Australians at War Film Archive

Archibald Murdoch (Jim) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity this morning. What I just want to emphasise is for the first part we'll just talk about your upbringing. Where you were born? If you want to walk us through that...?**

Yes, I was born in Sydney in 1923. My father, he was a sea merchant and he was

01:00 a First World War veteran but by 1929, I would say, I'm not sure of the exact date but I'd be about six I know, my father who was on four pounds a week, that's the equivalent of sort of eight dollars a week, found living in Sydney pretty tough with a family of three children. So through a friend of his he contacted a man up in Lismore, northern New South Wales and he took us, his whole family, with the last bit of money he

01:30 had in the bank he booked a passage on a little coastal ship called the Wallongbar, she was later lost during the war, and he took us all to Lismore.

Is that a coastal town?

No, the coastal town is Byron Bay. You hear a bit of that these days through some of the stars. Landed at Byron Bay because in those days you couldn't put a gangway out because the jetty ran into the sea. So the ship's going up and down on the swell. You've got to be landed by basket. A crane takes all the

02:00 passengers. She only carried a few passengers. So that's how we went to Lismore. I started at Lismore Primary School. I would be about six or seven. I'm not sure of my age at that time, but I was in a primary school. Later on I rode a horse to school. By the way, they used to have a paddock there for the horses. So I rode a horse to school in my early days. Later on I went to Lismore High School when I went through my primary education and

02:30 I did my secondary education at Lismore High School. I didn't achieve tertiary education. I did get my leaving certificate in 1940 and because the war had started in '39 I was, like most young boys at school in those days, our biggest worry was the war would be finished before we could get stuck into it. And most of my

03:00 school mates joined either the army, air force or navy. I attempted to join the navy as a midshipman but because my academic qualification wasn't good enough, I was refused entry to the navy. I was attempting to get in as a midshipman but the commanding officer at HMAS Rushcutter where I went down to join the navy, he advised me to join the merchant navy as an apprentice seaman because I had a very strong ambition to some day be a

03:30 sea captain. So I went down to try and get into the merchant navy through a man called Captain Day who was operating as marine superintendent for AUSN [Australian United Steam Navigation Company] in Day Street, Sydney. He couldn't place me but he gave me a lead then to join the BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary], which owned ships and he put me onto a Mr Potts. He accepted me and I started then in 1941 as an apprentice seaman. My first ship being

04:00 the SS Iron Warrior. Joining the Iron Warrior was an experience I will never forget because I come down the wharf all in my uniform with my sea bag over my shoulder and here's the Iron Warrior laying alongside number one berth, Port Kembla. In those days that berth was open to the north east and there was always a swell. You couldn't put the ship alongside the wharves. She had to be held off by buoys each side because she would have wrecked the wharf had she been allowed to sail alongside

04:30 the wharves. So she was just outside, a few feet outside the apron of the wharf and secured by lines to buoys each side to keep her off the wharf. So I, having never had anything to do with shipping, I joined the ship and of course the first officer told me to get out of my uniform and get into my working gear. The gear we were working in in those days is what you see the girls walking around now as fashion gear. Jeans and a shirt, and that was our working

05:00 gear with a white cap. And I was immediately put to work with the seaman on the ship. Now the

seamen, there weren't very many Australians went to sea as I found out, most of the seamen were either Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, English, Irish, Scottish. Most of the seamen, and the firemen because they were hand-fired coal burning ships. They had to be shovel-fired. Steamers, they were steamers. The Iron Warrior, Iron Prince, Iron Master, Iron Crown

05:31 were all steamers, hand fired ships. So I started and had to start to learn to be kicked around because all these fellows, knowing that someday you hoped to become an officer, got all their vented hate against officers out on the apprentices, as you can imagine. Which happens, I think, in most industries too in those days. They tricked you into getting tools that didn't exist. Find the key of the kealstone, and all this and

06:00 the golden rivet. All sorts of tricks they used. You learned quickly and I must confess, looking back, I enjoyed every minute of it. My early training started with Australians, most of these chaps had married Australian girls and were living in Australia, but there were very few Australian-born people. I'm third generation Australian but there were very few of us in those at that time. My first

06:30 experience of what you might say war time at sea was to realise that they ship was in danger of mines as a lot of people don't know, or don't realise, that German raiders and particularly German submarines had laid mines around Australian before Japan came into the war. So we were fitted with what they called paravanes, which is mine sweeping gear. You put a paravane on each side of the ship and it's towed by a boom or an A-frame which has to be lowered

07:00 down on the fore part of the ship and the paravanes, as the speed of the ship, they've got veins on them to take them wider then the ship and they have wires down to the towing gear and on top of the paravane is a big cutting tool because when the ship goes through a mine, the mine's just under the surface of course, because they're looking for ships that are only drawing maybe 15 or 20 feet, so they've got to get fairly closed to the surface and they moored on the bottom of the sea in water that is going to allow them to

07:30 be at the depth. Obviously the ship laying the mines has to know the depth of the water she's laying them in and she sets them all, so they're just under the surface. Now when the ship's bow wave hits the mine, the mine goes away from the bow of the ship and then comes back and hits the ship. This is how mines work. A lot of people don't realise that the mine comes back and hits the ship usually back at number one hatch or number two hatch and blows a hole in the side and sinks her. What happens then

08:00 when your paravanes are out, the mine goes to come back but its mooring wire now contacts the towing wire of the paravane, you follow that? And it slides up and cuts the mine and the mine comes to the surface. And we were fitted…each ship was equipped with two 303 rifles. They had been the standard weapon right through from the First World War. All our troops were issued with 303s of course. We had 303 rifles. And if we cut a mine, the ship had to be stopped and manoeuvred and the mine was set

08:30 off by the 303. And I might add that when you went into water that wasn't of sufficient depth to negative mines, you had to have your paravanes out obviously all the time because we didn't know where the minefields were. It goes without saying, on Murphy's rules of what goes wrong can go wrong, all these times occurred at probably one or two o' clock in the morning. Never at a nice working time. So you were dragged out of your cabin as soon as the

09:00 ship's entering water that might be dangerous for mines. And my first experience of course, I can't for the purpose of being decent tell you how you were called. Because these fellows when they called you in the morning had some horrible expressions, which I will have to leave to your wild imagination. They don't say "Get up lads, we're going to put the paravanes out." It was something or other, "Hit the deck!" You hit the deck and in my case, the first time, of course I didn't have a clue, I wasn't even

09:30 told anything about this, but I had to hit the deck. There was only one other apprentice on the ship, a man called John Lowry, and John and I hit the deck and of course it was bad weather, you were in oil skins and sea boots and no lights were allowed because war time the ship has to be kept completely in the dark. And we all dashed out onto the deck and of course, you've got to understand how these paravanes are used because the ship has two steel derricks which have to be topped up, have to be wound up to the

10:00 height, and what we called guide out, so they can pull out over the ship's side to drop the paravanes. And all that rigging's got to be done by seamen who know what they're about. I didn't have a clue what we were about. So I have great memories of hearing voices like "Get that young bugger out of the way! He'll be killed!" You want to help but you more or less get in the way. When people are doing things you're inclined to get in the way. And of course I had to learn quickly

10:30 what it was all about. Now when we're taking the paravanes back in, when the ship goes into water deep enough where mines are not to be found, you have to take your paravanes in and that's a whole reverse process of recovering the paravanes, bringing your derricks in and stowing all the wires. Of course the towing wires are quite long and because I was the most junior person on the ship, they reckoned you're lower than marine growth, I'm put right down the bottom of number one four peak store

11:00 to coil the towing wires around. Now I suffered from sea sickness, so I'm being sick all the time, I'm coiling wire, wishing I'd die, because if you've ever been seasick you wish you'd die. It's like most stomach things.

I just wanted to ask you, if we could just go towards the actual other experiences you had with the ships, I want to come back to your war time experience, during the Second World War, in greater depth.

11:30 **Could you explain the other ships you were on in brief, and what happened in post war era as well? You were on other ships as well, weren't you?**

In the war I was on the Iron Warrior. After having done my first year and got through my first year exam, because you're examined each year both practically and theoretically, I was posted to the Iron King. And while I was on the Iron King I finished my apprenticeship

12:00 and sat for my second mate's ticket in 1944. I came back as an officer, as third officer of the Iron Knob. And I served on the Iron Knob and the Iron Baron as third officer until the end of the war. And so that was my war experience. Going from training to watch keeping officer, which means keeping watch in convoy. And then the war finished and in 1948 I

12:30 joined the Eastern Australian Steamship Company, that's a P&O [Pacific and Orient] group company, as third officer of the Nanking. I stayed with them right through my career until the container revolution. Well the container revolution was 69, 70, and by that time I had command. I was in command from 1962 until then, serving on general cargo ships and then I got command of our first container ship which was built in

13:00 Japan. I went up and took her as a new ship and I stayed on her until she went for her 12 months guarantee, like when you buy a car you have a 12 months guarantee, so I had to stay with that ship until she went through her guarantee docking. Then they took me out of the container ships and put me onto the two small liners, the Cathay and the Central. They were sailing under the E&A [Eastern and Australian] Line flag which is a P&O offshoot company. So I stayed with those for five years. They carried

13:30 just over 300 passengers and 10,000 tones of cargo. They were on their run up the east up to Singapore, China coast, Japan, Pacific Australia. I stayed with them for five years then I went back to the container ships and finished my career in 1986 on the container ships.

What's the container revolution?

Well, we went from the…the conventional cargo ship was, how can you explain it? It was like the step up from

14:00 sail to power. Like the early conventional cargo ships carried sails, of course, as well as steam power. Even the first ship I was on. If we got into any weather over about force five on the Beaufort Scale, if we were a light ship we had to put a spinnaker up to keep our head into the wind. The wind would just blow you off course. As the ships got more power and more sophisticated and it took…when I think of the advances in technology in

14:30 my 46 years at sea, it staggers me, particularly in communication technology and navigational technology. It's unbelievable how quickly…of course the war brought a lot of it on. I mean during the war we were still doing inter ship communication by semaphore and shore communication by semaphore. We hadn't, on our ships, got a daylight.…we had to learn Morse code but we couldn't use light Morse because we didn't have a daylight. The navy had the big

15:00 shutter they used to communicate with. They did a lot of semaphore too but they also had the daylight signalling lights but we didn't get the August light until well towards the end of the war where we could talk to another ship by Morse with a daylight light that you could see in daylight. And of course all the inter convoy communication was done by international flag signals. People who know the old British system was…

15:30 England expects that every man in this day will do his duty at the battle of Trafalgar, that was done by signal flags. They call that the Pophams Code and it was improved and improved until…well, our code book was about that thick. You could send a whole lengthy message just by using your triadic stay with flags, with a four flag voice and two flag voice.

What about your experiences in other

16:00 **conflicts? I understand you were supplying other governments?**

Well we ran to Saigon, up the Mekong River. I think from memory for the French Army we took up complete railway trains with their munitions on them. We'd land the engine and we had to stow the ship so we got the engine out first and put it on the tracks. Then we discharged

16:30 the ready, the actual carriages with all the equipment in. Then they'd hook and take the train away. I never was up there at the time when the North Vietnamese were attacking Saigon. I was never up there in that very bad period where the Australian soldiers…we had to deal with…well, they were more like bandits, people trying to get on board the ship going up the Mekong River. There was a lot of lawlessness because the

17:00 South Vietnamese government didn't really have control of the country. It's interesting to note, I think,

that we never even had any rifles. We had five 38 revolvers which the senior officers carried, the captain and the senior officers carried, and although we had many baddies try to board the ship from coming out on barges and grappling, we kept them all off with a very good fire hose system. A fellow

17:30 can't come up a ladder on the side of a ship with a full bore fire hose on him. He can't even fire a gun at you. We never had to kill anyone. We hosed them off the ship. We used to do this with the pirates around North Borneo. The North Borneo pirates, they came down Jolo Island in the Philippines. They even, just after the war, had a big Chinese junk with two Oerlikons mounted on it. The Oerlikon

18:00 was a very effective gun. Every shell was a tracer and an explosive and they were very powerful.

A junk had an Oerlikon?

Yeah, the junk had two Oerlikons mounted. They had an old junk rigged up. They used to come down and raid places like Lahad Datu and Samporna and Wallace Bay. That was a British colony at the time, North Borneo, and that's when they used to raid those logging. The British had withdrawn their troops from North Borneo and their air force. I think all

18:30 they had in Sandakan was a great big launch with a couple of Sikh Indian police with of 303 rifles so there wasn't much against the pirates. We were at times threatened but never…there again we used to at nighttime, if we were anchored in places like Bohian Island or Samporna, we would keep

19:00 our two fire hoses going down the hawse pipe, that's where your anchor chain is secured to your anchor, we'd keep two hoses going full bore. That was a great thing, coming up the anchor chain and coming through the hawse pipe. We'd keep the ship lit up like a Christmas tree all night and keep a watch on deck with sailors and an officer all night to deal with anything and keep nothing over the side they could use to get onto the ship. So that's how we kept out of trouble in those days.

19:31 I suppose later on when I was on the, when I was captain of the Cathay and the Central, we used to go up via Banka Straits to Singapore and we were sometimes, we were never actually attacked but we certainly had some baddies have a look at us to see if they could have a go at us, see if we had anything hanging over the side. But there again my own principle is eternal vigilance is the price of success, which is an old cliché but it was very true in our case. If you

20:00 keep your crew vigilant, you can stay out of trouble.

What I'll do is now get back to the pre-war instance and work up to your post-war experiences. Your father, I understand, was a First World War vet? Could you tell us about his experiences? Did he ever talk about it?

Not a lot. My father, needless to say, he was really a

20:30 hero of mine. He used to really shock my mother at times with some of the things he used to tell us. But he was a good man, I can tell you. He was a very good man both morally and physically. He was very strong. He served as a gunner. His unit was a Howitzer unit. The 106th Howitzer Unit, First AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. They were horse drawn. They were

21:00 dragging a twelve pounder gun behind horses. So he had to ride a horse. I might tell you this one, which I think is an amusing story which my father used to tell me much to my mother's horror. It's not a dirty story, but…in 1918 when they pushed through the Hindenburg line, the Germans had, they'd held those lines for years as you probably know. Trench warfare was shocking in the First World War, unbelievably shocking. The stories of the mud and the lice in your clothes would make

21:30 the average person today be horrified. But they had to live like that for weeks and months on end. But when they broke through the Hindenburg line they'd come across farmhouses where the Germans had had ladies with them. Because the ladies and troops had had to withdraw quickly because of the speed of the advance of the Allied troops, the women had left a lot of clothing behind. The Australian troops were a bit wicked in that regard. My father, for example, he found a

22:00 ladies corset that he put on, one of his mates strapped it on him. This is while they were in action. And one of his mates had…the ladies used to wear big hats with feathers in them. They all had hats with feathers in them or corsets and other feminine attire on, then they'd all be going into action. Because the British officers who used to see this…the Australian troops, you've got to remember, people don't realise, they were volunteers. They couldn't be….A lot of the other

22:30 troops, I'm not rubbishing the British, they lost a lot of men and they did a wonderful job, but most of their regiments were professional soldiers. They wouldn't have even thought of doing that sort of thing. That's an Australian trait. And for example, because they were often short of food, they'd grab a bag of spuds, or my father tells me they sometimes found some onions, they'd stick in the billy, they'd hang it on the controls of the gun. They'd be riding into action with billies with,

23:00 you know, things in them and all dressed like that. It's crazy but that's the sort of thing they used to do. They did do shocking things. They did cut insignia off dead Germans to bring home as souvenirs. My father even brought home a German gas mark and several officer insignias.

We were talking about World War I and your father…

23:30 Well, he was wounded in World War I. I'm not sure of the exact month but it wasn't all that long before the Armistice. And one of the things he used to tell, which you can imagine in any warfare…sure, they all showed fear because they were expecting to get shot, but when he got hit in the left shoulder with a little shrapnel which nearly took his arm off, luckily they patched him up but as he

24:00 said "When you're hit like that and you know it's not fatal and you know that with a bit of luck, you're going to get out of the fight, you think that every bit of hardware in the sky has got your name on it from there on because when you're lying there waiting for stretcher bearers and the stretcher bears do come and so on and so forth, that's when you really know what fear is because you're now helpless and you feel that you're going to get knocked over before you can get out of the line." So he said "That was his

24:30 most fearful time". And being stretchered out of the lines, because of the tremendous fighting that was going on, and the lack of facilities like we have today, he was several days before he was right out of the actual danger zone. He got very friendly with…I'll tell you another story. He got very friendly with one of his stretcher bearers during this time. His name was Skeeter Webster, just from memory. I mean dad's told me, that might be the wrong name, but Skeeter and

25:00 he became quite friendly. He said that Skeeter came from Tasmania and he said to dad, he said, "You must come and see me after the war, Arch." He said "I'd love to see you." He said "Yeah, I'll come down and see you Skeeter." Well now coming back 50 years after the war, I was in command of a conventional cargo ship called the Arafura. Now the company wouldn't allow wives on board. You couldn't have your wife on board, but you could, as captain, carry one of your relatives. So I used

25:30 to take my father with me on the ship just around the Australian coast. He couldn't go overseas with me. And this particular trip, we were going to Tasmania. I never even thought about the war time experience. Unfortunately, for that particular trip I was relieved in Sydney by a Captain John Plant, a very close colleague of mine and Captain John, he looked after my father like a brother. My father stayed on the ship until he came off in Melbourne to come to have a holiday with us in Melbourne.

26:00 When he got into Melbourne, he said to the agent "I'd like to try and locate a mate of mine." And you've got to remember, this was about 1968 or something, we'd be 50 years after the war. And one of the chaps said "Look, I think there's a Skeeter". I'm not sure of the name, I think it's Skeeter Webster, "In our golf club." And sure enough that was the bloke that was his stretcher bearer and they brought him down to the ship and I believe they met as though they'd only parted company a week

26:30 before, you know. He said "I told you I'd come and see you some day." He was a very nice man. He had a war service home in 50 Dora St, Hurstville, Sydney, which is not far from the St George ground. That's where Sir Donald Bradman was playing most of his early cricket, and Bill O'Reilly, and of course we used to walk down to the oval, I remember, when I was only a little kid. I must have been only six before we went to Lismore. And of course Sir Donald Bradman

27:00 was quite a hero even then. And I can always remember my father saying to me, I'd go down with my autograph book to get Don's autograph as he came through the gate after his innings, and he more often than not made a hundred of course, and I can always remember my father saying to me "Don't forget to give him a pat on the back." That was my orders from my father.

Your father actually told a lot of stories about his war experiences?

Well, not a lot. The ones I've told you, and a few others which I

27:30 probably shouldn't tell. He really didn't have any hang-ups about the war. I had the pleasure of marching with him on Anzac Day in Sydney in 1947, after the war.

You said there were other stories you should tell. What did you mean….?

Well, I'll tell you one of them, but it's the sort of…my mother used to be horrified of this. He used to have me on his knee as a

28:00 kid, and he showed me this particular gun metal ring, and it had written inside it 'Gott mit uns', 'God With Us' in German. Almost in every war in every century everyone's had God with them. He used to show me. He used to muse on it and say "I had to lick the bastard's finger to get that off." That sort of thing. They were fairly…well, war is brutal. And as I often said to people when they say

28:30 "Why did you hate the Japanese?" Well, of course, you can't fight a war on love. And you've got realise that in a war, the government, through its propaganda agencies, build up hate against…you've got to hate them or you wouldn't fire a shot at them. It's a terrible thing, but that's what war is all about. You don't say to your troops "We're going out to kill them, but they're nice people." You can't do that and there was a lot of nice Japanese in war. And make no mistake we had a

29:00 lot of our people who were pretty brutal also. It's a brutal thing and I think that it's a shame but you've got to forget it after the war. You've got try and…well, new generations coming along have to show more tolerance to other nations. But you can't fight a war on love.

Did your father tell you any more other gruesome stories?

Only of the shocking

29:30 conditions of dead people with flies and maggots, this sort of thing, which were very terrible in the war. And some…another funny story : I remember when at nighttime when they were on that push through the Hindenburg line and when it was rainy and muddy, you were always looking for somewhere at night. Of course you couldn't take your clothes off and you'd be looking for somewhere to get out of the water out of the mud. And my

30:00 father and his mate, they found the dugout that the Germans had been using. It was an officers' dug-out. And the dugout had inserts dug into the sides, just enough to take a man laying down and they could get out of the water and there were two. One each side. And so they thought well, this will do us for the night, because you could get into the slots and

30:30 sleep clear of the water, you see. And they'd just got in and got themselves comfortable and a British officer came down with his baton and said "Right you two, out!" (UNCLEAR) When they got to the top of the dug-out, my father said to this bloke "What a bastard that pommy was." And his mate said "Don't worry Archie, I've got his glasses." He'd pinched his field glasses.

Did he talk about other instances about the Aussies scoffing British authority?

Well,

31:00 generally speaking they did. I, they used to sling off at the Americans, too, by the way. When the Americans came into the war and my father met some of them when they first come in. When they first came in, my father's battery was resting behind the lines. They'd been taken out. They only used to keep them in action for so long, then they'd rest them. And they were resting and some of the Yanks coming through were saying

31:30 "Say you guys, where's this goddamned shooting gallery?" This is the sort of the way. He said once they'd experienced a bit of it, they weren't so cocky about it. He used to tell us things like that.

Did the Australian soldiers like the Yanks in the First World War from your father's experiences?

I think it was the same in the Second World War, the Yanks are different…I don't know the words to describe

32:00 it. I mean, it's a character that we don't have. I think they're more up front with their comments. I remember in the Second World War we used to go to the Trocadero if we were in Sydney. The Trocadero used to have a dance on the Saturday night. If we could go to that dance, we'd go to it. Full of Yanks and I suppose we Australians were a little bit jealous because their uniforms were better, they looked better and naturally the girls

32:30 used to think they were pretty good. They had more money than we had and we used to be a bit annoyed about that. My brother in particular, who was in the 2nd AIF, his unit at one stage, they were training up in Brisbane and his unit declared Brisbane off limits to the American Army. They stuck a roadblock outside of Brisbane, wouldn't let them go into town on Saturday night. That sort of thing they used to do. But I think most of us appreciated the fact that we

33:00 couldn't have done any good without them. I was engaged on merchant ships, of course, and in convoy we more often than not had at least two American destroyers on duty. We'd always go out to sea. Well, the Mugford and the Selfridge and the Perkins are three of the ones I remember, we were always glad to see them. And they were very friendly towards us, by the way. You couldn't really fault them in that regard but we were a little jealous of their money. They had their personality.

33:30 **There was a…with your father's experiences, did it actually affect him in a negative way? Do you recall anything like that?**

No, no. My father, he was born in Australia of Scottish parents. And Lord knows, a lot of the Scots haven't always been that friendly towards Britain. They fought each other like the Irish and Scotch and English fought each other for years. Still do probably. My father, in spite of all that, was terribly

34:01 British patriot. He was a member of the British Empire Society in Sydney. He was a very keen member of the Masonic Lodge. No, he didn't like objectionable ones, but he had a very strong feeling. e would be terribly anti-republican today.

So he was a staunch monarchist?

Staunch monarchist. There again, the same with me. Because when I first

34:30 went to sea, we were all British. There was no Australian Republican movement ever thought of when I was young. We were all British people. Australia only had what five million and the Anglo Saxon race was strong and the Christian religion was the religion of the country. Everything was based on the British system. You've got to remember today that as strangers coming to Australia did, all our rights were based on the British system, and they've been handed down since

35:00 time immemorial.

Your mother, for instance, did this impact on the marriage in anyway? His war experiences? He seemed to talk quite freely about it, your father, I get the impression?

