immediately came, and deal with all submarines, all aircraft and all surface ships that came...It was simply, the covering squadrons were merely there to deal with the heavy surface units, the German surface units, that came out to attack us, that were just far too big for the destroyers to deal with. It was a very well equipped convoy.

30:30 But I don't think it was ever contemplated that we would get the air attacks that we did. But you've got to realise that we had very long hours of daylight. It so happened that we had very good weather at the time of the first attack, and this was really very much in the Germans' favour. The first attack, I remember very clearly, was by forty torpedo bombers,

31:00 Honika 191s with a torpedo under each wing. And they came in one massive wave, the whole of the horizon was black with these bombers coming in. They probably started off about four or five thousand feet and they came in at about two thousand feet, and they just plastered the whole area with about eighty torpedoes. Luckily they weren't very effective.

31:30 I think we might have lost a Merchant ship out of that lot, but no Naval ships were hit.

Where were you at this point?

I was on the bridge. We were on the port quarter of the convoy, so they had first go at us. The we had other intermittent attacks for the next five days,

32:00 with torpedo bombers. Following the first day, then we had wave after wave throughout the day of high level bombing. High level bombing, in those days, was probably ten thousand, fifteen thousand, thirteen thousand feet. And I can remember, I could clearly see the bombs leaving the bomb bays.

32:30 That continued all day. And my recollection, I can't tell you how many ships were lost to bombs, but not many, I think the bombing was fairly inaccurate. It's pretty hard to hit a ship, you know, from dropping a bomb on it. They're very lucky if they get a bomb onto a ship. We took avoiding action, it probably...we suddenly turned to port or starboard.

33:00 But I don't think it wouldn't have made any difference if you'd kept a steady course.

Taking the evading action, was that something that was called by the captain and which each ship did individually or...

Each ship did individually because you have a long way between ships. You see, we were about four thousand yards apart on the screen. You had stacks of room to manoeuvre. Each ship just picked off its targets as it wished, and fired when it wished, there was no concentrated fire.

33:30 We sent up three Hurricanes, fighters, from the carrier, and they had no effect on the Germans at all, it was just like a brick wall approaching. I think they crashed one Hurricane and they got the pilot back,

and I think they got the other two back. I don't think we lost any Fleet Air Arm boys,

34:00 but it was an impossible job for them anyhow, even though they were fighters and the others were bombers, but it was pretty uneven.

What action did your ship take? As anti-aircraft officer did you...

Well, no. We had the main armament, and we just fired everything we had all the time. Every time an aircraft came near enough, you would just fire it, and that would have gone on all day.

34:30 But we didn't see any direct hits by ourselves, nor did we see any direct hits by anyone else. But I saw several of the Germans dive into the sea and explode, or dive into the sea. The Germans, I think, they said they lost between twenty five and forty aircraft that first day. Not all of them crashed around the convoy, I understand a lot of them never got back to Norway.

35:00 They hit a tanker, you can see it in the painting I just showed you, and in the photographs I have, I've got several photographs of the tankers going up, one with aviation fuel. There's one bloke....a story I heard of one bloke, a single bloke was picked up about half a mile away from the ship,

35:30 probably the only survivor. The tankers and a couple of ammunition ships that went up in the course of that big battle, was phenomenal. You would never want to go and see a fire works display again after you have seen that.

How long were the days at this stage?

My recollection was that you had sufficient daylight to continue fighting, fairly accurately, up to about twenty hours a day. I could be wrong,

36:00 but certainly very long days of daylight, and the Arctic twilight. But the attacks didn't go into that period, it was in the body of the day that we had the air attacks. They continued on and off for five days, and then of course, the submarines came in, And I think we had about fifteen submarines involved over a very heavy period of that five day battle.

36:30 And we lost in all, I think, thirteen or fourteen Merchant ships. My memory is hazy on this, but I can remember seeing the Merchant ships being hit, and I'm pretty sure we lost about thirteen ships of the convoy all told, which was probably not too bad when you consider what it was like. Naval ships, I think we lost a Tribal-class destroyer, and I can't think of her name.

37:00 Our Naval wasn't too bad. We lost the [HMS] Bramble, which was a minesweeper, we lost a Tribal-class destroyer, I can't remember her name, and we lost the [HMS] Achates, also. I don't know....I think the Achates might have been on another occasion [sunk by Admiral Hipper in the Battle of Barents Sea, 31 December 1942]. I think we lost about three Naval ships on the way up, and we lost the [HMS] Somali on the way back,

37:30 which was another tragedy. It was pretty hot there for a while, we didn't have much time for eating. The cooks and stewards might tell you that, they were all gun crews. I can remember we didn't get much to eat during that period. I don't think it worried anyone, you didn't have much stomach for eating. A cup of hot coffee, or hot chi, or a cup of tea was pretty good.

38:00 We got bread and stuff like that. The cooks and stewards were marvellous, just like everyone else, they were very, very good. But you had to drag them off the guns to do it. They were nearly all gun crew.

Did you remain at permanent action stations for that five day period?

No, not for five days. We stood down after all the aircraft vanished.

38:30 There were big periods in between when they had to get back to Norway and regroup and refuel and re-ammunition and stuff. So there were quite big periods between the air attacks, because they got pretty badly mauled, because all the Merchant ships had our AA armament. So we never....My recollection is

39:00 we never ever went past defence stations, which was four on, four off, and fifty percent of your armament maintained, because we were under constant submarine attack at the same time. The submarines were in a pretty good position, because it was only about an eight knot convoy from my memory, which made it a sitting duck if it hadn't had such a heavy escort around it. The thing that I feared most that didn't happen was that the German heavy units didn't come out.

39:30 They would have been dealt with if they had, because of our covering forces. I think they were always aware of these big, heavy, covering forces. When they came out and did attack us, they used to keep their action pretty short, a few hours action and get straight back again, because if our heavy units had come up I think they would have been pretty heavily engaged and certainly they would have lost something, I think. I have to say we would have, too.

00:37 **I wanted to ask you how you personally coped with such an intense situation. When you saw these bombers coming over and it was such a sustained assault, how did you personally cope and focus on your work?**

I was terrified when it started because I hadn't been subjected to this sort of thing before.

01:00 It's surprising you know, and I've heard this from other people, that once you get into a battle you are so busy, that it becomes your norm and the intensity goes out of it. You don't feel there's any less risk, but I don't think it impacts upon you the way it does before it happens. But once you get stuck into it you've got to get out of it.

01:30 And it's absolutely chaotic, because you've got guns going off all around you. If you've got the breeze blowing the wrong way, you're getting covered in the muck out of the muzzles of the big four point sevens every time, hot embers...You've got all your anti-aircraft stuff going off. You're pretty busy, believe me, and there's no time to be really frightened.

02:00 But I never felt comfortable watching the bombs come down because I always felt they were headed straight between my eyes, but they never did. We had several bombs landing either side of the ship, but not sufficient to blow the plates in or put us out of action. But sufficient to lift the ship up and give you a big thump. You feel the concussion on the ship a lot. But there was none of our destroyers that were hit by bombs, to my knowledge...

02:30 I think one of them might've been. But when you consider how many there were, they were mainly two hundred and fifty pound bombs, which are enough to blow a destroyer open. And therefore, there was a lot more of them than if they had 500-pound bombs. But they're pretty big bombs when they go off beside you.

Does your ability to cope with the situation, a battle situation, does that become more and more difficult to control the longer the battle goes on?

03:00 **If you are going on for five days, does the exhaustion catch up with you and your ability to cope?**

Well, no, I don't think so. I think we all coped extremely well. I think once you know what they are going to do, and how they are going to do it, you are rather relieved when they have done it, because they are not inexhaustible in terms of supply. Once they get rid of their bombs,

03:30 and they're not circling around to come back again, you know, it's over. So I think you probably become more adept to dealing with it the longer it goes, at least that was the way I found it. I think one of the big things in life is fear itself, it is fear of the unknown. But once you know exactly what they're going to do and how they're going to do it,

04:00 I think you go about...in my case I lost my fear of it, and you just deal with the situation as it arises. I don't think anyone on board the ship, that I know of, was unduly concerned about the fact that they were coming back the next day. You might be concerned that one would land on you, but I think we felt that...We'd given a good account of ourselves and we came through it and

04:30 you take it day by day. But every day was less, which indicated to us they were getting a belting, which they did. The German Airforce was pretty efficient, but this high level bombing is very inaccurate, and the torpedo bombing is very inaccurate also, because you can take avoiding action in ships like destroyers. But the convoy couldn't take avoiding action much

05:00 because they turn too slowly. So the convoy just kept going, and believe it or not, the number of ships that were hit was vastly less than what I thought they would be. So, you find that you get on with your job, your job becomes paramount, and believe me, you're very, very busy, the time goes in an instant, like this interview, it goes very quickly, and you wonder where the time's gone.

05:30 **How significant is leadership in a battle situation like that?**

Oh, everything. If you had a bloke on the bridge who was panicking and shouting and really didn't have the confidence of the people there, I think it would be appalling. The British Naval officer was pretty experienced.

06:00 I never saw anyone panic, I never saw anyone unduly raise their voices....Sometimes the captain had to shout louder than usual to give orders simply because of the row. But I never ever saw anything like you see in some of the films, where you've got people on their knees crying and asking for Mum, or screaming orders and total panic. I never witnessed anything like that, ever.

06:30 The discipline always held, never any lack of discipline. They were doing what they were trained to do. And when it was all over, everyone just picked up and went on with their jobs just the same. A lot of talk of what had happened and what had been done, but there didn't appear to be any undue stress on anybody. The main stress I found was the incredibly long hours.

07:00 **I just wanted to ask you about that immediate post-combat period. Can you describe what the mood of the ship would be immediately post-combat?**

There was an awful lot of talk about what he did and what I did and what happened to them, and so forth, and, Did you see so-and-so?" And, "Gee, that tanker went up." but I didn't hear anything negative in terms of the well being of their psyche,

07:30 they didn't appear to be sombre and upset about anything. In fact, they were quite elated about the whole thing, that everything missed. Everyone was terribly concerned about losing the Merchant ships, that's a different matter. That's an appalling thing to see them hit, because you know the blokes on there have very little chance. There weren't a great deal of them rescued,

08:00 I don't know why, but we had the rescue ships, but they probably couldn't get the boats away, I would think, in many cases. In many cases the ships exploded or caught on fire, there was no one there to put the fires out, or do anything like that. Those who were lucky enough, would have been picked up by the rescue vessel but there were only, say, two or three little rescue vessels, the nature of tugs or something like that, a bit bigger.

08:30 When you're talking about a convoy at sea, like PQ18, you could be talking of an area of twenty square miles, or twenty or thirty square miles over the ocean, which puts it in perspective of how difficult it is to rescue people. Particularly so if they're in the water and they only have a short period to survive. So they had to be in a boat, really, to have much chance of being rescued, I think.

09:00 **Can you give us a bit more detail on the relationship between Naval seamen and merchant seamen? In particular, the Royal Navy and the English Merchant seaman...**

Well, they weren't only English Merchant seaman, the boats, the cargo ships were from all nations. We had several American boats, we had....Well, we had boats from anyone who was prepared to accept a cargo to go there, would be in the convoy.

