

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Sydney Keith (Sid) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/404>

### Tape 1

00:42 **Good morning Sydney, how are you?**

Wonderful thankyou.

**I would like to start off the interview today if you could tell me where you were born and when.**

I was born at Roseville on the seventh of January 1925. And

01:00 I was a third child. Two further children were born at Roseville. Then in 1928 we moved to an orchard farm at Mt Colah and there two more children were born. So I was one of seven children. From an early age I had been told that my mother had two brothers who went to the First World War. One was killed in action. He lies buried in France.

01:30 My uncle Charlie came home. My father and his brother Hughie, they joined the Royal Australian Navy. And they both came back, so it's rather fortunate in that way. A bit of bad luck for Uncle Hughie some years later. His son was a radio telegraphist on the HMAS Perth, which was sunk in the Sunda Strait. He was saved and was a prisoner of the Japanese. They put him on a ship taking him home to Japan

02:00 It was torpedoed by American submarines, the USS Pampanito and USS Sealion, and about four hundred and fifty other allied personnel were drowned in that ship. So Uncle Hughie lost his son. As time passed on we knew that war was brewing. You could see that from about 1938, from the news that was coming through. We were not at all surprised when on the third of the ninth,

02:30 1939, that war was eventually declared. My eldest brother Les, he was in the militia doing night and weekend training sort of thing. And Les immediately left his employment and went into the Army. As soon as America came into the war Les then transferred

03:00 to the Royal Australian Navy. Because we have always been at sea the Keiths. My great grandfather, my grandfather, my father served at sea and now Les was just following in Dad's footsteps. The next brother Harold, he turned eighteen and he immediately went into the Navy. I was an apprentice printer with The Land newspaper and I had been promised

03:30 a Manpower release but when it came close the factory manager said, "No, you can't go. We're too busy." I worked for the government and that was it. So I walked upstairs to the General Manager's office and as I went to walk in the secretary said, "You can't go in there." I said, "Just watch me." The man was Sir Harry Budd.

04:00 I told him my story and he brought the foreman and the factory manager in and they immediately fell down, sort of thing. "A man's word is his bond. This lad will get his release." And so on my eighteenth birthday I filled in my papers and submitted them. I had a medical exam at Hornsby and then on the twenty seventh of January 1943 I reported to a drill hall in North Sydney with the others,

04:30 was put on a tram and taken to the recruit reception depot at Sydney Showground. And there we were photographed, x-rayed, blood typed, and had aptitude tests. I applied for the armoured division and I did well in the aptitude tests so about four days later I was on a train going to Singleton. Passing the old farm - I had been in touch with Mum - and she was at the fence waving.

05:00 We settled in to Singleton. I had been there a few days and I'm standing there on parade. We always stood and sergeant major walked passed. He came back a few steps and he slammed his hand in the middle of my stomach and he said, "Suck in your gut." At the time I thought he was a mongrel but he taught me how to stand and I've had a straight back ever since. Training was good.

05:30 I did well on the short ball range. Out of a hundred men I came second. On the long range (UNCLEAR). From there I qualified well. I became a first class shot with both the Bren gun and the 303 rifle. After about three months they put us on a train and took us down to Victoria to Puckapunyal military camp,

which was the main armoured division training

- 06:00 place. I remember arriving by train. We got there at midnight and it was pouring with rain. We had a fleet of open trucks to take us to the camp. So we settled in by about three o'clock in the morning. I was asleep across from the bugler. The Reveille went at six. The training was very very hard but you had to be fit.
- 06:30 You had to be able to do ten mile runs in army boots and things like that. You might do a route march at twenty miles and you'd fight at the drop of a hat, sort of thing. Because you were that damn fit. As time passed on they asked for volunteers for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and I sent the papers home to Dad. And he scribbled over the papers, "I've got two sons overseas,"
- 07:00 I'm not going to have you overseas." So I went to Sar Major and told him the papers got lost in the mail. He gave me another set of papers and my mate signed as my father and another mate witnessed it and I was then in the AIF. As time passed on I went to a Signals training course. And I qualified well there. On parade one day an officer came alone
- 07:30 and he asked for radio operators for Army Small Ships. You had to have the experience. So I fronted and said that my father had a cruiser on the Hawkesbury River. I spent all my life going backwards and forwards, out through the heads to the ocean. "You're just the sort of man we want." My father didn't have a canoe but I was prepared to fib to get where I wanted to be.
- 08:00 We were immediately given fourteen days leave and told to regard that as our final leave. We would be going overseas immediately. When I got home my brother Harold, he was home also on leave, and when he saw the Australias on my shoulder he said, "What are you doing wearing Australias?" I said, "I wouldn't put New Zealand there, would I?" We got out in the yard later on and he said, "You've joined the AIF. Mum said that Dad wouldn't allow you to go." And I said,
- 08:30 "Look, I wasn't going to stay at home." and he said, "Don't go to Water Transport. They sail unescorted. They are losing a lot of men." And I said, "Well that's where I'm going." And so I went back from leave and they took us down to a training camp on Port Phillip Bay. A place called Mt Martha, which is near Mornington. There we used to go out on the bay in working boats, which is a forty-foot launch.
- 09:00 We were practising our semaphore with an Aldus lamp and I thoroughly enjoyed that. Then the time came for the final exam for the course. There was about twenty of us. They said the top mark gets first ship. Where the other men were going to the canteen and the pictures I was in the radio shack. And I got the first ship. I was put on a troop train and sent over to Western Australia.
- 09:30 The ship had been built at Fremantle. A three hundred ton wooden ship, built out of jarrah. And we settled into a camp there for about - we were in Fremantle for about six weeks in total. We went and had a look at the ship. She was wonderful. After about three weeks we moved aboard. We started splicing ropes and more training. They would take us outside and
- 10:00 we would be dropping anchor and manoeuvring and different people taking a trick at the wheel. And then we did the twenty-four hours acceptance trials. We sailed twelve hours into the Indian Ocean and twelve hours back again. And when they went to turn around there was a hell of a sea running and I was seasick. When she turned around the helm came off the shaft.
- 10:30 And the helmsman, a Corporal Flotilla, he backed into the corner and turned to the Officer of the Watch, a Lieutenant Bronner, and said, "What will I do with it, sir?" A bit of a panic. We were a twin screwed ship so they were able to keep the ship screwed into the sea until the engineers came up. It took a couple of hours in total. They put the helm back on again and while we were out there we were challenged constantly by the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and being signaller I had to go up and answer the challenge. They would flash
- 11:00 zero, zero, three and I would reply with our code, which was BKFR. Then they would just waggle their wings and off they'd go. Finally on the ninth of September 1944 we were ready to sail. We had a bit of fun at times. We went out on trials one time and came back
- 11:30 and we had left our radio on in the focsle. The Comforts Fund had given us two radios. And when we plugged into wharf power the radio burned up. So being the talker I was asked to go and see first mate and ask if he could apply to the Comforts Fund for a new radio for us. And he lined us all up and went along wagging his finger and abusing the hell out of all of us. He said, "You don't deserve to have anything decent." And that was it. A couple of weeks later we went
- 12:00 on trials again and as I walked aft and I looked in and the officers' radio was sending up smoke. Without a word I went aft and had a cup of tea with the cook and he said, "Give him five minutes, Sid." I went back and there was the same lieutenant who was abusing us. He had a towel and he was waving the smoke out of the wardroom door. I said, "Having a little fire, are we, Mr Bronner?"
- 12:30 He never ever talked to me for quite a while. But the morning that we sailed the skipper arranged for a padre to come down and bless the ship. And we had had that much trouble in the harbour. At one stage the wind got us as we were manoeuvring around the harbour and belted us into a Danish tanker, the Storinger. We did a bit of damage to our railings. And while we had been at sea on trials, a shackle had broken and an anchor had fallen

- 13:00 so we had to get a new anchor. One of the anchor winches wasn't working properly so we replaced that. This padre came down and he gave a bit of a sermon and then he blessed the ship and those who sailed in her and then he said, "Let's sing that old song of the sea - For Those in Peril on the Sea." He thought we were going into peril. And some of the wharfies were hanging over the (UNCLEAR) and one of them yelled out, "You've got that one right mate."
- 13:30 So when we sailed from Fremantle out to the Indian Ocean and turned south, around Rottnest Island there was a gale like you wouldn't believe and nearly all of us were sick. I can remember coming up out of the focsle and I leant against a toilet and I'm losing tea. And a bloke dug me in the ribs and said, "Move over, make room for someone who's dying."
- 14:00 We cleared Cape Leeuwin, that's down the bottom of Australia. And now many years later I went to Cape Leeuwin on a caravan trip around Australia and there was a rock cairn down there and on that rock cairn it commemorates the six sailors who were washed away down there in a storm. That was on the HMAS Nizam that they lost the sailors. When I saw that just those few years ago I understood.
- 14:30 I flashed a message to the lighthouse and got mooring instructions for Albany Harbour. Albany Harbour is a very tricky harbour to get into so they let us through and when I got there I found that my father had a cousin living up in the town overlooking the harbour. I went up there to have a meal and when I came back, I looked out the window after having the meal,
- 15:00 and the ship was on fire. What had happened was there was a day tank just above a skylight just over the galley. They had been pumping oil into that day tank and the idea was that you pressed a button and the pump down the bottom would stop. The engineer would look after that. The fuse was broken in the button so the oil kept pouring out. It hit the skylight and then the stove and the back of the ship was on fire.
- 15:30 Fortunately all we lost was some rope. Some of the decking was damaged. But the aft gun...there was a walkway around it and the ammunition was stacked under it in boxes. The boxes were charred but nothing went off. We were there for about a week and they did some repairs. At the town they put on a dance for the
- 16:00 men and a party for the officers. The following morning the Skipper, a Captain Ron Tanner, staggered down the wharf and he missed the gangplank and fell into the ocean. So we dropped the ladder over and he came up the ladder and his hat was floating so I dived in and brought his hat back. And I remember he grabbed me and he kissed me on both cheeks and the fellows gave me hell about that. We finally
- 16:30 pushed off from Albany and got to Esperance Bay and there we had to get some more repairs made and there was very bad groundswell from Esperance Bay and we ran against the wharf and our starboard sponson was damaged So we sailed on after about four days, across the Great Australian Bight, where normally the sea is very bad but for us
- 17:00 it was fairly smooth. A swell of about forty feet but the swells were about four hundred yards apart. We rode up the side of one and down the other. It was very comfortable. As we approached Adelaide a navy boat was coming out and it flashed the signal U (UNCLEAR) from his masthead light. That meant we were going into danger. So we stopped the motors and this fellow came out with a megaphone and shouted
- 17:30 "You've just headed into one of our pet minefields". So we headed out of that into Adelaide there and we painted ship in Adelaide. We changed it from Navy grey to Khaki green. It took about a week in Adelaide to do that and then we sailed out between Kangaroo Island and the mainland. Through an area called Backstairs Passage and ran into a gale like you wouldn't believe. When I went off watch
- 18:00 at eight o'clock at night, that's twenty hundred hours, Kangaroo Island was off the starboard bow. When I went on watch again at four o'clock in the morning it was just off the starboard quarter. In eight hours we made sixteen miles progress and none of us expected that the ship would survive a pounding like that. When we got out into the Southern Ocean,
- 18:30 the First set a course for Melbourne. And we were rolling so badly that the skipper fell out of his bunk. And he abused the hell out of him in front of us all and we sailed for the bottom of Tasmania. There we had the sea coming from the starboard bow and the ship corkscrewed for about a day and a half till it came turns to do a ninety degree turn to port and we headed into Melbourne. When we did that turn to port, there was a bit of a radio message from a ship
- 19:00 in Bass Strait that said a submarine had surfaced on the starboard bow. During the war we lost seventeen ships on the Australian coast to torpedoes and mines. We got into Melbourne. A few crew changed. We were there for about a week. And then we finally sailed form Melbourne in a convoy of seven ships. Again we got out into Bass Strait.
- 19:30 There was a terrible sea running and we were rolling about thirty degrees each was very uncomfortable. Eventually after about three days we got into Sydney Harbour and there we were told there was no leave. The officer in charge, Captain Blair, he was on this ship that was leading the convoy. He sailed past Sydney, he thought Sydney was Port Kembla.

- 20:00 We got to Barrenjoey Lighthouse before he we realized we had made a mistake and came back. But this time the pilot boat had been out for a couple of hours and they abused the hell out of us and said we were a bunch of Murray River Whalers. We birthed at Watson's Bay and when they said there was no leave I wanted to get home. So I wrapped my clothes in a groundsheet and went over the side and underneath the wharf. But my foot broke water and the provost [Military Police] caught me and sent me back. The following day they said there was still no
- 20:30 leave but I had a mate on a ship that had a fuel stove. So he had to get a load of wood. So I got in the back of the truck and got down on all fours and they put a tarpaulin over me and sat on me as though I was a box. And we got out past the provost guards and I got home to see my family. I got back that night and we sailed the following morning. And we seven ships
- 21:00 approached the boom gate. There was a boom gate across from Middle Head to North Head with a gate in it. They'd open up the gate to let the ships through. And the Manly ferry was coming the other way. So they opened up the gate. Our skipper had taken over as convoy commander after the schemozzle missing Sydney and going to Barrenjoey Lighthouse.
- 21:30 And as we approached, the Skipper waved the Manly Ferry through. And he wouldn't let us through. He waved us through. As each ship passed he came to attention and saluted. He was going to work. We were going to war. We came out of the Heads and there was a small ship about five mile out that was on fire and sinking. That was one of the seventeen. That probably was one of the seventeen. We sailed
- 22:00 north and ran into a hell of a sea. The first night at sea the convoy dispersed and we were on our own. A couple of days later we got into Byron Bay for shelter. And while we were in Byron Bay, we dropped anchor and I contacted the lighthouse and asked if they had news about our convoy. And he said well Dora is in Brisbane. Gundiah is somewhere at sea. Rahrah is aground in Coffs Harbour and Rannah, trying to pull her off got steel cable all around the propellers. So that a diver (UNCLEAR) cutting it clean. And Medalliar, she's standing by. A couple of days later we got into Brisbane and bit by bit the convoy came in. And there we provisioned and we sailed out to sea. We sailed out past Caloundra,
- 23:00 where the hospital ship Centaur had been sunk by the Japanese. We went into Mackay for supplies and fuel. And Mackay is a terrible harbour. It's got about a seventeen-foot rise and fall of tide. So we all went and had a night out. We went to the pictures and left two men on the ship to look after the lines. And so when we
- 23:30 came back from the pictures the ship was sort of hanging at a strange angle. Those fellows didn't get leave at the next port, I can assure you. We finally cleared Mackay and as we did there was a hell of a sea running. It was rolling about thirty degrees each way and there's a (UNCLEAR) alongside us at times would disappear completely into a trough. We rolled over so far that our port lifeboat floated
- 24:00 off the deck and the griping spar that held the lifeboat secure floated off into the ocean. We didn't get a new griping spar until we got to New Guinea. We got to Townsville and there we provisioned and we sailed on to Cairns. After about three days - we sailed from Cairns on the eighth of December.
- 24:30 And at that time there were only four of us going. We were going out through the Grafton passage... straight to the Solomon Islands. There was a diamond pattern we were sailing in and the ship astern of us on the port side got on the radio and he said, "Check course". Now we'd sailed until about two o'clock in the afternoon and I wrote it down on the pad and handed
- 25:00 it to the skipper and he said, "Just tell him the course is OK. And then at about half past seven, which is twenty-one thirty hours, Poolta flashed again, "Check course, in reef". And I showed it to the skipper and he said, "Tell him I'm in charge." And that's it. At eight o'clock
- 25:30 or twenty hundred hours, we hit (UNCLEAR) reef. She went up a ships length and she fell to about twenty degrees. And there was a hell of a panicking. I got some fellows to move my batteries aft so I could talk to the ships behind by Aldus lamp. The first mate called out, "Stand by the lifeboats," because he thought she was going to go over. Then in the darkness someone screamed, "Abandon Ship!" We never found out who did it.
- 26:00 And they went to the only lifeboat they could get down. They let the falls go and she jammed in the falls. So the Bosun, Jock Beach, grabbed a tomahawk and chopped the falls through on the boat. And it went in nose first. All the oars fell out and things like that. And some went out on rope and recovered the oars. And they paddled in alongside. The four ships astern, as soon as we hit, I went to the wheelhouse and
- 26:30 I flashed U? on the masthead light. That meant we were going into danger. They put their engines astern but two of them also hit. They hit and got off straightaway. One ship stood by us on the port quarter and they were in about twenty fathoms of water. There was a channel. If we had only been twenty yards further over we'd have got through.
- 27:00 But anyway the ship (UNCLEAR) and we were all a bit scared. At times at sea when you are in storms and that you pass through that stage of being scared. You are absolutely terrified. And about midnight, when I'd gone home to Mum she'd got me a Christmas cake to take, the cook made a cup of tea and we cut the cake. We had a

- 27:30 bit of a cuppa. I remember I then radioed for a tug to get us off. There was no tug at Townsville or Cairns. We got one at Cooktown. It was a Yankee tug. He came out and he arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon. By this time we'd got through a night and a day of the ship pounding all the time on the reef.
- 28:00 Fortunately the jarrah timber is so very hard that we got off. About six months later one of our ships had been built in Tasmania out of Huon pine. She hit a reef and she didn't get off. They lost the ship. The Poolta had put a line on the port quarter. It was running at half speed just trying to hold her steady. The tug arrived and put a line on the port bow.
- 28:30 And the fight to save the ship was on. By about seven o'clock at night, which was twenty-one hundred hours, she started to groan. And she started to move a little bit. By eight o'clock that night, she floated free. By that time we all had our gear packed in the stern flap because the skipper had told us if we didn't get off in that tide we'd abandon ship.
- 29:00 Anyway bit by bit she moved and when she finally came off there was timber floating everywhere. In Hobson's Bay dry dock in Melbourne they put a plank underneath the keel and the plank was about ten inches wide and four inches thick. That's what saved us because the plank floated up on the sea torn to shreds. The other ships
- 29:30 gathered round in deep water and we thanked the tug and sent him on his way. And we limped back to Cairns Harbour, escorted by the other ships. We were down two feet at the bow with about a five-degree list to the port where the cargo had moved in the hold. Got back to Cairns, opened up the boom and they allowed us in. And we anchored in midstream. They immediately sent a Navy diver down to have a look at it.
- 30:00 And when he came up he said it's a wonder she's still afloat. When we went to lift the anchor - the standard procedure for lifting the anchor is the bosun goes on the anchor winch and one of the seamen, one of the deckhands, stands over the side with a hose going as the chain comes up.
- 30:30 Mud had dropped down into the chain locker. Had to clean it out. And I remember him standing there and he waved his hand straight up and down and he said, "She's broken, the anchor's gone." The shackle broke on the anchor and it dropped down into the mud. We sent the diver down again and when he came up he was just one big blob of mud. And he said, "It's in fifteen foot of mud. You'll never get it back."
- 31:00 And so we moved into the wharf and I'll always remember while we were still at anchor the cook put on a brew. We gathered round, the crew of fourteen and the skipper came up and he said, "It wasn't good out there. Some departments let us down." The signals didn't. We moved into the wharf
- 31:30 and docks operating company, they started to unload us. But when they knocked off for the night at about six we the crew, we worked all night. We wanted to get the cargo out. The following day they lined us up opposite the navy (UNCLEAR). Because Cairns Harbour goes up and divides into two creeks. Smith's Creek and Alligator Creek. And when they lined us up they dropped the cradle down underneath and we sat
- 32:00 in the cradle and they pulled us up onto the slips. There was a hell of a screaming as we were going up because the slips were run by just a Ford V8 motor. (UNCLEAR) down. And when we got up there we dropped over a Jacob's ladder and we went over the side to have a look at her and there were chafes everywhere on the hold. The sheeting they had put on had been torn off and we found that some of the bolts
- 32:30 going up through the key were pushed eighteen inches up into the hold. It was just ground away. The slips being owned by the navy a navy commodore came down. Commodore Palmer came down to have a look at it. And he went with a little quarter pound sounding hammer and he tapped one of the chafes and the hammer went into the hold. He just said, "Close, bloody close."
- 33:00 And our Bosun, who had served in the navy, had served under this man. And he walked up and said, "By God it's (UNCLEAR) Palmer." Palmer, he turned to the Chief Engineer, Bill Uson and he said, "I want that man charged with insubordination." And Bill said, "Never heard a thing, Sir." And that was it. It took about four weeks to put patches on the hold and do the repairs that they could. They worked like hell on it. While this was going on,
- 33:30 I had sent my radio away to be tropic proofed because moisture gets into everything. I'll go back a bit and I will always recall when I was in Brisbane. We were there for a couple of weeks and Kodak in Brisbane used to release film at twelve o'clock each day. So I'd walk past and get a roll of film with my cap on and then go past and take my cap off and rifle up my hair,
- 34:00 walk past and get another roll. By the time we were sailing from Brisbane I had twelve rolls of film. I had to keep them secure, keep the moisture out. So I went to the Regimental Aid Post and asked for twelve condoms. And the fellow said, "Are you going on long leave?" And I said, "No. I want to save my films and I can take them out of the box, put it in a condom, tie the top and keep the moisture out." Those films are now over fifty years old and they are still
- 34:30 good. Anyway after they repaired us in Cairns, we sailed north in the convoy with two of the ships the

Gundiah and the Dora. The Dora was in charge of us and we used to anchor at night. We had two forty-foot workboats we were taking with us. They were inside our bow wave. We broke the sea for them. They were only forty-foot boats. And we, after about three days, we got to Thursday Island.