No, I've got out there in my study, postcards my mother sent to my father during the war. They didn't marry until after the war. I've often said to my wife, "She and I are extremely lucky to have come from very happy

35:30 backgrounds". It makes a big impact on your life if your parents are together, are happy. I didn't realise until I got around a bit and talked to other people about their background, how many flaming people didn't have that. And it staggers me the amount of people who have sad backgrounds and parents who didn't give them a fair go. I could show you right now, my father gave me on my 21st birthday, much to my horror, pasted in a book

36:00 all my school reports, all my references I got. Everything. He kept all these things. That's the sort of bloke he was. Same with my brothers and sister, there were only three of us in the family. Two boys and a girl. He was just a family man. The family was everything to him.

So how did, in the later years, how did the Depression affect your family? Now you said you were struggling already in Sydney?

Well, but I think it showed the strength of my father more than anything that, because, I say, he

36:30 took us all up to Lismore. He made a success of himself up there. And you've got to remember they never retired on any sort of superannuation or anything. One of my heroes, I call him "Uncle Bon", he's a distant relative of my father, and Uncle Bon was a sea faring man also. He wouldn't accept the old age pension when he retired because that was charity. He died a pauper in the sailor's home in New Zealand because he would not accept the pension. Now my father finally accepted a pension but against his better judgement. They considered that

37:00 charity.

Really?

They wouldn't accept that. They paid taxes, but they didn't believe the taxes gave you superannuation. Taxes were to keep a government going. They never looked on it that way.

They felt degraded by taking the pension?

That was degrading. To accept money from another person was the last thing they would do. And when my father was on those low money, I can remember my mother buying spec fruit, taking the fruit home and cutting all the bad out of it, because you'd get the bad fruit a bit cheaper

37:30 than good fruit. The fruiterers would keep it all, they wouldn't throw it away like they do now. They'd keep it all and poor people would buy it and cut all the bad out of it and use all the good out of it.

So this was the Depression period?

The Depression period, yes. And the milk they got each day was that much in the bottom of a billy. That was the daily milk which was probably tuppence. But make no mistake, we were happy. It was a happy period. My mother used to take us for a picnic down the backyard. They

38:00 had a, they were trying to grow a blinking orange tree down the backyard. She used to pack a hamper and take us down the backyard and put a rug on the grass and we'd all sit on the grass and have a picnic. It was a tough time but every Sunday you'd have a roast dinner and you'd look forward to that all through the week. Sometimes, she wouldn't have enough spuds to give everybody more than half a spud each but that was life. If you come home from school hungry you'd get a lump of bread with

38:30 some dripping on it. The dripping was terrific by the way. If you got a good bit of beef dripping on bread, boy, it's a nice taste.

Oh it's nice?

Yes.

I thought you said it was horrific?

No, terrific taste. We used to like it. I can't remember any real hardships that I'd call hardship. I can remember how I used to be very comfortable at night in the very cold weather, when my

39:00 father would come into the bedroom to see if I was okay, and he'd bring his army great coat, his old great coat. He used to tell us how he'd have to run his thumb along the seams to take all the gnats out of it. And he'd stick that over the top of you and boy did that keep you warm, that big great coat stuck over you. I used to love that great coat. That Australian Army issue great coat. Pleasant memories.

Tape 2

00:32 **So you were saying about your father having some paraphernalia from the war?**

I remember the German gas mask he brought back from the war. What was interesting about it, it was still quite useable, it had the thing on the bottom that you unscrew and put the cartridge in and screw it up and it fits over the mask. It's a peculiar smell. I don't know what happened to it, by the way. I

01:00 don't know what happened to all his memorabilia. It could be with one of my nieces, but I'm not sure. A interesting thing about it to me was he used to show me how the Germans were very short of leather. They had no leather and all the straps on the gas mask and the carrying case for the gas mask. They looked like some synthetic material, but if you pulled a bit of it off and unravelled it, it was brown paper. It was all made of brown paper. All wrapped into little tight

01:30 things and knitted together, beautifully made.

Is this the German gas mask?

It's German. The Germans were short of leather. Another bit of a nasty thing they used to do, as they found out when they were going through the German mines, they used to boil down their dead for fat. Which is a pretty horrible.

The Germans did? Whose dead?

Boil bodies, their own bodies down to get the fat. Just a thing you probably haven't heard before, but that's what he told me.

They must have been pretty desperate?

02:00 Well, as I say, war's a pretty nasty old thing. (UNCLEAR) Almost every depravity you can imagine takes place during war. As I say, you've got a whole lot of men who think they're going to be killed tomorrow, they're not all going to be nicety-nice.

Did that tarnish your impression of war? When you grew up how did you view war?

Well, I don't know how I viewed it really. I knew it was pretty dangerous. But as I think I told you before, all us kids at

02:30 school, we were all dead scared the war was going to finish before we got into it. That was our main fear. I was only 15, 16. We had no illusions. It was nasty, but it was the patriotic, I mean, people forget that even in the Second World War, farmers, the night that Britain declared war on Germany and Australia followed suite at the same time, a lot of farmers went straight

03:00 off farms and straight into the army. They dropped everything. The patriotic fervour was very great.

So you were living in Lismore at the time?

I was living in Lismore, yes.

So what was Lismore like at the time?

Well, it was a very patriotic town. Crikey, I didn't know of anybody who was what you called a conscientious objector. We used to treat them with disdain because a conscientious objector, he's okay while you're in front, but if you start finding that the enemy is just outside the gates

03:30 of your city, and are raping all your women, they're not conscientious then, you know what I mean? It's easy to be conscientious if you can just carry on and live and carry on with your…that's what everybody would like. We had no time for conscientious objectors, but I didn't know any personally.

What about in Lismore, for instance, during the Depression years did you have much contact with other people of different ethnic origins? Like Aborigines?

Oh well, Aborigines

04:00 yes. There again, you see the Aborigines….you've got mixed feelings on this because people say when Cook discovered Australia he said this and did that. The Aborigines in Lismore were unfortunately…you see, I've got to stress that they were pure blood Aborigines, not half caste or mixed blood Abo. The pure blood Aborigine was a very docile, but very nice sort of person.

04:30 In school we had a few of them in our Lismore School, but one of the things the teachers used to say was "They will not compete against the Anglo-Saxon". So if an Abo child knows the answer "Who knows who's buried in Nelson's tomb?", and all the hands go up, even they know it was Nelson, they won't put his hand up. It's a shame that they're not competitive. They weren't great workers because I think they…I'm talking about the

05:00 tribes up there, they weren't very reliable. I know my father had friends who employed them. They had good intentions. They wanted to give them a job. But see one of the blokes, he'd work for you for maybe two months, work very well. I can remember them milking cows, for example. Hand milking cows. This bloke, Tom Combo his name was, this Aboriginal. He'd see a big housefly, maybe,

05:30 I was going to say a fathom, but I'd say three or four feet away, he could hit dead centre with a squirt of milk and kill him. Bang. Another thing he used to do, he'd light a match and he could put it out with the cracks under his foot. Of course, he used to go round barefooted and the big cracks under his foot, he could put a lighted match in and put it out in the crack under his foot. I remember those little things about the Aborigines. They used to, because my father was working for a seed merchant, they used to dust out

06:00 paspalum and you'd see all the Aboriginal women, sitting before they got a disease called Ergot, they used to dust out paspalum dilatatum to use the correct…but anyway they used to dust the seeds out in these big canvas. They'd have a big sheet of canvas and the women would all be around because the men didn't work as hard as the women in those days, but anyhow, they used to dust out the seed into there. And they used to sell that seed. They used to get sixpence

06:30 a pound, I can remember the price, six pence a pound they'd get for it and that gave them some income. But the men would bring it in and my father used to buy it off them, the seed. I can always remember, I saw this with my own eyes. He'd put it on the scale, the big scale that you run the bit of brass along, to get the…with the weights, you've seen them I presume. You put the weight on the thing and you get the finer adjustment with a thing, and my father would slide it along and the Aboriginal bloke would say "What are you

07:00 making boss?" And dad would say "Can you get your toe off the scale?" And he'd be "Sorry boss!" and he'd have his toe pushing the scale. And he also used to…my father had a big length of copper pipe sheared off at the end, to a point, and he'd take a sample of seed out of the centre of the bag, because sometimes you'd find bricks and lumps of…

07:30 they'd have that much on top of the bag good seed and all the rest was full of junk. (UNCLEAR) These are the sort of things I remember about them at the time. They weren't allowed to drink in those days, so there was no such thing as drunkenness amongst Aboriginal people. It was a bit unfortunate, I think, I'm giving a personal opinion now, it's a bit unfortunate that they bring up these human rights things, that they've got to be allowed. Once they brought that up, they destroyed

08:00 them. Alcohol. That's just a personal opinion.

What did you think about the White Australia Policy?

Well, of course, you've got to admit we were all in favour of it. We thought it was good at the time. I realise now that we were wrong, but at the time we thought it was good. I mean I think the average person who's got any racial….

08:31 fidelity (UNCLEAR), if they're proud of their race and so forth, it's a natural thing. Most people seem to live better with their own race, then they do mixing with other races. Australia's, to a large extent, proving us wrong, and it's the same out in Australia with religion. You've got to remember too that we were a Protestant family. We hated the Catholics and the Catholics hated us. These things come

09:00 traditionally down through the ages, but in Australia, we still go to the Anglican Church around the corner. We've got plenty of friends who go to the Catholic Church. We're close friends. It shows how you can live together.

So what was it like during your schooling years?

It was pretty prominent in those years. We didn't like Catholic kids and they didn't like us. We used to play football against Woodland College. Woodland College was the

09:30 Catholic college, I went to the state school, Lismore High School. And we'd play rugby league, and if we could tackle them hard, we tackled them hard. We really hated them. We used to end up the game by three cheers for Woodland, we'd do all that sort of stuff, but we really hated them. That's not a good word 'hate'. We didn't really hate them, but we'd been brought up thinking they were on the wrong tram, and they were brought up thinking we were on the wrong tram. The fact that we're all supposed to worship

10:00 a God who believes in love and we should love our neighbours as ourselves, seems to go out the window when you get that sort of thing. But you realise now that a lot of it now's just absolute stupidity, really.

Did you come from a religious background? Were your parents strictly religious?

My father only went to church to set an example. I don't think he was really. I think he believed in God, I'm sure he believed in God, but he

10:30 wasn't a man who would be involved in church activities. My mother was from a Salvation Army background. I mean my Aunty Lily and my mother and her sister used to [go] around the slums in Surry Hills in Sydney in the Depression scrubbing floors for people who were really down and out and while the people were abusing hell out of them, telling them to get out, they were all singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" while they scrubbed the floors. That's the sort of thing they used to do.

Did your mum come from a Protestant background?

11:00 Yes, that's what the Salvation Army is. I don't know whether I should tell you. I think it's really a funny

story that happened to my wife and my aunt who is a staunch Salvation Army. She lived next door to a Catholic, Mrs Marr, Irish Catholic. And my aunty's name was Lillian Bass. And even after living next door to each other, both widows, my aunt lost her husband in Gallipoli,

11:30 and Mrs Bass, I'm not too sure how she lost her husband, but she was a widow, after sixty years living door to each other they were still Mrs Bass and Mrs Marr and they used to see each other everyday. And Mrs Marr was poorer than my aunty, and my aunty used to get a newspaper everyday and stick it in the fence for Mrs Bass, and she had to put it back again. And when TV came, my aunty lived until she was 96, so she was probably in her late 80s when TV came in,

12:00 Mrs Marr used to be allowed to come in and watch the news in her place but she had to go home as soon as the news was finished. And my wife, one day, was talking to my aunty, who was stone deaf, I'm deaf too by the way, but my aunty was stone death, and she used to lip read you while you were talking, and my wife was talking to my aunt and my aunt was saying, she said "Mrs Marr," she said, "She came in last night," Joan talking to Karen,

12:30 and she said "When she went out, Joan," she said, "There were fleas on the thing. And they were Catholic fleas! She got them up at the cathedral!" Catholic fleas, I never heard of that one.

With your schooling background, how did you come to enlist into the naval cadets, was it, initially? I understand you were 16 years old?

Yes, I tried to get into them. You see the navy would take

13:00 you as a midshipman at 13. I initially tried to get that but I didn't have a high enough academic background. They then brought the age back to 16 and I came down to join. I was only allowed to join the paymaster midshipmen school. By the way, the pay was seven dollars a day, which wasn't bad in those days.

Sorry, you said you didn't have a relevant academic background? High

13:30 **enough? What were they looking for?**

I couldn't tell you exactly what it was. I'd got my leaving certificate but I think I'm right in saying you had to get English, I think it was history, a foreign language and Math One and Two. I didn't have Math Two and I didn't have a foreign language. I was in there for a while. They gave me my medical and

14:00 so forth, and then they have what they call an Officer's Selection Committee. I've got the letter out there when they told me "My application was unsuccessful". But the commanding officer out there was a very nice bloke and he told me how to get into the merchant navy, what they call the equivalent….I go in as an apprentice seaman on five shillings a week, can you believe. That's 50 cents a week. And it was just as bad then as it is now. Yes, five shillings a week, that would buy you more than

14:30 50 cents, but it was still not really a weekly wage. But there again my father used to send me through the mail, occasionally, a couple of quid in the mail, which was always received with great pleasure.

How long did you last at naval college?

I was only days there. I wasn't accepted.

A few days, that's it. Did that upset you?

Oh yes. I was disappointed, but

15:00 not when I found had they accepted me I would have been a paymaster midshipman not an executive. I wanted to go through.

So you always felt a calling to the sea was your forte?

Oh yes, because of my Uncle Bon, as I called him, Uncle Bon. My father's very distant relative, a very close friend. He and my father were two heroes, sort of thing. They had a big influence on everything I did and wanted to do and so forth. And

15:30 Bon was, he was a man, by the way, who was completely without education. Yet he educated himself, and at the age of 42 or 43 got his second mate's ticket. It doesn't sound much now, but to a bloke who's never learned any basic mathematics, how he did it I would never know. He got his second mate's, then he kept studying. He encouraged me to study two hours a day which I did right through my whole time. He got his

16:00 first mate's (UNCLEAR) and then he got his master's (UNCLEAR). You see with marines' interviews, if you don't think you can get the unlimited ticket which means you can go on any ship anywhere in the world, you can get limited coast trade, harbours and bays. Limited certificates. In my time they were… these days they're just graded Master One, Master Two, Master Three, Master Four, Master Five. But in my time there was only one master ticket,

16:30 well, there were two really. There was Coast Master or Foreign Going Master, and Foreign Going Master was unlimited.

So how did you come to join up in the merchant navy?

Well as I think I mentioned before. I went to see Captain Day down on Day Street and he couldn't place me with AUSN, so he recommended me to Mr Potts of BHP and he placed me as an apprentice seaman on the Iron Warrior.

Why didn't you join the AIF or the air force?

Well, I had thoughts of doing

17:00 that, but I wanted to go to sea, and I thought the navy bloke and Day recommended me to do what I did, so I took their advice.

Did ANZAC [Australia New Zealand Army Corps] mean anything to you at the time?

Oh yes, well because of my father, ANZAC meant a lot to me.

Well, what did it mean?

Well, I suppose it meant patriotism and fighting for your country, all that sort of stuff. I think all the young blokes that I went to school with, they all got mixed up in one

17:30 form or another, air force or army or navy.

How were Anzac Day celebrations conducted in Lismore? Was it a big thing?

Oh yes, it was a big thing. In Lismore, my father always marched of course. And the thing that impressed me the most was, of course, was the original light horse. These days they still have some of the old diggers get up on horses. They're not actually ex-light horsemen, they're doing it to show people what it was like. But in those days, in my younger

18:00 days, they were returned Chavell's troops, who were local, who actually had participated. They were well-turned out, of course, on the horses.

So you had people from the light horse in Lismore?

We had them. They had enlisted from there. Not necessarily Lismore, but that area. Lismore, Grafton, Murwillumbah were the three centres. See, Lismore High School. We used to

18:30 play inter school sports with Maloombah and Grafton. See Maloombah High only went to intermediate stage. All the Maloombah kids had to come to Lismore to do their leaving certificates. But Grafton was the same as Lismore, similar schools, coeducational and up to leaving standard, yes. We had a thousand pupils at Lismore High. About half boys, half girls.

Did you have many people with German or other European origins in

19:00 **Lismore?**

Ahh, no, I don't know of any. I know they interned a lot of people that they shouldn't have, particularly in South Australia, but I don't recall any in Lismore. There probably were, but I don't recall any scandal, or hearing anything, or Italian for that matter.

With the Empire, how did you

19:30 **see the Empire before you actually joined the merchant navy? What did it define to you?**

Well, of course you've got to remember we were taught at school that this is the Empire, the sun never sets. All the maps of the British Empire were in red. Australia was very prominent all red, as was Canada and South Africa and so forth. I suppose that was, in a sense, another reason we didn't like the

20:00 Yanks. We considered them to be rebels against the British Empire. The patriotism in Australia, and of course in all the British countries, was very strong at that time. I mean when you went to the theatre, the moment "God Save the Queen" started, everybody stood. Crikey, you would have got your head blown off if you hadn't stood up immediately when it started. In those days King George V's head would come on the screen while it was being played and

20:30 later on when Elizabeth ascended to the throne, either on her trooping of the colour's horse or in other ways. Every ship I served on as captain, I insisted on the Queen's photo be in the dining saloon all the time. Right until I retired in '86. It's gone out the window now, but I kept that up.

Can you walk us through your experiences on your first posting to a ship? Was it the Iron Warrior I

21:00 **understand?**

Yes, the Iron Warrior. I think as I told you I got a rude shock. You see in the navy if you go in as a midshipman, you are virtually officer straight away. Sure, junior officers. If you've watched the show "Hornblower", you'll realise that even as a midshipman he actually got command of a merchant ship they took over. Very unlikely these days, but still in Nelson's time it was like that. And they had

21:30 officer's status. The interesting thing about it is we had to wear uniform to go ashore. We had to go ashore looking like midshipmen, full number one uniform, but the moment we got on board the ship, into working gear, working underneath the basin. And they kicked you around, because they were pretty sure that you'd some day be an officer. And they treated you pretty harsh. Not all of them. I mean

22:00 some of them were quite good and helped to train you in all the….The thing that used to annoy me a little bit when I first started, and particularly when I started to get a few skills, like you gradually learn seamanship, and it's hard to explain to people who don't go to sea what seamanship's all about. But you've got to know how to put lines on bollards. You've got to know what strain you can put on lines. You've got to be able to work up the mast and know that, ultimately, when you're good enough you can work on just a bit of rope. And you don't…

22:31 Like these days they've got safety harnesses and ear plugs. We had none of that sort of thing. You've got to learn to look after yourself. One hand for yourself and one for the boss, sort of thing. What used to annoy me a bit though, and I'll give you an example of it, because merchant ships, as we found out during the war, when they're torpedoed by a submarine go down awful quick, usually under a minute, you have to have your lifesaving gear a little bit better than

23:00 in peace time things. Like now if you see pictures of ships you'll notice their life boats are usually stowed on the ship. Now in the ships I was on, they had what they called radial davits, with the boats hanging on davits, on board. As soon as we put to sea, no matter where it was, we swung the boats out, so that you can let them go to the water quickly. To get them out you've got to take one end out like that, and then bring this one out

23:30 after it, and then you've got to gripe the boat against the spa to keep it steady, otherwise the rowing of the ship would destroy the boat. But it's on the falls, that's the ropes that are holding it, and they were three sheave blocks on the boat. The best manila rope on them, by the way. When you swing the boat out, and gripe it out, you've got to make the falls fast on what they call a crucifix cleat, and the rope's got to be put on a certain way so

24:00 it can be lowered without jamming. That's what seamanship is all about knowing how to handle rope. And what used to annoy the daylights out of me after I'd been on the ship working with the crew for three years, even, I'd go to put the ropes on the cleats and a Danish or a Norwegian voice would say "Get the lad off that!" They wouldn't let you make you a (UNCLEAR) in case you made it wrong, you follow? And it took me years and years before some of these,

24:30 particularly the Danes, would let you do a seamanship job even though you can do it. And you might occasionally be able to do it when no one's looking, they're inclined to not let you. "Get the lad off that winch!" or "Get the lad off this or that!" Or put a stopper on the line when you're taking topping lift… thing [?]. You knew how to put that stopper on, but they wouldn't let you put it on.

25:00 You get this humiliated right through your time. I was still scrubbing the chart room and the wheel house out of a bucket, when I was in my fourth year. It was a little bit different, in the navy you would have been treated, as I say seven bob a day against five bob a week, and treated differently.

Why were the crews so mixed with other foreigners?

Well, that's what I say. I haven't got figures of course, but I'd love to see them. But

25:30 the Australian Seamen's Union was absolutely full of Irish and Scottish and English and Norwegian and Danish. I sailed with one chief officer, they used to call him the "Square Head Mate" because when he picked up seamen, it was a casual pick up in those days, if he went to the casual pick up and they all had to show their books, he'd only take blokes whose name was Jacobson, Mortison, Neilson, Johannson. That's all the people he'd take, because he knew they were good seamen. They were good seamen, too, but I'd go without a

26:00 shadow of a doubt saying the best seaman I ever sailed with was Jack Cedar, and he was an Australian born Jew, can you believe it? And he was a wonderful seaman. He could do anything on a ship. But that's the way it goes, I guess.

What was it like to work with Danes and Norwegians and Swedes?

Oh, they seemed to be nice people. As I say, they were pretty tough.

They were rugged people?

Oh yes, they're pretty rugged people. The only fault I could find with a lot of those sailors were, they were terrific drunks.

26:30 Like, they were dry ships, you weren't allowed to have any liquor on board. And they used to buy the big demijohns of cheap wine. And the smell of them once they'd had a few snoots of that, it used to horrify me. They used to get on the turps. I used to have a few arguments with one bloke called Jimmy Jensen. I was really a non-drinker, but I used to go to the pub, we all used to go to the pub together. I used to drink sarsaparilla in

27:00 those days. It's like fly spray, the taste of it. And I'd be having my sarsaparilla and they'd all be talking about all the great sailing. Some of them, of course, had been on sailing ships. It was all "When I was on the Pamir we used to do this and that." And I used to say to this Jimmy, he had one blue eye and one brown eye, and I'd say to this Jimmy Jensen, "All you can talk about up here is how good you are. Let's see you do some of that down on the ship when we go back to the ship". And he'd say….I can't think what he used to say. "By the living Jesus Jimmy, I'll break those

27:30 legs off at the knees." I won't tell you what he told me do with them. But he was a nice bloke, really, in spite of all this. He had this huge chest and he could have clouted me one, I wouldn't have woken up for a week. But still they were pretty good blokes.

So not many Aussies at all, you're saying?

No, not that I sailed with. I can't speak for all the ships. Most of the ships I were on, both the seamen and the firemen…see, we had nine firemen on each of those ships. There were three

28:00 firemen on each watch, so three watches and three firemen and three (UNCLEAR) on each watch. We'd have about nine ABs [Able Seamen] I suppose in the basin, and a ship's carpenter. We'd have three stewards, a captain and three navigating officers and two cadets. And seven engineers. That'd be the crew.

That's not big then. How big was your ship? The Iron Warrior?

3,500 gross tons. I've got a model of her out there, I'll show you later on.

28:30 **So it wasn't that big either, the ship?**

That's not big, no. The biggest of the sailing ships were just under 3000 tons. So, those ships were built in 1923. The Iron Warrior was the same age as me, about 1923. See, they were being built not that long after the sailing era, although the sailing era was really finished in 1863 when the Suez Canal opened because the steamers could get quick routes to

29:00 India at that time, and Sri Lanka. But when they had to round the cape, the sails still had a bit of a hope, but once the Suez Canal opened, the sailing ships were finished. A lot of them ran into…even when I went to sea there were still seven or eight big sailing ships still operating, commercially. Not long today where they're more of a replica sort of job with an enthusiastic people who want to look back on the old days. As my Uncle Bon used to say, "Don't let them

29:30 talk about the old days," he said. "You were housed like a dog and fed like a pig." And he was pretty right. They were pretty rough treated, the sailing ships.