09:30 But by and large they were mostly British and American. There were some other nations there but I...If you take the Greeks and the rest of them, I don't know that they were all that keen to go on Russian convoys, or even the Atlantic convoys. I personally think that they're some of the unsung heroes of the war. These fellows had a terrible time, these Merchant seamen. They were not recognised. If they were rescued, they came ashore with no rights

10:00 and with no compensation, most of the time. I've spoken to a couple of them, nobody wanted them when they came ashore injured. Most of the time they had to find their way to a hospital or something, I don't think it was quite that bad, but they didn't have anything like the underpinning of support of a massive organisation like the navy that we did. But by and large when they came ashore, and they came out of hospital,

10:30 they went home, pretty well on their own. There was no compensation for them, there was no continuing pay. They were very badly treated in my view. And I am surprised that anyone would have wanted to be a Merchant seaman. I understand when they went to Russia they got some form of special bonus payment, which the navy didn't of course,

11:00 but they certainly deserved it. Because anyone who went to Russia, either navy or Merchant navy, had a pretty good chance of copping something if they went there often enough. I don't know of any Merchant seaman who went to Russia more than twice at the outside. They weren't terribly keen going there, I can thoroughly understand that. I know one bloke who had been there twice. They got some form of special allowance. But they're unsung heroes, so far as I'm concerned,

11:30 the Merchant seaman. I think they've been very badly treated and not properly recognised, and they didn't get...They didn't get any rights at all, so far as I know.

Do you know of any examples of the Merchant seamen being forced or coerced into having to do the runs? Were these volunteers?

I don't think they were volunteers. I think that if you are on that ship, and you were on a Merchant ship that loads up tanks in Boston

12:00 or somewhere for Russia, well you're on the ship, and unless you jump ship that's where you stay. There is a certain camaraderie that builds up between them, and you don't go off and leave your mates, you usually stay there and see it out. But all of those ships going to Russia had either food or arms. Most of them had arms, tanks, and motor vehicles,

12:30 in fact I have a list of things, ammunition...A lot of them had fuel for Russia, a few of those got hit. As I say, they just light up the whole area, they just explode.

What about a comrade or respect between sailors, the personnel at the Royal Navy versus the Merchant seamen? Was there a relationship....

13:00 Oh yeah, a close relationship. But remember, we seldom ever saw them or spoke to them, because these blokes went into port in their ship, and they'd go ashore. We'd go into port, maybe a different port, and I'm sure you wouldn't know they were Merchant navy, just blokes dressed up. So we never ever came across them, and wherever the navy went the navy had its own facilities.

13:30 In Hvalfjord, in Iceland, for instance, they had a big Naval set up where everyone could go, where the

sailors could have a beer or read a paper or something like that. But half the time they were fighting one another, because they had been on the turps too much. There was some trouble. The English sailors have a great pension for cleaning up the other ship, in my experience.

14:00 It doesn't take much to start a brawl between them. It was great fun for them.

There was a sense of responsibility for the merchant seamen?

Very much so, we felt a very heavy responsibility towards them. We had a very unfortunate experience right up near the ice pack.

14:30 There was only Onslaught, we were coming back by ourselves. We had been to Russia by ourselves and we were coming close to the piece pack, and in the mist, in the distance, we saw what we thought was a ship, about north of Bear Island, and we knew there was no other Naval ships in the area, we had no enemy reports,

15:00 reports, so we weren't sure, but we didn't know. It was a pretty fair lump of a ship, and we only had the fuzzy outline of it at a big distance. We challenged it three or four times, and it made no reply and turned away from us. So we opened fire, and we hit it with every shell of the first salvo,

15:30 which is most unusual. Of course, when you don't want something to happen, it always happens. And of course the lights were flashing everywhere after that, so we went closer to it, and it was an American Liberty ship that had somehow become detached from the convoy, a convoy, I don't think I ever found out. But anyhow, we felt absolutely terrible about it. So we said to them, "Well, where are you going?"

16:00 And they said, "We are trying to find our way back to Iceland." I don't know whether they weren't properly navigating, which was not uncommon. We said, "Follow us, we will take you back to..." "We were going back to Seydisfjord, and we took them back there. As soon as we got into port we sent the doctor over in the launch, full of apologies, and so forth. We set them on fire, they must have put that out....

16:30 I think we killed about sixteen. We got them back, and we felt absolutely bloody dreadful about it. But you talk about your Merchant service people, there's nothing we could do to help them. They had no idea about the right things, which is so often the case with the Americans, they didn't understand it. They gave us the wrong signal back every time, or ignored us....you know, you don't fool around up in those regions.

17:00 So that was a very unfortunate incident. We felt...I mean, we really felt terribly bad about these blokes. We never saw them again, I suppose they got back to America okay. We left them in Seydisfjord, or wherever we left them, and we gave them what we could. We felt terribly upset about that, because they were Merchant service blokes. They were American, they were all part of the family.

17:30 **Is there an accumulation of those traumas that you experienced throughout the war? Obviously you can't reflect or deal with them too much as they occur, you're too busy, you have a job to do, but do they accumulate? Does it ever catch up with you?**

I sometimes sit and think about it. I feel terribly sorry for a lot of the people that were involved.

18:00 I think some of the people died agonising deaths...it was an enormous loss of life. Naval ships, we didn't lose that many, but we lost a lot of destroyers over a period of time. There were a hundred and fifty seven destroyers lost in the last war, which is almost unbelievable. That's the figures from Admiralty. That's a lot of ships.

18:30 If you reckon that the average destroyer has got about two hundred and fifty men on, and you lose at least half every time, or even more...In our case, we lost...The things I saw, we lost most of the people most of the time. They were pretty big losses. I often reflect on that. I reflect on the hardships a great deal, the crew's hardships on the mess deck.

19:00 I think of that a great deal of time, the hardships that the seamen on the mess deck had. I think it would be harder to imagine greater hardship than they had, on the run. The blokes in the Mediterranean and out in the Pacific, they still faced dangers but they didn't have that appalling cold water, being wet and probably their mess decks weren't awash the way they were up there.

19:30 **With that reflection, is there any answer as to why these guys behaved so well, why there wasn't a reaction in such appalling conditions? Why did they keep doing what they were doing?**

Well, I think you have to look at the psyche of the British. They've put up with a great deal. I think that they knew they had a job to do. Their country was under attack, and a lot of them had lost their homes in the bombing.

20:00 They knew that things were pretty desperate, and if they were going to finish this war they weren't going to give up. I don't think they ever would have ever given up, personally I wouldn't have. But it's the nature of the beast. They're very, very tough tenacious people. If you look at the history of their Warfare, since the days of Marlborough, the Duke of Marlborough

20:30 right through, and the British Armies, the maulings they got, but they never ever gave in. The British

are very stoic, they're very tough, they accept discipline reasonably well and I think they were fighting for a cause. I think that's what took them through it. I think they had a lot of faith in the organisation.

- 21:00 I think the seamen and petty officers I knew here were all blokes that had an enormous respect for the navy. I think I'm right that there weren't conscripts in the navy, I think that they were nearly all volunteers, even though they had been conscripted to come into the armed forces. I think it was the nature of the beast they put up with an awful lot. I think the harder you drive them into battle
- 21:30 and so forth, the better they become. When times get pretty easy and they don't get their own way, they were pretty difficult to handle, that's my experience. Out here in the Pacific War, when we had nothing, there was no stress on them and they became very hard to handle, because they reckoned we were wasting their time. Which they were, we were wasting our time here in the Pacific. We should never have been here. It was only because Churchill refused to allow the Yanks
- 22:00 to have a hundred percent victory over Japan, because the Yanks told us straight out they didn't need us, so we never fired a shot in anger. Nice sunny conditions all the time, pretty hot, but totally different people then. They weren't under stress, they didn't have a cause to fight for, they just wanted to go home. It is the nature of the people and the circumstances.
- 22:30 **Can I get back to the organisation of the convoys, and the way that Liberty ship became separated and obviously didn't know its signals....How does that happen? Was it the Admiralty that co-ordinated the convoys?**
- Yeah. But it was the captain of the ship's fault, because he wasn't following his convoy instructions. He had all his instructions. It was the only recognition you got at sea, if you flash a signal to them,
- 23:00 and if they don't flash the right answer back, you don't ask too many questions, if you can't see who it is, especially if you don't know where the enemy is.
- It is difficult to imagine that sort of complacency, isn't it? In such a...**
- I don't think they were complacent...I had another occasion when the Americans...they were the nicest people, but they had no clue in the world about what they were doing. It was out in the Atlantic, on that big Atlantic sojourn I was telling you about,
- 23:30 and at that stage the Yanks were flying over these Flying Fortresses into Britain, and they used to fly them over from Greenland, I think, Newfoundland to Greenland, Greenland into Britain, or somewhere. I was supposed to tell you, we had an aircraft carrier with them, only pocket aircraft carriers, they only carried eleven planes or something....They were converted banana boats, the big boats they used to run bananas in and out of South America.
- 24:00 This thing was circling. There was about four destroyers and this carrier. And we were on this special submarine hunt. And this thing was circling and getting lower, and it came down low and flew across the aircraft carrier. We were waving it off. But finally, to cut a long story short,
- 24:30 it came down and hit the water probably the best part of a quarter a mile away in front of us, in front of Onslaught, in the Atlantic Ocean. They deliberately landed it. This shook us very, very badly. They got out, most of them got out, they didn't all get out, they killed a few.
- 25:00 But the captain got out....I think about four or five got out. So we picked them up. By this time they were floating in a little dinghy, it inflated itself, and they were all sitting there and waving. So we picked them up...And in fact, I've got a photograph of them there in the album. And the captain's name was Captain Masso, he was of the Italian extraction, an American. We took them down to the ward room,
- 25:30 warmed them up, because they had all been in the water. So we said, "What on earth are you doing?" He said, "We lost our way and we saw an aircraft carrier and we thought we could land on that." They had no chance of landing on it, nil. He said, "We dared not leave you because we thought we were flying close to Norway."
- 26:00 They were nowhere near Norway, they were south of Iceland. This conversation went on for a while. Finally we said to them, "Why did you land down wind? You should have landed downwind," because the aircraft broke up as soon as they hit the water. I said, "You should have landed up wind." I was talking to Masso, the captain, I said, "Why didn't you land up wind? There was a pretty fair breeze blowing." I said, "You could have taken a bit of speed off and maybe not broken up and lost the rest of your crew."
- 26:30 "Oh, brother," he said, "brother, when we saw the carrier we knew that carriers always steamed into the wind. So we landed the way the carrier was going." The carrier just happened to be going on a course not the way the wind was blowing. These were the nicest blokes you'd ever meet. But this Masso bloke, the captain...As I told you, I've got photographs of them there, with their dinghy, on the quarter deck.
- 27:00 I said, "Have you ever been over the ocean before?" He said, "Brother, I've never seen the ocean before." He'd done all his training in the mid-west. He started off from some aircraft base. The first time he'd ever seen the ocean was when he left that American coast to land in Greenland. He had left Greenland, and he was headed for Britain, and he'd totally lost his way. His navigator had done only a month's navigation or something,