- 35:00 And there was...the Skip went ashore for a party and my job as the signaller was to raise the flag every morning and take it down at night. And I forgot to take it down and the following morning over breakfast, he said, "You made me look a bloody fool", he said. "We were all standing out on the balcony watching for you to bring the flag in and you didn't."
- 35:30 On the first night out at sea I learned that the HMAS Australia, my brother's ship, had been badly damaged. Kamikaze bombers, the captain was killed, three-hundred casualties, four men buried at sea. And I didn't know whether Les was alright. About three days later we got to Moresby and before the ship was secure I contacted navy headquarters.
- 36:00 I gave them Les's number. He went to his orderly and said, "Check it out." And he went to this chap and he (UNCLEAR). Moments in life you never forget. I went back to the ship and an hour later he came down in a jeep and said, "He's alive." And I'm a very emotional person.
- 36:30 I remember the skipper walked over and said, "Are you alright?" I just nodded my head. I couldn't talk. And hour later I was alright and he felt rotten. He told me later the worst job he ever did was he sewed his best mate up in his hammock and saw him go over the side. He said that he was on his gun, his two mates were gone, hit with shrapnel,
- 37:00 and he looked over to the twin Bofors on the other side. It was gone. Missing completely. The four-inch behind, that was gone. They took them back to...I can't think of the name of the harbour now. And they did minor repairs and it was sent home to England to be repaired. And while
- 37:30 Les was in England he got leave and he went to Scotland and looked up the Keiths. My father had done the same thing in the first war. My father was on the HMAS Australia and the first war ended and he was in Portsmouth Harbour and he got leave. He went to his aunts up in Scotland. I've got a photo there of my father standing with his two aunts. I've also got a postcard
- 38:00 there. If ever you get a wee bit of time just drop me a line. Dad wasn't a very good letter writer apparently but I've still got postcards there that he sent home to Mum. He was courting Mum before the war and just by coincidence one of the ships Dad sailed on was the Margaret. It was a (UNCLEAR) minesweeper and he was courting Margaret Jones.
- 38:30 We unloaded at Moresby because we were badly damaged and we knew we weren't going to get to the Solomons. But the army had a workshop at a place called Kaikara in the China Straits. About halfway along New Guinea and we were going there. When we got to Kaikara we anchored and went ashore to see the
- 39:00 officer in charge of the slips. We can't be slipped here because our slips are broken and we hadn't been informed. So we stayed there for about two days and all the time we were there the ship was going round in a slow eddy. We didn't know the chain was going into a knot.
- 39:30 The anchor chain was all knotted and the engineer had to go with two crowbars and undo the knots as they came up. We went to Lae....I'm sorry, we went to Milne Bay and we waited there at the wharf for orders. It was very good in Milne Bay because we lived on Yankee rations which was turkey and ice cream and tinned grapefruit and stuff like that.
- 40:00 We lived well on our ship because all the time if we travelled we trolled for fish. We got some good fish and we had a very clever cook, Frank Woods. We used to get our ration of blue boiler peas and some of the ships used to put them over the side but Frank used to put them in calico bags and dip them in water and move them along his bench. By the time they were about five or six days old they had a little green shoot on it and that was our green vegetables.
- 40:30 Very clever cook. He used to make damper and stuff like that for us. And when word finally came that we'd have to go back to Brisbane for major repairs we went back again...we backtracked to Moresby, Thursday Island, down through Cairns, Townsville, and back to Brisbane. As we were going just out from Cooktown,
- 41:00 we ran into a hell of a gale, which turned into a cyclone. And we had to duck in behind an island. We were there for about three days. We had two anchors with full anchor watches all the time because the wind and the rain were so horrific. When we finally lifted anchor and went to clear this island we looked on the shore. On the shore of that island was a wrecked DC3 aircraft and in the wash was a mine.
- 41:30 Got to Brisbane. I got fourteen days leave and I got back from that leave to a staging camp near Brisbane. And I sailed on the SS Almiston, a troop ship carrying about a thousand men. We sailed unescorted and I got to the Solomon Islands. When I landed we had to go down through the cargo nets on the barges to be landed.
- 42:00 I remember the
- 42:03 End of tape

## Tape 2

00:31 **Sid. I'd like to take up your story again and ask you about your brother Harold.**

My brother Harold had joined the navy when he had turned eighteen. And he was on an infantry landing ship called the HMAS Manoora. What happened was the Australia, the Shropshire, the Warramunga and other ships of the

01:00 fleet up there...they would lay down a heavy bombardment on the position and then the Manoora's job, she carried a thousand troops and those troops would go over the scramble nets into the barges and form a circle. Then when the signal went up they'd all hit the beach together and they'd do the landing. The Manoora and the Australia, they did eleven landings. Infantry landings.

01:30 And they did a wonderful job. While the HMAS Australia was being battered by these Kamikaze bombers the Manoora was about three or four miles away and she saw it. And I often wonder how brother Harold felt. He knew that Les was there in all this terrible thing that was happening. Once I got to the Solomon Islands where our base was on

02:00 a place called Purata Island in Torokina. Purata Island had been captured by the Americans. They lost twelve hundred men getting that island. Because men were expendable and the Japanese were so fierce in their fighting back. When I got to base I was immediately put on leave on picket duty on my first night. The troops were fresh and I remember

02:30 I was on the transport lines and this fellow came over and went to hop into a jeep. and I pointed my bayonet at him and said, "Out." And he said, "But I'm the CO [Commanding Officer]." I said, "I don't care who you are. No one takes a jeep off these lines without a G2." A G2 was an authorization. And he called for the Sar Major and the Sar Major came over and said, "Sid Keith is doing his duty and he's doing a damn good duty too."

03:00 I was on that base for about a month and there was a landing going on at Porton Plantation up the top of Bougainville. And the Sar Major came out and he said, "We want two radio operators to be in that landing. Not you Keith, you're going on Daisy tomorrow." The landing went ahead. It lost quite a few men. One of my mates went and he was killed. It's

03:30 a matter of luck. Then I moved onto a ship called the Daisy under Captain Eric. And there we circumnavigated Bougainville. We went to a place called Buka Passage. As we left port, we were a two hundred and fifty ton ship and we had three hundred and fifty ton of cargo on the ship and we towed a barge fully loaded. And in

04:00 Buka Passage, there we dropped off three priests who were going ashore to re-establish their mission station. And we dropped twelve soldiers with them to look after them and help to rebuild their sheds and things like that. The building material and all that was in the barge we were towing along behind. We went through Buka Passage and turned down the east coast of Bougainville and there we stopped at

04:30 Numa Numa and Kieta. Kieta had been one of the main Japanese bases. And I went ashore there and saw the way that they fought and lived. They had no supplies because they were isolated and they lived in dugouts in the side of the hill. When you came out the side of the hill there would be the open latrine where there would be bodies which they hadn't buried. They were in a

05:00 terrible condition there. They were glad it was all over because the war ended just before we sailed on that trip. I remember the war ended and we were all given an extra beer ration and we went onto the beach and I got drunk and the tide came in and woke me up. But when we got to Kieta, there we saw an island which had all the contagious diseases kept.

05:30 The lepers and things like that. They were all walking around with fingers missing and feet swollen and distorted. You realize health is such a wonderful thing. We sailed round the bottom of Bougainville and back to our base. And then we did three trips with Japanese prisoners aboard. The prisoners had been brought in from Nauru and ocean islands and put in a compound at Torokina and we were taking them four hundred at a time.

06:00 Two hundred down in the hold and two hundred up on the deck. And they were standing shoulder to shoulder and they were there for eleven hours, the trip was. They sent along about ten soldiers to guard them and so with floodlights on all the time. And we do the trip down to a place called Fauro Island. Fauro Island had a deep harbour. The Japanese had one aircraft carrier left.

06:30 They ran backwards and forwards between Japan and Fauro Island taking their men home. They were just like us. They each wanted to get home, get out of it. And our first trip went OK. The second trip, an officer came down, we had the prisoners aboard and an officer came down and said, "The men will be late. They will be a couple of hours." And our skipper, an arrogant man, Gordon Erret, turned and said, "No one tells me what to do. Cast off forward.

07:00 Cast off aft." and we sailed with no escorts. As we cleared the harbour the signal tower started flashing

to me. And the skipper sat alongside me and said, "Tell him you can't read him." I just sent the letter B, which means your light is out of focus or burning badly. They started to sail round the corner and they wanted to call me up on radio and he said, "Turn it off." And I wasn't feeling too well and I think I had a touch of malaria at the time and I'm lying in my bunk

- 07:30 and two of the mates, they, Tony Barnes and Errol Camel were their names. We called Tony Barnes Trigger Barnes after that. He said, "We'd better load the stern." And he put it on the table on the focsle and put the magazine in and it raged. It puffed out three slugs. These three slugs, they ricocheted in around the focsle and I sat up in a hell of a hurry and hit my head on the bunk above.
- 08:00 And blood trickled down my nose. And the skipper sent an officer back to see what the hell had gone wrong. When the officer looked in he said, "My God. If you'd been a Yank we could have got you a purple heart." But we got rid of those prisoners, but before we did, in the daylight hours, the skipper put myself and another bloke up on the wing of the bridge and he put a white line across
- 08:30 the deck with a big white hand in chalk and the native word is "i tambu" which means "forbidden". I'm leaning over the side watching these soldiers and a fellow went to walk past and the skipper said, "All the controls are back there. If anyone tries to walk past, warn them once and then shoot them." And this fellow walked up to this line and stepped over this line and I walked over and waved this gun in his face and said, "Back." And he pointed to his insignia on his shirt and he said,
- 09:00 "Officer, Officer." And I leaned over the side and said. "Tommy gun, Tommy gun, back." To this day I think I would have shot him. I would have been obeying orders if I had shot him but he went back. We were glad to get rid of that lot. And whenever we took the Japanese like that on our ship, we used to take along four gallons of disinfectant. When we dropped them at Fauro Island we'd keep about twenty men on the ship and they'd scrub the ship from stem to stern. They had been sick and there were no toilets or anything like that for them.
- 09:30 And we were coming back on our last trip. It was just breaking dawn and I said to the skipper, "Someone's trying to contact us from the shore." And he said, "We'll go and have a look." We dropped anchor and went ashore in the small boat. And what had happened was some natives had been coming up from the bottom of Bougainville and they found a clearing and built a camp. And they made a fire and underneath
- 10:00 there were some explosives and it went up. There were about two natives dead, a lot were very badly burned. There was a woman there with a child and she was crying. We put her on the ship and I radioed for help. And a couple of hours later a sea ambulance was coming down and I just flashed him and told him where they were. When we got to the wharf there was an ambulance waiting for the woman and the baby. But it was a very emotional time for
- 10:30 us. But it's all there. I've still got it, which is the main thing. And after those three trips we loaded a full cargo. About three and fifty ton. We didn't tow a barge this time. And we called at Feni Island, Green Island, across to Namatanai. And up around the top of Kavieng. Again the natives
- 11:00 came out and warned us away from a minefield. At Kavieng. We had been dropping off supplies all the way. We dropped the last of the supplies there. There was a compound there of prisoners and then our cargo from there to take back to New Guinea was about a hundred natives. These natives had been taken over there as slave labour. They had been there for a couple of years. They'd met native
- 11:30 ladies and they had married them and our cargo were these natives and they brought along their WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. They brought a goat, a pig, and there were a couple of babies and as they were leaving they knew they would never see their mothers and fathers again and they stood on the side of the ship and they waved their arms and sung a farewell song. And those of the wharf did the same.
- 12:00 We sailed from there into a hell of a sea and everyone was sick so we stopped at a place called Ablinki Bay?. Just to let the people ashore and give them a rest because there were babies and all with them. And we finally dropped that mob in Lae. Then we loaded cargo for a run up to Finschhafen, Madang. And when we
- 12:30 were passing...We dropped our cargo at Finschhafen and there was an American ship up on the reef and he asked for help. So we put our towlines on him. We broke our first lot of line so we put some more lines on. And we eventually got him off and you see he had a cargo of fresh fruit onboard. And the skip said, "We'll
- 13:00 be right." And then he dropped his anchor over to try and kedge himself off the reef. He hadn't been successful. and his winch had broken and so we picked up his anchor and put it on the deck for him. And then he just turned and he said, "Cast off forward. Cast off aft." And sailed. And the skipper said, "Whenever we see another Yank we'll go and give him a bloody push." We got to Madang and there we unloaded and we picked up some troops and bought them back to Lae.
- 13:30 And did another trip to Madang. and this time I had scratched my leg on a cargo crate and by the time I got back to...Yes. I went to see a doctor in Madang Harbour. He was an American doctor and he said, "I'll radio ahead for you." And I said, "I can do that." And when I got back to the wharf at Lae there was an ambulance waiting and they put me into hospital at Lae.

- 14:00 And there I had this tropical ulcer on my leg. They were going to operate for a while but then they started the penicillin injections. I had a penicillin injection in my bottom every four hours and they packed it with penicillin powder and gradually it closed over. While I was in there I developed dysentery and was put in the dysentery ward. So I had Christmas Day, New Years Day and my birthday in the Lae hospital.
- 14:30 I was there for six weeks. While I was there I read the army newspaper, the Guinea Gold. And they were calling for printers because I was a printer by trade, to relieve the married men and let them go home. So I applied and I was accepted for Guinea Gold. So my sea going days
- 15:00 were over. I left 13 Small Ships Company and I went to Guinea Gold at Lae. It was a newspaper that printed seven thousand copies per day. It was very good to get back into the trade and to smell the oil and the ink and the paper. And after we printed the papers we'd roll them up and take them to the airport. They'd be taken in DC3s
- 15:30 and dropped to the troops wherever they were. After about six weeks they said we were going to Rabaul. So we printed one night, I remember we finished about four in the morning, had breakfast and went straight out on the strip and got in a DC3 aircraft. Now a DC3 aircraft is not pressurized. Each seat is about a three-inch circle cut in the glass. We stopped at Finschhafen
- 16:00 and Jacquinot Bay. Jacquinot Bay, incidentally is where Sir Ninian Stevens started his career with Water Transport. Sir Ninian Stevens later became Governor-General of Australia. He started in Water Transport working at a beachhead at Jacquinot Bay.
- 16:30 We left Jacquinot Bay in this DC3 and we were flying over the mountains to get to Rabaul. Rabaul Harbour is very interesting. It is made by a ring of volcanos, more or less, and as we came up to go over the last volcano all the side of the mountain was burned out and I said to the fellow, "That a bushfire?" He said, "No. One of the planes a couple of weeks ago didn't make it." So we
- 17:00 landed at Rabaul and established our printing factory there. The printing factory was a mobile printing unit. It was on the back of five big trucks. You had the orderly room, the journalists, the paper store, the compositors, who made up the forms for the printing, and the print truck. And we lived under tents
- 17:30 and while we were there they'd go every morning...We had a staff of about twenty-five and they'd pick up about twenty-five Japanese prisoners from the compound. They were our servants for the day. All we had to do was take the bolts out of our rifles and our bayonets and they were locked in the orderly room. They'd make your bed and do your washing and clean your shoes and do the garden. It was wonderful to have servant. I never ever thought I'd have one. It was good but
- 18:00 at Rabaul they were constantly having small earthquakes. You'd sit on your bunk and it would start to shake but you got used to that in Rabaul. While I was there, the Japanese war crimes trials were being conducted, so I went along to have a look at them; how they were conducted, how the men were treated. And I arrived and
- 18:30 found that there was lots of guards around and everything. On one line there were the witnesses and in the other line, I've got this all on photograph, and there were the accused and I went in and I watched them. I watched the whole procedure. And I saw one man, I think he was a Korean, and to get him to take his oath they got a match and struck it in front of him. And he blew the match out. That was his way of oath.
- 19:00 If he told a lie his life would go out just like that match did. There was an officer there and he said that, "When we ate the Indian prisoners I ate their liver because I like liver." And afterwards he stood out the front of that tent and posed for me to take his photograph. He was sentenced to be hanged. You see the Japanese soldier dies by the sword and that is honour. If he is shot that's almost honour. This Bushido thing that the Japanese have got.
- 19:30 If he is hung that's the ultimate disgrace. So all the Japanese criminals, they used to hang them. That's the way it should be. There's no honour in the way they had carried on. I've got a story in a Water Transport book there of three thousand Indian prisoners who had been taken by the Japanese to work as their slave labour, building roads and bridges and things like that. Now when the war ended
- 20:00 there was fourteen of them left. They said they had died of dysentery, malaria, scrub typhus, malnutrition. They were killed and eaten by the Japanese. Of those fourteen they kept one officer back for interrogation. The other thirteen were put on a plane to go home. The plane crashed and they were all killed. One man out of a thousand made it back to his homeland.
- 20:30 Terrible things. But anyway I served out my time at the Guinea Gold. And all the soldiers were given a priority listing. If you were married your points were doubled. And I had a hundred points so I had to wait my turn. And finally I boarded the HMAS Manoora
- 21:00 and went back to Sydney. And that moment when you are sailing through the Heads and under the bridge and we tied up at number two Walsh Bay and the band was there to greet us home. It was over and I got leave then. We were all given twenty-four days leave and I spent

- 21:30 that leave with my parents. I went and bought a motorbike and I went back to be discharged and the officer said, "You're a printer." I said, "Yes." And the officer said, "Eastern Command Printer Works near Central railway station. Would you like to be a five day a week soldier?" And I said, "I'd love to." And so I became a printer with Eastern Command
- 22:00 which meant I was able to get home every night. And then shortly afterwards I went to a dance at Chatswood Hall. It was on about the third week in December 1946 and Cath was there with another fellow and he turned his back and I picked up the barn dance. And once around the floor and it stopped and he came and took her off the floor so I didn't have a partner. And then she picked up her purse
- 22:30 and he was taking her home so I went to the door to see which way she went. She got into a car and went off into the night. My cousin was there with me. And said, "That was nice. With that bloody (UNCLEAR) you'll marry her." I knew. And the following morning Cath went to her girlfriend, who was later our bridesmaid and said, "The fellow picked me up in the barn dance and we'll get married. You watch." And we boys, we decided we would go camping together.
- 23:00 I hadn't seen Les for two years and we went to Port Stephens. We camped on the beach and we cooked for ourselves and fished and lay in the sun and told our stories and laughed a lot and got drunk over and over again. We were that glad to be back together. I came home and went to a dance then. I told Cath I would be at the dance the first week in January. She walked in the door that
- 23:30 night with that fellow and she put her money on the counter. "I'm paying my own way in." She walked straight over to me and that was it. We've been together ever since. I remember I took her out two days later, sixth of January 1947 and we were going across on the Manly Ferry. I said, "How old are you Cath?" She said, "I'm nineteen today." I said, "I'm twenty-two tomorrow." We were that close.
- 24:00 But in later years when I had to get an insurance policy and a birth certificate I found out my birthday is really the eight of January. Mum had made a mistake. It didn't matter and we have been married now for fifty-five years. Four children. One was adopted. The other three were ours. And we've just had a wonderful life together. And now we are retired out here at Rowland Village, it is paradise. It really is paradise.
- 24:30 That's my story. We've settled in out here now and we have no worries. That's the way it should be. But it's little things that go back. I remember after we hit the reef captain Canner was taken off our ship and that's something I just thought of. We got a new skipper, Captain Bollitho. Sam Bollitho.
- 25:00 An older man. And we cleared Cairns Harbour and some of the big brass had come to see us off. There was a lot of saluting and stuff like that. And as we cleared the harbour I was on the wheel and he gave me the course and he said, "Back in a few minutes." He went into his cabin and came out in a torn shirt and a paint-splattered pair of shorts and he said, "Thank God the bullshit's over."
- 25:30 We had out lighter times in the forces but at times it was pretty grim. The times we were at sea and half our ship was under water all the time. And some of the corking. The first night at sea outside Perth was the worst. Half the ship was under water all the time there. I was in the focsle and the noise as you are
- 26:00 laying in your bed and you could hear the ship digging into the ocean. But we got out of it, you know. And I'm so happy to be a returned soldier. I march on Anzac Day and I am so proud to march on Anzac Day. And I've got my mates and on one occasion two years ago I got Les and Harold to come to my reunion with me. We had just a wonderful day. But life is just wonderful. But life is what you make it.
- 26:30 I wouldn't be anywhere else but there and right now it's time for a cup of coffee Cath. Can I disconnect this in some way so I can go to the...

**Sid, can I just take up your story again and ask you about**

- 27:00 **your childhood and growing up in a family of seven children. You mentioned that you wanted to enlist in the army but you'd had family in the navy. Can you tell me why you were drawn to the army?**
- I wasn't drawn to the army. I wanted to go into the navy and Dad said I've got two sons at sea and I'm not going to have a third. And so
- 27:30 I went into the army. I have always been very patriotic in my feelings. Even at Asquith Primary School. Once a week we'd raise the flag and things like that. And I've always been very patriotic. I remember before I was able to go into the forces, early in the war, when other fellows were going overseas
- 28:00 they'd put on an afternoon tea for them. I would go along to that and I thought one of these days that will be me, you know. If the war lasted long enough I would be in uniform. I always thought I would go and fight for my country. I had so much to fight for. Mum and Dad and my younger family members that I constantly thought about.
- 28:30 But life was very good as I grew up. I went to Sunday school and things like that. But we still go to church, Cath and I now. Not many people do but we got to church. We've got our belief. Life at school was very good. I did six years at Asquith Primary and then I went to Hornsby Junior Tech. Then I went to Ultimo. There was no other school.

- 29:00 These days children have got it made. There is a school next door but I've got to go twenty odd miles to get to school. And there I did my Intermediate certificate. I got my Intermediate when I was thirteen. That's very rare. I went and did a pre-apprenticeship school in carpentry and then I left school at the age of fourteen even though
- 29:30 I had done so very well at school. Dad just said, "What trade are you going to go into?" And I got a job with Les at The Land newspaper and I enjoyed the printing trade. But whatever I've done in my life I've enjoyed. It's just the attitude that you have. And I had to fight like hell to get in the army,
- 30:00 get my clearance. But once I got in the army the feeling of being with fellows, the mates that you develop. At times we hear of one that's passed on. We lost one recently. He had an interesting experience because he was in one of the forty-foot boats that we escorted to Port Moresby. When we got to Moresby he tied up astern of us
- 30:30 and he filled his boat up and fortunately he was the only one aboard because when he pressed the starter button petrol must have spilled in the bilges. It exploded. It stripped all the aft canopy. And poor old Nuggetty. He staggered up onto the wharf and he had no hair, no eyebrows, his clothes were on fire but he was alive, you know. And they towed the workboat over to workshops
- 31:00 and it sailed again about three weeks later. In Moresby Harbour, when we arrived there, there was a wreck laying on its side out in Moresby Harbour. It was a thing called the Macdhui. It had been tied up at the wharf unloading supplies and the Japanese came along and bombed and the bomb went down the funnel. But somehow or other the captain of the ship knew that if he left it there....He knew that it was going to sink
- 31:30 but if he left it there it would have blocked the wharf. He cast off and with what steam he had in his boilers he just ran out into the middle of the harbour and it sunk. And when she sunk there was a little bit still laying on top at low tide when we were there. And when she sunk there was fifty-seven bodies still left in her. And when we arrived there was still an oil slick going away from her because the bosun,
- 32:00 we dropped our heavy lifeboat in the water, he said we were going to go sailing. We went sailing around Port Moresby Harbour. It was good while the wind was going in the right way but then we had to row back. We rowed round the Macdhui and I looked at the oil on top and thought of the men lying down below. And we tied up at the wharf at Port Moresby. I remember the swimming pool was on the other side and I enjoyed swimming so I dived over the side and just swam about
- 32:30 five hundred yards to the swimming pool and joined the fellows there. And the skipper abused the hell out of me because they had been catching sharks in the harbour but you don't think of these things. But I had a good mate, Harvey Stevens. I met him the first day that we had gone into the Army and we stayed together right through. Even when I left the Printing Unit, Steve was in Rabaul Harbour with his ship
- 33:00 and we had the same hundred points. We came home together. Went up the gangplank side by side. They guided us down below...you're down on deck so and so. And the deck that we were supposed to be sleeping on was right down of the keel sort of things. And I said to Harvey, "Listen mate, I've seen a few mines in my time. We might hit one going home." So we left our kit bags down there, took out our valuables and went up on deck. And every night we used to sleep on deck.
- 33:30 It was cold. It didn't matter. We felt a little bit safe. There was still that wonderful moment to get home. We knew that we had made it. But different things that come back to mind as I talk. We were going...as we were going along occasionally the Skip would say to me, "I want you to take the wheel." I'd take the wheel and he'd go aft and get some boxes and bags
- 34:00 and throw them over the water. I'm going to sneeze. Pardon me.. Then after he had thrown the bags in the water we did a circle and would
- 34:30 have gunnery practice. It was good because we had to be trained. I always think that I possibly could have got into the navy. As soon as I got into the army I thought, "I'm away from Dad now. He can't tell me what to do. I might get into the navy. I went for a medical exam and they said, "No. You're no good for the navy. You've got flat feet and you would have trouble standing on a rolling deck." I wish they could have seen me in later
- 35:00 years. Because we had a lot of rolling decks. We were sailing from Moresby across to the army workshop at Kaikara with our ship. I can remember looking over the side and seeing the coral bottom. And I ran to the wheelhouse and we were just about aground, you know. Another time we were coming up the coast and we was just
- 35:30 a little north of Mackay in Queensland. And there was two islands off the headland and we were supposed to sail between the two islands. But one island was covered with fog and we didn't. By the time we saw a reef dead ahead, there was a bit of a panic. We sort of got the ship around and there wouldn't have been much
- 36:00 room by the time we got it round. But it was wonderful sailing and the albatrosses used to come round all the time and get the scraps from the galley. It was good to see the cook. We'd catch these Spanish mackerel and he'd lay them out on the table and cut them up in slices and we'd have grilled Spanish

mackerel and he was a good cook and a great fellow. He became a bit strange later on in life. He came to visit

36:30 and I didn't want to see him again after that. He was a different man after he got back to civvie life.