So they still had them around at that time?

When I started they still had several commercial sailing ships. They were still running, even when the war started, they were still running the grain race from around at Port Germain and Adelaide to Europe. There were ships like the Pamia and the Passat, the Lord

30:00 Hill and the Moshulu and the Archibald Russell, the Huia and Pamir were running from….and there were lots of schooner ships running to Tassie of course. The Alma Dopel and the Alita May and the Kermande. There were lots of them still running commercially, yes.

So with the war in progress, was there any suspicion at least for

30:30 **the Scandinavian crew? That they may support Germany in some way?**

No, I never heard anything.

Did you ever have any Germans on board?

No, not to my knowledge. I can't remember any Germans. We had a lot of Greeks, though. I remember one called Jimmy Laismanis, who I sailed with. Irishmen, Paddy Curran. I sailed with.

31:00 Practically all the masters of the ships I was on were either Scottish or English. Two great Scots I sailed with, Captain John McLeod of Williamstown, who was the first merchant navy master, to my knowledge, who was given the job of Commodore of a convoy, which was a big honour for a merchant seaman to have. And I sailed with him, quite a lot. Because we cadets had to do all the semaphore and a lot of the flag work in those days. Captain

31:30 Mackenzie, another Scot, I think he was from….I think McLeod was from the Isle of Lewis (UNCLEAR) They were mostly English and Scottish.

If you're serving with all these nationalities, then you must have picked up some of their linguistic terms?

Oh yes. I think I remember mostly about the Norwegians because

32:00 they can't say 'V'. They say 'W' for 'V'. So they'd call a ventilator a wentilator. Varnish is Warnish. But they were good seamen, I've got to admit that. I learned a lot from them. You're learning from them, but

they're very reluctant to let you go with it. Ultimately they did. I would say that the biggest thrill I got before I finished serving my time, was when a basin called Eric Jacobson, who I had very high respect for. Only a young man, he wouldn't be alive now…

32:30 he would have been ten years older than me then. Eric Jacobson. We used to have to send all our block and tackle down as soon as the ship went to sea, to overhaul your block and tackle which is a seamanship job. And I used to go up with a seaman as his assistant. We'd work up there, taking the shackles off the block and lowering them down for the crew to overhaul on deck. He was always "Righto Eric, you go up. Righto Jim,

33:00 you go with him" sort of thing. I was always with him, but this particular day he said "Righto, you go up and send the gear down." I couldn't believe it. I immediately felt about eight feet tall and about ten feet broad. So that was a day I'll never forget. They were good seamen.

So how long did you serve on the Iron Warrior for?

I was 12 months on the Warrior, and I was…

And what were the duties you had to do, in terms of….?

Well, you get called at six o' clock in the

33:30 morning, and the first job my co-cadet and I do is to clean all the brasswork, and you've got to realise on those ships there was a lot of brasswork. The foc'sle bell was mounted over the windlass. The windlass is the equipment for doing your anchor work, and the big foc'sle bell was the bell….see you got to remember the communications on a ship weren't like they are now. For example, we had no radar, so all the time at night

34:00 in particular, and in bad visibility by day, you had a seaman posted on the foc'sle, that's the forepart of a ship, keeping a lookout. Now if the wind is blowing like all hell you can't hear him if he yells (UNCLEAR), so he had to ring the bell if he sighted, he'd give two bells if he sighted something on

34:30 the port bow, and one bell if he sighted something on the starboard bow, and three if he saw something right ahead. These are all, all these things are tied together with Morse code, as you probably know. All the flag signals are tied up with Morse code. Every signal means something, every flag on its own means something. And you've got to learn all these things, of course, in your seamanship training. So the bell's right up on the foc'sle head,

35:00 if the ship's dipping her nose under the water, the spray comes all over the ship and all over the bell. Salt spray. We used to think it was an absolute imposition to have to clean that flaming bell everyday. After it had spray on it for 24 hours, it's green. And we weren't allowed to use brasso by the way. We had what they called bath brick and oil. You've got to scrap the bath brick and make it into a flake

35:30 and mix it with oil and mix it, and that's what you used to clean your brass work. Now I got the bright idea, probably from somebody else because I've never been brainy, now I got the idea from someone that if I could cover that bell with a bit of…the equivalent of Vaseline, that sort of stuff. Grease. It'd be transparent…I tried this only once. I cleaned the bell, I got it

36:00 all nice and bright and I just smeared petroleum jelly all over it, which I got off the engineers. Well of course the first officer on his rounds went up and for some reason, probably someone dobbed me in I think, he felt the bell and felt it had grease on it and boy, did I get a caning. I was absolutely given a real roasting down (UNCLEAR). And we used to clean all the brass, and all the brass

36:30 included…see those ships had big magnetic compasses with huge binnacles, big brass binnacles. The telegraphs…even the telegraphs were all brass and all out in the open of course. All the port holes of the bridges and all the accommodation had these big brass things. All that had to be done in there. All the brass work in the wheel house had to be cleaned. The binnacles had oil lights fitted, all made of brass, in case the power cut out because those

37:00 ships only had one little generator. At night time that generator was shut off. They wouldn't let that be used for cold. The only way you could get that generator on was if the radio officer wanted to send a message out. He had to ring up and get it put on, so he could send a message out. One hundred and ten DC direct power current. But you know, brass work every morning from six till eight, breakfast from eight till nine, then with the crew working,

37:30 all then, possibly at least an hour up the crow's nest lookout. If you weren't up the lookout, you were on the gun. We had the guns, of course, down aft. We had the four inch and the Bofors gun, which had to have…

They were fixed?

Oh yes. We were quite well armed really. We had Oerlikons and Ack-Acks on each side of the bridge. And we also had a system on the bridge where if you were dive bombed, the officer

38:00 on watch could pull a lever and two rockets would go up with very fine wire between them. So if a diving craft got too close, he'd go through the wire and bring him down. Not that I ever saw that

happen. We were quite well armed.

Were you trained how to use all of them?

Oh yes, yes.

Can you tell us about the training?

Oh yes. As soon as the ship reached port, at any main port where there was a naval base, a naval truck would come down and pick…we carried naval gunners of course,

38:30 who maintained the guns. We just had two gunners. They had to keep the guns cleaned and oiled and ready for use, and check all the armament and indent for replacement armament if they wanted it. That DEMG, stands for Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship Gunners and all ships had them but they also were responsible for keeping the

39:00 gun crews trained on the ship. Gun crews which we had to be, two cadets must be part of the gun crew, we were all picked up with… the rest were volunteers from the crew and we were all taken to the nearest naval base, no matter where it was, and we were trained in the guns that we had like we got Oerlikon, Bofors, four inch and 12 pounder training because the smaller ships had the 12 pounders, but the chiefing class ships had the four inch. And

39:30 they were four inch guns built for the First World War, by the way. They weren't modern guns. You'd have to see us operating to realise how lucky we were to use them as well as we did. Like the four inch shell, for example, had a cap on the end of it because when that firing pin was struck it exploded the shell. So in action, strictly speaking, you've got to take that off. The breach loader puts the shell in,

40:00 it's rammed home with a ram rod, then the cordite bag, which is about that long and that diameter, silk cordite bag, that goes in behind the shell, that's going to be the charge that sends the shell on its way. The breech worker closes the breech, that's the big breech (UNCLEAR). He puts a firing pin in behind it, that's a little cartridge that sets the cordite on fire and he sets that, and it's set on to

40:30 a trigger. The gun layer is the man who's got the gun in this direction. The layer is looking through his telescope, he's got the cross-wires, but he's mainly dealing with this one, he's going to put that right on the target. He's sitting in a steel sheet with his tin hat on. The bloke on the other side, he's training the gun this way, so he's dealing with this wire in his telescope, you see?

41:00 And when he puts it, when he gets onto target, he yells out "Trainer on!" so that the layer knows he's happy with where he is and when the trainer is ready the gunner (UNCLEAR), the usual you'd say is "Fire when ready." So he'd fire when he's on target. Now I was a sight setter, I had to set the sights. The only time we were actually in action against the sub that sank the Iron Crown, I was setting the sights.

41:30 It's remarkable how when you're trained and how your crew are trained, how quickly you can get that gun to fire, how quickly you can put shells through. I might add that under the gunnery officer's command, we didn't bother about taking the (UNCLEAR), he'd only have to touch the gun to blow it to kingdom come.

Tape 3

00:33 **Right, I think we left off before where we were talking about the role of your ship, the Iron Warrior and what sort of ports you'd dropped into, and I understand that most of your career, during the war at least, the Second World War, was within Australian territorial waters, was it?**

Yes, the main purpose of those ships was of course…you've got to bear in mind that in Australia BHP

01:00 was the only munitions maker. They controlled all munitions production.

BHP was doing this?

BHP. Yes. Their top man, Essington Lewis, they had a title for Essington Lewis. He was the Managing Director of BHP, but he was also called "Chief Munitions Boss". He had another government title. So our big task was carting iron ore

01:30 from South Australia to the steelworks in Newcastle and Port Kembla. And of course the Japanese Navy were attacking us in-between Gabo and Brisbane. That area of Australia.

So where's Gabo?

Gabo is…you might call that the south-eastern…the furthest south point of course is Wilson's Prom [Promontory], but southeast is Gabo Island.

It's an island, is it?

02:00 It's an island just off, the Victorian border comes out there. The Japanese were obviously going to attack that area because that's where all the action was as far as merchant shipping was concerned. See we had something like, overall, right around the Australian coast, we lost 40 odd ships, if you count all the naval ships.

02:30 But between Brisbane and Gabo Island, we had something like 32 ships lost and several attacked, that weren't lost, but they were attacked (UNCLEAR). So it was a pretty lively area, particularly from about mid '42 to early '44.

So are we talking about submarines, air attacks?

No, submarine attacks. They had to introduce the

03:00 convoy system because of the losses. And we even lost a few when we had full naval and air protection, we still lost a few. But gradually the Japanese, once the Japanese started to get beaten back north, the amount of…it's interesting to also note that the very last Australian coastal ship that was sunk, was sunk by a German U boat, not by a Japanese submarine.

Where was this?

I haven't got the

03:30 exact location. But that's been an historical fact.

Which ocean?

I think it was somewhere in the Southern Ocean. I'd have to look it up. And the earliest ships that were sunk, were sunk by mines laid by German surface raiders. There were a lot of German surface raiders operating around Australia. Like the Thor, and the

04:00 Kormoran, which sank the [HMAS] Sydney of course off Western Australia. The Pinguin, funny name, like that anyway. Pinguin. That was the main thing we were up against.

So where were they laying the mines?

Well, they laid mines all over the place in Australia, mainly in the main shipping lanes off the East Coast but also off Victoria here. And off

04:30 Wilson's Promontory, they sank a couple of ships with mines there. They were quite…

Wilson's Prom? How did the German surface raiders get that far?

They were all disguised as merchant ships, of course, and the average naval ship would see…unless there was a naval ship where they were, they got away with it. They operated for quite a few years. See, the main purpose of the German

05:00 surface raider, of course, was to attack the British shipping in the Atlantic. But the Germans, as well as armed merchant raiders, had their pocket battleships out there. The Admiral Scheer, and what was the one they lost over…

The Graf Spee.

The Graf Spee. See they were very, very lovely warships, those pocket battleships. I felt more sadness at seeing the Graf Spee blown up than if she went out and fought

05:30 a proper action when she should have…

That was at the Battle of the River Plate ?

The Battle of the River Plate, yes. See, strictly speaking she was much more powerful than the British cruisers that were out waiting for her.

They scuttled her.

They scuttled her. Hitler was dead scared that she wouldn't win the battle, so he told them to scuttle her. Poor old Langsdorff, the captain, committed suicide, then sunk the ship.

06:00 **When you were operating around the Bass Strait region, I understand the Japanese even had a plane that was around?**

The Japanese submarines were very big submarines. They were nearly as big as the ship I was on. They were big ships.

And they were around Bass Strait you think?

They'd carry in aircraft themselves. And of course you've heard about the midget submarine attack in Sydney, see I think it

06:30 was the I24, I27, they had those submarines attached to their hull. And they would set them free off Sydney and send them into Sydney. They could have, they were a bit unlucky that they didn't cause a lot more damage than they did. The United States had one of their big men of war in Sydney at the time.

The [USS] Chicago.

And there were several other big Australian ships. And they missed everything and got the poor old [HMAS] Kuttabul, alongside

07:00 Garden Island, and that was a bit of a shame, looking at it from their point of view. I think they hoped to get out again, but of course they didn't. Luckily the authorities (UNCLEAR) it was fair dinkum, and got stuck into them.

So who pre warned you about the dangers?

Well the first warning we got, I suppose, of the dangers on the coast was when the first ships started to get attacked. We had already been armed at this point. I think the

07:30 Australian authorities realised, you see in Britain they were very slow in getting their ships armed and properly equipped. Mind you, they didn't have the wherewithall to do it. Admittedly they had a king's size war. You can't compare the Battle of the Atlantic with the battle that we had. It was similar only as much as I suppose that if you're going to get drowned it doesn't matter whether you're in the Atlantic or the Pacific, and you're ship is going to gown awful quick (UNCLEAR). The Brits had some

08:00 wonderful history things to add. The relief of mortar is a classic example, Operation Pedestal. They had some wonderful episodes of bravery and tenacity which saw them through.

So what sort of cargo would you transport?

Well, as I say we were taking raw iron ore to both

08:30 Newcastle and Kembla. We had to often bring coke, coke and coal into Melbourne for their gas works and when Whyalla started to make steel, we'd have to take coke back there for their blast furnace. We used to carry a lot of steel products. At the time I mentioned we were attacked by the I24, we had toluol on board, which is a

09:00 very high explosive substance. That didn't make us feel too happy, particularly when the Iron Crown copped it right alongside us.

So you were actually around there when the…?

We were passing. Looking back on it I would say that we were possibly his first target, and whether we were a little bit lucky, I don't know, but the Iron Crown copped it.

09:31 The Iron King was really designed to do ten knots. She was also a hand fired coal burner but she was what they called a quadruple expansion ship. Whereas the Iron Crown was a triple expansion, we had a slightly bigger crew. I was on the Iron King.

I'm getting mixed up. Are you on three ships that were…Iron Warrior?

I was on Iron Warrior, Iron King, Iron Knob, Iron Baron. They were the four ships. But when the Iron Crown was sunk, I was on the Iron King, as an

10:00 apprentice, as a marine apprentice, and I was sight setter of the four inch gun on the Iron King. When the Iron Crown was sunk, because she was sunk so close to us, I couldn't give you the exact distance but it was close enough for us to hear the explosions and see her go down, we couldn't believe that anybody could have got off the ship. I didn't put a stoplights on her, it was just "God, look at that!" I mean just a huge ball of, she had iron ore on her and to see this huge cloud of

10:30 iron ore and the ship hit right at midship going down like that with everything crashing together was quite something. And we of course, our officers and what shouted "Action stations!" we all went to our gun positions and luckily for us the submarine actually came to the surface. Possibly because our engineers were told "To get the damn ship going as quick as they could", and they were getting about twelve knots out of the Iron King, and she was trying to blow the safety valves all the time. The boilers were

11:00 absolutely being fully stretched. We went into action stations. As I say my station was sight setter on the four inch gun, and we opened fire on the submarine. Now at the same time a Hudson aircraft came out to assist with it. I don't know whether the captain had a special signal they sent through when they were being attacked. I think he got that message out. Although in the history books they say the Hudson was doing reconnaissance patrol from

11:30 Bairnsdale, he was close to Bairnsdale and he started to bomb the submarine. The submarine possibly came up because we were going faster than he could go underwater. See on the surface they would have done 18 knots at least. Underneath, I'd say they'd be lucky to do eight knots. I don't know for sure. We were lucky because very few merchant ships during the war, and that includes the Atlantic, very few merchant ships had the chance

12:00 of at least having a go at some of the people who were trying to stop us, in particular, from reaching our 21st birthday. So we were a bit lucky. I'm certain we never hit him by the way, I'm certain of it. What happens in this sort of shoot, the gunnery officer has got his field glasses and he's watching the fall of shot from our gun. He can see the splash coming up and he'd adjust the sights, telling me what to do to try and, like if he

12:30 sees the shot falling a few hundred yards short, he'll yell out "Up two hundred!' or whatever it is. Then I've to yell out "Up two hundred!" and I'll alter this line, up two hundred, fire. And so I was getting these orders and I have got to be quite candid, I was so nervous I was finding it hard to hang onto the… I've got two knobs to turn to get these things. Every time the gun went off, of course, it makes a…when you're so

13:00 close to the gun as I was, because I'm the man nearest the actual barrel, nearest the front of the gun, and when the shot goes off, we're just working in shorts and a tin hat, and I'm very hairy, and my hair used to get singed from the flashback of the gun. It was very uncomfortable because those guns make a lot of noise and you've got to keep your mouth open to let the air come out when the thing goes on, then hold your breath. Then you

13:30 get the orders to do. As I was saying before we were fairly well practised and trained, we'd done a lot of practice and training. Our biggest fear on the gun was that we would cause the trouble ourselves. Like as soon as a shot finishes and the breech is opened, one of the blokes has got a big mop and he puts it in the water and mops the end of the thing, so there are no live sparks on it because the loader uppers are putting the shell in and ramming it in and putting

14:00 the next cordite bag in there. If that thing's got a spark that hits that cordite bag, well, we're all history, because right back here, just a few feet behind here, is a big steel magazine with all the cordite bags in it. You've got to have a lot of faith in the blokes behind you, particularly your breech worker and the man mopping the gun and so forth. It's one of those times when you don't feel exactly…at no stage did I feel anything like a hero or

14:30 brave, I was as scared as I could possibly be. And as I say we had toluol on the ship, and I knew if we were skittled, it would be goodnight nurse. Your main thing is hoping like hell you're going to get out of it. People have said to me "Oh, you didn't go back and pick anybody up." Well, for a start, we weren't allowed to do that anyway, because we certainly would have lost the ship. And I say if a vote had been taken on the ship that day "Do we go back and see if there are survivors?" we would have voted "Bugger it! Let them stay where they are!" I mean, it sounds

15:00 horrible, but that's how we would have felt at the time. Now the reason this is an interesting story to me is because we learned later on that five men got off that ship and were picked up the Mulbera, another ship. We were staggered, we said "Geez, how did anybody get off that flaming ship?" We could only think that very often, it was just after four o' clock in the afternoon, 25 past four. The men who have been on the 12 to 4 watch have been on from midday to four, and particularly the firemen and trimmers who would have been down below, because that's a

15:30 curse of a place to be. Like later on in convoy, if our escorts were attacking a submarine, the sound of those depth charges going, if you're down below I tell you it sounds like every one's hit you. So we thought it must have been the blokes who came up. They used to come up and sit on the hatch and have a cup of kii we called it. That's condensed milk in cocoa mixed into a paste sort of thing. And we thought they must have been having their kii in the afternoon.

16:00 But what, 57 years after that event, since I've retired I've been skippering the Wattle. She's a little tug here operating in Melbourne and we take passengers out to the seal colonies. And I was skippering the Wattle out of Rye Pier in Melbourne here, and this chap came into the wheelhouse when I was teaching young kids how to steer the tug. I give them a steering certificate if they hold the wheel for ten seconds, "I'll give you a steering certificate." A little kid hanging on, give him a certificate. So I'm doing this and this fellow

16:30 came in and said "Yeah, you're a bit old to be doing this sort of thing." I said "Yeah, this is hard work." And he said "Were you at sea during the war?" I said "Yes." He said "What ship were you on?" Like I told you, I said "Iron Warrior, Iron King, Iron Knob, Iron Baron." He said "I'm a survivor off the Iron Crown." Now can you believe it? And I think he's the bloke who told your organisation to come and see me. George Fisher, name doesn't ring a bell? Yeah, George, very good mate of mine, very nice man, and George was a survivor off the Iron Crown.

How big was the crew?

17:02 I could count them all up, but I think about 42, 43, 44. They lost everybody but five. It was a big loss. Not as big as when the Centaur was sunk because she, when she went down with a lot, she had a bigger personnel on board.

The Centaur? That was another cargo ship?

No, she was a hospital ship. Torpedoed off Brisbane. But she had nursing sisters and

17:30 she had ambulance people and so forth. And some troops on board.

So you travelled in convoys?

Yes, when that Iron Crown was sunk, I think three days after that the Australian Government decided that all these ships on the coast would have to be convoy. So we went into the convoy system. The Iron King, on which I was a cadet, we were selected as the first commodore ship.

18:00 And the Commodore appointed was a British naval man called, he called himself Hobbit, but he spelled his name 'Hobart', the same as Hobart. Commodore Hobbit was appointed the Commodore. He brought his own crew of signalmen and wireless officers with him but he also employed the two cadets on the ship, of which I was one, to assist in all this signalling for him. So we were on the commodore ship, which was, you know, quite good. And

18:30 so we had to get used to convoy work. Now when I got my second mate's ticket just a few months later, I came back as an officer in charge of a watch on the Iron Knob and she was the sister ship to the Iron Crown. She had all the concrete around the wheelhouse and all the same equipment that the iron ships had. And that was another episode…How we didn't collide with each other in bad visibility,

19:00 don't ask me. We had that many close shaves of collision. When you're in convoy three cables apart in every direction and fog closes in, or heavy rain, it's just bedlam. We used to stick a fog buoy over the stern to two, so the ship behind could see the…a plume of water comes out of the fog buoy. You see this plume of water, you know there's a ship only a few hundred yards ahead and of course we had no communication

19:30 like today's ships. The communication with the engine room was a voice pipe. It's all brass, I cleaned them often enough. A big brass pipe in the wheelhouse. You pull a whistle out, a whistle plug out, and you blow and that blows a whistle down in the engine room. He takes his plug out and you talk through this pipe. That was your communication. So if you think you're catching the ship in front, you'd have to blow down, and say "Pull her back five revs!" He'd probably tell you to go to buggery when you

20:00 tell him, but he's got to try and pull the speed back whatever you think's suitable for the speed you want. And that was the system. And you were nearly skittling ships or getting skittled every…in bad weather or in bad visibility, which you can't dictate what it's going to be like. It's beautiful in lovely fine weather when you can see everyone, that's wonderful, but that ain't too often, unfortunately.

So you'd have thick fog over the sea?

Oh my word. There's usually a lot of fog at sea. It's very dangerous at

20:30 night because you can't even see any lights. You've got no lights. Every ship's in complete darkness. When you come back like I did as a brand new officer, and then you're put in charge of a watch, and you keep the eight to 12 watch and you suddenly find at night that you're the only officer on deck, it gets to you. Another thing that might be of interest to you and

21:00 it's interesting if you ever read The Loss Of The Sydney, the system of identification of ships, like because of the raiders, the surface raiders, was that the captain would have to go ashore just before you sailed from a port and the navy would either give him, or send a naval officer down, with a big sheet of cardboard, with if your voyage was going to be six or seven days, he'd probably give you eight days

21:30 or nine days, he'd give you nine days of the signal, it was a two letter signal, he'd give you every day of your voyage a certain signal written in ink by the intelligence people. Now the captain, at midnight, had to come onto the bridge. Every date was sealed with a wax seal. He'd break the wax seal, peal it back and underneath was two letters. It might

22:00 be 'GC', written in ink. That was written on the board in the wheelhouse, 'GC', so when the officer takes over the bridge at midnight, the first thing he looks at is that signal 'GC'. Now if he's challenged by a war ship or an aircraft or submarine or anything, if he's challenged "Who are you? What are you?" if he doesn't give that signal, strictly speaking, they can sink him or at least challenge and try and capture him. This was the system. It was a system in

22:30 place when the Sydney was lost to the Kormoran.

