

Australians at War Film Archive

Gordon Steele (Stainless) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:42 **All right then Gordon, as we discussed out there in the kitchen I'm going to need to kick off with you giving me a bit of a summary without too much detail in it of your whole life story.**
- Yeah.
- Off you go.**
- Ok. My name is Gordon Eric Steele. I was born in Kogarah in 1920 so that makes me, now I'm
- 01:00 eighty-three years of age. I went to school at South Carlton School and I've forgotten the other. St Peters School. I went through to the third year in the certificate. It was called the intermediate certificate. From there I left school when I was fifteen and I worked in York Street for four years.
- 01:30 And the war started and 1939 I applied to join the navy. That was following the instincts of my father who had been a sailor in the first war. Then I had to wait until the call up came and the call up came in early '40 and in June '40 I began my initial training down at Flinders Navy Depot and that included the parade ground drill and
- 02:00 rifle drill and of course the engineering school was an important part of my training. From there in September '40 I was drafted to HMAS Perth. It was a light six-inch cruiser, six-inch gun cruiser. Then after a few months doing escorts around the southern part of Australia and to Fremantle, our ship
- 02:30 did escorts including the Aquitania and Mauritania and those troop ships that were taking the various soldiers across to the Middle East. In December we moved ourselves, we moved to the Middle East and we arrived in Alexandria on Christmas Eve 1940. We had Christmas Day and Christmas Eve and then from Boxing Day
- 03:00 we found ourselves bombarding the Bardia Coast. There was no rest for us from then on for another six or seven months. Perth was a very busy ship and so were all the ships in the Mediterranean. The Bardia coast was, of course, the 6th Division when they advanced up through Benghazi and such up the coast. Then early in 1941 we were involved in the Malta convoys
- 03:30 and that was our first taste of the heavy bombing and the enemy attacking us. We moved into Malta Harbour and there was a devastating attack on the Royal Navy carrier, Illustrious. And that's a well-known action that particular one. It was a devastating attack. We were fortunate to get out. There were ships in there sunk alongside us in that place there.
- 04:00 We then went back to and did more patrols back out of Alexandria. That included the famous battle of Mattapan was in that period. And the battle of Mattapan was when the two battle fleets and we were part of that, the cruiser squadron was outlying protection to the battle fleet and we came under enemy fire with
- 04:30 the battleship, an Italian battleship was firing at us. Fortunately there was no hits there but other ships were sunk and the Italians suffered a devastating defeat. By this time the British battle fleet had come in closer itself on the coast, the [HMS] Warsprite in particular, that was the one that brought the Italian fleet undone. We went then into Greece and Crete into
- 05:00 Athens itself where immediately following this the Greek people were just then engaged in the start of the Italian war. Of course they thought it was wonderful that we could do that to their enemy, the common enemy. And then the threat of the Germans moving down into Southern Europe, we had to transport Australian troops and British troops, allied troops really.
- 05:30 We had a series of runs into Athens, or Piraeus to be correct. Those soldiers were disembarked there and within three weeks we were back there again taking them out. The Germans come and made an onslaught into the place, of course, and the soldiers were driven out and we evacuated them. They took them back then down to Crete.

- 06:00 Then again it was only a matter of weeks we were taking them from Southern Crete and that was a devastating action that was. There were ships sunk. Awful that was. I think there were thirteen within two days, Royal Navy ships and Australian ships. There was only one, no there was one Australian ship that was hit but it wasn't sunk. Then we
- 06:30 got them out of there and we were engaged then in the bombardment of Syria. The 7th Division were making their advance up the Syrian coast and Perth bombarded the roads. You could see the roads and the traffic on the roads, I well remember that. And that was the 7th Division's action. Perth was to come home by that time. And unfortunately for me, I thought it was unfortunate at the time,
- 07:00 as it turned out I was very glad but I was drafted to a destroyer, the [HMAS] Vendetta and the Vendetta was on the Tobruk run, running supplies and troops into Tobruk to relieve their situation and that went on for some months of course but then by this time those little ships, the scrap iron flotilla as we were known as, they were all being deployed and sent away. They were
- 07:30 old ships and worn out and the modern destroyers were coming into action and they were taking our place. Vendetta was the last, one of the old ships to be engaged in that Tobruk run. Vendetta then set sail for Singapore to do a refit and of course the Japs [Japanese] were not in the war at this time. And when we got to Singapore it was late November '41.
- 08:00 We were engaged some weeks dismantling the guns and the turbines were taken off and on the jetty and within, on the 7th of December, the same day as the Japs hit Honolulu, Singapore was raided also. And of course that started the Japanese war and we had a ship that was dismantled.
- 08:30 We never got to get the ship back into place and we didn't know what was to happen. The Vendetta made then a spectacular towing job to come home. It came home cold. There was no power in the ship but there was only a skeleton crew on it. They remained to bring the ship home. The rest of us came back on a passenger ship, not truly a passenger ship. It was
- 09:00 The [HMAS] Kanimbla. Rather vague, I can't remember this straight off but the Kanimbla was an armed merchant cruiser. It had been working up there under naval control. But we brought home the consul and the children came back with us from Singapore. Everyone was rather apprehensive of what was going to happen. It was the start of the war and we weren't aware of the Japs, how powerful they were. And we actually saw Warsprite and [HMS] Repulse coming into the
- 09:30 harbour. They were only there two days and they sailed out again and the horrifying news we got then, we couldn't just believe it, was the ships, the two big battle ships were sunk by the Japs off the coast of Malaya. And then I went home then, had a month's leave and then I was drafted to a corvette. It was early '42 and
- 10:00 that was another very busy time. The Japs had started their onslaught by submarine onto Eastern Coast shipping. And there were something like thirty ships sunk off our eastern coast here. And the little escort vessels, [HMAS] Mildura was one of them, ceaseless work there for fifteen months we did that escorting merchant ships up and down the Australian coast. And then we'd take troop ships
- 10:30 to such places as Noumea and Papua New Guinea and Madang. We were engaged in that and there were patrols up on the north coast of New Guinea, Balikpapan was later. I'm thinking of Finschhafen and Madang and those places we were engaged there early on. We had another period then back on the west coast of
- 11:00 Australia, there was anti-submarine patrols. There was Japanese subs were in that area for a period. And then we went north again when the army was moving further north, we were gaining a foothold in, we went beyond New Guinea and they started to move into Borneo and those actions up there.
- 11:30 We were particularly engaged in the actions against Tarakan and Balikpapan. We were in Balikpapan when peace was declared. That was a most amazing event. We didn't believe that there was going to be peace but it so happened then. Well that's the wartime part of it and then subsequent to that I was engaged to be married. My wife was a
- 12:00 WRAN [Women's Royal Australian Navy Service], a service woman. We had trouble finding somewhere to live, such was the situation for housing for all the troops being disbanded and we waited eighteen months and then we got a little flat. We moved into a little flat in Summer Hill and while we were waiting for this home we are in now to be completed and we moved here in 1952. That makes nearly fifty-two years
- 12:30 we've been in this home. I went back to work in York Street, I become a salesman in the rag trade. I spent most of my life doing that, working in the rag trade as a salesman and company representative. I have five children came of that marriage and ten grandchildren which makes a wonderful complete life. Here we are both of us are quite aged now but we are living comfortably together
- 13:00 in our little home and our children are all happy families and we are very pleased with my life.

We've certainly got a lot to get through today so thanks for the summary. So we are going to go right back to the beginning now, in fact so far back that you're not even in the picture.

Your father served in the First World War?

Yes.

What was his service?

He served in the

- 13:30 Australian navy and he was a radio operator and he served on troop ships. It was a merchant, converted merchant ships they were, and he transferred troops into the Middle East and to England and out of England and they carried troops and horses. And that was his experience of the First [World] War.

Did he talk a lot about that to you?

Yes, he did. He told me about all the places he went to. He didn't see any of the

- 14:00 gunfire. It was rather a passive sort of navy, well they had to keep the troops away from gunfire if they could possibly do and they did too in his case. They didn't want any troops going into the battle lines as troopships. No that was my father's experience.

And did his stories give you an inspiration to join the navy?

They sure did. It was when the time I was leaving school. I had left school and was going on a few years

- 14:30 and he often discussed with me about joining the navy and I considered it too. And I didn't feel there was any real outlet for me in joining the navy. To a boy it was appealing but I was just thinking ahead of myself how I would form my life as being a sailor. And I wanted, like my father, strangely enough I foresaw that I was going to be a family man and all the people

- 15:00 that I respected in those days, my uncles and such, they all had houses and families and kids and I thought that was probably my life and that's the way it's turned out too. It was a natural instinct and a good approach I thought.

Fair enough. Where did you grow up then Gordon?

It was Kogarah Bay really. It was a lovely situation really. In those days there was a lot of paddocks around everywhere even though my father,

- 15:30 he built a house after the war and we lived in the new one he started anyway. The old house is still standing out there at Kogarah. And I don't know whether it was down across the paddocks it would be Carss Park and of course Carss Park was all bush and trees everywhere. We had a wonderful life, kids swimming in Kogarah Bay there, home made canoes for instance, I remember that. My father went mad at me, I was in tin canoes and on

- 16:00 one occasion the darn canoe turned over. It is very easy to tip an old canoe over and I was about twelve and I swam half way across the bay trying to get back to the shore. Fortunately I was a good swimmer. Living like kids, living like that we lived pretty good in a way. We didn't know our family was poor. Our father was never out of work. He worked as a telegrapher on the railway

- 16:30 and government jobs didn't pay much money and he obviously had six children. But I didn't know we were poor. I used to go crook because my mother made me wear shoes to school and all the other kids, they didn't have to and I didn't know but their mothers couldn't afford to buy them shoes. And that was one little incident of the kind of innocent life schoolboys grew up in.

- 17:00 And that's when I started to work.

So how many siblings did you have?

How many of us, was six. There were three boys and three girls in my father's family. Yes.

It must have been tough for your mum trying to budget on your dad's wage there.

Oh when I think about what my poor old Mum had to do to, she was always at the stove, always sewing and reconstructing

- 17:30 and saving. There was never any spare money at home. But again that didn't worry the kids. Probably my mother was embarrassed the fact that she couldn't supply us all. It cost sixpence to go to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon and vary rarely could I get tickets because my father didn't have sixpence to give us or when he did he had to give the other kids the same sixpence too, you see. But that's how hard the times were.

And as a

- 18:00 **young guy, as a young kid did you try to do any sort of jobs or anything to try and get a few pennies together?**

Well there was one thing we could do. Every kid wanted to get a job. Other kids used to do grocery deliveries on their pushbikes. I remember that I didn't have a pushbike so I couldn't do that but some of the other kids had pushbikes so they would deliver groceries, for a pittance too, of course. The thing

that our little gang did, we could

- 18:30 gather newspapers and the grocer, the butcher it was, the butcher would give us sixpence for getting a bundle of newspapers so that was one way of getting enough money to go to the pictures on a Saturday afternoon.

So the pictures were something that was a big treat.

We always used to go to the matinees on a Saturday, that was excellent for kids to be able to do that. And it

- 19:00 used to cost a penny each way in the bus up to Kogarah and we had a couple of pence to buy yourself an ice cream. That was a treat too. It was a big day out. But as a kid all the kids in these paddocks I'm telling you about, we all used to play sport, impromptu games of cricket and football but I was always doing that sort of thing. As I say I had an untroubled childhood. I was not worried about growing

- 19:30 up. Because the big thing with that was there was no one to be envious of. All the other kids were in the same trouble. A little illustration of that is you'll still hear people saying now, they never closed the doors, times, didn't lock the doors when we went out. And of course my answer to that was when I think about it is there was nothing in the house worth thieving. We were all poor.

- 20:00 **And were you a good boy Gordon?**

Yes. I never got into trouble for anything like that. I remember getting caught. We raided, a couple of times we did. We would go and raid the orchards out there. There were little small orchards in that neighbourhood and we knew where all the good fruit was and we could climb the fence of course and we'd sometimes get caught and get chased by the owners but that was the only scallywag thing we did. All kids do that don't they?

- 20:30 Go and pinch fruit.

Certainly I'm surprised there was any fruit left on any trees in the whole of Sydney from the number of orchard confessions I've had in this job.

Well that was a common thing. You'd understand.

And at primary school what one was that?

South Carlton was the primary school. Yeah.

What were you like as a student at primary school?

Oh just so so. I wasn't a very concentrated kid really but I passed

- 21:00 primary. I never misbehaved or anything. I didn't get into trouble for any things like that at school. I wasn't a scholar in any main. No.

But you obviously went on to?

Well I did the three years then times were so desperate and my father had a friend, he was a commercial traveller in York Street again. He told

- 21:30 my father to send me down to his office and I got a job at fifteen. It's remarkable. I got sixteen and seven pence a week and I did that for twelve months and then I think I got a pound at the end of twelve months service. And that was an award rate they paid for fifteen year old boys and I gave my mother ten shillings and I had six and seven pence to spend on myself. And it cost me

- 22:00 four shillings for the fares into the city and of course the only money I had was the, my mother used to cut my lunch and clothe me too, that wasn't very much but she was glad of that ten shillings. I know she liked that.

So that was after, you left high school after three years. Is that right?

Yeah.

At high school were you any better or just a middle of the road sort of?

Oh just middle of the road, nothing starring in me.

- 22:30 **So when you went to leave school at fifteen what were your ambitions. Where did you think your life was going to take you?**

I didn't really know. I thought the job in York Street because it was all glamorous. I didn't know what work was of any kind really and I was that enthusiastic when I found something, an outlet and I could see the start of an industry and how business worked.

- 23:00 I was observing all that and learning all that and I thought that that was the way to go then. And really that's what I followed. Actually of course when the war finished I went back to doing that same thing and continued my life doing the same sort of thing. But to illustrate the hard times then, there was not

one of my contemporaries who was given an apprenticeship. No boy of my age in the years up and down

23:30 was given apprenticeships. That illustrates the difficult times it was then. And I observed that when I joined the services. We had tradesmen of course that were, there was always artisans in all ships and they were trained tradesman. There were none of them at my age. They were all older and towards the end of the war I noticed

24:00 we were getting these tradesmen coming in. They were young, they were petty officers. If they had a trade they became petty officers. And these young petty officers started to come in. They were boys left school long after I did but they got their trade. That's where I first noticed it. It must have been the influx of tradesmen when times were improving,

24:30 industry was able to afford trade apprentices.

So the job that you had in York Street, was it?

Yeah.

What sort of company was it?

A soft goods company.

What does soft goods mean?

Clothing and piece goods. It was all soft good warehouse.

What was the nature of the work you did there?

Oh it was a warehouseman really.

25:00 That's the broad terms. The work that I did was preparing orders and stacking and packing and measuring and things to do such as that. And of course there were sails to be made. The country buyers used to come out of that store and we would show them the expected lines of the new goods that they were to prepare for their own sales in country towns or the cities too.

25:30 Buyers used to come in there for those. That was the work I was getting there. That came on and I become a salesman myself. Afterwards I used to travel the country by train and car and such and I became the traditional old country salesman at one stage.

So what sort of journey did you have to get into work?

I travelled by bus to Kogarah Station

26:00 then from the train down into the city and I worked in York Street. Nothing spectacular about that, it was just a suburban commuter ride in and out of the city.

And what was sort of roughly your working hours?

Oh a quarter past eight till half past five. That was the hours of my day. At one stage early on

26:30 after the war we had to work Saturday mornings. That was a blow we had to come back to work for Saturday morning. That didn't last very long. It was only four hours but it was quite a pest. It ruined everybody's life. I was in a football club and I was hard put trying to leave work on a Saturday and get to my football match. I played junior rugby union for Saint George.

27:00 Saint George had a rugby union team. I did for many years after the war too but they also had juniors and I was in the juniors.

What position did you play?

I was in the back line, winger. I wasn't much good as a footballer but I could run so that's what, as long as they kept me out of the road then I could run up behind them and take the ball. That was about my effort at playing football.

And as a young man there

27:30 **starting work in the city, any female attentions?**

Oh I had girlfriends all over the place. All kids have girlfriends. I had given up the Saturday night pictures when I was at this age and all the boys used to go to the dance and all the girls too. That was a favourite thing. Kids don't do that now, all the teenagers, it was a favourite place to be, all going to the Saturday night dance. And it was quite innocent really. Some blokes got entangled

28:00 but it was mainly not too, everyone was, I think about the society then, we were all pretty prudish. Yeah, it was. The teenagers were relatively innocent and good too, there was nothing wrong with our society then.

Where were the Saturday night dances?

Well Hurstville was a favourite one. Actually we were at a

- 28:30 Saturday night dance and we got the word, somebody came into the hall and told us war had been declared. I remember walking out on the main street of Hurstville. They stopped the dance, everyone went out on the street and I thought the war's going to come down via Australia tonight because the look of everyone when war was declared and I recall that, when war was declared.

But before that war was declared did you know anything about

- 29:00 **what was building up in Europe?**

I sure did. I think about how studious I was then. I remember those books, famous books they are, Inside Asia and Inside Europe, Insanity Fare, these were prominent books showing the developing trouble in Germany and Europe in general and I was an avid reader of them and I was only a teenager. I must have been a serious

- 29:30 kid and I was too. So I was well aware of pending trouble and of course that's when the war started and I wanted to be in it. I was trying to join the navy but they told me the navy had reserves, Saturday afternoon sailors we called them and they didn't recruit any fresh ones until they had placed all the men they already had in hand. They had to complete their training before they were dispersed to the various ships

- 30:00 or posting overseas or wherever they went and so that's why my call up was delayed until the middle of the next year.

So obviously you were quite interested in what was going on in Europe to have read these books?

I sure was. Oh yeah.

You must have been better informed than a lot of people in the street?

As a kid I was, I'm sure I was, yeah. I was very interested in the development of the Reich Tag and all those dramatic

- 30:30 events that happened in Germany. I knew all about those, yeah.

What about the people you were working with in the warehouse?

Yeah, they were too. They were pretty well informed. Although not many men my age but there were lots of fellows in there a few years older than me and they were pretty intelligent guys too. We used to discuss that and it encouraged me to know these things. Most of those men when I think about it now,

- 31:00 most of them did join the air force. Subsequently so many were lost. They went to England early on all enthusiastic and so many were killed in that early air force people that went over to Europe.

We've talked about you knew about what was coming in Europe, what about, had you any idea what was happening in Asia with Japan?

I knew about the

- 31:30 Nan King. That was 1936 that was. I knew about that too and the devastation but I didn't think it applied to us. We were told about the yellow peril all the time. It didn't seem to really impress us, or me anyway, the threat I could see was in Europe maybe because England was more involved in the threat from

- 32:00 there and that, the story was in the newspapers of disturbances or concern in the British Government, that's why we were more worried about the European trouble developing. No, even when we were in the Middle East early in the war there was still that threat of the Yellow Peril but we didn't think it was going to develop like it did. And of course North America pretty obviously when

- 32:30 December the 7th and when they devastated the fleet in Honolulu.

So do you think it was still at that stage people in Australia their fortune was very much tied up towards Britain and Europe?

I'm sure it was. They were more orientated towards England and the England problem and we accepted that as an ongoing, it would be our problem and it was our problem too.

- 33:00 All the fellows, you've only got to look at it, all the men that joined the army, they were all sent off to join the British forces in the Middle East. Some even went to England, we had Australian soldiers going over to England early in the war. And of course our men that were sent to the Royal Air Force. They went over to supplement their forces there and we had so many of our people went and joined the Royal Navy. They were in the Australian navy but they became attached to

- 33:30 the Royal Navy. There was quite a lot of them in the early part of the war also.

When was the first time that you approached the Royal Australian Navy to join?

When? Well it must have been late '39.

Before or after war had been declared?

Oh after war, I didn't attempt to join the peacetime navy.

So just after war had been declared in Europe.

Yes.

34:00 That was my turning point. I knew it would be a wartime commitment. But it was twelve years. I couldn't image a boy like me committing myself to twelve years and I didn't know what was going to happen but when the necessity of the thing, I saw a necessity, that was when I did join and that was an engagement for the wartime only.

What inspired you to join? Why was it so important to you?

34:30 I was a royalist and an Australian Patriot, an Australian patriot first. I'm not so much a royalist that's not quite the word. That did influence me but I was a patriot.

So Australia, then king.

That would be about the form. Yes, Australia first. Still today.

So where did you go to try and join up in '39?

35:00 Down to Rushcutters Bay. And then I went over to, that's not quite right, there was a naval school, it turned out to be a cadet school over in North Sydney. I went there and they told me they were only cadets and I didn't want to join the cadets. The cadets were, that was wrong and then they directed me to Rushcutters Bay but Rushcutters Bay told me then to come back in the new year.

35:30 Which I did. I went back early in the new year and they still weren't recruiting and I went back a third time. And the third time I went back after a couple of months went past again, they took my name and from that name I was called up and it turned out on the day of recruitment there were thirteen of us were called in to Rushcutters Bay and we spent the day being inducted into the service. They actually gave us a king's shilling,

36:00 was a process that was from old fashioned times, they'd give you a shilling. Then a severe old navy officer we had, he was a recruiting officer said, "Now we've got you." We couldn't get out, we took the king's shilling. Well that was the intention anyway and he, this was remarkable, you wanted to know how I come to be a stoker. He got us all lined up there and he said, "Now you are in the navy what department do you want to be in?"

36:30 And they all wanted to be gunners except me, I wanted to be a radio operator like my father. "No," he said to me, "We don't want any radio operators" and he said to this other mob, "And we don't want any gunners." We said, "Well what do you want?" He said he wanted stewards, supply and stokers. Well we are still all dumb looking at each other and one of them was a bit clued up than most of them and he said,

37:00 "Which ones wear the round rig, the sailors hat" because we all wanted to look like sailors. The other two divisions, stewards and supply assistants, they wore the coat and tie. It might be scaled down rather like an officers unit. We didn't want that. So the only one we had a choice for was stoker. So I got to be a stoker and I didn't even know what a stoker was. I had never seen a lathe or a boiler house or an engineering shop in my life.

37:30 Anyway I got sent down to Melbourne, well, Flinders Naval depot and I did see engineering shops down there. I spent six years of my life working in an engine rooms. Mainly boiler rooms of course and then the engine rooms too.

So that was on your first day that you got lined up there and asked what you?

Yes, remarkable. That's how I came to be a stoker. I was a stoker then and so much for me being a stoker. I didn't know what a stoker was. I just wanted to join, I was in the navy.

38:00 **Looking back on it it seems that the Australian navy was quite disorganised in those early few months of the war in the way they were doing it all?**

Ye. Well, not true. They had these half-trained men, the Saturday afternoons and their training had to be completed which was logical when you think about it. They wouldn't send them right to sea on a ship when they had only done a few parade grounds on a Saturday afternoon. They had to go and learn

38:30 to be sailors and they concentrated on that and they were all called into camp, they all went into barracks and completed their training and they were slotted off into various postings on ships or shore establishments all across the world. A lot of men from the Australian navy joined the Royal Navy. Well not joined, they were

39:00 seconded to the Royal Navy. Particularly as anti-submarine ratings, asdics. We had a very efficient schooling in Australian and so many of my friends were sent as anti-submarine operators into the Royal

Navy.

What did your dad reckon about you being a stoker?

He wasn't very pleased. He thought I was going to be a

39:30 radio operator. It didn't worry me. I did what I was told and I coped with it all right. Lots of people said, "How could you be a stoker?" They all thought it was dirty. It wasn't dirty at all. I never saw a shovel or anything like that. It was all very clean. It was hot. That was the part I didn't like. It was always hot but we got used to that, being a hot environment. It was darned hot too.

40:00 **So on that, after that first day when you took the King's shilling at Rushcutters what was the procedure from there?**

Well then they were still, they had started the recruiting in earnest. That day was the very first day they started the initial induction of naval recruiting in Sydney (I don't know about other parts) for wartime recruiting. They had people who had just joined the reserve as I indicated

40:30 but they were not straight wartime recruits. Then we waited, about three weeks I was in Sydney and they built up, every day there was recruitment going on, these groups of people, say I mentioned the thirteen, there was about ten or twelve each day after that. I saw the ranks were swelling and

41:00 after the three weeks we were all sent down to Flinders Naval Depot. There were fifty or sixty of us went down in the first load down into Flinders Navy Depot and we started

Tape 2

00:35 **Gordon was your family a religious family?**

They were believers but very modestly. It was pretty typical. We all went to Sunday School as kids. None of us became really enveloped into it. My sisters were in the choir but there was no great depth to it at all.