**Can I just ask you Sid, going back to when you were very young, you've got a job in a printery. You had just left school and you hadn't had any contact with boats or ships before. When you got to the army how did you find**

37:00 **your sea legs?**

Well the Keiths have always been seafaring people and I just wanted to go to sea. And I just grabbed the opportunity when it came along. I was lucky that it came along to get to sea. If I hadn't gone to sea I would have stayed in Armoured Division in tanks and I would have been over in Western Australia in the deserts. They gathered

37:30 all the Armoured Divisions over there in case the Japanese were going to come down through Darwin. And some of those fellows were over there for two years and they weren't even returned soldiers. They got no benefits at all. But being a returned soldier I got quite a few benefits. I got my hearing aid and things like that. But no, I was so glad to get the opportunity to go sea.

**Can you tell me what type of training you received?**

38:00 In the army? Well first of all you had to learn discipline and you had to learn how to drill and you went to all your training with your rifle and you are throwing your grenades and stuff like that. You had to go through what they called a baptism of fire. You would be in trenches with bullets going over and stuff like that. They taught us how to dig trenches and just how to look after yourself and how to look after your mate.

38:30 That's the big thing. And the feeling between the men in the forces is wonderful. I have no regrets whatsoever about serving. I enjoyed the service and I enjoy the feeling that you get now. I enjoy being able to march on Anzac Day and things like that.

**You mentioned before that after**

39:00 **your application into the AIF was accepted that you were then.... Tell me the story of how you came to be in the Signals...**

In the Signals Corp. I was in Puckapunyal and we did driver training first of all in trucks, then in Bren gun carriers and they just called for volunteers to go to a signal school. I just grabbed

39:30 the opportunity. A funny thing happened in tanks. They took us out on the armoured fighting vehicle range one day to drill the tanks. And the mate and I were in the turret together. My mate Steve. And the sergeant, Sergeant Poncho is hanging his legs down inside the cupola and he's swinging his legs and he called out, "Open fire.

40:00 Besa. The Besa machine gun. And Steve pressed the wrong trigger and the two pounder went off and the blast of the two pound nearly knocked him off the back of the tank. And he abused the hell out of Steve and he yelled, "Change over." And I got in and I did the same thing. He put us out of the tank and we had to walk the five miles back to camp. But we were so fit that five miles was just a stroll. But I enjoyed all my training, especially Bren gun

40:30 training because we used to go out the back of the camp at Puckapunyal chasing rabbits. That took us in between logs and in between trees and it was very good training. We had a Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel RA Murray was his name. And I remember we were on guard duty one time and the watch that I was on was from twelve to two and it was mid winter, down in Victoria.

41:00 It was damn cold. As you walked around you could feel the ice cracking in the mud underneath your feet. And so the orderly officer had been round earlier in the night doing his inspection and we thought he won't be back so we went to the cookhouse. The four guards went to the cookhouse. And there we made some cocoa and we made some toast because we found out where the key to the officers' ration store was.

41:30 And it came to about quarter past two and one of my mates said, Sid, you'd better go and get the Sarge to wake up and change the guard. And so I must have walked one side of a row of huts. The orderly officer had been to a party in town and he came to do a second inspection, which I hadn't expected, and he went to the officers' lines. No one was there. On the transport lines,

42:00 no one was there. He went to the guard house and I wasn't there and he walked to the

42:06 End of tape

00:31 **Sid. You were just telling me that you got fourteen days detention at Puckapunyal and our tape ran out. Can you just pick that up again and tell me how that happened. Where? Why did you get your detention.**

I was away from my post. It was winter time in Victoria and

01:00 the cookhouse was nice and warm. Everyone did it but it was just unfortunate that the orderly officer had been to a party in town and he came back for a double check. It was hard being put into a cell and then the only book there was the Bible and I'm flicking through the Bible and in came the Roman Catholic padre. And he spoke to us all and then he walked out again and the

01:30 ...I must have impressed him because the provost sergeant came and said, "Keith. Outside." He said, "The Roman Catholic padre has been to see the CO and you're out." I was confined to barracks for seven days. So I only did seven days detention but confined to barracks meant I wasn't able to go to town or anything like that. That was because I spent my duty in the cookhouse. We had a bit of a turn there one time. This

02:00 Lieutenant Colonel RA Wolf Murray, he insisted that we all be in uniform at night time but if you came in from the field where you had been training at half past five and mess was at six you didn't have time to have a shower or get tidied up. So we decided one night that we'd bung on a turn. We all came out in our working clothes and of about two hundred

02:30 men, about twenty decided they would go out in their uniform and the rest of us went out in our working clothes. And the Sergeant Major nearly had a fit. He ordered us to go back again and come out in our field service uniform. We went back again and came out in our working clothes. So they took us down to the mess and we had a meal and then we went back to the huts

03:00 and the fellows who had gone in their field service uniform, we threw their clothes out the window. And the following morning we went out for lunch and we were told we were going for a walk. We had to report with all our clothes, gasmasks, blankets, steel helmets and we walked for two and a half days out in the bush and the meals would arrive at odd times and sleeping on the ground,

03:30 double guard duties and things like that. It was all part of training, I realize that now. When we got back to camp, there were about twenty fellows that couldn't make it back. They had to go and find them and bring them back by truck because their feet had blistered and things like that. But I've always been able to walk. I enjoy walking. Then the following night we were sitting in the mess

04:00 and the Sergeant Major came in and called us to attention and in walked the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel RA Wolf Murray. "In my office is a book of military law and on page such and such it states that mutiny is combined defiance of a military order. During wartime it is punishable by death at the Commanding Officer's discretion. Now you'll

04:30 sit and you'll think." We sat there for about an hour, sitting at attention. We had to think. But we learned a lesson. But he'd learned a lesson too. Because after that, mess was put back half an hour so we'd have time to have a shower and get tidied up. And when I was going to Western Australia on this draft to go to my ship, we were standing outside, I think it was Flinders Street Station. There was

05:00 ten of us because some people on our ship were in Western Australia with other units, waiting to move to us. And who should walk along the road but Lieutenant Colonel RA Wolf Murray. The officer called us to attention and then Murray walked past and came back and he said, "Lieutenant, may I speak with one of your men?" He called

05:30 me away from the others and he said, "The face is familiar." I said, "Yes sir. I served with you in Armoured Division training at Puckapunyal." He said, "I thought so. I never forget a face." And he walked over to the Lieutenant and he said to the Lieutenant, "Will you be here for long? He said, "Yes. We've got about an hour to wait for the train." He said, "Good. I'd like to take this man away for a moment." He took me up the road and he bought me a beer. He remembered that I served under him but he didn't remember

06:00 sentencing me to fourteen days detention. When I got back to the men, they gave me hell. But it is all part of it. Those are the things I did in my service career.

**And when you finished at Puckapunyal and you volunteered to go into the signals?**

In Water Transport.

06:30 **When did you receive your posting?**

After the officer interviewed us. The following day I was sent on fourteen days leave. And that's when I came home to let Mum and Dad know what was going on. At that time there was only Mum and Dad and the three boys there. My sister had gone into the Land Army. She went down to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

07:00 Then I reported back to camp and the following day I moved to Mt Martha. It was by the sea. It was wonderful. But it was hard training. We still had our route marches as well as our signal duty. But there was so much to learn in going onto ships. You had all your international code flags and there was a

thing called Tren? Code, which was the code that we used for communication on the ships.

- 07:30 But there was dancing. They put on a dance one night at the rec hut and I went to this dance and I picked up this girl for a dance. She was called Pauline and I went to school with her at Asquith Primary School. But Asquith Primary School - I remember Stan Wright and Arthur English. They went to the air force. They went down over Germany and Tony Henley
- 08:00 went to New Guinea when he was nineteen and he was killed up in New Guinea. We lost, from the small school at Asquith, there would have been about thirty who went into the forces. And we just lost the three. We were lucky. But it's strange. When I was in Cairns I walked down the main street of Cairns and I bumped into a bloke from Asquith school,
- 08:30 Frank Meyers. Then I bumped into Jim Maclean. And Jim Maclean had one eye. He was playing hide and seek with his sister and he was looking through a keyhole and she poked a knitting needle through it and he lost his eye. And there was Jim. He had a colour patch signifying that he was in the infantry. And I said, "Jim, how did you get into the infantry?" He said, "I'm A1" I said,
- 09:00 "How can you be A1 with your glass eye?" He said, "When I went through the medical in Sydney the doctor told me to read the chart." He said, "I did it with my good eye." And then he said, "Read it with the other eye and he had a fit of coughing and dropped the card and put it up to the same eye." And he said that the doctor was about seventy years old or older and so he
- 09:30 got in A1. Jim went up to New Guinea and he got Mentioned In Dispatches for bravery in New Guinea. I don't know where his is now. You lose track. They move into the country and things like that.

### **And where is Mt Martha?**

Mt Martha is just out from Frankston on the shores of Port Phillip Bay. It is a good camp. A funny thing happened. The first day we went there

- 10:00 with my mate Steve, the Sar Major told us all about the camp. We arrived just before lunch. We had lunch and then he took us outside and told us all about the camp. And he told us all about the Commanding Officer, a Major Mick Munnery. And he said, "He's a pretty good sort of bloke really." And so we went in to have a shower and Steve and I were in this shower block. It was made out of corrugated iron
- 10:30 and it had a division up the middle. One side was for the officers and the other side was for the men. I turned to Steve and said, "What the Sar Major said. The CO doesn't seem a bad sort of bastard, does he?" And we heard this bump on the other side and then a head poked over the side and it was the Commanding Officer. He said, "When you get to know me I'm a pretty good sort of a fellow." He never ever mentioned it again. He saw the humour in it all, you know. We used to go on parade every Saturday morning
- 11:00 and if everyone passed parade inspection you were granted leave to go to Melbourne in the afternoon and you had to wear your small pack on your back and have your shoes clean and your webbing polished and all that sort of thing. And we went on parade this day and Sar Major always said, "Why can't you get your packs to look like Corporal Icon?" And it started to rain like hell. "And put on your groundsheets."
- 11:30 Everyone had their groundsheets but Corporal Icon had a nice square pack because he had a box to put in it to make it look good. Corporal Icon was no longer Corporal Icon. He was a private after that. And another time we all had to stand to attention and they raised the flag and the officers all saluted and the men stood to attention and the flag got half way up. And someone had been down through the night and they'd nicked the
- 12:00 lanyard almost through and in the wind it broke and the flag fell down and there was no leave in Melbourne that weekend. And we didn't know who did it. We would have liked to because we missed the time on leave and I had a date with a girl that night. But we used to write to girls and we used to go dancing and things like that. I loved the army but I used to love the leave. I had a good time. We'd go to a restaurant and have a
- 12:30 meal and eat something a bit different to the army food. The army food was good but the first winter in Puckapunyal nearly every morning was scrambled eggs made out of powdered egg and it was a yellowy greeny colour. Terrible stuff. And so you always tried to get cookhouse duty if you could. When they were handing out duties for the day you'd go for cookhouse.
- 13:00 Steve and I, we got into strife. We'd gone down to the rec hut and Sar Major found out that instead of being on duty cleaning trucks and that we....there were enough to clean the trucks. They hadn't been used much and he found out about it. And this morning he is calling out the duty squadron and he said, "I want two men for the officers mess." Steve called out, "Trooper Steven and Trooper Keith". And he said, "No.
- 13:30 Anyone but you blokes. I'll arrest you blokes later in the morning. The next duty is I want two men to clean out the latrines and I want Trooper Stevens and Trooper Keith. I will make a personal inspection to make sure they are done properly too." All those things that come back. How every morning your two hills at the back of Puckapunyal camp, every morning after roll call,

- 14:00 we had to run up the top of the hill and back again. That was to get your muscles going. But there were two mountains at the back of our camp. One was Mount Certainty and one was Mount Disappointment. Because everyone was given twenty-five clothing coupons to buy singlets or something like that if you wanted. And the prostitutes from Melbourne used to come up, occasionally on a Sunday and they'd set up camp in the bushes at the top of Mount Certainty.
- 14:30 And if you ran up the wrong hill you were at Mount Disappointment. It was a bit of a joke. That actually happened. The girls used to come up and set up a business. Some of the fellows were a bit loose in their morals. When I was on the Daisy we stopped at Feni Island one time and our captain, Captain Gordon Erret had owned the island and over mess that night
- 15:00 he said anyone who wants to go ashore and spend the night with a native woman, the boat will be leaving at half past five. That night, out of a crew of fourteen, there were five of us left aboard. The others went ashore to meet the native women. Some of them were married men. (UNCLEAR) the fact that I was on anchor watch that night. But I loved being at sea. Yet when I came home I had no desire,
- 15:30 I had got it out of my system. I just wanted to get married and have a family. I wanted that because I had come from such a happy family myself. And then when I met Cath I went with her parents. I lived with her father for a while. Her mother had passed on and then we just wanted to get away on our own and from the seven children.
- 16:00 We also had to bring our girls home for the weekend at Mt Colah. Dad sat their one day, he said, "Look the orchard has got too much for me. I've subdivided it and made twenty-two blocks. You can all have a block of land." I was going with Cath at the time and I walked around and we picked out a place where we would build a house. Then we were married and we were living in Cath's
- 16:30 parents' house and we wanted to be on our own, not living with someone else and so Dad had an old settler's cottage. "Would you like to buy the old settler's cottage up on the hill?" he said. "A hundred pounds. You can move in straight away. If you pay it off a pound a week as rent, you won't see it go." And so we moved into that and about a week later Dad came up and gave me fifty pounds. He said, "You want some
- 17:00 new boards for the verandah and other work has to be done. Take that son." And I got the house for five hundred and fifty. And then in the meantime we had built a garage on our block of land and we sold that land and the garage for four hundred pounds. Now it cost me two hundred pounds to build the garage so I'm two hundred pounds in front. I've got the house for three fifty. We lived in the old house, which was falling down,
- 17:30 for about eight years. And then we decided to rebuild so we cut the house in half with a pair of tin cutters, a saw and a hammer. And we carted half of it away and then we put plans into Hornsby Shire Council and we built our dream home. It was an L-shaped house which went around the old house. We finally finished and put up two scaffolding planks and slid the furniture
- 18:00 from one house to the other. And the half a house was standing there and a fellow walked over the road and said, "What do you want for the half a house?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I'll give you fifty quid and take it away." Which he did. The archery club built a shed out of it. And so I really got a house for three hundred pound. And we borrowed two thousand pound from the Rural Bank and
- 18:30 we paid it off in seventeen years. I can remember when I made the final payment. I was working at La Fiamma, the Italian newspaper. I went up the road and bought half a dozen bottles of beer and some cheese and biscuits and put them on the table. They said, "It's your birthday." I said, "No. Today I paid my bloody house." That's a wonderful moment for any couple. To make that final payment. We've been very happy.
- 19:00 In that house we had our three children. We adopted a baby and then we more or less adopted another baby. We took in three state wards. We had eight children pass through our house. We still have contact with six of them. Two of the state wards went back to their parents. The parents got back together again
- 19:30 It was a bit of a heartbreak and then finally the fellow from child welfare came out and he said, "Why don't you adopt a baby?" And I said, "But we've got three children of our own." He said, "I can get you a baby." And they phoned us one day and said, "Come into Yurong Street and there's a baby you can have a look at."
- 20:00 It was David. He had red hair and oriental eyes. That's why people had rejected him. We took him on and his hair went darker and he lost his oriental eyes. They came like ours and he is our fourth child and we are very proud of him. And we are proud of the way we have had to do with the lives of eight children. We gave them all a good start where we could and we are still helping out children.
- 20:30 And just...it's great.

**It sounds like you have a very very loving family.**

Yes. They are very loving. My childhood was wonderful and now it's still wonderful.

**I might take you back to Puckapunyal. Can I ask,**

21:00 **you've just reminded me, I was going to ask you how much you were being paid when you were at Puckapunyal.**

Six shillings and sixpence a day. And then once I went into Water Transport and was working as a signaller I got an extra two shillings a day, which meant eight and six a day. And I could sent an allotment home to Mum and Dad to put in the bank for me.

21:30 And when I came home eventually I had the money in the bank to go and buy a motorbike. But no complaints. When I went into the Eastern Command Printing Unit, after a while I became a sergeant and the pay was quite good. I had a very enjoyable life then because I lived at Artarmon and I could leave home in the morning and half an hour from leaving home, I was at work.

22:00 And I got on with the fellows there. I was married while I was at the army-printing unit. and I was able to print my own wedding invitations and things like that. I wasn't sorry to leave the army. I would have stayed in the army but they moved the printing unit down to Melbourne. They offered me the same rank or better to go to Melbourne but I talked it over with Cath

22:30 and we decided our family was here, we'd spend all our lives running backwards and forwards between Sydney and Melbourne for weddings and funerals and things like that. So I got my discharge. Which I had in all, total, served five years and eight months in uniform.

**And when were you discharged?**

September 1948. Yes.

23:00 I remember we went to Port Stephens for a fortnight. We had our second honeymoon. It was wonderful. And then we came back to living with Cath's Dad at Artarmon again.

**Well just going back to when you went to Mt Martha and you were getting your training as a signaller.**

Yes.

23:30 **I understand that was part of the Water Transport?**

You had to have Water Transport experience because in tanks you didn't have semaphore and you didn't have Aldus lamp and we had to learn all about international code flags that we could fly on our ship if we wanted anything.

24:00 **And what is an Aldus lamp?**

Aldus lamp is something like a dolphin torch that casts a constant beam but the beam goes up in the air. If you are signalling you press a trigger and bring the beam down and it gives a flashing light and the other ship receives that beam. I remember we lost contact with a convoy going up north of Townsville.

24:30 We couldn't see them. But by flashing the light on the clouds above, he could read my signals. You had to think all the time. (UNCLEAR) those convoys going along and as we were going along, I'd be going side by side with my mate Steve and so we'd get out on the deck and practise our semaphore to one another. We'd tell jokes and tell stories by semaphore.

25:00 Steve was a very good mate. I've got drunk with him on quite a few occasions, you know. But nowadays, I've settled down and I rarely have a drink now. I have a glass of wine on a Sunday night. That's all I have. I rarely go to the pub. Heavens alive. That's not my scene at all.

**And how did your uniform, when you went to the Signallers, distinguish you?**

25:30 **as being in the Water Transport?**

We had a special colour patch that had an anchor on it. And we'd go to a dance and the girls would say, "Are you in a fishing unit?" I've got a...pass it over Cath, will you? We've got our own plaque for the unit, for our association. We are very proud of our association. I fly my flag every morning.

26:00 I own a special flag and I remember when I moved into the village they told me that I couldn't fly a flag without permission. I put the damn thing up and let them try and pull it down.

**And in every other way your uniform was the same as the army's?**

Yes. Except that we had a beret instead of a slouch hat,

26:30 we had a beret which we wore. And I have a beret with a colour patch on it which I wear on Anzac Day. They are a wonderful bunch of fellows. We did a damn good job. I remember I was going to my son's place one day to have a meal and I went into a liquor store out at Woodville Road. And it was Anzac Day

27:00 and I had my beret on and he said, "Water Transport?" And I said, "Yes." He said. "I would like to shake you by the hand." He said, "You fellows got us out of hell many a time.". We didn't only have the wooden ships, we had the landing barges, the landing craft companies. We had the water ambulances and we

used to do the landings.

27:30 When men got in trouble we would send a barge in and get them out. I'm very proud of Water Transport.

**Yes. I was just about to ask you, as another arm of the army what is the main purpose of the Water Transport?**

We carried the supplies, we moved people, we carried the prisoners, and we brought out the wounded.

28:00 There was a saying: "The dark days of New Guinea from Finschhafen to Daru, When the call went out for grub and guns the Small Ships took it true."

Some of our fellows did some marvellous feats. We had fellows who were delivering supplies and in one particular case, they used to load all the supplies onto a barge that had a shallow draught. They couldn't get into the harbour and so we'd tie a rope on the barge and then back a few hundred yards and go flat

28:30 out...full speed. When he got to the reef, he would drop the barge off and it would go in over the reef to drop the supplies onto the beach. And we helped in that way. That was our job. Everyone had a job. We'd move men around from one place to another to where they wanted to go. At times we had a hundred of our troops on our ship.

29:00 We were moving them from one place to another where they were needed. And we'd go out and tow a landing barge and where supplies were needed we'd anchor and send the supplies in with a landing barge and then go on to the next place. We were often well overloaded but it was wonderful.