So every day they had a different…?

Every day. I can tell you one, bit amusing I suppose. One of those ships I was on, when I was a cadet this was, the captain was a man who had been brought back from retirement because they were very short of experienced men. Captain F.W. Tellick, from Melbourne. Tellick was ashore at the…they used to have a conference with the navy about tactics and this sort of thing and

23:00 the naval officer who had been a reserve officer, he had been in the iron ships before the war but had joined the navy as reserve grade officer, he was the reserve officer in charge of intelligence in Port Kembla and he came aboard the ship with this secret thing with all the things on it. But he knew the chief officer and the second officer of the ship, because he'd been shipmates with them and they all like a drop of the old amber fluid, you see. He came

23:30 down to the ship in the morning, but by about two o' clock in the afternoon they were all enjoying a few

noggins, you see. When the captain came back, we were sailing that night, he said…the chief officer's name was William Arthur Robby, and Tellick says "Mr Robby, have the navy been on board?" And he said "Yes, sir." "And did you get the secret documents?" "Yes sir". "Where are they?" They couldn't find the flaming documents. I was only a cadet. The captain was real

24:00 upset because you could imagine if those things are lost, that's all the Allies, everybody- navy, army, air force, everyone and his dog has got that as a secret signal for this identification business. So if it's lost, they've got to change the whole…I can still see old Fred's walking up "There's going to be a court-martial." He was waving his arms around. But they found them ultimately. They'd been up on the bridge and they'd stuck

24:30 them, they thought for safety, they stuck them under the settee in the chart room. The secret (UNCLEAR) that's one of the funny things I remember because the captain, he was really upset that day when he thought they had lost the secret documents. That's what it was. And I say, whether he liked it or not, the captain had to be up on the bridge at midnight and break that seal and write up the secret signals.

So was the life at sea…it sounds like a very tough job, especially during war

25:00 **time? Was it difficult for most men to cope, without women?**

Well, I don't know about that. We probably had our own ideas on that. I don't know about that, but I know this, that if you had amongst your crew someone who had been saved from…on one occasion we had two members of the Iron Chieftain. She was sunk and the survivors came ashore somewhere

25:30 near, just south of Newcastle, in a lifeboat. And two of them came onto the ship I was on. One of them was the junior engineer and we were all having our meal one day, and this junior engineer was sitting opposite me at the table, in the officers' dining saloon. Now bear in mind, the ship's going that way and he was sitting with his back to the way we're going, and we're all sitting around the table. There were four this side,

26:00 there was a settee on that side, with the captain on that end and the chief engineer at that end. And the doors were aft, here. And all of a sudden the action stations alarm went because what used to happen, the leading escort, if any escort got the signal which they thought was a submarine, they used to put a big black pennant up. The black pennant would have been wider than this room. This huge black pennant went up which meant they got an ASDIC [Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] signal from a

26:30 submarine. They wouldn't attack it until they got confirmation and so forth, but all the ships went into action station when this black pennant went up. Well this day, the moment that sign went off, this engineer who had been a survivor off the Chieftain, he dived straight across the table. The table had all cutlery and crockery on it, he dived just like as if you were diving into a swimming pool. Straight across the table to get out the door. We all used to

27:00 keep our…when we were in the danger areas, that was, say, from Wilson's Prom up to Brisbane, anywhere in that area, most of us used to sleep with our life jackets on these ore ships because they went down so quickly. But those blokes, they used to go up and sleep on the boat deck underneath the boats. That's where they used to sleep.

This is the sailors?

All the blokes that had experienced the sinking to a man, used to sleep up on the boat deck. That was the effect it had on them. They

27:30 were very, very nervous.

I want to talk about how sailors actually dealt with the absence of women in their lives?

Well, of course, later on when I was trading up in the east with all male ships. We had one bloke, a radio officer, who used to give us a treat by still photography. Just showing photographs, still photography. And he was the first…

28:00 there was no such thing as stereophonic sound, of course, it was the old days of the 78 gramophone sort of thing. They had come off the great big speaker thing. They'd done away with those and they had speakers, but the speakers all had the old valve system in them. Now John Watson, his name was, he was a radio officer. He'd actually been captured on one of the ships by a

28:30 German raider, the Thor. The Thor captured the ship John was on, and the Thor was a German raider, but they transferred their prisoners to a Japanese ship and they were incarcerated in Japan. And John had come back after the war, it nearly killed him, but he was very keen on stereophonic sound. He became a bit of a boffin on it and before we'd even heard of stereophonic sound, he had got two speakers and he used to put these little

29:00 amplification things with valves in them. They were quite exposed of course, in boards up to the two speakers, so he had his gramophone running and was experimenting with it. He was trying to get ping-pongs, so you'd get the sound going from one side to the other. He used to put a still picture show on

about once a week. Everyone on the ship had come to see this still picture show and it was only because he was very gifted in taking

29:30 pictures. There'd be the odd sexually attractive woman amongst the lot of them, that would always get a few whistles and yells. But he was very clever with all other types of photography. He used to have waterfalls and bush scenes, sea scenes, ship scenes, he was very good at it. And that was one thing we used to have as entertainment. We used to play a lot of chess. We were very fond of chess, and we also used to play a lot of cards, some of the blokes. And fellows do queer things. Some of the

30:00 fellows who I used to think didn't like human beings, were usually very fond of animals. And you'd see blokes ashore in port, feeding stray cats. Blokes who wouldn't give you the time of day as a person, but they'd get up early and go and scrounge meat and stuff out of the galley and go and feed cats on the wharf, and that sort of thing. The trouble with ships without women, when you got to a port where there were women, and where there were dives where they could go,

30:30 it was very hard to keep them out of that sort of thing. And as an officer, and particularly as a captain, it was always a big problem with social diseases. We had no doctors of course, and we used to, before the days of penicillin, we had to treat them with sulphur dimidon [?]. That was always the danger with the troops ashore, that they would pick up social diseases. But generally speaking, basically they were pretty good. Most of the blokes were…there weren't a lot of family men because I

31:00 suppose if you go to sea like I did, strictly speaking, you shouldn't marry, you shouldn't have a family. Strictly speaking, if you choose this sort of work. My wife's been so good to…I've had the best of both worlds by having a woman who…because my Uncle Bon, who I've told you about, his wife shot through with all his money. Left him virtually a pauper. Probably she felt justified, probably he treated her poorly, I don't know.

31:30 It's not a wonderful life for a married person. Although conditions have improved so much now and of course they have women at sea, serving as officers. That only came about because of the tremendous improvement in the quarters and the fact that when those container…I talked to you about the container revolution. Once the container ships started, every crew member has his own en suite. Every crew member. So everyone has his own cabin and that enabled women to participate in crew.

32:00 Like, when I first went away, there would have been about 16 of us all using the two showers, for example, and I tell you (UNCLEAR), because you were busy, you had to be on deck or on your watch or whatever. I don't think…my sister and my mother used to be horrified if they came to visit me at the conditions we lived under. You certainly wouldn't have got either of them wanting to be a sailor, I promise you.

So what sort of weather did you come across, in terms of bad weather?

32:30 Well, it's like you might as well say the same to yourself. Everyone has good and bad weather they've got to go through. Seafaring in bad weather's not much fun. I still think the worst facility before we got really effective radar was heavy rain, because once on the ship when you can't see where you're going, even if you've got clear skies before it happens, you're worried that you're going to hit something. Visibility is always a…

33:00 Weather is always your most important thing on a ship, all the time. It's a continual worry from the day you start to the day you die. Even now, I don't have a day where I don't check the barometer and the temperature and sky and so forth. It's the kind of thing you do all your life.

When you were in Australian waters during the war, did you ever have terrifically rough weather?

Oh yeah, very often. Oh crikey.

Where were the worst parts?

33:30 Well, you can get.…See, if people do a trip on a ship where they get bad weather in Bass Strait, for all their life then they'll say "Bass Strait's got that". Even though you can go around Bass Strait for months sometimes and it'll be as calm as a milk run. You can get bad weather anywhere. It's the same as the old sailors used to talk about how I came west about the [Cape] Horn because that was the most southerly point you could go, in a sailing ship, that's where they'd all talk about. Because if you get

34:00 bad weather there it's bad news because the weather is continually blowing from the south west, that's the prevailing weather, to get a sailing ship against that weather around the South American continent, that's a big job. Going the other way, it's relatively easy because you've got the wind behind you, sort of thing. Even in a steam ship coming west about there in bad weather it's nasty. I went through lots of typhoons in the northern Pacific

34:30 and they're all very nasty. After the war the technology started to get better. In the early days, you just had to go on your own meteorological training but now after the war, they started to put a plane up from Guam to plot a typhoon centre and that would be broadcast to all ships, so you know where all the systems that are typhoons or are going to be typhoons are. And if a typhoon developed to a

35:00 full typhoon with winds sometimes over 100 miles an hour, the aircraft would plot that typhoon every four hours from above and every ship would listen in for that weather forecast. And you could navigate

your ship accordingly, which I did all the time, but occasionally you'd get caught because they make mistakes and you make mistakes and you get caught in a typhoon that's pretty nasty, yes.

Can you tell us about an example where you encountered huge waves?

35:30 Oh yes. I often had huge waves, particularly as I say, in typhoon weather. And a couple of times I got caught through a bit of imprudent action, because I used to try and work the…even when I got onto the bigger ships, the container ships, I tried to use the typhoon to my own advantage. You've got to understand how a circular storm works. In the northern hemisphere the wind is going anti-clockwise round the lab orometer. If you can visualise

36:00 this huge…they generate as much energy as about 40,000 hydrogen bombs. Tremendous energy is engaged in a typhoon. Now if you can get on the outskirts, if that typhoon is moving north and you're going north, but if it's moving, say, a bit to the north west and you're going due north, you can use that wind with your container ship like a fair wind on a sailing ship and you might get two or three knots over your rev speed. And if you can pick up two or three knots for 24

36:30 hours, it gives you a good advantage on the ship without using extra fuel. And ship owners are not famous for using extra fuel. They expect a ship to be on a railway line in direction and always going as short a distance as quickly as possible. And I used that often but sometimes I'd make a slight error in judgement and the typhoon would get a bit close and I'd have to veer right off. With those huge winds, the wind

37:00 say within 10 or 12 miles of the centre will actually wreck the average ship. With the seas so big it will just wreck the ship.

So you've got massive waves pounding against the ship?

You get massive waves. A big ship was lost in 1981 called the [HMS] Derbyshire, the biggest loss of any British ship, bigger than the Titanic of course in size. And she was lost in

37:30 typhoon Orchard and I was in that typhoon on the Ariake and that was a very bad typhoon. She got into what we call 'the dangerous semi-circle'. The dangerous semi-circle is where if you run before the wind, you're running across the path of the storm and that area is called the dangerous semi-circle. And he for some reason got into the dangerous semi-circle, she was a ship of 160,000 tons and he lost

38:00 the ship.

A hundred and sixty thousand tons?

Lots of ships were lost in typhoons.

So we're talking about a ship that's enormous, really?

A hundred and sixty thousand tons. Yes, a well found ship. She was a bulk oil carrier. They used to carry oil one way and bulk oil the other. A very big ship and she went down with everybody. But I was also in a big typhoon in Hong Kong Harbour in a ship called the Eastern and the typhoon was Wanda and the recorded wind speed in

38:30 that typhoon is almost unbelievable. Two hundred and sixty knots. That wind was strong enough to take all the paint off the ship, for example. It chipped the paint off like it had been done with a giant hammer. It took everything that would move off the ship. Those ships had what they called jumbo gear and we had life boat covers

39:00 and it took everything like that, every bit of canvas that was trying to protect things from weather, they were just stripped off like as if they were tissue paper.

This was just the wind and the water?

The wind and the tremendous amount of spray and rain. We had no visibility. We were actually caught in Hong Kong doing engine repairs. We had our engine in pieces, the steering gear in pieces. As soon as the number one signal went up in Hong Kong,

39:30 in those days the signal station was quite predominant, and as soon as number one signal went up…I gave you a hundred mile an hour too fast. A hundred and sixty one knot winds was the recorded wind.…

A hundred and sixty?

A hundred and sixty one knots. But the thing is the ship was virtually a limp ship. She was alongside

40:00 the bund and doing the repairs when the number one signal went up and the bund authority advised us to go out. They didn't like her being alongside the wharf, not because they're worried about your ship, they're scared you might damage the wharf. So they got us to ship the ship out to a buoy.

Tape 4

00:33 Well, one day there was a big typhoon in Hong Kong and the Eastern was undergoing repairs. The captain was Captain Bernie Dunn, I was first officer of the ship and we were advised to get the ship out to a typhoon buoy. The typhoon buoys in Hong Kong are very large buoys if you know what mooring buoys look like. It's a huge metal structure with a big ring on top to secure to. It's secured by very big

01:00 anchor chains capable of probably up to 400 ton strain, certainly 300 ton strain. It's secured to concrete blocks set into the harbour floor. Now your ship when it's attached to that buoy should be capable of withstanding the average typhoon. You've got to bear in mind that the ship is going to be attached to that buoy by their own anchor chain. The anchor chain on the ship would certainly have a couple of hundred breaking strain on it.

01:30 So because we were a dead ship, we had no engines, the captain had to hire three tugs to take us out to the buoy, which they did. And the system is…I've got to explain the system on the ship so you understand this…the anchor chain on the ship, we usually have up to 12 shackles. Each shackle is…

02:06 Anyhow, we have up to twelve shackles of cable. When we say shackles, each length is 15 fathoms, from the anchor to the first shackle is 15 fathoms, a fathom being six feet. So every section's got a

02:30 shackle, so you can disengage the chain and also to let you know how much chain you've got out. Like if you let an anchor go, the captain will say to the officer in charge of the anchor "Put three shackles in the water." That means he's got to identify one, two, three, and that shackles going to go in the water, that's how much chain the captain wants out. Is that understandable? To go onto a buoy…the shackles are all painted, by the way, painted white,

03:00 with the shackles each side so you can identify them. They've also got seizing wire on those to identify them. On this particular occasion we're going to put the port cable to the typhoon buoy. So we've got to lower the port anchor, a sailor goes over the side on a basin's chair and shackles a wire onto the anchor and brings it back through a fairlead, then we pull that anchor along

03:30 the port side, out of the way, slacking chain off until we get it hanging and we hang it off on a pennant, so that anchor is now hanging off and the chain has got a (UNCLEAR) comes back up the hawse pipe. Now we secure that and all the chain is down in what we call a chain locker and it comes up through spurling pipes and the spurling pipes come up behind the windlass and the windlass is the machinery that's going to control it. And

04:00 the anchor, the two anchors come up over the windlass, now that one was still out with an anchor on it, this one we bring it out, and the crew….it's very heavy by the way. As it comes out, it takes two sailors with hooks to pull it, and they fake it, what we call faking, they fake it along the deck like that until we get to the first shackle. When we come to the first shackle, anchor chain rides one horizontal, one vertical, like that, and the machinery

04:30 on the windlass is geared so that the vertical chain gets pulled when you take in (UNCLEAR), that's how it works. When you come to the first shackle the ship's carpenter, everything's got to be done by demarcation, the ship's carpenter has to knock a wooden plug out of the shackle and you undo a forelock, and you can then break the chain. Okay, we've now got the chain broken, that's kept to one side, now this part that we've broken, we've got all the rest down there, the seamen now pull this as the machinery brings it up

05:00 from the chain locker and it's fed down through the hawse pipe, the hawse pipe's the one that feeds it out over the ship's side and they feed that down to the men on the buoy. Now the ship's been placed by the captain underneath the buoy and that chain's shackled onto the shackle. Now when it's shackled onto that, the ship is left to drift back and drift back until the ship is now riding here, with a big continuity

05:30 of chain, probably about a shackle and a half out to the buoy, which is on top of the surface of the water but shackled to the…can you follow? The ship's now set up. The starboard anchor lowered down to the water for emergency and put on the brake because when you're letting an anchor go in a hurry you just let it go, you don't walk it back with the machine like (UNCLEAR). Now we're settled on that and the engine room crowd are full bore, getting the engine back together and the steering gear back together which had

06:00 been left to drift for the repair work. So, I think number one signal is about ….now the signals in Hong Kong are shown on a flag hoist. and they've shown number one signal, a typhoon is approaching from the south. I forget all the exact wording of them now, but typhoon signal two will be the typhoon is expected to affect the colony of Hong Kong. Number three'd be the winds

06:30 are now growing so and so, and so on and so on, until you get to number ten signal which says the centre of the typhoon is expected to pass through Hong Kong. That's the number ten signal. All the others give you warnings. When you're getting up to seven and eight, gale force winds are expected from the northeast or whatever. You've got that on the port information, you can see what each signal means.

So it's like a classification system?

Every ship in the harbour is watching

07:00 whether… every captain and officer in the harbour is watching those signals to see what the forecast is. It wasn't like today where you've got satellite photos, there was no such things as satellites, we're all doing this on our knowledge of how storms react and so forth, and knowing what they are. Anyway, finally they get the engine together, it takes them about five hours to get steam up, they were actually getting steam up before the thing got to gale force winds. So by the time we

07:30 got….the ship's now riding into a gale. Now, I've got to explain that a ship in this position is better if she's by the head. I used to tell the yacht blokes "If you get caught in a bad storm and you've got anchor, keep your head down" because the ship I was on, the Eastern, she was light ship and her natural trim light ship was by the stern. Even with all my forward ballasting and the four feet tank full, she was still 15 feet by the stern.

08:00 She's got 15 feet more draft than the head. You follow what I mean? And she's right into that chain and when the wind hit you'd love her to ride like that straight to there, but she'd never ride like that. She's four points, or 45 degrees, to the wind with the chain leading like that. The ship's trying to come up into it but when let her come up if she was down, the chances are the stern if it was more wind resistant would act like a spanker

08:30 and push her head into the wind, but we were 15 feet by the stern, which was dangerous and we were right out with tremendous strain on the chain. The captain sent me up forward to keep an eye on the chain. I had a bosun, his name was Kwok Shing Tai, he was an opium smoker. Kwok Shing Tai, along with four seamen, we're on the foc'sle head to let the other anchor go if we felt that was necessary or take

09:00 any action we thought…maybe slack a bit of chain if the captain wanted more catenary. The catenary acts like a spring. You don't want the chain taut like that, that's (UNCLEAR). Anyhow, it wasn't long before we couldn't see, the ship's straining. Luckily for us the engine's had got ready by this stage, we had engines and steering, but the ship was straining like billy-o on the chain. We tried to

09:30 put everything down below that could move on the ship. To give you one example, there was a 44 gallon drum about half full of bolts and nuts. We used to carry a lot of horses on deck on those ships, and we had these for building stalls on deck, for livestock, and the wind took that drum over the side like it was picked up by someone's hand. And as I say, it blew a lot of the paint off the weather side of the ship. The first thing that went wrong, the chain when it comes over the gypsy, as we call the machinery of the

10:00 thing, when it comes over the gypsy it goes through a compressor. The compressor would be a couple of ton casting riveted to the foredeck of the ship. That compressor keeps the chain straight onto the machinery. It goes from the compressor straight down the hawse pipe. Now that compressor has a steel bar, it's about feet long, it's about two and a half inches wide and nearly an inch thick. You can use that, if you can visualise the chain with one vertical and one horizontal, you put that

10:30 bar down on the horizontal link and let the next vertical link come against the bar, you can take your weight off the machinery. So we've slacked it off a little bit, so the weight's on that bar. Now the first thing that happened, luckily for us, myself and my bosun and my four seamen, we're crouched under the protection of the foc'sle bollards, as we called them, the bollards. We did have a canvas

11:00 dodger. We had actually taken that down. It would have been ripped to shreds anyway. We're all crouched down, I'm trying to see what's going on, the ship's yawing all over the place. And the first thing that's happened was that bar, with a sound like a rifle shot, broke it into about a million pieces and the wind took it like shot down to leeward, never saw any bits of that again. Just went bang! Like that. Now we've got the chains onto machinery. Mind

11:30 you it's big machinery, and the brake's pulling, the brake's got a huge drum on it and it's fully wound up, of course, at this stage. And the chain held. Thank Christ. "What's going on here?" I might add that we had the sophistication on that ship of a telephone line from the foc'sle to the bridge. I'm trying to tell the captain this, but I know he can't hear me. I know the noise of the wind and the rain is so great, I'm yelling into the phone but I knew he couldn't,

12:00 couldn't hear me. I knew it wasn't getting in. I couldn't talk to the captain. I wanted to tell him this bar had gone. But the next dramatic thing was this compressor block just fell into two pieces as if someone had hit it with a giant axe. It just parted like that, it fell into two parts and the chain now, bang! It's going straight from the hawse pipe to the windlass. It's got a bad lead now.

12:30 It's across the machinery which is bad of course. I suddenly realise that something unusual is happening over the side. The port anchor we've hung off on a thing, the wind has blown that right through the ship's side and because I'd filled the four feet tank with water to try and get the head down all that water is coming out plus all off the surface of the sea and the rain. We're losing all the water out of the tank and there's this big damaged gap,

13:00 that the anchor's bashed through the side of the ship. A lot of people won't believe this but it's true. I had a heck of a job seeing because it's so strong I can't see properly, I had to keep my fingers over my eyes to stop the rain and the anchor chain where the hawse pipe comes out through the ship's hull, there's a big collar, I think it's probably wrought iron, it's a big collar to protect the ship's hull from the wear of the chain. It had broken

13:30 that collar and pealed the side of the ship back like a giant tin opener. And from about six feet from the (UNCLEAR), the side of the ship's all opened like a giant tin opener. I'm now pretty sure that that chain's absolutely, you know, sitting tight like and the wind was almost at its height at this point. I realise that we're going to have to let go but I've got now communication, so

14:00 I decided I've got to make the effort to get up to report to the captain. I had lifelines rigged, as we'd had them for the last three or four days, right from the accommodation so you had something to hang onto when (UNCLEAR). Because the ship was lying like that, the wind was on the port side, I went down the starboard side on the lifeline on the lead side and I went down as if I'm (UNCLEAR), the blinking wind sort of shod me along…I don't realise

14:30 that I look a bit of a wreck because the wind's almost taken all of my clothes off and my oilskin's in ribbons. I go through the accommodation, we had 12 passengers, amongst them were a few ladies and I believe I heard this later, I got to the door of the passengers lounge, we had them all in their lifejackets because we knew it was going to be a pretty serious day, I believe I came to door and said "Don't worry ladies, everything's under control." But I believe I looked such a fright one lady fainted. I go up onto the bridge and old Bernie,

15:00 who was a very cool customer, old Bernie (UNCLEAR), I told Bernie I said "I can't get through," he said "That's okay." We then (UNCLEAR) you know two signals like this means she's gone, we've lost the chains, see, so I had to make my way on the foc'sle deck (UNCLEAR), and I hadn't been up there very long when the chain parted. And so I gave him the signal which he saw luckily, he put the ship on full ahead, she was a turbine, quite a powerful ship, the Eastern,

15:30 she had parson's turbines on it, and she starts to go. But of course, we had radar by the way at that point, it was 1962, we had radar, but in that sort of weather, it's all rain, you can't see anything. The radar won't give you any definition, although the radar was working, it was just a complete blackout. And unfortunately for Hong Kong, we went right across a tug. A tug

16:00 called…there was a tug that was trying to get back to her base in Hong Kong harbour and we skittled him. I was up on the foc'sle head and she hit the tug, and all I saw was the red hulled bottom of the tug, she went straight down with all hands. I think she had 12 men on her, they were all drowned anyway. We lost everybody on the tug. When the tug was sighted, which was too late, the ship was going full ahead.