01:00 **What denomination were you?**

Church of England. So there was no great depth to that but like all people then there was a distant root to belief in it, changing moods as the world changes and that, as various, we all vary that,

01:30 our depth of feeling in that manner.

Was music part of the household, did you do any singing with the family or anything like that?

Oh yeah. There again my sisters all learned the piano. There was a piano at home. My mother played the piano. And my father, he couldn't read a word of music but he played the banjo. Self taught banjo and he played it all his life. And his kids, little kids, he'd have us all circle round and

02:00 he's playing his banjo and we're all singing these songs. Old fashioned ones, old vaudeville songs like 'Old Black Joe' and 'Swannie River' and you name them all. My father because he was in the RSL [Returned and Services League], he led the little troop in the RSL, the musicians. They'd take buses and go around to various concerts and charities and things.

02:30 My father was a musician if you can call playing the banjo a musician.

Of course, a very important instrument, the banjo.

It was good for a sing along and a party. A joyful sort of instrument, the banjo. But that was the experience. I tried the banjo and I couldn't get the gist of it at all. No, I was not a musician.

And you said that you would go to dances. Did you get some dancing lessons?

03:00 Oh no.

You were a natural.

I did, I was a natural dancer. I was a pretty good dancer. My wife and I, our claim to fame is we won a couple of local competitions, just in impromptu club dances and things like that. We were pretty good at it yeah.

It was a pretty handy skill to have in those days if you were going to catch the eye of a pretty young girl, wasn't it?

Oh yeah.

03:30 When we were in Sydney, this is when the war was on, the Trocadero was a big haunt for many people who were chasing girls, as many sailors were. We would go up there to the Trocadero and usually it was

full of American sailors because all the girls would be clamouring after them and jitterbugging was the big thing. Well I could jitterbug as good as the Yanks [Americans] and they'd have an impromptu little competition. They'd clap each one and then be

04:00 eliminated. I was very proud of myself. These expert American sailors, Jitterbuggers, and I come second this time up there. Just some girl, I didn't know her, another girl in the audience, we danced together and I become second in the Trocadero Jitterbug competition one time. Yeah, I was pretty good at that one. I wouldn't want to be on the stage but that's what they did.

04:30 **Did you used to enjoy watching pictures that featured sort of dance sequences and that sort of thing?**

Oh I did. Those sort of things, what do they call them, Showtime movies anyway.

Musicals.

Musical's the word, yeah, of course. They were enjoyable then and of course there was not much outlet. Don't forget there was rather limited entertainment in that period. Not like now where you can turn that many instruments,

05:00 televisions and tapes and such are readily available to everybody now but it wasn't then, it was quite limited. I enjoyed it all anyway, the movie part of it.

So it was an exciting part of being a teenager.

Oh being a teenager and a young sailor, the music was a great enthusiasm. That's where I met my wife as a matter of fact. I did. I met her on a ship. She was a messenger,

05:30 a sailor messenger and then I got invited up to the dance with all the girls and I met my wife.

What year was that?

'44.

We will talk in depth about that meeting in a little while. So you were pretty,

06:00 **you felt pretty good about the sailors uniform when you put it on?**

Oh we did too. It was a good thing. Any young man, I suppose these days too, girls liked the sailor's uniform. And I was never shy either. I would go and talk to any girl in the street and they would talk to me too. They liked talking to sailors too.

You said that you used to talk to dad about his experiences

06:30 **in the First World War. Did you know much more, did you sort of seek out information about that war from other sources, did you go through school or through your reading?**

Yes, we all knew about France and Gallipoli of course, that was a very important part and a very impressive part for schoolboys. There was, my mother's cousin was killed, in Flanders

07:00 he was killed and that was family history and then my father's cousin, he was at Gallipoli. He survived Gallipoli. I remember him well. He also lived in Kogarah. But we were well informed about the first war really and my father had various war books, soldier's books mainly so we were well versed

07:30 in the first war.

And how did war feel to you as a young man? Did it have a sense of adventure about it?

Oh sure did. It was an adventure. And if it hadn't have been how can I put it, something, we always liked to avoid it

08:00 but it was there and had to be done and I never let it depress me in any way. And there was some fellows who were depressed to their detriment. War worried them and some of them I saw them get, well they had to be discharged from the service. They were no good, to have a man like that in the service. But it didn't get me down at all. You could get frightened.

08:30 Stuff was going on that, can't wait till we get this over with and fortunately I survived it without any injury. One of the ships that I was in for a long while, the Perth, that was eventually sunk in a big battle and two thirds of the people in the Perth were killed in the battle. And the other third became prisoners of war.

09:00 And I resented being drafted off from that ship when it happened. But as it turned out it suited me not being in there. The first chance I could have been killed and the second chance of surviving, the Japs. No I didn't resent the war in any way. I resented the people who caused it and I thought well this is a thing to be followed through.

09:30 At one stage there I thought the war was never going to end. I just didn't see. And I ended up, foresight, how are we going to overcome these fanatical Japs. The island would have to be invaded and then,

fanatical as I said, they were already doing this Kamikaze thing. I was up in the Philippines at this time and we'll never breach the shores of Japan. Then fortunately,

10:00 fortunately for the Western World, the atom bomb was developed. It wasn't very fortunate for the victims. But anyway overall that shortened the loss of life, Japanese included. Their lives would have been squandered too in fruitless defence of their country. But so much we were horrified by the atom bomb it was to the relief of the world really.

Your dad

10:30 **had told you about his experiences on the sea as a young boy. Had that captured your imagination to the point where you took an active interest in maritime activities and knowing things about ships and the history of maritime pursuits and that sort of thing?**

Yes. I was an avid reader of all shipping events, particularly disasters,

11:00 ship disasters. I was well versed in those sorts of things and the Battle of Jutland and those things. I was well versed in those things. I knew all that.

And had you been out on the water much prior to joining the navy?

No. No. I had never been to sea. My experience was that my father used to have boats down on Kogarah Bay, little putt-putt motorboats.

11:30 We would get in his boats down there, all packed in but it was only on Botany Bay, that wasn't going very venturesome. It was a big thrill going out on the big wide ocean. That was something brand new.

All right, you were waiting round Rushcutters for around three weeks before they finally moved you to Flinders?

Yeah.

12:00 **Did you do anything in particular during those three weeks?**

Well we were only dayboys really. We were training, mainly parade ground drill, there was not much to be done down there. Rushcutters Bay Park was filled with new sailors all doing parade ground and that. It took about three weeks before they gathered enough people to make a trainload. Not a trainload, it was two carriages. We all got farewelled from central station and

12:30 sent down to Flinders on the Melbourne express.

How did you take to that very early taste of naval discipline, the whole business of drill and that sort of thing?

Well it was what I expected. It was no more than I expected. Yes. I knew that I had to learn something and do what I was told. No, I didn't resent that at all. I fitted in nicely to that thing and all my service life

13:00 I didn't do anything wrong deliberately. Sometimes, well I was only ever punished once and that was a thing in the destroyer Vendetta. We were in Haifa and we were given day leave, we went down to, well, day leave anyway, a town I can't recall

13:30 south of Haifa. We were to come back on the ship, we were supposed to be back on the ship at seven o'clock and it was about an hour's ride on the bus back up the coast and while we were in there in this bus in the terminal there were buses going to Jerusalem. The other three fellows I was with, they wanted to get back to the ship whereas I wanted to go to Jerusalem. I've never been so bold in my life. Only had a few bob in my pocket anyway. But anyway I caught the bus to Jerusalem. It was full of Arabs going home. It was quite strange. I didn't know where I was going.

14:00 It was dark by this time. And the next thing I know a couple of hours later the bus is in Jerusalem and I was directed to, what is it, a British hostel for servicemen and I stayed the night there and in the morning I went and saw the man at the desk and he told me there was a guide and there was a little American man, a bible student, an old man too and he took me around and he showed me all the first hand

14:30 information. I got a tour of Jerusalem. You asked me was I religious. I wasn't religious at all but I saw the holy sepulchre and David's wells and all those things that we know about. I saw them first hand. My wife is very jealous of me. She is religious here, now and I don't care much about it at all really but I've seen it all and it cost me five shillings. And to come back to being punished,

15:00 when I got back to the ship, I got back in the afternoon and of course I'm on the missing list and as soon as I report on board I had to report to the officer in charge. And he said, "Well where you have been?" He was actually quite severe with me. And I tell him what I've done. He told me what a silly blighter I was. He said, "You should have asked us." People had special missions. They thought I had run off getting drunk or run off with the girls or something.

15:30 But I'd been doing this thing going to Jerusalem. But that cost me two weeks pay and leave. Well the ship went to sea for two weeks, I didn't miss any leave, that counted, time at sea. I didn't miss any days

at shore so my leave didn't but I lost my two weeks pay and I was getting about thirty bob [shillings] a week then and some little allotment so it cost me three quid to have my tour of

16:00 Jerusalem. That was the extent of my being a bad boy.

Not a bad deal.

No.

All right so you jumped on the train and headed down to Flinders.

Yeah.

What was the atmosphere like on the train amongst the blokes?

Well we were all young men, we were all excited. The unknown was coming too and we didn't know. There were serving petty officers in charge. There was one

16:30 senior officer. The recruiting officer, he took the trip down to Melbourne with us. He was an old lieutenant. He actually wore a frock coat. This was out of Nelson's day. He paraded us up to the train and he carried his sword with him. I think of how strange that was now. All the officers must have laughed at him because they didn't do it, the other serving officers. He was an old-fashioned fellow.

17:00 But we were impressed with him and we were impressed with the petty officers who were in charge of us. That was good. All part of learning.

So what happened when you arrived?

Well when we arrived we were all slotted into our barracks, allocated, spread around there. And then we went up, we wound up formal or proper marching where we

17:30 had gunners mates, they were the parade ground commanders and they were very severe and strict. The other fellows we'd had prior, they were no better than me but these other men knew the strict drill and we had a month of that. Then we had two months of the engineering school. We had the classes and the practical applications.

So you were finally learning what a stoker actually did?

Oh yes.

18:00 **And how did you take to it, did you think it wasn't a bad deal after all?**

Oh yes, I wasn't disappointed one bit. No. I copped that for the rest of, when I say copped it it sounds like punishment but I wasn't punished at all. I never worried about doing my watch keeping and it was four on and eight off and I spent my life doing that. It was a good deal where I was concerned.

18:30 **So what sort of things were you learning particularly on the engineering side of things at that point?**

Well we learned, all stokers had to learn the boilers first. How to fire the boilers to start with. We learned the passage of the steam and the steam pressures and how to read the gauges and the water levels and the pumps that supplied the water level into the boiler and

19:00 where the steam was returned after it had finished working through the engines it was condensed again, recovered and became more water. There were evaporators. There was always a loss of water in the circulation systems so you had to make up the water and it had to be pure water too. Of course they didn't use straight shore water, the water had to go through the purifying systems. Of course it would corrode the motors if they put

19:30 contaminated water through it. Drinking water was contaminated too severely to use in motors. At emergency times they did use it but it caused corrosion in the works. That was all absorbed and I'm glad I absorbed it. I didn't resent that at all. I knew it all and I still remember it

20:00 to this day, all the lessons I learned about motors and what made motors work. There were two types of steam engines, there was turbine propulsion and reciprocating engines, they are the ones, the piston driven steam engines and then I

20:30 spent most of it, I became a leading hand and the leading hand mostly worked in the engine room. I had learned all the primary things about the steam making and all that side of things.

This was still when you were down at Flinders?

Oh no. I didn't become a leading hand for nearly three years. Working on the other bit.

So it was just the boiler room until.

Only the boiler room for the initial two and a half years anyway and then I became

21:00 a leading hand and then I worked in the engine room and there was, in the little ship that we had, three

leading hands in the engine room and engine room staff and three petty officers, stoker petty officers and they worked in the boiler room. And I did have experience, going back, when they were short a petty officer and then I would be back in the boiler room and I would be doing a stint in there.

- 21:30 I remember fella got sick one time and they put him off onto the shore. And I did work back in the boiler room again. In those sorts of emergencies I could be slotted around but in the main the latter part of my life was working in the engine rooms. And in the engine rooms there was not only propulsion, there were all the auxiliary motors had to be serviced too. There were dynamos and all those sort of engines, if you can understand they were all steam driven too.

So your

- 22:00 **initial training there at Flinders there was a fair bit of theory involved as well as the practical?**

Yes. We all had manuals and we read from our manuals and we had instructors and we had exercise books of course and those things. We had to draw diagrams and understand the progress of steam and what steam did. Steam starts off as a highly powerful concentrate and then expanded

- 22:30 and the term triple expansion means that there were three different sized pistons on each motor. As steam expanded they put it on that. That was interesting to learn that. The pumps didn't have that triple expansion thing or the double expansion. A steam pump would just have the initial thrust and the steam was returned back into the system.

- 23:00 **Were you training on a specific vessel at that stage?**

The Perth was the initial training vessel.

Was that down there at Flinders when you were there?

Oh no, no.

Or all the training was not on board?

No. There was no ships in Flinders there, no. There was a big boiler house there. They had a boiler house and their own generators down there and that's where we learned the reciprocal. There were no turbines there to start with. We didn't see any turbines till we went onto a ship.

- 23:30 The ships were propelled by turbines, the modern ones. Well the little ship was a freshly built one but it was an economical way of running and building ships was to use the traditional piston driven ships. Turbines were expensive and the destroyers and cruisers, they all used turbines but the lesser vessels, had the other method.

So it's probably a good time

- 24:00 **just for you to give us a pretty simple straight forward definition of what a stoker is and what a stoker's tasks are. Just a simple summarised version rather than an in depth technical one.**

Well stokers were part of the propulsion staff of all ships. All ships have and when they are steam driven vessels there was about a third of all

- 24:30 ship's companies were involved in making the ship move. And of course stokers were the lowest ones and they had all the various grades of engineers running up into senior engineer and such and they were the ones that got the ship underway and kept the ship moving. That's the simplistic way. Stokers were involved in making the ship move.

And can you give us a simple understanding of the relationship between the boiler room and the engine room?

- 25:00 Well the boiler room was a separate compartment to the engine room for obvious reasons, for safety reasons. If the ship should have been holed in any manner, and of course the most important thing, the boiler room was a pressurised room because they had big fans that forced the draft through the boilers and that forced draft was more efficient burning of the fuel and could raise

- 25:30 a higher pressure of steam and that was the important there. Older type vessels, a tug for instance they don't have that. The tug was open to the same pressure, air pressure, natural pressure to the engine, was side-by-side really. That is the big difference. They had to have that pressure room to make them work efficiently. And of course when

- 26:00 it was in the next bulk head, the engine room and that's where it makes the ship move, where the engines were. And of course the propeller shaft, the propeller to turn the ship and the ship moved along.

So how long was that training in Flinders?

Three months. You weren't fully qualified stokers. You had to wait, I was a stoker second-class. Everybody was a stoker

- 26:30 second class. Like ordinary seamen and able seamen. They didn't use the same term but the same

period of training. A seaman joined as an ordinary seaman and after twelve months and examinations and various things in his training he became an able seaman. Stokers joined as stoker second class and after twelve months they became stokers first class. It was the same procedure and it meant that you got a rise of a

27:00 shilling a day I think it was. We got four and sixpence a day when I was fighting the battles of our nation. It's true, in the Mediterranean I was given four and sixpence a day. Horrifying isn't it.

So what happened after that training period in Flinders for you?

Well then. We were all, in our class we were divided up into various ships and

27:30 dispersed. And there were nine of us in this particular draft I was in. I was sent to the Perth with this group. The Perth was lying at Princess Pier in Port Melbourne and we joined the ship and the ship left that night and we steamed up to Sydney in a hurry. Something had happened to the propeller shaft prior to getting

28:00 on there and the ship had to have it repaired at Cockatoo Dock. It was in there for two nights. And there was a convoy of troops laying out in the stream in the harbour and the convoy had to be taken across the bite over to Fremantle. The Perth was dedicated to it because it had this whopping propeller. It had four propellers and one of them was disabled. And it was repaired overnight in this panic.

28:30 It was a panic too, to get the ship ready for taking the convoy across the bite. And that was the reason for the hurry of the Perth getting over there. And we took the Mauritania and Aquitania and, that was that. Another convoy include the [Queen] Mary and the Elizabeth. They were involved in our convoys across there in the initial stages.

So as they were repairing the propeller you were getting acquainted with the boiler room?

29:00 Yes. Well we still had duties. It was in the dock there but there were still duties all the time. There was always some activity in the boiler room and engine rooms even while the ship was in the dock.

How many men would be involved in maintaining the boiler room if you were at sea?

There was about eighty stokers on every cruiser and

29:30 that was a big vessel and the lowest ones, there were just as many senior grades of engineers above that too, to make the ship work. There were four boilers and they each had two stokers and then there were the leading stokers, the petty officer stokers. They were

30:00 a great team of engine room and boiler room staff all the time on the big ships.

So where were you starting on the Perth then?

I was in the boiler room on the Perth. I did about three or four months in the boiler room. Of course this was part of the instruction period. When you were a second-class stoker you got slotted around in all the different positions of training.

30:30 I had to learn, I got put onto the steam generators. And I knew how to, only stop and start them. I didn't know what was inside them but I knew where the valves were to make them work and that. We had to learn all that. And of course had to learn the engine room. In the engine room I knew where, they didn't let me touch the throttle. There was always a senior petty officer on the throttles in those big ships. And

31:00 as time advanced, when I was on the small ship I was always on the throttle in the small ships. A leading hand was sufficient to be on the throttle in those little smaller vessels.

Was there any process of initiation involved when you joined Perth?

No. No. We had to register at the ship's office and go to the payroll of course.

31:30 The papers went from ship to ship with you. You didn't carry them yourself. They were sent prior to you leaving one ship to the other and then they were in the ship's office. You had to check through the ship's office and then you went down, the engine room had a chief stoker's office and his staff. He was the regulating chief stoker. He slotted people into their different jobs and their rotation and according to their grading and their training.

32:00 Everything was checked thoroughly step by step. Obviously it was to complete everybody's training so we all had a fair indication of all the jobs we were expected to do along the line. There was one important thing about the stoker, stokers generally made up the fire parties in action stations, and I had experience at this too. We were in a fire party.

32:30 We wore those fireproof suits. I can't remember the name of it. The big fire rig gear we used to have to put on and we were in the hose parties. Some of them were just bucket brigades and some of them were long fire hoses of course you might imagine. But that was an important part of the stoker's work too.

Did you do practise drills?

We did fire drills. Oh yes, we had that.

- 33:00 **Were there many stokers around at that stage within the navy, was there quite a demand for them?**
- Oh yes. About a third of the navy were all someone involved in making the ships work. It was no good us all being gunners or else we'd have a slow ship, wouldn't we, if we were all gunners.
- Was there any unofficial initiation process as far as becoming a**
- 33:30 **sailor just amongst the blokes? Any little rituals or anything that had to be carried out?**
- Not really but they knew.
- Any drinking of rum or?**
- Well the Australian navy never had a rum issue. That was only in the British navy. I experienced it once. I was attached to the Royal Navy at one stage, only for three weeks. We had a rum issue but even in those days we were still quite young
- 34:00 and we were given our rum issue, it was only a tot of rum anyway and there was always some old hands, some old shellbacks who soon got to like those young blokes who didn't like rum so they got our rum. But as soon as we used all our rum they didn't talk to us any more. We were pals while we were giving them rum. No. I didn't drink the rum at all because I didn't like it.
- So you were**
- 34:30 **happy to find yourself on board Perth. You found it to be a good vessel, to be involved in?**
- It was the newest vessel. It was six years old but it was still the newest vessel in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy]. We had only just got it. Perth didn't arrive in Australia until six or eight months after the war had started. It was on the way through the Panama when war was declared and it got sent back again, this is how close it was and it did six months in the
- 35:00 Caribbean, patrolling there. It didn't see any war there. Of course there was no threat in the Caribbean from the German navy at that stage. It got sent back to the canals and it was completed from then. When the time was up it came back out here, back to Sydney. It had been in Australia some three or four months or five months or something before I
- 35:30 joined it. Anyway we were the first of these wartime recruits into the ship much to the resentment of all the old hard heads. They thought they were exclusive, they didn't have to have reservists coming onto their ship.
- Was there a bit of resentment when you were first there?**
- Yes. There was. Some of them were quite silly the way they went on, didn't want any wartime recruits. They thought they were something exclusive, particularly
- 36:00 as they thought they were selected. And they were too perhaps. They went on Australia's newest ship and we broke down their aura of self congratulations. They were not so exclusive after all.
- So you were thrown straight into convoy work?**
- Yeah. I didn't think about that afterward was I wanted to join the navy to go and fight and I got sent on the most active ship of its time, straight into it.
- 36:30 **So typically you were involved in convoys from where to where?**
- It started, well the first convoy was across to Fremantle. Then we stationed in Fremantle for about six weeks and we did other escorts from Fremantle half way up the Indian
- 37:00 Ocean and the [HMAS] Canberra was stationed in Colombo and those two ships would meet at some halfway point. The Perth would return to Fremantle and wait for another convoy. We didn't do much waiting, we were always at sea, come and get fuel and go out. The raiders were around, those German raiders were around in those days and we were always out chasing them. And they sunk a lot of ships too, those German raiders.
- 37:30 We didn't find any of them of course, it was a vast ocean but other ships found them. So it wasn't only convoys. We were stationed there. We were the defensive vessel attached on the Western Coast in that particular period. And in November we moved on to the
- 38:00 Middle East.
- Before we talk about that move, how did you go during your first voyage to Fremantle as far as your sea legs were concerned?**
- I got seasick. I got seasick and embarrassed myself. The senior hands all come crook and it's all over the steel deck of the engine room and I had to clean it up of course. I never got seasick
- 38:30 all my time in service after that there but there you are. That was an experience. My very first night on

a ship I was seasick. And it's not to be wondered at either. There was a strange atmosphere and I was rather over awed, not necessarily frightened but it was strange. No wonder I got, and of course most of the ship was entirely new, I had never been to sea. I was seasick but it never happened again and all the years I saw there and those other people

39:00 took weeks on end some of them being seasick. You weren't allowed to, very rarely did they ever take someone from a ship because of seasickness. Most of the officers used to think you were a bit of an impostor trying to get off a ship because you were seasick. That wasn't an excuse, you had to suffer. The poor devils did too.

So I imagine the old sea hands made you

39:30 **feel pretty bad and awkward about being crook on that first voyage?**

Oh they did. First of all I was an object of derision, getting seasick. I didn't know but perhaps they'd been the same themselves when they started too.

So there was no sympathy?

No sympathy. No. This is part of your life. This is what you chose to do. There was nowhere to go. You were a seaman. You had to put up with it.

So you were essentially based in

40:00 **Fremantle?**

That was only for three months and then we moved on. As I say we got drafted over to the Middle East.

Did you spend much time around Fremantle?

Yeah we did too. The ship only had to come back to refuel and that might have been ten days at sea and then they'd come back and top up again with the fuel. That was an important part of all the vessels staying at sea.

40:30 It would be a folly to have a ship be engaged in some action and be caught with a low level of fuel. They had to keep all vessels at all times as near to capacity as they could. And that was one of the restrictions on small fast little destroyers. They didn't have a very big range the destroyer. They were built for high consumption of fuel and they were very fast but

41:00 they're small tanks. They couldn't carry very much. They had a limited time at sea. And if they did have long voyage, ten days at sea, they would send them, I forget where it was but at various time we would go on one boiler so we didn't consume too much oil. They were ready of course, the other boilers were ready to be engaged if there was occasion,

41:30 where action was threatened. But that's how important it was to conserve the fuel.