29:30 **You were telling us earlier on about the first ship that you were on...the Swan.**

Yes.

**What type of class of ship or boat was the Swan?**

It was a wooden ship a hundred and twenty five foot long, a thirty-five foot beam. Fully loaded she'd draw about twelve feet.

30:00 It was powered by twin (UNCLEAR) straight eight diesels and we had four wooden booms for the handling of cargo. There was a Southern Cross diesel to run the winches and a small Rainer diesel for power and water pumping. The bilges were pumped out of the ship

30:30 because all ships take in a bit of water. But I remember when we were on the reef outside Cairns. It was coming up in the hull and it was seeping in where we had been damaged and the bilge pumps couldn't keep up. We had the emergency pump. We were pumping the water out there because we thought she'd die out there. We never though we'd get the damn thing off. But it was just the Yanks came and pulled us off. But it was a mighty big barge.

31:00 But just the feeling of being with them. In times of strife when your mates are there.

**And what type of armament or gun did the Swan have?**

Forward we had two fifty-millimetre Hispano cannon which were

31:30 just like an Oerlikon and aft we had just the one. We were all fully trained. We constantly had gunnery practice and things like that. You just never know when you might need it. We were sailing north from Cairns and we were just getting along, the sea was kind to us, we were enjoying the trip sort of thing. And then suddenly three Beaufighters come

32:00 over, just missing the top of the mast. Then they went into the clouds. And from there they'd send their challenge "OE" and I'd answer "BKER". That told them who we were but it gave us a hell of a fright. It used to be good because there was two men from the engine room and two of us from the deck staff... because signallers were considered deck staff. I still had to stand a wheel watch.

32:30 And we came off watch and we'd sit on the hatch covers and play cards. You could always go aft and see the cook and get a pot of brew. We were lucky because on our ship we had two household sized refrigerators. One driven off electrical power and one off kerosene and we kept our supplies in that. When we went to Thursday Island one time,

33:00 my mate, he went ashore to get the supplies. And the Skipper filled in the figures that we had to get the supplies for. We altered the figures slightly and got a double beer ration. It was good. I can still see them all, you know. A lot of them have gone now. I am still in contact with a lot who sailed with me. He lives in Western Australia now. I went round Australia by caravan about seven years ago and I

33:30 visited him and we talked for three days. I am ever so glad I went because since then his wife has gone into a nursing home with Alheimers and Wally is on his own. I would like to get over to see him again one day and maybe I will. He was a good mate. We went into a pub in Albany there and there was four of us.

34:00 They'd all have beers and I'd have a sarsaparilla. And we had a couple of rounds and finally the barman turned to me and said, "Listen laddie, the milk bar's up the road." And this Wally grabbed him by the front of his shirt and twisted it round and said, "You serve him a sarsaparilla or I'll twist you through this bloody mirror." All these things that happened, you know. The dance they put on at Albany with all the girls there. It was

34:30 lovely to have a dance. I went out with quite a few girls while I was in the forces but then I met Cath and that was it.

#### **And how many crew were onboard the Swan?**

Fourteen crew and it was a good way to live because the officers ate out of the same pot as us. So the cook was good and the officers would go into town and buy extra

35:00 supplies. An extra leg of lamb or something like that and they'd share it round. We got on good with all our officers. Fortunately on our ship it was all...the skipper was called Skipper. The chief engineer was Chief. The rest of us were on Christian names. We were tied up in Brisbane and the ship that tied up next to us was the Blackwood. She was a sister ship of ours.

35:30 She had been built in Western Australia. The captain of that was ex-Navy. All the fellows had to stand to attention and salute and all that. But even though discipline was a little bit lax in some ways, you always showed the officers the respect with which they were due. Coming across from

36:00 Adelaide to Melbourne and I was on the wheel watch. When you went on watch two men went on at the same time. One stayed in the wheelhouse with the officer who was laying the course and things like that and the other went up on what they called the flying bridge to watch out for ships or anything like that. And I had come down off the flying bridge and it was cold and it was raining

36:30 and the wind was blowing and the Chief came up from down below and he said, "What's it like up there, Sid?" I said, "It's bloody awful." He said, "Not so good down below either. She's tossing around a bit." He said, "You'd better have a drink before you go to bed." And he took me in the wardroom and gave me a drink called Curasol, and I remember it went down my throat like a torch procession but it warmed me up. You had that

37:00 feeling between the officers and the men. You were all mates together and all the things that we did together. Poor old Bill Houston. I contacted him...I think it was about every year I used to phone him up. I phoned up about a year ago and Bill had gone. That's why it's so important that these stories be recorded now. Because we've got the story of the Rosemary.

37:30 All the men are gone now. And those men are killed on the site, you know. Killed by the Japanese.

#### **And how did the Swan get crewed up?**

Well the men were selected and when we got over to Western Australia, there we met our skipper Ron Tanner. He was a bit of a devil.

38:00 But he used to drink a lot and gradually the fourteen crew members were there together and we started our training. And about a bit before we left, Swan Brewery sent down a five-gallon keg of beer and the men cleaned that up. I wasn't drinking at the time but the rest cleaned it up. Especially Tanner. He liked his beer. He was a good navigator except the time,

38:30 he put us on the reef, of course. When they put us on the reef, naturally there should have been a court of enquiry and there wasn't a court of enquiry. There was a whitewash. He put it off. It was thought of as compass error. And he was sent north. He was flown up to Port Moresby and given command of another ship. Promoted from Captain to Major. What happened I'll never know.

39:00 But that's what happened. He went up there. He went in charge of a thing called the George Peat. The George Peat had been a vehicle ferry. When I was a boy Dad used to take us down to the Hawkesbury River before there was a bridge across the river. And there was a ferry that ran backwards and forwards. And Dad would take us over there and we would have an

39:30 afternoon tea and come back across on the ferry so that Dad could look down at the stoker and watch the men shovelling the coal. He would remember his days at sea. When the bridge was built the George and the Francis Peat, twin ferries, were no longer needed so the army took them on. The Army put armament on them

40:00 and used them for carrying supplies up around the islands. And when the war was over they were no longer needed for that. They came back to Sydney and they were sent over to New Zealand. And they served over there until a bridge was built. And then the George and the Francis Peat sailed side by side down to Tasmania. Out in the middle of the Tasman Sea the Francis Peat split a seam. The crew were saved

40:30 and the George Peat sailed on to Tasmania and is used to this day. It has been renamed now. It is now called the Mangana and she runs backwards and forwards between Bruny Island and the mainland. But that ship was built...It would be close to ninety years old now and it's still serving as a vehicle ferry. That's about all I can tell you.

## **Well going back to your**

- 41:00 **well actually I think we're just coming to the end of the tape so I might hold that question and we'll change the tape.**
- Twelve o'clock.
- 41:12 End of tape

## **Tape 4**

- 00:31 **Sid. You have an episode at Puckapunyal you'd like to share?**

An episode at Puckapunyal. Every Sunday a soldier had to go on church parade. I remember being on church parade one Sunday and it was a standard question. The Adjutant would step out and say, "Is there any man who does not wish to go to church?" On this occasion, with about six hundred men on parade, one man stepped out. And he said, "Sar Major,

- 01:00 take this man to his squadron lines and dismiss him." It happened the next Sunday. The Adjutant said, "Any man who does not wish to go to church?" And about thirty men stepped out. "He said, Sar Major, take these men to the cookhouse. The walls are to shine. Don't worry about the mess they'll do everything." The next week it was the same question. "Any man who does not wish to go to church?" The same man, the original man, stepped out.
- 01:30 He was taken back to squadron lines and was dismissed. And so when we came back from church parade we had to try and do our washing and things like that. So my mate and I, we got onto a lurk. We found a lot of lurks in our time. We started taking communion service, which was an hour early. You'd go from breakfast, straight to the chapel and go to communion service,
- 02:00 Then you were dismissed. As we were going back from our communion service, the other fellows were just going on church parade. And so we had all the hot water and the use of the tubs to wash your clothes in. It was a little lurk and Steve said, "Don't tell anyone. This is ours." It was very good. But church parade was compulsory and even going over in the troop ship,
- 02:30 there was a chaplain on the troop ship and there were only about thirty who went on church parade but I went. Because I always had my belief in that direction. And I've still got it to this day.

**Sid, I'm interested to hear about your time on the Swan. You said there was a small crew but there were a lot of roles to fulfil.**

Yes.

## **What experience did you have being inducted into each of those different roles?**

- 03:00 Well my role on the ship was I had a wireless watch to keep and I also had to help with the deck duties. I scrubbed down the decks in the morning. If you were in calm seas that happened. In stormy seas it would be washed automatically for you. That happened on many occasions. You had to do a trick on the wheel. You had to do two hours on the wheel and then go up on watch.
- 03:30 But they are all very important duties. Then help with the moving of cargo at times. And at times I'd go and help the cook a bit. When we went up to the tropics, he got an offside, which was very good. Poor old Hec. He wasn't very bright, his offside. We were sailing from Port Moresby across towards Kaikara workshops
- 04:00 and the officer of the watch said, "You've got the wheel, Hec." And he said, "That star out the front. That's a pretty good guide." And he came out about half an hour later and Hec is still following that star and we are about a hundred yards offshore, you know. But all those things come back. They never leave you. I lay in bed at night and think about the things I've done and the places I've been.

## **Can you tell me**

- 04:30 **what you did on wireless watch?**

Wireless watch meant that you had to sit in the wheelhouse with your headphones on. There were different times of the day when they might want to contact you. They wouldn't expect you to sit there for twenty-four hours of the day. And I'd sort of go on and put the headphones on and sit there with the Morse key. If I received any messages then I'd reply to those messages, you know. At times you may be out of range of base.

- 05:00 You'd have to wait till sometime later when you were a bit closer or waiting behind an island or something like that. Then you'd get your message through...your reply. They might want you to go to some different port to pick up supplies or pick up men. And it was just a great life on the sea.

### How were these messages being sent to the ship?

By Morse code. If they wanted to

- 05:30 contact us. Because voice messages don't carry so far but Morse code can go hundreds of miles. It depends on the power of your set. And at times I'd get up and move the aerials around a bit to try and get better reception. If they wanted to contact me they could always do it in those hours. They knew... I'd sort of come on from twenty-one hundred at night
- 06:00 and about nine o'clock was the normal time they'd get me. And every morning I had to pick up the radio message to check the chronometer. It was used to set the course of the ship and it would come on. On the sixth dot the time will be two hundred GMT [Greenwich Mean Time] and I'd be there watching and I'd say, "Now", and they'd get how many seconds out the chronometer was.
- 06:30 Because they used the section to get the position of the ship and if the chronometer wasn't working right your position would be wrong. But our officers were well trained, very well trained. And they never got us into real trouble, except the time they put us on a reef, of course. He had had too much to drink before he sailed I think. I don't know, but he
- 07:00 ignored the warnings from the other ships. He thought he knew it all. Once we got back to Cairns, the other three ships remaining, they just sailed up through the passage and strait to Bougainville. On one occasion they wanted to get some landing barges from Brisbane to the Solomon Islands. And they took them up to Townsville and from Townsville there were about twelve barges and they sent a small tug along
- 07:30 with them. They went through the open sea...sixty-six foot landing barges. From Townsville straight through to the Solomon Islands. Fortunately they didn't get any very very heavy seas or they would have been in real trouble. On one occasion they told me each of these barges had three V8 motors driving them. If one of the motors packed up they would just winch it over the side and put another one on. Everyone carried a spare. V8 motors were expendable. There were that many millions of them made.
- 08:00 Fortunately we had the American production lines. Otherwise we would have been in strife, without the Yanks. They talk a lot and they waited a hell of a time. They didn't come at the first war until they thought the time was right I suppose. In the second war they came in when they were attacked at Pearl Harbour. We have been to Pearl Harbour and we've seen the wrecks laying on their sides
- 08:30 and those wrecks will never be moved now, of course. Those bodies down there will remain forever. It was just a day of infamy. That's all there is to it. The Japanese had to do something because the Americans had cut their oil supply down to one tenth what they wanted. And without oil they couldn't live. That's why the Japanese came in. Personally I think that's why
- 09:00 the Japanese came in. Because they realized they had to come in. Whether they wanted to join Hitler and Mussolini or not I don't know but that's what happened. They came in but I was glad we had the Yanks. But the Yanks had so much supply. When we were in Milne Bay I can recall being
- 09:30 tied up in Milne Bay and seeing the Yanks. They had landing barges latched onto them and they would take them out into deep water and scuttle them to get rid of their surplus supplies. They knew the war was ending. In my opinion the campaign on Bougainville was a damn waste because the Americans had pushed the Japanese back and they had the Japanese on Bougainville completely isolated. They couldn't get any supplies through.
- 10:00 They had no medical supplies and things like that. They were losing men because of disease. I'm sympathetic with the Japanese. I can recall being on a coach tour. I don't know...about seven years ago I suppose. And the coach director, right out of the blue, he got up and said, "What do you people think about the atom bomb?" And no one said anything and I said,
- 10:30 "I think we made a mistake." I said I think they made a mistake. I've seen the Japanese and what they did in the war. They should have waited until they could bomb from one end of Japan to the other." It's a terrible thing to say, I know, but the Japanese had become cannibalistic and it was very wrong the way they conducted the war. And then when it was all over their children at school weren't told the truth. I believe
- 11:00 they are learning a bit of the truth now. But the Japanese were put up to people as being good soldiers, you know. But they were mongrels in lots of ways. I suppose at times some of our fellows did some terrible things too but nothing like that. I hate the thought of it.
- 11:30 The mind goes back, you know.

**Well Sid. If I can take you back to your first vessel the Swan. You said earlier that it was armed. On top of the earlier training you had received in weaponry, were you trained in the use of the guns on the ship itself?**

Yes. We were all trained on the guns because you had to be prepared to step in if a man got into trouble. We had all fired the

12:00 Hispanos and the training was good in that regard. They were a bit lax in one way when we had to fire in Albany Harbour and only a couple of fellows knew how to use the fire extinguishers to get the fire out and we got it repaired on our way again. We did a damn good job.

**Can you tell me about the training on the ship?**

12:30 Well it was systematic. We had to learn how to fit the magazine on, how to aim the thing, and how to press the damn trigger. If you saw you weren't getting your target you had to move your aim a little bit. But we were all trained.

**What size were the guns?**

They were fifty millimetre. Was it fifty millimetre?

13:00 Half a centimetre. Yes. They were half a centimetre Hispano Cannon. And we used to lead the drums with one armour piercing. Each shell had a different colour code. One armour piercing, one high explosive and one incendiary. Armour piercing, high explosive and incendiary in case you had to...some of the ships were attacked by aircraft up there

13:30 and we lost some ships. I've got a record of one of our ships that hit a mine and there were no survivors. We were lucky.

**The different types of armour that you've mentioned, for what purpose were they distinguished?**

For anti-aircraft chiefly, but some of our ships were fitted with

14:00 twin Brownings and they were a much smaller calibre in case they came up and got...in the case of our Rosemary they got into real trouble. And they were lucky. By the time they got that ship out, it had a hundred and eighty bullet holes and some of the equipment had been smashed by bullets coming in. They fought and they won. They managed to get their men out and then they radioed for a Catalina to come in and take their wounded

14:30 away, when they got out to sea again.

**For what purpose would you have had to use incendiary bullets? And armour piercing for that matter?**

Well if you were fighting aircraft coming in, the armour piercing would have hit him. The high explosive would have exploded when it hit and the high incendiary would have started a fire.

15:00 But we had experiences. There's a story on one of our books about this ship that was going along dropping off supplies and the Japanese had come in and followed the fluorescent track of the propellers and machine gunned the ships. They used to take a native boy along and they'd say, "Japan men. Him come." He could hear him coming in.

15:30 They'd cut the engines and turn off to port and they'd spray the bullets and there was nothing there.

**What contact did your vessels have with enemy craft?**

Well some of our ships had direct contact with enemy craft. We weren't a hand-to-hand fighting unit. We were supplies.

16:00 There always had to be the man behind the gun to keep him there. And when I was on base at Torokina, when I came back from leave, we could hear the fighting up in the hills. But the island I was on was Purata Island. A funny thing happened there too. At the entrance of the harbour there was Purata Island and Torokina Island which made Torokina Harbour and to get into the harbour all ships came

16:30 in on the northern end and went out on the southern end. The entrance was marked by two dim lights. And this time, Harry Warder brought his trawler in but some others had been out and they'd been fishing. And they masked the top light and all you could see was the dim light from our cookhouse and the south light.

17:00 They came in about six knots. He was straight up on the reef. There was a hell of a crash. He was coming in and I was in the mess at the time. And the Sergeant ran out and said, "Is that you, Harry. Come in." It took two days to drag his trawler off. They never found out who was fishing. He just up-anchored and went inside again. But it was a good base.

17:30 I was still on there when the war ended. And the singer Gracie Fields came up and put on a concert for the men. And so they rigged up a stage and they put some trucks in on an angle so you could sit on the backs of the trucks. I got a good seat. I got over there an hour early and I got a seat on the back of a truck. And Gracie Fields was to come out and the officer walked out first off all and he said, "Be kind to Gracie.

18:00 She came over in a DC3 from Lae today and she's got a bit of a frog in her throat." And with that he walked off. and he said that she had been out to the hospital and she sang a song in every ward in the hospital. And there were five wards in the hospital and he said, "Now she's come here to entertain you

tonight." She sang about ten songs for us. She had on a pink evening dress and a white flower in her hair and in my mind I can still see her.

- 18:30 She was beautiful and she gave us all the old Gracie Field songs. 'We Won the Battle of Waterloo', 'Grandpa's Bagpipes', "'The Biggest Aspidistra in the World'" and when she sung 'Ave Maria', her voice broke right at the top note and being a trooper, she said, "Got there (UNCLEAR)". And she worked her way to the side of the stage and she sung her last song which was Gracie's theme song. 'Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye' and as she finished that song.
- 19:00 she did a catherine wheel from one side of the stage to the other with her dress flying. And when she got to the other side of the stage she went like that, you know. She was wonderful. Everyone fell in love with Gracie that night. There would have been about a thousand people there watching. Of course later on she went back and married an Italian fellow and went to live on the Isle of Capri and there she passed away. She was a wonderful trooper. I can still see her. We used to
- 19:30 have concert parties. Harry Dearth had a concert party up there at one time. Went to Milne Bay for a while and the pictures used to be on nearly every night. You can go and put a groundsheet on but it was mostly raining and you'd sit with a groundsheet and a hat on. I'm just trying to remember other things that happened.
- 20:00 My mate Steve's boat came into Port Moresby while I was there. And I remember he sent a boat over to pick me up and I remember we got well and truly drunk that night. I stayed on his ship. But you were so far from home. I would never
- 20:30 have done that at home. If I hadn't gone in the forces I probably would never have got drunk. But you get away with your mates and you didn't know whether you were going to make it back home. That was the main thing. You were a bit careless at times. All the time in the army, I just wanted to get home and get it over with but we were lucky we won. That's all. I remember last Anzac Day,
- 21:00 I went down to Martin Place and there was a fellow standing there with a 'No War' sign. So I walked past him and I thought, 'Damn you' and I walked back and stood in front of him and I said, "Listen mate. If we hadn't gone to war we would be growing rice now and your mothers, your wives and your daughters would have been concubines for the Japanese. Australia would have been full of slant-eyed kids.
- 21:30 So wake up to your blasted self and go home." And he didn't move and so I went over to a policeman there and the policeman said, "He's got his rights, you know. He can stay there." I said, "Go over and tell him this. There are men coming down here shortly who were prisoners of the Japanese and I have no doubt at all that they will belt him to the ground and jump on him. So for the good of his health, why don't you advise him to pack up and go home."
- 22:00 Sure enough five minutes later the fellow packed up and went home. The copper had told him what I had said. Because I have had friends who were prisoners of the Japanese and they were just so bitter. But the one man who has every reason to be bitter was Sir Edward Dunlop, Weary. And I recently saw his memorial in a park down south and even though when it was all over he said he couldn't hate them. But a lot of us
- 22:30 could have. Especially when I saw the war crimes trials. I can't understand how one person could do that to another human. But they did and that's all behind us now. We've got to live in peace. I was glad that our Prime Minister sent our men to Iraq. Because everyone has that right to live in peace and decency.
- 23:00 Those people, there were just so oppressed. And I'm proud of the forces we've got today, the way they conduct themselves. Everything. You must live in respect. You must live in peace.

**Sid. You mentioned something earlier that I found interesting. I would like to take it up again and that's that you regarded**

- 23:30 **that your service onboard ships was carrying supplies and you weren't in as much danger as front line troops. Still, supplies make a reasonable target and I'm wondering what threats were considered from the enemy when you were onboard ship?**
- 24:00 Well we were constantly worried about being attacked from the air. Some of our Water Transport ships were attacked from the air and some were lost in enemy action. We lost some good men. But that was your job. You had to be prepared to protect yourself. We were lucky we were never attacked but we could have been. We could have been.
- 24:30 We could have been down in Bass Strait when the submarine was just a couple of hundred miles away. It could have been us and he would have just come up and blown us out of the water. You were constantly in that danger but you didn't think about it. You had a job to do and you had to be prepared to do it.

**I imagine that's very much the case. Although part of your job is to be,**

- 25:00 **I also imagine, alert of the possibility of an attack?**

Yes.

**Was it possible to not think about that eventuality?**

You thought about it all the time. You had to be on watch all the time but we didn't lose as many men on Water Transport as the infantry and stuff like that did but we did lose some. I

- 25:30 didn't turn eighteen until 1943. I got up there when the bulk of the fighting was over. But still if need be, I was there. I was there to do a job and proud to do it. But I remember going up the coast north of Cooktown and you see ships that had been wrecked on the reef and that. Your navigation
- 26:00 had to be good. You only had to have the one bad thing that was going on with the reef. My God we were lucky to get out of that lot. She could have broken up. As soon as we hit it was (UNCLEAR all the time, in case you had to get into the water. But we were lucky. We had ships standing by. And I always remember when the tug was making
- 26:30 that final effort to get us off, there were about four lifeboats just standing ready in deep water if they were needed. Because again you think about your mates. You protect your mates. But we were ever so grateful that the skipper worked out that if Poolta came in and put a line on the stern it would hold us. When we first hit, the Chief Engineer went below and the thought he could have got
- 27:00 her off with power in the props, but he walked up to me after and said, "I think I might have done some damage to those engines. They are gunning at four, nine hundred and they are supposed to be going at thirteen hundred." But he didn't have a hope, of course. And when they were finally getting us off, he was running the port engine full astern but the starboard prop was out of the water. I still don't know how
- 27:30 the hell they got us off. Just the top of the tide. Right at the top. And they winched us free. They came along side us then, the tug, and they called up, "Is everything alright? How're your bilge pumps holding?" And we said, "Now we're off, the bilge pumps will hold." We had hand pumps going as well. There were four hand pumps. and we were manning them all the time because the water was coming up into the engine room.
- 28:00 And we were just damn lucky. It was just the big tug. Otherwise we would have been wrecked out there. The fellows who were wrecked on Woodlark Island, they were there for three days before the aircraft went over and saw them. The ship hadn't arrived, you see. She was due at...I think she was due at Jacquinot Bay and she hadn't arrived so they went out looking for them. Where are they? And they saw the men there and just the wreckage,
- 28:30 floating up on the beach. They lost that ship. It was a good ship too. They were all good ships. But I was so glad it ended because if it hadn't ended when it did, our unit would have - we were gradually packing up - we were moving, our unit would have invaded Japan. The Americans expected to lose one and a half million men in that invasion. And that's right, the atom bomb stopped all that,
- 29:00 of course. I have a friend in America. He was on an aircraft carrier four hundred mile off the Japanese coast. He was sending aircraft in to bomb Japan all the time from there. But he was a good friend over there because our son went over there as an exchange student and he...so we went over and we visited. So he told us his story and he
- 29:30 had photos of his ship as well. But all service men are reasonably proud because you are prepared to put your shoulders to where they are needed and do your duty. I was very conscious of that all the time when I was on that ship.