- 27:30 they hadn't the faintest idea where they were, but they had calculated they could be near Norway. It's an extraordinary tale, but it is in fact absolutely true. The other extraordinary thing, was when we picked the captain out of his boat, they sort of stepped out onto our deck, almost, he had a massive revolver strapped to his waist.
- 28:00 Here was this bloke, flying across, he had a huge revolver. We said, "Well, you had better give it to us." Anyhow, we took Masso's revolver...But he went into the water with this massive weight on him, no life jacket. You can't believe it. They were so naïve. That tale is well nigh impossible to believe.
- 28:30 Except, luckily, I have the photographs of them all there with their dinghy standing on the deck.
- I would like to address another issue that comes out of that story, which is the challenges of navigating in the Arctic or in the North Atlantic. What were the major challenges to navigating?**
- They were massive challenges. Well, we couldn't use radar, for a start, to help us with navigation. And sometimes, in the Arctic Circle,
- 29:00 you would go for a fortnight, three weeks at a time, without seeing past the heavy foggy cloud base that was always there. The Arctic seems to have this incredible ... not fog but some form of visual barrier that things vanish into. And that extends up above, too, so you see nothing .
- 29:30 So we didn't get any sun sights or any moon sights. And in fact at one stage we had just come out of Kola Inlet which is Murmansk, and we were by ourselves again, we did a few trips by ourselves on special missions, and we were out about three days when the weather closed in and we never got another single sight
- 30:00 or range or any indication of where we were, and we came back about another six or seven days steaming, all on dead reckoning, to the coast of Iceland. Believe it or not, when the weather cleared a little, we weren't too far out. So you get a lot of experienced people who get a feel for things.
- 30:30 The weather up there was consistently bad for sights. We did an enormous amount of dead reckoning. We used to go for days and days at a time on just dead reckoning in the Arctic. All of the ships became incredibly experienced. The navigators were very good, you got feelings, you'd have three or four blokes talking about it, the captain, the navigator, the officer of the watch, and we used to all talk about it and we knew the tides, and you would make allowance for the wind
- 31:00 and your speed. They all....the calculations were made by very level headed logical blokes and we never lost our way. We thought we did, but we didn't.
- That negotiation process was quite important, was it? That people discuss their various theories?**
- Yes. Well, you had your navigator who would always lead. "This is what I think, we've got the currents and the wind, and we've been at
- 31:30 so many revs for so many times on such and such a course...." It was all dead reckoning. The captain would always have the main input, because by the time you are as senior as Joe Selby was, he became a rear admiral shortly after he left us...They've got a pretty good idea, they have got a feel for it, but that doesn't mean they don't come to grief sometimes. But don't forget, you were in open ocean, and whilst ever you're in open ocean,
- 32:00 you can't come to too much grief, unless you hit another ship. I mean, you're not going to hit submerged rocks.
- What about icebergs though?**
- Well, we didn't have any icebergs....Well, that's not true, we did, but at the time of the year that I'm speaking about, we knew where the icebergs were. Sometimes they would come south and other times they would be further north.
- 32:30 If you hit one it would give you a nasty jolt, it could even sink you. But they weren't the icebergs that you get down in the southern ocean, in the Antarctica, they weren't as big as that. These things down here are enormous. A really big iceberg, everyone would know where it was, because there would be notification of it. But there were icebergs probably half as big as this unit, (UNCLEAR), but they were few and far between.
- 33:00 **We were just discussing the challenges of navigation, and the heavy reliance on dead reckoning navigation. Did that become extra complicated when you were in a convoy situation, where it wasn't open ocean?**
- It never happened, strangely enough, when we were in convoy, but I think you would be even better off because those merchant ships are really specialist navigators,
- 33:30 they have career navigators, whereas the navigators in the navy were more general. They had specialist navigation, of course, but they probably didn't have the experience, I'd say, of the Merchant service. But

when you're in a situation like that, there's a lot of ships comparing their position everyday, so you've got an awful lot of people doing the same sums, and you soon sorted out where you are.

- 34:00 If there was any great variation, they....Well, I've never known a variation. But I do know that if you're going along with Merchant ships, if you wanted to check on anything, you always ask the Merchant ship what your position was, just to check it.

Was there a system in place within the Royal Navy to keep experienced navigators,

- 34:30 **or experienced captains from the Arctic, in that region throughout the war? If they were to change ships or get a posting, was there an attempt to keep those skills and specialisations in areas?**

No. Naval ships were sent where they were needed, simple as that. A lot of our ships from the Home Fleet were drafted down for the invasion of North Africa. Wherever heavy duty was needed, they just sent the ships.

- 35:00 So to that degree, you were jack-of-all-trades. Every ship could go anywhere or do anything.

I wanted to move to your relationship or your experience of Murmansk. You were going to a great deal of effort to get supplies into Russia, how did they receive you and what was your experience in Murmansk?

Well, the Russians didn't really receive us. They were most stand off-ish. They didn't seem grateful

- 35:30 for what we brought. In fact, I was admonished on one occasion for just bringing a small amount we brought. "What do you think you are doing just bringing us this? Where's all the rest of it?" So they were really quite ungrateful and uncooperative, and we were not allowed off the ships there. They wouldn't allow us ashore. So you would get there and we'd oil up,

- 36:00 we might have to stay there for a day or two, a couple of days, and no one was allowed off the ship, and they had guards there to make sure you didn't go off the ship. There was no feeling of friendliness that I came across. In fact I think the Russians were stretched to the limit themselves. I think they were under such appalling restrictions by reason of Stalin's regime

- 36:30 that they dared not to speak to anyone or do anything. The Russian Navy was an enigma to me, because I have heard so many reports of what the Russian Navy did to help us and so forth. In fact, they did nothing. We very frequently were told that at such and such a point three Russian destroyers would meet us there and make sure to give us any support we needed. Out of all the times that happened, I only remember

- 37:00 a couple of Russian ships coming out on one or two occasions. But they were never around if there was any trouble, that was for sure. So we really had no assistance from them. We had no assistance in port. There was no air cover in Murmansk, except, as I said before, a squadron....of Hurricanes manned by Australians and that was it.

- 37:30 And of course, the German Airforce used to come and bomb the place regularly when we were there. In fact, we lost a Tribal-class destroyer inside Kola Inlet, which is the inlet going into Murmansk. So it was a pretty harsh, inhospitable place. My recollection of Murmansk is...well, I never got past the wharves. It was a ramshackle, run down, hopeless looking place and covered in ice and snow.

- 38:00 And the people were very dour and unhappy looking and rugged up, with their eyes poking out. But I think they were having a pretty rough time in Russia, so I don't judge them too harshly. I think probably life was very hard on them, and I think they just dared not speak to a stranger, because everybody was reporting on everybody.

- 38:30 The big tankers, the Russian tankers who gave us fuel when we came up, nearly all manned by women, women who squat, very powerfully built women. You wouldn't leave home for them, I can assure you. But they did their job all right, passed the hose over and gave us fuel and a wave and off we went again. But it was just as bad as being at sea, really. So we were quite happy when we left to come home again.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **I think we got up to the first couple of days of aerial bombardments when you were talking about PQ18. Could you pick up the story after those initial two days, and how the battle then developed?**

Well, the air attack diminished daily, and I can't help think that is probably due to their losses and the fact that we were getting further away. all the time.

- 01:00 Because, from memory, I think the convoy changed course to go further north to get further away from the air bases, and also to....make them fly further and probably get out of the way of the submarines as well. The air attacks diminished successively each day, until it finished all told.

01:30 And I don't think any convoy up north went through anything like that again. The losses, the German Airforce losses, I believe, were quite high. And I never knew of any attacks like that again. Certainly, I was never attacked like that again, although we did get bombing raids but nothing ever like that. You would get spasmodic, half a dozen or something like that. I think from the point of view of the German Airforce,

02:00 it was a failure. I don't know how they came out with a statement of assets and liabilities on the operation for them, but they paid a very heavy price, But then, so did we with the ships lost.

Was there, quote, unrelenting U-boat...

Yes, the U-boat warfare never stopped. They pulled back after a couple of days out from Murmansk. You could usually recommend they were not going to go any further, because...

02:30 I don't know for what reason. They stayed with the convoy. You always had this bunch of submarines. I don't know that all of them came with us all the way, but you have got to remember that if you have got a very slow convoy of about eight knots, they are sitting ducks for submarines to surface at night, get way out of sight on the horizon and

03:00 do a day or two steaming, and get say fifty or a hundred miles in front of the convoy and just wait for it to come and then come in from the flank. That was the submarine tactics on it, and we continued to lose ships that way. I can't remember how many we lost to aircraft and how many to submarines.

How did you go about juggling your dual roles of anti-submarine, anti-air craft officer in a situation where you...

03:30 Well, once you put your short-range weapons on, as I said before, you can't do much more than tell them to open fire and fire at will, because they're removed from you, I mean you have a headset. But they are removed from you and you can't be at about six situations at once. When you're getting a mass attack, you just let them fire at will.

04:00 They've got to pick out their own aircraft. I mean if you've got a single aircraft coming in, you'll put what guns will bear onto it, but otherwise you have got to leave it to the discretion of the individual gunner because it is only very light ammunition. By that, I mean he's got to be pretty close to be hit by an Oerlikon, Pom Poms are a bit better, forty millimetre....But with an experienced crew, they will do more than what I could have done by telling them what to do. All I can do is put them on the targets and tell them to get on with it.

In that respect, was your appointment almost a token appointment?

04:30 **In that the ship wasn't really equipped with anti-aircraft defences, per say? The restrictions of the gun's movement and that sort of thing?**

Well, most of the destroyers were pretty well in the same boat. You were quite restricted to space where you can put guns. You couldn't have put anything much heavier than a four barrel pom-pom, which was behind the funnel. The main armament was fundamentally

05:00 for...field gunnery armament. But the later class destroyers, I think their turrets could elevate to close to fifty degrees, forty eight, fifty degrees, or something like that, which was pretty good against torpedo bombers and dive-bombers. But we had nothing at all with high elevation that could deal with aircraft almost directly overhead.

05:30 Our main armament couldn't elevate more than forty degrees, so it wasn't much good against aircraft flying at about ten thousand feet or so, because you had to fire so far away from them. So your local armament had to deal with that. Torpedo bombers, you could put up a barrage up against them, you'd put up a full broadside into them as often as you could, because they were coming along a bit above sea level. So the armament wasn't too bad,

06:00 but we had no specific armament. It's totally different today. There was this argument still being raised in the Admiralty that aircraft are no worry to ships and...quite wrong.

But you had no specific training in anti-aircraft warfare, had you?

No. I didn't need any. I only had to make sure that the gunners knew where they were firing, because they could see them better than I could in most cases,

06:30 because I was on the bridge, but the gunners in the blisters on the side had an unobstructed view. The blokes behind the funnel had a very restricted field of fire anyhow, probably almost from...a bit fore of the beam to right around. So it wasn't all that effective.