Tape 3

00:32 **So coming in and out of Fremantle what sort of route were you taking the convoy ships, the troop ships on?**

Well we were taking them across to Colombo. We only went half way and there was another vessel, the Canberra was based in Colombo. They'd come down and pick us up at the half way mark and that's sort of how they were transported up there. But that didn't last, it lasted a couple of months

01:00 and that was interspersed with the chasing raiders. The Germans had raider ships in the ocean there and they were sinking merchant ships on their own. Actually that was very evident when they sank the Sydney. That was twelve months later than our time. That was in November of '41. Well in November of '40 we were in the same area doing

01:30 the same thing. But the Sydney got caught and it was sunk in consequence.

So did you feel a bit apprehensive being out there?

Well apprehensive, alert but not afraid of it. We were self confident really. We thought our ship was the best ship in the sea. Everyone knew that, fortunately. No, we were not worried about it.

What were your

02:00 **living accommodations like on the Perth?**

Very sparse. There were no deckchairs on there I can tell you and sheilas [women] serving drinks or anything. We didn't find any of that. We were just lucky to find a rest place. All the sunny places were crowded in times of relaxation. Of course we weren't working all the time. There was an off duty watch all the time, there was somebody who had completed a watch and had time off to recover.

02:30 Same as if we were down in the boiler room, glad to come up into the fresh air. That was the way it was, a routine of exchanges.

And what sort of personal space did you have?

Not very much. We had a place to sling our hammock and that was only two feet either side of you there was a hammock swinging there. And actually if the ship rolled too much one hammock would be hitting the other hammock.

03:00 That's how close they were. There was not a lot of personal space.

What was the tucker like aboard?

Pretty good. It was nothing very fancy of course but it was good food really. It was always nicely prepared on a big ship. I am trying to think what we did have but there was a regular routine. Bacon and eggs was pretty regular on ships and then

03:30 some hash food. I didn't like them. Any mass produced food I suppose is not the best but it was good clean wholesome food all the time. One thing we did like and I didn't learn to appreciate then but as the years went on, fresh bread on a ship. It was rather a unique thing for a serviceman to have anywhere but we were eating fresh bread all the time. That was very evident at times when we had to transport

04:00 soldiers sometimes. Of course we did at times. They would come aboard pretty bedraggled and war weary. They would be exhausted and some of them had been sleeping in their clothes for weeks when we'd had soldiers. And we would give them all the best we could but they always wondered where we were able to get them fresh bread. They didn't bother put anything on it. They'd just get the fresh bread and they'd eat

04:30 the bread freshly cooked. We all like fresh bread I guess but they were getting it and they'd never had it for months.

So how long did you run around in the Indian Ocean for?

Not very long really. A limit of, it would have been less than six months, that particular station but we were destined to go into the Mediterranean and that was another posting that lasted a lot longer, more dramatic.

So when did that come about?

05:00 At the end of December we moved out of the Indian Ocean. No, end of November we moved in the Indian Ocean. We were in, 12th of December which I will remember was my twentieth birthday, on the 12th of December we were in Aden and we had two Italian bombers came over. They were very high. We were firing guns at them. Which was,

05:30 well it was exciting. It was the first experience we had of gunfire other than practising. This was enemy up the top but it was very high and remote and that was the purpose of firing, to keep them high. And it always was to try, any defensive gunfire was not necessarily to shoot them down but to keep them away from accurate bombing and attack. These two Italians, they had come out of Eritrea and Aden.

06:00 But all they did was futile. Look. They did drop bombs but they fell way over the other side of the harbour.

So what did it sound like from down below when you heard all those guns open up?

Well it was initiation. It got quite common. I never got used to it but it was a common sound, the gunfire when you were down below. All the ship would shake and resonate through the ship, with the heavy gunfire. The gunfire

06:30 frightened you more than the actual bombs going off. We couldn't hear the bombs because they fell in the water. But you could hear the gunfire, yeah.

Were you able to get off the ship at Aden?

Yes. I got off the ship in Aden. It was my first foreign port. I never forgot what a desperate hopeless place it was. My goodness. We weren't very enthralled about at all. When we were coming home we were

07:00 coming home some twelve months or more later we went to Aden again because it was a fuelling point. That was the main reason the British held the place. There was certainly no other attraction there. There was nothing defensive about it but it was a fuelling point.

So you didn't think much of your first foreign.

No. I did not. No.

From Aden where did you proceed to?

07:30 Well we went through the Suez Canal then. And that was exciting, the famous Suez Canal and we were

that buoyant, we even had, the ship had, we had a brass band aboard the ship and they all entertained us up on the forecastle. We took about twelve hours to go through the canal. We were all up there having a gay old mood. We didn't know what was going to be on the other side when we got to the Mediterranean.

08:00 It was all big trouble was in the Mediterranean and we were soon going to find that out. So we went through the Mediterranean into Port Said and then into Alexandria. Alexandria became our base.

So you arrived in Alexandria.

Yeah. We arrived in Alexandria on Christmas Eve 1940. We spent

08:30 that day and two nights there. On Boxing Day, we had Christmas Day in Alex.

How did you celebrate Christmas Day?

With a traditional navy Christmas dinner. They provided the very best. We had turkey, well poultry. I don't know how much turkey there was. And all the trimmings were good. We even got an issue of beer, a bottle of beer. We didn't get too many issues of beer but we got a bottle of beer for our Christmas dinner. That was something we celebrated but

09:00 then the war started for us. The next day, Boxing Day we were up off the coast of Bardia. I might have told you that before but that's where we were. We were up at Bardia and we were supporting the advance of the 6th division that were moving in their drive up the coast and then they went as far as Benghazi. Into Tunisia they went up there. And then they were driven back.

09:30 They ran into the Germans. The Italians were up there but they didn't give any resistance to the 6th division. Lots of prisoners, Italian prisoners were taken but then the Germans made a difference. The Germans started to force them back down again. And then ensued, eventually after some months the siege of Tobruk began because of that German advance down the coast.

10:00 And so what were you doing off the coast of Bardia then?

Bombarding. The ship was there. The Perth and some other ships were involved bombarding the coast and supporting our troops on shore.

Were you aware that they were Australian troops that you were supporting?

Yes. We couldn't see them but the ship knew who they were helping, yeah.

10:30 Did you receive any opposition?

No. Not there. There was no shore guns capable of firing the distance our ship was able to.

When you were down in the engine room or the boiler room how noisy is the noise of the machinery and the fans?

It's bad enough in ordinary steaming time. There's, I have indicated there that the boiler room's always

11:00 under pressure and there's enormous fans that keep the pressure and cause the draft, upward draft through the boiler passages and then through the funnel of course. That's noisy enough but to talk in there, you had to talk loudly to hear. Generally messages were given by signals. There was always a chief stoker in charge of a boiling room. He had a system of signs he used to transfer across the boiler room to,

11:30 if he wanted further sprayers. If sprayers up, sprayers down to increase the steam pressure and that was done by signs. And the engine room was not so noisy. It had a definite high-toned whine was I guess, the whir of the machinery. But you were

12:00 audible to speak with each other. But when there were action stations on, when the four-inch guns were firing, the anti aircraft guns. There was four twin mounts right directly above the aft boiler room and that must have been the most frightening place I've been in. It was just the sound of our guns and the whir and the pressure and the whole ship was under power,

12:30 high power the ship and of course the ship would shudder and shake and it would shake because of the vibration of the gunfire and sometimes close bombs were enough to shake it too. And you've heard about this asbestos, I've well experienced that, how it could happen. All the lagging, the lagging was the asbestos rope placed around the steam pipes to

13:00 conserve the heat should it be necessary and the flakes of this asbestos would break away and you'd think it was a snowstorm. That was true, how heavy it was. The exhaust from the guns was sucked in by our fans too. That made it worse, made it cloudy in the room. It was a terrible place to be, this aft boiler room in these air raids.

13:30 I didn't experience, we all had that experience rotated. We weren't made to suffer very much of it but we were rotated around so we copped that and that would be the worst position. There were other positions. If you didn't have a job in the engine room or the boiler room or the fire party there were always different jobs that spare hands had to do when they were off watch and I was

- 14:00 allocated jobs of all places in the magazine. That's deep in the bowels of the ship. If you were going to be afraid, you'd be afraid in it and in the lock down, about four decks and they were all clamped down with big hatches were clamped down on top of you. And don't forget we were sitting on gunpowder, cordite it was and the stokers became shell handlers. Not only stokers but spare cooks and whoever was spare hands,
- 14:30 all had to work in these confined spaces like that.
- So it could be a pretty unpleasant workplace at times.**
- Yeah. It could be the very worst one. To indicate how dangerous it was we all had to wear felt slippers. We were not allowed to wear our boots in there. We had to put on felt covers over our shoes. There were sparks because it was a steel deck, the decks were steel but to resist the
- 15:00 chance of sparks the cordite containers were all aluminium. Of course that wouldn't cause a spark, aluminium but there was still enough steel stanchions in there to cause a spark. They wouldn't let us wear boots with nails in them. We had to put slippers over the top.
- For the noise did you get any ear protection?**
- Ears, yes, we had earplugs. We were all issued with earplugs and we used them.
- But I guess you didn't get anything for**
- 15:30 **breathing?**
- No. We didn't get any masks or anything for that. No. But earplugs. Yep.
- To your knowledge has that environment affected the health of stokers?**
- It did. There was lots of that. There's a complicated word for asbestos lung poisoning. Like Mesaloma, I don't know the name.
- Mesothelioma?**
- That's the one, yeah, that's the one that's caused through working in all these
- 16:00 asbestos spaces, yeah. But we weren't aware of the dangers anyway. I worked for many years in other ships. Not to the severity of the one but all the time I used to be applying this lagging and it came in various forms. You would have to seal these asbestos ropes and you would cut them and use big clippers and saws on it to put it into place. Fortunately
- 16:30 I never copped anything as a result of it but some of my pals did. Of course they are dead. It affected them so badly.
- Ok. So you were bombarding Bardia but didn't get any opposition back from that. From supporting the Australian 6th division into Bardia where did the Perth sail off to?**
- Well not immediately but we went back to Alex all the time. We had to go back to Alex where there was a
- 17:00 fuelling point there. That was our centre. We were then allocated, the next major operation was the relief of Malta. They had been without a supply for some months because the Germans blockaded the place both with aircraft and submarines. And so they forced, there was a gathering of warships and freighters
- 17:30 and we met them at Gibraltar and we took that, from the Atlantic we took them through into Malta, under constant air raid too. The Germans were determined to make Malta be starved out. And that was a big breakthrough and a well known action that one.
- So you picked up the convoys in Gibraltar and then did the run across.**
- We were not in the harbour. We were off Gibraltar.
- 18:00 I actually saw Gibraltar in the dark. The gathering of ships had come down the North Sea with a British escort and there was another escort into the Mediterranean and we picked up from there and continued then into Malta.
- Now prior to that you just had the kind of nuisance bombing by the Italians in Aden and then not much opposition off the coast of Africa. Things were getting a bit more serious now.**
- This one, the
- 18:30 Malta thing was the first introduction to the serious stuff that was there. And very serious too.
- Can you describe what your experience was below decks being under that much attack?**
- Well that was, I didn't feel any different. I had been getting used to it in a way. The odd ones, sporadic firings in the

19:00 depths. I didn't really, I was concerned, that's not to say I wasn't concerned. I was frightened as such. Not to the extent that I was going to give in or panic or something. And some fellows did unfortunately. Some fellows broke in this sort of thing and they were invariably shipped away. They sent them home because they couldn't take the pace.

Did anybody from your immediate area pack it in?

Yes.

I'm not asking for a name

19:30 **or anything like that.**

Yes. I can remember one fellow was so distraught when we were in Alexandria Harbour and we got raided there one night. And that again was rather frightening again because we weren't allowed to defend it. We were in the inner harbour and only ships in the outer harbour could fire. And the ground forces around the perimeter, they had anti-aircraft fire and searchlights. And we were in the middle of this and close in the harbour and ships

20:00 tightly together were not allowed to fire. So we were there. We were suffering there. We were in action but we weren't doing anything. We were inactive. This poor fellow, I remember him, he went berserk. He couldn't stand this pressure and a few of us, he was a stoker. He wasn't working, he was on the upper deck. We grabbed him and we held him down and they went for the doctor.

20:30 We had a doctor on it. And he came back with his little bag, and while we were holding him he gave him a needle to quieten him down. He went to sleep of course. The next morning he was taken ashore and he was sent back to Australia. His nerves got the better of him.

Being below deck and below the water line when you were under attack from aircraft or whatever. Does that not

21:00 **give you a little voice in the back of your head about.**

Oh sure did. I knew there was about a half-inch steel plate and outside was a torpedo perhaps. I didn't like that at all. And of course that was reality too. Many ships were lost. That half-inch steel plate didn't hold when a torpedo hit it, no. I must admit that was always there but you couldn't bear to think about it. You would never have been able to continue to work. You just had to keep doing it.

21:30 **What sort of, technically what was the evacuation procedure then for guys down below like you?**

Well I don't know that we were ever given any instructions on how to get out of there. There was always a petty officer in charge of each little compartment and he had the authority to decide whether it was too dangerous to stay where he was. It could have been a fire, not necessarily

22:00 any action. There were procedures to evacuate places and of course there were fire control systems, extinguishers and such. They'd go off if you were to be caught in there. And then of course one that was a very frightening thing was they were able to flood the compartments from up on the top deck. I didn't like that idea at all. Some fellow with a remote control lever can open the flood valves and you're locked

22:30 down in a steel box. That was a gruesome thing to contemplate. That was another hazard you had to live with. And lots of people think about, because you were a stoker you were the only one, on any vessel there wouldn't have been, if I said twenty per cent would be the most people exposed and actually seeing the enemy. The rest of us all had inside jobs.

23:00 For instance the gunners were in those big turrets. They didn't see the enemy. They were following a plot. The plot was prepared by the lookouts and the gun layers. The range finders were. They set the range and they put a plan down below and it had to be transferred to the turret captain. He had a telescope or a viewing point. He could see out

23:30 through the slits in the turret. But the rest of the crew and the gun crew, they didn't see the enemy. They were preparing the gun for firing. And that's only one bit, there were all the other postings right through. Signalmen and radio men and all of them. Most people are inside and under cover.

If the hull had been breached when you were down there what sort of chance would you have had of

24:00 **getting out?**

As long as the explosion, it knocked a bit of concussion for instance or you could have been killed of course initially, but if you could survive that then there would be a scramble. There were the usual access ladders on either side of a boiler room and in the engine room there were ladders to reach the top deck.

And what sort of damage control training and procedures did you have?

Oh quite efficient really.

- 24:30 There were methods to shore up a breach in a ship. There were great billets of timber in all sizes and strengths and shapes and collision mattresses. They were a big thick rope mattress, I don't know they might have been I think ten foot square, terribly heavy. It would take a couple of men to lift these mats. But they were supposed to plug the hole
- 25:00 and then methods of, this timber was to shore up the holes. The perceived holes, I never saw one happen but all that gear was in every ship to shore up holes if need be or try to shore them up. And it was successful of course in lots of cases. Many ships came back with a damaged hull and with this stuff to shore up the hull.
- They still use them today the bits of timber.**
- Yeah. Still use them, yeah.
- 25:30 **So in a case like the Malta convoy where you were under more or less continuous attack how did your working day go as far as what shifts and where and action stations all the time?**
- If you were in a boiler room you couldn't stay there too long. There would be a relief watch come down but gunners for instance, they would stay in their post most of the time.
- 26:00 They weren't firing the gun all the time, they were just ready, an actual attack might last twenty or thirty minutes and then they would be on the alert for the next wave of bombers or whatever it might be. But in the boiler room under terrible heat and the noise and the vibration. That was a terrible stress. Those men had to be relieved more frequently than the fellows in the less stressful positions.
- How often do you reckon that would be?**
- 26:30 Well they did their four hours and then they would be relieved. When I copped it, being junior hand I used to get hot cocoa was the thing. We used to get hot cocoa as relief and I used to go with a big billy can or dixie it was called, I would take it upstairs. I would take it up to the top deck to the galley and get this
- 27:00 cocoa or ky [hot chocolate] it was called and take that back down to us and we'd all get a refresher of this hot cocoa to revive us. And that was a junior hand's job.
- So you were the skivvy of.**
- Oh initially I was, when I first joined, yeah.
- So you'd work four hours and then how many hours would you get off?**
- Eight. Four on, eight off.
- So after four hours working in that environment what would you do to**
- 27:30 **relax or clean up?**
- Oh you had to eat, cleaned yourself up of course, and sleep. And if you were able in more peaceful times you might play cards or such as that to pass the time. So there was, we were always glad to have time off. We always found something to do. You might think it would be monotonous but you filled your time between watch keeping.
- 28:00 **What were your impressions of Malta when you got into the harbour?**
- It was an ancient old harbour. And don't forget it was the first time I had seen anything like this. I was more impressed than most but Malta is still an ancient harbour, it had been there in the times of the crusades, or before that. It has a long history, Malta. And that was impressive. The historic part impressed me. I was impressed with that but it was cramped too.
- 28:30 There was lots of British ships there. It was a submarine base and there was a submarine in the dock there in this particular, and the submarine was bombed and wrecked in this particular raid it was in the dry dock. I can remember that submarine getting knocked out. Other ships were damaged in that initial raid there. We went into Malta twice, similar experiences, both to relieve the pressure of the,
- 29:00 well they were starving. The Maltese people were starving at those times.
- And what sort of battle damage could you see around Malta?**
- Well see the warehouse and they'd be maintenance depots from the dockyards, they were damaged. They suffered bomb damage. We had a large aircraft carrier, the [HMS] Illustrious. That had been damaged on the way in there. They attacked
- 29:30 the largest ship. It was a target for them and they did. They tried to knock it out. But the ship was put out of action by the flight deck was damaged and they couldn't use it for the purposes it was there. And this was ironic, they had been working on it for a couple of days, three days or whatever, dockies [dock workers] and they repaired this big hole in the deck

30:00 and remarkably in the ensuing raid they got a bomb in the same place they had been repairing and wrecked it again, wrecked the same deck. The ship was taken the following day. They didn't continue that, they took the Illustrious and ourselves. We all left and we went to Alexandria at that time. We had to get out of that.

Did you experience any air raids when you were in Malta?

Yes. This is the one we were talking about. We were getting that.

30:30 Perth was tied alongside of course, yeah and we took a bomb. It fell between the wharf and the ship. You can imagine how close that was. All it did, it exploded under the water near the stern and it wrecked one of the propellers and the propeller shaft, not the propeller, it was the shaft got bent. So we had to come back to Alexandria on three propellers.

31:00 We had time in the dock there while they replaced the shaft, got a new propeller shaft for the damaged one. Oh it damaged, dented the tanks. The oil tanks were between the sea and the hull of the ship and it dented them. We were losing oil. Oil was leaking and that had to be repaired also.

Were you aboard the vessel when that happened?

Yes. I was

31:30 off watch but I wasn't up, this was right at the stern of the ship and I was up forward on the ship. Yeah. I wasn't the watch keeper man. It was just in the harbour. We just have spare jobs like being in a fire party. You'd be ready dressed in this fire fighting gear and stationed in some section of the ship that was allocated. That's where you stayed.

32:00 I wasn't near where the bomb was but it lifted the ship about six feet out of the water. It was quite noticeable what happened. It was so fortunate. It would have blown the stern off the ship had it hit the ship itself.

So you were definitely aware that something had hit the ship?

Yes. We knew that something had happened to the ship.

There must have been a couple of seconds of worry there?

Oh my word. We didn't know what it was and then we got the message it didn't hit

32:30 the ship. We thought the ship had been hit but it was the bit between the wharf and the ship. And there was another one. There was a gang plank there of course and when you are in a harbour the toilets were, we had to use the shore toilets because you couldn't pump out in a harbour and we'd use the shore toilets. And we were, up right at the end of this particular raid one of our fellows went into this toilet block and

33:00 he came out in a panic. He saw that a bomb was embedded in the floor. It had gone through the roof of this toilet and just inside the door was this bomb. It was a frightening thing and he come back and we were all warned off. Of course they didn't need to tell us twice not to go into the toilet. And that was the danger. That was only twenty feet off the ship. That bomb could have got us too there.

Did you actually get to see any of the German

33:30 **aircraft?**

Oh yes. Not on the Perth. I saw them, because it was a big ship and my jobs were always enclosed. But when I got on the destroyer it was a much smaller vessel and if I was on watch in those times of attack I didn't see it because I was down below. But when I was not down below I was again in this fire party up on the deck. And that's when you can see what was going on. You can see dogfights and all the action

34:00 that gunfire does. I did see it then.

The damage from the bomb in Malta, could any of that be repaired whilst underway or was it too?

Oh no, no, the shaft had to be taken out of the water to replace the shaft to start with because it went through the hull of the ship, the shaft. So the ship was out of action for, it might have been nearly a week getting that done, in the dock.

34:30 **So you went back to Alex [Alexandria] for that.**

Yeah.

What did you think of Alexandria and the Egyptians?

Well Alexandria was just a service town and rather a sparse Egyptian city. It wasn't a very glamorous sort of place. There was not a lot to do there. Bars everywhere. They were filled up with the soldiers and sailors that were there. And it

35:00 wasn't a very attractive place at all but it was a good respite for us. And one of the most famous places there was the fleet club. They had a wonderful fleet club there for the Royal Navy, they were instigators. Traditionally they were in Alexandria and there was a big base and they did have this big fleet club there and that was a place of good entertainment. They had various entertainers come there and give a stage show. But mainly they used to play tombola.

35:30 What's tombola? It's like bingo. And of course Englishman, they all liked tombola and I learned to play tombola there. It was a good pastime. And drinking beer. There was plenty of beer. It was only Stella Beer, not a very enticing beer but it was the best beer, the only you could get so that did us.

So the fleet club was a regular haunt?

Yeah. It was a big

36:00 attractive place and it was safe too. In the streets of Malta there was assaults by robbers and whatever. They did take advantage of whoever they could. But the locals were doing that.

Did you have any rivalries with the Pommy [English] sailors?

Not personally but it was an undercurrent all the time. It was a tribal thing really. I had some good pals with them too. There was a little bit of animosity,

36:30 a mutual sling off at each other and that sort of thing but it was nothing very serious. They were valued comrades really.

But you would needle each other a little bit?

Oh yeah. Oh of course. You still get it now from ship to ship. You get blokes doing that now. But it wasn't very serious.

And what about your interactions with the Egyptians and shopping and all that sort of, sight seeing.

I suppose they were all right

37:00 but there was many tales of the Egyptians were prone to take advantage of a person in a foreign country. They had the advantage and they would sell some, an unknowing sailor would buy a watch for example and the watch would be a worthless watch and they would have it done up like some rare European watch and that sort of thing but they were taken in other words.

37:30 It is still a common practise today I understand. The watches is a good illustration but other things, oh another good story about how the Gypos [Egyptians] robbed, we had ten o'clock leave. Normally you had to be in the ship by ten o'clock at night. If you were lucky. Four o'clock or ten o'clock was about our leave time. So you didn't get very far ashore but it was necessary to give men a break.

38:00 They couldn't be in the confined space of a ship all the time. This particular night I was coming back with a pal back to the wharf in the dark and we come back in a taxi and we were all gathered in. This was down the back end of the wharves and it was dark or semi-dark. They had a brown out there. And we got to the gates of the dockyard and we were told that our particular ship had extended leave. Instead of being ready for sea the next day they had another

38:30 couple of days. So we could stay off till whatever, anyway overnight leave, we had that if we wanted. It was pretty rare. We didn't get overnight leave. There was no where to go anyway much. So we didn't go back straight aboard the ship. We were going back making our way up to town when another one of our friends arrived in one of those horse drawn carry, it was one of those four wheel horse driven vehicles. A rather fancy type vehicle and

39:00 then this fellow, he had had too much to drink and we stopped him and we were talking to him in his carry. And he said, "Well let's go back up to town," and he got back in his carry. So two of us we got back in with him and the driver turned around and we were going up town again. And he said, "I just bought a bottle of whisky." Good whisky is as rare as could be and you had to be wary of whisky. They had

39:30 all sorts of tricks, they filled it up with cold tea. "No. Not this one." He said, "I've examined it thoroughly and it was sealed. The seal was intact." Well we are going on our way up in the dark and he undoes the top off it, took a swig of it and it was cold tea. So we turfed it and we took it up under a lamp and we examined it and in the bottom it had a pin hole sealed with a little bit of wax.