**I'm wondering Sid, how was the position and the condition of your ship when it hit the reef known by the tug and the other ships?**

- 30:00 It was fully loaded so well down in the water. She went up and she fell to a sort of a list. And we knew we were in real trouble. That's when I brought out Mum's Christmas cake and we had a cup of tea. Because we knew that the tide was falling so we had no hope of getting her off then. We radioed for a tug. I wasn't the only radio onboard. We had another.
- 30:30 He was working on it too. But they took the radio off when we got back to Cairns. The big one. And I was on my own then. It was quite a responsibility to be radio operator of a ship. But everyone was responsible. The officers were laying the course and things like that. But our skipper, Captain Montana
- 31:00 had been in the Royal Navy before he came to Australia. Our Bosun, Dick Price, had been in the Royal Navy. He was discharged from the Royal Navy because he was caught on a bombing raid in Alexandria. When he worked, he used to wear a leather sling on his left arm to help support his arm there. He wanted to go to sea and
- 31:30 he was a good guy. He passed away last year. One by one they are going and I hope I'm the last man to walk down Anzac Day with that flag because life is just so good.

**I would like to ask you more about your role**

- 32:00 **as a signaller or a wireless controller on the ship?**

Yes.

**What were...what did you use to signal?**

A 3BZ radio. It was a very good set. Built by AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] here in Sydney. And at a certain time each day, I forget what time now, but at twenty-one hundred hours, nine o'clock at night, base would always contact me

32:30 to see how things were going and things like that. And you just replied, "Everything going OK." "Yes. She's right Sid. We'll be on time." Wherever they wanted to take supplies. When we did our first trip around Bougainville, that was supplies of mostly bully beef and rice to keep the Japanese alive until they could be collected. They had to sent the prison ships around to collect them

33:00 and get them into Torokina and put them in a big holding compound. There were fifteen thousand Japanese in that holding compound and then there was about three ships just taking them down to this Fauro Island. I remember I visited a fellow two weeks ago. He was a radio operator in his ship. He was on Dora and I was on Daisy. And

33:30 he was coming in from a run and I was taking a load down. And we passed just at the entrance of the harbour. I was going out and he was going in and he leant over the side and said, "The sea's great Sid. Have a good time." I saw him a fortnight ago. He's not as well as I am. He's put on too much weight. I went to see him and he had a beer in his hand and I thought to myself, 'There's your weight, mate.'

34:00 But you don't mention that. You don't want to offend him. I've been through signal school with him. We just got different ships that's all. I was with him on the troop train going across the Nullarbor Plain for two days and we got two meal a day and we all stopped at the one place and the natives would come in and they'd get the spare food.

34:30 **What other instruments would you use to signal?**

Semaphore. That's your flag waving and your radio to communicate between the ships. But I was quite good at semaphore and radio. I picked up my Morse speed. I got about fifteen words a minute which for general work, it was

35:00 adequate.

**And what was...Semaphore is something unfamiliar to me. Can you give me an explanation of it?**

It is coloured flags on the end of a stick. You wave your arms around and A B C D E. You never forget those things, you know. And then it's H, I, with two flags out.

35:30 I always enjoyed signalling. I always enjoyed it. Especially going along the coast with my mate telling stories as we went along.

**When would you use the semaphore as opposed to your wireless?**

Whenever you wanted to communicate with someone who could see you. When you were outside. You might wave him up. To wave him up you'd just stand and wave your arms like that. And the fellows would say to me, "Hey, Steve wants to talk to you."

36:00 And then I'd get a message from him. "We're getting low on fuel." or something like that. We used to carry reserve fuel with us in drums lashed on the deck. And I remember we were sailing from Cairns across to Torokina and we had a full load. We had drums lying everywhere. If you wanted to go from one end of the ship to the other you had to climb over the drums to get there. It was a good life. I loved it.

36:30 I only ever got to see it again once. We did a Fairstar Cruise up in the islands. It was great to feel the moving deck underneath your feet again. During my time at sea, we had enough of them. At times you could hardly stand up, if you got a beam sea and she was rolling. And then we had vents on the aft deck and I remember one time we were in a storm at sea and the vent had been torn off and she rolled over and she poured solid water

37:00 into the middle of the mess deck table.

**I imagine the radio you used was a fairly sophisticated piece of equipment.**

Yes. It was a sophisticated piece of equipment. When we came down from Milne Bay, bringing the ship back,

37:30 an officer came aboard and had a look at it and then he gave me a different set. It was a crystal set... you had to work the crystal to get the frequency. He gave me a different one and I had to report to him all the way down to Brisbane. The code call was JMP. I'll never forget that. I have a wonderful memory for things like that. Our emergency code number was ZK5EO. That meant we were in trouble. That's

38:00 neither here nor there but our ordinary code was BKFR. That was our code.

**And what did that represent?**

It just represented our ship. If an aircraft came over and challenged us, which they often did, the navy would come out and challenge with a Fairfield launch. It would pop out from behind an island and send out a challenge and you'd answer and if you didn't have that challenge right you'd be in trouble. If you had the challenge right it was all OK.

38:30 **What would happen Sid, if your radio was damaged by water or by accident?**

Well it couldn't be damaged by water because things like the wheelhouse...if they got underwater you'd be in strife then. No doubt they'd send an aircraft carrier looking for you. They expected you to report in and that's all there was to it.

39:00 **And how often were you required to do that?**

Just every day. At twenty-one hundred hours, nine o'clock, I had to contact base. When I came back on the Almiston I was on base for about a fortnight and I hated it. Even though there was a swimming pool there enclosed by a reef

39:30 I still hated it, but every morning you'd go on roll call and you'd walk past taking your pannikin with you. The officer, no the sergeant would give you Atebrin tablets in your hand and the cook would give you your pannikin of orange juice. And then you had to step in front of the officer, put your Atebrin tablets in and swallow them down. The Atebrin tablet used to send you a yellow colour in your skin.

40:00 Some people didn't like that. They might try and avoid taking their tablets. On our base, you had to take your tablets and that's all there was to it. But base was good. There was a big coconut tree in behind the tent line, while I was there, and I decided to get some coconuts. It was easy to get up but when I came down I scratched all my chest and my arms coming down. The natives...we used to carry a native boy all the time with us round the islands to help the cook,

40:30 he used to enjoy it. He enjoyed the travelling and he enjoyed the good tucker. You see the natives, they chew a thing called betel nut. It is like a drug and it makes them drunk and it sends their teeth red. When we went to Simara Island, when we did our Fairstar cruise, I said to one of the girls there "Are you chewing betel nut?" "Yes Master. Bad."

41:00 I never ever tried it myself. I didn't want to. But...

**Well on that note of talking about food, I think it might be time for us to break for lunch.**

41:15 **End of tape**

## Tape 5

00:31 **Sid. I would like to take you right back to the beginning of your war experience. You mentioned that your father had been a stoker in the navy in the First World War?**

Yes.

**You also had other family members who served. What did you know about their wartime service and their experiences.**

01:00 Dad went in the navy and his first ship was the HMAS Brisbane. It was a four funnel light cruiser built to British design. It was built on Port Philip Bay at Hobson's Bay dry dock. From there they sailed out around New Zealand and Tasmania. I think it was just to show the people, 'Look what we can build here in Australia.' And then they went to Albany and they joined the fleet of

01:30 boats which was convoying the troop ships to the Middle East. He went from there to Colombo, Madras and India and he went up through the Suez Canal. They stopped at a place on the Suez Canal but the name escapes me. He said that they coaled ship there.

02:00 They had no mechanical loading facilities so the ship was coaled by a group of natives who formed a sort of human conveyer belt. And they put the coal in baskets and they passed it from man to man. And as they passed it to the next man they'd chant. "Ichalli, Ichalli, Ichalli." And Dad said it went on for a day and a half and it drove him mad. And from there they sailed up to the top of the Suez Canal and to Alexandria.

02:30 And there my father was able to get a trip out to the pyramids. He went across to Ismailia, which I think was in Greece [actually, Ismailia is in Egypt] and then he went to Malta. Malta had been beleaguered then by the Germans. In fact I've got a photo there of a ship sinking off Malta. It is a British ship. And from there he went out

03:00 past Gibraltar to the Atlantic Ocean. The convoy worked in the Atlantic Ocean, up through the English Channel and they went to Portsmouth. While they were in Portsmouth, Dad got leave and went up to Scotland to see relatives up there. And when he came back King George V came down to the ship, and

he went through and lined all the crew up, shook them all by the hand, and gave them all a

03:30 Certificate of Appreciation. I still have that certificate today. It is part of my collection of war history. And then he came home but he didn't...correction. He didn't go to...When he got to Malta, he transferred from the HMAS Brisbane to the flagship, the HMAS Australia. That's where he went to Portsmouth and out to the Atlantic. When he came home on the HMAS Australia,

04:00 When he sailed in through those heads he got down on his knees and he said to everyone. "I'll never go outside those blasted heads again." Dad really hated the sea. He went to the navy to serve but he hated the sea. Then he transferred...He went up to New Guinea. There he joined the Una, which had been the German Commandant's personal yacht. And they went sailing all around

04:30 the islands off there - Thursday Island, Fiji. There he transferred to the HMAS Margaret. which was a coal-burning minesweeper. Why they had it up there at that time I don't know. By coincidence, he was, at that time, courting Margaret Jones, who he married. My mother. He came home and he married in 1920.

05:00 I've got a certificate there. It says 1920 or 21. Anyway Dad married slightly after the war when he was discharged. And he and Mum bought a house through the repatriation department at Roseville. There they had their first five children and from there they moved to Mt Colah as I've

05:30 said before.

**I understand he was a stoker onboard.**

Yes.

**And from what I have heard that's an arduous and dangerous profession onboard a ship?**

Well it was dangerous in the fact that if the ship was torpedoed, you were down below the water level. They used to call them 'Shovel Engineers' but Dad just...

06:00 He went into the navy to serve but he never really enjoyed his navy service.

**I'm wondering if he told you any of the less glamorous tails of wartime service?**

He said he was on the Brisbane and they all had to line up for what they called division, which was church service in the navy, and

06:30 the Commander used to go along and there was a barber aboard and he used to walk along and say, "Haircut, haircut, haircut, and haircut." And so when it was all over and they phoned him up at home they all got in the phone box and said, "Get your bloody hair cut." He told us the story of if you were on a navy ship, the toilets were called the heads and if you were detailed to clean the heads for the day you were called 'Captain of the Heads.' And this fellow wrote home and he told

07:00 his mother that he'd been promoted to Captain of the Heads (UNCLEAR).

**Sid, you had mentioned before that one....if not more of your family's relations were killed in the First World War. I 'm wondering what impression you had of the war in general?**

War, in general growing up,

07:30 I was sad that I had never ever met Uncle Herbie. Mum told me that he was a very, very, nice fellow. But I still got to see Uncle Charlie, who was Herbie's brother. He went to France also but he got out of it. Then of course we had quite a bit to do with Dad's brother, Uncle Hughie. He lost the son on the HMAS Perth. My father didn't follow the RSL [Returned and Services League].

08:00 But he used to march on Anzac Day. I've got a photo there of him walking along ever so proud and Mum'd take the seven of us kids down to see him walking up the hill, towards the Town Hall. And they would have a reunion ever year. We used to drive Dad and his mate, Charlie Pilcher, so they could be at the reunion.

08:30 And we'd drop them off and we'd go for runs and we'd have a meal and come back and pick them up a couple of hours later. Dad's last reunion, he was crippled up with arthritis and Charlie had gone. He was on his own and I pulled up outside Navy House in Margaret Street and said to the man on guard out the front, "Would you help me get my Dad down the stairs?" He came and helped me get Dad downstairs and there were about fifteen of them left.

09:00 And I said, "Well how long before I call and pick them up." They said, "No, stay with us." And I sat down and stayed in the last Brisbane reunion that Dad had. We lost Dad when he was eighty-three and held his hand as he breathed his last. Wonderful father, wonderful man. Both Cath and I were lucky. We both had wonderful parents.

09:30 Poor old Dad. He breathed his last and Cath said, "He's gone. And I'll go and get the matron for you." He was in a nursing home and I said, "No. Leave me with him for a few minutes." And I relived it all again. The wonderful life that I could thank him for. He was a wonderful father. He worked hard. He worked all his life as

- 10:00 a paper seller. He lived in The Rocks and he used to deliver papers for a fellow after school. And this fellow got ill so Dad took over the stall. It wasn't really a stall. He used to stand against a pylon selling Suns, Mirrors and Woman's Weeklies. That's all they sold. And when Dad
- 10:30 went to war he got his younger brother, Jack, to look after the stand and when he came back they formed a partnership. They used to sell at Manly Wharf, Circular Quay, from half past two to half past six every night and until twelve on Saturdays. And that's how Dad earned his living and was able to raise seven children. So that's a lot of papers passed through his hands. He was a wonderful Dad.
- 11:00 **Having had some contact with earlier war veterans, what did you foresee might become of you in the war in which you were involved?**
- I saw the mateship that existed between those men and I knew that if ever a war started again
- 11:30 I would probably be in it. And I'm ever so glad that I was in it because it gives you a certain amount of prestige. That it does. People look up to you a little bit. Especially living in the village here with so many returned servicemen. A fortnight ago we went to a service for Col, who lived over
- 12:00 the road from me and he had been a tail gunner in bombers during the war and they didn't have a very good lifespan, tail gunners. They were the number one target, sort of thing. But it's sad to see those fellows go but we have such a happy association between those that remain. That's the important thing. You don't march on Anzac Day
- 12:30 and that to remember the war in any way at all. You march to remember those that have been before you ,if you are amongst those that still remain.
- What about the time leading up to war? You saw your own father marching on Anzac Days. Did you in any way see war as glorious?**
- Never. Never. Because I always had that thought in my mind that
- 13:00 Uncle Herbie died in the war and I never ever met him and that was sad. No, you never looked forward to a war but if it came then I was going to be in it and that's all there was to it. I wasn't going to sit back. I could have sat back. In the main work in the printing trade, the company would have looked after that side of it. Not for me.
- Well now you mention that, I understand that you were in a Reserved**
- 13:30 **Occupation?**
- Yes. Because we were doing printing work for the Government and The Land newspaper, that could have kept me back. But I argued and I got out of that one. I was the last apprentice from The Land to go. No one followed me. Before I went into the forces there were three of us apprentices. We rode our pushbikes
- 14:00 south and we camped for a week at a place called Werri Beach near Gerringong. And unfortunately both those fellows have passed on so I'm the survivor. But I used to...when the children were younger and I was younger, I used to go on Anzac morning to Hornsby RSL
- 14:30 and to the dawn service at the cenotaph. And then we'd go into the RSL and we'd have a light breakfast. They provide that. But now I go down to the cenotaph every Anzac Day. I'm there at quarter to eight because our unit, our association, we place a wreath on the cenotaph at eight o'clock and I'm glad to be part of that. There were some wonderful fellows. I've got a mate who lost a leg before he went
- 15:00 into the Army. He had been in the militia and he was involved in a vehicle accident and he lost a leg. But he got an artificial leg and they kept him in the militia. The war started and he joined the AIF. How he got in I don't know. But he's the fellow who...He was climbing a mast on his boat and he fell and broke his good leg. He was laying in hospital
- 15:30 and Sir Ninian Stevens visited him in hospital. I've got a photo of that. And I'm still in touch with Frank. We're going down to have a meal with him next Wednesday.
- By the time of your enlistment in 1943, the war had been already underway for some years.**
- Yes.
- What did you know of what was happening?**
- 16:00 We got the newspaper reports and we saw the casualty lists. Australia lost a lot of men and every day in the Daily Telegraph, the casualty lists would be there and we might see someone who we knew who had gone. And the fighting in the Middle East was very bad. Tobruk was a wonderful thing for Australia to be able to hang in there. But that's where
- 16:30 Water Transport more or less started there, in Tobruk. They were carrying the supplies from the boats into the beach and they lost a few boats and lost a lot of men there, doing that job. But it was duty. It was duty. And I was so glad to be able to serve. And if a war started again I would like to think that my

sons or my grandsons

17:00 would don a uniform. Because it's a wonderful uniform. You're fighting for something you believe in.

**What did you believe in when you enlisted?**

Pardon.

**What did you believe in to prompt you to enlist?**

When I enlisted I believed that we had a country that was free and I was prepared to fight for it.

17:30 I was just following in my father's footsteps and my brothers as well. They were both in uniform. When Les was up around the Philippines, Leyte Gulf and things like that with the Aussie [HMAS Australia]. There were up to four hundred naval ships in a convoy. It was hard to believe that the convoys could go forty mile long and the Yanks

18:00 lost a lot of equipment. They lost a lot of ships and a lot of men but their production line was such that they could replace those ships. And they had so many men as well that they could bring in. I've just about finished mate.

**Well before we do I'd like to know, especially in the point of your enlistment, your wanting to be involved**

18:30 ...as you say you were aware and you were informed of the losses that Australia had incurred.

Yes.

**What concerns did you have for your own safety?**

Well I knew that if I had to die for my country I had to die for my country. That was it because I had so much here to try and protect and

19:00 I wouldn't deliberately put myself in danger but if danger came I would face it. That was the feelings of most men that I have spoken to. If your number was up, your number was up but it was a great life really. Because of the friendships that we formed. And I was lucky the places that I saw. We

19:30 stopped at an island and we weren't allowed ashore. It was a mission island. But at times we'd be able to get ashore and have a walk on the beach and a swim and some fresh fruit might have been going. And once we traded a big forty-pound Spanish mackerel with some natives for some fresh fruit and vegetables. Mangoes, pawpaws, coconuts, and stuff like that.

20:00 It was very good. Water Transport was good in that way. Where the troops on the shore were lying in the mud we always had a bunk and we could get to it. One time I was on duty for forty-eight hours straight. But you had the stamina because of the training to get you through that. But the bed was very good when you got to it.

20:30 And I was lucky. When I first went on the Swan I had a bunk in the focsle. But once we got to Melbourne I was given a bunk in a four berth cabin aft. Which was very good indeed. You had a porthole at your head. Wonderful.

**On that note, of the training you received, I'm wondering about the level at which you passed out of your training**

21:00 **and your graduation, so to speak? How was it you were passed fit to complete your training? What were the examinations of what you had been taught?**

The only examination I ever went to in the Army was the signalling examination. I sat the signalling examination down in Mt Martha. And I was determined to top that school. I sat it and I topped it.

21:30 That meant I got the first ship. That was quite an achievement really. You just all trained together. You had to sleep out at night in the bush. That didn't worry me. And you always have someone with a wireless there who would phone up and report your map position and they would come out with some stew and stuff and some bread and stuff to keep you going.

22:00 It was fun driving Bren gun carriers though. Catching rabbits. I remember we were in the holding area, south of Seymour. We came to a ford one day which was running pretty high with water. It had rained. And the corporal said to me, "Give her a wash, Keithie." And I drove into this wall of water and it just went up and over the carrier. They were so designed.

22:30 They could go through stuff like that. The water just fell away though the holes in the bottom, sort of thing. They were a lot of fun, Bren gun carriers. But the best fun of all was just being at sea. Going from island to island and dropping off supplies. Meeting different men as you moved them around.

23:00 We got to the Japanese base at Kahili, down the bottom of Bougainville. And we went through looking for stuff we could grab. And the Skipper found a safe. He dragged it down to the beach and hit the hinges with an explosive called a Quarry Monobel. And he stepped back and let it off and the door

23:30 opened and there was nothing in the damn thing. Just some old newspapers. That was it. There were a lot of laughs at times. A lot of good fun.

**As you mentioned earlier you were lucky to, in the end, be in the Water Transport because you had enlisted in the AIF and were training with a motor regiment in the Armoured Division.**

Yes. Yes.

24:00 **You received training there for radio operating.**

Yes.

**What differences were there between that training and radio operating training for the ship?**

There was no difference. They were both specialized but whereas in a tank...on your radio in a tank you had three radios really. One was the intercom. You talked to your mates inside the tank.

24:30 And the second was from tank to tank, which would carry about two or three hundred yards. You'd talk to the tank next to you. But the main radio, of course, was back to headquarters. It was a very powerful radio. And the Matilda Tanks, they were terrible damn things. I've got hearing problems now, which I blame on the Matilda tanks. In fact, Veterans' Affairs have accepted and I get an extra pension because of that.

25:00 Because when you are sitting in a tank as an operator gunner you have a screaming diesel over your left shoulder and another over your right shoulder, with no partitions in between, you could see them, and the noise inside that tank was absolutely horrific. But you had headphones on. But the noise went in through the bones. But that's what the hearing service tells me. You had no chance. Once you were in the tank you were going to have hearing troubles. I'd just started

25:30 on a course of tank driving when I had the chance to go to Water Transport. It was the best thing that ever happened to me....to get out of those tanks. Because as I said I would be stranded in the desert in Western Australia. And no one wanted to go over there.

**I'm quite unfamiliar with the Matilda Tank. Can you describe it for me?**

The tank weighed twenty-eight ton. It was an infantry tank really. It was a tank that went in and if an infantry

26:00 line was moving ahead a tank went with them. And only at a maximum speed of fifteen miles an hour. And they sort of blasted away and made room for the infantry to come through. They were very noisy. They were built in England and as I said, twenty-eight ton. There's a few of them on display. There is one up at Singleton that I have seen and one in the war museum in Canberra [Australian War Memorial] and we also went through the Armoured Division

26:30 Museum at Puckapunyal. They've got one sitting in there. But our unit, we also had other tanks as well. We had the Grant and the Lee, which were heavy tanks with the old petrol engine. Ours was diesel. And they had a high-speed light tank, the Stuart. It is great to be seventy-eight and to be able to remember all these names and have this recall,

27:00 you know, for the things that I've done. But I never ever travelled in those tanks at all. The only tank that I travelled in was the Matilda. It was a very efficient tank.