Did you return from Murmansk after PQ18 in convoy with the other Naval ships?

Well, we came back in batches.

07:00 There was about four of us came back in one batch. If I remember, I think we dispatched several of them before we came back into Murmansk. Those who had had enough fuel, perhaps bigger capacity than we had, they went straight back to Scapa Flow, they didn't go into Murmansk. Four of five of us

went into Murmansk and we came back into company together. There was HMS Marne,

07:30 a big M-class destroyer, ourselves....I can't think of the others...Somali was with us, a Tribal-class destroyer. We were probably three or four days out of Murmansk and she was hit by a torpedo, mid-ship, she didn't sink, killed a lot of men. The remaining ships,

08:00 of which we were senior officer, we decided to try and tow her back into Scapa Flow, which was a very long tow, probably ten days...next to Iceland where we were going to go, probably another seven days steaming to get her there, it was a pretty ambitious sort of a thing. With flat calm motion, so we took her in tow....We didn't take her in tow, another....yes, [HMS] Ashanti, another Tribal-class destroyer took her in tow.

08:30 And I think we towed her for about two days, We took all the crew off and then put aboard a volunteer crew from the various ships around. And we put forty men back on board to just tend to whatever needed attending to a sort of an emergency crew. Very suddenly a big arctic gale blew up, and it made it pretty well impossible to tow it. The upshot of it was that the gale was so violent,

09:00 she broke her back and sank in two, in a very short period of time. The seas were so vast, so bad that we couldn't get to her, we could get no survivors off. So we lost the whole forty blokes we had just put on. This caused us all a lot of grief, because we'd all contributed a few sailors to help get her back to Scapa Flow, and we lost every single one of them. We were all friends,

09:30 and we'd been through PQ18 together to lose one of our big Tribal-class destroyers on the way back was pretty devastating, and we were all upset, very upset. And it had a terrible affect on my captain, it really upset him to watch it go down. And totally helpless, we couldn't do a thing. We all just went back to Scapa Flow. I think we went back to Scapa Flow, we might have gone to Iceland for fuel, but it was

10:00 a very sad occasion, because you stood and watched it, there was nothing we could do.

What motivated the decision to pick up survivors and attempt to tow her when so often you would leave ships that had been torpedoed? Obviously that risk...

Well, because she looked to be in good enough condition to tow back, that we would make it quite safely.

Wasn't there the concern that the U-boat that had torpedoed her was still in the area?

10:30 Well, there were ships sweeping for it, normally she wouldn't be hanging around there. Normally she would get out of there with three or four destroyers hanging around. Certainly, it was hunted it, but we didn't find it. And the ship that was still in the water was well and truly protected by us. We were around it like dogs running around it, keeping it safe. And we did keep it safe, as it so happens. I think that no one realised the extent of the structural damage.

11:00 It hit just near the torpedo tubes and the torpedo tubes went through the air and landed somewhere in the water. And I think that the experts who looked at it...she seemed quite stable and fairly upright, and they thought they could get her back. That was probably the decision at the time. The alternative was to sink it by gunfire.

11:30 They made a valiant attempt but it didn't work out. I don't think anyone ever contemplated we were going to lose everybody, because they were all friends from our own ships. That really very badly upset everybody.

Was it more comfortable to operate in the North Atlantic and Arctic by yourself or in convoy?

We used to like to go by ourselves.

12:00 You would be very unlikely to run straight across a submarine, very unlikely. We used to zig zag, we used to go at a pretty fair speed, and I don't think a submarine would have gone out of his way to try and do anything, because he would only have to give any indication of his presence and he would be hunted relentlessly and he could come off the worse. So by and large

12:30 they didn't really....They'd go after the cruisers or the bigger ships. But we didn't lose too many destroyers through being torpedoed by submarine, but in convoy, yes, we did, because the submarines were all around us and very often they would pick off a destroyer on the edges. But they were really after the Merchant ships to get rid of the supplies. The loss of a destroyer didn't mean much to a big navy, but the loss of a Merchant ship full of tanks

13:00 meant a great deal to whoever was going to get the tanks, you see. So they usually go for the ships in the convoy, because they were usually tankers or very big cargo ships full of very valuable armaments. That was their preference, to sink the Merchant ships.

I wanted to ask you about the way that intelligence and tactics

13:30 **in terms of the Battle of Atlantic developed throughout the war. And from your perspective. How you saw orders and the way that the Admiralty dealt with sending convoys and combating the U-boats and aerial attacks. How did those tactics evolve during your time there?**

To sum degree the tactics were...I was aware of it, because I was very interested in it,

- 14:00 and I've have read a great deal about it since the war. The tactics were dictated to a large extent to the resources they had available to them. We were desperately short of ships, and a lot of the ships we had were really not up to the task. Like the Flower-class Corvettes were very, very good, but incredibly uncomfortable and small and so forth. But I think they dealt with it very well. The convoy system
- 14:30 evolved in the First World War and it was very successful. The reason why the American Merchant losses were so incredibly high in this last war, up to the time that they followed the British convoy system, was that they refused to use the convoy system, I think primarily because it was British, and their losses were absolutely extraordinary on the east coast of America from U-boats.
- 15:00 It was the best time they ever had, the U-boats. But the convoy system was a tried and true system. The British had very good intelligence about the whereabouts of the U-boats. In the early part of the war, the U-boats used to have to come to the surface to charge their batteries, and they had to report their position and intentions every day to Germany. Every time they did their position was fixed,
- 15:30 by cross-fixing, from the shore stations, so we knew where every boat was every day and that was of great assistance to the planning of the convoys. And very frequently the convoys would be re-routed, that is to say altered course to further north or further south, to go around a group that they may have known was gathering. The Admiralty became extremely good at this.
- 16:00 They had to deal with new tactics by the Germans of what they called the Wolf Pack. They would tell one another and then gather together in a pack. They would attack in turns, they had their tactics worked out before they went, and the Wolf Packs would gather around a convoy and just prey on it. And turn which way you could,
- 16:30 you couldn't do much if you had an eight or nine knot convoy, because the speed of the convoy was too slow and there simply was not enough escorts. But we became....We had rising Merchant losses for the first two years of the war, to the degree that if something hadn't been done about it, we couldn't have kept going. The Battle of the Atlantic, it could have been lost.
- 17:00 The Americans came into the war, of course, and they supplied a lot more new merchant ships, but then the British broke the German Naval code and from then, on for a long period, they knew exactly the intentions of all the U-boats, because they were reporting that they had broken the code. And this was a great help to us, also. Then they realised they didn't have sufficient intelligence
- 17:30 to deal with the U-boats. So they had to develop....part of their tactics and strategy was to develop these incredibly long....they wanted to cover the whole of the Atlantic with aircraft surveillance, an enormous task. It was being done from the other side by Canadians and Americans. But then they developed very long-range Maritime aircraft. And these in conjunction with the more escort ships that were coming along,
- 18:00 and the more pin-pointing of the German submarines was of great assistance. The losses never stopped. The losses started to come down as we brought more ships in, as we got more intelligence about the submarines' movements, but at the same time the Germans were building more submarines.
- 18:30 So we had to get this long range coverage. There was what they called the Atlantic gap, that was between the surveillance coverage they could have out from the United Kingdom, and out from the east coast of America, but the central Atlantic gap was where all the trouble was. That was to some extent covered by the radar fixer and so forth, and telegraphic fixes on transmissions.
- 19:00 And of course, our tactics were getting better in terms of submarine warfare. We had at least one genius, Johnny Walker, of the 2nd Escort Group, who developed tactics that hadn't been done before, and that was of one ship just hanging onto the submarine, while others were guided on to it. Two or three other ships would take runs at it until it was finally destroyed. It was very successful.
- 19:30 **How were those developments relayed to you? How did you learn about the new ways of approaching anti-submarine warfare when you were on board?**

When we were on board? Well, frankly, we didn't know much about it.

Did you experience changes to the way the ship moved in relation to the convoy, or new technologies used on board?

No, there was no new technologies

- 20:00 in relation to escorting convoys.

New tactics in terms of positioning or the way that....

Well, that was always the case, and that was largely in the hands of the senior officer Escort and the commodore of the convoy, and they used to talk together all the time. One of the big problems was stragglers. The commodore of the convoy had to keep his ships in tight, close formation. Some of them straggled, they'd have engine trouble, and they'd just have to drop out and take their chance. But there had to be

- 20:30 very strict discipline in the convoy itself. That meant that the lines had to be straight, the ships in convoy had to maintain their two cables distance apart from the one in front. If you got them all over the place, then you'd have lost control, and that made it much easier for the Germans to pick them off. But convoy control was always a major problem, not because people didn't want to comply, but because some ships developed engine trouble,
- 21:00 some didn't steer properly, but they were overcome slowly in course of time. The convoy tactics, escort tactics was largely a matter for the escort commander at the time. It was always a matter for the escort commander at the time. Now if the escort commander wasn't very good, then really did suffer the consequences, and I will tell you about that in a minute.
- 21:30 But we usually had very good escort commanders who knew what they were doing, they'd have conferences beforehand. There were always very long conferences beforehand. The convoy commander would sit down with the Naval commander on most of the big convoys, they'd work out tactics. The escort commander always had his plans worked as to what was going to happen. So it wasn't ad hoc, by any means. There was always a plan.
- 22:00 But by and large, the convoy tactics didn't change much, in that you put as big a ring around a convoy as you possibly could, with the number of ships available. If you couldn't do that it, depending on what information you had, you would have to position your escorts in the best position available around your convoy. So it was a moveable feast. But if you had a blockhead as escort commander, who wouldn't take advice, and really didn't know what he was doing, then usually there was serious consequences.
- 22:30 In fact, I have a very close friend called John Beaumont, and he was in a Flower-class corvette at the time, and the Mediterranean fleet was running a bit short of fuel I understand, and he was on an escort that picked up nine tankers from Trinidad. They were attacked about half way
- 23:00 across the Atlantic onwards, and he lost seven out of the nine tankers. He got into Gibraltar with two tankers. He is absolutely open about blaming the escort commander for losing that. He said he was so wrong in his tactics, and so utterly devoid of understanding what was required and so forth, it probably wouldn't have happened with more onus and more experience,
- 23:30 and listening to people like Johnny, who was a very capable anti-submarine bloke. He wasn't in John's ship, mark you, but there could have been conferences beforehand...This bloke is eighty four now, he's an incredibly wealthy bloke, a successful businessman. So what I'm saying is, he's a bloke who knows what he's doing, very level-headed and very sensible. He's very bitter about that. So you did get blokes who really didn't understand what they were doing, and you pay the penalty.
- 24:00 **Did you find yourself in any situations during your war experience where you found it very difficult to take the orders you were given? Where you were in a situation where you felt that the wrong decision was being made and you had to follow through?**
- I never had any consequences from it, but I felt that my captain, on one occasion,
- 24:30 went far too close to an unknown ship. I was on the bridge with him. I told him about the Sydney, and I said, "Sir, I would go to action stations. I would get out of it." But he didn't. He must have felt fairly sure of himself. It was, in fact, a straggler, again. But then the Cormorant
- 25:00 looked like a straggler. The Cormorant was an ordinary merchant ship flying the Dutch flag. And I'd come away from that experience in the Indian Ocean and I said to my captain at the time that I had grave fears that he was far too close to this ship, not at action stations ready to open fire. He said, "Digger, I understand you." But I think...That was the only time I ever spoke out to my captain, that I thought he was wrong...
- 25:30 No, I spoke out on another occasion. We were coming back from Russia, I'm pretty sure we were by ourselves on this trip also, and we went into a...violent Arctic storm, which delayed us days and we were very low on fuel, for some reason. And because we were very low on fuel, the ship was rolling dangerously, in my view. In fact, I thought we were in danger of rolling over.
- 26:00 In fact it was so bad that we had Oerlikons, gun platforms on either side of the bridge, and they had shields on them and the gun poked out between just the shields, and the gun was poking forward with the shields, facing the way the ship was going. We rolled that under and the shields folded back. So I was on the bridge at the time...There was water foaming from the ocean just there,
- 26:30 we were over that far. After that I said to him, I said to my captain, "Has it occurred to flood seawater into a couple of the fuel tanks?" Because I really felt we had a danger of turning over. He was very worried about it, too, and he discussed it with me and he said "Look, if I do that and I am wrong," he said, "I'm in terrible trouble because
- 27:00 the ship will be out of action for many weeks, because they have to clean out all the fuel tanks." He said, "If it gets any worse we will certainly think about it." I had no hesitation in speaking up. But he didn't do it and we survived, but he was a very experienced bloke, but he was also a bloke who would listen. So yeah, I did speak out on a couple of occasions, when he frightened. He frightened me on two occasions.