40:00 It was in the curved bottom of this bottle of Johnny Walker and they had gone to the trouble of drilling the tiniest hole in this bottle and taking the valuable whisky out of it and filled it again with cold tea. It must have been an awful procedure trying to get a bottle of tea through a tiny little hole in it, a microscopic hole. Anyway my pal got duded with his bottle of whisky. So

40:30 that's what the natives did to him, robbers. He was a bit, well, I told him he should have bought it onto the ship because it was half (UNCLEAR). It was a big joke, this wise guy got caught.

So no love lost between the sailors and the Egyptians.

No. No not at all. No. The soldiers had to live ashore with them all the time. They were very difficult about it. The soldiers have told me they'd sneak into the camp and steal their shoes when they were asleep.

41:00 They'd put a blanket on top of their shoes and they'd still pluck the shoes out from under the blanket while they were asleep. That's how adept they were. Taking the soldiers' boots. The only way they could go to sleep and keep their shoes was to go to sleep with their shoes on.

Tape 4

00:30 **We were just talking a bit about what you got up to in Egypt so I have to ask whether you or the blokes you were friendly with ever did a little bit of exploring around the brothels or any of the delights of the local**

01:00 **lasses that were available to an eager young sailor.**

I think you are overdoing it with the delights of the place. I saw them but it was the most repulsive looking activity I can recall. I was horrified really with what was going on. I saw these queues of soldiers and sailors too lining up to go through the procedure. I was horrified so I was well aware of it

01:30 and very choosy. I didn't get myself involved in that sort of activity. It wasn't through prudery either. I was curious what was doing but I thought it was going to be something more glamorous than that. Queuing up one after the other, that's awful. So that's my experience of sister street I think was the name of the place. No.

Was there any other way or having any other sort of contact with women, bars or clubs where you could sort of mix with some?

02:00 Not really. No. No. There were girls working in a NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] canteen there. They were English women but they were only working there. They probably had many offers if they were that way inclined but it never finished with any of our fellows being involved with them at all. No. But there were English girls and women. But so very few and there was certainly no

02:30 dance halls that we could go to. There was one night club, but there was no women, the Petit Trianon. I remember that was an exclusive place and we were allowed to get in there. Eventually we were barred from going in there not because we had done anything wrong but the officers wanted it for themselves so they made it an officers only venue. But they did have entertainment. It was a nice well conducted large restaurant and we could

03:00 get something decent to eat and wine or beer but it was more expensive. We couldn't afford to go there very much really but I did go there a number of times. That was a very nice place to go. But then the officers claimed it for themselves, they didn't want the hoi polloi disturbing their days ashore. Yeah.

Were you much of a drinker in those days?

No. I couldn't afford it anyway. But I did, I had some. I always drank something but not very much.

03:30 **And did you get to do any sightseeing. Did you get to look at the pyramids or anything like that?**

I didn't get to the pyramids. There was never time enough in there to get out of Alexandria. But I remember seeing the catacombs. That was impressive. In the heart of Alexandria there were catacombs there and I was very impressed with that. There were down below ground of course on these walkways and the niches in the walls and there was these degenerated bones,

04:00 decomposed bones. I was amazed. I was looking at stuff that was a couple of thousand years old. These collapsed skeletons were sitting on a stone shelf. Yeah. That was an impressive thing.

Were there people around to take you on tours or did you just sort of wander around by yourself?

No. That particular place it was a, how would I put it? They didn't take you through it. It was just a one way passage. You walked through these catacombs and came out the other end.

04:30 That was the thing. There wasn't a guided tour. There were no other places I saw like it as such. No guided tours there. That was Alexandria. Later on as I started to relate before I did have a guided tour of Jerusalem. That was worthwhile. But that was the only one I did myself. Don't forget there was no time for touring over there. Soldiers might have had more time but a ship was that valuable they

05:00 had to get every day's work out of every ship, they had to keep working them all the time. They were very short of ships. Admiral Cunningham, he always decried his lack of ships particularly when he kept losing a lot of them. That made it worse for his planning. But the ships were so valuable that the ship's company didn't have much time to enjoy their selves. No.

05:30 **Because you were under so much demand and because of the gruelling nature of working in the boiler room was there much impact on you physically? Was it hard to maintain that sort of level of commitment physically, did it take a toll?**

It did too. When we were in the, it was exhausting in regards to the heat was oppressing and then you would go from heat to cold, that didn't do us any good.

06:00 Any people working in those hot confined places had to suffer that, the contrast at times. The Mediterranean was a nice balmy place normally but we were there during the Mediterranean winter. That was quite severe. We spent some terrible days at sea. The seas instead of being lovely Mediterranean cruising like you see in the picture books, it wasn't like that at all.

06:30 Some of it was. Most of it was wild stormy seas in a ship. Ships were never to be deterred by the nature of the sea. If they had to go from point to point, they had to go there no matter what the weather was like. So it was trying in other words, is that what you were asking? It was a trying activity. But it didn't have any ongoing thing with me. I've

07:00 had treatment for bronchitis. The only thing I left the navy with, they accepted my condition of bronchitis which was caused I guess by this alternating effect on the lungs. I had this. That's worn off in my old age. I never suffered much. My chest never worried me in years later on.

Was it challenging to keep the weight on since you were, you know, doing a lot of sweating, a lot of hard work, did you start to lose weight?

07:30 Well I never gained much weight. I was nine stone seven when I joined and six years later I was ten stone seven. Not that that means much. The most I ever got was just over eleven stone. I'm eleven stone now. And understand that contributes to a persons good health. You maintain your weight, whatever it is, your constant weight indicates reasonable health. I'm told that by doctors and I am quite pleased I'm as healthy as I am.

08:00 And when it comes back to that, if I didn't have that rotten rheumatism I'd be pretty good for an old bloke. I've got rheumatism but it's a legacy from my dear old Mum. She passed on, with all the good things she passed to me she passed on her rheumatism. One sister got it but the other four siblings weren't affected but I copped it badly.

08:30 I'll excuse my mother for that.

So I just wanted to talk a little bit about the Tobruk convoys. Were there many incidents for you during that time?

Well the procedure was doing, it was called the Tobruk ferry. It was to relieve

09:00 the garrison that was there, to take supplies in and reinforcements and bring out the wounded. Now that was the routine of all the ships. Generally this was done by destroyers. There were other smaller vessels did it but it was destroyers. A large ship couldn't get into the harbour. It was a relatively tight harbour. But it wasn't large enough to take a cruiser. They didn't want to take a cruiser in a confined space like that anyway. But destroyers were in and out of there.

09:30 The procedure was to leave Alexandria and it was timed dusk, two hours before dark and then another two hours into the harbour. And we were in the vicinity of Mersa Matruh when the dark began to fall. And that was the danger period, dusk and dawn. We'd run in the dusk

10:00 and as soon as the dark come we were safe, the bombers couldn't get us. We'd get into the harbour and the decks were loaded with all the stores and the reinforcing soldiers. They couldn't get them inside the ship vessel anyway. There was no room for them inside. And they were unloaded. Everybody turned too between eleven and one. And the ship

10:30 had to leave the harbour at one o'clock so they only had two hours in there. And all their stuff got funnelled off. Sometimes a ship left and it still had stores on it. But we were ordered out of the place. And they had subdued lighting on barges alongside. We never went alongside the wharves there but other ships, the other destroyer did I understand. Mainly we went up to the barges in the stream and the soldiers were on there receiving all the discharges, and receiving the reinforcement soldiers

11:00 and we were loaded with the wounded and that took place within two hours. And then on the way back we had a couple of hours of darkness again and at dawn we'd get down, it would become daylight and we were still not free of the enemy air force. They could fly without the protection of, the top half of Egypt, Mersa Matruh was relatively safe.

11:30 The Germans used to, they weren't down that low so we were attacked by Stukas in that particular period. And if we got close enough to the Egyptian border we had the protection or sometimes, mostly I guess, we had the protection of the British Hurricane forces. They used to be the fighter forces. But there was that danger period of course in that close area. On one occasion

12:00 coming back there the Germans came over. There were about a dozen or fourteen or whatever Stukas came through and they began their attack. There was the other destroyer and ourselves in it and we were getting a pretty hard time. We didn't get hit but all the guns were working hard and we had these

people coming at us everywhere. And out

- 12:30 of this blue I think it was seven Hurricanes came over from Egypt. The Hurricanes were far better at manoeuvrability than the fighters, than the dive bombers. The dive bombers were good at their job but they weren't fighter planes. And in the first five minutes one of the Germans got shot down. He came down a hundred yards from the ship. There was a lot of cheers in that one. Anyhow they eventually drove them off. We watched this dogfight going on and that was one of the best parts of the war I saw,
- 13:00 these Germans getting. And it went on for fifteen minutes before they disappeared and in the distance we saw another one come down so I actually saw two Germans shot down.

Where were you, what was your vantage point?

Oh I was on the upper deck then. I was in the fire party and that meant I was on the upper deck. And that was always a job for a spare hand. You were allocated some sort of emergency job like that.

- 13:30 If I'd have been in the engine room or the boiler room I wouldn't have seen this particular occasion. And another thing I want to tell you about was another occasion, not that particular one, I was on the upper deck and these bombers were coming at us and I saw one coming down and the ship heeled over which it did, took a big hard swerve to dodge the bomb. I'll tell you this part first.
- 14:00 A dive bomber started his dive and he had to aim his plane where he was going and he couldn't release, he couldn't get out of that dive until he released the bomb. In other words he was tied into the job and the ship's captain knew that. So the ship's captain would hold him until he was sure he was in his dive and at the last minute the captain would swerve away. A very dangerous procedure. He had to judge it well of course. Thank goodness our bloke did. And the ship would swerve away. This
- 14:30 time the ship heeled over and we all dived for the decks, a natural human thing to do, to dive for the decks and huddled, tried to grab the steel deck and I got showered in that water. I thought we'd been holed and it was a row of fire buckets. They all tilted over and it was the water on top of me. And I looked up and still the dive-bomber was coming. He's got to complete his dive. And he was rather close to us. He would be only a
- 15:00 hundred feet or so above and I was looking at him and he gave me the two fingers. That's true. That's how close he was. I see him do that. Yeah. Cheeky bugger.

You didn't respond did you?

Oh no. I was so startled but I was still there when he went to fly away.

So did you ever get to see much

- 15:30 **when you were near the Tobruk harbour.**

Well Tobruk harbour was, I saw the harbour in the dark but it wasn't always pitch dark. I could see what was there. The harbour was littered with sunken ships. I dare say in the initial capture of the harbour the ships were sunk and most were burned out and beached ships. And some that had been in this main stream, they had been dragged out of the main channel so the supply ships could get in.

- 16:00 The harbour was littered with sunken ships. And one of the dangers when you were in the harbour, they called this thing 'Bardia Bill'. It was a German gun, a big field gun, eight inch or something it was. It would fire spasmodically. They didn't have an exact sight on the harbour but they had the range of it. None of them ever landed near it but I did see
- 16:30 these shells land in remote parts of the harbour. They were popping these massive big shells there and I'm not absolutely sure whether it did hit any of these ships. I don't know about it. They were just wild shots. They didn't only fire at the harbour. They fired at what they imagined to be the gunning places of the Australian soldiers that were around the harbour too. But that was Bardia Bill, the soldiers called it.

Did you ever have any contact with the troops that were being taken

- 17:00 **back from Tobruk?**

Oh yes. I was always talking to them. They were all wounded and they'd be on stretchers. Some were walking wounded but they all, yeah, they were all walking wounded and on stretchers too. Sometimes badly shot up but all glad to be going home too. Or certainly going back to Alex to recuperate.

So you'd hear a few interesting stories?

Oh there was not much, the soldiers

- 17:30 didn't give any bravado about anything. No. That wasn't anything. Soldiers did have always something to say but there wasn't any great drama attached to their descriptions. Because like most private soldiers and private sailors for that matter, you weren't in any place to be informed about the detail of anything. All you knew was the immediate place you were in, that was all. I suppose the generals and admirals

18:00 knew where all the big time things were happening. But just, what's the word for it, do or die and not to reason why is what I'm trying to say to you.

That's the one. So approximately how many times did you do the Tobruk run do you think?

Well for my part I was only in it three times because I was joined Vendetta

18:30 from Perth and Perth was dispatched home and we were the last of the old scrap iron ships still in, the others had all been dispatched. The [HMAS] Stuart, the [HMAS] Voyager and what was the other one, the [HMS] Empire. They all had come home. Oh, Waterhen was sunk. It was right at the time I joined Vendetta. It was sunk by a near miss. It didn't get

19:00 struck direct. It was a near miss and broke its back and the ship sunk. There was no loss of life in that one. But that was the time when I first got on. That was on its (Unclear) run, the [HMAS] Waterhen was lost. There were many many ships lost on their way in there, on their way into Tobruk. I think there were thirty-four ships lost getting in there.

All right, so we heard about the work around Malta. Could you tell us about your involvement

19:30 **getting troops in and out of Greece and Crete?**

Well these were, not so much Greece, which was bad enough. We had taken the troops in there in an earlier monthly period before and then the Germans came down through the Alps and Albania and down there and got onto our fellows and drove them back down to the coast and the ships picked them up. And Perth

20:00 did its share of picking up and taking the troops back to, didn't take them back to Alexandria, they took them back to Crete and then the soldiers re-established themselves on Crete but they didn't expect what was going to happen to them because no about three weeks after they had been there the Germans invaded Crete with paratroopers. It was the first time paratroopers had been used by the enemy against our people.

20:30 They used them in Europe apparently but this was the biggest one, effort, on the parts of the Nazis. And of course they devastated our people there with the mighty force they put upon us. Our men weren't really organised. They hadn't been there long enough to set up their protections. Then again our soldiers were put to flight. They escaped from the North side of the island to the south and in the south there was a couple of little ports on the south side

21:00 where there were evacuation points. And Perth was involved in particular with Sfakia. I've been there since and I didn't see it actually. It was in the dark. I couldn't see much when we were there. But of course I visited the place some years ago and I saw that it was a lovely little fishing village. That's all it was. Had a beach of only about two hundred yards long and that's where the thousands of soldiers were taken out of it, off that beach there and Perth was stood off shore and

21:30 we had the men were taken out in ships boats and barges and then we brought them back to Alexandria.

And I believe there was a situation where you were ashore in Piraeus and there was some German strafing going on.

When we were taking the soldiers into Greece it was a rather peaceful sort of place. Instead of being out in the ocean we liked going up to Piraeus

22:00 and Athens. And on this particular day we had taken the soldiers in there and I got shore leave. We were able to have midnight leave or something there and we were in a night-club, a cafeteria. Well yes it was a night-club. It had a band and that sort of thing in there. And of course the Germans weren't fighting against the Greeks up till then and then the Germans, they didn't

22:30 attack the city of Athens they attacked the harbour, Piraeus. And we had to wait some hours there. The trains were all out of action, we couldn't get back down to the port. But there was a duty watch onboard the ship of course and our ship Perth even though it only had half the ship's company onboard, well I don't know if it was half but a lot of the ship's company were not aboard. Our captain moved in. There was a panic.

23:00 There was quite a panic on the harbour when the Germans raided it. And our captain pulled his ship out and he went out into the open sea. It was the right place to be. After the air raid finished we were given an all clear and we were allowed to travel down. They got the trains operating again and this was two o'clock in the morning. We got ourselves down to Piraeus and our ship's not there because it has gone out to sea so we were gathered all in the one spot, there was a meeting.

23:30 And the few officers there took control of it. I'm trying to get the right sequence here. Across the far side of the harbour it was next to where our ship had been moored was an ammunition ship. We knew it was an ammunition ship and it was ablaze too. It was glowing red and I was actually looking at this thing, I was half a mile

24:00 away and it blew up. Of course it devastated, flattened all the fore shores around Greece, around

Piraeus and the part of the ship, it landed on the wharf we were on. It was a big chunk of metal about ten feet long. A yard, a mast or

24:30 something it was off and it was glowing red and it fell on the wharf only a hundred yards from where we were. We were wanting to look at it and then we got into trouble from the petty officers for going up and looking at this red-hot lump of metal. We were taken from there round the foreshores on the open sea side and it was a deserted holiday resort place. It was a big café and it was deserted in the raid. I remember being there. I was sitting on the

25:00 and they sent ships boats in to get us from the shore. That was the extent of it, we got away from there thank goodness. We didn't get back to Greece again, sorry, we didn't get back to Piraeus again. But that's when some couple of weeks later we did the evacuation from southern Greece. Yeah. That was the Perth then and that's when we started taking the troops, as I said, down to Crete. But that business of that raid on Piraeus, that was

25:30 devastating. There were trams overturned and live wires all over the road. It was a terribly dangerous place to be and we were there at two o'clock in the morning. It was dark, worrying. I can't add any more to that. No.

Were there many locals around on the streets?

I didn't see any, no. No locals there. There were some policemen there. Strangely enough these officers got,

26:00 they commandeered two taxis. I don't know where the devil the taxis came from but, and they loaded us into these taxis. We were all hanging all over the sides of it, going across the peninsula. I don't know. It was about a mile away we had to travel, a couple of miles perhaps, out to where this meeting point on the beach was. And that's how we got out of Piraeus.

Prior to that had you had much of a chance to look around Athens?

Oh we did. Thoroughly enjoyed it, Athens was a lovely place.

26:30 And up to the acropolis of course. That was great. I enjoyed that bit.

How did you find the locals?

Good, yeah. And when we were coming back to the, one of the early visits there I was quite a young man and I was coming back quite mystified and I was talking to the senior men. I said I'd been in a bar in the fashionable part of Athens and

27:00 there was this well dressed fellow in there. Not a uniform. I don't know what he was but it turned out that they think he was a spy or one of the underground kind of fellows. This fellow was quite boastful and the other Greeks were encouraging him but he started to give me the bad message. He said, "The British are wasting their time. You are wasting their time." "What are you talking to me like that for?"

27:30 I told them and they said, for want of a better word, he was some sort of insurgent and he got in the mix there and I believe there were a lot of them in their community did that. Trying to upset me as one of the allies there.

Just subtly spreading a bit of propaganda?

Yeah. He was in there doing that too. I well remember that bloke. He spoke with a foreign voice

28:00 of course. I thought he was a well educated Greek but he could have been a well educated German sitting next to me.

And he just approached you out of the blue?

Yeah, in a bar. There were a lot of people just talking to each other. He wasn't very forceful but he made himself known to me. I was talking to others and he said, "Come and talk to me" and he gave me a discouraging view of the place. So that was evidence that those fellows were about in those times.

28:30 **So how did you feel to sort of realise that the war had taken a real turn and suddenly things were getting really hot in your area there? The Germans were coming down in a big way.**

Well the evacuation of Greece to Crete wasn't so bad but when the Germans attacked

29:00 Greece they had the air force on Rhode Island which was only a hundred miles away. It was nothing by plane and they got wave after wave of these determined bombers and fighters were coming across from this island there and the job, even though the ships were terribly in danger and terribly valuable. They had to be used to get the troops out because the troops themselves were terribly valuable. Each trained soldier, I

29:30 don't know, he was worth a million dollars or something and they are too. And they had to get them out, no matter what the cost was. In those forty-eight hours we lost thirteen ships of the British. There were British ships were lost then. That was a terrible day. There were other ships before and after that were lost there but that forty-eight hours was frightful. We just couldn't believe, they were giving us the

reports of these ships that were sunk. I did actually see

30:00 one ship in the night that had been set fire early in the day. It was a blaze of light. I think it was the [HMS] Southampton that one, a big British cruiser and it was a frightening sight to see this big ship afire in the dark. And of course it had been sunk too. They did get crew off it, they had already gone away

30:30 in the hour or so before our ship got near there. We were originally looking for pickups but we didn't find any, all the people who had been able to escape had been picked up before we saw it.

A fairly grim time.

It was terribly. Yeah. Admiral Cunningham said that it was the lowest point in the navy's defence. The loss of his ships and he was indefensible, he was a very good

31:00 admiral, as good as a navy's ever known and yet he couldn't act very much because he didn't have the ships to conduct his methods. He had been losing ships. He did lose, lots of ships were lost after but the ships in the English fleet, in the North Sea fleet, they came down and fortified the losses in the Mediterranean shortly after.

31:30 But they'd lost, the [HMS] Barham was a battle ship, that was lost some six months, that was sunk off Tobruk wasn't it, the Barham was sunk. A big battleship. And the Elizabeth was sunk there too. That was afterward. We had a harrowing time in the Mediterranean.

Did you encounter much trouble when you were moving the troops from Crete to Alexandria?

32:00 Yes. We got bombed virtually all the way in there. The enemy knew what we were doing. If they could bomb a shipload of troops that was as good as winning a land battle. They could get rid of a lot of soldiers in one go. Yeah.

So what happened next for you after that evacuation process?

We were put on other duties then.

32:30 They abandoned the northern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Nobody went there. There was no purpose for going there. Malta still had to be protected as best we could. There were patrols into Malta. Not our ship but other ships went in to Malta. Perth's duties then became for the remainder of her time, the most memorable one,

33:00 we bombarded the coast of Syria. The Syrian campaign. The Germans were trying to get it down into the Suez Canal of course. And they couldn't come across the desert, they were stopped by Tobruk and El Alamein but they then attempted to come down through Syria. The Vichy French had been there and the Germans came in and the 7th Division this time were holding Syria and

33:30 Perth was sent in there with other ships too and we bombarded the coast of Syria. And that was to assist in the advance of the 7th Division. And they did too, they cleaned the Germans out Syria.

And did you encounter any resistance?

No. There was no shore batteries there. No. Not large enough to fire at the range of to sea that the ship was.

34:00 It wasn't the end of, it was near the end of my experience with Perth because in the beginning of July, we all knew the ship was due to come home and we were all anxious about it to come home, we'd been there for seven months and we were overdue to come home. We waited on the relief of the [HMAS] Hobart. The Hobart had already arrived and we still hadn't been given the clearance. And when we did get the clearance we were all excited about going back home again

34:30 and I got drafted to these, not only me, there was, I don't know how many of us, about eighty. About eighty people off the Perth anyway, we got drafted to the various destroyers to give those men a break. Some of them had been there since the start of the war. And they took our places on the Perth and we helped fill the destroyers again. Incidentally we as much

35:00 as we protested about it some of those poor devils who thought we had a privilege taking our places they were killed when the ship was lost. In Sunda Strait the Perth was lost at the beginning of '42. So that was fortunate for me and others.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the battle of Mattapan and just

35:30 **your perspective, how it impacted on your time. What you were involved in in the middle of it. Were you ever out of the boiler room or?**

No. I didn't actually see any of the gunfire. I knew all about it. In the boiler room we started, one of the things that was memorable was to make smoke. A smoke screen was not a

36:00 defence used very frequently in the navy but we had to make, we had three cruisers, the Perth, [HMS] Ajax, and [HMS] Orion, the two other, they were Royal Naval ships. And we three cruisers all worked

together, 7th cruiser squadron and we were all ordered to make smoke because the Italian battle fleet were coming up to attack our battle fleet so we had to make smoke

- 36:30 and protect our fleet. But that was an exciting time, in the boiler room we had to go at full pelt and deliberately make smoke, which was a hanging offence if you made smoke, you would always give your position away if you made smoke. So the captain didn't like giving our position away and the engineer would have been in a bother if we had made smoke. This time we had it all billowing. I've got photos of it, billowing black smoke for the smokescreen.

What's the process of deliberately making the smoke?

Choke the air out of it.

- 37:00 The oil burns without sufficient air so you've got half burned oil belching out through the chimney. You could do it the same in your house. Your chimney would smoke if you stopped the air flowing through it.

So that was a successful tactic?