**What firepower did it have?**

A Besa machine gun...Which was a point 303 machine gun with about six hundred and fifty rounds per minute

27:30 and it also had a two pounder, a two-pounder gun, a tank attack gun it was really. But you had the one control to work the revolving of the turret and two triggers. One for the Besa and the other for the two pounder. We did quite a bit of training in them on the AFV range at Puckapunyal.

28:00 **Which range I'm sorry?**

AFV, Armoured Fighting Vehicle at Puckapunyal. I had a couple of mates that went overseas in the Matilda tanks. They went to New Guinea but it was a stupid move because a couple of hundred tons, they just sunk in the mud and they didn't do much good at all up there. But they had to try something.

28:30 The Japanese had the light tanks. I saw the Japanese light tanks after the war. The Matilda was too heavy. The Stuarts would have been the right tanks to take in there. The Stuart only weighed about eight tons. The Matilda...The Bren gun carrier was about four ton. It was very manoeuvrable and as I said, a lot of fun to drive.

29:00 **It sounds as though you had your fair share of armament training during your earlier times. But your time onboard ship gave you less time to develop those skills?**

It gave us less opportunity. All we had to do on the ships was train and be prepared to use it if necessary. But the guns were always well maintained and we always had to do our regular training on

them. It was just good. That's all.

29:30 I don't know if there is anything else I can tell you. I've gone through the lot, Chris.

**Trust me. I've got more questions. I'm wondering just from your telling of your training at Puckapunyal, you enjoyed your training on the Bren gun carrier. Was not firing a weapon in combat something of a disappointment for you?**

No. No. I

30:00 didn't want to fire guns but if necessary I was prepared to fire them. I was trained to fire them but no, I wasn't disappointed at all. My job was radio operating. And I did that well, very well. I always remember when we came back from the reef and Montana said, "Some departments let me down, but the signals didn't". It meant everything to me.

30:30 **What was the most difficult circumstance under which you had to operate your radio?**

We ran into a storm. It came between...just out of Cooktown.

31:00 We went behind the island for shelter and I had to try and get through and I couldn't get through the first day. But I got through the second day to let them know where we were and that everything was alright. But that was a hell of a time. We went backwards there for quite a while. We were always going backwards because our maximum speed was about seven or eight knots and we were going into a wind of seventy or eighty knots and the wind just pushes you back.

31:30 Couldn't stand against that. But I remember we went in and I dropped the port anchor and he laid forty fathoms of cable on the bottom and she dragged. So we went to six fathoms of water, which is quite deep, and he dropped both anchors and let forty fathoms out on each one....It was chain. You don't just drop an anchor over the side. You drop an anchor and then you

32:00 go backwards and lay chain on the bottom to give you a good drag. And we were there for about three days and we couldn't move. And we (UNCLEAR) out to sea again. The sea was still very, very rough. It was good travelling.

**What exactly do you mean by laying drag?**

Laying cable.

32:30 Laying the anchor down. If you drop, say you are in six fathoms, say you drop only six fathoms down, the anchor can drag very easily. Forty fathoms of chain down on top of the depth of your water. It means that it would take a hell of a wind to drag that. So you went on two anchors. That would have been almost impossible to drag us. We could have stood hundreds of miles of wind and she wouldn't have dragged.

33:00 But she was a good ship the Swan. I did see her later on after she had been repaired. I was in Rabaul in the printing unit. I saw this ship come in and I came aboard and there was the new radio, see, that I had built. And the fellow came in and I said, she's the Swan. "No. She's the Ord," he said. "The

33:30 name was changed because of confusion between HMAS Swan." It was now the Ord. And I told him that I built that seat. The first seat collapsed and I built that seat. And I'd love to sail with him again. "What are you doing now?" I said, "I'm with Guinea Gold." He said, "Well I hope you're doing a good job on that mate because you'll never get back on this thing again. You've transferred out of the unit." But I was happy to go to Guinea Gold and get back into the trade.

34:00 And I remember we were working in Lae one nigh on a high speed Miller Press. That press has now been placed in a war museum in Canberra. And my mate forgot to lock something down and she smashed. There were bits lying everywhere. And he said, "Oh God, you'd better go and get Don." Don was the engineer. They put that printing unit

34:30 in the war museum and I've seen it there. They put it on display and then take it down again. It has been welded in about fifty places. But it still printed and when anything went wrong with that, we had another old hand-fed press you could print on. It was funny working the old hand-fed press. You started with a thousand or something like that. And then the pictures would end and all the fellows would go home to bed.

35:00 And we'd have all the power. And she was running at about two thousand an hour and we were flat our feeding the damn thing. But again we were doing a good job. Guinea Gold was a newspaper that was dropped to all the troops. It kept them informed with what was going on. It had a crossword puzzle and a few girly pictures. But it also carried the world news to let the men...Morale was such an important thing. Old Blamey [Gen. Sir Thomas Blamey]

35:30 was the one that kicked Guinea Gold off. He started it and the machines were there and they found the necessary men to work it. They started printing at Port Moresby and then they went up to the mountains to a place called Dobodura and then to Milne Bay...Over to Lae. Not Milne Bay.

36:00 And then they took the printing over to Rabaul without the equipment. We knew equipment had been

installed for us. I met a funny fellow there, Ernie Anderson. He was a bit of a devil. One day he was doing some work with an oxy torch. He was making something or other. And the foreman walked in. "That's a good sort of a flame you've got there Ernie." He said, "Yes. It should be. It's running on a hundred octane

36:30 aeroplane fuel," and he ordered him outside with the damn thing. But his mate Mervyn Quigley, had been up in the mountains and they had found some explosives. They had looked in caves and things like that and he came down and chucked some in the jungle alongside our camp. When it went off, it cleared and area about the size of a tennis court. He got into strife over that. But Ernie was always in strife.

37:00 Finally he deserted the Army because he also went to the Eastern Command Printing Unit back in Sydney. He deserted and he left me with his rifle. I didn't know what to do with the damn thing. When you got discharged you've got to hand your rifle in. Then another mate came out and took the rifle. Then we were living at Mt Colah, and we had had our first baby when Ernie

37:30 came through. He said, "Sid, I've come for my rifle." I said, "Mervyn's got your rifle, mate." And he said, "Care for a snort." He had a bottle of rum and I said, "No. I've got drunk on rum once and I'm not doing it again." It is terrible stuff to get drunk on. Besides I had a child then and I stopped drinking. You have responsibilities. I've always been a very responsible person.

**Well you've made reference to the fact that**

38:00 **being a wireless operator was a responsible role.**

Yes. Very responsible.

**I'm wondering. It's an interesting point you make as to when you went onto Guinea Gold working on the press.**

Yes.

**And you've left behind, in a sense, that role of earlier and being aboard a ship. Operating the radio...as you described it you have a very specific**

38:30 **job that is responsible and one where you work in tandem with your tools, your instruments. What sense of attachment do you get with those instruments and with the ship itself?**

You become very attached to your ship. There is nothing you wouldn't do to make the darn thing go better. I didn't have to worry about that. I was just to be contact with headquarters. That was my main position. We

39:00 were at a place called Kavieng and an Australian officer came aboard and he said he had to get in touch with headquarters to give permission for his wife to have a very important operation. I then radioed headquarters and gave that permission by radio.

39:30 Our headquarters was at Torokina and I was at Kieta. He gave that permission and I was responsible for getting that permission through for him, which is rather important. I remember sailing out of Kieta and it was a breeding ground for porpoises. The sea was thick with them. It was wonderful to be on the sea when it wasn't too rough.

40:00 Occasionally up around New Guinea, you'd strike some rough weather and I'd get a bit crook. Usually it was OK. But that first night at sea outside, Fremantle I thought I would die.

**It might seem surprising then that you do get attached to your ship?**

Yes. Every sailor's the same. I remember my eldest brother,

40:30 Les, and Harold. They loved their time at sea. And occasionally up in the Philippines they could actually meet. If they pulled in alongside the same refueller or something like that. But I'm just so worried about Les.

**Well Sid. this tape's coming to a close so we might pause on that note.**

41:00 **and change over.**

41:08 **End of tape**

## Tape 6

00:36 **Sid. You were telling us earlier in the day about a story that moved you very much and that is when you were taking New Guinea slaves back.**

Yes.

**Aboard the Daisy I think it was.**

Ye. The Daisy.

**And**

**01:00 when the Papuans were singing, why did that move you so much?**

I guess I'm just an emotional person. To see these poor native young ladies waving goodbye to their parents and knowing that they would probably never see them again. Goodbye.... Goodbye.

**01:30** because it is a long way from Kavieng to Lae or New Guinea. It really got to me, it did, and as we were going along we ran into this terrible storm, going down past New Ireland. Those poor people were just so sick. Babies were sick and everything, you know. And we were having a meal

**02:00** and (UNCLEAR) used to have their meal and watch us. And I said to the Skipper, "Wouldn't it be good if we could get them ashore somewhere. There's a long way still to go." And he said, "We'll think about it." And the next thing you know we were anchored in a bay called Allege Bay?, and we put them in a couple of boats and took them ashore and left them ashore with some provisions for about four hours

**02:30** so they could have a rest. Because they were just exhausted. We were more or less used to the sea but these poor natives haven't been at sea. But that really got to me to see them so distressed and I was ever so glad when we got into Lae Harbour and they were marched off. A funny thing happened at Lae Harbour. As we were leaving after that trip, we were travelling north. Our jeep had been playing up. Nearly all Water

**03:00** Transport ships, they stole a jeep from somewhere. When I went on the Daisy, there was a green jeep sitting on the hatch with AV283 on it. And I said to the fellow, Where did you get that from?" And he said, "We did a run a while ago and we got it at a Yankee base down at Guadalcanal." And our jeep was playing up and the Skipper said, "We've got to get a new jeep. There's no good trying to get this jeep fixed. We couldn't get it to the workshops, anyway."

**03:30** He sent a couple of groups of four out to try and find a jeep but we couldn't find one we could get at. (UNCLEAR). Normally you would leave your jeep out and take the rotor button out so we had a couple of rotor buttons which we got from workshops somewhere. And we couldn't find one of them. And we saw some Airforce officers parking a jeep on the wharf and they

**04:00** were probably coming for a party or something like that. Within half an hour that jeep was down in our hold and it was painted khaki green the following day. And we did a couple of runs up to Madang and we came back from our last trip up there and we anchored. There was no room at the wharf and this air force (UNCLEAR) boat came out and it circled us. And it went back and we saw the fellow

**04:30** walk over to a phone. And the Skipper said, "My God. We've been sprung." So we dropped the jeep over the side. And then an air force launch came out and said, "We've come to pick up the Japanese prisoners." And we said, "No. That's on the other ship on the other side." A waste of a jeep. Just after that I left the ship but I've no doubt they found a jeep somewhere. It was good when you got to a port because you'd be able to put the jeep in and have a run round and look at the place.

**05:00** And we had a lot of fun at times. A lot of funny things happened.

**Can you tell me a bit about what you knew about the Papuans who had been used as slaves?**

I didn't know much at all about them until we picked these up. About a hundred there were but

**05:30** I just knew what terrible people the Japanese had been. We'd heard how they'd machine-gunned nurses down at Banka Beach. They had murdered all but one. She floated, pretending to be dead and the Japanese went off and they left her. She went ashore and the natives looked after her [Vivian Bullwinkle]. She was a nice lady. It was only about two years ago that she passed away and you see that's why this is so important.

**06:00** You don't have her story and these stories are important for future generations to look back on. That's why I've written my book. I've written my story to leave behind for my children. I want a record of the part of the war that I knew about. The war was well and truly on the way when I turned eighteen. Millions of people had already been killed by then.

**06:30** I was just so lucky to get out of it because there was many a time when I didn't think we'd make it. There were terrible storms at sea and the ship was so small.

**And how many trips did you make carrying POWs [Prisoners of War]?**

Just three.

**07:00** Just three. On the first and the third one, we had escorts aboard but on the second one there was just a crew of fourteen with four hundred Japanese. But they were so subdued. When they came aboard they had brought no food or water with them. They just stood while we moved them. We were glad to see them go naturally. But

07:30 it was OK. It was someone fresh to talk to and as you can see I like talking. But it was still just another good job that we did. It was our orders and that's all there was to it.

**Who were the escorts?**

They were from an infantry regiment. Ten or twelve of them used to come along with us. One sergeant or maybe an officer and some men.

08:00 We'd just sail under floodlights during the nighttimes so we could see them. It must have been pretty tough for them. They just had to stand there and no food while they moved, the sea was also rough. But sometimes in the tropics, it was beautiful sailing. The sea was like a mirror. But other times, of course, it was very bad.

08:30 When it was good, you could pass one of your own ships and have a chat with the radio operator next door. The sig officer, either by radio or by semaphore or Aldus lamp or whatever you wanted to talk with. They were always glad to have a yarn.

**And how close did you come on**

09:00 **board to the POWs yourself?**

You brushed shoulders with them. Because when it was your turn to go on the wheel or if I had to go on the radio, I would go from the focsle and brush shoulders with them and they would let you go through. As I said, they were just like us, they just wanted to go home. They knew it was over and they just wanted to get out of it like we did.

09:30 One thing happened when I was on the ship one time. We stopped at an island and they shot a small beef. There were a few beefs running around on the island and they brought it back to the ship and they hung it up over the stern. This was on the Daisy at the time. And our cook, he butchered this beef

10:00 and hung it over the stern. And he cut up what meat he wanted and shoved what he could in the fridge and chucked the rest over to the sharks. And a couple of days later he was sick and the Skipper said, "Well someone's got to be cook, Sid. I'll nominate you." So I had never cooked in my life. Breakfast was easy. We had some cornflakes and stuff like that and paw paw and banana that I could chop up.

10:30 That was breakfast. Lunch was easy. That was bully beef rissoles. That was easy. But for teatime I decided that I would put on a braised steak like Mum used to make and I chopped up this beef into about inch cubes and I put it in the pot and I boiled it and boiled it and boiled it and I tossed in some onions and some spuds and some peas that I had and it tasted awful.

11:00 And so I had a bottle of Worcester Sauce there and I thought that would help so I put that in and it didn't make it any better at all. We were at anchor and we all sat around the big table in the mess together. And I said, "Sorry Skipper, it's not too good." He said, "Yes. You've got that right. I'll tell you what. The first person who complains, he's cook for tomorrow." I was never asked to be cook again. I couldn't make braised steak like Mother.

11:30 What happened was, of course, I've learned since. When you kill cattle, it's got to hang for at least a day before you can use it. Otherwise it is as tough as leather and I didn't know that and we tried to cook it straight away and it doesn't work that way. It does in the movies but it doesn't in real life. But I was at sea one time and

12:00 I went down and I know that I had a touch of malaria and the Skipper came down and said, "Have you got a bit of a wog, Sid?" And I said, "I'm feeling rotten." And he came down with an extra ration of Atebrin tablets and a lemon drink which he made out of a muli. A muli was a small lime. It's a native citrus tree. And I was on my feet again

12:30 in a couple of days. But I had the shakes and all the normal things that you would get. But when I got my army record, that wasn't recorded because we were at sea and it wasn't put in the ships log. But it doesn't matter. I've had no trouble since. I had a touch of wog twice but I only got it light. I've seen fellows very bad with malaria.

13:00 At Lae, when I was in hospital, the whole ward there was just malaria. People died with malaria. They are still dying around the world today with malaria. And provided you took your Atebrin tablets, you were usually pretty right.

**And what type of physical condition were the POWs?**

13:30 Oh they were poor. They were in very poor condition because they had no supplies. They lived off the land as best they could. When we got to Kieta. We unloaded at Kieta the last of the supplies that we did when we did our trip right around Bougainville. The ship was unloaded by native collaborators. We weren't allowed to start the winch to lift the cargo and there was about a hundred and fifty ton of cargo to

14:00 move. They had to pick every case up and lift it up onto the deck themselves from the hold because the collaborators had taken the Japanese up into the hills to show them where the whites were. The men were murdered and the women were raped and raped and raped and ten murdered. And these

collaborators were punished in that way. If they went up for trial later on I don't know. I actually saw this. A couple of police boys came

14:30 onto the ship and I see a police boy pick up, we had a bat there for playing cricket, and he belted this native with a bat because he wasn't working hard enough. This native could have caused the death of some of the whites. But the conditions, when we got to Kieta, was unbelievable. They had taken all their rifles. They had thrown

15:00 all their rifles into the water off the end of the wharf. I remember I dived down, it was very deep, I dived down and got one rifle for myself and I cleaned it up and like a damn fool I left it on the Daisy when I came off the Daisy. I forgot to take it with me. Then I sent some natives down to dive for more for the other members of the crew and everyone got a Japanese rifle. We had to clean it up because it had been in the water for a while. As I said they were just like us.

15:30 They just wanted to get out of the damn place. It was a most uncomfortable place to live and the temperatures can be terrible. And I remember being in Milne Bay and it rained for four days straight. Just pelting down. I've still got a lot of happy memories.

**And when you say the natives could have**

16:00 **caused the death of some white people, what did you mean by that?**

Well the Japanese came in and these natives lead the Japanese up into the hills where the whites were hiding. They betrayed the whites. The planters and the people who had been working there, when the Japanese came in they raced up and tried to hide. The natives showed them where they were hiding and that was the end of them. The Japanese had a terrible reputation.

16:30 They went into Nanking, China and I think six hundred thousand people died in the first day. They were murdered. They were a terrible race. But they lived with that code of Bushido and they had to be all-powerful. We were just lucky that we won it. That's all.

17:00 **And on the three trips when you were carrying the POWs, whose job was it to control the discipline of the POWs?**

As I said we used to take infantry men along with us. About ten or twelve of them and it was their job to make sure they didn't do anything wrong. But I'll never forget the trip when we

17:30 went with no escorts and I was a bit scared then that something might have gone wrong. But as I said they were just so subdued. They were just glad to get out of it. But they cheered when that blasted aircraft carrier came in to take them home.

**And which aircraft carrier was that?**

18:00 I don't know. The Japanese had one aircraft carrier left, I'm told. I never ever saw the damn thing. It wasn't aircraft carriers but other ships that were taking them home but I was told they had one aircraft carrier left. They had lost all the rest. Fortunately the American production line was vital. If they lost a ship, they could make another one.

18:30 They could make them so fast.

**You've explained that the New Guinea slaves, the women who sang the song because they were really sad to leave? They were leaving children behind?**

19:00 Yes. They were leaving their parents behind. They would never see them again. Not a chance in the world. Unless they got a job on a ship. They might get up to (UNCLEAR) again. There was a big shed on the wharf at Kavieng where there was a unit called ANGAU, The Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. And they were the ones

19:30 that used to go in and used to control the natives. My wife Cath had a brother that used to work in ANGAU. Cath had three brothers up in the islands. The same as my father had three sons up in the islands. And the ANGAU organized the...The Japanese put all this material in the one shed and I went round the back of it and

20:00 pulled a bit of iron off and had a look inside. There were a lot of tools and boxes of tools and radio stuff and electrical gear there. So I told the Skipper what was there and he sent me up the road because there was a guard on the shed. There was just one Japanese guard on the shed and he had a telephone. That's all he had. So I went up and cut his telephone wire and insulated the end of the part and told the Skipper what I had done.

20:30 and he started up the winch onboard and the motor was very noisy. And I went there with another bloke and we prised the back of this shed and stole all these tools. Because we used to scrounge. and I stole an electrical instrument called a Mega, [an instrument for measuring ohms] which I bought home. And my brother Harold started an electrical business and he used my Mega for many many years.

21:00 But we also got boxes of tools and torches and stuff like that. We tied up in Cairns Harbour and the Americans, they had a base there in Cairns Harbour. And we watched them all day. They were lifting

these barges off a liberty ship and dropping them over the side. And they they'd start their motors and take them alongside the

21:30 bank. About twenty barges. And a mate and I went to the pictures that night and we came back and we couldn't get some tools and equipment and so we had a look at the barges and there was the Yankee. He was asleep with a Tommy gun laying across his lap. So we went to the barges and got some boxes of tools and some matches and some (UNCLEAR) matting for the

22:00 (UNCLEAR) to stand on. Big (UNCLEAR) matting. And some other stuff and we took it back aboard the ship and we knew they'd come looking for it and so the funnel on our ship was just bolted to the deck so we unbolted the funnel and we packed all this stuff around, just inside it, so it couldn't touch the exhaust going up and bolted it back again and

22:30 there was just a job to paint the funnel. And so when the shore patrol come in to search the ship, I'm painting the funnel. All the stuff was stacked inside it. I remember this Yankee officer saying, "I know you've got it somewhere but we can't bloody find it. Get off our bloody wharf." And we had to hang on the pick off the harbour then. And I remember he went to the stern and Frank Woods, the cook, he was fishing over the side and he turned to Frank and he said, "I know what

23:00 you've got. There's a rope and a box on the end with all our stuff in it." And he pulled it up and all there was was a hook and the bait. We beat them again. We did a lot of things we shouldn't have done but we got away with it. It was sad to see the way he had changed when he came to visit me at my home, you know. He was just a different man all together.

23:30 He bought his wife out as well but they weren't happy. It is wonderful to be happy. You've just got to have the right partner. It's great.

**And what was your nickname?**

I was just called Sid or Sig, whatever it was, you know. It was normally Sig. How are you going Sig? Gee I remember we got back to Brisbane

24:00 on the Swan after we'd been to Milne Bay and they couldn't repair us so they sent us back again. And Frank Woods and I got stuck into a bottle of brandy. I'll never forget it. And he walked up and down the wharf looking for Sig and Sig was asleep in the lifeboat. Oh dear, but the day before we sailed

24:30 on the Almiston. We had been in a holding depot for a while. Jimmy Pollock, we went into town and we went from pub to pub. And we sailed the next day. I was in Torokina and he had gone over there in an infantry regiment. It was his second time. He had been wounded and he was going back again.

25:00 He came to see me on my island. He said, "Sid, I've got troubles." I said, "What's your troubles, Jim?" He said, "I've got a girl in trouble." I said, "Well you're engaged to her, you know, it's her mate. (UNCLEAR). I said, "Well you'd better go and see the chaplain and try and get home and sort it out." I don't know whether he did or not. I never ever saw him again. But some of these fellows, they would get into all sorts of strife. But I didn't. I kept away from anything like that.