16:31 We only saw him as we hit him. The captain instinctively had the ship going full of stern and she became then completely unmanageable, and by now she was near an area called Taikoo Harbour, which was a big rock area and she swung right down and went up onto the rocks and stopped dead. She stopped dead upright on the rocks. She was on the rocks, I'd say, I don't know but I'd say 30 foot of the ship was on dry rock. And she pulled up

17:00 dead. The winds still howling like billy-o, but the ship's stuck. It's a funny feeling. We all felt relieved because you can do nothing. You can go full of head, full of stern, hard of port, hard of starboard, give every order you like. Nothing's going to happen.

And you were safe?

We were apparently safe. Mind you, my immediate job was to go around sounding the ship to see if she was making water anywhere. There was a bit of water lapping around the forepart, basically she's almost dry on the forepart.

17:30 And she's not making water anywhere, so I come back up on the bridge with the carpenter to report to the captain, and the chief engineer, a chap called Jim Stanbury, he's come up out of the engine room, they've just got her on standby, but there's nothing's happening, the propeller's still in deep water so all his equipment's okay. So the three of us are up on the bridge talking, with the officer of watch, a chap called (UNCLEAR), we're all talking up there saying "Gee, you know, we're a bit lucky I reckon to be up

18:00 here." But we know from our training that we're not safe yet until we see what happens. Well, then the worst thing of all happens. The typhoon ten signal, we hadn't seen it because it was nighttime when it hit, but ten had been broadcast, the centre was going through Hong Kong. Now the centre went through Hong Kong, this was about…look I forget the time, it was just before lunch. The centre of the typhoon is full of what we call horseflies, typhoon flies,

18:30 full of it. Millions of them. But it's dead calm, dead calm, but all these flies flying around and there's no wind. But you can hear the wind, you can hear the roar of the wind and we're all standing on the deck thinking gee you know, this is the centre all right. But we know enough about storms to know you go from a gale from one direction, to a full gale from the other, when you go through the centre because it's a revolving storm. So I said to the old man, it was my idea and he accepted it, (UNCLEAR) I said

19:00 "Look, we've lost the port chain, and the port anchor's still hanging over the side. What about I say, I let the starboard anchor go onto the rocks and when the gale will probably push us off the rocks, we'll have a good hold of her on the chain." He said "Oh, that's a good idea." It was a lousy idea because when you drop your anchor onto the rocks it doesn't bite into anything. It sounded a good idea at the time. So I let the anchor go onto the rocks and

19:30 I stood by waiting for the wind. It was about 20 minutes later the wind comes round full bore and of

course the ship just went off like a big hand had pushed her off and of course I'd already agreed with the old man that we'd give her about four and a half shackles on the chain. So I've got the carpenter, he's on the controls, I've got the carpenter with the brake wide open. And I'm watching the shackles come out, with the paint and the seizing wire, and when we had four shackles out, hang on, and as

20:00 soon as he put the brake on the anchor jumped off the rocks like somebody had picked it up and thrown it off. Now we've got four and a half shackles of chain out.

With these sort of experiences you had, were there any such experiences in war time? In the Second World War, in Australia?

I really thought this day we were going to die, particularly with the amount of wind we had and the fact that I knew the captain was going to try to take her to sea and I didn't think we'd make it. I thought we'd probably die. Our main trouble here

20:30 now was when you're fully occupied like that, you don't think much about your own safety. But here we had four and a half shackles of chain and the wind is so strong that the anchor would have been just tumbling along the bottom. It acted as a sort of drogue, it did keep our head into the wind a bit and during the next four or five hours, we nearly skittled other craft, we came close to skittling North Walk in Hong Kong. We had lots of near misses on things, until all of a sudden, we

21:00 realised the ship was holding and I realised the anchor was holding. I was able to tell the other men "Holding", so he stopped the engine. What you do, you feel, you can feel the anchor if it's tumbling, I could feel no tumble. The chain comes up through and into a catenary. (UNCLEAR) We still had, I don't know, it wasn't blowing as hard as in the centre but I'd say it was still around about a 60 or 70 knot wind.

21:30 So by ten o' clock that night we had a starry sky and no wind and we were brought up, because we had another great shock coming to us (UNCLEAR).

I'd like to go into that in more detail later, but for now, because we've got limited time left, I want to focus on two aspects of your experience in the merchant navy. One being encounters with marine life,

22:00 **and animals in general. Sea creatures or, that is, birds or whatever. Do you have any experiences there?**

I've got a few experiences to tell about it. I'll tell you about a bird one first. We used to do the great circle track from Hobart right around to Fremantle which puts you well to the south of Australia and that's where all the beautiful big albatrosses are. On a fine day,

22:30 it's not very often it's calm down there but when there's a very high pressure area covering that area usually you come across literally millions of albatross asleep on the water like a big carpet of albatross. But in the bad weather, they're all in flight. In this particular story was a time when I was third officer of a ship. I used to stock it with seasickness by the way.

23:00 If I had to be sick over the side, it was only in bad weather I got sick, but if I had to be sick I was very embarrassed about having seasickness, so I could just get out of the sight of the man on the bridge, I kept the lee lookout, a sailor kept the weather lookout and there was a man on the wheel and there was a cadet who used to do rounds. And I had a man on the foc'sle head. Now the captain's orders were that if the ship looked like taking water over the foc'sle head, if she looked like she was going to bury her nose, you had to bring your lookout man off the foc'sle head. Chinese crew by

23:30 the way, had to bring the Chinese crewman off the foc'sle and put him on the flying bridge, so he was safer. So this night around about 10 o' clock I (UNCLEAR), she's starting to put her nose under so I thought before long she's going to be taking in water over the foc'sle, so I took my lookout man off the foc'sle and put him on the flying bridge. Now in between being sick, which used to about every 20 minutes, there was a big albatross, it was nighttime. I'm on the port side and the red side light shows from right

24:00 ahead to two points above the beam. And this big albatross had come in to my side, very close to me, I'm on the lee side of the bridge, he'd come in, they glide, they're like a sailing ship, they glide, and he came in and then he…a bit of draft was hitting the bow and then he'd go out again. I was just watching this happen. I had my man on the lookout then all of a sudden a draft of wind got him

24:30 and bang! The wind just pushed him. He hit the rails of the flying bridge. (UNLCEAR) Albatross, they can't walk on the land. They take off on the water. If you get an albatross for any reason on the ship you've got to pick it up and throw it over. So I go into the charge room and get a torch because it's as black as the inside of a cow out there. I climb up onto the flying bridge. My lookout man's there with his oilskins on and his sou [south]-wester and his

25:00 side boots and he's looking out there, standing there. I'm expecting to see the bird and I can't see the bird. He didn't say anything. (UNCLEAR) and I go all round the bridge, I can't see the bird. I heard him hit the damn thing, I couldn't find him. He must have somehow got blown over the side. I'm just about to go down and I hear "Aawwwrrr". I look around and the lookout man's got him under his oilskin. His beak's up and his feet (UNCLEAR) huge bird, he's a big bird, and he's got (UNCLEAR)

25:31 I made him take his thingo and got the bird and threw him over the side and he flew off. He would have been a salty old meal, wouldn't he?

What about sharks? Would they have been a big concern?

Well, are you talking about cutting off fins of sharks? Before…the crew of one ship I was on, caught a shark up in Moresby, we were working cargo in Moresby and they caught him in the Moresby harbour. And he was so big they had to put a derrick out

26:00 to pull him on board when they caught him. He was still alive and to my horror they cut his fins off while he was alive. And chopped his tail…

Did you ever lose any sailors to sharks?

Not that I know of. I've had fellows…some went missing on the ship who we never found. It's one of the, I would say, perfect murders that because you've got no body, you've got no evidence, no-one saw him, no-one knows anything about him,

26:30 and suddenly you're a bloke short. Yes, I've had that.

How did you deal with that situation?

You can't do anything. No-one knows when he goes over the side. You would investigate, "Did anyone see?" Everyone says "No, we didn't see him", they're all asleep and it usually happens at night of course. Could be murder, could be suicide, but you can't do much about it. You can't hold an inquest, you can do nothing. You have to put it in your log book, of course, and it goes in your official log and the records are all kept at Cardiff. I've had

27:00 enquiries five or six years later on [about] people who have died.

Did that only happen to you once?

Oh, no. I've had a couple of fellows disappear.

What were the dynamics of crew relationships?

Well, you've got to keep on it because the ship's like a little private country, all of its own. Even if you're in port and someone gets murdered you don't necessarily have to call the local police in, on the ship.

27:31 As captain you are in charge of that ship. Once you call the police in, then you're over to them. I didn't always call the police in for incidents on the ship. If a sailor attacked an officer, or something like that as happened in one case, I didn't call the police in. If you can, it's better to handle it yourself.

So what was mateship like on a ship?

Oh, pretty good. You get lifelong mates of course. The same goes for the crew members. You don't get to

28:00 know your crew so well because as captain in particular, you don't have anything to do with them.

I understand on small ships you could have factions, as you do in any organisation for that matter. How would you deal with considerable tension when it would erupt between groups?

28:30 Well, I might tell you after lunch of an incident where my wife came to the party on that. But in the early days it was mainly firemen and sailors, they didn't like each other. Basically, it was the firemen, there were nine of them and there were nine seamen, and they treated them…in the old sailing ship days if you called a bloke a farmer that was an insult. "You should be a farmer and not a sailor." And traditionally that became…your stand-by man was always called the farmer, so sometimes there was friction between decks. I've

29:00 seen some fearful fights between (UNCLEAR) where they took shovels to each other. A lot of blokes got injured, almost rendered the ship incapable of being worked. You get some of that. You get a bad crew, they can give you a lot of trouble.

Tape 5

00:35 **I'd like to…you mentioned toward the end of the tape before, you were talking about incidents on board ships, fights, things like that. Could you elaborate on that? Are you there any other stories about that, can you elaborate on that?**

We had times when our crew were

01:00 anti, particularly in more recent times. Getting right into the container era when I first went to a ship called Ariake 1, she was the second container ship my company built and I did the trips on the first container ship but I did the first relief of the captain on the Ariake 1 and when I went to that ship the

crew morale was pretty low. The crew seemed to me to be

01:30 real anti-officer and reluctant to do anything and so forth.

This is post war?

This is post war. I'm now into the 70s really. My wife was allowed to travel with me at this time. And she suggested, because the Chinese like playing ping pong, that we buy them a ping pong table for the crew, so we did that. Then she went and bought a shield for competition

02:00 and from thereafter we held a competition on the ship all time. And coming south the four top players played off the finals in the ping pong and we gave the winner some sort of a prize.

I suppose I was referring more to war time.

Yeah, war time, okay. Well forget about that. The discipline was much stronger of course and no-one… there was never any real crew trouble that I can remember.

02:34 As I say I suppose booze was the biggest problem really. Fellows who liked to drink to excess were quite common.

Out of all the ships you served on during the war, did you have a favourite ship?

Well, probably I'd say the Iron Baron. But I was the third officer of the Iron Baron. She was quite a nice ship,

03:00 I thought. But they were very similar. The Iron Baron and the Iron King were sister ships but the Iron King was the one I had most of the war time action on of course.

I wanted to ask you when you were sailing around during World War II, did you notice the physical beauty of the places you were sailing to or sailing past?

Not really, no. There used to be a bit of a saying, "When the coastal

03:30 master loses sight of land he starts getting scared and when the deep water master sights land he starts getting scared." But we kept pretty well out because of the mines, the danger of mines during the war. Most of course were set well off the coast.

So there weren't any places you visited…?

Always loved Sydney as a port. Always have done. Sydney is a beautiful place. Sydney as a port, to my way of thinking is

04:00 just the best in the world. Even though there's all those arguments about Buenos Aires and so forth, Hong Kong. Sydney is, from a seaman's point of view, a well protected and beautiful harbour.

How would you describe your relationship with the sea? What do you like or love about the sea?

Well, mostly I liked…I always loved it once you got clear of the land, clear of the smells of…because

04:30 I was initially engaged of course with BHP where all the smells were industrial, steel works, all industrial smells. To get the ship washed down, all the brass work clean and everybody in clean clothes, getting to sea was always fresh air. Even today and even after the war when the motor car started to take over and I realised that coming

05:00 into any major port of Australia where if you arrived off the port as I used to like to do about five o' clock in the morning, so you'd have plenty of time to get the ship alongside and do a day's work, I always noticed that the coastline of the city, Sydney or Brisbane or Melbourne, the city looked lovely between five and six, if it was in the winter time, the lights. In the summer time you'd see the mountains right back, by seven o' clock you were lucky to see the land because of the industrial

05:30 smog and the people ashore wouldn't notice, they wouldn't notice it. But from the sea where you'd been in clean air, the pollution is unbelievable. I used to notice that quite a lot. By seven o' clock in the morning the air's really….it cleans up a bit by 10 o' clock, but it's bad.

What else do you love about being out on the ocean?

Well, I like the sound, I like the sound of the water. And the smell,

06:00 even the seaweed smell I quite enjoy. Not the real nasty seaweed smell, the general sea smells I enjoy. I always had a keen love of the sea before I started. Reading about my heroes Cook and Nelson and Fisher and so on I've always had a keen love of the sea, and things nautical of course. That's probably why I succeeded at it.

Do you have a respect for the ocean?

06:30 **Oh my word, yes. Nature presents a lot more dangers than anything human. The wind and**

(UNCLEAR) the sea of course depends entirely on the wind. Which is why it's funny when you hear people say "Oh, you don't want to go across the Bay of Biscay, that's a rough area" or "You don't want to go to the Southern Ocean." But you see there are times when it's as calm as a milk run. The sea rises depending on what the wind does.

07:01 **Is there an almost, do you almost have a spiritual feeling when you're out there?**

Well, I've always been a believer in God. And I was never a religious man. I don't like hocus pocus in religion. I don't like the priest all done up in gear and incense, I don't like all that sort of thing, but to believe in a supreme being has always been a feeling I've had. And it got stronger as I started to learn

07:30 celestial navigation. I had to learn to identify 32 stars and how to use them to fix position. I had to learn about the true movement of the Earth and its relation to the sun. The moon, for example, is pretty useless as a navigational object because the movement's so quick. And with a ship in particular, unlike an aircraft which's virtually going from A to B on one course, a ship's altering course every few hours and your navigation has got to be much more

08:00 precise than air navigation. Finding out where you are all the time is vital.

What do you know about celestial navigation?

Well, I had to learn to navigate by the stars of course to get my first mate's certificate. (UNCLEAR) And I was first officer for 10 years on ships, so I took star sights twice a day. I've got every star sight that I ever took. Worked out by logarithms of course, identifying

08:30 stars and watching them and watching the way the pole star just goes in that small circle above the North Pole. And how the early navigators used the pole star…it's an obvious one to use. It's easy to explain to people when you can visualise the Earth and the pole star. "Here's the pole star, it's right above the North Pole", now you can't see the pole star at the equator for the surface it's so close. But if you go 10 degrees north of the equator, the pole star is 10 degrees in the sky, so

09:00 it's quick to show people how you can use that to get your latitude. If you can take with your sextant the angle of the star to the horizon, you've almost got your latitude straight off. So by the time you get to the equator, it's right 90 degrees. That's just one example and an easily explained example of how you use stars. But to use all the stars you've got to use spherical trigonometry and so forth to work it out, so it takes a little big longer. But watching

09:30 the stars and the way the planets and Venus and the moon and….

How does the moon affect things?

Well the biggest effect the moon has, if you're looking at it from a navigator or a seaman's point of view, is the tremendous power it has over the tide. Because if the moon and the sun are in opposition to each other, they pull the wave out towards them, so when they're both opposite or they're both together on

10:00 the one side that's when you get your Spring tides. It makes the tidal waves so much higher. So you've got to learn these things when you're studying how tides are formed and what makes tides go and so that the least tide is when the moon is 90 degrees from the sun, so the tides are all (UNCLEAR). So you learn all these sort of things, and it gives you an appreciation of the fact that on the Earth we are such an insignificant….I used to say to my cadets, if

10:30 you put a grain of sand in the middle of this room you could not…if you want to make something to scale, you could not anywhere on the Earth put the nearest star. If you make the sun, that's our system, if you put the solar system just as a speck of sand there, you can't place the next star, it's too far. There's nowhere on the Earth you can place the first star. It gives you a rough idea how insignificant the solar

11:00 system is compared to the universe. The varsity, time everlasting if you look into the sky, makes you realise there has got to be a supreme power, which is your…you say "Oh it's impossible," it's not impossible at all. We like to say in the Christian religion the body is the temple of God. So your body is his temple on Earth and your consciousness is him talking to you. You can't fool me that he

11:30 tells you every time you're going to do something wrong, or something you're not going to be happy with, he'll tell you. And what action you take is your answer to that demand. And that goes for everybody, whether you're a Muslim, or a Buddhist or what you are, it's exactly the same thing. There's a supreme being there.

When you were in difficult situations out on the ocean, whether it be the weather or the enemy, did you

12:00 **pray?**

Always put my faith in God. Many times in my career when I thought things were really going tough. I can only make the point, it's only personal experience, I don't believe everyone has to accept what I'm saying either, in my own personal experience when the going was really tough and I thought I was in trouble, and I made a sincere prayer, which was sincere, with no holds barred, always answered. Always. But if you make a prayer though for your own advantage, which you know by him telling

you….you won't

12:30 get it. That's as simple as that. If you're fair dinkum, you get it.

So we were talking about the sea and stuff. Did you ever experience a tidal wave?

No. We had warnings of tidal waves but I never. When you see the graphic things that some of the experts do, showing a wall of water about

13:00 30 foot high coming across the ocean, nothing like that. Had some very bad weather over the years and I have experienced earthquakes at sea for example where the whole ship shakes, which you know is not being caused by the wind and the water. Mainly up around Japan. I've had several earthquakes in Japan, but I've had them at sea south of Japan too, where the whole ship shakes. It's a funny feeling.

And they can cause tidal waves, too?

They can, yes. They also, on one occasion…I didn't actually

13:30 see it happen, but I was fairly close to where an island was formed by a disturbance. Actually, an island came up out of the ocean, south of Japan. That would be dangerous if you were in that area. We weren't in sight of it, but we got the warning that there was a big earthquake and there was an island forming. I forget when that was. It would have probably been in the 50s, I think.

Did you ever encounter pirates?

14:00 Yes. I never actually had to fight pirates, but we had pirates try to board the ship on times. I was telling somebody the other day we kept them off with our fire hoses. Each officer on the E&A Line ships, we had a 38 pistol each but because we weren't too happy with wearing them or carrying them, we locked them in the captain's…

14:30 I had them locked in my safe. And I had them in a safe that had a combination, I could never remember by the way. I had it written down in certain parts of the ship, secretly, and to get the pistols out, I had to go and look up all these damn things, and muck around with a thing, so it would have been hard to get them out in an emergency anyway. But as I say, we did have pirates try to board the ship several times, but we kept them off with fire hoses, yes.

Where were they from?

Well, the first ones I

15:00 had experience with were the Vietnamese. Although they probably would have classed themselves as freedom fighters or whatever, I think they were mostly bandits. It wasn't in the days when the North Vietnamese were actually getting close to Saigon, it wasn't in those days when they were properly trained. Not parachute forces, what do you call them? Special Forces.

Commandos?

The Commandos.

15:31 The ones that attacked the ships I was on, were mainly lawless bandits taking advantage of the situation to try and get some filthy lucre. We kept them off with hoses. Later on around Borneo when I was trading in timber from Borneo, when it was British North Borneo, there were quite a lot of bandits raiding the logging camps. They used to come down from Jolo. As I was saying earlier they had (UNCLEAR) fitted with Oerlikons on the bows. So

16:00 they occasionally skirted our ships but there again we had our fire hoses going.

So you kept them off the boat?

We kept them off altogether, yeah.

I was going to ask you if there were any men on board during the war who suffered from LMF? They call that lack of moral

16:30 **fibre and they had to be discharged?**

Oh yes. I think I was telling you before about, particularly blokes who had been sunk and how they reacted. And we did have the occasional bloke who had to be paid off because he was too nervous to sail. It's unfortunate but on one occasion we had the entire crew sign off, because they maintained our naval escort wasn't strong enough. That was a bit of

17:00 an unfortunate incident that was soon sorted out. We had the navy on the ship within about two hours and we sailed anyway with a full naval crew.

So what happened, they sort of mutinied?

It was sort of a mutiny. They all walked off and refused to sail and within a couple of hours they had a full naval crew on the ship. A merchant navy officer's naval crew. It was the only one incident that I'm a little bit ashamed of. I'm not ashamed of it, a bit sorry about it happened during the war.

Were you the

17:30 **captain?**

No, I was only a cadet. I was only the apprentice. We had no say in anything. We were indentured apprentices, so we did what we were told. We had to stay of course, luckily we did. We were in our fourth year as apprentices, and the navy blokes didn't have a clue how to work the ship, work the cargo gear and that sort of thing. My mate and I were in charge of (UNCLEAR). Him at one end, me at the other to get the all ship ready for cargo work, that sort of thing. So we had an experience

18:00 like that but it only lasted a short time.

So with the men who couldn't cope, did you know any men who went troppo? Sort of lost the plot?

I never saw that, but I have heard that they did. Not on any ship I was on, no.

What do you think would cause a seaman to lose it? What sort of pressures?

One bloke on a ship I was

18:30 on, he got scared leaving Newcastle, New South Wales, and it was a fairly hot area. Newcastle to well south of Sydney is where the Japanese subs were really coming in from the Coral Sea to attack the coastal shipping. And one bloke just suddenly lost his lolly and dived over the side as we were going out of the harbour. He just dived over the side. He was picked up and I never

19:00 heard to this day what punishment, or whatever happened to him, but yes, he just suddenly decided he wasn't going to go and he just dived off the deck of the ship and straight over the side. I remember it well for one reason. I was the cadet on watch with the captain. And the captain, I was dead scared of him. Fred Tellick, lives here in Melbourne. And he was a real English gentleman, a real nicely spoken bloke but he had me bluffed completely. I was his signals officer of course, I was only

19:30 17 or something at the time. And he turned round to me and said "Lad! Get up and tell the navy I'm proceeding without him!" He wasn't going to stop the ship and try and get him back. I could semaphore of course, but I was like this, (UNCLEAR) I did the call-up sign to Nobby's Head and a naval rating in purser's rig stands there and of course, they were specialised signalmen. We only did it as

20:00 part of our training and he steps out and answers very beautifully. I mean, semaphore is beautiful, it's much easier to read than Morse, if you can read it. And I felt so nervous, I'm not sure to this day what I told him. And he did it very fast and I was that nervous I didn't read it properly. And anyhow, he finally finished his signal, I come down and Alfred says "Well lad, what did he say?" I said "Proceed, sir." I don't know to this day if he did say that. I

20:30 was too scared. I was too nervous to read. I was only a kid.

When you went to sea, what did you pack? What did you take with you?

I forget the exact number of things I had. But in uniforms, you had what they called Number One. That's what you wore to the ship. That's the double-breasted, brass-buttoned uniform with

21:00 the cap with the white peak on it, and you had to have a sea bag, the white sea bag. And in the sea bag the only other item of uniform you had, apart from black socks and several white shirts, was what they called a patrol jacket. That's a jacket that buttons up to here. We as cadets, we had to be in uniform before we went in to eat. We weren't allowed to eat with the crew. We worked with the crew but they had their own mess hall. When they went to a meal we had to wait until the officers had their meal and then we

21:30 weren't allowed in the salon until the captain had gone out. We weren't allowed to eat with the captain. So if the captain was a bit late coming down, and you bear in mind that on Australian ships the stewards weren't too great at staying there too long, they'd push us through the meal very quickly. And being youngsters we were as hungry as horses of course. I must confess we used to pinch a lot of food when we could, but we had to get into these patrol jackets to go in and dine with the officers, but we could

22:00 only go in after the captain had left.