It was yes. Another one, they used cold oil or didn't warm the oil. Normally in a ship the boilers were fired,

- 37:30 the oil was warmed it burned more readily but if they put cold oil in it would make all this black smoke. So that was what happened there.

So you were just listening to what was going on down below?

Yeah. We only got reports down below. As I said before, most people on the ship didn't see it. It was all reports coming to us.

- 38:00 **How often would you get your reports in that sort of situation?**

There'd be some sort of messenger going up onto the bridge and he'd come back and tell us. He didn't come back and tell me. He would come back and tell the engineer because the senior officer was in charge of all this under, they wanted to know themselves what was going on too so the runner had to come back and give a report of where they were and what they were doing. So we knew through that. Indirectly we knew.

- 38:30 **All right so that was pretty much Mattapan from your perspective.**

Yes. It was the only time that part of the fleet was ever fired on by a battleship. It is the only time any ship I know of was ever fired on by a battleship. Of course there was the people in the loss of, I mean Japan's battle fleet knocked off Perth and [USS] Houston up there in

- 39:00 Sunda Strait. That was battleships involved in that one.

All right I think it's time to move on to your next vessel then. So at the time you were a bit disappointed about being told that you had to be drafted on to another vessel rather than?

Come home. I thought it was the end of the world. We'll never

- 39:30 get home now. We'll be killed over here. That was very unhappy days. We had to do as we were told. We were well disciplined of course and we all got our different ships. And don't forget our pals were in ships, we were all spread amongst the destroyers then. All my age group, being the juniors. It was always the junior hands in any one of these emergency drafts. We were all juniors so we were the ones unlucky to get spread around.

So separated from a lot of mates?

Yes.

- 40:00 But that was what it was at the point. That was so desperate that the men, I remember one fellow on the draft the same as me, he offered fifty pound and don't forget we were lucky if we were getting a pound a week to spend. Of course some of us had allocations of money, allotments of money, this fellow offered fifty pound, a year's income to stay on board and no-one would take him on.

- 40:30 That's how much they all wanted to go home. It was worth fifty quid or more not to stay there, yes. So that was a trying time. We didn't want to do it. Well nobody took them on so there was people trying to buy their way out of this enforced draft and they didn't, nobody would have it.

Did you end up getting to Vendetta with any of your old mates from Perth?

Oh yes. Considerable. My word there were. There was quite a lot of Perth men

- 41:00 went with me. There would have been thirty of us. Not all stokers, there were about ten of the engine room branch and the rest were gunners. It wasn't only the old stokers who had been there for a couple of years on the ships. It was the old seamen as well. Those people were relieved too. And there was, I naturally

- 41:30 knew the seamen and the gunners in other parts of the ship. They came on board the Vendetta with me,

yeah.

Tape 5

00:32 **Gordon one thing. I know we were just about to get on to the Vendetta there and go home, but one thing we forgot to talk about with the Perth was the time it was actually struck by a bomb.**

Oh yes.

What are your recollections?

Do you want to do it now?

Yeah, we'll do it now. What are your recollections of that incident? Sorry. Off you go. I was blocking the camera.

Well it was during the evacuation of Crete this happened and

01:00 we were loaded with soldiers. There were hundreds of soldiers, I think seven hundred soldiers would have been aboard. And I was in the after engine room and this again, we were aware of the noise all over the ship. There was noise in the ship. But that bomb actually exploded and I didn't know. Nor any of us in the after engine room. The story was that it was a stick of bombs that was delivered to us. It was during an air raid of course.

01:30 Our guns were firing and this particular, the last of a stick of bombs would have fallen clear of the ship unless, and it's authentic, my friend who was in the crows nest saw this bomb coming at him and he followed them down and one struck the yard arm and the yard arm deflected inboard onto our ship. That bomb obviously hit the upper deck and the upper deck was immediately above the galley.

02:00 It went through the deck space above the galley and it went through there into the boiler room, the forward boiler room, and exploded in the deck head of the boiler room and the downward blast burst the steam lines on top of the boiler. It didn't kill anybody in the impact in the boiler room

02:30 but one of the chief stokers ordered them all out. All was to go up on one side. They were to go up on the port side and there was a team in there, about fourteen of them. And the stoker, one of the stokers decided he was going to go up the other side, there was another ladder, an equalising ladder. And he went up the wrong ladder and he ran into the super heated steam, which is invisible, super heated steam and he ran into it and he wouldn't know what hit him but he was cooked.

03:00 He ran into a jet of steam and the poor devil died. He was on the grating one flight above the boiler room floor. That's the story of that bomb there. To go on a bit further why we didn't hear it was we were done aft, in the after part of the ship and it was relatively small. Two hundred and fifty pound they estimated it at. It was a two-hundred and fifty pound bomb and that disabled the forward engine room

03:30 and a boiler room so they were both out. But we got back under our own power into Alexandria. And that boiler room had to be brought up to function again. All the engineers worked on it, used steam lines and what so ever to, so that was the story of the bomb we took. A little more to it. There were thirteen people killed all together of which there were four sailors, two

04:00 stokers and two cooks. Don't forget it hit the cook house and killed two of the cooks and two of the stokers and there were nine soldiers killed. They were all British soldiers. There were a mixture of Australian and British soldiers but there were nine British soldiers. The unfortunate part of that those soldiers come aboard a ship, they thought they were safe you know. They were escaping from invading Germans. And they get aboard the ship after trials and tribulations and they were killed on their way back to safety at

04:30 Alexandria. Unfortunate but that happened. And then the pathetic thing that really touched me, that boy that went up the wrong ladder. He was my class-mate and it could have been me. And I have never forgotten that. We worked in, he relieved me. The same boiler he was attending was the boiler I'd been attending before I was sent down aft into the other position down there and he took my position really.

05:00 Some couple of hours before but that's how it came to be. Yes, rather touching that. That friend of mine was killed. I didn't go there, the aftermath of that was that some of my pals went and visited the father. They knew he worked in the New England, is that the word, the railway engineering works out of Melbourne. Is that Newington?

05:30 **I've no idea**

It's a name like that. That was the big, it's like Everleigh in Sydney. The railway engine shop and they had to go and tell the father they'd been with his son when his son was killed. The poor old man broke down and cried, no doubt, losing his son.

It must have bought home some of the realities to you?

Oh it did. Losing a pal like that. Harry Smith was his name, that man.

06:00 Poor old Harry, he was killed in a ship.

Ok. So you went onto the Vendetta and you did the Tobruk runs that you described earlier to us.

Yes.

And then you did some bombardment along the coast of Syria. Is that right?

No. It was the Perth did the bombardment before I went to the Vendetta.

I beg your pardon. So eventually you ended up sailing to Singapore on the Vendetta.

Yes. A little bit more,

06:30 I will go back to Tobruk, in there. There was a great rapport developed between the soldiers and the sailors in that period with the benefit still remains to this day between the soldiers and the sailors who were involved in that one. I was with some of the Rats of Tobruk fellows yesterday. You know I've been made, because of my association with them I'm not only the treasurer, state

07:00 treasure of the Rats of Tobruk but also I've been made a life member and I'm very pleased with that association. That was feature. But it developed because of our association with soldiers.

Ok. So there was a few more duties around Cyprus on the Vendetta.

Oh yes. That was a rather pleasant part. We carried more troops. They were British troops this time. We carried them to Cyprus. Cyprus was a fortified place but they were afraid then that seeing

07:30 as Crete had fallen they thought the Germans might attack Cyprus this time, another step closer. But they didn't bother. They had failed in their attack on Syria. This is what it looked like to me. They seemed, they failed in their attack, that pincer movement down there so they abandoned their approach to Suez. That was the end of their attack on Suez. When they got pushed out of Syria they didn't pursue that idea any more.

08:00 Of course they were under pressure. They were getting pressured in Egypt at Alamein. That bought them to a standstill. That Alamein thing.

Ok. So you did a bit of escort duty taking troops up there?

Yeah, we did escort duty there. The very last, was a torpedo attack. There was ourselves with a troop ship and one other destroyer. And the Italian, there were two Italian torpedo bombers come in and they

08:30 circled well out of the range of our guns, Destroyers only had four-inch guns and they haven't a big range. And of course they were lower level flying too to successfully launch their torpedoes. Which meant they were in danger, if they come in to make an effective attack they had to get down in close before they fired the torpedo. Anyway they persisted. These fellows were, I well remember the action I saw there. There was the troop ship in the

09:00 middle and one destroyer this side and that and we were each circling the main ship and defending against these two bombers. After some twenty minutes they eventually did make their attack and fortunately both, they only carried one torpedo a piece and fortunately both torpedoes missed. So that was the last I saw of the Mediterranean action.

And then you sailed off to Singapore?

09:30 Then we were to Singapore to do this refit and wonderful relief we were all looking forward to. We didn't know what wonders. We couldn't have been, Japan wasn't in the war and we thought we'd come back to Australia and have a loaf. And while we were in Singapore the Japs attacked Singapore the same as they did Pearl Harbour, actually the same night. It didn't get much mention that, across the world but it was the same. It was December 8th in Singapore so the time factor,

10:00 December 7th in Hawaii but that's the same. Prince of Wales was there. It arrived a couple of days, and Repulse was out in the stream. Prince of Wales was tied alongside the wharf outside the barracks. We were all established in the barracks then and we were rudely awakened on this particular night. There was this monster big battle ship outside our window firing. They were firing these anti-aircraft guns. We were two stories up and that meant

10:30 it was right outside our bedroom window. It's the worst bedroom I've ever been in. Bombs going off, shells going off outside our house.

Just before the attack, when you arrived in Singapore in sort of Mid November.

Yes.

How would you describe the sort of mood and everything in Singapore at that time?

Oh we saw all these soldiers and they don't, we'd come from an intense war

- 11:00 with the soldiers in Egypt and the Middle East, we were all war wary, war weary perhaps. But when we were in Singapore it was the most unrealistic thing, as I said before, but I can personally say I felt the same. These soldiers were riding in trucks through the town on movements no doubt, but all gaily waving and it was a great time. Reality wasn't there and they
- 11:30 weren't prepared. They weren't prepared for the, well I'm talking about the ones in the city. Obviously the people in the out lying parts, the soldiers were prepared but obviously not well enough as history has proven. But there was, it wasn't the right atmosphere to a pending war. The navy was a pending war. In our spare time when we used to go between trips the barracks were on the other side of the island where the docks were and we were daily transported in trucks to and from doing
- 12:00 our duties, dismantling the ship. But in the meantime there were other duties to perform. In the parade ground inside the barracks they set up sandbag machinegun tripods to defend, air defence it was. I'm glad we were in there. There were mountains of sandbags and a tripod Lewis gun
- 12:30 stuck in the middle of it and each one had a crew, I was in one of the crews. It was only temporary. We never ever got to use those guns. Somebody else might have. I can remember we spent hours filling the drums. Those round drums in Lewis guns. We had to push all those loose cartridges in there, the .303 cartridges were shovelled in there. All prepared they were. And another one I can not get over
- 13:00 that, I mentioned that the battleship Prince of Wales, we thought it was going to secure the defence, we were right, something positive happened in there and we went to the movies on the first night. We got invited aboard, those big ships had movies onboard and we went aboard and saw some movie. Back in our barracks at ten o'clock, two o'clock we were rudely awakened by this gunfire.
- 13:30 The ship was gone from the, it left the berth there and then in the dark. Two battleships went to sea and twenty four hours later, they went up the coast of course and history tells us that those two battleships, the pride of the eastern fleet were blotted out by enemy aircraft. I saw the, and there again some twenty-four hours later perhaps we saw the survivors of those ships come into our depot.
- 14:00 British sailors they were of course on those ships. And they come into the depot and we welcomed them into the canteen while they were being kitted out and whatever had to be done with the other surviving sailors. It was a pity, it was a very subdued navy atmosphere in that barracks losing those two monster ships and first hand we saw this. It was terrible.
- 14:30 Some two, that was the 7th, on the 10th we were again wakened. That was the same barracks two nights later. We were shipped further around to that infamous causeway which was not that far along and alongside the causeway was the Kanimbla. It was a converted merchant ship and that was the ship that was to bring we survivors home, well not only the survivors. We hadn't survived
- 15:00 anything. We remnants of the Vendetta crew and then we had to go out into the stream to set sail and then they found they had these consular figures, families so we waited a couple of days and they brought these private people aboard. They were important government officials and we brought them back to Australia with us.

Ok So after that, after the bombing attack and after those British

- 15:30 **capital ships had been lost, what, how had the mood changed in Singapore then? You said you were subdued but.**

Well we weren't in the city. We were still in the barracks but the barracks of course was, that was very subdued, very quiet desperate times. Everyone didn't know what was going to happen. And the first women service people I saw apart from nurses, they were quite prevalent in the Middle East

- 16:00 but there were English WRENS [WRNS - Women's Royal Naval Service] there and I often wondered, they became POWs [Prisoners of War] of course. There was no way they could get out of it and I didn't know why we were favoured. Australia was sort of short of trained sailors or anything but particularly trained sailors and there was some expert crew numbered amongst us. I'm not saying me of course, only a junior hand, but never the less I was jolly glad I got included in getting transported out of Singapore.

- 16:30 I was very fortunate for that one.

What sort of state was the Vendetta in by this stage?

It had been partially dismantled. They removed the deck plates to get the turbines out and the turbines were lifted out, ready for the dockyard workers to do their maintenance on them and the gun turrets were moved and I didn't see it but other friends have told me this story. When they went back to the ship there were twenty-nine of these men left there to care for the ship and

- 17:00 get it home. We didn't know what was going to happen but they were left there and they became the recovery crew and they brought that ship back and what they did, they couldn't reinstall all the motors and the guns they just funnelled them all back into place, loosely fastened in some manner and then the ship came out under tow and they had various tows trying to get it away in its progress from Singapore down through the Sunda Straits.

17:30 That was just before, it got out of there just before Perth was sunk. That's how close it was, in the same narrow area of Sunda Straits. That was quite remarkable they got through there and then the rest of the way. It took them months to get the ship back to Fremantle and when they got to Fremantle they had a proper seagoing tug that was able to bring it across to the eastern states. It was repaired in Melbourne.

That's a long, long journey home.

It was.

18:00 It is a famous story too, removing that ship. It came home cold. There was no boiler, no power in it at all. They were actually using candles, tinned food. They couldn't cook anything. These men put up with that to get the ship home like that.

So it was just more or less a floating hulk?

It was too, there was no power in the ship at all. They bought it like that. But of course the hulk itself, it was a hull with potential. That's why they wanted to keep the potential. They took one of the boiler rooms out subsequently on it

18:30 and they used the boiler room as a store room and it became a fast forward supply ship up in the islands. So it wasn't a destroyer as such any more. It still had some of the guns. Instead of the four guns that it had it only had two guns on it and the rest of it, there was no torpedoes on it. It was used for ferrying troops and supplies to the forward troops in New Guinea and those islands.

19:00 **So you were sort of emergency drafted onto the Kanimbla were you?**

Yeah. And we, about eighty of us came home on that. When we first got to Singapore, I should have told you, about half of the ship's company were immediately drafted home. They were the fellows who had been away the longest from the time the ship went over there. They came home in the first weeks we arrived there. We'd been,

19:30 they got away weeks before the Japs started anyway. And then there was our group come in, we were in the Kanimbla.

So what sort of ship was the Kanimbla? How was it fitted out?

The Kanimbla had been a coastal passenger ship built by (Unclear). It was one of six ships they built under contract with a subsidy from the Federal Government and there were six of

20:00 these ships, each shipping line, coastal shipping line, had one of these vessels. McIlwraith McEacharn was Kanimbla's. And there was the [HMAS] Duntroon, [HMAS] Manoora, and [HMAS] Manunda, [HMAS] Westralia. There were six of them. And they belonged to each of the shipping companies. Even though they were passenger ships they were built with reinforced mountings to take a six-inch gun and each of them had

20:30 a six inch gun fore and aft and either side a six inch mounting built into the structure of the hull because to fire a six-inch gun no ordinary merchant ship could do that. They had to have this special structure built through the hull. And these ships did. Some of them didn't even measure up to it. The Westralia didn't measure up at all. The hull still wasn't strong enough to do that. But Kanimbla was and Manunda and Manoora.

21:00 They were well built ships but the private companies were subsidised for the emergency and of course the emergency come and the private companies had to surrender them for the duration of the war.

And so when you first boarded the Kanimbla how long did it take for you to get out of Singapore?

Well two weeks in getting back to Sydney.

Who was aboard the Kanimbla?

Who was aboard? Well it was the initial crew.

21:30 It was under charter. The Royal Navy actually had control of it at the time. It was called HMS, it later become HMAS. Because it had been a British, even though it was private companies it was British private companies. It was a bit complicated who actually owned the thing. Eventually it reverted back and it became for the rest of the war the HMAS Kanimbla. There was Australians on it only.

22:00 When I went on it there were Australians and Royal Navy. They had a mixed ship's company in that period. And it had been on patrol in the Eastern fleet, that meant up Hong Kong and that part of it, that's where it spent its first part of the war and it did some time up in the Persian Gulf. It was there too.

And who did you evacuate from Singapore in that ship?

Well I don't know. There was lots of these VIPs [Very Important Persons] come out.

22:30 I said about the consular staff and their families and of course my own immediate ship's company, the Vendetta people and there were lots of other soldiers. There were senior soldiers. I can remember lots of braided officers coming out with us too. They didn't bring any ordinary soldiers out because they probably needed them for defence but these other important people came out on it.

How did it feel pulling away and leaving everybody else to their fate?

23:00 Well I was really happy. Incidentally it was my twenty-first birthday so I never forgot it. That was the 12th of December so a memorable day for me. Yes, just jolly glad and a feeling of sorrow. We didn't really know it was going to be so bad for them. We thought they were still going to fight their way out but of course it was a month later that the whole island surrendered.

23:30 December, January, yes it was about a month later that they surrendered, yeah.

In retrospect what do you think about the fact that the VIPs got themselves saved and left everybody else behind?

They didn't save themselves. They weren't allowed to do that. They were selected, ordered out of the place. They didn't just put their hand up and come home, no. They were told by the authorities back in Australia. They needed them out.

24:00 And pretty wise too. To be an expert in military matters it's no good being captured. You can't be used. We need all the experts back here in Australia. Whatever the expertise was they needed to come back. They were needed back here.

Ok. So when you sailed back what sort of atmosphere of danger was

24:30 **there on that voyage?**

The captain was, I mean he was terribly afraid. He took the ship, we sailed down way off the shipping lines. That's why it took us two weeks to get back from Singapore. And we went way down south around the bottom of Tasmania, way round past there and back up on a non shipping, we came into Melbourne. We tied up in Melbourne.

25:00 And then that was Christmas Eve and we were given leave and a railway pass to get back to Sydney. And we got back to Sydney on Christmas morning. I eventually made my way home to Kogarah and my mother was preparing Christmas dinner and she got the best Christmas present of her life she said. I came in the door.

It was a surprise for her?

On Christmas Day. Yes.

How did it feel to be home?

Oh wondrous.

25:30 Everybody, it doesn't matter whether under pressure or not when you come home and find comfort and hope and sanity and safety, it's all in your own home where you come from.

How did you find the atmosphere in Australia? You'd been over in the Mediterranean more or less under constant attack. Things were grim over there. Things were grim in Singapore. How grim were they here?

It was a bit of a dither here.

26:00 I can remember my father for instance. He was digging air raid trenches in the back yard. I don't know what for but they had all these threats of dangers and promises and it was mixed feelings but I remember he dug this. It's quite funny really but it filled up with water the first time it rained and that sort of thing. It was quite nonsense. But people were trying to protect themselves. They didn't know. Another little humorous thing on that time,

26:30 they had a local militia people manning Tom Ugly's Bridge. The bridge itself still stands. On the southern approach to the bridge there's a shelf of rocks still there to this day. They mounted Lewis guns on tripods again to protect the bridge. The bridge was a vital thing. I don't whether they thought these invading forces were going to come up the river in a rowing boat because

27:00 that's all the darn Lewis guns would have been able to knock out. And the hilarious part is that in these grim times, is the boys scouts or someone got in there and played monkey tricks with these guns and dismantled the guns and the militia had gone home for the weekend or something and that was the disjointed routines or organisation they had.

So you think it was a bit amateur what was going on here?

27:30 Yeah, amateur. They didn't have any real underlying plan of how they were going to handle it. And truly my father's house was on Princess Highway, they're up from Tom Ugly's Bridge and we all expected the Japs to come marching up the road one day. That's how we thought of it. It was rather horrifying thoughts were going through people's minds. There was a sense of desperation. Everyone looked for

somebody

28:00 else to tell them what to do. But it eventuated that there was no danger there. The danger of course was in the north. And they were concentrated to the north. It wasn't rational. It was pointed out that the Japanese wouldn't send a landing force to the south. They'd have to advance from the north if they were going to get there. They couldn't transport, it was too far down south.

So a bit of panic around?

Oh there was in a way

28:30 and it wasn't so much spoken about but there was a sense of, not uneasy, that's not the right word, they were very unsure of themselves. All of us, I didn't know what to think about it either. It was strange. Not that I was any expert either but no one knew really what was going to happen. In that time I had the month's leave and I was drafted to the Mildura. That was

29:00 one of these coastal patrol vessels. I think I spent four years on it but the first fifteen months of that was in the East Coast protection when we lost thirty-four ships. Merchant ships were lost when those Japanese raiders were around. I had been in and out of Sydney harbour for the month or so up till May

29:30 and our ship and another ship got arranged, we were ordered to Noumea. There had been some Americans troops going to Noumea to protect Noumea and two attacks on their ships. One ship was lost and the other troop ship was holed and was beached on the reef at Noumea and they had to send protective, anti-submarine protective, that was us.

30:00 And we did a stint down there for about a month. We did two of these things. It was about a month that time and a few months later we were sent out to do a similar thing to Noumea again. That was because they were losing these American ships going into Noumea.

Just tell us about the Mildura first when you were first posted onto it.

Yes.

What did you think of her the first time you saw her?

A funny little ship. I'd been used to big warships,

30:30 and really battle equipped ships. Mildura had one old fashioned gun. They didn't have a shield around it even. It was 1918 stamped into the breach. That was when it was built and it wasn't making us all very happy. Subsequently as time went on we did get a more modern gun. It was 1940 or something, wouldn't have been that. It was only about ten years old when we got it anyway. It was a modern gun but still only one gun and we had

31:00 a machine gun on either wing of the bridge and that was it. As time went on we got a Bofors and Bofors were a wonderful anti-aircraft gun and we had one of those installed on the stern. That was a real protection and we had an Oerlikon instead of the little machine guns we had Oerlikon guns on the wings of the bridge. They were good protection. They were anti-aircraft. We became better equipped. But it was

31:30 all we had really as an offensive weapon were depth charges. We had rollers and throwers. We could roll the depth charges off or throw the depth charges. That was effective. We had good anti-submarine detection gear. Of course that was efficient and we were efficient at doing that. It was also equipped for minesweeping but the mine sweeping didn't ever come into use until the latter end of the war.

32:00 Then we were engaged in the minesweeping.

What about your part of the ship? What was the Mildura's engine room was like compared to what you had been used to?

We had a small boiler room. Two boilers there, two efficient boilers. It produced enough power. And we had two reciprocating. They are much slower and more efficient, fuel efficient is the word. They weren't as fast but they were fuel and that's what they were built for and they carried

32:30 our their duties well. Sixteen knot was the, going down hill that's as fast as we could go. But normally those little vessels they did about twelve knots and they were doing well if they were doing twelve knots. But that didn't matter because most of our escorts, we had to go as slow as the fastest vessel in the merchant fleet that we were escorting. We might have had twenty vessels that we were escorting and some only did eight knots and that's what we had to do, eight knots,

33:00 all of them had to do eight, same speed. All scattered in a pattern but that's the way they proceeded up and down the coast, as fast as the slowest one. Yeah.

And what about your living conditions on this little ship?