25:30 I always treated girls with respect and I still do.

**I don't doubt that. After you left the Swan, how did you then crew up the Daisy?**

Oh it just happened.

26:00 The fellow from the Daisy was my mate, Steve. They came into port and Steve had ringworms, real bad. His skin was peeling off him. At that stage it's called cris cris. Incidentally one of the most pathetic cases I've ever seen was when we transported those natives, taking them back to Lae. This native came aboard and he was an albino native.

26:30 He had very pale skin and pink eyes and he had cris cris like I've never seen in my life. His skin was falling off him all the time. I felt so sorry for him. But poor old Steve had this very bad ringworm. It wasn't to the Kris Kris stage but very bad ringworm. They took him off the ship and I got his ship. I went to visit him in hospital the night before I went aboard. I said, "I'm very sorry you've got ringworms mate. But I'm mighty glad I've got your ship."

27:00 So we were good mates, you know. We have been through thick and thin together. I had a couple of leaves with him and had a good time. But my pattern changed completely when I met Cath, you know.

**And so sorry, did Steve come back to the**

27:30 **Daisy or not?**

No. He never came back to the Daisy. I met him again at Rabaul. He had been put on shore based at Rabaul, waiting to go home. But when it ended they had so many men up there and so few ships. See the war ended on August 15, and I didn't get back until May 26. And

28:00 there were a lot of fellows like me. A lot of young fellows who didn't get home until very, very late. Some had less points than me. But I had my hundred points and that got me home. Just to walk up that

gangplank and know that that was your last trip, it was a wonderful feeling.

28:30 **You told us a little bit about spending Christmas and your twenty-first birthday in hospital. Can you tell me a little more about your twenty-first birthday?**

Well I went into hospital with this tropical ulcer on my leg, which they started treating, and then I became gastric they wanted a specimen, sort of thing. And then next thing I know I was moved into an isolation ward, which was

29:00 I think it was Ward Fifteen. I'm not sure. There, you weren't allowed to come or go and all food was delivered to that isolation ward by the cooks coming in and putting it on a table and then going through the double door. And then after they had been, you could walk in and get your food. And the food was diet food, like.

29:30 But I just had six weeks in hospital and Christmas and New Years Day came, I wasn't too bad then. It wasn't until after that had passed that I got dysentery. Dysentery was very prevalent up amongst the troops and very hard to treat. The nurse would come along with a glass of

30:00 water and she'd put in the mix of Sulphur Quinidine and she'd stir it and you had to drink it real quick. It set like Plaster of Paris. And then when I was proclaimed to be cured, ready to go home, the doctor has to make a final examination with an instrument called a Sigmoidoscope. And they used to call it the 'silver stallion'.

30:30 You went on all fours and he shoved this thing up to look inside to make sure there was no scarring inside and he turned to the orderly and said, "His teeth are OK and he's got no tonsils." And he pulled the thing out and I said, "You might have blasted enjoyed that Sir, but I didn't". He just laughed. All these things are stored up in here. These memories. It is wonderful to be able to retain these memories.

31:00 But it was great to get out of that place and get back to Guinea Gold where I was needed because they were the sort of men, the men who had wives and children, they wanted to get home. The natives used to come and they would steal everything. They were almost as bad as us Water Transport fellows. And one day, you couldn't leave anything around, it would go. One day the cook decided he would fix them. So he got a tin of sausages

31:30 and he soldered a bit of wire on the bottom of them and he poked a sausage out the top so it could be seen. And this black hand came up and tried to steal the tin and he dropped the other side on the spark plug of the fridge motor. I can still hear this native scream and run off into the jungle, you know. But we left the food around there and it wasn't touched any more. There are a lot of

32:00 stories. I saw that. I will never forget it. This poor native. He didn't know what had struck him. Have you ever got the lead of a spark plug? It is a terrible thing. A pulsing goes through your body and this native got it that day. We used to have natives around the printers to sweep the floors and wipe the printers over. You had to watch you left nothing for them to take. Otherwise they

32:30 would take it. It was a good unit to be in because there was a stream running past at the back of it. You'd take your washing down and there was a bench running down the middle and you'd do your washing and you're standing in the water and you'd do your washing and rinse it out. Then you'd put it up on a line near your tent so you could see it and the natives couldn't take it. Lot of happy memories round that place.

33:00 **Well before we talk about Guinea Gold a bit more, I'm interested to hear a bit more about the time that you had a batman?**

Yeah

**In Rabaul?**

Well they were glad to come to us.

33:30 We were better than the Japanese because they would get a decent meal. We got extra rations and we fed them the same rations as we got for lunch, you know. And this fellow, he came in and there's the washing and there's the soap and they do the garden and I had never had a batman before. I had never had a servant. But then we had a fellow come in one day and he was a printer and he

34:00 watched me hand feeding the machine one day and he went like that. So I said, "Yours", and I watched him doing the hand feeding in the machine for the printer. But Guinea Gold was a wonderful thing up there to keep the troops occupied because if you don't keep the people occupied well you know, they get bored. And with Guinea Gold they could sit down and they could

34:30 do the crossword puzzle together and they used to have Ginger Meggs [a cartoon strip] in it and things like that. I really enjoyed my work up there.

**And when you left Water Transport, what type of discharge process did you have to go through?**

None. Guinea Gold just organized my transfer. They contacted Water Transport

- 35:00 and said you've got a printer. We want him and that's it. They had priority. Why I was happy to go into the printing unit also was that any time that you worked in the army at your trade, came off your apprenticeship. So I got six months off my apprenticeship for working for Guinea Gold. And then I came back to work at The Land newspaper and I wasn't very happy there because I was treated as a junior. Other apprentices who had come into the place after me were working
- 35:30 on more important machines so I stacked on a blue about that and I finally got what I wanted. Finally I argued with the foreman and I went to the factory manager. I said, "I've done four and a half years. I've got six months to go. Would you sign my papers." And he said, "It would be a pleasure." So he signed my papers and I only did four and a half years apprenticeship. Of course these days all apprenticeships are only four years. I stepped out and I went to
- 36:00 ConsPress, which was Women's Weekly. And from there I moved to other printing companies. I couldn't settle. I remember one time there, I had been through about eight jobs in a couple of years because the foreman only had to look sideways at me and I didn't like that sort of thing. If I didn't get what I wanted I'd move on. I
- 36:30 remember that my father in law said to me, "A rolling stone doesn't gather any moss." I said to him. "I don't want moss. I want wages and good conditions. I want respect." And that was it. I went to the Hornsby Advocate, which was near my home at Mt Colah. I was happy to go home to Cath to have lunch every day, especially when the babies were coming along. That was good.

### **So when you joined Guinea Gold in**

37:00 **Lae,**

Yes.

### **Where were you up to in your apprenticeship?**

I think I had done about...I went in eighteen. I had done about two years. But I knew enough about the trade. I picked up things very easily. I picked up the mechanical side and I went into Guinea

37:30 Gold and fell back into it naturally. I got six months off my apprenticeship there and served a couple with The Land when I came back and then I just moved from job to job until I found something that I liked, where I got respect. Respect means a big deal to me. You should never be looked down on. I don't like people looking down on me. And I give respect also. I treat everyone as an equal.

38:00 **Well I think that's a very good sentiment to have. Can you describe your job when you were an apprentice at Guinea Gold?**

We just printed the newspapers. The forms would come on and you'd put them on the machine and pack them and when you had finished, you'd pack them and take them to the airport. They'd be distributed from there. And some of the units around close to us, we'd drop them in as we went.

38:30 But they were always glad to get Guinea Gold. We were greeted wherever we went. We had a bit of fun there too at times. For instance we printed our own envelopes, we printed our own letterhead. Cath has a piece of Guinea Gold letterhead there. Bring it over. I've got a couple of hundred of those there that I'll use as notepaper.

39:00 There. Guinea Gold. I can't walk over and get it myself. A very happy mob. The editor, Gavin Green leaves. Guinea Gold, we used to have a reunion every couple of years. We don't anymore because the numbers have dropped so far. And I

39:30 was driving up past my home one day and there was Gavin on the side of the road. He was hitching a lift. He had a haversack. I stopped and said, "Gavin, what are you doing here?" "I'm just looking for a bit of peace, Sid. Do you know of somewhere?" It's in the thin red book, Cath. I said, "Where do you want to go?" "Drive me will you? Somewhere in the bush." I drove him north and I stopped

40:00 down towards the Hawkesbury River. And I said, "If you want to spend a night in the bush this is about as good as you can get, mate. What are you going to do?" He said, "I just want to try and find peace." He had had a bit of trouble with his son. His son got involved with a witch up at Kings Cross. A sheila by the name of Norton and there was a bit of publicity and it brought Gavin's name into it. And he went off and he

40:30 had a sleep in the bush. I said, "How long are you going to stay away?" He said, "I've got a bit of food and I've got money I can buy with as I'm going along." He said, "I'll probably stay a month away and go back." He had lost his wife. That would be a terrible thing to lose your wife at that age. He died shortly afterwards, Gavin. He was a nice bloke and it was sad to see him go that way. I've got a wonderful -

41:00 I can still see him till this day. Gavin as he was. Sitting at his desk and writing the news. If you've got that Guinea Gold thing could you pass it?

41:17 End of tape

## Tape 7

- 00:32 **Sid, I would like to talk to you more about the printing press in Lae. Whereabouts in Lae was the printery?**
- I couldn't tell you exactly. I know it was just near the outdoor theatre. But it was a high-speed Miller press, which I had never ever worked until I went there. But a couple of lessons on
- 01:00 it and I was soon very proficient. We used to cut our own paper on the guillotine. And there was four printers and we used to...There were six printers in Lae and we worked on shifts. I didn't mind that. Sometimes you'd be on night shift. Sometimes it would
- 01:30 be early evening. Sometimes late at night. That didn't worry me. I was just doing the job that I liked doing. I liked printing.
- I imagine that technology has probably changed radically in printing.**
- Oh yes.
- When you were doing printing back in the forties can you tell me how you would work the press...like**
- 02:00 **can you explain that to me?**
- Normally the press was automatically fed. But if our automatic feeder broke down we would have to hand feed the press. Put our printed forms down on the hand fed press. That's all there was to it. But it was a real good job. Yes
- And what about typesetting?**
- We had our
- 02:30 learner top operators...used to cast the type and compositors to make up the forms. They would be proof read of course. And we had our journalists to write the stories. They would pick it up by radio and tape recorders weren't in then of course. They'd have to get what they could, get the salient points
- 03:00 and then fill in from their memory. And we used to get the newspapers from Sydney. They would be flown up to us and the articles in them would still be good. But for the on the spot news, the current news, we would get that by radio. We had some good journalists. But they have all passed on now of course. Gavin's gone, Chisolm's gone.
- 03:30 **And where did all the staff...as you've just described all those jobs...the journalists and the typesetters....Where did all those staff come from? Did they come from the army?**
- Yes. Yes. All different states. Gavin was from New South Wales. Horry Chisolm, he came from Victoria.
- 04:00 They had been journalists in...that was their job before they went into the forces and they looked for an opportunity naturally to get back into their trade, or their profession, whatever you would like to call it. They were very happy people to work with, though. We got on well but in the army you got your beer ration. You got two bottles of beer every pay day and pay day was every two weeks. You got a bottle of beer a week. And
- 04:30 the Kanimbla came into port for the first time over in Torokina and I saw my brother Harold for about the first time in a year and a half. It anchored out in the ocean. I knew it was the Kanimbla and I wanted to see Harold. So I went out on the wharf and there was a little dinghy there. So I hopped in this dinghy and paddled out in the ocean to see my brother Harold and
- 05:00 on the way, the oar didn't have a keeper on it. I lost one of the oars and just dived into the ocean, Put the oar back in again and paddled out to the Kanimbla. By the time I got there, Harold saw me coming and I pulled alongside the scramble net over the side and we put a rope around the boat and I tied the oars to it and they pulled it up and sat it on the deck. They said I was a silly bugger paddling out into the ocean. I saw Harold
- 05:30 and he said, "Do you want to stow away and get home early? I can stow you away." I said, "Harold I'll wait my turn." And I had a meal with him. By this time they had a ferry service running from the Cannibal into the beach so I put the dinghy into their barge and went in with the Sar Major. I told him me brother was on that ship out there and I'd like to spend the night with him, "Will you give me your promise that you'll come back?"
- 06:00 And I said, "Yes Tex." We used to call him a Christian name job." I want to spend the night with him and have a good meal and a drink with him." I went back onboard. I had four bottles of beer with me that I was saving up for my twenty-first birthday and I had a roast dinner, which was wonderful. I slept the night in the spare bunk they had there. And then in the morning we had
- 06:30 breakfast, sort of thing, and we didn't have rations like that ashore. And then I went back in the barge and I said my goodbyes. They said, "We'll see you next time." I said, "We'll probably be moving from

here. I don't know." "I'll find you." And I went back to Tex and said, "I've kept my promise." He said, "Good on you." And that was it. Just after that I got a ship.

- 07:00 I didn't like shore but. I didn't like being onshore at all. I liked being at sea. Shore had its advantages. There was a good beach there and we had a little island in the middle of Torokina Harbour. There was a constant ferry service and barges going backwards and forwards. If you wanted to have a swim at the beach then you'd hop on a barge and have your swim and come back. But we had a...on one occasion,
- 07:30 there was a sporting officer on the Torokina headquarters. His name was Bert, Bert Oldfield. And he was a test cricketer who I had seen playing cricket when I was a child. And the word came around, Major Oldfield's going to come round and he's going to give us a talk about his test cricketing experiences. And so we all went down to the big rec hut and he started talking and they said he deserves a bit of respect, he's
- 08:00 getting on in years but have a listen to him. At about eleven o'clock that night, the cook put on coffee and biscuits, you know. He was so interesting to listen to. A lovely fellow Bert, but he's gone now, of course. Another thing happened on that island. I had a tooth playing up and I went to the dentist and the dentist was just in a little tent. And all he could do was extractions. He didn't have any drilling equipment. He had a small drill there but it wasn't working
- 08:30 properly and he said, "That tooth will have to come out", and he pulled the tooth out and it he gave me hell. And I said, "I must ask you, did you have any training before you came in the army?" And I was washing pots for a week. He reported me for insubordination. He did a hell of a job with my tooth. He just pulled the thing out. Very painful. I liked my time on that little island.
- 09:00 I wanted to get to sea. I didn't want to be at base. Anyone could be on base but I wanted to be at sea. My mate got ringworm so I got his ship. I'm also glad I missed the Porton Plantation job too because one of my mates died there. It could have been me. One out of three, you know.
- 09:30 That's in a recent issue of our logbook. It shows how they went back and exhumed the bodies of the men who died there. They buried them up there. They brought them back and put them in the war cemetery. War cemeteries are wonderfully kept places. I've been to the war cemeteries at Moresby, Lae, Torokina,
- 10:00 and they showed this picture that they had gone and exhumed the bodies and come back and put them in the war cemetery so they were all there together, which is good. When we did our caravan trip up through Australia, I went with Cath to the war cemetery at Adelaide River. There, they are all laid out... All the post office staff are laid out and all the young pilots are laid out. Nineteen and twenty years of age. They took
- 10:30 Wirraways against Zeros and they didn't have a chance. And in some places the headstones are just marked 'Seaman, known only to God'. We lost a lot of men at Darwin that we weren't told about at the time. It has all come out now, of course. The numbers that we have lost there. That's the first step the Japanese made, you know. They would have come in the top there. But
- 11:00 that didn't happen. We were lucky. As I said, we were lucky to have the Yankee equipment. And we had some damn good soldiers there as well.
- 11:30 **You told us the story earlier on about a very difficult time using your radio on a boat. When would your radio fail?**
- Well it didn't fail. If it did fail we would have had to (UNCLEAR) back to base to pass another (UNCLEAR) ships so I could talk Aldus with him.
- 12:00 But the radio didn't fail because we had taken the trouble of having it tropic proofed. So every connection in that radio was covered with a thin like nail polish. It kept the moisture out and it worked. It really worked and our radios went well.
- And how would you protect the batteries?**
- Well you'd just look after them. A bit of Vaseline. Keep them dry, keep them clean
- 12:30 and occasionally you had to take them onshore and give them a good charge. I remember we got to Madang and I took my batteries onshore and charged them up and I went over to check them. It was just on dusk. I took a torch with me. I borrowed a Yankee torch from a bloke. It was completely waterproof. As I went to step on the wharf, a ship had gone out at high speed
- 13:00 I think it was a Fairmile went out and it made a bit of a wash and my ship moved and I dropped his torch. I wanted him to get it back so I just dived down and followed this torch. It was going down faster than I was. I went down to the end of my air and realized I wouldn't get it and then I realized that the ship had a flat bottom. If I didn't come up, I would be straight underneath it. So I just drifted straight
- 13:30 up and went to a pearling lugger, or a fishing lugger just behind me and spoke with a native there and gave him a packet of tobacco. And he went down and got it for me but I had to stand on top and hold another torch to guide him back again. And I got the torch back and I wiped it over and handed it back

to my mate and he never knew he'd nearly lost his torch and me too. If I'd have got caught under that ship I'd have never got out.

14:00 Because the Daisy was completely flat bottomed. It had three propellers and two rudders and it was driven by two tractor engines, one after the other. In the engine room, with six screaming diesels going, it was absolutely unbearable. But it got the ship along alright. Occasionally, we hit a reef. We hit a reef coming in to

14:30 Namatini Island. And the skipper, this Gordon Erty, a very clever man really, he just backed the ship up at half tide and he let the tide go all the way out. And he fitted a new propeller on. We always carried spares and the next tide we just floated off and we were back to normal again. We just had three engines instead of the two we'd been travelling on. There were some very inventive men really in the forces.

15:00 Gordon passed away the year before last. He passed up in Brisbane.

**What's the advantage of a flat bottom?**

They didn't have an advantage. They were easy to build. They built them down in Geelong in Victoria and they were very fast construction.

15:30 They were steel and the fellows used to say that when it's all over they'd take them out and back and use them as water tanks for squatters. But they were efficient. If you struck any sort of a sea they were very bouncy but you leaned to live with it no matter what sea was going. You leaned to live with it.

16:00 **And which boat did you prefer? The Swan or the Daisy?**

The Swan. It was a much better ship. More comfortable. Besides on the Swan I had a cabin up aft and in the Daisy I was stuck up in the focsle which is very cramped, a very small steel focsle. You can hardly move in the damn thing. But the Swan was a very comfortable boat to live in.

16:30 **You've just mentioned that the Daisy was made out of steel.**

Yes.

**How did the ship generally handle?**

17:00 Well it handled OK. It didn't handle as well as the Swan because of this flat-bottomed business. But still the Daisy could go places the Swan couldn't. The Daisy had a draught of seven feet but the Swan had a draught of about twelve and you'd hit reefs that the Daisy wouldn't. I remember once my mate's ship

17:30 was the Gundiah. She was on old timber boat. She was laid up on a bank in a river in Tasmania for about a year until the Army reprovisioned her and they fixed her up as best they could. And they got as far as Milne Bay with the Gundiah and the Daisy was leading her and the Daisy went out over a reef and the Gundiah hit.

18:00 It started to sink and so they ran her up onto the beach and then this Gordon Erret, made a diving mask out of a gas mask. He went down and then at low tide, jammed oakum into the crack on the Gundiah and the Gundiah sunk to the extent that the

18:30 water rose up over the engines. If we hadn't got her on the beach straight away she'd have gone down. They bought barges out from Milne Bay and they unloaded her cargo, which made her lighter still and when Gordon Erret finished up plugging up the splits in the seams they took her to the Kaikara workshops. The slips there had been repaired and they put her there and repaired her properly.

19:00 And they sent her on to the Solomons and she did a couple of cargo runs in the Solomons and they came back and the war ended and she was full of borer and they took of a few souvenirs and they took her about five miles off shore and they scuttled her. She wasn't worth taking home. The same as we've got a photograph there of some of our landing barges just laying in amongst the porpoises. A barge we had built for a specific purpose. There was no good taking it home.

19:30 They just left the damn things there. I've got all this in copies of our Water Transport magazine. They were just laying there to rust...rust in peace. The poor old Gundiah. It was sad to think the army had tried to do something with it. They wasted a lot of money there. But no one was hurt. They sunk her outside. She is down there...A breeding ground for fish.

20:00 **You just mentioned that the Daisy would go places that the Swan couldn't and you used a term called draught. What's a draught?**

Depth of the ship below the waterline. Every ship has a plimsoll mark sort of thing. We disregarded them completely. On the Daisy I know at times, it was a two fifty tonner

20:30 and it sailed with three hundred and fifty ton on it. We just closed the portholes up real tight, you know. And we just sailed on the seas delivering cargoes. That was our job.

**What about regulations?**

There were no regulations in wartime. They didn't count. We had a job to do and that's all there was to it.

21:00 Many's the time we sailed way overloaded. I've got photos of the Daisy with deck cargo up almost to the wheelhouse windows. And that shouldn't be. When we sailed with the Swan, we hit the reef. We had deck cargoes of drums of fuel and I don't know whether we were

21:30 overweight or not. I don't know the weight of the stuff we were taking. We were taking over general supplies. But regulations didn't count in wartime. You could in peacetime but not in wartime. Whatever you wanted had to be got there and that's all there was to it.

**What about the danger of overloading a ship?**

22:00 There is no danger in overloading a ship unless you get a very rough sea. That could cause trouble. But generally speaking, these are only small ships. We were 13 Small Ship Company...emphasis on the 'small'. And some of the other units, later on, had bigger ships. They had ships of thousands of tons constructed for a specific purpose. But we were just there to deliver cargo.

22:30 We were happy to do it. I can't think of any grumpy persons that I met in Water Transport. It was just a very happy unit. When we went into port or there was movies on, you'd work out your watches. Some would have to be there to look after the ship but the rest would go to the pictures or a live show.

23:00 **I understand that it was wartime and the need to deliver supplies was very great and that's why you would overload your ships.**

Yes.

**Who would cop the brunt if it was discovered you were overloading?**

23:30 Well the people who ordered us the cargo. I mean we came in at Torokina harbour one time and the fellows had gone to the harbour one night and they had closed off the seacocks on a sixty-six foot trawler and when they came back she was sunk at the wharf, sort of thing. There was half the ship sticking out of the water. A bit of coral would have caught in the seacock. They hadn't closed it off properly. But

24:00 they sent her down to the workshops then. They cleaned the seacock out and sent a diver down and bought a pump over and pumped her out. The army had a big workshop. A thing called the Kelang. The Kelang had been the Sydney showboat. The Army took her over and they put one and a half million pounds of engineering equipment in her and she was our floating workshop. I have a photograph of the Kelang. And we could put a sixty-six foot trawler in alongside

24:30 her in the afternoon and she sailed in the morning with a completely reconditioned motor. They'd take the motors out overnight and they had the equipment there to re-bore them, re-seat the lot. The trawler would sail the following morning. The mechanical side was completely rebuilt. The Kelang did a wonderful job up there. They had a crew of about seventy on the Kelang. All engineers and things.