What was the food like?

I can't remember it being bad. As I say, we had no freezer, so we had to eat mainly stuff that you could preserve. All preserved stuff. We'd have ice on board for a couple of days. (UNCLEAR) We used to get big ice blocks, about six feet long, very heavy. (UNCLEAR)

22:32 The ice was just like a big ice room really, a small room but it had insulation, just like the old ice chests. Of course most of the houses had ice chests in those days. We'd carry the ice in and we had to go through the storeroom to carry the ice in, and we used to stuff as much ware as we could pinch, dried apricots and things like that, on our way through the storeroom, which we'd dash back to our quarters and off load onto our bunks, before we'd brought the next load. And when we'd done

23:00 all that, he'd thank us very much and maybe give us a small tin of peaches, when I probably had about four tins already. We used to pinch, we used to thieve food like that if we could get it.

So did you ever take any sort of mementos aboard the ship? Special or luck charms, lucky charms?

No, about the only thing I took on board for which I was threatened to be tied to and thrown over, I'm very musical by nature and I decided to

23:30 teach myself to play the saxophone. And at the time the Glen Miller Band was something like Elton John and them today. So Glen Miller being my favourite band, and his saxophonist, he was my hero. So I brought myself a saxophone (UNCLEAR), so I got a tutor book but of course to do practice on it, I had to wait until I was off duty which was usually late at night, and I had

24:00 to beg and borrow the key of the fore peak storeroom and take it up there. So I taught myself to play it over a few good years, not well, but I learned to play a tune.

So you practised when you weren't working?

I'd practise when I could get an hour or so. I would have averaged an hour a day, I suppose, with the sax. I couldn't play where my colleagues were. They threatened to stuff me and the sax into a big keg of soft

24:30 soap one day. When my son was born though, you've got to practise every day a musical instrument to play well, and of course when my son was born in 1947, I had to sell the sax.

So you don't have it anymore?

No, I brought an organ, I've still got a flute out there somewhere. I brought an organ when I went on the container ships and learned to play that in the last few years.

How important was it to have something else to do?

25:00 Well, as I think I told Serge [Interviewer] before, I used to do two hours' navigation study every day to get the certificate. And when you consider we were working, we were working at least 10 hours a day, sometimes 12. Because we used to work with the crew until they were knocked off, then we had to go to our bridge, steering the ship and learning from the officers. Some of them were reluctant to teach you anything, some of them treated you as a potential

25:31 competitor, as an officer, but some of them were very good teachers. Most of them were quite reasonable, most of the captains were quite good. So it was a fairly full day if you wanted to do anything else. They didn't show you any mercy. I suffered absolute chronic sea sickness for years, but I can say in all honesty I never even had 10 minutes off because I was seasick. They'd give me a job where I could use a bucket, and be

26:00 sick in the bucket. They wouldn't let you have any time off.

As far as teachers go, was there any men, or a man, that you regard as a real mentor for you? Someone you really looked up to?

Oh yes, I had a few of those really. Yes, a fellow called Roy Hennings was one I remember. He was a fellow who would give you plenty of help with your studies, and another fellow called Jock Bell, who was

26:30 later a pilot here in Melbourne. He was quite good. Most of the captains used to be good in as much as they made sure you did your full hour on the bridge and so forth. My Uncle Bon, who wasn't with me, but he wrote to me consistently giving me advice on what to do and how to do it. He was very good. I used to get letters from him all the time. He was in command of a ship, and he was still actually…he retired before I

27:00 got my own command as captain, but he came back in his 70s and did a few jobs as captain himself, while I was in command, which was good. We used to write to each other at that time. He ultimately lost his ship up on the Jomard [?] Reef up in the north Coral Sea there.

Did you always aspire to be a captain?

Yes, because of my Uncle Bon writing to my father and giving him all his experiences, I became very keen to go to sea right from an

27:30 early age, yes.

And once you became a captain, what was it like to be a ship's captain?

It's hard to explain to people what it's like. It's a lonely existence. In your first days as captain, you're very nervous. You feel sure that if you have an accident at any kind, that will be the end of you, you will never get another chance. Because you've got to convince somebody who's investing in ships that you're capable to do it. Having your master's certificate

28:00 ain't good enough, you've got to prove it. I was ten years with a master's certificate as first officer before I got command. And we were talking about Typhoon Wanda before. The last line in the captain's

report on that typhoon, the last line, he gives a full report of what happened and what we did, special reference to Mr AJ Murdoch, Chief Officer, that's what got me my first command. You had to have your captain's recommendation, and

28:30 that comment, that did more than anything to get me in command of a ship.

So he was very supportive of you?

Well, he sacked me about three or four times, because I had to tell him to go to hell a few times, but by and large we ended up very good friends. When he retired, he and his wife came, if I was home on leave, they came here twice a month for dinner and recounted old times together, and some of the dangers and difficulties we went through.

You said there were a few times where

29:00 **you had to tell him to go to hell or whatever. What were those occasions?**

Well you have to know his name was Bernard W. Dunn. You have to understand even his own son didn't know these stories until I told him. Bernie was I suppose, we in old terms we'd call him a bull tiger. He liked to have a couple of pink gins before dinner at night. And when he had two or three pink gins, I never saw him drunk but he was argumentative when he got a few. His nose used to glow red.

29:30 And you've got to bear in mind I was first officer with him. Which meant I was taking, my watch was four to eight afternoon, four a.m. to eight a.m. The reason I got that watch is you can only do star navigation at twilight, evening and morning. So in the evening stars, usually you take in stars in the six o' clock, between half past five and half past six, is the time when you're at twilight. You've got to do your stars when the sun's gone, but

30:00 there's enough horizon and the stars are coming out and you can get the high magnitude stars, like Sirius, Canopis, Aldebaran, and these well known stars, you can get them before you've lost your horizon altogether. And that's when you've got to take your stars, and that's the time Bernie's having his couple of pink gins before dinner, you see. You have to understand that in star navigation you first of all have to work out your sidereal or star time, what stars are going to be in your vision at

30:30 that time, how high they are, so you can pick the best ones for distance above the horizon to take your sextant shots with. And what you do, I'll show you later on if you're interested, you make a bit of paper with the ship's head, you draw the ship's head on it, and you put the Asimov, or bearing if you like, of the star and its height above the horizon, on five or six stars, I usually take five stars. Now when you've got all that worked out, you've got that bit of paper with all those (UNCLEAR), you have

31:00 your cadet who's on watch, because you're standing by your chronometer, because you have to have the exact GMT [Greenwich Mean Time] when you take stars. And you want to take them as quick as you can.

What's a GMT?

Greenwich Mean Time. We call it Universal Time now. It was always called Greenwich. The rest of the world don't like it.

Basically it tells you where you're located?

A good set of stars is the best fix you'll ever get. Maybe it won't beat the…we didn't have satellite.

I always wondered how when ships were way out at sea, without

31:30 **the use of radar…**

I never ever used anything but sextant to determine the ship's….sun and moon and planets and stars is the way to do it. It takes a lot of…it took me 10 years to get qualified in deep water. But anyway, as I was saying, he used to have his gins at that time, you see, and he knows nothing will put you off more than someone talking to you while you're doing stars. Now you're gonna take five stars, so the brightest one's going to

32:00 be the last one you take, because you want these to be all visible before you. They all come out in their order of brightness.

So it's depending on their relation to the horizon that tells you where you are?

You've got to solve a triangle, they call it the PZX triangle. It gives you the hour angle, the angle of your longitude to the Greenwich meridian, and your latitude by what you call meridian altitude. But anyway, without trying to tell you how to do navigation, he'd come up on the

32:30 bridge, he'd had a few gins, so he'd come up on the bridge and he'd have this glowing nose, I've got my bit of paper there, I've got my cadet standing by the chronometer, and I'm waiting for the least magnitude star, because then I can take them….see the ship's covering a mile every three or four minutes, so the quicker you get them, the more accurate the fixtures. So you want to get very quickly, only seconds between them. So you've got your cadet writing it all, he's at the chronometer, and you yell out "Stand by" and he'll bring

33:00 the star down to the horizon, “Stop!” and you yell out “Fifty four twenty, stand by!” And you do them as quickly as you can. But you wait for the least star to appear before you take them, because you’ve already seen this star, it’s been out maybe 10 minutes before you get this one, you follow, but you don’t take them until that one’s out. So you go one, two, three, four, five, quickly.

Til they’re out? What do you mean out?

Until you can see them. You’re waiting…

Oh, as soon as they appear?

See the sky’s clear, you look the next time at twilight, just when the sun’s

33:30 gone down, within five minutes you’ll probably see Venus in the sky. It’ll be 20 minutes before you see some of the other stars. So when you’ve got five stars you take the least magnitude first, so you go one two three, and take them all quickly. But old Bernie would come up on the bridge…

And distract you…

The first thing he’d do, him being the captain you can’t argue, he’d say “Give me your thing.” And he’d take your paper. And when I haven’t got my paper, I’ve got all my directions written down and he’d have that. And I’ve got

34:00 my sextant waiting, and of course, maybe Canopis is very visual there. He’d point to Canopis or Sirius, one of them, “There’s the bastard! Shining like a silver dollar on a nigger’s arse, get it!” They would be his exact words. And of course, I’d say “Yes sir.” and say I was waiting for, I’d name a lesser star I was waiting for. And he’d look

34:30 at me, hand it back and go off. But it was all done as sort of a ritual to try and upset me. He was like that. He had the devil in him. He often did that to me. But he was a nice bloke, underneath all that because when I was injured once…

So what happened if there was cloud?

You don’t get them. You go by guessing by God, by the courses you’ve steered. We kept what we called “A Day’s Work” running all the time, and A Day’s Work is recording the course

35:00 you’re steering, the time you were on it. See in the old ships during the war, and maybe for 10 years after the war, the only thing we had of the ship’s distance through the water, was what we called the Cherne Keef [?] Log. It’s a brass thing with a propeller on it. It’s towed over the stern on a line, and it’s whirling around and the line turns a mechanism which is geared to show the ship’s distance through the water. But if you anchored the ship

35:30 in say off Melbourne heads where you’ve got an eight knot current on the M tide at Port Phillip Heads, if you threw it would show you going at eight knots. That’s not telling you where you are. In the old sailing ship days, they used it by having a line with knots on it. They had a triangular piece of board on this line with knots, and the officer used to have an hour glass, or a time glass, and he’d yell out “Watch their watch now!” And they’d

36:00 put the thing in the water, he’d turn the glass, and they’d count how many knots went through when that hour glass, and if four knots went through, that was the speed of the ship in knots. That’s why we have, there were knots on the line. It’s not just from nautical miles. Nautical miles per hour is knots, and it comes from using the log line for knots.

One knot, how many miles per hour is that?

Well, that would

36:30 be one knot, if only one knot came through. The knots were all on the line, worked out by what we called then the pointy heads ashore, who gave us all these things. And the pointy heads figured out how long you had to have before that thing would take you through one mile, you see? So that’s how they worked it. And the Cherne Keef Log [?] was just a refinement of that.

I’d like to ask you one more thing. Did

37:00 **you ever get lost? Lose track of your way?**

Oh, many times. If you get into a typhoon and you can’t get out of it for 36 hours, when the thing lifts, you haven’t got the slightest idea where you are because you’ve probably been steering the ship to keep her safe not…You keep this “Day’s Work” going, and of course, as soon as the thing clears, you’ve got to take sights as soon as you get the sun, or if it’s twilight you get stars and you fix it and you set it, her up all again for

37:30 where you’re going.

So even during the war you’d get lost?

Oh yes, oh crikey. On one occasion, we left Melbourne here on a light ship, I think it was the Iron Knob. It was the Iron Knob because the second officer was a fellow called John Street, he was the brother of

Justice Street who was well known in Australia at the time. John Street was second mate, I was third mate. We got blown south of Melbourne. When we got out, the ship wouldn't steer, she was light ship and full south west gale blowing, big seas running,

38:00 and we were in that storm for about three days, and when it started to moderate, we didn't have a clue where the ship was. She'd been all over the place, you couldn't keep a proper day's work, and we couldn't get sights. When the weather started to abate it was still overcast, so….

When you've got big waves coming towards you, we won't dwell on this because I know you talked about it earlier, but I'm just curious when you have big waves rolling towards you, how do

38:30 **you position the boat in that situation? Do you have to point the boat towards the wave?**

(UNCLEAR) and the navy don't do this enough by the way, because they are more urgent, we always slow the ship right down. You slow your speed down, so the ship won't bash herself into the wave. You let the…you can only do it by your own personal (UNCLEAR) by your experience.

So you slow it down, so when the wave comes it just goes…

Well, waves are coming one after the other, so I

39:00 used to slow it down well before it came to where it might be dangerous. Where you have to be careful is where you lose the lee of the land. For example, if you're coming down the New South Wales coast and you're coming near to Port Stephens, you're coming to Sugarloaf Head, the configuration of the land goes in towards the west there, towards Sydney. Now if you've got a very strong wind coming off the land, you've got a bit of lee when you're coming down the coast, you're a little big protected against that. And

39:30 you, in the bigger ships, the faster ships, you must slow your ship down before you actually get down to Sugarloaf, or you'll get caught. If you're going at full power, you'll lose the lee at Sugarloaf and all of a sudden because the wind's brought the wave, you'll got up and come crashing straight down into a wave. And you can easily damage the ship that way, big damage, too. You could really damage all the fore part of the ship.

You don't want to be side on to a big wave either, do you?

Oh,

40:00 well, yeah, you don't. If you can, you can't always do it because of where the land is or reefs, if you're coming into a reef. The best place for a ship is to have the wind is on the quarter, a quartering wind. So if you're heading this way, just about 45 degrees, so the ship is riding up and over the waves as necessary. So she's coming up, she'll be very difficult to…the big danger is a big wave will come over the back and stove in.

So you're almost surfing the ship?

Yes, you're trying to

40:30 surf her. And the ship…

What about going against the waves?

That's why you've got to slow your ship down. There again, keep her a little bit off the head if you can. You'll hear the expression "Hove to", probably heard it already. "Hove to" means that you stop trying to go anywhere and just kept the ship head to weather, so she's going over the wave, head to weather. I always prefer a little bit off the head, but strictly text book speaking, head to weather and

41:00 no power on the ship, not going anywhere but keeping her straight into the weather.

Hmmm, interesting.

So they're the things you've got to learn.

Tape 6

00:33 **Very interesting Jim, interesting stuff. I asked you, did you have any superstitions while you were on board?**

No, I've never been superstitious.

You're not a superstitious person?

No. I agree with seamen that you don't kill albatross, we were talking about the albatross story before. But there again, during the war, because we had to be trained with the .303 rifles for mines, to cut a mine, we used

01:00 to have target practice. We'd tow our fog buoy astern and have pot shots at that. It didn't matter if we hit it, you wouldn't do much damage with a .303 bullet. But I must confess to my disgust, some blokes cannot resist a moving target. And there were always albatross. Not always, but very often if we were doing this sort of thing in southern latitude, you'd see the albatross going back and forwards behind the ship. And always some [Smart] Alec would hit them and kill them. You'd see all

01:30 the feathers fly and the bird go (UNCLEAR).

Is there a sea myth associated with that?

I think most seamen from time immemorial have had a lot of respect for the albatross and consider...

Why is that?

...that the albatross was a sort of a seaman's bird. He's a pleasant bird. As I said the night that the one got caught up in the ship he was...they always fascinated me watching them,

02:00 going backwards and forwards. And the way they go over waves, just touching the waves with the tips of their wings, or they appear to be touching the waves with the tips, they never hit it you know.

They're quite large birds.

Oh, they're huge birds. As I say when he had that one, the beak was up here and his feet were on the ground. He was a big bird, and quite heavy and powerful. They'll give you a nasty old nip too.

They don't attack people though?

No, but we attacked him.

Fair enough. I mean fair enough that it might bite you.

02:33 **Do you recall any songs, sea shanties or songs that you used to sing?**

Sea shanties were mainly in the sailing ship days when they sang them to, when they were warping the anchor up, or anything like that, or using

03:00 the halyard, the sail halyards to take up. The only thing interesting I remember about sea shanties was I had an association with Brighton Grammar School. They adopted me as their sea captain, and the boys from Brighton Grammar used to come down to visit me. I'd write to them and I made a knot board for them, and I used to write them letters from overseas ports, to tell them about navigation and different hazards and I was visiting the school one day, and the headmaster, we used to call

03:30 him Hoey Joe, he was a Church of England cannon, the headmaster, Cannon Wilson. And Cannon Wilson said, before the whole of the assembly, I'd given a bit of a talk, and he said "Now, let's sing Captain Murdoch's roaring sea shanty. What shall we sing?" "What'll we do with a drunken sailor?" It's over, we decided to forget it. I remember that sea shanty. The boys were good fun though.

Did you as a crew used to sing songs together?

04:00 No, not really. When I started to play organ for a hobby though, I remember the chief engineer...very often captains and chief engineers weren't always great mates, although I must confess most of them I found very good friends, but one of them who was a good bloke, a fellow called Allan Hatten, he came in to my cabin one day, when I was just at the beginner's stage trying to learn scales on the organ and he said, his exact words were, "Will you play me a Bach

04:30 fugue?" I hadn't got up to Bach yet. I said "Look Allan, I would only consider myself to have arrived as a musician when you write to the company that owns this ship and tell them you want my music piped into your cabin. Then I will know I have arrived." I never, ever got that.

Did you have any contact with WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] during the war?

No, never.

05:01 No, we never had anything. See, they were strictly navy. Although we had naval personnel on all the ships I served on, WRANS were never part of the (UNCLEAR).

What did you think of women joining the navy?

Oh, I think they were very well thought of. Even in the land army, a lot of the blokes used to sling off at the land army but I think they did a wonderful job. Australia lost a lot of people into the services

05:30 and I think it was a real great thing to get together. And they did a lot of work in the factories, too. You've probably heard the song "I'm the girl who made the thing/that builds the ring/that oils the spring/that works the thingamebob/that makes the engines go". They used to sing a song about that. I think the women did a wonderful job. I met Joan at the seamen's mission during the war. She used to go down and of course any seamen who lost their ship

06:00 and some of the ships would come in with a lot of survivors on them, they used to take them into the mission, and she used to go down and make all the beds down there and help with the cooking. We as seamen used to go there of a weekend. I must confess it was mainly to dance with the girls. But the padre, the man in charge, Padre Oliver, who had a speech impediment but was a tremendous bloke. Padre Oliver, we all had to go to evening song in the

06:30 chapel before we'd have the dance, so we'd always have to go to evening song. It wasn't compulsory, but he thought more of you if you went, so…

Yes, so tell me about when you first met Joan and how you became involved?

Well because I was only on five shillings a week and I couldn't afford to go anywhere that was going to cost me, and the missions were free of course. You got a free meal and a dance. You had to buy…if you wanted they only

07:00 had soft drink. You could only buy that at the canteen, or chocolates. They had billiards tables and ping pong tables. It was like a club, a seamen's…where I met Joan is still exactly the same right now as it was when I met Joan, what, 60 years ago.

And she was volunteering there?

She was volunteering. She went down there as a volunteer. Joan worked there as what they called a scientific lapidary, she was making quartz crystal. All the

07:30 radio sets we had at sea, and the army, they were all governed in their frequency by quartz crystals. That technology is gone now. She was grinding those quartz crystals. She worked in a protected industry grinding quartz for radios. She used to call herself "I'm a scientific lapdog." I think it was lapidary, they were called. But she had to learn how to make these crystals

08:00 and work them down to the size for the different frequencies. If you could have seen the radio office at the time, with all these crystals laid out. As she often used to say me later when I was a captain, "It's like a voice crying in the wilderness. You can never get anyone with them." But she worked on that and her work at the mission was an extra job.

And when did you get married?

Well, I met Joan I'd say in 1942. I'm not a hundred percent sure but it was

08:30 either '41, more likely '42 than '41. I'd only see her of course if I was in Melbourne and sometimes I wouldn't come to Melbourne for 12 months. It wasn't as if I saw her regularly. I met her on one occasion and thought she was a pretty good sort and I didn't immediately write to her at that stage. But the second time I met her…The first time I met her and asked her to go out with me, she knocked me back. And the second time I met her and asked her to

09:00 go out with me, I think we went to the movies. And I went up for my second mate's certificate in Sydney at the college, in Sydney, in 1944. This was my second mate's certificate. And it was while I was at the college in Sydney that I suddenly realised I was in love with Joan and wanted to marry her. And I couldn't wait to get through my qualifications in that time to get back to Melbourne to propose to her. It all of a sudden hit me,

09:30 "I've got to have Joan". I don't know what it was, but I know it was in the classroom going for my ticket that I, well studying for my certificate, that I thought of Joan. And when I got to Melbourne on the first time back, she wasn't here. She was holidaying with her family at (UNCLEAR), she'd been very ill. I rang her up and I think I made it quite obvious to her at that stage over the phone that I was more than a little bit interested in her. Ultimately, I

10:00 proposed to her, I think it was not long before the end of the war I proposed to her. Then I came off on leave in about June, '45, no it would have been July, because we were married on the 13th of August, 1945. You can always remember it because they dropped the first atomic bomb

10:30 on Hiroshima, and everyone thought that was the end of the war. But the Japanese didn't immediately surrender. Everyone thought they would but they didn't. Anyway, we assumed they did. I was two weeks on leave and so we decided to get married. We had to get the arrangements done in a hurry, and we got married at St Marks Church of England, in Canterbury, in Melbourne, and I think it was two days after we got married, they dropped the second bomb on Nagasaki

11:00 and the Japanese capitulated. So, that's our marriage, we'll never forget it because it was in between the bombs, 13th of August, 1945, and our son was born in '47. So it was a fair while, we're heading for 60 years.

Congratulations. Speaking of the end of the war, with the use of the bombs, what was your view on the use of the atomic bomb?

Well, I can tell you now, I know a lot of you

11:30 young people think it's odd, but I can tell you now, everyone to a man, particularly men I know, I never heard one person, even though we knew what it was going to do by the way, it wasn't ignorance of what an atomic bomb does because the Yanks had put one up in the desert at Nevada and seen it operate.

They knew the tremendous after effects, the radiation, but I can tell you to a man, everyone agreed with it a

12:00 hundred percent. The Japanese were so fanatical, they were going to fight for every inch of ground. We were fighting on Okinawa at the time. The American Army together with the British and the Australian Army and Navy, had gone right up through the Philippines. They had gone right through Formosa, it was then called. It's now called Taiwan. They were fighting in Okinawa and the next step was the Japanese mainland. And the

12:30 Japanese, you'd have to…even to this day it's very hard to understand the Japanese psyche. One of the reasons they mistreated our prisoners is the Japanese treated being taken prisoner as a dishonour. You fight to the death, that's it. If you're fighting for your country, you fight to the death. Incidentally, that's why I think a governor general should be someone who's put his life on the line for the country. Greater love hath (UNCLEAR) who laid his life down for a

13:00 friend, should be the first principle of the governor general. Anyway, everyone when they heard they were going to drop the atomic bomb, "Get on!" And they really thought it was a terrible weapon. They knew it was going to kill thousands of women and kids, they knew all that, but the fighting was so devastating, all through Saipan, Guam, Iwo Jima. The Americans were losing troops because the Japanese, like the suicide bombers of today, and they used

13:30 the kamikaze tactics off (UNCLEAR), the kamikaze go and say their Hail Mary's, not their Hail Mary's, before their Zen religion and dive their planes straight into a ship loaded with bombs. It was the same thing as we're having today with this thing in the Middle East. When you're fighting that sort of thing, when they're not you might say, fighting fair, what are you going to do? You're going to lose thousands of your people. And if your

14:00 side's got a weapon that's going to save all those people, sure you're gonna use it. You've got to. If America was as bad as they're saying now, they could have at that time taken the whole world over. Anybody who disagrees "You're getting an atomic bomb tomorrow". They were the only ones who had it and you've got to admit it, some of their generals, particularly General MacArthur, weren't all that humane. He wanted to hop into China with the atomic bomb and the American

14:30 Congress wouldn't allow it to happen. But they dropped two bombs only. When the second bomb showed the Japanese…see a lot of Japanese would only hear about it, like we did. They wouldn't have seen the tremendous devastation that that Hiroshima bomb did. And once the second bomb went off, the Emperor, of course, who was considered immortal and his word was law, he was luckily giving advice to tell them to stop fighting. Prior to that they would have fought for every inch. Do you know

15:00 the American Air Force before the bomb, the American Air Force were shooting up fellows on push bikes. They ran out of targets in Japan. When I first went to Japan after the war, the devastation was unbelievable. They made a hell of a mess of Japan. But the atomic bomb shocked them in to surrendering. Shocked them.