They were remarkably good. We had more elbow room per man on those small ships than we did on the big ships. The bigger ships had more complicated war gear and this little vessel

- 33:30 it didn't have to have those extra men. As time went on we got radar. First of all we didn't have any radar but the radar crew was relatively small. It was about, the radar crew was about another eight men come on to operate the radar gear we had. But all in all they were more comfortable in that manner. They were terribly uncomfortable sea wise.
- 34:00 I'd say they would roll on wet grass and they would too. You always knew you'd been at sea if you went out on a corvette. That's what I mentioned before about people getting seasick. That was hopeless. People going on there, you'd see them for a week. They were seasick. They had never eaten for a week. That was true. They didn't eat for a week some fellows. They were that crook. Yeah. We didn't have a long endurance. They didn't carry enough fuel to go very far. Those
- 34:30 ships, the limit, the best we could do was ten days. I can't remember any experience longer than that. So they didn't have a long endurance at sea.
- Well who was the captain?**
- Well there were two captains in my time, Lieutenant Gill and Lieutenant Commander White. Not White.
- 35:00 White was another man. Lieutenant Commander Little was the second man. But both were very efficient sea captains and they were merchant reserve officers. Each of them had been in charge of large merchant vessels. I can recall Captain Little. We tied alongside a huge merchant ship in Sydney. It was a big passenger ship
- 35:30 they used as a troop ship, the Awatea. And our captain in his peacetime service, he'd been the captain of this monster ship and here we towering alongside a little motorboat alongside this and he'd been captain of that one and now he's captain of the little fellow. It's an allocation because he had been in the reserve and he got called in, he became a merchant officer, well he always was a merchant officer. He became a merchant reserve officer in the RAN.
- Being a smaller ship with a smaller compliment**
- 36:00 **of men did it make it more intense, the bond?**
- Oh yes. Oh of course it did. The smaller the ship, everybody virtually knew everybody else, had some association. There was an average of eighty. It fluctuated up and down on the ships but the corvettes had about eighty crew and the big ships, Perth for instance, they had six hundred and eighty. It was impossible, I only knew a smattering of people
- 36:30 in the other divisions, the seamen and whatever. There were only a very few of those people who I'd seen. I didn't even know all the engine room staff for that matter.
- So how many of you, how many stokers were there aboard the Mildura?**
- About sixteen.
- So much easier to know everybody?**
- Yes. That was about it, sixteen, something like that.
- 37:00 **And what about the officers? You must have been tripping over them as well sometimes?**
- Oh no we only had four officers on a corvette.
- No. I mean in the fact that you would have had a lot more contact with them.**
- Oh yes. I see what you mean, yes. We were in more contact with officers.
- Did you get to know the captain?**
- No. Captains always remained remote. We were very respectful of our captains. We always salute and stand aside and never intruded on him in any manner.
- 37:30 Although there's one old gentleman now. He lives in Brisbane, he's ninety-four, we still see him, sometimes he musters up enough strength and comes to our reunion. He lives in a home up in Brisbane but they've taken him sometimes to our reunion. He's very frail but he was an efficient man and a very efficient fellow. A good seaman I suppose. He didn't have to do any gun battles at all but he was a wonderful seaman. He had to be
- 38:00 because he was, these little ships took a lot more to control than the big ships in rough weather.
- And where were you ranking on the ladder at this stage when you joined the Mildura?**
- Oh I was a leading hand then. That's a corporal. That was my job.
- So you got to order people around a little bit.**
- Oh not much orders but that was the seniority of whatever your ratings were, yeah.
- 38:30 **You said that you only had a range of about ten days maximum, so did that mean that you**

were running into Sydney and out again to do these jobs?

Yes. The main part of that eastern coast part where the Japs were running was Sydney. We were stationed in Sydney and invariably the run was down past Gabo. And there was a, the ships come out from

- 39:00 Port Philip and they'd bring the ships outside the heads and a day or so up and meet us off Gabo and then we'd escort that convoy round from Bass Strait up the east coast to Sydney. Some of them had to go to Newcastle. Some of them even had to be taken out, went out again and went through up north. That was on a course but invariably the escort we were involved in was Melbourne to Sydney,
- 39:30 Newcastle then it came another time to escort Sydney, Brisbane, Townsville for a couple of months. Then another period we were stationed, as war progressed we moved on, we were running escorts, I mentioned Noumea. We did that out there and then we did from Cairns to Port Moresby and Milne Bay.
- 40:00 And then when that progressed there we were involved in (UNCLEAR). Buna and Gona and all these places, Finschhafen. As the war advanced up there we moved on in that manner up the coast.

So the Sydney, Melbourne kind of convoy you might have only been out for four or five days sometimes?

It was exactly six days return. That was a routine. Yes.

Like a weekly job.

Oh well it was a weekly job only it was a bit rough really, ceaseless. You didn't get any time off and

- 40:30 no overtime or anything. So if I went to work last night I would have to go tonight. Just keep going.

Tape 6

- 00:37 **Gordon where were you when the subs came into Sydney harbour?**

Noumea. Even though we were on the east coast patrols two corvettes had been called to attend to the subs [submarines] that were attacking American troopships in Noumea so at that

- 01:00 particular time we were in Noumea. I can't relate any more than that.

What impact did the news have on you that Sydney had been attacked?

Very concerned, Sydney was sacrosanct. Attacking our wonderful harbour and our wonderful city at home, it was not supposed to be touched in our calculations and it was.

And when you did get back to Sydney,

- 01:30 **did you notice a change in atmosphere?**

My family were quite disturbed, that was the real change. They were all full of stories and neighbours. It did have an effect on them, it was an awakening to the drama of the war on our doorstep, it was an awakening.

What changes had

- 02:00 **come to Sydney at that time because of the war?**

I was most startled at that stage to see a jeep in George Street. Jeeps were only supposed to be up in the war zone and there we had a jeep, foreign vehicle of course but Americans had brought jeeps into Sydney. The war is having an effect on Sydney, we were in the war. That was a

- 02:30 very obvious little one that I recall.

And the family were dealing with the rationing situation?

Yeah, that was a disaster. My poor old Mum with a large family, she's relying on coupons and whatever little supplies she could eke out. She had no facilities of buying extras on the black market as it were there was always something like that to be gained somewhere but she wasn't able to indulge that sort of thing so she had to rely on what the

- 03:00 rations were. I was able to supplement them on my infrequent visits back home, I was able to bring such things as a tin of coffee. You're not supposed to do it of course but I'd bring a tin of coffee from the ship. That was invaluable. Another one, my poor old father was a smoker and he was getting I think

- 03:30 one ounce of tobacco a week, that was a day's ration really. I was able to because all troops were rationed with so much tobacco and I chose to take the tobacco because my father would get half my ration, I'd bring that home. He'd look to me when I came, I always had some extra smokes for him.

Do you think mum and dad were a little bit concerned for your welfare now that

04:00 **the Japanese were on the doorstep?**

Oh, were they. My brother subsequently joined the service. He joined three years after the war started. He was too young to go earlier but he was of age and they took him. He was only seventeen when he left. He was involved too at that stage of the war. My mother and father, they've got two sailors

04:30 they had to worry about and they were certainly worried.

Did the public know much about the sort of activities that you were involved in and the fact that there was such a close threat to merchant vessels from the Japanese on the east coast?

Not the individual ships, they knew there was a threat. They didn't tell the losses of individual ships or how many.

05:00 They knew ships were being attacked off the east coast. The very fact that Bondi and coastal parts were shelled by the Japanese and of course the raid on the harbour itself by the midget submarines, they were well aware but not the extent, they didn't know what ships. No individual ships

05:30 names were ever declared in any of these problems.

Did you get that information, did you know the extent of what was going on?

Most of us did, not straight away. We knew when ships were lost, particularly navy ships but then we'd be told that a merchant ship was lost off Gabo or something, we'd know that sort of thing. I actually saw one of the ships blow up one night off Montague Island it was.

06:00 This ship was struck, I saw the flare and it blew up. That was at midnight one night.

Were you restricted in what you could tell your parents about what was going on?

Verbally, you're not supposed to write much, couldn't write letters about it. You'd naturally tell them, it's a bit hard to censor people passing messages across the kitchen table at home.

06:30 **So you could give them a little bit of privileged information?**

Yes. Then again, didn't want to disturb them too much anyway. I was concerned for them. They weren't going to war but they worried more than they needed to.

So how sticky did it get for you doing these convoys, did you end up under fire from the Japanese?

07:00 No, we were chasing submarines you see. There was no surface vessels down here. The submarines that did have guns mounted never attempted to attack a surface warship. Because a warship even though we were a small warship had a better chance of knocking off a sub and we weren't very valuable to them either, they don't want to risk their sub when they could knock a merchant ship.

07:30 A little escort vessel was nowhere near the value to their war effort than to get a merchant ship. They weren't ready to torpedo minor war vessels.

So did you often come close to Jap subs?

We did. We had many alarms and many attacks with depth charges but none

08:00 of them proved effective. They could have been, we got no result from them and subsequent war histories don't indicate the Japs lost any subs to our efforts. Our main effort was defensive because we were dropping depth charges in their vicinity, that was enough to keep them down, they knew they were in danger if they presented themselves any closer to the surface and

08:30 became more visible so they didn't want to do that. Our effort was in keeping them at a distance.

You mentioned you were able to get a little bit of leave, spend a little bit of time in Sydney with your family.

Very rarely did we get more than one night's leave in a row. To illustrate that, at the end of the war, we were supposed to get three weeks leave a year and I'd already had

09:00 one month's leave and I had over three month's accrued leave so I wasn't getting much. They didn't call overnight leave, leave as such. I didn't get the three weeks annual leave that was rostered for everybody, we never got that. I got a month's leave from overseas leave and another

09:30 time I was given two week's leave when the ship was in Western Australia, took a week travelling either way. It was only the second time I got more than a few days in a row. I didn't have many days in a row, it didn't happen very often.

Apart from being with family in Sydney when you did have some time what sort of places would you go to for recreation?

10:00 I used to mainly go, I lived a train ride from Cronulla so I'd go to Cronulla and have a surf. Sometimes Manly.

Any dances or wandering up to the [Kings] Cross to see what was going on or anything like that?

The Cross was for visitors and I wasn't a visitor to Sydney, I didn't want to go to the Cross in the war but

10:30 we used to go to the city, the Trocadero, went to the Trocadero quite a bit and some other places in Sydney. There were service clubs, places to entertain troops. There were a number of them anyway in the city of Sydney. They had places, didn't sell any grog, it was tea and sympathy there or whatever you call it. They were nice places

11:00 and well attended too. Another favourite place was Johnny's Navy House, one of the few places in Sydney you could get a regular supply of beer but you were always under strict naval observation, there was a navy patrol there all the time to stop all the fights. There was always somebody causing a disruption but the authorities liked the disruption down there because it was in their dung hill and they could control it.

11:30 If you played up there you were under navy authority and you'd get lumbered by the navy. It was a good place to go though, I enjoyed being there, we all liked that.

Was there a limitation on how many beers you could have per night in a place like that?

They didn't count them but if you played up, if you were obstreperous they'd stop you like they do now, the publican is not so severe as they were in those days. Anybody was playing up the patrol used to stop them.

12:00 **What time would they stop the beers?**

Went to about nine o'clock. You could always get a cheap bed there. It was filled with hundreds of sailors, always overflowed. Lots of times I'd go to bed on the floor, a number of times, just sleep on the floor. It'd still cost you one and six for a bed and you didn't get a bed at all, you just slept on the floor.

Were you rubbing shoulders

12:30 **with many Americans at that point?**

No, Americans didn't use that place. There were Americans in Sydney of course. Americans were here thank goodness in those desperate times of the east coast patrols, we didn't have one major vessel here, we'd lost Sydney and Perth, Canberra, we didn't have any major vessels and there were four

13:00 wonderful, modern, nearly modern American destroyers here. Even though we had, I was on a little warship, they were only little warships, we wouldn't have been very effective if a big surface vessel come along and they gave us great heart. One of them was named Blue and the others I should remember and they were all lost, lost in the Solomons,

13:30 they were sent there when the battle of the Solomons came on. The Americans paid dearly in the Solomons for us.

What was your personal attitude towards American servicemen?

I liked them. I never found any trouble with them.

No resentment about the fact that they were running off with some Australian girls here and there?

I suppose I was running off with someone else's girl too.

14:00 I didn't have a girl then.

So you were having a little bit of luck yourself at that point?

Ah well, I had many girlfriends, I can't even remember their names. I couldn't remember the name of the next date, didn't matter to me.

You were doing well.

I was yes. It wasn't me doing well, she was doing well, reminded me who I was. I had to keep writing her letters.

We'll get to that part of the story quite soon I think.

14:30 **Let's talk a bit about the work you did around New Guinea and that general neck of the woods [area]. So that phase started for you when?**

When we first went to New Guinea, that was

- 15:00 early '43. We'd finished with the east coast by then and were moving up, taking convoys into New Guinea, Milne Bay, Buna and Gona, moving slowly up the coast. As the troops advanced we obviously moved up the coast and we lesser armed ships, small ships were not allowed within two hundred miles of an imaginary front line.
- 15:30 The reason was the fighters couldn't come down and get us, it would give time for our fighters to get in and protect us. We still had to escort the ships against the submarines but when it became dangerous for air cover we were limited in the areas we could operate. The corvettes, we never
- 16:00 got anywhere we were being bombed. Some of them did. We lost one corvette. [Unclear] into Timor got knocked off by bombers. That was one of the reasons why they put this limitation on preventing inadequately armed ships going into high danger zones, that's what happened, shouldn't have been there in the first place.
- 16:30 **So you would never set down up there, you would always turn around and come back, would you ever set foot on soil at Port Moresby?**
- Yeah, a number of times, I went to shore in Moresby quite a bit.
- What did you make of Moresby?**
- It was a service town. Obviously it was the black fellas town, it was their home but the rest was all service people.
- 17:00 I remember going out on an army truck, somebody took us for a ride over the mountains and not far out of the town was Kennedy air field. My eyes nearly popped out of my head. I said, "We're going to win this war." We were coming over this mountain, this hill looking down at this huge monster of airfield and full of hundreds of aircraft. "We're going to win." Of course, American aircraft,
- 17:30 they pumped stuff into there. That was a good confidence vote, seeing Kennedy airport for the first time. Not Kennedy, that's not the right name. It was a well known one, just over the hill from Moresby. There was a big disaster there one time, a troop carrying aircraft,
- 18:00 a bomber crashed into our troops. It failed to take off properly and crashed at the end of the airfield and killed hundreds of troops. You've probably got that story somewhere. What was the airfield again?
- I think it was five mile or seven mile.**
- Yes it was out of town, this army truck took a bunch of us out there, never mind,
- 18:30 Kennedy airfield is the famous one in New York.
- Never mind. Any other interesting experiences around that phase for you?**
- In that particular time we kept moving, we got to Madang and Biak, a little island in the gooseneck of New Guinea, a base.
- 19:00 **Did you ever have much to do with locals in those areas?**
- No. Not much need. Go ashore in places like Finschhafen and Hollandia, but there was nothing much there to see. Mostly I saw where advancing troops had flattened everything. Whatever natives, there'd been
- 19:30 white people, Dutch people in that area. We could see their bashed houses or such, structures or whatever there may have been and bits of proper made roadways and that but certainly no Dutch people there, they'd all been long evacuated out. There were native people around still but there was no contact. The only contact was
- 20:00 with other soldiers, already there.
- You mentioned earlier that there was a time when you thought the war was never going to end.**
- Dear me, didn't I think that, near the end. Coming up to Balikpapan or somewhere then and I remember thinking that. When the war was rumoured it was going to be ended and I can remember thinking, "This is a break for me," I didn't ever contemplate the end of the war, I thought
- 20:30 I'd be in a uniform forever. I didn't think about it whatsoever. Maybe it's one of those things, some of my mates there, they used to worry about it all the time, how long we were away and furthermore, they were the ones who were married or anxious to be married or they were tired of the war and desperate to be away from it. I just took
- 21:00 every day as it comes, that's what helped me, I had no real responsibilities particularly the marriage part. I couldn't have beared to be up there and have the responsibility of a wife, let alone a family, that'd be awful. I saw the result, these other poor devils lived like, worrying about it all the time, wanting to get home. I'd like to go home but it was never an urgency for me. These other fellas with

21:30 closer ties than mother and father, they were the ones who wanted to be home.

So you were coping okay but maybe starting to feel a bit weary about the whole thing?

I was getting browned off. Glad it was over of course when it eventually did happen but it was, I had a

22:00 resigned attitude to it all. I was just there to see the thing out, that was all I was doing.

So you did that stint working up around the islands there and what was next?

Next our ship needed a refit. Refits were the only time we got any lengthy, might have been three or four days at once. If

22:30 the ship went into dock for a couple of weeks that time was spread out giving each section, might be a break of three, if we were in there for three weeks, we each got a week's leave, that sort of thing. That's about how it averaged out, there was always two thirds of the ship ready to do their duty but the other third got time away. That's pretty well the system. The end of '44

23:00 our ship was sent to Fremantle. Fremantle had facilities that were available for the docking. All the east coast facilities were being used so we got sent over there. We were there for some, about a month doing this dockyard thing and we got home to the east for two week's leave, a week

23:30 each way on the train and then when we got back to the ship and ready for sea again we were doing eastern patrols for a couple of months and then we moved up from there, the war was advancing, we were sent up into Morotai, further north. We were operating there.

Just before you went to Morotai, did Nell come into the picture?

I met Nell in

24:00 late '44 when we were in Fremantle. Nell was working in the signals office there and the duty signal girls had to, after the signal was sent to the ship, a copy of that signal had to be delivered by hand to the ship if possible or some courier got them down there and that's when Nell was one of the girls used to come down to the ship sometimes and then I happened to see these girls again at the dance up at the town hall.

24:30 She's listening and she's laughing too. She got me.

Who do you think was chasing who?

It's an old story, you chase a girl, she catches you.

Did you get a chance to get the relationship going at that point

25:00 **or was it more just a friendship that you went back to later?**

I don't know about that one. She was good company, I was very happy to be with her. It's probably closest I'd known any girl in all the war, the closest. We were sent away again, we went up north to Morotai and we were up there for some months and then we were

25:30 sent to, it's not quite in sequence but I know we were at Tarakan, Balikpapan and the war finished. Peace was declared when we were in Balikpapan. This was the time I was full of wonder and didn't know when the war was going to finish, that was at Balikpapan. We had a few days there, a week or so while they

26:00 decided what was going. We even took aboard some army officers who were needed back in Darwin and we were to be sent to Darwin for recuperation. They tried to give a ship, anything over six months you got sent back to an Australian port for recreation leave, even though it was only Darwin or Cairns, you did get back on the mainland. We were going back to Darwin, for a bit of a rest.

26:30 We left Balikpapan and we got a signal halfway back to Darwin from Brunei, where we were, Balikpapan and we had to turn around and go back to the Philippines. Funny, all these frustrated soldiers on and they couldn't get off, we were going the wrong way. We took them up to Manila.

27:00 They must have got off at Manila but I know we were going the wrong way. We got sent up to do the relief of Hong Kong. This was when the minesweeping gear came into play. We were the 21st mine sweeping flotilla. Our ship was the lead ship of the flotilla, seven vessels and the idea was we would be there, the

27:30 channel had to be swept into Hong Kong because it had been mined, the Japanese had mined it. The British had mined it too but we knew where those mines were, we didn't know where the Japs had put them.

I don't want to get too far into that part of the story just yet because I just want to get a few more details on the other bits and pieces before we get stuck into that.

I was talking about Nell, wasn't I?

28:00 **You were telling me a story about Nell, if you want to finish that.**

I got tangled up going too fast. We went up there and the war was declared and eventually, this was leap frogged to alter again than Hong Kong. When we were all coming home, we were at least coming home this time and I got bundles of letters from Nell. I'd be sitting there, going home, we're all free and easy and had the lights on, ship's coming home with lights on.

28:30 I'd never been to sea with ship's lights on. Read that letter, throw it out, never see her again, throwing it all out. I haven't got any letters. Of course Nell's address was in Perth so I thought I'll never see her again. When I get to my father's place at Kogarah who should be there in uniform than Nell and her girlfriend

29:00 from Western Australia. I nearly fell over. What had happened in the mean time, when I was at Perth I'd given her my home address at Kogarah, they'd got drafted over to the eastern states here, another course they were doing and they presented themselves at my mother and father's. They welcomed these two girls with open arms, Gordon's friends. They'd been going out, visiting my Mum and Dad, without me knowing, where those letters got to, no time

29:30 to catch up with them. So she chased me, all the way from Western Australia. You fellows, we should protest, shouldn't we?

Did you get into trouble for throwing those lovely letters out the port hole?

Oh yeah, she never let up. She's laughing over there now.

30:00 Fifty six years, we've been married. Lucky, if I'd got it wrong. That's my story about that.

Very nice. Tell us about Morotai.

Morotai was a staging place for the allies, doing their advancement. That's where they gathered

30:30 forces to attack Borneo. It was out of there. There were massive Australian troops and American troops there and all our supply ships were all in Morotai, it was a big staging place. Morotai, there were natives at Morotai but didn't see many of them though. Recreation places there, football fields and such as that.

31:00 Recreation I should have mentioned, at various places there we were allowed to swim over the ship's side. I've often pondered this. Our so called tropic waters, full of sharks, I used to think about that. Anyway we all needed a swim or something, diving over the ship's side. I was a reasonably swimmer, I used to love swimming. A swimming

31:30 party necessitated an armed guard standing on a boat with a rifle. He couldn't hit a barn with a blunderbuss let alone trying to shoot a shark. They weren't looking at the sharks coming under the ship, they only looked for the sharks coming this way. I subsequently found out that the services generally agreed to do this

32:00 with the troops. They were so needful of exercise and entertainment, the swimming was a good outlet for them and they did lose a number of lives to sharks, there were fatalities but they reckoned the risk was worth the exercise, the recreation gained from it. It was a bit hairy out there. We used to play water polo,

32:30 whatever time, we had six to a side I think in a water polo team and we used to put out these little gantries at the side of the ship, goalposts, swimming up and down between. The worst part was being a goalie. It was all right being a goalie when you're out the front of the ship because you're out of the stream and the ship always faced where the current was and there's a flow of water going past the ship but if you were goalie in the back end, somebody throw the ball to the goal and miss it you still had to fox the ball.

33:00 I'd be halfway out, gasping for breath, trying to get, I'd catch the ball eventually and pushing it forward and it'd come back before I could get a swing. What made it worse, I was panicking about these damn sharks, I kept seeing these sharks. There was no one there looking for them. Obviously no sharks came near me, not that I know of anyway. I didn't like being a goalie in the water polo.

So what operations were you involved in

33:30 **in Morotai?**

All these escorts. That was, you don't want to know about Hong Kong yet. No, just escorts.

Nothing out of the blue?

No, all pretty routine. Don't forget the Japs were on the tail end of it all the way there, weren't going too well at all.

Even still you felt like a never ending

34:00 **effort for you.**

I got to know their determination, their fervour and what sort of people they were. They were bad enough in post ordinary warfare let alone foreigners trying to set foot on their own soil. They were fanatics and they would have slaughtered themselves and their own people,

34:30 would have been a disaster. Of course the atom bomb prevented all that.

So you had a pretty well developed concept of what sort of a soldier the Japanese soldier was at that stage?

My word, I knew what they'd be doing, yes.

So it was Borneo next?

Borneo would have been next yes. That was when,

35:00 moved on from Morotai, some of the assaults were on Brunei and north of Borneo and we were involved in Balikpapan and Tarakan. Tarakan first and then Balikpapan was where we were in the final assault. That was the final Australian military effort in the war. That's where we were when

35:30 the rumours of the war came upon us, initially came our supply boat going over to the big supply ship and they bring back the stores. They were coming back telling us that American officers on that ship were taking bets the war's going to finish in a fortnight or next week. Sure enough, the officers knew about the atom bomb

36:00 being prepared and taking bets on the score of that, we didn't know anything about atom bombs. I knew as we all did the theory of an atom bomb but it hadn't been explored or mastered, to smash an atom bomb was an unknown result, no one knew really what was going to happen then they successfully contained it and used it. So we thought we were coming home,

36:30 all come back to Darwin with these captive Australian Army officers and we finished up in Civic Bay first, next adjoining Manila. There were five hundred assault vessels waiting there, gathered to assault the mainland of Japan. It was incredible. The ships that were there. What would have happened to them, half of them would have been sunk but they certainly

37:00 would have taken a big bite out of, some grip on the mainland of Japan and that would have been a disaster for whoever troops put ashore there. That's why I thought the war was never going to end in effect. From there we found our duties would be doing this mine sweeping and we led our mine sweepers into, the minesweepers led the fleet in.