The concern there was the free flowing fuel that was shifting the weight...

27:30 The fuel didn't worry me. What worried me was there wasn't sufficient weight in the bottom of the ship. With the turning moment, if we got a big wave on the turning moment, she might go over, because we had already dipped most of the bridge under and that was good enough for me, hanging on with the foaming water around my feet. I got frightened, but he was there and I told him.

I would have thought the lads would have been quite pleased to be out of action for a few weeks? Back in Scapa Flow?

They would have been.

28:00 **I would have been filling those tanks up.**

He was a very experienced bloke, this fellow, he knew more than I did.

Talking about experience and using one's experience. Can you tell me about going to HMS Osprey? I believe you went there as a student initially performing anti-submarine course, and then you stayed on as the instructor....

No. I was posted there to do a long,

28:30 what they call a long course, a top specialist course, a staff course. Then when you come out of there you get posted as a staff officer in anti-submarine for warfare, wherever you go. To a flotilla leader, for instance. The flotilla leader has the staff gunnery blokes, staff anti-submarine blokes, staff signals, just the senior bloke in that field of endeavour.

How did you feel about leaving your ship after two years?

29:00 I was quite happy, I was getting pretty tired of it. I would have preferred to have gone to another ship, but we'd virtually won the war at sea by the time that posting came you know. The submarine warfare had broken right down. Once we knocked off that ninety or a hundred U-boats

29:30 in three months in that North Atlantic blitz, reading the German staff reports, it was really the beginning of the end for the Germans at sea, and they knew it. I wasn't aware all of that when I went to Osprey. I didn't think there would have been any staff appointments for me back in the Home Fleet,

30:00 because there wasn't any need for any, as I personally saw it. But it was about a five months' course. So I did this course, and then they gave me an instructor's job there for some time, and I asked for another ship, I got a bit bored with that.

30:30 I asked for another ship, so they posted me as group AS [Anti-Submarine] officer to HMS Pheasant, which was a Bird-class sloop. They were specially built for very long-range escort work. Magnificent ships, with all the latest equipment, they had Hedgehog...they had four twin turrets. A beautiful ship, but totally different to a destroyer. They were squat, wide,

31:00 an enormous fuel capacity. A different class of ship entirely.

I will come back to Pheasant, but I did want to just deal with your time at Osprey with a bit more detail. Could you explain the nature of the course? I realise it was anti-submarine, but what were the particulars of your studies in the five months?

First of all there was the technical side, and the strategical and operational side.

31:30 The technical side, there had been great strides on the technical side, and I was not familiar with any of that equipment, and indeed the course designed to bring everybody up to date on it. So there was a great part of the course devoted to the weaponry. In addition to that, you had the tactics for the use of the weaponry, which were very similar your tactics before

32:00 of finding your submarine and hunting it, but your attacking procedure was totally different to what depth charge procedures were.

Can you explain the difference?

Well yes. The depth charge were thrown out from the side of the ships and dropped over the stern. Whereas both Hedgehog and Squid were forward-throwing bombs, in effect.

32:30 With the Hedgehog you had a very big pattern of about thirty projectiles, big bombs with fins on them which would explode on impact, and they formed a big elliptical pattern out in front of the ship, about three hundred yards in front of the ship, where you reckon the submarine....or where your gear gave you a calculation where the submarine would be at the time they sank to what depth

33:00 you thought the submarine would be at.

Whereas the depth charges you had to pass directly over the top of the submarine?

No, no. You always dropped the depth charges in a situation where you thought they would run into them, also. You never dropped anything over the top of it, because by the time they got down there they would be gone. Submarines could go up to five or six knots underwater, that's a pretty fair speed under water. The more modern ones, they go a very high speed underwater,

- 33:30 but the average German sub, then, could probably do about seven knots underwater, pretty fast, I think. So you had to calculate where they were going to be, and that depended entirely on what depth you calculated, because we had no means of accurately predicting depth in the earlier days except your own calculations, and speed. So depth charges were pretty hit and miss, but on the other hand there was a massive explosion which had
- 34:00 a devastating effect from quite a distance. So they were quite effective for the time. The Hedgehog was an entirely different weapon. It was a bomb with a fin on it that armed the projectile as it went down. It had to make contact with percussion projection to detonate the bomb. Then we progressed onto a Squid,
- 34:30 which was more a mortar based weapon, to...in gimbals they moved with the roll of the ship, so that the projectiles would always be fired on an direct upward projectory. There were three in either, and they were huge massive projectiles which would explode at a set depth,
- 35:00 and they were very successful. There was a lot of work to be done on all of that. The tactics were not different, really. Strategic planning was not a great deal different, except that we'd learnt so much from experience. We learned a great deal from the tactics of Johnny Walker in the 2nd Escort Group. We had learnt a lot from
- 35:30 aircraft. There was a lot of aircraft bombing on submarines at this stage, or the period before then. We learnt a lot about co-operation with aircraft on finding. There was a great deal to be learnt about the German tactics that we knew at that stage. So it was a very comprehensive course.
- 36:00 We worked extremely hard, very long hours, and there were several people from overseas on those courses which went back to their own countries. There were Indians, Canadians....The Royal Navy was pretty well fitted up, I think, at that stage with long course experienced blokes. And maybe at the time I graduated
- 36:30 I think the strength was somewhat diminished. But there was still a lot of instructing to do, just the same, because the war was still going on. So I became a long course instructor. I was not instructing long course but instructing short course people. I never instructed long course people because the long course instructors...I think I replaced one or two of them at various times.
- 37:00 But I only instructed for about three months, a relatively short period.

In your course were the participants in effect then sharing their knowledge on a regular basis? Was it almost like a symposium? Were the students who were on the course sharing their experiences from the field?

Well, they were, but they weren't of much assistance. They were there for a course,

- 37:30 and the course was laid out. You would occasionally get someone chipping in saying they had an experience and they did this and I would say, "Well, you wouldn't do that now." That's about as far as it went, because the people who were attending these courses were certainly nowhere near up as far as we were in terms of advancement.

Sorry, I meant on your five month long course, was that....yourself being a student and the other people who were participating, was that an open scenario in terms of sharing experiences?

- 38:00 Yes, absolutely. The navy was very, very good that way. It was always a joint effort, and they would always listen to you, and they knew a lot of the blokes that were there were highly experienced anti-submarine officers....Some of those instructors had never been to sea. Some of the mathematics subjects, for instance,
- 38:30 because they attempted to instil a bit of maths into us because there were advances in the knowledge about the Pitto electric effects of the transmission of the beam, and so forth, which we were all pretty familiar with. Yes, it was a joint effort.

How did you feel about that opportunity to share your knowledge and to have that relationship with your peers?

I think that there were several there who knew more than me.

- 39:00 The blokes who had come in from the standard Atlantic runs, where they just ate submarines day in, day out, they were much more perhaps orientated towards submarine warfare than I was. Where you were more orientated to worrying about whether the bigger German ships were coming out at you at the time. They didn't have worries like that. They didn't have any bombing experience.
- 39:30 So ours was a much broader warfare experience, with a much broader battle experience than they had. So to that extent, I think some of them probably would have been much better than we were. It was just a question of how your life had gone beforehand.

Tape 8

00:32 **I am interested in the way you adapted to life on land, or life with warmth, after your experiences at sea. How was that transition to do the training?**

Well, you must realise you're adapting in the same general atmosphere as navy. Your routine ashore is not a hell of a lot different to the routine on a ship. The hours are different, different people,

01:00 but you've still got that discipline of being there and doing this. So to that degree, the main difference was the creature comforts. We had very good food and regular hours. You could wander off and have a beer. You had a lot of congenial company, you had all the WRENs [Women's Royal Naval Service] in the mess there with you, there were a lot of WREN officers there, which made a big difference.

01:30 But you were still navy and you still had a job to do, and you were still told what to do and when to do it, but it was very much more pleasant. It was in a hotel at Dunoon where we started off, was a beautiful big hotel overlooking the Clyde, the Glenmorag Hotel it was, a well-known peacetime landmark.

02:00 It had very comfortable accommodation. Service blokes coming from all Services. It was very pleasant.

Was your appreciation for them far greater than you had in the past?

No, I think from memory I just accepted it as being what I needed. To be very honest with, I missed the ship, I missed it greatly, I missed the blokes on it, and I missed the shipboard life.

02:30 I had grown to like the shipboard life. And after our first heavy years and our heavy Atlantic work, life was pretty good aboard there. We did a couple of trips to Russia where no-one worried us. I really enjoyed Onslaught, although the time had come for a change, I missed the ship when I went, it was a great ship.

03:00 **Did you have a sense that your skills or talents could have been better used at sea?**

I don't think so. I think I probably did as well as I could. There were some pretty capable blokes on board. I think, from memory, they were all graduates or under graduates at officer level, and they were a pretty competent lot.

03:30 I didn't feel like shining out amongst them by any means. They were a well-educated, good bunch of blokes.

Did you shine on your long course? Is that why you were asked to remain as an instructor?

Well, I topped the long course, but I don't give myself any credit for that. It could have been, it could have been.

04:00 It could have also have been there was no need for a long course instructor to come out at the moment. I have no doubts that they thought I filled a gap there, for the time being. I don't think there was any great skill on my part that got me the job. Pretty soft job actually, but like everything else you do you've got to do it properly and there was a lot of preparation. You didn't just wander into a course, you were fully prepared for it each time.