Where did you go in Japan after the war?

I went up to Kure. We were supplying the Australian Army of course, and I had a look at Hiroshima, just a couple of years after the war,

15:30 and it was devastating. It makes you realise you never want to see an atomic bomb used. I'm all in favour of people hating it, and believe me, we hate it. But at that time, you'd have to be honest, everybody said "Give it to them!" You're not going to beat them with conventional weapons. When they didn't surrender "Give them another one!" We would have all been in favour of it, yes.

Did you talk to many Japanese at that time?

16:01 Oh yes. If you want something humorous, one of the humorous things I struck when I went up there the first time, I said to one of the Australian occupation troops "Well, what do you think of Japan?" You can't print all of this, I hope you're going to vet all this. They'd said "How can such horrible little slant-eyed, banty-legged buggers have such charming sisters?" The Japanese, they lost two and a half million of their marriageable men, so there was literally millions of

16:30 young girls in Japan who would never have a relationship. And a lot of them were working as bar girls. They were on the streets by their hundreds. If you walked up the street in Yokohama, they'd all try and…

What was your opinion of the Japanese at this point?

I must confess, to my horror, that we first went there like conquering heroes. We strutted. We strutted around

17:00 Japan and wouldn't, even though they were still running their trams and trains, what was left of them, we wouldn't pay any fares, tell them to go to…And they'd have to accept it, because we were the big conquering heroes. Now I'm ashamed of it, but at the time that's what we were like. All of us were like that. We gradually got to know them better, and got to realise that amongst the Japanese there were some very nice people. And an interesting thing about old Bernie Dunn, the fellow who was with me in

Typhoon Wanda, old

17:30 Bernie was a real bull tiger, and they never ever quietened him down. He was captured on Nanking, he was incarcerated in Japan. When we got back to Japan, he invited two of his jailers down for dinner on the ship. Two blokes who had been jailers in his camp. He had no grudge against the Japanese and he treated them very well. Gradually we got to know them better.

Did you used to talk about the war with any of them?

Oh yes, we used to talk about it. You've got to remember too that the

18:00 British companies, I worked for P&O, or a P&O subsidiary company, E&A Line. E&A Line in their agencies employed all Englishmen, no Japanese. Everywhere we went we dealt with Englishmen. They'd come down to the ship. Gradually they introduced Japanese. I'd say from 1952 on, they started to get the odd Japanese and gradually got them up to sub-managerial level, til ultimately they were running the whole show. That took 20 odd years.

Can I ask

18:30 **you, while you were at sea during the war, did you experience any illnesses?**

Not myself, no.

Or any injuries?

No. I can say honestly I've never had a day off, ever, in my whole career. I got seasick. Terribly seasick. You wish you're gonna die, but you survive if you're sensible.

How often did you get sea sick?

Every time the weather got bad. You're talking about the

19:00 waves coming, when you have that motion, when you go up on the crest of a wave and the bottom drops out of the ship, it's like if you get in a fast moving lift coming down and the floor goes, well you get that all the time, you see, and it gradually used to make me very sick.

How would you be sick? Just regurgitate?

Well, because I've had false teeth practically all my life, the first thing I used to do was I'd take

19:30 my teeth out, so I wouldn't lose them over the side.

Did you have plenty of fibre?

You must keep eating, so you could get rid of it all the time, and drinking. You must drink a lot of water and you'd get rid of that too. I used to get about 20 minutes between being sick. I could go three quarters of an hour, if I really had to.

It must have been terrible….?

And do you know a lot of my colleagues had no idea I ever got

20:00 sick. I hid it, I hid it from everybody. I got caught a couple of times. I hid it from all my associates and particularly when I was an officer. I was telling you about the day we had the albatross, if you can imagine the bridge, it's all open bridges, you're out in the weather, you've got all your oilskins and sea boots. I used to wear thigh boots because it was very wet on those ships. It was very lively and very wet. If they dipped their nose under they'd throw big spray right over the bridge. If I got right out onto

20:30 the lee side, end of the bridge, I could just get where the man at the wheel couldn't see me if he was looking, and the other lookout, he couldn't see me. I'd take my teeth…I was married then, Joan used to give me a whole lot of lumps of calico, in my oilskin pockets, because when you're sick you go very white and look horrible, so I'd take my teeth out, be very sick, scrub my face with this cloth, put my teeth back in so I'd get a bit of colour. Then I'd just be

21:00 the officer on watch with my hands behind my back looking very important, again. And I'd do that all the time.

Why did you hide it?

Well, I was embarrassed about it. You're not supposed to be seasick. I was a very proud sailor. Only in bad weather. The same when I'd wake up in the morning and the steward would bring me a cup of tea, in my little dog box cabin that I had. We had no electricity and no running water, we had a big galvanised jug under a basin with a plug in it, that had a waste bucket under it. And you

21:30 poured a bit of water in your basin, it'd be cold water of course, you'd have to shave with that and everything. Sometimes I'd be dying to be sick when he came in, and I'd have to hope he wouldn't talk to me, and as soon as he was gone, I would dash outside and be sick. I could hide it from people. When I was relieving the bridge as an officer, I'd go up on the bridge to relieve the other officer. Now he's been on for four hours. He's got to put the ship on the chart, show me where the ship is, tell me any traffic dangers or hazards, and

22:00 generally have a bit of a chat to you. I'd be sick before I went up, do my stuff, get up there, I'm all okay now. If he stayed more than a quarter of an hour, I'm starting to think c'mon…. I had to get rid of him because I wanted to be sick. So I had to get rid of him. And I kept it under wraps until one day the captain came up just after I took over the watch, and they used to call him "Spitter" this bloke. He used to smoke a pipe and he'd smoke and spit between his legs all the time. And I wasn't feeling too

22:30 hot, and I'm thinking c'mon off, get off.' He wouldn't go, he kept on talking. He wanted to talk, he was an old Scot. In the end I said "Excuse me, sir" and I had to dash over and be sick. And he was looking at me. When I came back he said "What, did you eat something for breakfast this morning?" I said "No, I'm seasick." And I'd been with him for about three years and he didn't know. You get caught occasionally.

He didn't know? How did he react?

"Gee, I didn't know you got sea sick." She was doing….I was only sick when it was bad weather.

23:00 **Did many other guys get sick?**

Oh yes, a lot of my colleagues, later on, when I used to tell them this story, they admitted to me they also got sick or had similar stories.

They kept it to themselves?

And you'll hear people say "I don't get sick." But when I was on passenger ships, I'd go down for my meal, when there's very bad weather, and there was a lot of people missing….

Was it a sign of weakness to admit you were seasick?

I think so, yes.

23:30 Well, we macho men are like that. I would have sooner died than tell you I was seasick. I don't care now. When you get old, you don't care. But I was very embarrassed about it, yes.

Speaking of macho, was there a degree of machismo amongst the crew? Did they have to pretend they were pretty tough?

Well, yes. And you hear so much now about homosexuality. We didn't

24:00 seem to strike it much. Whether they were more hidden then than now. We used to get a certain amount of homosexuals in our stewards department on ships, because they like to look after men. They're not necessarily active homosexually. We knew what they did, but we were much stronger against it than the general public is today, at that time. And maybe they were scared to even admit it but we knew they were, what we called "Queers", and they liked that sort of work. It annoyed me

24:30 a bit when the container lines started, because suddenly the pointy heads ashore, who never go to sea, suddenly decided we're going to have a general purpose crew, where everybody does everything. I used to feel like writing to some of the directors saying "I presume all you blokes are going to learn to type, so you can do the typing." They can find why there's no reason why a ship can't have stewards who go and keep look out, and go and do greasing. Those people were not suitable to do what sailors do,

25:00 keeping lookout in gales.

Was this on during the war? Stewards during the war?

Well, right through. They were attracted to that sort of work and when they tried to amalgamate the crew, you suddenly put people into jobs they don't want to do. You take for example if I'm officer of the watch and the ship's in heavy weather, very bad weather, and we used to have what we called all our jumbo gear, we had a

25:30 30, an 80 and a 50 ton jumbo derrick stowed up against the mast, with the purchase blocks, two blocks, and all covered with canvas. Now sometimes they'd get a little bit of drift. They're all wedged in to stop them moving. Everything on a ship has to got to be cleared off. When you're getting into bad weather, everything is cleared off that might move. We used to unship our cow ventilators, and put plugs on all the…and you put extra wedges on and lock in (UNCLEAR)

26:00 with all your ropes and boxes. Anything that moved, you put down below. You did this to prepare for the ship for bad weather. Now when you get into bad weather, the ship might be rolling heavily and suddenly a couple of wedges will fall out of a jumbo, and the jumbo derrick will start moving only maybe a couple of inches. But every time the ship moves you can hear this bang bang. You've got to send a bloke up there to put those wedges back. Now you can't send stewards up or people who are not seamen.

When you say they were homosexual, how did you know

26:30 **they were?**

There again, because we're starting to blame everybody…

Because they might have been effeminate or…?

Well, it's because they select that sort of work for one thing. They don't want to come on the ship as a sailor, in my early days as a fireman or a seaman, they want to be stewards. They're usually a little bit suspect right from the word go. Not necessarily. I know we had dozens of them who weren't. But it is a job that attracts them.

Were any of

27:00 **them, did any of them come right out and admit that they were?**

Not to my knowledge, ever. Some of them, by their speech and by their….

Demeanour?

A lot of them do appear that way by the way they walk and talk. But: a) we wouldn't accuse them and, b) they wouldn't, in my time, never have admitted it. I felt sorry for them.

Did they get a hard time?

If they were definitely going to be, they'd get a hard

27:30 time, yes.

So it was very much a no-no?

Yes, it was kept under wraps. And you bear in mind, that we were all male manned ships so there is obviously going to be a bit of trouble there if it is let out. But I never had any trouble with it at all. I knew there were a couple of the female side of a homosexual relationship on the ship, but I never had any complaints and I would have turned a bit of a blind eye if possible. I'm sorry for them. I know they're built that way and they can't help it and I would

28:00 never penalise a bloke for it, but you're better off generally on a ship if you haven't got them, that's all.

So you think as far as ship morale goes…?

I would say so, yes. I may be prejudiced here, but I don't like to give them any leadership role and particularly…it's like giving paedophiles leadership roles with children. It's a dangerous practice, you've got to be careful what you do. You don't automatically assume that every choir master's a pedo, or every scout master, or whatever you like is one, but you've got to be

28:30 always suspicious if people you don't know want to do that sort of work. You've got to be careful what you do with them.

Why is that? Do you doubt if someone's a homosexual that they don't have the ability…?

This is only my own personal experience, they are generally artistic people, very good at music, they're wonderful musicians, they're very good painters and so forth. I've got nothing against them really, though

29:00 we make lots of fun of them, I know. I can remember one of them I knew that was a homosexual, he used to go to our church and he used to run the drama group at church. And when he found out I was seaman, I came home on leave…(UNCLEAR), and he's dead now, so I can slag him off. He said "Jim, I love the way sailors swear." That's the sort of thing he'd say. It was humorous. He was quite a nice bloke. I had nothing against him at all. I used to be amused

29:30 at looking at the way he walked, and his little beret and all that sort of stuff. He was quite a nice bloke. And a very, very good director of drama. He knew all the things. They had a young drama group and he was the king pin. He ran it. He taught them all the different plays they did and how to act. He was really good at it.

So you don't really think the military is a place…?

I don't think so. That's old fashioned, I know, now. But I was always glad when

30:00 we didn't have too many on the ship, particularly during the war. You don't feel that they're going to cope so well if the going does get tough, that's why. And that could be completely misplaced too, because some of the toughest blokes are real cowards when it comes to the real thing. You can never be sure of anybody, really.

Well speaking of that subject, did you encounter any cowardice during the war? Any men who

30:30 **sort of broke down or chickened out?**

The only thing that bothered me on merchant ships was that we were sometimes pushing to get gun crews from the seamen, and that was a bit of a shame. But I never can remember us actually not having a full crew but it was always difficult to get it filled up all the time, who would do the gun crew work. And I told you before about the chap who dived across the table. But they had experience being sunk and

31:00 that's understandable.

So he may have been experiencing some sort of post traumatic stress disorder?

I was staggered. I was sitting at the table. When that chap dived straight across the table, I couldn't believe it.

Across the table?

The table was all set with all cutlery, and he just dived to get to the door, to get out when he heard "Action stations" go. I mean we all had to go but the moment the first ring of the bell, he just dived straight across the table to

31:30 get out.

Where did he go?

Straight out onto the deck. I had to go to my station. He was an engineer. He'd been saved from the Iron Chieftain.

So he really lost the plot?

Well, he realised I think that you've got to get out of those confined quarters. That's why I wonder how these naval, these big naval ships where they

32:00 really stagger me, those fellows who were locked in the turrets of the big ships, and they were virtually locked in, and that must have been horrific. And really a rabbit warren to get out, if the ship's damaged. They had no quick way of getting out.

A bit like a submarine?

And the sound of their own guns was so deafening. Even the four inch guns used to upset me, and they're firing 16 inch guns on battleships, you can imagine what it was like in the turrets. The noise and the cordite smell, it would be

32:30 horrific, really. During the war, if we were short of firemen, which we often were because nobody liked that hand-firing job, and my mate and I, if we were too short we had to go and fire the ship. We were the automatic stand-by people for everything and I hated that. In particular if the

33:00 escort dropped a depth charge, the shock underwater is very great. If you're down in the stoke hole or engine room that feels like you've been hit, like even if it's several miles from you, it travels so quickly underwater and because you know nobody got out of those areas, that was a bit horrific. It's a scary time you can have. I take my hat off to those blokes who did it all the time, and quite cheerfully did it all the time.

Did you ever feel yourself,

33:31 **a sense of claustrophobia of being on board all the time? Did you ever get that feeling?**

I am claustrophobic by the way. Terribly claustrophobic. Even reading a book about people in the war who escaped through tunnels, I sometimes get quite sick reading a book. So I'm very claustrophobic. But I was always happy on a ship, but never in positions you can't….like if I had to go into a ship's tank,

34:00 and I had 10 years as first officer when you've got to inspect all your double bottom tanks with surveyors to look for damage or weaknesses in the tank. Every year you've got to go through all your tanks. I'd have nightmares about that before I had to do it and for months afterwards. If I knew I couldn't get out. If I know I'm going in and there's a bloke behind me, that I can't get out and I've got to go forward, I'm always claustrophobic. And in that typhoon I told you about we had to examine the whole ship

34:30 for damage, of course, we'd been on the rocks and had a collision, and when we went into Taikoo Dock in Hong Kong, we were the only…there were 18 ships lost in that typhoon and we were the only ship that sailed on (UNCLEAR) They let us sail because they were so short of space and we had no actual breaches of the hull. Where we'd gone ashore, the bottom was all scalloped like that. And where we had the collision the bowel was all….but there were no leaks in the hull.

So you had to go right

35:00 **down into the depths of the ship?**

The chief engineer was ill and they insisted on an internal examination of the hull and she was a big ship and the whole double bottom of the ship is all tanks. Either freshwater tanks or fuel oil tanks.

So what is it actually like down there?

In the tanks it was about three foot six deep I suppose, and it's all got what we call frames with lightening holes, they're big

35:30 frames, but they lighten them by cutting. They've all got lightning holes in them and four and a half

girders continuous, what they'd call intercostal with water tight bulkheads. When you come to a water tight bulkhead, the girders cut and started on the other side. The bulkhead's continuous.

So you had to go down and check all that?

You've got to check every (UNCLEAR), takes about three days, and you're crawling through tanks all day.

Crawling?

Crawling with what we call surveyor's hammers, little hammers, so you can see if there's any corrosion, see if it's active corrosion or just

36:00 surface corrosion, and you've got to go through every…because the chief engineer was an old and sick man, I had to do all the oil tanks as well. I'd put that down as the most horrible time I had.

Unpleasant?

Unpleasant, yes.

During the war, when you're on board the ship, what did you know about the war elsewhere, what was

36:30 **happening?**

We were pretty well informed, all the time. I was lucky enough in that regard, because we were associating with the officers, we got pretty well to hear everything that was going on. And particularly a signal man on the bridge, we knew what was going on in our convoys, if a ship was attacked or… sometimes the poor old blokes working shovelling coal and working the engine room, they didn't know what was going on and I felt sorry for them. One advantage we had as apprentices, we were always with the action

37:00 all the time and it was a godsend really. We knew what was happening in Europe as well. We knew there were huge shipping losses in the Atlantic. Where all the Allies lost a tremendous amount of ships and a colossal loss of life of course. I think there were over 360 Aussies lost on the Australian coast, but there were over 200 other nationalities lost, just in that coastal battle that we

37:30 called it, the secret battle, it wasn't publicised at the time. It was called the secret battle and in that secret battle there were well over 500 people lost their lives. We knew all these things, what happened to the Sydney when she…

Did you know anyone on the Sydney?

I didn't know anybody, no. But you may not know that the Centaur, that was the hospital ship lost off Brisbane, she was working just as a normal merchant ship when the Sydney was lost and she actually picked up the big lifeboat, the main

38:00 German survivors who were in a lifeboat. There were 62 top German naval men, under the command of a man called Detmers. Detmers got the Iron Cross first class from Hitler after the war and he was a very capable bloke. But it was the Centuar that came a….now Detmers was a pretty shrewd rooster. He got them to kick holes in the lifeboat so when the Centaur came, he saw the ship coming, he told them all "To look

38:30 like they were all sick", and they were all in the boat because he wanted to get on board that ship with his 60 men. He was a pretty shrewd rooster. And because the boat had been hulled by then, she was floating on…the buoyancy tanks are under the thwarts of a lifeboat and even with the hull gone, she'll float on the buoyancy tank, so they were all up to here in water, all looking sick, but the skipper of the Centaur was a little bit more shrewd. He had no doubts of what they were up to. So he got them to lower his boats and he

39:00 put them into two of the Centaur and towed them into Carnarvon. But had Detmers got aboard the Centaur you can get your bottom dollar he would have taken that ship off the merchant crew and…

Really?

Oh, he would have taken them.

He would have been armed?

They wouldn't have been had to. They had 62. They were armed, but they could have taken the ship without. The ship wasn't armed at all. He would have taken the ship.

That's an interesting story.

A lot of people don't know that.

Tape 7

00:35 **Now when did you hear about the end of the war, Jim? When did you hear the war had been declared over?**

Yes, my wife and I had just been married.

01:06 **I'll just ask you that question again, Jim, because we didn't have your mike turned on then. Where were you when the war was declared over?**

Joan and I had just been married. I think I'm pretty right in saying it was the 15th of August, we were in Albury on our honeymoon and it was a great feeling to know it was the end of hostilities. It was a

01:30 really special day for every Australians that day because irrespective of what your feelings were you knew that…there were a few men killed after the Armistice of course. I know, in our case I don't think there was any merchant ships lost but there were a couple of minesweepers blown up just after the war where men lost their lives. But by and large the end of the war was great for that reason. That you knew no more people would be killed. Unlike today,

02:00 the newspapers, everyday the paper was full of the names of men that had lost their lives.

Did you lose any mates at sea?

Yes two of my close mates went down on the Iron Knight. That was Daryl Cole and Bill Kermode were the two. I lost other mates, but they were mates that I really. I mainly go to the dawn service these days to pay homage to their memories. Two young men in their late teens killed before they got the chance to…like me they were

02:30 very keen seamen and keen to some day command a ship but never got the opportunity. So I really feel sorry for them. I knew them very well, yes.

How did they die?

Well, they were drowned when the Iron Knight was torpedoed. They were the two cadets on the Iron Knight. The two cadets on the Iron Chieftain when she was torpedoed both fortunately got off. One of them ended up as one of the top men in Western Australia,

03:00 a fellow called Lofty Noble. The other Alex McCaddy ended up as a Melbourne pilot, here in Melbourne.

When you were away, how did you keep in touch with Joan, as far as contact?

Well, I wrote to Joan fairly regularly. I'm not a great writer, but she kept me well informed too. As I say we only really started corresponding regularly in, you might say, the last few months of

03:30 the war when we became engaged. I proposed to her down on St Kilda pier. I remember we were married at St Marks, Camberwell, but I'd say for six months before that we were corresponding regularly. And of course, thereafter, because my career kept me away from home for long periods, all our correspondence was by letter, yes.

04:01 **Just going back during the war, how do you deal with the possibility of being killed or wounded?**

Well I suppose you don't think all that much about it. If you're in a ship in convoy that's being attacked, of course you start to think this could be it. And I remember old John McLeod, as we sailed into Port Arthur after a fairly

04:30 dangerous passage, he'd always say "Thank God for another safe passage," with a real Scottish brogue. But no, I don't think we dwelt on that too much. I think the average person feels that if things do happen, they will be one of the lucky ones who gets out of it. I suppose. You've got to think positively. Although a lot of fellows say "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" I don't think we really felt like that. You like to have a good time in

05:00 port, and off the sea in the periods you were, but I don't think your attitude was do every damn thing you possibly can because you're going to die, I don't think it was quite that bad. Some of the fellows might have had that, I certainly didn't.

Did you have fear of being wounded and was there any particular wound you were afraid of?

No, you see, most merchant seamen were simply drowned. The odd one was wounded by gunfire from submarine fire or

05:30 surface fire but the main loss in our particular neck of the war was drowning because our ships were not really equipped to last. They didn't have the compartments like a man o' war's got. They didn't have the procedures that a man o' war has. Sure we used to practise our abandon ship and our fire drills quite regularly, but we weren't quite equipped like a man o' war was. Or soldiers and air men. We were sort of,

06:00 we were more like hunted prey, you might say. We knew that our biggest enemy was the submarine and they were out to get us and we sort of hated them for that, I suppose. Being in a confined spot on the ship was your biggest fear all the time, if you were hit. You'd like to be out in the open.

Did you, as far as being on the land

06:30 **goes, if you had spent a certain amount of time ashore, did you ever get the desire to go back to sea? Is it an addictive thing?**

As an apprentice you had to serve continually. We had to stay with the ship all the time, whereas other people could go and have a spell ashore and they had certain times before they would be called back, we were on the

07:00 ship all the time. Every time she went through the area, we were on it. We were fixtures on the ship. We stayed on the ship, for example the Iron Warrior, for the full 12 months and the other one for the full two years. Over your period at sea, you were allowed 28 days' leave, in four years.

I guess I meant after the war?

I stayed at sea. I never got used to…I did come ashore for a short time when my son was born. I gave the

07:30 sea away for about 12, no about 18 months because I felt that my wife wanted me to be with her.