37:30 A British admiral, Fraser, he came in aboard a big, [HMS] Augusta, was a large British cruiser, he followed it in to the harbour and then we found our way in. The Japanese still had the signal station, we didn't know, we were warned away. The Japanese said they'd fire on us if we come into the narrows going through there so we went out again. Then they brought the big

38:00 battle ship up and said if you fire on us the battle ship will obliterate them which they would have. We peacefully passed through these narrows, they didn't fire on us. We were sweeping the mines too, turns out there was none there, or if they had they'd been cleared, we didn't get any mines but that meant our Australian ships, my particular one was the first one back into Hong Kong harbour

38:30 at the end of the war. Then some few days later there was a big surrender ceremony. British marines come in and we saw them, they went ashore in Hong Kong, fully armed and they rounded up all the Japanese troops on the shore. We could hear them, there was shooting going on ashore but I don't think anyone,

39:00 didn't come to any battles, just skirmishes, British marines did their bit. They still, the Japanese still had British policemen there from pre-war. They were using, and logically too, they had British policemen helping to control their occupation. Maybe they didn't like doing it but it was probably better than being stuck behind stone walls or something during the occupation. The British policemen were there and together with the marines they got the place

39:30 controlled. A few days later we were allowed to go ashore in Hong Kong and the locals, didn't see any Japanese there but the locals were all very subdued and worried about seeing the Allied troops marching down their streets. Another interesting thing, from the shore, these marines

40:00 assault, no the marines didn't cause this particular thing, it was the locals turning on all quislings. We heard this across the harbour. There was a stone wall around the foreshores of Hong Kong harbour and they were getting these quislings and tossing them over. Just toss them in the river. The locals were doing that to the quislings.

Tape 7

00:31 **Gordon this jumps back in time a little bit but how did you feel when you heard about the loss of the Perth?**

It was devastating. In one blow I lost the most mates in the whole war. Some of those men, the very day I joined, joined the service with me. Did our training together and of them there would have been at least six

01:00 very close pals, they were dear to my heart and the ship was dear to my heart too, being my first ship and a very efficient ship. It had fronted up to all the battles and the traumas and dramas of my early life and all the hard times I'd known and all the good times, the adventures that a young man started, it came to be associated with that ship and to think the thing

01:30 was lost forever in such dramatic circumstances. I was devastated. It was a very trying time and I still feel for the loss of that ship. I'm no longer the president of the Perth Association, we disbanded it as such, there's no more records kept but I was vice president for many years and the president

02:00 died eighteen months ago and I became the president. There's a few of us. We still have a monthly meeting and I can gather at the most six people at our meetings. We meet in the Gallipoli Club in the city, for many years and still doing but no longer official, it's just a get together. We kept the records, elections, fees and that's all been abandoned but that was how closely

02:30 associated I was with that ship. I marched with them virtually every Anzac Day until recent times and we became, we invited Perth II, a fine bunch of young men, younger men, they're no longer young and they rightly have taken over the Perth Association, they call themselves the Perth National Association which embodies both the ships of Perth. There is a Perth III now,

03:00 fitting out, it's not been commissioned yet. I was in Melbourne at the launching of it, Nell was there, about three months ago, the launching of the Perth. The name of Perth is very dear to my heart and always will be.

The mates that you lost on Perth, did they go down with the ship?

Four of them did and there were,

03:30 I'm talking about very close fellows, two others survived the POW and there were a number of others, basically I'd call them acquaintances, I knew them and it was those very close ones that really hurt me but then the men that survived the horrors of the POW camp, that was a thing we were all concerned about too. I was

04:00 just as intensely concerned about because we didn't know who the survivors were until the war finished. All those three and a half years they were prisoners and we didn't know who survived the sinking. Of course two parts didn't survive, they were killed in the action and the other third survived the sinking, didn't all survive being a POW, lots of them died in the camp too.

04:30 It was a touching time for me.

Did you ever have thoughts that it could have been you on that ship?

Did I, never out of my mind, it could have included me. Those men, they joined the same day as me, we did the same functions together, joined together, drafted to the ship together and just a turn of fate, that's all life is you know. If they'd have asked me, I

05:00 desperately wanted to stay aboard the ship and come home with it but I was denied that and all the rest of my days I've been thankful that it so occurred.

You must have been proud that she put up a good fight.

Yes, they used every piece of, they were firing practise shells. Practise shells are ineffective, they didn't penetrate, low power explosive, they were just practise shells, didn't have the range but

05:30 that's what they were driven to using those shells, they actually ran out of ammunition.

When you were up around say Morotai region into 1945 what sense of danger was there left?

We were becoming more secure. We knew the progress of the war and the heavy stuff which was

06:00 American Navy, they bore the brunt of the Pacific war, they were ferocious and determined. Halsey just was to get his vengeance and avenge the devastation at Pearl Harbour and they did too. That's why the Americans didn't want anybody interfering, they allowed the Australians because Australia was involved. Not to the extent of the Americans and their loss but the Australians were involved

06:30 in this onslaught of Japanese advances. They didn't want the Netherlands, France or British, they didn't want anybody. That's why the British didn't operate in the Pacific, Halsey didn't want them in there, he made them stop in the Indian Ocean, they wouldn't accept them. That's been up the nose of the Brits ever since. They weren't allowed, right to the very end. They did get

07:00 attacked by some kamikazes in the last bit of it but I'm sure that's what has them a bit dismayed that they weren't involved in the real attack on Japan.

So you were in that part of 1945 there, you were feeling a bit more secure?

Confident, yeah. I didn't think we were going to lose but I was anticipating a dreadful assault on the mainland of Japan. That was the thing,

07:30 in the distance, something awful was going to happen and it did, it happened to the Japs.

Do you think as you got to be an older sailor you got a bit warier?

Of course you did, yeah, experience and awareness, more confident. I was coping with it quite well.

But do you think you might have thought, it's coming to an end,

08:00 **I don't want to get killed in the last bit of it?**

Yeah. I didn't think that much, myself, of going off. In the navy there was never very much chance of minor wounding, it was always the lot, get killed, drowned. The worst was going to happen straight away, that was on your mind.

08:30 I didn't anticipate getting wounded, that never entered my head, being a wounded survivor.

By this stage you must have had a few young fellows on the boat that hadn't seen much?

There was always rotating new chums coming onto our ship.

Did you tell them a few mess deck stories?

They were aware of me, used to

09:00 hold me in awe really. I was only young then but I was old to those fellows. They were coming in eighteen, nineteen and I was the ripe old age of twenty four, an old bloke. Anybody thirty in the navy was an old bloke, that's what we would think. Our captain was thirty four and I thought he was a grandfather.

09:30 **So the young fellows used to hold you up as a bit of an 'old salt' [experienced sailor]?**

They did too, they knew that I'd been on Perth, Vendetta in the Mediterranean. Not so much the young fellows only, the older blokes my age and also people who served before me. When they knew I'd survived and experienced the Mediterranean, that was always and still is a big thing in the services. Soldiers also,

10:00 soldiers that served in the Middle East are far more, not respected, the other soldiers have got respect but the soldiers themselves look to the Middle East men as seniors.

What did you see of actions like the Balikpapan landings and the other landings?

There again we didn't actually see the landing, we were bringing up the escorts, escorting the supply ships and such coming in behind

10:30 but when we got to Tarakan we went ashore, we went ashore in both places really. Tarakan was the place, or Balikpapan, one of them, there were a series of oil tanks on the shore line behind the beaches amongst the palm trees and they were in the onslaught bombing prior to the landing these things were set fire.

11:00 The steel structures, the roofs of the tanks had collapsed, you can imagine, the bomb, burnt out. I went ashore there, in this particular place, nothing to see except broken down palm trees and remnants of wrecked buildings. One thing, the soldier gave us a ride in a jeep, a couple of us along the foreshore of the beach and he showed us these dugouts

11:30 formed from the fallen palm trees, they weren't block houses, they were only made of palm trees but they were earthworks, palm trees and slits between the trunks of the trees. I recall the soldier said these have been fired on or fired out, whatever the word is, with flame throwers. The flame throwers were dreadful,

12:00 brutal things, they'd fire these awful pall of flame into the dugout, nowhere to go. One of the worst features I thought til then all flame throwers fired live. They fired cold, as they called it, they just fired fuel into it and after they filled the thing with the fuel, terribly volatile fuel they'd fire a live shot and set fire to it.

12:30 Terrible. Looking through these slits in these palm trees, I tried to look in and it's all black of course but the smell of it, all these burnt bodies still in there. They stink. I didn't spend too much time looking in these burnt out blockades.

Must have been quite an ugly sight.

Awful, yeah. Must have been uglier for the troops

13:00 who had to come along behind and clear that stuff away, dig into it, clear it somehow and get out the bodies and bury them. I wonder did they just bulldoze those holes and put more sand on top of them. I

don't know what was done. Would have been a terrible event, trying to get the bodies out of there.

Did you have any sympathies for the Japanese?

No, none at all. They did, brutal people, it's bad enough

13:30 the few stories we heard of them but I had no sympathies. I had sympathies for the brave men, undeniably brave, particularly those sailors that manned the submarines that come into our harbour but if it'd been my turn to drop a depth charge on them I certainly would have done it. They were brave men and our nation done the right thing. They recovered four bodies from that Sydney Harbour raid,

14:00 dead of course, bodies. They were cremated and sent through the Red Cross channels back to Japan and the most wonderful thing we done really to hopefully alleviate the pressure on our own prisoners of war up there. I understand it had some effect too, the Japanese authorities did treat

14:30 us differently. That didn't necessarily emulate down the line to the brutal camp leaders, the fellows in charge of the POW camps, they still brutalised our soldiers but it did do something. If I'd have been in charge of that I'd have done exactly that, treated the ashes with respect.

Do you think it was correct to accord them that honour?

I do. It showed we were an honourable enemy and we honoured some

15:00 very brave people. They were fighting for their country. They might have been an illegal claim but they were still fighting for their country, their country told them to do it.

Did you encounter any Japanese prisoners at Balikpapan?

No, the only Japanese prisoners we had were taken prisoner in Hong Kong. I saw a number of Japanese prisoners there. I saw Japanese prisoners

15:30 in Morotai on the way home, they were in a compound but it was not my responsibility to handle them. A little story, when we were in Hong Kong after we'd been there a week or so they found out that the brewery was some miles down the coast and they found it was still occupied by the Japanese. They'd been making whatever the beer was. These troops were occupying the brewery and we were sent

16:00 down with a party British marines, about fifteen of them, we got them on board our ship and chugged down the big long bay for about four hours or something. There was a jetty, must have been shallow water because it was a very long jetty and the head of the jetty was a big square of work space on the wharf and down the centre of this little track was the normal thing you find on a wharf,

16:30 a set of rails and hand trolleys for unloading and such. When we tied alongside the jetty and down went the marines, all marched off under the control of the British sergeant of marines and he's leading his men down and we could hear in the distance gunfire, these people weren't pulling any punches, they were firing to warn the people, hands up.

17:00 They eventually rounded them all up, it took about an hour, we were wondering what was going on, they were out of sight. Then up they all come, they had about thirty of these Japs, they marched them all up the wharf and they were all sitting on their haunches, looking at the ship and the marine sergeant in charge, they're all looking over the side, and the marine sergeant said, the captain's on the bridge, he's looking down

17:30 and he said to the captain, "Captain, do you want any beer?" and of course the captain, he got drowned out because we're all, "Oh yes, he wants a beer." The captain said yes so the marine sergeant he went along and said, "I want all of you," he's pointing at these troops, "on your feet and go down." They wouldn't move. They're looking at him, they disobey him. He's got a service pistol

18:00 on his hip, on a cord, it went whack, whack on about three blokes sitting down and they all sprung up. He pistol whipped them. They didn't like a sore head. They all marched off, they've got their hands on their head, they all trotted off. They were about half an hour or something. Back they come, they were using this hand trolley and some were carrying boxes of beer, we loaded our ship with beer. I don't know how many were there but

18:30 there were lots of crates of beer come on board and we stacked them all over the deck. We took them and the prisoners, and the marines, we all went back and we gave the marines, they took some beer with them back to their ship and we still've got all this beer. Our captain is making a big deal of this, he's making signals to the various friendly captains he knew round the harbour, "Do you want beer?" So they sent over a little delivery boat and the captain would load them up with cases of beer back to their ship.

19:00 Then it was our turn to get near them and we're licking our chops and it was the most frightful beer, dreadful beer it was. Mildura captured a brewery, made a name for itself. The only unit in our forces that captured a brewery in its history.

I think it's an incredible part of the ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] legend, capturing a brewery.

Yeah, we captured a brewery.

19:30 **Just back a second to when you heard about the surrender when you were on Balikpapan, what sort of celebrations kicked off?**

Celebration, we weren't allowed to do much celebrating. We had an armed guard fore and aft on our ship for some days. They were wary of the Japanese trapped at either end of the channel and they'd been drifting down the stream,

20:00 they'd paddle out on a log or whatever, some of them were armed, usually with grenades or something like that, they'd hide in some shrubbery and they'd come alongside, attempt to board the ship and then throwing grenades into the ships, that's why we had these armed guards there. We had been aware of that and some men had been killed on the other ships, American ships, they'd lost people. So with this thing in the wind, we anticipated,

20:30 we knew the bomb had gone off and the Japanese were given so much time to accept the terms of surrender. The second bomb went off and that meant everyone was aware it was going to happen. The captain took these armed guards off the ship and he got the duty deck officer to lock all the small arms, there were always ready use arms

21:00 and big shells around the ship ready to be used in emergencies and small arms, pistols and rifles. They were all locked away in the big steel locker, padlock on and the duty officer had to give the captain the key. This is a bit severe this. We found out the captain was aware what happened with people in their excitement firing off arms and our guards had no access,

21:30 the captain had the key to the lock and we watched the shore this evening of the celebration and there were trucks moving up and down through the jungle, we could see them. And the firing, grenades, all these explosions going on and it turned out how dangerous, they were killing their own people in the excitement, blokes were getting killed on the shoreline of Balikpapan. Our captain had a lot of foresight

22:00 to anticipate that.

Any splicing of the mainbrace?

Yes we did, we got a beer issue to celebrate that. We didn't have much beer up there. We were at this stage getting an issue of beer. Twice a week we got a bottle of beer, in harbour and it didn't accumulate. Oh yes it did but you couldn't get it all at once. It accumulated

22:30 a week, two day's store, you were allowed to have that one day apart, a bottle one day apart. They didn't want any drunks. The cunning fellows, one bloke would get two bottles on the day of issue and the next day the other fellow would get two bottles on that day of issue so they were getting a bit of a sting out of it. This particular night we might have even got two bottles, I know there was a bit of a celebration on the ship because we got an extra issue

23:00 of beer anyway.

It's only fitting.

Yeah. Well, spent six years trying to arrive at this point, wasn't a bad consolation to have a bottle of beer for six year's effort.

How long did you think at that point it was going to take you to get back and get out of the navy?

We were obligated by our joining agreement, the engagement for

23:30 a minimum of two years or the duration of war plus six months, that was the terms of engagement. So we all thought we were going to do the six months and it was true. There was a system of points for discharge. We didn't know much about that. Married people with long service, they were obviously the first fellas out. Then come back to seeing I had longer service than most but

24:00 I wasn't married and that delayed me a bit. I actually went unfortunately, I didn't do the six months, I was two days short of the six months which denied me a very lovely medal. There was a medal issued for a hundred and eighty days active service in a non war period. We were active enough, we were mine sweeping for the next six months except

24:30 two days so I didn't get that lovely medal. Some of my pals, they stayed on the ship, same as me, they were on the ship for the rest of the week and they got this. I remember writing to Bronwyn Bishop when I got that. I got a nasty letter saying I wasn't entitled to it so I wrote a personal letter back because I used to see Bronwyn Bishop in Martin Place. She wouldn't remember me but I knew her. That's when she used to be the minister, I was always at the head

25:00 of the Perth detachment. I got a letter back, too bad, I didn't make a hundred and eighty days.

That's a big tough.

Yeah.

So you went up to Hong Kong. Did you see anything of the surrender ceremony up there?

On the day Admiral Fraser, the British admiral, he brought his fleet in there, he had major ships and aircraft carriers and battle ships, so he

- 25:30 conducted the surrender service and we knew when it was to be. Nobody had any shore leave then. Every ship in harbour had to be dressed. They used every signal flag they could find, didn't indicate any signal just rows and rows of coloured flags all over every ship and it looked good too. We knew they were going to fire a gun at whatever time it was, when the actual, you could see in the distance they had a bit circle
- 26:00 of our allied ships all round the main vessel and the Japanese generals were there on the ship. When the signal took place, the signature was given and they fired guns commemorating the closure of the war. Then we had to drop the flags, clean the ship up. No longer having a party, take all the bunting down.

26:30 **Following the surrender ceremony and the brewery incident you got even further away from home then didn't you, you had to go to China?**

Yeah, we did this minesweeping around, getting into the harbour then we did minesweeping in extended areas around Hong Kong and then we eventually went up the coast to Fuzhou and Amoy.

- 27:00 Fuchau we didn't go into, we were off Fuzhou, but Amoy was an international sea port and that was a very worrying place. There was no fighting there but it was the time of Chinese communists, Chinese nationalists and the Russians were in there, American marines were in there and British soldiers.
- 27:30 It was a rather worrying place. We were a few sailors walking round the town, we're the only people without any arms. They're all getting round with machine guns and bombs in their pocket. There had been skirmishes, not that we saw them but these people, the Chinese nationals disliked the Chinese communists and they were starting to shoot each other. I didn't like Amoy at all, very glad when we left but that was off the island of,
- 28:00 the offshore island of Formosa. There's two islands within ferry distance and that was where the British government had been, the consuls more than the government, in the peace time. They had a nice consulate out there, quite dilapidated when we got out to see it but they had a billiard table of all things. We'd go out there and enjoy some of the old colonial lifestyle for a couple of hours.
- 28:30 There was still a native caretaker there. They let us play billiards in the consuls palace, in his apartment anyway. I can't remember the islands name, it's well known and they would bombard each other and they were doing it for years. Still to this day, they're part of Formosa, of course Formosa is at loggerheads with the Chinese
- 29:00 government, they're still trying to maintain their own nationality, their own government.

How would you say the Chinese occupation had treated that part of the world from the evidence you saw?

They treated them very harshly. They slaughtered, rounded up peasants and made slaves of them. They'd slaughter them if they didn't do what they were told, virtually starve them, terrible time. The wealthy Chinese didn't get involved in that part apparently,

- 29:30 they continued to trade to some degree.

Was there any damage that you could see?

Not such as that, no.

Sounds like there was a bit of a breakdown of law and order?

There was too. I didn't indicate before, in Hong Kong they use those colonial police, they still had a job during the Japanese occupation and they were well used to restore the by the

- 30:00 British again, helped them to restore the natural form of things.

How long did you spend up around in the Chinese waters before you were sent home?

We were about four weeks around there, doing those things. Mainly going into Amoy, I didn't find out until after, it was after we were there, we had to go in and show a British flag. That was the whole system of letting the locals know in these foreign ports,

- 30:30 show the British flag, that's what we were doing.

Letting them know that the empire was returning?

That the empire was, on its last gasp but it was still going.

What Australian port did you sail back to?

Cairns first and down to Brisbane and Sydney. When we got to Sydney we had about a week in Sydney

and after

- 31:00 a week we were sent down to Melbourne and that's where I spent the rest of that six months I'm talking about, mine sweeping in Bass Strait. That part, the war wasn't even on. Minesweeping in Bass Strait, the amount of rough Bass Strait gets, it was an awful time we had, used to hide in behind
- 31:30 the southern point of Victoria, a big lighthouse there, there's a little bay we'd go and hide in there from the storms of Bass Strait then we'd duck out and do a day's mine sweeping. You couldn't do much in very high seas pulling mines, it was too dangerous. When we pulled a mine up sometimes it exploded on the way up but not often, something had to set it off.
- 32:00 A big mine was a six foot ball and they were floating and when they cut the suspending rope, wire, they'd bob to the surface because they were all anchored at a certain depth. Our sweeping wire used to cut them free. When they bobbed to the surface they'd explode naturally sometimes, vibration would set off the horn but we used rifle fire,
- 32:30 anti tank rifles they used on the ship and they used to crack the shell and if the shell was cracked in half they'd expose the float part and the mine would sink. I presume some of these things are still sitting on the bottom, I don't know how long they'd last. They're submerged down there and they're full of explosive. On one occasion we pulled, recovering the wire at the end of the day sweeping
- 33:00 and tangled in the float, the last thing was a float beyond where the cutting wire was, they dragged up the anchor, there was a big weight at the bottom and we'd pulled the weight off the bottom and the mine's still coming up with it. It got within touching point, of course we could have blown the stern off the ship. They stopped the recovery wire, there's big winches pulling this thing and they stopped, the ship was progressing slowly, always when they were recovering mines,
- 33:30 stopped, everyone was ordered up forward except the couple of blokes in charge of this recovery wire and they had to stay there and supervise it. They were successful, relaxed all the wire, didn't use the steam power, let it run free and the ship slowly picked up speed and moved away very gently. It'd only gone thirty feet and this mine, you could see the mine bobbing around under these wires getting tangled up in the horns of it
- 34:00 and the damn thing blew up. A most spectacular explosion too, being so close, that's how dangerous it was there. There was one ship doing the same exercise as us a little bit later than that, he was up in New Guinea waters, Coral Sea somewhere, round Milne Bay I think, [HMAS] Warrnambool and Warrnambool was sunk sweeping one of these mines, lost lives in that after the war.

So there were still plenty of mines bobbing around in Bass Strait at the end of 1945?

Oh yes.

- 34:30 Bass Strait took a long while to clear out. I didn't see the end of the clearance down there. My six months was up and they sent me my relief from the ship and I had to be allowed to run free. I left the ship then but the minesweeping was still going on. I think they were still minesweeping a couple of years later, still dragging mines in various parts round our coast.

- 35:00 **There must have been quite a lot down there if they hadn't swept them all up earlier in the war?**

My word, I suppose they're sure enough now but it took them a long while to say it was all clear.

The ship, the Mildura hadn't been used very much for minesweeping in the main part of the war, did it take a while to get the techniques up and running?

The men were trained in minesweeping, they knew what to do.

- 35:30 They probably had a few practise runs, I can't remember that. The only stoker was the chief stoker, he was on the big winches and he had a stoker offside looking after, called a grease monkey but there was only two stokers in that operation, the rest were seamen. There were floats and kites and such.

- 36:00 **In that time sailing up and down Bass Strait did you start to get a little bit frustrated about finishing up and wanting to get home?**

Yeah, everyone had the urge then. They were all waiting for this points, you gather so many points and then when you accrued enough points when it got down to your level, obviously the very early ones had the most points. A fellow been in the service the full

- 36:30 six years and he was a married man with five kids, he got out earlier than a married man with no kids and all that.

Did it make you wish that you'd married Nell a bit earlier?

Ah well, perhaps, I knew that was the thing holding up, gathering the points.

When were you finally discharged Gordon?

End of April '46.

37:00 **Where were you discharged from?**

In Rushcutters, same place I joined. They made me, didn't make me wait but there was various routines for discharge, had to go out the army barracks and have medicals, fill in forms, state all the complaints, be examined so that I was

37:30 given a clean bill of health. I did have a clean bill of health other than this bronchitis I'd been treated for. I had them write that down, they stood me in good stead too. Furthermore you had a quicker discharge if you didn't claim a pension I was told, just claim for treatment, a very wise move. All the people were claiming pensions, told to claim pensions, I didn't do that, I got

38:00 an earlier discharge, most of them got knocked back, they were all bodgies. Their fathers in the first war told them to claim for a pension but naturally there were some people got a pension from the word go but I didn't. I went thirty years after the war before they gave me any assistance. I already had a claim in and that sustained me. My claim against them was treatment. All they did for my treatment was they used to give me cough mixture.