04:30 I didn't think too much about it. As I say, I was missing being at sea. I rather felt I was loafing, that I should have been back at sea. Really, the worst part of the war was probably very close to being over at that time.

Did you feel as though your personality and your skills worked well as an instructor?

Yes. No question on that. From the reports I got back, yes.

05:00 **What to you were the most important attributes of a good instructor?**

Firstly, I think he has got to know what he's doing. He's got to have a certain presence that's going to arrest the people's attention. I think you've got to be somewhat of a psychologist to see where your own strong and weak points are, but even more importantly where is the weak

05:30 and strong points in the class? To see that you've got people who understand what you are talking about, and if not you've got to make sure they do. You've got to be terribly conscientious of the responsibility these blokes are bearing when they go out. But if a bloke doesn't want to learn and doesn't want to be there, there is not a hell of a lot you can do about it, except tell someone. But I didn't have to do that, I had a few blokes who were pretty thick,

06:00 but not thick enough to tell someone that they're no good. I think that a lot of the blokes saw the short courses, the fortnight courses, as just a spell on the land and to be enjoyed. I don't think any of them worked too hard. A lot of them had a bit of an idea of what I was talking about. Long course people were totally different,

06:30 they were a different kettle of fish. If you were talking to them you really had to be ahead of them, because they would stop you and say, "What about so and so?" There were some very highly educated

people amongst them in fields that I didn't know, fields that had no relationship to what I was talking about. So it was by no means a sinecure. If I didn't know, I used to say so, and, "Well, you tell me." And in many cases they could.

07:00 And that was no disgrace on me because I didn't know what they were talking about, in the detail of it, but they knew and related it back, so it was very good. It was a very co-operative effort.

Were there close similarities between the way you approached your instruction and your leadership in general within the navy? Were they similar...

Yes.

What were the main differences?

The main differences were that

07:30 in instructing, you were talking to blokes probably at a much higher level of education than you were talking to on the ratings on the ship. You were covering a much more technical subject, a much more broader band of objectives. On the ship you were very confined in what you were talking about. It was getting a boat down or getting the guns ready or

08:00 talking to your own men in your own department about preparedness, or the state of equipment. It was a much narrower field of operations you were talking about on the ship, to a group of people who really weren't much interested past the problem you were talking about. It certainly wasn't the case on the course. You covered a very big, broad group of people from all walks of life,

08:30 some of them senior officers, who expected you to know more than they did, and to tell them what they came there to learn. And you had to be very aware of that, but it seemed to work quite well.

Your decision to request being sent back to sea was motivated more by your desire to get back to sea rather than a dislike for training?

Yes.

09:00 I got bored with it. It's never a life that's suited me much, was going back and sitting, drinking. I didn't go much on going back to my room and studying, I only liked to study what I liked to study there. So really I found that I was getting terribly bored with it all, and I just wanted to go back to sea again, and I didn't care where it was.

09:30 I would have preferred probably an appointment in destroyers again, but that wasn't the way it worked. So I was appointed to the BPF [British Pacific Fleet], one of the ships in the British Pacific fleet. By this time, it was getting towards D-Day and we sailed for the Pacific about a week after D-Day. So I missed all the fun of that.

10:00 **You joined HMS Pheasant in England. Whereabouts did you join up?**

It was an east coast port, it might have been at Rother, I think.

Had she been previously with the British fleet or was she on her way there for the first time?

No, she had been on Atlantic duties. She was a relatively new ship, a very good ship.

10:30 All fitted, purely BPF for very long-range escort duties.

Could you make a direct comparison between her and Onslaught? In terms of size, crew....

Well, Onslaught had a crew of about two hundred and forty three, about two thousand four hundred tons, Pheasant would not have been that big.

11:00 She would have a crew of about a hundred and eighty six, or something like that, I guess. A smaller ship of a totally different design, much slower, it would never have reached the speeds that Onslaught could reach. She was very well equipped with the same modern communications and radar equipment that Onslaught was. The messing accommodation was probably much better than Onslaught.

11:30 It was a much later constructed ship, made for an entirely different purpose. It was relatively slow, equipped for very long-range voyages.

What were her defences?

She was very well equipped. She had four twin turrets of four inch guns, very modern. She had Hedgehog fitted,

12:00 the latest radar equipment and so forth. The tragedy is that none of it was ever used for the purpose for which it was...Really, it was just a waste of time sending her out to the Pacific because she never did any useful work that I know of. We were patrolling up and down in the Pacific there, at one stage, for sixty nine days without seeing land ,

12:30 to my mind, for no apparent purpose. We had no ships we were guarding or anything. It seemed to me

to a total waste of time and waste of resources, but that's the way it was. The Americans had the enemy well under control. We did no bombardments, we did nothing, we did no submarine attacks, we never fired a shot in anger. So really it was really a Pacific holiday, if that's what you wanted, which is what I didn't want.

13:00 I bet you didn't mind the warmth though?

I didn't mind the warmth, but I certainly would have preferred to have been back in the Home Fleet. I found the Home Fleet are a very cosy family. The people running it knew what they were doing. They were very efficient, they were very committed, all of the captains were very efficient. There was a purpose to almost everything we did. Then I came out

13:30 to this rather loose arrangement of no one really knowing what was going on. We were never attached to anywhere or given any assignment to do, we were always patrolling somewhere, which produced nothing. On several occasions we accompanied groups of Merchant ships. A lot of the time we were patrolling by ourselves. So I rather felt it was

14:00 a lost period of my life, particularly so after coming from such an exciting life and an efficient ship and having wasted....not wasted, but put in so much time at Osprey on the long course. It was an anti-climax. None of the blokes that I know that came to the Pacific on any of the British ships, and I had lots of friends in destroyers that came out here,

14:30 I don't think they ever fired their guns in anger. They were running around and patrolling, like we were, non-existent baggage trains and supply trains. The Americans had it under such efficient control that I always thought there was no place for us there. The only excitement I had on Pheasant was when we were coming down through the Bay of Biscay,

15:00 I did get what I thought was a submarine contact. We were about a day out of Gibraltar, going to Gibraltar, and we fired a Hedgehog pattern. My captain was not an experienced captain. I think he was brought back for war service. He was a totally different breed of officer,

15:30 to whom I had been used to in the Home Fleet. He was a very easy going bloke and didn't bother too much about strategy and so forth, and he didn't worry too much about anything. We had a first lieutenant, an Australian, who was pretty slack in my view. So the ship wasn't under

16:00 firm discipline like I was used to. And so coming down through the Bay of Biscay, I got a very firm submarine contact, and we finally attacked it with a Hedgehog, which missed, and the Hedgehog....Well, I don't know whether we missed or not but the Hedgehogs all exploded. But I think if we did hit a submarine, we didn't know about it,

16:30 because of the damage we did to ourselves. We blew our own bottom in, because the captain didn't veer away from the explosions, and he hadn't checked the depth of the water. So we punched our fuel tanks in and got into Gibraltar and sat there for six weeks in dry dock while we had the fuel tanks repaired. That was my great excitement on Pheasant. The only thing was I learnt

17:00 a bit about La Lina in Spain, and Gibraltar, spent an awful lot of time sitting in the ward room drinking, but apart from that we didn't do much. Coming through the Mediterranean we were following another ship and it hit a mine, with big losses. But other than that, that's where all my fun stopped in terms of bangs and Warfare. But the situation in the Pacific wasn't all lost.

17:30 We were part of the fleets that supported the Iwo Jima, Leyte, not much to do with Okinawa or the Japanese mainland campaign, because they were gathering around the Japanese mainland. The Yanks were going to invade Japan, as you know.

18:00 They'd made extensive allowances for losses there and so forth, but after the atomic bomb went off...I was at sea when the bomb went off, everyone virtually said, "The war's over now, it doesn't matter much now." But that was after the Leyte Campaign, and Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and all those around about that time, anyhow.

18:30 So shortly after that the Japs surrendered. So I went into Tokyo Bay with the British fleet. That was very interesting. The Japs, these massive Japanese battleships were sitting with the water just lapping their decks, they had sunk all their ships, no fighting. I couldn't believe it, the number of Japanese ships that they sunk in Tokyo Bay. We steamed past these things...

19:00 A great martial nation like Japan just chucked their hand in straight away. It was very difficult for me to come to grips with these modern battleships, these massive battleships sunk, steaming past them. So we sat in Tokyo Bay for a day or two before the actual surrender.

19:30 I went ashore with a big landing party one day, and we were armed. We didn't know whether there was going to be any resistance. But there were a lot of Japanese sailors on the shore. We landed at the Japanese naval base of Yokosuka, which was the premier naval base, or one of them, in Tokyo Bay. And a lot of Japs on the shore, I didn't know what they were going to do,

20:00 but as soon as we got close to them they all started bowing low and they took off. We had all these British sailors who'd a gut full of the war, they rioted, they went mad. So went into one of the huge

Japanese buildings, a five or six storey building

- 20:30 and by sheer chance I went in and it was the Japanese officers huge mess. The blokes with me just went stark raving mad. They smashed everything to pieces with their rifle butts. They were throwing rolls of silk out the window, hanging onto one end like lavatory paper. I would say within about five hours that place was an absolute wreck. They tore it to pieces. They were souveniring everything. I was no better. I have got that little thing to show you there.
- 21:00 I've got that little box with Japanese...The only things I took were six saki glasses out of the Japanese naval officers' mess and a Japanese....All the naval officers had a little pocket for their serviettes, and they have a silver serviette ring. So each Japanese had his own serviette ring and serviette. These Japanese serviette rings all had the Japanese Naval crest on,
- 21:30 and all the saki glasses have got the chrysanthemum on, the Naval crest. There's six of them there with a serviette ring, that was my souvenir from Japan. Then the surrender was taken the following day, great ceremonies and so forth. The following day we set out for Hong Kong, and I was at Hong Kong for nearly six weeks.
- 22:00 We didn't seem to do much at all in Hong Kong. We had a lot of....jobs we did ashore and a lot of shore leave and so forth. There was a lot of trouble with the Chinese there. A lot of people didn't see this, but there's no doubt about it, the Chinese rioted.
- 22:30 And some of my friends said I was wrong, but I wasn't wrong, because my brother-in-law Tom Cappywood, who lives in Sydney, married to my sister, and he was in the Royal Marine Commandos and he was bound for Singapore, the invasion of Singapore, when it was called off and they went straight off to Hong Kong, because they were going to retake Singapore. And he remembered it clearly. The Royal Marine Commandos were on the streets there, they were restoring order. It was pretty nasty.
- 23:00 The Japs all chucked their hands in. The navy used to march them out in the morning to help them do the work on the streets of Hong Kong, they'd march them back at night and lock them up again. They were terribly co-operative at this stage. I had a nasty experience there. I had a nasty experience there. I was up on the peak one day, there was four or five of us wandering around, just looking, sight seeing, goofing.
- 23:30 And a couple of Chinese rushed out of some bush, low bush, being chased by another bloke who was firing a sub-machine gun. When he saw us he fired at us and missed. So it was up and down there for awhile, but the British soon restored order there and then the fleet slowly left, and the
- 24:00 Pheasant came back to Australia, as so many British ships did. A lot of the British ships came back and had leave in Australia for quite a long time. I came back and went to....We stopped in Brisbane and I took my discharge in Brisbane, I was there for about month or more and took my discharge in Brisbane. I came back to Sydney by train. That was the end of it.
- 24:30 But of course, I stayed on in the Australian Navy as a reservist for another eight years after that. That was long enough, because my practice was beginning to take time and it was time to stop playing games, get serious.