What was that like?

Well, I worked in a motor garage and didn't even have a driving licence. And I had to learn new skills there and yeah, it was a bit different. I finally realised I had to go back. I was only qualified up to first mate

08:00 foreign gallery at that point. So I realised I hadn't got my master's, so I went back to sea again. That's when I joined the E&A Line. I actually joined a company called AUSN, Australian United Steam Navigation Company, another subsidiary of P&O.

What year was that?

That was 1947, '48. End of '47.

So when war was declared, can you talk me through once war was declared, what happened then?

Well, I was at school. I was at school until I was 15.

I'm sorry, when peace was declared I meant to say.

Oh, when peace was

08:30 declared? When peace was declared, well, as I say, I was on my honeymoon. I was on regular leave at that time. The end of the war was incidental to me being on leave. We had thought about getting married but we knew the atomic bomb was going to be dropped, and everyone was pretty certain this would be the end of the War. So Joan's family made the arrangements for us to get married, and we got married

09:00 here in Melbourne on the belief that the war would….when the first atomic bomb went off that was before we were married, and we thought but that didn't finish the war.

So what happened as far as your service commitments go?

Well, I was on official holiday. I forget what the leave was. I think it was only about six weeks. I went back to sea again after we were married and we had a little flat here in Melbourne, and I didn't see Joan for about 12 months after that. So

09:30 we were separated.

That must have been very hard?

Well, then I forget when…it was fairly soon after we were married, the ship I was on went in for refit in Newcastle. So I sent for Joan to come to Newcastle and she came and lived there. The ship was laid up for about three months, so we lived together in a hotel in Newcastle. I had to work on the ship every day, it was just like having a day job that and then of course

10:00 she came home and I went back to sea. We gradually got used to these long periods of being apart and she brought up the children. That's where the church helped us a lot because the church had a lot to do with the kids. Their social life was all associated with the church. That's why I felt when I retired I better give them some time back, for all they did for Joan during my sea faring.

So having all this time apart, especially just

10:30 **being married, newlyweds, did you ever sort of think, oh maybe I'll just give it up and stay on land?**

I think that's when Peter was born, that's what…even though I loved my job I was torn between my duty to my wife and I came ashore for that time. I didn't really go back to sea again straightaway because I

felt maybe Joan was happy but I don't think Joan was happy with me tossing my career away

11:00 at sea, she being a more sensible person than me.

She knew you loved it?

She knew that I liked it, and she knew that I'd probably succeed at it, so she encouraged me to go back. So I tossed that in and went back to sea, and that's when I went straight onto a ship called the Nanking. That's when we were going up to Saigon and China Coast and supplying the Australian Army of occupation. I was only really out of it for

11:30 about 18 months.

After the war….let me ask first, did you enjoy the war at all? Was there anything about it you enjoyed?

No, only that because I loved ships and loved learning about it, I enjoyed the training period. I realised that we had to learn the tasks of manning the guns and so forth and I must confess that the training was all helpful. The naval training on the

12:00 guns was helpful. It was a job that had to be done. When I got my certificate I was in two minds about going into the navy as a reserve officer but I realised that the merchant ships were just as important and at that stage probably more important, so I stuck to the merchant ships and I stayed there. And I knew it was going to be better for my career to stay there even though after

12:30 the war, men who had been in those ships before the war and joined the navy, they got their seniority restored. So I had to go back two pegs with the men coming back from the navy, that was understandable.

Did you talk about the war much afterwards?

Not really. During the war we used to…every morning during the war, at breakfast on the ship the captain would give us a report on what

13:00 happened. We wouldn't have access to radio or anything, but he did and he would invariably tell us "They shot down so many German bombers over London, or there were three ships torpedoed in so and so". We'd hear news like that every morning. And it was discussed then, you know, but we could see by the end of '44 that things were going pretty well for the Allies.

13:30 **When the war was over, did you dream about it?**

No. I had the occasional nightmares about being trapped down below on ships but not very often. But I used to wake up straight away. I think that was my claustrophobia more than anything else. The feeling of being trapped without air, is a horrible feeling. But I think I would have had that anyway. I think I am claustrophobic.

So you never had dreams about being gunned,

14:00 **gunfire or bombs?**

No, I think army men and naval men had that, but not us. No.

What was your contact during the war with other services? Other Australian services?

Our only contact was if we carried troops anywhere. And supplying

14:30 goods to troops. In our case we were supplying the armament factories in Port Kembla and Newcastle, and of course we had naval crew on board as well and we always got on very well with them. We all shared the ship together and shared our social life together ashore. We always had good relations with them. The navy destroyers had a very distinctive

15:00 siren. You know, whoop, whoop, whoop. When we heard that if we were waiting for convoy, say in the port of Melbourne or Sydney or Newcastle, when you heard the destroyers come in with their sirens, it was always a very pleasant sound. And after I retired and took command of the Wattle, the steam tug Wattle, and she was an ex-navy tug. She had a siren, and the naval ships don't have it these days. So I used to get a great kick out of blowing that siren on the Wattle, if I was going down the river in

15:30 Melbourne I'd give a few hoots going under the Westgate Bridge, or taking people around to see the naval establishments I used the siren quite a lot.

With merchant seaman as opposed to the navy boys, do you think there was an essential sort of difference in personality?

I think so. We didn't always get on all that well. The navy looked on us as bumped up civilians, I suppose.

16:00 I never had any personal fights with them. We get on very well with them now. The commanding officer of HMAS Cerberus about five years ago, agreed to let us build our main memorial in HMAS Cerberus,

so the main merchant navy memorial is just near the chapel in HMAS Cerberus. And we have a remembrance ceremony every September down there, and it's well attended by

16:30 our veterans. We haven't got a lot left now. But the DEMS [Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship] gunners also come with us to that memorial. We have a service in the chapel, and then we go and pay our respects to our fallen at the ceremony down at HMAS Cerberus. And that's a thing we always look forward to every year, and as many of us who can go down to that ceremony. We also march on Anzac Day in Melbourne. I go to the dawn service every Anzac Day as well. We're much closer to the navy now than we were during the war.

17:00 **So there was a bit of antagonism?**

I wouldn't call it antagonism altogether. I don't the think the average navy bloke looked down on us, but somewhat the upper strata. We had a horrible thing, which I maybe should not put on record, but during the war in the navy there were three different bands on the arm. The rocky

17:30 stripes (UNCLEAR) the rocky road, the rocky stripe. Say you had one stripe it'd go and form and square and go down. They were men who had been in the naval reserve training of a weekend. And we used to call them "Gentlemen trying to be seamen". That's what we used to call them. The men who had been trained in the merchant navy, and maybe like me later had gained foreign (UNCLEAR) masters, they were very sort after in the early days, because the navy suddenly getting a whole lot of ships, didn't have a lot of men trained in navigation

18:00 seamanship. So they took a lot of men out of merchant ships, volunteered, and they became the naval reserve, and they had a chain type stripe, they were the chain gang. We used to call them "Seamen trying to be gentlemen". The regular navy were straight stripes, like they are now, straight bands with the curl on the top of the band. We used to call them "Neither and trying to be both". That was a bit unpleasant, but that's how we used to sling off at them, and they undoubtedly slung off a lot more.

18:32 We used to have gentlemen trying to be seamen, seamen trying to be gentlemen and others neither and trying to be both. But I didn't get into fights over that. You could have gotten into fights (UNCLEAR).

What about navies from other countries?

Yes, the Dutch navy played a big part in our protection. As I say, the United States Navy. Not so much the British Navy because you've got the remember the Australian Navy

19:00 was virtually an arm of the British Navy. I mean our naval ships fought in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and they fought in the battle of the Coral Sea alongside the Americans. The Australian Navy ships were virtually, although in the latter part of the war they were very firmly under Australian control, you've got to remember in the early days we were all British. We were the same in the merchant navy. All our owners were British companies, and all our bosses were all British. And the Australian Navy, the top ranking people ashore were all British

19:30 officers who'd gone through the British and all our men like Collins and Farncomb and Waller, some of the great Australian seamen, they were Captains rank, really, when the war started. There were very few above captain's rank. They were all the very early people who came out of the Australian Naval College. Prior to that, all the senior officers were British, trained in England. And all those fellows trained in England, they all had training in England.

Who was the top brass of the merchant navy?

The merchant navy was a bit

20:00 different in as much as the highest you could get in the merchant navy was captain of a ship. I mean, sure management of shipping companies who were usually businessmen. There were a few ex-seamen got to the top. One of my very close friends, George Rose, who was a Captain in E&A Line, he became a director of P&O Lines of Australia. And they got into positions of operating ships (UNCLEAR). See, the navy was different. They had people attached to the

20:30 government and to ambassadorial staff. They did a lot of things ashore that was never open to merchant seamen. Actually, I only know of two merchant seamen who actually were awarded the honour of aide de camp to the Queen. Jeff Champion, who is now dead, he was one, I forget who the other one was. It wasn't very usual for a merchant navy reserve officer to get up to the rank of captain navy reserve. Some of them did, but they were very rare. Very rare.

Did you

21:00 **have…did you get many merchant navy men crossing over into the regular navy?**

They did at the early stages of the war. But they had to stop it because they were stripping the merchant ships of experienced seamen, you see. The Yanks had a terrible trouble with it. They had to try and get people through their colleges quickly and when they started to build these liberty and victory ships so quickly, building a ship in a week, they ran out of experienced people. And some of the captains of those

21:30 liberty ships, when they got over to say Papua New Guinea, they got lost. They used to have to send several small craft out to board these ships and bring them into port and so forth, because they didn't have the experience. They had a lot of trouble that way. A lot of them went ashore, hit reefs…

Did you ever see a big armada of American ships?

They didn't come in armadas, they were built to supplement their merchant fleets, you see. As ships got lost, they'd

22:00 put in another liberty ship, and if they saved men off the merchant ship, well they'd get jobs on these new ships. They didn't lose all their men, but they were very, very short of experienced men. I'd say we had, very often our masters were men in their mid-70s, because they had to come back. They didn't have experienced men. It was a bit of a thing in the end that they sort of more or less put a bit of a stopper on merchant seamen going into the navy.

You said you transported

22:31 **troops, army troops?**

We didn't, but I say many merchant ships did. I was never involved in that.

What about POWs [Prisoners of War]?

Well now, after the war, we took a lot of the Japanese POWs back to Japan. They were interesting people…

From Australia?

From New Guinea, back to Japan.

Did you talk to them?

Oh yes, but they were very, very quiet. Some of them had been through war crimes

23:00 trials. We used to take them back on our cargo ships. We'd take them back. They were usually under armed guard. They had Australian soldiers, they'd have a couple of guards. We'd only take about four or five at a time. We didn't have that much space and they were usually handcuffed to their beds and so forth. So we did quite a bit of that and the Japanese, they had quietened down a lot then and they realised it was all over, and they were going back. Some of them were very

23:30 fine men, really. Some of them were quite high ranking men in the Japanese Army and I think the Australian guards were reasonably good with them. They used to exercise them around the decks with handcuffs on. They wouldn't give them an inch of room to make any sort of effort on the ship. We took quite a few of them back after the war.

Did they speak English?

Some of them spoke a little bit of English, but most of them didn't.

Did you converse with

24:00 **many of them?**

Oh no, not really. As I say we went back up as conquering heroes. We didn't have a lot to do with them, no.

So, have you visited any of the places you served, since the war finished? Revisited?

24:30 Well, yes, because I was on Australian coastal, as I was saying. I think of the other things we were involved in like the war in Vietnam and Korea, and the revolution in China. It was interesting to go into China, particularly after the revolution. I was in there before the revolution and after the revolution. We were bound for Konan in North Korea and only about 12 hours away when the war started. And

25:00 the port we were going to was Konan, and it was wiped out the first day. So we were a bit lucky we didn't make it.

This was Vietnam?

No, the Korean War. It was after the Second World War. It was the first big war after the Second World War. And so we were a bit lucky there. With China, of course, we went into Shanghai just about a week after the revolution, and that was quite interesting. I could fill a book on the story there. All the kafuffle that went on there

25:30 and the tremendous difficulties in getting through all the authorities going to Shanghai. The tremendous security things on the ship and (UNCLEAR) our flag signals, of course when they secured the ship, if you were visiting a port like that, when the immigration, customs, political people, security guards, police, they secured the ship, you had to put a signal up to let the…

26:00 You could see all the guns trained on you from the shore, to let them know you're now under their

control. They had all their own secret flags for that sort of thing, so you couldn't put up a false signal and come in. They had the signals that you didn't know, same as the old international code flags.

I believe one of the things that happened during your career, was there was a leap in communication, development of communication

26:30 **in ships. Can you sort of explain that briefly?**

Well on the ships before that, the captain's orders from the bridge to both ends of the ship was through an ordinary megaphone, shouting out and sometimes the language was a bit rough, that was shouted out. We had a First Officer who was an Anglo-Indian, by the way. He was very well spoken, very nice man. Budd Caruthers, and Budd was a fairly portly man. He would

27:00 never swear. But the captain of the ship was a real dinkum Aussie, with a very foul mouth at times and this particular day he only had his megaphone and of course when you're berthing a ship, if the wind's off the wharf, you've got to be careful. You get a line ashore, it's got to be treated. Once that line's ashore you don't want any sudden strain put (UNCLEAR) break it, because you're trying to get the ship close enough to get a line, so I used the word "friggin", and he yells out "Don't break

27:30 that friggin' line, sir" and this beautiful English voice comes back, "Don't break my frigging line, sir". Because on a ship you've got to answer every order exact as it's given. It always sounded funny to me to hear his orders being repeated in this lovely tone.

So in those days it was all just yelling?

I couldn't tell you what year they came in, and then with of course the ship's communication the radio's were…when you were five hundred miles out of Australia you had no contact at all, as I say, you

28:00 were like a voice crying in the wilderness. You couldn't hear anything. It was lucky in a sense. You were out of control of your owners, and you had to do your own thing according to your written orders (UNCLEAR). But communication's gradually…radios got better, we were fitted with technology like the, what they called the "George", the steering. We were hand steered right up until the '60s, you had to have men on the wheel 24 hours

28:30 a day, the ship was. We rang the bells in those days, every half hour, the bells…the man on the wheel actually rang the bell, he had to watch the clock and give us the bells. You get used to the bells when I first became captain of a ship to lie in my bunk, which was right under the wheelhouse. The steering telemotor was bolted, the bolts came through just above my head. I could hear the wheel being turned. I could hear the bells being struck. It's comforting if you're captain of a ship to hear that the bell's being struck. And you can hear the

29:00 muffled voices of the lookout reports. It's comforting if you're responsible for the ship and I missed all those things when they went. And then they got the George, which fitted so you could take the man off the wheel when you were in open ocean and set it. We got the gyro compass fitted. That came in my time, gyro compass, radar, the emergency beacons came, then we got the Doppler Log. We used to have the old Cherne Keef Log [?], which was wonderful. By the time the

29:30 container lines were running, we had the Doppler system, where you're getting the speed of the ship over the ground like you were a motor car. Much more accurate if you lose sight of your stars and what not, to have your accurate speed over the ground. The technology that happened. We got fire detecting systems. It used to be if you suddenly saw smoke pouring out of a ventilator, you rang all the bells, and everybody raced down to put out the fire. We often had fires, of course, on ships, for one reason or

30:00 another.

Did you ever use walkie talkies?

Well, they came in, when the walkie talkies came in. When they first came in, we had the VHF [very high frequency] walkie talkies, but then we'd be coming into Sydney and I'd be trying to talk to my officer on the foc'sle head, and I'd get a doctor operating in Prince Alfred Hospital or something. I could hear all them talking to each other. We had to get the ultra-high frequency sets to combat that. That was wonderful, because everybody carried one, so as captain every order

30:30 I gave was heard by everybody on the ship. Everybody knew what you were trying to do. You had to be careful, though, if you say "Let go the starboard anchor" and another ship picked it up, and let their anchor go. So there's all that sort of danger. But it made a big difference, that sort of thing.

As a captain, did you ever experience disobedience?

Oh yes, I struck several times, when I had a disobedient crew, or on one occasion

31:00 when I got into a bit of bad weather I was captain of a ship called the Nellore, and we had a Chinese officer steward called Wing, a delightful of old man, useless as a steward, but a delightful man. I can still see his big broken teeth, and his big smile. He used to have a knife and fork in the top pocket of his white jacket. As an officer, if you said "Wing, get us a couple of beers", he'd have this big toothy smile and he'd say "Oh yes, master" and bring out two bottles of beer from behind his back and put them on the table. He was just a

31:30 delightful old bloke. Well, on one occasion when I was captain of the Nellore and he was a steward there, we got into the north-east monsoon coming across the China Sea, and she was fairly light and she was very rough, and the ship was rolling very heavily, but you'd have to know the navigational hazards to know well, I had to keep the ship on a certain course. I was heading for a dangerous passage called Balabac Strait, and the ship was rolling very heavily and poor old Wing, I didn't see it happen, but he got thrown across. He

32:00 lost his footing during a roll, he was thrown across the alleyway and broke his hand, you see. Well now, two of the officers decided that we'd have to go. We were halfway across the China Sea, but we should turn back and go back to Hong Kong which would have meant another two days getting back there. Or their preference was to 'Heave To', as I say it means rigging your speed right back and just holding your ship in one direction. Now in the north-east monsoon, it could blow for

32:30 two months. I mean, you can't, you've got understand you can't do that in that sort of weather and because I insisted on keeping going, they were very, very upset about it. They didn't refuse duty, but I let them know in no uncertain terms, that the ship was going to carry on. I loved old Wing and all that, but we were carrying on. They took it, but they were down mumbling.

They were Australian?

For the next couple of days. We actually got out of the weather, and we went

33:00 into Labuan and got Wing fixed up.

Sorry, were they Australian?

One was English, and one was Australian.

So there was a bit of ill-feeling?

Second and third mates, they were. The first officer understood my decision (UNCLEAR). They weren't nasty, but they were quite (UNCLEAR). They gave me no doubt how they felt. And I told them what would happen to them if they refused duty.

What happens if

33:30 **someone refuses?**

I can remember one occasion when I found an officer, I didn't actually catch him asleep on watch, but I suspected when I went onto the bridge, for some reason, at about two o' clock in the morning and I couldn't find the officer of the watch. There was a man on the wheel, a lookout man and a cadet. He suddenly appeared and he had some cock and bull story. He was

34:00 up on the bridge (UNCLEAR). He had a story, which I let him off. But what I would have done had he not had an explanation, I simply would have relieved him of his duties and done it myself. One of the unfortunate things as captain, if one of your officers get sick, you have to take his watch for him. Some captains would make the officers double the watch up, but I would never do that. I don't think that's fair, I'd do that watch myself. That often happened to me where an officer would get a temperature and couldn't do his watch, well I'd just go

34:30 and do it for him.

Did you know of any captains in the merchant navy who were sacked, basically?

Oh yes, yes. I won't mention them because there's been quite a few sacked over the years, maybe through grog, is the biggest thing, that gets them sacked. They can't carry on because if a man's got a bit of a weakness then that way, it's a tempting weakness because you've, see I had my own steward, all the

35:00 time. A fellow signed on as captain's steward, he looked after me doing nothing else. Now you'd say "Get me a whiskey", he'd get you a whiskey. A lot of them who got a weakness in that way, they had too much access to grog. There was quite a few, when I say few, there were two or three who lost their jobs over booze.

What, they'd just be drunk all the time?

Well, drunk at vital times. They couldn't come to the bridge when there was an emergency because of grog. Something

35:30 like that. And it's a bit unfair, some of the officers, for example, if they haven't been in charge of a ship in traffic, say around a place like Japan where there's literally thousands of ships trading from all over the world. Japan's a big trading nation. In Australia, we're only chicken feed compared to a place like that. And Great Britain, where thousands of ships coming in and out. So there's always traffic problems and collisions, every day of the week. They lose over 300 seamen a year through marine

36:00 accidents, but you never see about it like you do air accidents because it's not good news anymore. But it's still happening right today, all the time. Big marine accidents all the time. It's very unfair on officers who maybe have done their training but they haven't actually experienced what can happen to you in

very heavy traffic, trying to navigate, because the officer's navigating the ship, changing cause for fishermen and other traffic all the time and it can be a fairly nightmarish

36:30 job for people who are not experienced at it. And when you get a new officer, if you're captain I'd always stay on the bridge with them until they got to know how to cope with things because some of them just couldn't cope.

I'd just like to ask you, what personal changes did war bring to you? Your war experience, how did it change you?

Well, that's a hard question to answer, because as I say, my own father

37:00 was well and truly still alive in those days, and he was, I would say, he was very proud of my climbing up the ladder on the ship. As I told you before, I had the pleasure of having him with me after I got my own ship as captain, to come away with me. He used to love being called "The old man's old man". Much better than Joan when she was called "The old man's old woman". But he was very proud of that. And I would say because of his own war

37:30 experiences he knew a little bit of what it was like and he was very, very proud of me when I got the second mate's sticker. I can still see him. You get a blue form from the examiner when he passes you. You do a week of written examination and you do two days of orals and seamanship, practical seamanship. When I got this foreign going second mate's sticker of course, I can remember my father being so happy that I made

38:00 it, you know. I'd be sitting in a train in Sydney, going home to Hurstville on the south coast line, in Sydney, and thinking to myself there wouldn't be one other person on this train who's got a second mate's sticker.

What did it do for your personality do you think, your war experiences?

I suppose it teaches you to be a little bit more down to earth with people. As I said before to you, we had a very lucky upbringing and happy families

38:30 and you start to meet people on the ship who are affected by war time things and who didn't have happy upbringings. Fellows who'd play up very badly when they get off the ship ashore, who obviously need something more than they had, character building. I think the war did make a lot of men better than they would have been if it hadn't have happened, yes. You've got to stick together. Like on a ship, everybody

39:00 knows you're on a ship, warts and all. You can't be like a businessman who beats his wife up, goes to work the next day in a lovely suit and everybody loves him, then he comes home and gives his wife a black eye. On a ship, everything you do is known, so you're warts and all. Everybody knows everybody. It's like a big family thing. It's like a member of your family trying to get away with being a boozer. Once a man on a ship steps out of line, everybody knows about it. So it's a close association and as I say, you were

39:30 known for what you are and what you do, sort of warts and all.

Is it a test of character, do you think?

Well, I think it possibly is, I suppose I'd be skiting, I don't know. I didn't realise what a wonderful job I had until I retired. I just took it all for granted. For example when I first went up East on ships, I'd never been up there before. I didn't go ashore. I wanted to look after the ship. I was essentially

40:00 a seaman. I wasn't a good. Until Joan started to travel with me, I wouldn't go out of a port. When she started travelling with me, we used to make the effort, if we had time off, to go and see the sights of a place. Prior to that, I wouldn't have got out of the port at all. I used to stick close to the ship all the time.

We're just going to finish up now. Is there anything you'd finally like to add to what we've been talking about?

40:30 You know you've taken me through a lot of things. I sailed with a lot of different people, I could certainly write a book on some of the funny people I sailed with, but it'd take me all day to tell you. We always used to say "You've got to be half crazy to go to sea in the first place", and I think a lot of us were a bit crazy. But no, generally speaking we enjoyed each other's company. We had to make our own entertainment for 20 or 30 years before they brought in the

41:00 film, before they brought in the 35mm films first. I think in about the middle 60s, they started to give us three films for each four monthly voyage. And of course when the videos came in and we could get the taped videos, we got a huge library of films. We'd put a feature film on every night at eight o' clock.

41:30 So that was a great thing. As I say, technology went so rapidly when I look back at those old ships and think of how basic we were, just the magnetic compass and so forth, I realise how lucky we were to get the technology.

Alright we might finish there. Thanks very much Jim.