38:30 Quite useless it was, I had to go all the way out to Randwick hospital, see a doctor and he'd give me a prescription. I know what it was, it was a saline solution to flush my nose and throat, that was it. I could have made the same salt water mix at home without going to Randwick but it was on the list, on my medical history. When eventually I did show cause and they finally,

39:00 I got a ten per cent disability allowance. I've done better since. As I grew older of course the more ailments became evident and they accepted it but it stood me in good stead.

How did it feel walking out of Rushcutters in civvies [civilian clothing] after those six years?

It wasn't quite Rushcutters unfortunately. Reporting back and from there and I was being diverted to Marrickville for

39:30 medical examinations. I went to various establishments and not only Rushcutters, Garden Island, had to go there for procedures. One day spent was returning all my gear, the things had to be returned. You're not allowed to keep your hammock, blankets and such things,

40:00 a life belt, gas mask, they all had to be returned. What did hurt me was this, I tried to return a grey army blanket I had and they said no, it was a white blanket, the navy used to have an off white blanket with three broad navy stripes and the army blankets were grey with a royal blue stripe through it.

40:30 I got that blanket very honourably, the army one, when I was coming out of Tobruk one of the wounded soldiers laying on the deck was getting wet, sea water washing over them, spray coming over the top of them. I went inside and got my blanket and put it over this bloke. When it come to go ashore the ambulance blokes come on, they lifted him up bodily in his stretcher and carried my blanket with him. I didn't have blanket but someone found

41:00 an army blanket that had been left behind and I washed that blanket and had it for the rest of the war. Only had one blanket, my army blanket. I tried to put it and they wouldn't listen to me, I had to pay two pound that blanket, I was fined two pound and they still kept the grey blanket too. They took my blanket. An honourable cause, a wounded soldier got it and they still charged me for the blanket.

Tape 8

00:32 **Gordon can you take us through that final process of finally stepping out to civvy street [civilian life] and how you initially felt when you found yourself in that situation free of the navy?**

Despite all the anticipation I had in being free of the navy and all that,

01:00 it felt quite strange not to be in the navy. It had become really a part of me. I belonged to the navy. I really understood the navy even though I was only a lower rank but I was still attached to the navy, it was me. I would have stayed in the navy or given more consideration to staying in the navy if I hadn't intended to marry. By this time Nell

01:30 was around, we were still waiting to be married, we were engaged. I didn't imagine myself being an absent husband because I'd seen these other fellas, lonely men, unnecessarily lonely and they didn't appreciate the navy because they were always trying to be home, or wishing they were home, it disturbed them, they didn't have happy lives. I in turn didn't want that if I

02:00 chose to be married I didn't want that extra burden on me. I was going to establish a home. I followed the ideals of not just my father, my uncles and all the senior members of my family had all had the traditional family life. My grandparents, they all lived like that, I thought that was the way I should go. So that's why I didn't remain in the navy and yet I was that deeply involved, when I was actually

- 02:30 free of the navy I felt quite strange. When I left that showground and walked out of there I was still in my uniform but I knew I wasn't in the navy and I thought, "This is funny." I'd been back and seen my old boss incidentally, he was only too anxious to get me back there, he was short handed there and he wanted me to start work straight away. I said, "No, I'm going to have a month's leave," which I did. I reported back to them
- 03:00 and I started straight away my old job. So then I had to get used to catching the bus and the train, going back to work every day. That was an effort too, I didn't like that routine very much of having a hurried breakfast before I started work. Don't forget, for six years I only had to walk from here to that door and I was on the job. Here I was, having to travel all this time on buses trying
- 03:30 to get to work. When you're on a ship you start work straight away, so I had to get used to that. Then of course, still with Nell, Nell was here, she hadn't gone for her discharge yet. She had to go back to Perth, Nell lived in Perth and she was in the navy here still. She was sent back to Perth eventually for her discharge. We were still looking for somewhere to live. It took eighteen months
- 04:00 and we found a little flat so we had the promise of that and we were married then but it was an eighteen months lapse. I had to go back and live with my father again for about eighteen months. Not that it mattered but I still wasn't married at that time. We got the flat and in the mean time I'd applied for this home here, a home, I didn't know where it was to be and this one was eventually offered to me. I had to wait for it to be built, I picked it out off the plan and I had
- 04:30 to pay a substantial deposit but I was fortunate, all that time in the service, I had all this accrued leave and accrued war service leave, delayed, gratuity. I had all that war gratuity and I was paid two and sixpence a day.
- 05:00 The ordinary service, for being overseas, we got two and six a day added to our discharge for war service. I had five and a half years of two and six a day which meant I had considerable savings there and I had my own savings. The little bit of time was only worth sixpence a day deferred pay, that's the word I'm trying to think off. The deferred pay for ordinary people in Australia, non
- 05:30 war zones anyway was sixpence a day. I had a big advantage there and all of it went into the deposit for this home which was very gratifying. This home has been the anchor of our days, this place here we're living in. Very pleased. I always thought from the word go I was fortunate to get such a nice place. It's not the grandest place but to get into this as a raw discharged young service person I was very pleased. And we made the most of it,
- 06:00 we had bare boards, we came here with bare boards in this place, packing cases and things. We had a bedroom suite, that was a bit of luck. So we had very modest beginnings here. We had a family before we moved in, the eldest girl was already born so she had to be cared for, Nell couldn't work. Other children came along.
- 06:30 We coped thanks to Nell, Nell worked her tail off here organising our children on modest income and we've done well, all our kids have done well too. I've had a real proud life, so has Nell.

Gordon how long do you think it took you to adjust to that feeling of the umbilical cord of the navy being cut?

- 07:00 It took a while. This boss I had was understanding. There was a group of men in this big company, soldiers from the first war, there was a panel of them set up, about four of them and they were to be our guide, mentors to introduce us back into civvy life. The place was in the city, in York Street and we were able to walk in and out of that building as we chose. If we wanted to walk around the block or go and have a cup of coffee, we did, free
- 07:30 to do so and no one queried where we were gone or why. That went on for twelve, eighteen months, we were free to do that all the time, that was a wonderful induction. These other old soldiers from France, they used to come and talk to us now and again, "How are you feeling? Are you coping all right with the work? You haven't got claustrophobia?" all these kinds of things that did come. That part was, we had understanding people and by this time,
- 08:00 we had three month's leave. That meant for three months I was entitled to wear my uniform. It's strange you know, some days, I'd been out of the navy for some weeks, I'd go and put my uniform on and go out, I'd go down and find some of my friends, wearing my uniform down Circular Quay.

Would they sometimes wear their uniform?

They did, yeah, they were doing the same as me. We'd get our uniform and all go down to the Ship Inn and have a drink.

- 08:30 We did.

And would the talk be of old days or new days?

We'd talk about everything. We asked each other how we were succeeding in what we were doing, new times for us all and of course talk about old times. Each of us were going through the same experience so it was mutual support I guess, a bit of a change over. I must admit the tension had gone out, we lived

in.

- 09:00 The tension all the time, that was, to think about that, it was tension all our days. We were free of that. Unfortunately none of us, we were all shocked at the money, we thought we were badly paid in the service but the basic wage was three pounds fifteen. I got more than basic wage, I got five pound in the job I went back on, five pound a week and when I complained
- 09:30 of it in my first pay the boss said, "We haven't taken any tax out of it, we're paying out your tax." I don't know what I was supposed to get. These people, senior, they weren't on the basic wage but only a matter of ten bob difference and these people had been living all those years on this lowly money. Sydney was like that all over. People in basic
- 10:00 jobs, say bus drivers, they were only getting five pound a week, they were getting less, four pound ten a week, that was the yard stick. I couldn't really make how they'd worked for so long on such a minimum wage. They all held, they were used to the war time
- 10:30 restrictions. We still had lots of rationing after the war too, it was a long while before that, notably it was tobacco, beer and petrol. I bought a sidecar when I was discharged and I had petrol coupons to fill up the tank on my motorbike. When I was married I had to get a taxi from Kogarah, married in Summer Hill, I had to
- 11:00 get the taxi to Summer Hill and the cabbie wanted to know what coupons I had to get him that far. Fortunately I had coupons for my motorbike. Very small rations for a motorcycle but I was able to give him enough petrol, apparently that's the way cabbies worked, if they had a long job you had to give them enough petrol to go the distance. That's an indication, that's what petrol rationing did. It's hard to explain.
- 11:30 You had to give a cabbie, you wanted to go to Hornsby or home you had to give him petrol rations to get up there.

As well as the fare?

As well as the fare. I didn't buy the petrol, I was giving him the coupons. The fare included the cost of the petrol of course and his income. That was a strange thing.

What did you miss the most about the navy?

- 12:00 The excitement. I was always enthusiastic, always something happening. The ship was always going somewhere, we were always doing something. Not necessarily new, it might be an old port we were going to, might be new and it was all interesting. That was the lively part. That was good. I didn't like
- 12:30 the monotony of long days at sea, that becomes very boring but convoy work was like that. Convoy work was going dead slow, keeping up with these slow old merchant ships, pitching and tossing round there. That wasn't how you wanted to spend your days. It was all part of the routine, the days in the service.

Did you miss the sea

- 13:00 **over the years, have you longed for that life?**

Yes. Even when I was married I had friends who joined the merchant service and I was sorely tempted at times to go. Then I was going to be back in the same position as when I'd been in the navy, if I joined the merchant service I'd be working on coastal ships going up to New Guinea or something. I didn't go on with that but that did tempt me. I'd hear stories about these fellas, still going to sea and their

- 13:30 life, what they were doing. Not dissimilar to the life we had. They weren't so disciplined of course, the merchant services to what I'd been used to but the mere fact of distance disciplined those fellows, they had to suffer that, being away from their home. I become engaged in fishing clubs and fished. I had ocean going fishing boats too in my time.
- 14:00 That was satisfying. I used to love going out to sea in the fishing boats. Not that we caught many fish around Sydney, even in those days, sometimes you could get a good catch but Sydney is not a good fishing place, never was in those days. I get the joy of fishing from being, the freedom of the ocean, being out there. It's something I really liked, still like, I wish I could go now
- 14:30 but my arthritis stopped me going out in boats. If I fell over the side I couldn't get back in the boat again, I'd drown.

Did that on going contact with mates from the navy, did that continue to be an important thing for you?

Still is to this day. I still see to this day old associates like that. Grand old pals.

- 15:00 We've sustained ourselves all our days with each other's company. Good friends, all with a mutual incentive, mutual experience. A wonderful thing to have in the background, that. I did, I might have said to you before, I was the vice president of the

- 15:30 Perth Association for many years. That's when we had organised days, organised routine of keeping records and fees and such as that. That president died about eighteen months ago and I became the president of this very small organisation and we decided only a few months ago that we'll cut out all, we lost our secretary also, that caused this in March.
- 16:00 So we decided we wouldn't go any more with records, we become quite informal and we signed everything off with all the important people who organised the association, the admirals. Had a big, still have some attachment with the navy department now. I'm still the president of the scrap iron flotilla. They're running out of numbers and I was one of the few blokes
- 16:30 with all my arms and legs. Trying to get somebody to hold the flag up, I'd been doing that. The same as the Rats of Tobruk, that's another thing, engages the soldiers but there are sailors involved in that because the navy was involved in the siege of Tobruk so we've all been made welcome to join those clubs of course, to join the Rats of Tobruk. I enjoy their
- 17:00 company too. Nothing like old soldiers, I was with two of them yesterday. A little bit unfortunate, I've got a headache still, [UNCLEAR] scallywags. Another experience has been the RSL. My father was a foundation member of Kogarah RSL in 1932, '34 or something.
- 17:30 After the war he got me, took me up to the RSL of course and I joined there. I've been a staunch member of the RSL ever since. Still engaged quite heavily with the RLS. I've been a secretary and president of the local sub branch for years on and off. I've always had a job, welfare officers, go to state council meetings, I've been
- 18:00 heavily involved with the RSL. It's all been a cheap hobby. It didn't cost me. Other fellows had other venues but it was always expensive. They became keen sportsmen but all sports were expensive, even to play golf. I found, I did play
- 18:30 social golf, liked it too but even to fork out thirty bob for a round of golf and I was only getting seven pound a week, that was a big hole in my week's earnings, thirty bob to play golf, those things were, that prevented me becoming more. Even the fishing boats I was involved in, fishing was relatively cheap. It was still something I wanted to do anyway. I'd much rather have a day out
- 19:00 on the ocean than run around a golf course, that's true still to this day and it was cheap. I was limited in my pocket money and even though I've been going to clubs I was never able to overstay my time. I'd be there for a long while perhaps. All the other blokes would get themselves drunk, I'd just have a couple of glasses of beer and I'd do whatever
- 19:30 job was required of me, go to the meetings or whatever and just stay briefly and I'd be home but the other fellows, they'd get themselves full, cost a lot of money too and damage their health. My health, even though I spent a lot of time there, I wasn't able to indulge myself. I'm grateful for that part I was poor, wasn't able to damage my body.

What do you put your survival

20:00 down to through the war?

I was always, well the discipline was very important, to do as you were told and not hesitate. If you didn't understand you would hope that people with more knowledge of the situation knew what they were going to do and we all had trust in

- 20:30 ourselves and trusted the fellow servicemen alongside you. We all hopefully did what we were supposed to do. That was a good part about discipline, discipline was very important in survival. It applies everywhere, no matter what form of life, if you're disciplined and contain yourself, you don't have any outrageous theories about doing something different,
- 21:00 sometimes you proceed spectacularly by breaking the rules but invariably you don't, people go off the rails too much and they fail. I obeyed all the rules. One thing my father told me when I was joining the service, he said, "Never volunteer but don't dispute an order" and I followed it ever since. I didn't
- 21:30 volunteer, I didn't unnecessarily bring myself to the fore where I was going to endanger myself or whatever, to be a volunteer beyond a routine order. Not that that ever occurred very much, most of us just followed the discipline and routine orders that came through. My Dad told me that, "Never volunteer but never disobey." Not a bad routine in life anyway.

22:00 How do you think your experience in the war changed you as a person?

I was a young fella, a steady bloke, I always thought about the next step, I didn't do anything rash, I wasn't going to be caught doing wrong things. Much to my limited knowledge, we don't have much knowledge when we're youthful but I'd try to weigh things up and think ahead a bit. That's done

- 22:30 in all my life really. I thought about what I was going to do and try and anticipate the next step and then anticipate how we were going to cope with it. Fortunately, it's been pretty good.

Were there any particular lessons you learnt from your war experience?

- 23:00 Much like I said, discipline, anticipation, reason and I didn't over estimate my chances, I always was very modest about when I approached something, I didn't over estimate my capacity in doing things because I knew what ever it was I might come undone I
- 23:30 didn't want to be stepping beyond my own capacity. I was rather restrained I guess but I was never afraid to have a go at things when I weighed it up as best I could then I'd be in to whatever I was supposed to do. In all my life's activities I've done that. None of us can foresee everything in our life of course.
- 24:00 The best approach is to take things as they come and don't complain about something you can't alter. If you're caught in an unprecedented and unanticipated event just wear that and get yourself out of it with reason. That helped me.
- How do you feel about your enemies these days,**
- 24:30 **the Germans, the Japanese, even the Italians?**
- The Italians were never much of an enemy. All they meant was to play mandolins and make wine I think. I think they're still like it. They're pretty joyful people really. There's some vicious coots in the mafia but mainly they're good happy Europeans and Greeks are the same. I can't cotton to
- 25:00 Germans as such. I haven't, I don't know a happy German. They're strange people. I've met them, we've had reunions where the Africa corps and they still come to Australia and meet the Rats of Tobruk. Some of our fellow rats, they're enamoured about some of these Germans and they in turn go back to Germany, lots of them have been back to Germany.
- 25:30 Rommel's son was the president of the association over there. He was the mayor of Munich at one stage, used to be invited by Rommel's son to Munich, our Australian soldiers. They thought the Germans were all right but the few that I've met, those Germans coming here, I haven't been to Germany but I've met Germans that come here to their meetings and I don't take to them at all,
- 26:00 they're joyless people, don't like them at all. Japanese people, I know there's not many Japanese now who even remember there was a war and even know there was a war on but I'll never forget the pointless cruelty those people exercised on not only Australians, they did it against the Chinese people going from Nanking onwards. They were ruthless people.
- 26:30 Going back to Germans it was, all along I'd known of the cruelty they imposed on their captured countries. I never forgot the story, I was in Crete a few years ago, service reunions there, visits to the old battlefields and we were in one function there,
- 27:00 Chania, a little town in Crete. There was a service on the beach front, a big cross memorial and the endless names, some Greek mayor was up there reading all these endless names, it turned out there were a hundred and seventy of them. They were the names of the villages, I'm asking the Greek man behind me
- 27:30 what he's talking about, and he was a sea captain, came to Australia, he was telling me he was reading out the name of the villages and they do it every year, the anniversary of this German slaughter. When they arrived in this village, these paratroopers, the paratroopers came down to the village, there was no soldiers in this particular place. They herded the locals, this hundred and seventy, herded them all
- 28:00 onto this beach, forced them into the water and they machine gunned them in the water, slaughtered them all. It was so hideous, you wouldn't credit it, they'd done this to the people, defenceless villagers. He said, did I see across the way there, there was a very tall, gaunt Greek man and he was sixty three, that ties in with the age of the, this man was three year old and it was the sixtieth
- 28:30 anniversary, he was a three year old toddler, his mother had him in hand and his mother had a baby in arms and the three of them were forced into the sea, they were all slaughtered in the sea and they brought the bodies back, put them in drums and stowed them on the beach in drums. This little three year old boy was pulled back inside one of these drums, stacked in with other bodies in this drum and he was not dead.
- 29:00 The mother and child were killed and there was this poor gaunt old man, very tall man, hollow eyed and he'd suffered one of the worst horrors. You think, do I like Germans, but any person, Australian troops couldn't do that, it's not in our nature. That's a big difference of humanity,
- 29:30 man's inhumanity to man. Those people capable of those things, it's got to be in their national ethos to do that and it's not, Australian's wouldn't do that. There are rules, I suppose all British soldiers and service people have the riot act read to all of us at various stages, if we were coming to
- 30:00 the occasion when we would have prisoners of war, landing in a strange place, the riot act was read to us, "You're not to touch villagers" or do anything like that. Severe punishment for anybody who went off the rails like that. The British ethic is still within all of us whether you felt like doing it you'd be punished. I still wouldn't have known an Australian soldier
- 30:30 who would put a foot wrong. Might go berserk if he found one of the enemy doing wrong, mistreating

his POW mates or something like that, I have known instances of cruelty that they did inflict, some Australian soldiers did but that was in fury at that momentary time

31:00 and they didn't do it to civilians. They did brutality taking their own back on the brutality of enemy soldiers.

Do you think dropping the atomic bombs was the right way to finish the war?

Absolutely, I'm certain of it. It saved thousands of lives. I know it cost a hundred thousand or whatever it's estimated but it'd cost ten times that more lives if they had not dropped it

31:30 and there was conventional invasion of that island to subdue the Japanese nation. We would have paid, I couldn't imagine, paid in lives of millions of people slaughtered, they just wouldn't have given in, the type of people they are. I don't blame them, invading their country, a ferocious, determined nation. You asked if I agree with it, I certainly do.

32:00 **You mentioned that you've been back to Crete, have you been back to other locations that you visited during the war?**

No. I never earned sufficient money to indulge myself in that manner. As we've grown older and retired we have sufficient money to do it but Nell has skin cancers and I've

32:30 suffered other disabilities. I had an attack of shingles one time, a terrible thing. Five, seven years ago we'd planned, all paid up to go over and do a trip round England and Europe and that fell in a hole because I couldn't move. That was a disappointment. Another time, it was only two years ago, the men were going back to England, going to the battlefields

33:00 of Gallipoli and France and England and Nell got attacks of these skin cancer things and she still suffers. So we've given up doing our magic trip overseas, we've never gone overseas together. We're satisfied to go and visit our daughter in Perth every year, two or three weeks over there.

33:30 **How important is the Anzac tradition to you?**

That's a marvellous tradition. It's something all Australian servicemen, more than Australian servicemen, civilian people anticipate that. For a serving person to know and feel the impulse that those soldiers, all very young men with no experience, they were determined

34:00 as a unified young nation, they exhibited the spirit, the finest spirit can be, they were there fighting for their country. Ironically they were fighting in the wrong place, I know that but they were doing the bidding of their nation and they were going to uphold their nation. In those days we were more loyal to Britain and Britain

34:30 in turn was the leader, the inspiration for our Australian nation. That particular one, those young men, sixty thousand of them died in that first war and they died not only in Gallipoli, but in France too with the same spirit. I couldn't imagine it could have happened in the last war, to die, to slaughter pointlessly was not logical,

35:00 we all learned that and we were never called on to do that, to sacrifice yourself unnecessarily or pointlessly, but I know the Anzac spirit and will always respect it, it was a grand thing that happened to our country.

And why is Anzac Day an important day?

Anzac Day commemorates the one centre point

35:30 of the Australian serviceman's spirit. I know that we have other nations involved, our allied nations join in, but they are joining in because it's an allied service day also, but they don't, they wouldn't know, they can't claim to know the Anzac spirit, they wouldn't anticipate that, but even a youngest boy joining the service, he would know about it, in peace time, in

36:00 six months and he'd be full of the comrade spirit of the Australian service person.

How do you typically spend the day?

Anzac Day, I always go in the march. The last few years I've been involved in Perth all the years but then there's the scrap iron flotilla association, they were running short and rather

36:30 on a demise really and they were going to fold it down and one of the instigators there, he got me to come and bring a couple of pals and join the scrap iron flotilla association and it's been resurrected. That in turn meant I had to leave my pals in the Perth group but that didn't matter so much because Perth was bolstered by the Perth 2 men in the

37:00 Perth association. So I continued then with the scrap iron flotilla association. That's very small, there's so few of us, this only happened at the beginning of the month, we decided that stepping towards the closing down of our organisation, we'd secure the banner. We've got a very large

37:30 spectacular banner, the scrap iron association and that's always carried through the streets of Sydney

on Anzac Day. The men, I used to carry it myself but I'm too old, now I'm the president I lead the march anyway so we get servicemen and they come from the water handling establishment, the naval establishment over in Wollstonecraft Bay, over there.

38:00 At the beginning of this month we did a presentation at HMAS Waterhen, that's the small ship's depot in Sydney and we did this presentation at Waterhen and the commanding officer invited us to do so. That banner's now held in his trust. It's

38:30 proposed they put it in a glass case and it'll be there. They will bring it across to the parade ground on Anzac Day and it'll be paraded every Anzac Day by the young men still serving in Waterhen. We've secured our lovely banner for the scrap iron flotilla.

How do you feel

39:00 **about war as a general concept these days?**

I don't really think there's any justified war at all but in cases a person has to resist when something's being imposed on you. You have to resort to desperate measures and desperate measures is to fight the person doing it to you. So like it or not we have to

39:30 resist when we're really forced into a corner, any natural instinct is to do so. Nobody likes war. I've never met any man who enjoyed going to war and people getting killed around you. There's no wonderful thing about that at all but there's a satisfaction when, even horrible as it was, there's a satisfaction

40:00 comes that you know what you were able to do when the pressure comes upon the nature to uphold yourselves. That's the feeling of justification of war to me, that we're going to war, to me.

I just want to offer you an opportunity to pass on a final thought, a message, a reflection bearing in mind that this tape

40:30 **is going to be around as a resource for Australians for many, many years to come, is there anything you'd like to pass on that we haven't touched on yet?**

To encourage young men to continue upholding our fine nation, it's up to them,

41:00 it's got to be young men who can do that and generations unknown to us. I exhort them all to develop a love of their country and be prepared to do their utmost in times of stress. Be united and stand up for your country. It's true, I feel like that. Thank you.

41:30 **Well said.**

INTERVIEW ENDS