Let's just move back to the beginning of your time in the Pacific. What were your duties on board HMS Pheasant?

I was the anti-submarine officer,

- 25:00 we never had a group. My duties were, pure watch-keeping, I was just a watch-keeping officer, with the rest of the watch-keeping officers. It was a time of great boredom for every one of us, none of us felt a purpose. We weren't assigned a purpose, we had no object in view... We were slowly working our way up north behind the Americans,
- 25:30 when we were told we were allowed to go there. But we had no part in the Pacific War. There was no submarine warfare that I heard of that wasn't very efficiently dealt with by the Americans way in advance of us. We knew of no submarine activity at any place we were at. We did no bombardments, we really did nothing.

How did that lack of purpose manifest itself amongst the crew?

- 26:00 It had a devastating effect. The crew were very difficult to handle, and almost semi-mutinous some of the time, because they were like ourselves, they found no purpose of being there. We were going from island to island for a couple of nights and anchoring for a couple of nights. At one stage, as I say, we did sixty nine days at sea without sighting land. And to this day I don't know what we were supposed to be doing.
- 26:30 I don't think the captain knew. We received....The captain of the group came and lived on our ship, and I don't think he had much idea of what we were doing either. But this was my perspective. None of the officers on board knew what our objects were. I think it was a political thing.
- 27:00 It was so unnecessary, and rather sad in some ways, we were there at the surrender, and I think that

was Churchill's main objective, that the British were represented in Japan at the time of the surrender.

How did you cope with what you said was a semi-mutinuous situation?

We coped like the rest of them. There was nothing. There were no shore places for them to go to do anything.

27:30 They didn't get ashore amongst the girls or anything like that. We were in Maynus Harbour for months, doing nothing. It was a terrible place.

What sort of things did you do to try and keep them busy or to improve morale?

We used to have whaler races with other boats, but there was nothing to do ashore. You could go to the beach ashore, but you were eaten alive with sand flies and things like that. If you dived overboard for a swim you had all those

28:00 little things that you get in tropical waters that affix themselves to you and you can't see them....It wasn't a very good time, actually. The blokes were decent blokes, but they couldn't see the sense of it either. When we got to Tokyo Bay, and then to Hong Kong, it was better, because they were doing something. They had somewhere to go and something to do. So it all worked out in the end, there was no harm done.

28:30 It wasn't easy to keep them employed and interested.

Were exercises continually conducted? Were you going to action stations on a regular basis?

No, no. There were no drills that I remember in the Pacific, but we had a different sort of captain.

What did you do to take your mind away from the ship?

I did a lot of reading, a hell of a lot of reading.

29:00 And you'd....Wherever we could, we'd have ship ceremonies like crossing the line. There was a lot of interaction in talk, and just socialising on the ship. It was a very hard job to keep the people's interest.

Tell me about hearing of victory in Europe? Do you recall the moment you heard?

Oh yeah, we were pretty thrilled about it.

29:30 It doesn't matter how thrilled you are about it, if you are in the doldrums yourself, it doesn't last long. We were interested in victory out here, because we knew we had the victory out here. And after the atomic bomb went off, it was all down hill for us. We knew that whatever we did from then on was all on the way home and it made it much easier.

Can you describe the scene on hearing of VE (Victory in Europe) Day?

30:00 I don't think there was any great scenes.

How did you find out about the news?

We had radio in the wardroom, and we were up to date on all the news, there was no problems about that. We weren't isolated by any means, we were right up to date on everything. I think we were all expecting victory in Europe, and we were incredibly pleased when it happened. But we wanted to get victory out here,

30:30 and we also knew that once we got victory in Europe it was only a matter of time. I think it would have been much better if we were somehow involved in the victory out here, but we had no actions at all. We were looking forward to a war that we'd had in Europe, where was pretty go-go all the time, where there was something to be achieved, but that wasn't the case.

How did you feel about the Americans and their dismissiveness?

31:00 **Was there any resentment towards them in particular?**

No, not a bit. Not so far as I was concerned. So far as I was concerned, I think so far as our ship was concerned, it was their war. I think they took the view it was their war. And if you read the post-war writings on this, they really didn't want the British out there and they said they didn't want them. But as a great gesture to Churchill's demands, Roosevelt allowed him to send the British Pacific Fleet out there.

31:30 To my knowledge, I don't know that it was ever in action. Some of the big ships might have done a bit of bombardment or something like that, but certainly not at my level of escort sloops.

Did you cross paths with any Australian ships?

No. Not at all, I was exclusively RN the whole time,

32:00 I didn't see any Aussies at all. I didn't come across any Aussies in Hong Kong, either. I was purely British the whole time. In fact, the first time I heard an Aussie accent for many years, or set foot in

Australia, was when I landed in Darwin on the way up. I had four or five days in Darwin, and I went down to some of the springs inside Darwin, the Balaranka Springs.

- 32:30 I went to a few of the messes in Darwin with some of the army girls, and things like that, and then back to the ship and off again. But it was great to hear the accents again.

Can you tell me what role Pheasant played in Leyte?

We didn't play any war role in it at all. We were patrolling up and down,

- 33:00 outside where the action was. There was Leyte, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, all of those, we were in the vicinity, but did nothing. They had started, a lot of those had started long before we got there. The American supply train was so vast, it was literally thousands of ships, to supply this vast effort, we did a lot of escort duty like that,

- 33:30 seemingly from nowhere to nowhere. The Yanks had it so much under control. We saw very few American ships, they were involved, because we were not in the real theatre of war. When you say you were there on the campaigns, you were not on the campaigns, you were there, and escorting ships involved in the campaign, but we were not...We never fired out guns, which was a bit of a change.

- 34:00 **Where were you when you heard of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima?**

In the middle of the Pacific, and we were delighted, absolutely delighted. It was something you couldn't describe. It was such a wonderful feeling to know that that was the end of it. You know there were two bombs dropped.

- 34:30 The first one, we thought that would end it, but it didn't. And then when the second one dropped, we thought surely that would end it, and it did. So from there we went straight up to Tokyo Bay, which was probably four or five days' steaming for us. It was all down hill from there, after we spent time in Tokyo Bay and ashore there, only on the fringes of their establishments and then back to Hong Kong.

- 35:00 We had a lot to do, we were very busy in Hong Kong. We didn't fire our guns in Hong Kong, but a lot of firing ashore, small arms fire ashore.

The ships that were lying on the bottom of Tokyo Harbour, had they been scuttled by the Japanese?

Yes. You steamed past them, not a long way from them. A couple of battleships.

- 35:30 **What were your feelings towards the Japanese?**

I'd never come face to face with the Japanese, as I had with the Germans. I don't know that I had any ill feelings against them, because I didn't know of their atrocities at that stage. But I've since changed my mind about them. You see, I never engaged Japanese in warfare. They were just a name, they were just an action I knew about.

- 36:00 I really didn't know about all these atrocities that they'd committed. When we were there, they were a pretty harmless lot who were running away. We couldn't believe that they all chucked it in so easily, so quickly. There wasn't a shot fired in anger, anywhere. They all took to the hills where we were. So this was something I couldn't relate

- 36:30 to the Japanese character at all. But then, I didn't know the things they did. I knew a bit about the Manchurian affair, and I knew how ruthless they were there, but I didn't realise about Changi and all of that, and New Guinea.

I am interested in how you adapted to life at home in Australia? How did you settle back down to normal life, so to speak?

- 37:00 It was a bit difficult. There was nothing for me to do. Everybody...you are suddenly come back and everything has stopped, and there is no supplies. Don't forget in the navy you had everything you need in terms of...when we were out here, we had reasonably good food, good service and the ships were in good condition, and everything you needed was delivered.

- 37:30 But when you came back ashore, it was like coming back to a strange land. It was not the land we left. There was shortages of everything, there was certainly no housing. Housing was an appalling problem. It really was terribly bad. And none of us had any money. We had these accumulated payments from the war. I think from close on six years at war I received

- 38:00 £300, I think it was I received, and I was up amongst the really top payments. What could you do with that sort of money? You certainly couldn't buy a house with it that I knew of, and you didn't have a job. I decided to go back to the university full time, and for that the government was very, very good, actually.

- 38:30 They paid all my fees and they paid me about £3 a week or something, which you could live on. The universities were overcrowded. I went back into the Faculty of Law, because when I went they called me in just before I was posted overseas,

- 39:00 at the University, and I told them I couldn't do any more work. And they gave me a bit of test at the end of third year, Commerce, a Bachelor of Commerce, and they gave me a terrible exam. And frankly, I wasn't up to it. They gave me a Diploma in Commerce at the end of three years. So I didn't go on and do the degree because I didn't want to do commerce any more.
- 39:30 I had arranged with the Sydney University through correspondence, because I was doing nothing in the Pacific, I asked them if I could start and read some law because I had all this time, which they agreed to. So I'd already started reading some subjects in law while I was on Pheasant, so that enabled me to go straight into the Faculty of Law
- 40:00 when I came back, and I got a Diploma in Commerce, so I went straight into full time law, and I finished that in about three or four years. I managed to get articles of clerkship, which was essential in those days. I became an article clerk with one of the law firms in Sydney, and went back to the university and plugged along with my university degree, with no fees to the university and the allowance they gave me. And I managed quite well on that.