25:00 They did shift work the same as we did at Guinea Gold. They were quite happy to do that.

**So essentially the Daisy was built with a cargo hold. When you were making those three trips carrying the POWs, where were**

25:30 **those people put?**

We put a ladder up and the first two hundred went down into the hold and the rest stood around on top. It had two hatches. One hatch was left sealed and the other was just peeled back a little bit. But those... It must have been terrible for those fellows down in the hold but it was terrible for some of the people, the way they treated them so I really had no sympathy

26:00 for them. I was sorry for them in the fact that they just wanted to get home. But we had to move them. That was our job and we did it and did it well.

**And I think you mentioned that there were approximately twelve hundred POWs?**

Twelve thousand. There were thousands of Japanese. They were coming in in Liberty and Victory ships.

26:30 from Nauru, Ocean Island, and various other depots that the Japanese had had. They went into a big compound and they fed them on rice and bully beef and stuff like that. That's how they survived until we could send them home.

**And how many did the Daisy take in one trip?**

Four hundred. Approximately four hundred.

27:00 And it must have been very uncomfortable for them but still that was war.

**And how...Because people cargo is very different to**

27:30 **normal cargo that you would have been carrying. How would you know how many people to take? I mean how was it determined that you would take four hundred?**

The army headquarters. They just marched them down. The Japanese though...They didn't carry them in trucks. They had to walk, naturally. The compound was about eight miles

28:00 in from the beach, in from the wharf. They'd arrive and they didn't have much gear with them. They had practically nothing with them and they might have a spare shirt or something like that that they'd carry over their shoulders. Otherwise they had nothing and we just marched them in and down the ladder, onto the deck. That's enough. I think it was four hundred we took each time and we just moved them and that's all.

28:30 **Well you've mentioned that the physical condition of the POWs was fairly poor,**

Very poor. Because they'd had no supplies.

29:00 All they could live on, sort of thing, was what they could get out of the jungle. They were trained to eat bamboo shoots and things like that. They ate coconuts and paw paws and anything they could get. The paw paws were prolific up around the islands there. And we used to chop a paw paw tree down and just try and catch them as they came down. And they used to dig for yams.

29:30 Whatever they could get. Whatever they could scrounge out of the natives really. The Japanese were there and they had nothing.

**And those three trips that you made were from Madang to Lae?**

No we did two trips from Madang to Finschhafen.

30:00 From Lae to Finschhafen, Madang. Yes we used to do the drop offs. We'd bring troops back and there were also ships going home from Lae, you see.

**And how long would that trip take?**

30:30 About eight days return trip. Because it is quite a distance. We did two trips up there and on the second one, I realised that my leg was bad and I had to go into hospital. And then a doctor ordered me in. The Skip wasn't very happy because he was without a radio operator,

31:00 But they waited in port of a couple of days until they flew one over from the Solomons, which was our base.

**Four hundred people is quite a lot of people to deal with when they are in really good condition. If four hundred people in really poor condition were aboard ship, how did you cope with the demands of poor health**

31:30 **and needs.**

We didn't cope. We just stacked them in and when we got to the other end we just stacked them off, you know. We didn't have to deal with them personally. If you wanted to go aft you'd go, "Aye Aye Aye" and push your way through and they'd find a way to let you through. But they had no arms or anything like that, naturally. Their uniforms were so dilapidated, they were hanging off them because they'd been cut off

32:00 from their supplies. Why they insisted on keeping the campaign in Bougainville going, I will never know. I think it was just to give a campaign for General Blamey to look after, you know. That's all. That's my true feelings. I never ever met General Blamey, personally. That didn't worry me either.

32:30 **And can you just describe the cargo hold? What type of ventilation is down there?**

None. There is no ventilation. Yes. There was some ventilation. There were a couple of ventilation ports on either end of it. Just small ones. Yes. They would have been open for them.

33:00 We just stuck a pipe up there with a hole in the end of it, sort of thing, and we used to have canvas cover over it during weather. But if you had food down below or anything at all down below, the cover was off unless you ran into weather. If you ran into weather you had to seal them off. I can recall again crossing on the Swan from Western Australia, we

33:30 went into a hell of a sea there and someone hadn't secured the vent cover on properly. She rolled over and solid water just came straight in onto the mess table. But these things happen. We had spare canvas and a new cover was made straight away. There were some very able men on the ship, you know.

34:00 Our Bosun, Dick Price, who had had about ten years in the Navy, he came aboard and he knew splicing and all that sort of thing.

**You mentioned earlier that you carried disinfectant to clean the boat after you made the POW trips.**

34:30 Yes. And we'd just get the hose going and give them a bucket and give them brooms and stuff like that

and just let them clean it. But we were just damn glad to get rid of them when we got them down there.

**Where would you go to the toilet in a cargo hold?**

They couldn't.

35:00 They had to hold on. That's why we cleaned it out afterwards. We made them clean it out afterwards. There'd be stuff everywhere. If they were seasick they were seasick there. It was a mess. Once we cleaned it up it was alright. So we could pick up the next lot. We did three trips of those, down there. I was glad to get rid of that job.

35:30 It wasn't pleasant. It wasn't pleasant to see people so uncomfortable and so depressed. There was nothing we could do about it. As I said the greatest moment of all was to sail in through those blasted Heads. All the people on the ferries that we passed cheered and things like that and we thought, 'Great'. I want to go and get that leave pass and go home.

**36:00 This might seem like a strange question but I'm wondering were there any women POWs?**

No. The Japanese, they had taken some women with them as concubines for the men, for the officers probably. But I never ever saw them. I never saw one Japanese woman. Some of them were quite young men too. Some of them looked like they were only about sixteen or seventeen years of age.

36:30 They were grabbing for personnel just like anything else. They wanted numbers. Nothing more is coming. I've done it all.

**And what do you think is your proudest moment?**

37:00 What do you mean?

**You've told us many stories today and a lot of times you've said you were very proud to serve your country. What do you think is either your strongest memory or your proudest memory of your army service?**

That I was a volunteer.

37:30 That's one thing to be proud of. I've never shirked and to have been selected to go into Armoured Division, you had to sit for an aptitude test first, of course. And then to be selected to go to the signalling school and then

38:00 to go again to Water Transport. I'm proud to have topped that school and got that first ship. That was a big achievement for me. Otherwise I'm just proud to have done what I did and I'm proud of what I'm doing now. I'm doing this and just living in the village and helping people. That's the main thing to do in life. And I just help where I can.

38:30 I always will.

**Well I'd like to take you back to the printery. You mentioned that it was a high speed....?**

A high speed Miller. We used to make our own printing rollers. We had a mould

39:00 and we got these blocks of a sort of gelatine. It was a gelatine mix and we'd put it on the rollers to ink the forms. I remember one day it was my job to make some more rollers for the press and I fixed it all up and I boiled the stuff up on a fire we had going and some natives came around and they looked and I cut off a piece from this block and I

39:30 pretended to eat it. It wasn't in there at all and then I cut off a piece and passed it around and they all started chewing it and then they ran away. I was a bit of a character at things like that. We used to make our own rollers for the press because if you let things stand for a couple of days, fungus would get into them. If they had mould on them they were no good, so we were constantly making new rollers for the press.

40:00 There was only one person who was on the press with me that I still have contact with. I phoned him recently. And he was a good mate. I think they've all gone now, the staff that we had. I know there's two still going but I've only had contact with one. But just the passing of time that we

40:30 can't stop.

**And when you say rollers, what are the rollers for?**

The rollers ink the printing form. It is a very clever arrangement really. They ink the printing form and you have to keep on changing them because of the tropical conditions. Sorry about that.

**41:00 I think we're out of tape so we might stop now and change our tape.**

That's good. That's good. No more questions please.

41:12 End of tape

## Tape 8

00:30 **OK Sid. You were just about to tell me about the Eastern Command Printing Unit. Where was that?**

It was on the corner of Mary and Reservoir Streets, Sydney about five hundred yards from Central railway station and it was such a good job because I could do my printing, deal with my trade and

01:00 I could....I was still coming off my apprenticeship, which was great. And they were a good bunch of people. We had a staff of about fifteen. We did all the printing for the army in Sydney. We printed the routine orders for all the different units. We printed the wills, death certificates, anything the army wanted printed,

01:30 books to control the expenditure on vehicles and things like that. No matter what they wanted printed, we printed. And it was run by a Lieutenant Kent, he was a nice fellow. But they had an old machine there that never ever...they couldn't get it to work. And they got some new parts made and we got it

02:00 going. Then we had a hand fed printing press which is a terrible damn thing. And so a couple of us decided we'd get rid of it. So we got it going one day. It had jaws that open and closed and we dropped a bit of wood down it and broke it, purposely. It was a useless damn thing. They made it a

02:30 big project. They sent the damn thing back to the army workshops and got it rebuilt. We still had this terrible machine to work and there was nothing we could do about it. Otherwise the machines were fairly modern and I enjoyed working there especially seeing that it was so close to the railway station. And a five day a week soldier - it was great. I was just married then and

03:00 we were just so happy. We still are.

**And when did you start up your job at the Eastern Command Printing Unit?**

I came back on the twenty-fourth of May. I was given twenty-eight days leave. I would have been in there early July 1946. It was early July 1946

03:30 I'd have been in there and I was there for about two years. It was a very good job. Especially with the sergeant's pay, you know. And once a fortnight we had to march up to Victoria Barracks to be paid, which was like a route march for us. It was quite a good march. We'd go up there and have a cup of coffee and get our pay and go back again then.

04:00 We were paid in cash then. I don't suppose they would now. It would all go onto computer now. Computers hadn't been discovered at that time. I had no contact whatsoever with the staff that worked there. Once I left I never saw them again. We just didn't meet.

**And when you left the**

04:30 **the printery in Lae...**

Yes.

**What type of farewell?**

There was no farewell because from Lae we all went together. I have a photograph of the whole crew that went. There was about fifteen of us in total. We printed one day and some army mob must have come and taken all the machinery away because one of them ended up in the war museum.

05:00 The Miller ended up in the war museum. The rest of them would have just been brought back to Sydney or maybe thrown out. I don't know. The rest was old machinery...very old machinery. We printed there one day and then we all hopped in a truck and hopped in a DC3 and flew off. But there was no farewell or anything like that. I don't know what happened to the base that was there.

05:30 I suppose some ordnance mob would have come in and taken what they wanted and the rest would have been left for the natives to do with it as they pleased. But there is nothing else.

**I'm wondering if there was a final print run that you recall?**

There was a final print run. I've got a copy of that final print run to recall.

06:00 You know, "Farewell Lae", I think it reads. And the following day we were printing in Rabaul. The New Guinea Gold didn't miss an issue. That's something we could be proud of. We had a very good staff. But as I said I don't know where they are now. They've all

06:30 gone...They could have passed on or moved to different states and I'll never see them again. But I've got photographs of some of them. I've got a wonderful photograph album and I look at that quite often. In fact my wife says I look at it too much but....

**And whereabouts in Rabaul was the printery that you were working on?**

07:00 I know exactly where it was. It was just a few hundred yards walk to the ocean yet I never ever swam there at all in Rabaul. I wasn't there for that long. Two or three months before the magic number came up and I was able to go home. I've had a wonderful army career. Wonderful memories.

07:30 And as I said fortunately I can still retain them and that's a big thing these days. Because the important thing is these things have to be recorded now for all times.

**You mentioned a little while ago that you received a promotion to sergeant.**

Yes.

**When did you receive that**

08:00 **promotion?**

I'd been in the Eastern Command Printing Unit for about six months and I walked up to the Lieutenant and I said, "Look. I think I'll go. I think I'll apply for my discharge." And he said, "Why?" I said, "Oh I'd like to get back to my old company, The Land and work some bigger machinery that we had there." And he said, "Tell you what?

08:30 If I make you sergeant will you stay?" And I said, "Now you're talking." It was quite a rise in pay. And so he made me a sergeant and I think that's the last time I got drunk. They took me up to the mess at Victoria Barracks and they pinned my three stripes on my arm. When I got home that night Cath sewed them on

09:00 properly. It was quite a move. Especially a good move because when I finally left the army and got all my service leave, it came in at sergeant's pay, which was very very good indeed. We've managed very well. Now we are retired we are still managing very very well.

09:30 We can do what we want and this is the reward for the life that we've lead. And that's a big thing. At the army-printing unit we had a bit of a social thing going. We'd go to the Tivoli, which is no longer of course. And we had a couple of theatre nights out. I've always been a very

10:00 social person. Even to this day. Let me do everything. Fortunately I've got my health and that's a big thing. I've got Cath.

**You've told us that you enjoyed going to dances during the wartime. What about songs?**

10:30 **Do you recall any songs from that period of time?**

Well it was the Vera Lynn era of course, 'Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover' and Gracie Fields came up to sing to us, which was wonderful. Gee, she was an entertainer. But you know, that's about it.

11:00 **And in the army printery what would you wear to work?**

We had...I can't think. I can't think. that was in 1948 I left the printery.

11:30 I don't know whether we had overalls or not. But at times we used to do secret printing, for the Intelligence Department. Army Intelligence. They would come down and the sheets of paper would be counted out and on one occasion I had a tangle up in the machine and the paper was torn and the fellow that was standing by

12:00 from security, he took the paper and tore it up into shreds. And it was a concrete floor. He took a bit of petrol and burned it on the spot. It was secret stuff what they were doing. I can't recall what it was but they used to bring material down, it would be typeset and printed and taken away. And the sheets were counted. But that's the only thing about the army printing press I can't recall. I can remember that happening on quite a few occasions.

12:30 But we'd have been in....1947 and 1948. They still had their intelligence going then.

**You mentioned that when you returned from New Guinea to Australia in**

13:00 **1946, you found time to meet somebody.**

Yes I did. In those days if you wanted to take a girl out, you took her dancing. These days you take her to a pub or a club. In that way society's broken down. That is my firm opinion.

13:30 I came home and I bought a motorbike and I started taking girls out and dancing three or four times a week. And if you didn't take a girl you might meet a girl there to take home. And these days of course... In those days if you took a girl home you kissed her goodnight and that was it. These days it's different. That's where society's broken down. Men have no respect for ladies these days.

14:00 That's my opinion. We did. That was different.

**And what type of dancing did you do?**

The old type of dancing. The Barn Dance, Pride of Erin, the Canadian Two Step, Foxtrot. They don't do those dances these days. You just stand two feet away from a lady and move your arms

14:30 around. But ours was a different type of dancing. It was a different sort of life all together. I almost feel sorry for you people growing up in this generation. I really do. I don't think you get as much enjoyment as we did. You'd take a girl to the pictures and things like that. It doesn't happen these days. They take a girl out these days and to a club or a pub and that's it.

15:00 Not for me thank you.

**When did you learn to dance?**

When I was about seventeen I used to learn to dance at a Friendly Societies Hall in Hornsby. I used to go there with my sister...go dancing. And then whenever I got to a port, if I

15:30 had leave I would go and find somewhere and there would be dancing going on. I used to love it. I've enjoyed life right through from day one. And I'm still enjoying life. Every day's a blessing.

**You've just mentioned your sister and I'm reminded that earlier on you said that she went off to join the Land Army.**

Yes.

16:00 **And you had two brothers who you managed to catch up with.**

Yes.

**What news of your sister did you have during the war?**

What news. We used to write to one another. That's all you could do. Because she was down here then. When my brother Harold came home on the [HMAS] Kanimbla he had his mate Ron Black with him and introduced him to Joyce. They got married. They have been married

16:30 ...they were married a fortnight before us and we have been married for fifty-five years. They've got one, two, three children and some grandchildren. They are happy. They have a yacht at Bobbin Head and they go sailing. And I've never been interested in sailing. When I came home that was it, you know. I was interested in family. But not sailing. Ron even built his own boat

17:00 and then he put his wife and children in it and went sailing up to the Barrier Reef. His son followed him and he built his own yacht, a bigger yacht. He went to Lord Howe Island and up around the Solomons and everything with his wife and children. It is a different style of life and whatever to what I've developed. I like driving. I like going away on holidays,

17:30 spending nights away with Cath. And I just love my family. We get on great.

**What did your sister tell you about her Land Army experience?**

18:00 She just said she enjoyed the work. That is all there was to it. The Land Army was the most important part they had to keep the crops going....to feed the troops and feed the Americans. A lot of our lend lease was paid back by food that we supplied to the American troops. And I hated the Yankee troops ashore because they had all the money and we didn't. They got about three times the money that we got.

18:30 And if you went to a dance the Yanks would come over and buy the girl this and buy the girl that. But I danced in every state in Australia and I enjoyed it.

**Well out of seven children there are four of you who served the country?**

**Yes.**

19:00 And Dad was an air raid warden and Mum was a collector for the Red Cross. We were a very patriotic family...all of us. The three youngest brothers...they have all passed on unfortunately but they didn't have the opportunity to do the things that we older boys did. See people these days, they would never go to the places that I have been to.

19:30 I've seen islands and countries that they wouldn't dream of seeing. It was so peaceful. It was so beautiful up in the islands in our ship. You'd just go from island to island, delivering supplies, trading with the natives. Bully beef and biscuits for fruit and vegetables and stuff like that. We were doing our job at the same time.

20:00 I would not have been able to do this yesterday. Yesterday I was a mess but today I'm ok.

**And when did the four of you manage to get together after the war?**

When I came home in May we were all still living at home with

20:30 Mum and Dad. It was a big old rambling farmhouse we lived in and we all just went to work from there till the eldest brother Les, he married in the June of 1947. He has lost his wife since. And Joyce married

- on November 15 1947 and we got married on November 29
- 21:00 of forty-seven. Two weeks later. And
- I'm wondering, when you all did return from your various serving postings what you talked about with each other?**
- 21:30 What was the question?
- What did you talk about with your brother and sister at the end of your war days?**
- What we had done...the places we had been. Les and Harold would talk about how Les would go and blast the hell out of a place and Harold would follow in his ship and do the landings. Something just flashed in and flashed out again. But
- 22:00 we would have meals together. We'd laugh and joke about how glad we were to be able to have meals together again as a family. In forty-six I got home and Christmas forty-six was wonderful, all together again as a family. Mum and Dad were just so happy. And we put Dad in -
- 22:30 one of the boys had a sidecar on his bike. We'd go to the Greengate Hotel and have a few beers and laugh and joke. Dad used to open up about his navy experiences and the places he'd been and we'd all compare notes, sort of thing. It was just a very happy time. Then Les was married in early forty-seven. That started to break up the farm, you know. Harold didn't
- 23:00 marry till afterwards. A couple of years after us. Les has lost his wife but Harold has still got his wife. She was a girl he went to school with at primary school. I'm OK with Cath and Joyce is OK with Ron. But the three younger brothers have gone.
- Well it is actually quite unusual for**
- 23:30 **a family to be so close and to talk about their war experiences with each other. Most of the stories we've heard from people are that they don't talk about their experiences from World War II.**
- Yeah. But we are different. I enjoy talking about the places I've been and the things that I've done. But if other people want to keep it all inside....you should never bottle things up.
- 24:00 I'm quite happy to talk. Before I showed you the old clock that I've got. We have a friendship club here and I gave a talk on early maritime. Then I gave another talk on Water Transport, what I'd done there. Then I've given another talk on the history
- 24:30 of the area as I know it. Which is very good. And people enjoy that.
- You told us many stories about how you were very proud and you had a very good time really, all things considered, during the war. I'm wondering what would be your perhaps saddest**
- 25:00 **memory from that period of time?**
- The saddest part of my life I think was the three days it took us to get from Thursday Island to Moresby and I thought I had lost Les and that was...There are other sad times when I have lost family members and visited people in hospital and things like that. But I've had a good
- 25:30 life because I joined a Masonic Lodge and became a Master of a lodge on two occasions. I was in the lodge for twenty-two years but I resigned about four years ago because now that I've moved into the village I just want to be with Cath. I'm not interested in going out to big organizations like that any more. I belong to a Probus Club. We belong to a Probus Club and we enjoy that. That's things we are doing together. We want to do everything together.
- 26:00 So otherwise I can't imagine living life any other way. You know. We're here and we have a lovely little cottage. We've got friends all around because everyone's a friend in the village. Those people who think that no, I'm going to stay in my own home, that's silly because one partner will go and the other is left with four walls and memories. And that's not the way
- 26:30 to live. You should be amongst people and here we've got no worries because when I get too old to drive, the village bus will take me shopping and this is a self-contained unit here - Roland Village. I was at church one morning and a fellow said, "Where do you live?" And I said I lived in paradise and
- 27:00 I meant it. And he came out and looked at the place and he's now bought a cottage. He's living up the top of the hill. And I can't imagine people living alone. It would be terrible. And I think you can just about turn that tape off, can't you?
- Just a couple more questions. I'm wondering, on reflection, looking back, what do you think**
- 27:30 **your service in the army and the Water Transport and the printery means to you?**
- I think it gave me a feeling of importance. I think it gave me a stronger feeling of belonging to this

nation and being part of it. Whenever I

28:00 meet people who aren't Australians I ask, "When are you going to get naturalized?" Maybe I shouldn't say that. My wife's shaking her head there but I often say that to people. You know, you have been here for five years, are you a naturalized citizen as yet? You should be naturalized and belong to the place really. I like belonging to Australia. I'm proud of our Prime Minister and the way he's handled things. I think he's the greatest Prime Minister we've ever had.

28:30 I've seen a few come and go. But I'm proud of my service. That's all there is to it. And the life I'm leading now. I'm proud of being able to do this and put this away for posterity. Because it is so important that sometime, a hundred years from now people will have a look at this tape and realize some of the things that happened in our time. Politicians will come and go.

29:00 but I think this is important.

**Well thank you very much for speaking with us today. In particular is there anything else you would like to add?**

No. Thank you people for giving me the opportunity to record my story. Because as I say these things have got to be kept.

29:30 I march on Anzac Day and we have an Anzac Day service up the hill here. I march in that. I'm proud to march and to see the people gather round to see us marching. You walk through that city. There is nothing like the feeling of walking up George Street there as you've passed Martin Place and saluted the cenotaph. There's nothing like it. It is wonderful. And we go to

30:00 reunion dinners again and we carry all those cargoes into all those reefs all over again. And it's great, it is, at my stage of life. Of course I'd like it to go on and on and on but I know that can't happen. But while I'm here I'll enjoy it and I think you can turn that tape off.

**Thank you.**

You can take some photographs

30:30 End of tape