Tape 9

- 00:33 **You were just telling me about getting your law degree and becoming qualified. How long did that take you?**
- It was probably three years full time at the university. They were very good to returned men. They allowed us some concessions,
- 01:00 which were perhaps not available to everybody else. Conditions were very bad. You might imagine the number of people coming back into the law faculty. There were so many of us, Airforces blokes, army blokes, they couldn't do anything at the university, they had to hire a hall in the city, it had to be done in large premises in the city. The overflow was enormous. How the university coped with that
- 01:30 I don't know, but they were extremely good. I took my discharge in Brisbane. Because I'd met a girl up there and I wanted to stay with her for a while. I took my discharge in Brisbane, but then I came back to Sydney and I went to the university here in Sydney.
- 02:00 But because this girl was in Brisbane, I went back and finished my last two years at Brisbane University, so my degree is from the University of Queensland, simply because I finished off up there. I stayed in a Brisbane lawyer's office for a while and then I became one of the Commonwealth Bank's lawyers. I came into the legal department here in Sydney,
- 02:30 where I remained for five years or so before I went into private practice. And in private practice for a couple of years before I started my own practice.
- Were you fearful in that immediate post-war period about the availability of jobs?**
- Yes, it really was very, very bad.
- Did you see or fear situations similar to the Depression?**
- Well, it was a depression, there is no doubt about that,
- 03:00 it was not quite as bad but very similar in a different way. You suddenly had all these people thrown on the market. Your industry had come to a standstill, because everything was geared to wartime, there was no longer any war demand, so everything came to a standstill. The big industries that had been pumping out wartime stuff stopped and had to turn over to a peace-time industrial situation.
- 03:30 This was an enormous strain on them. It took years and years and years before the economy started to pick up again. It virtually came to a sudden halt when the war finished, because everything that had been driving the economy suddenly stopped. You had all of these men thrown back on the market,
- 04:00 all looking for non-existent jobs. So it was a very difficult time and a very difficult situation. It took a long time to sort out. There was a lot of family problems, a lot of housing problems....And I think the government handled it very well, really, because they made a big effort to look after the returned servicemen, and I couldn't possibly complain, the way they handled it.
- 04:30 **Did you have any difficulties in focusing and concentrating your energies? Other gentlemen we've spoken to did have trouble with being able to concentrate, and being in a still and stable environment was quite difficult for them.**
- Oh yes, it was very difficult. One of the difficulties, I think, was not knowing where you were going. I mean in my case, I had very heavy study
- 05:00 and therefore I had a purpose, and I knew where I was going and what I had to do. But life was very difficult just the same, because of the housing. I didn't want to go back home again...Although I did after the war, for a while, but then I went back up to Queensland where housing was just as difficult. I thought it would be easier at Queensland University

- 05:30 and I think in some ways it might have been. But there was really no promise of anything. I think the blokes who went back to the university were the lucky ones, because they had immediate pressures upon them and that helped them settle down. I know I had terrible pressures on me to get through the amount of work. And you come out of a wartime environment and suddenly your whole world stops and starts studying.
- 06:00 It's a very big change. Psychologically, it wrecked a lot of blokes. An enormous amount of blokes were wrecked because of their family situations. A lot were wrecked because they had no money. A lot got rid of their money immediately, they drank it or parties and so forth...They were very, very difficult times. Quite apart from that, a lot of the blokes were haunted by their war time experiences.
- 06:30 And several of my friends, like myself, are still...not haunted by it, but very much aware of them. The early days of the war were pretty action packed. Maybe I was better off than some of the others because I had all of this wasted time in the Pacific, where I had a lot of time to read and think and concentrate and I was just doing
- 07:00 watch-keeping duties, and pretty well disinterested in what I was doing, more thinking about myself. So perhaps I was one of the lucky ones.

Did you dream about your wartime experiences when you returned?

Of course you dreamed about them, dreamed about them for years afterwards. They wake you up. I don't know of any of my friends who didn't dream about them. They are so indelibly imprinted on your mind that they become a large part of your life.

- 07:30 **How did you go about of letting go of that hate or resentment that you felt towards the Germans?**

Well, I think you just...by inflexion of time, you became interested in other things and your life changed you had different objectives, and there were a lot of pressures on you to adjust and get going. You really didn't have time

- 08:00 to think about it, and secondly you were no longer involved with them. Once I came out of the East, I was no longer involved with the Germans. And I never developed the same feelings towards the Japs because I never got close enough to have a go at them. I think if we had got involved with them, we would have found that they did the same thing the Germans did. But I never got involved with them,

- 08:30 and I had plenty of time to think about things.

Was it difficult not to let bitterness or resentment linger and affect you?

I never consciously tried to get rid of it. I had a blind hatred of the Germans by the time I had come off the ship. And you know, time seems to heal all wounds, and I think over a long period of time it just vanishes

- 09:00 into something like the Arctic mist. But even today, I don't want anything to do with anything German. If there is any Germans involved in something, I would prefer to go somewhere else. It's still there. But I just felt that they were so ruthless. For an educated race that produced

- 09:30 people like Wagner and the music and the scientific inventions that they did, that they were just barbarians at heart and they weren't worth touching. I have no time for them, even today.

I guess in a similar vein was there, was there a spirit of romance or spontaneity to that post-war life? Was there an optimism that came with victory?

- 10:00 I don't know about optimism on my part, I saw nothing but difficulties and problems. So far as I am concerned the peace and the declaration of peace and the discharge from the permanent services...was just another step along the road to rehabilitation. Because I stayed in the navy as a Reservist for a long time, as did a hell of a lot of us.
- 10:30 Because I thought we were going to be called up again for the Berlin Crisis, and almost certainly we would have been called up if we had gone to war with Russia. I thought you might as well keep your hand in, because I felt fairly sure we were going to go to war with the Soviets, which didn't happen. But I saw it as one continuum, that I was here.
- 11:00 And I appreciated my time ashore, and the quiet time, and I appreciated the time on Pheasant. I would have preferred to be ashore, but I didn't mind watch-keeping. So it was really a slow process of let down for me. But I don't think anything prepared me for how difficult life ashore was.
- 11:30 It was purely because of the number of blokes and the enormous unsettlement of an economy suddenly stopping and having to change and get going all over again. And there were great demands everywhere that couldn't be met. There was money about, we all had money, but we didn't have much of it. Whereas in the Depression people literally did not have money, so to that degree it was quite different .
- 12:00 But there was some relief for the unemployed, and there were courses....But it was tough going, and it

was very tough going for the families. The blokes coming back out of the army and from New Guinea, that I do know, that those blokes were really in a bad way. A lot of my friends....the conditions in New Guinea they went through are just beyond description.

12:30 Could you tell me about your actual homecoming? In terms of seeing your parents again?

Well, it was marvellous seeing them, but you've got to realise that I'd grown away from them. I was their little boy who went away, and I came back a totally changed person. I no longer had much in common with the life that I had left. My parents had gone along with their same normal life.

13:00 It was a life I didn't know any more, and it was unacceptable to me, I didn't want that sort of life any more. And that's one of the reasons I went back to Queensland, to live my own life and be myself. But I always got on very well with my parents and I loved them very dearly. I was incredibly lucky with my mother and father, they were really wonderful people.

13:30 And never fought with them or argued or anything like that, we were always very happy together, but their life wasn't the life that I wanted when I got back. In fact, I don't know what the life was that I did want when I came back, but it certainly wasn't coming back to home, to the dull way of life, as it was to me at that stage.

Were you able to communicate what you had been through to them, or to your friends that you'd left?

14:00 No. I don't think anyone has got the slightest idea what I went through. My friends do, a lot of my friends know because a lot of my friends went through similar things. My closest friends are still navy friends. But the people I associated with post-war, they had no idea, they didn't have the faintest idea where I had been or anything about it, because I never go around broadcasting it.

14:30 If someone wants to know I'll tell them. But I've had great joy from all my navy friends, a few in particular, but they all had the same difficulty as I did. One, I think, died because of the problems and pressures and so forth, although he was a wealthy bloke in his own right, but his two marriages were broken up.

15:00 And this other very close friend is in a home, which he shouldn't be, in my book. Yeah, it had a pretty big effect on them all. It certainly changed their lives, there is no doubt about that. I think it changed their lives more than I think it changed mine.

Can you outline any specific ways in which you were changed?

15:30 I think I had better true ideas and values of what I wanted, and you had a pretty good view of where the world was going and how you wanted to go, and how you wanted to do it. But your problem was to get the opportunity or the money or the staff to do what you wanted to do. I know one of the biggest problems in my life has been to get the right class of people I wanted for staff in various projects.

16:00 Blokes who haven't been to the war have got a totally different outlook on life to the blokes that have been, I think by and large. And I think it's largely due to the discipline and the training and the companionship you get in units, whether it be army units or Airforce, you get used to a certain code of conduct and standard of living and discipline, which you don't find outside the Services you have been in.

16:30 To be quite frank, I'm appalled with some of the things I see going on today. An absolutely total lack of discipline, which in my view is responsible for a lot of the problems we're facing. But you can't discipline anyone today. I grew up with discipline in the army and then in the navy, and I think it's probably the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. I think I can look at things now in a different

17:00 way, a disciplined way, instead of like a spoilt brat wanting everything, and if I don't get it I make a complaint and sue someone, which seems to be the standard now. But I'm not complaining about it now, everyone's got a good life and I'm enjoying the good life, but you asked me what I learned, and what I learned was you can have an undisciplined life or an disciplined life. And the people I've seen with an undisciplined life have pretty well all come to grief. I think that anyone who hasn't had the discipline,

17:30 somewhere, whether it be at home or school...I'm becoming more despairing that it's impossible to get a discipline at school any more. Perhaps some of the more selective schools that a lot of people can't afford them. But everyone wants to do what they want now, and I notice a great lack of pulling together. At national level, I think Australia is probably as good as anywhere. I think it's the greatest country on earth,

18:00 and the people here are great. But I see big signs of everyone pulling in different directions and wanting it their own way, at any cost, and I think along the run it may not be in the best interests of everyone. But I've got no complaints.

How do you feel about our society's ability to respond

18:30 to a situation like we faced in '39? If we were to be faced with a similar situation today...

You mean in the Depression?

No, in terms of the war, and in terms of responding to something like the Second World War.

I have enormous faith that we would do very well. I have enormous faith in the youth of today, at least in the major section of the youth today. I see a very big section of the youth today that I wouldn't feed.

- 19:00 For the greater part of the youth that I see today, including migrants, I think they're tops. I think the young blokes I know today are as good as any I've ever known. But I see very large portions of the population, which are not going to be much good to us, which I hope I am wrong in. But for the bulk, I think they're as good, if not better.
- 19:30 Especially the young people I see in the Services, they're superb. But the young people I see who are not in the Services...I've got six granddaughters and...they're good, there's no doubt about them. But I think there is a great national movement, love of country, they don't call it love of country, but there's a great national movement developing which is good for this country.
- 20:00 And I've got a great deal of faith. But there is an awful lot of ratbags we've got in politics, who have got no idea of what love of country means, or what it means to be in this country, they're pulling down and destroying and criticising all the time. I worry about those people in politics, and those people not in politics, but mainly in politics....
- 20:30 There's a lot of people there who are totally unemployable, I reckon, and unfortunately they've got the say and they're swaying people, I think, away from the direction they should be swaying. But that's not just happening here, it's happening in every country. Britain is in the same boat. And I think the good common sense of Australians is going to prevail. I think they're good.

What were the best of times in the war for you?

- 21:00 Best of times in the war? There weren't too many good times. I can't remember a time that was a good time, I really don't. Because from day one onwards, I hardly got any leave, I'm not complaining about that. But I enjoyed the discipline and the
- 21:30 achievements of Onslaught. If I had to answer a question like that, I would have to say it was the incredible discipline, and the type of people and the leadership and the exploits that we accomplished in Onslaught. And that could never be repeated because we accomplished so much against such odds, with such people.
- 22:00 The people were top people, from the poor little bloke in the mess deck who was wet and wanted to see Mum, and upwards, they were good people. So I have no complaints. I'm very lucky. You would have to say that in many respects I enjoyed the experiences of war, if you could put aside all the bad parts of it. The best part of the enjoyment of it is to look back on it.
- 22:30 And of course it's given me a wonderful post-war life in the continued connection I've had with the navy, and the people in the navy. So it hasn't all been bad.

That strikes me as a pretty good note on which to wrap this up. Thank you very much.

Good on you, thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS