Australians at War Film Archive

Gavin Campbell - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:33 **Gavin, could you give me just a brief outline about your early years; where you were born and grew up?**

I was born in Portland Victoria in 1921. My boyhood was spent there until I went to school in Melbourne for further education.

01:00 On completion of that I went straight into the Services because it was 1939 by then.

What was your father doing?

My father was a draper and he worked for his brother in an emporium. It wasn't a general store, it just catered for

01:30 millinery, manchester, menswear, corsetry, and all those things that a big store served to the customers.

Was your father in the first war?

No, he was too young for the first war. He came from central Victoria. He went to the

02:00 mining school in Bendigo and he was training as an engineer when his brother called him down to Portland to help out.

Did you have much contact with First World War veterans in your childhood?

Yes, I guess so. My father belonged to the Bowling Club in Portland and there were some returned servicemen there,

02:30 and the RSL in Portland was on my way from home to the shopping centre.

Tell me about your decision to join the services straight from school.

It was a matter of frustration I think. I had wanted to do commercial flying. When I went

03:00 to Melbourne the course I did at school was meant for a flying course but then I got bogged down. I went to Holloman Airways; they wanted a five hundred pound bond which my father couldn't afford. They then recommended I go to the Air Force for multi engine aircraft. I went there

03:30 but of course they didn't have any multi engine aircraft. Avro Ansons were expected to come out, but they didn't have any, so in January 1939 out of sheer frustration I applied to join the Navy and took off from there.

As a result of living in Portland, as a port,

04:00 **did you have any attraction for the sea from an early age?**

Oh yes. Swimming was one of my main pastimes. I used to swim about a mile a day. I used to go down and have a look at the ships that used to come in, and go over them. I suppose that would be a back ground for that.

04:30 So yes I was familiar with the sea.

Whereabouts did you enlist?

It would have been in Melbourne.

And where were you sent from there?

Down to the Naval College in Flinders, which was HMAS Service and we did

05:00 training down there. There were five of us who started off together. We were the first Special Entry. They called us Special Entry because the College used to take boys of 13, 14 for four years up to HSC [Higher Schools Certificate] level. As the five of us had had HSC training

05:30 we went in with the fourth year and did our training with them. Although the courses were slightly different because the others did academic training, we did the hard stuff; the gunnery, torpedos, signals, doubled marched six days a week, and we were able

06:00 to march on a Sunday. This was all our training for the sea.

Did you find the training a tough course?

No, it was interesting. The gymnasium was tough but I was probably the fittest I've ever been.

06:30 Twelve and a half stone. I felt like a mallee bull really. It was so good.

How about the naval discipline that you encountered for the first time?

It didn't affect me as much as some of the others because I had been to boarding school for two years. I was more or less case hardened but it affected a couple of the others quite a bit.

07:00 **Had you any idea that war was looming?**

No idea at all. I wish someone had told me and it might have been different. But there again, had I taken up flying, I probably would have been sent overseas, and we know what happened to those who were first sent overseas. So, I suppose

07:30 I was lucky to join the Navy.

Where were you when war broke out in September?

We were on a 'Show the Flag' cruise on the [HMAS] Canberra. Let me see, we were in northern Queensland. We had just been up to Papua New Guinea and on the way back when we got word that

08:00 we had to make full speed back to Sydney and that war was looming. So the Canberra hotfooted it back to Sydney. When war broke out I was then transferred to the [HMAS] Hobart. The poor old Hobart had a mumps epidemic on board

08:30 and I guess it was appropriate that the Junior Officer on board should have got mumps as well. Two hundred of us were sent to Prince Henry Hospital for quarantine, but when war eventually did break out everyone was sent back on board and then the ship was sent to Singapore.

Had you recovered by that time?

Just about,

09:00 yes. We weren't allowed ashore in Darwin because it was still under quarantine, but by the time we reached Singapore we were out of quarantine.

Can you tell me what you were doing in Singapore?

We were on our way to our war posting. From Singapore we went to Colombo and we started

09:30 convoy work. Actually the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] was put under the control of the Admiralty and they just took all the ships away from Australia except the Adelaide. But all the cruisers were sent overseas and the Hobart was no exception.

What were your duties on the Hobart at this time?

10:00 I was still actually under training. I was in the supply branch. We looked after all the clerical work I suppose, and that's what I did. The ship's records; pays; stores, both the naval stores and (a funny word) vittles which was food, catering.

10:30 That was part and parcel of my job. I was still a midshipman and that was part and parcel of my training – going around to the various departments.

How long were you on the escort work?

Hobart was away from Australia for 18 months. We were escorting from Colombo up to

11:00 the Suez into Alexandria. We were 6 months in the Red Sea based in Aden at the hottest time of the year. That was rather dramatic.

The heat?

The heat. One hundred and forty degrees down in the engine room. The stokers couldn't wear leather boots. They had to have wooden

11:30 clogs because the gratings were so hot. Hour on, hour off. They had to come up on deck for fresh air. So the Red Sea was quite an experience with the convoys. At that stage the Italians had come into the war.

12:00 They had two ports in Italian Somaliland, and these ports had submarines in each which was a bit of a problem because they used to come out occasionally, wait for a convoy to come up and tail end Charlie

12:30 travelling at 6 knots would always get a torpedo. I would always get a torpedo. In the middle of my duty I would hear an explosion on the last ship, and of course the submarine would then duck back into the port. So we always tried to pass those ports at night with the convoys.

Were there other techniques for combating the submarines?

13:00 No really. ASDIC [Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee - sonar] had not been quite finalised. It was still being developed and the only way we could detect them was visually. But we captured one submarine.

Tell me a bit about that?

Across the entrance

13:30 to the Red Sea the Navy kept an anti submarine patrol, and on this particular occasion there was a North Sea trawler which had been commandeered by the Admiralty and it was patrolling. It got a sighting. Unfortunately

14:00 the submarine was down current from the trawler so the trawler had to make it up against the current to come down with the current because it wasn't a very fast ship. You had to drop depth charges at full speed which was his full speed plus the current. He did this

14:30 and up popped the submarine. Fortunately the trawler's gun was on the fo'c'sle as he was going down stream. So he had to turn around and come up again to the submarine. He approached the submarine when the crew had just come up on deck to surrender.

15:00 As soon as the trawler approached, everybody dived overboard and started swimming towards the trawler, and the trawler only had a crew of five, and if the crew of the submarine had come aboard they would have overpowered…anyway…they fired the machine gun and everybody turned back and went on the submarine.

15:30 The trawler then signalled the submarine to follow them, and so they followed them into Aden. So ended the war for that submarine and crew. I went on board later on. It was dreadful. This submarine had been lived in for 12 months or so since the war started.

16:00 It was absolutely…the smell! It was so unkempt and untidy. It was so unpleasant. So, that was how the submarine was captured.

Did you transport the prisoners?

No.

16:30 They were taken ashore and they became POWs [Prisoners of War].

When did your patrolling in the Red Sea come to an end?

We used to go across to Colombo now and then for R&R [Rest & Recreation]. On one particular occasion we got the signal

17:00 to return to Australia. That was 1941. We returned to Australia and did the refit in Sydney. It was then that I was transferred to the Canberra. We went back then on convoy duty and this was…the main purpose of the

17:30 convoy was taking the troops across to the Middle East. They were magnificent convoys. The Queen Mary; Queen Elizabeth; Mauritania; Dominion. Magnificent ships and magnificent sights at sea. The Aquitania, she was there.

18:00 Actually the Aquitania was a bit handicapped. Most of the convoys were fast convoys. The troop carriers, not the cargo and the maximum speed they could do was 26 knots. That was the speed of the Aquitania.

18:30 As you realise smoke is a hazard. If we went 27 knots the Aquitania would make smoke to keep up the speed. So hence the convoys were handicapped by Aquitania. But later on the big convoys were split into two sections.

19:00 The Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth and the Mauritania, they used to go ahead, and when the submarine threat was over as far as the Red Sea was concerned, we used to let the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth go by themselves because they could do 32 knots, and it was a magnificent sight to see these

19:30 ships go. Almost like a speedboat. You'd see a slight puff of smoke and then the stern would go down and a bow wave would appear and away they'd go. They were magnificent ships. One particular…I can remember. When the convoys would call in at Colombo,

20:00 The Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth weren't able to go in and we used to take them to an atoll…it's now used by the Americans. It's an atoll with a very deep lagoon and these ships used to go in.

20:30 But from the sea, you wouldn't see the atoll, you'd just see the silhouette of the ships and it just looked like the Queen Mary was just sitting on the atoll. But it was completely protected and it was just a magnificent sight.

What were the reasons they were there?

Troop carrying.

I mean on the atoll.

21:00 To allow the other ships in the convoy to go to Colombo for refuelling. So we had to hold them up while the other ships went in for refuelling.

Was your whole time on the Canberra spent on convoy duties?

Yes. From Fremantle

21:30 up to Colombo. At one stage we had a bit of a scare. The Germans had released what they called Pocket Battleships which were magnificent ships. About 10,000 tons, which was comparable to the Canberra and the Australia.

22:00 Both those ships were built under the Versailles Treaty where we weren't able to have anything bigger than 10,000 tons. But the Germans in the early 30s built these pocket battleships: the Graf Spee; the Admiral Scheer; and other one – there were three of them. And they had 11-inch guns…

22:30 I think six or maybe nine 11 inch guns plus secondary armour to six inch guns. Six diesel engines and these would just speed along. The Graf Spee of course was scuttled in Montevideo. Then we got word that the Admiral Scheer

23:00 was patrolling in the Indian Ocean and that a couple of ships had been sunk by it. So the Admiral in charge then formed a squadron to search for it, and it was eventually sighted by HMS Glasgow's aircraft but

23:30 it was lost in a rain squall and wasn't sighted again. Obviously we knew it was around somewhere. Canberra was patrolling one day and some ships were flying off aircraft, and two ships - merchant vessels were sighted.

24:00 One a tanker and one a cargo ship and straight away we knew these must be supply ships to the Admiral Scheer. So the Scheer must be around somewhere. It was estimated we were 24 hours away from it. The Captain was enthusiastic about it, but I guess the crew weren't, knowing how formidable the Scheer was.

24:30 We caught up with these two merchant ships. The [Norwegian] tanker called the Ketty Brovig, and the [German] supply ship was the Coburg. Both crewed by captive crews, which the Scheer had captured and put on board. We then

25:00 signalled these two ships to stop and they did. We then told them to abandon ship. We were then in company with a New Zealand ship called the HMNZS Leander.

25:30 They took on some of the crew and we took on the rest of them; Chinese. Then the Captain decided he'd have a gunnery drill. The two ships by this time had attempted to scuttle themselves and

26:00 the Captain had organised practice gunnery. The Coburg sank through the scuttling which left the Ketty Brovig still afloat. We opened fire – not very successfully. I think there were about 200 rounds of 8 inch projectiles

26:30 aimed at this ship before it scuttled itself. In our gunnery report back to the Naval Office about the number of gunnery rounds expended, back came a signal, please confirm…I think it was about 200 rounds…please confirm the number of rounds fired.

27:00 We sent back the same number we said originally. They couldn't believe we had fired so many shots and not sunk the ship. Oddly enough, the person who originated that signal to us to confirm the number of rounds fired was to be the Captain of the Sydney and he made the

27:30 the same mistake that our Captain did…because he approached the ship from the stern and the poor old Sydney was broadside on to the Kormoran and sunk. It was quite ironical that the originator of that signal was later to be trapped himself.

When did you leave the Canberra?

28:00 We came back to Fremantle and then we were engaged on convoy duties to Singapore. When we came back from Singapore in February 1942 we got a signal

28:30 to say when will Sub-Lieutenant Campbell join Perth? The [HMAS] Perth was in Fremantle. We then sent a signal to say, on what authority? They quoted a Naval Port signal, which we hadn't received. Perth was about to sail. We had just arrived and it was a panic move as far as I was concerned.

29:00 Pack up. Pack up my things, get out and join Perth. That was on 11th February 1942. I'll never forget it.

What was the reason for the transfer? Did they give you a reason?

Yes. To fill an empty vacancy. My predecessor had been sent back to Sydney for some reason I don't know. So there was a vacancy.

29:30 I was on board so it was appropriate for me to go to Perth. So there I was, the 11th February 1942. Perth then proceeded up to Java and there began another story.

30:00 **Is this when you ended up in the Fleet under Admiral Doorman? Can you tell me a bit about that story?**

Perth was then joined by…no, we were sent down to Surabaya to join up with a combined

30:30 force or squadron called ABDA (American British Dutch Australian) under Admiral Doorman because intelligence had said there were Japanese convoys approaching and we were to go out and search

31:00 for this particular force. We were absolutely uncoordinated. The Americans did things differently to the British. The Dutch did entirely different things to everyone else. The Australians understood what the Brits did

31:30 and the British crew on the [HMS] Exeter –was damaged. The [USS] Houston was also damaged, the US cruiser. And the only ships fit to fight were the Perth, De Ruyter and Java.

32:00 So the odds were against us right from the start. Doorman was very determined and we went out and searched but didn't find them. When we were returning to Surabaya, we got

32:30 word that the Japanese position was such and such, so we turned around and sure enough the Japs were there. So then started the Battle for Java Sea and it was a one sided thing. Doorman ordered line ahead.

33:00 Houston was eight-inch. Houston had eight-inch guns with one turret out of commission and the three other ships were six inch. The eight-inch guns out ranged the six-inch guns but there we were,

33:30 they were line ahead following each other. The Japanese of course had eight-inch cruisers. They opened fire and it was just a matter of being unsullied. The Japanese kept on firing and we just sailed into their shell fire. It's quite a scary thing.

34:00 My action stations were above the after turret and I could see it all. I could see the gun flashes on the horizon when a noise like an express train would come over…shellfire. The lob would be over the ship on the other side, so that meant

34:30 good aiming as far as the Japs were concerned. They were straddling us. The ideal thing for gunnery is that you straddle your target and the next thing you hit your target. So Captain Waller was most frustrated about this and he broke line and opened fire. Then Exeter was hit.

35:00 The six destroyers which were our wing escorts were eventually sunk and we just kept firing until…as I say Exeter was hit, and we lay down a smoke screen to cover Exeter

35:30 and her withdrawal which was just about evening. The engagement was broken off and the Japs also retired under a smoke screen and we let Exeter go and then we then

36:00 got our forces together again. By this time it was dark and we found the Japs and engaged them again. This time they had aircraft above us and our florescent wake really gave our position

36:30 away. The aircraft above us were able to signal our manoeuvres to the Japanese. This of course helped the Japanese no end. It was then we found out that the Japanese had a primary weapon

37:00 which they called the Lance Torpedo. This was developed from the Admiralty Torpedo. You see, the Admiralty had cancelled the development of this because it was too dangerous to handle. But the Japanese had taken it up

37:30 and they developed it to an extent. It was an extraordinary weapon.

Tape 2

00:33 **OK, you were talking about the weapon that the Japanese had.**

It was an extraordinary weapon and it was the first time the Navy had realised that the Japanese were using this as a primary weapon, not that the gunnery was secondary to the torpedo.

01:00 It had a speed of 50 knots, a range of 20 miles and a very very explosive head. It was this we encountered in the Battle of Java Sea. The Java and De Ruyter were

01:30 hit almost straight away in night action. It was so sudden. We were astern of them and we almost collided and we had to bring the wheel hard over to avoid then and we just brushed past the ship. So this left the Houston and ourselves

02:00 as the two remaining ships. Although Admiral Helfrich who was the Commander in Chief in Java said that every ship was to fight to the last, our Captain was a bit more understanding

02:30 and felt it was a hopeless situation. So because he was the senior officer he then ordered Houston to withdraw and we went back to Tanjong Priok which was the port for Jakarta, or Batavia.

03:00 There we just tried to reorganise ourselves and get some fuel, ammunition but none of it was forth coming.

Why was that?

The Dutch weren't very cooperative. So we found rafts and things

03:30 on the wharf. The Executive Officer then said they may come in handy, put them on board. Anything that was moveable went on board, and our Captain went

04:00 ashore to find out the latest intelligence and was told it was all clear; that there had been no sightings and everything was down at the other end of Java where we had just been. It wasn't until we left

04:30 Jakarta that the Captain came over the PA system and said, look, I'm not taking any chances, I'll go to action stations, relaxed action station where you can lie down but just be there if needed if anything happens. And sure enough it happened.

05:00 We sighted a ship ahead of us and we were challenged. This challenge is a system of lights when each day the signal was changed so it couldn't be compromise. The idea was you sent out a

05:30 certain number of coloured lights from up on your yard-arm, and the ship being challenged had to answer the same signal which was laid down. So we challenged this ship and it answered in a flurry of lights. The Captain opened fire and it was then we realised we were right in

06:00 the middle of an amphibious landing on the west coast of Java. There were merchant ships unloading troops; their escorts; and then we were right in the middle of it, Houston and ourselves. So this developed into the Battle of Sunda Strait

06:30 which was a harrowing experience to say the least. We kept firing. There were targets everywhere and almost point blank. The turrets that I was above were firing in both directions.

07:00 The Japanese were trying to put searchlights onto us, so every time the lights came across our forward guns would fire, so it was bedlam. I remember

07:30 distinctly we were at increased speed, full speed. The water was so shallow that a stern wave developed and this wave was almost as high as the gunnel [gunwale] on the quarterdeck, and I thought at any time we're going to run ashore, but we didn't.

How far from the shoreline were you?

08:00 We couldn't see the shore line. The flash of the guns were so bright. The heat and the gun flash were blinding. It was then the torpedo hit forward

08:30 and the ship just seemed to lift out of the water. Water and oil just rained down on us. Then the second torpedo hit. The Captain then ordered abandoned ship.

Where were you at this point?

I was up at my action station

09:00 below the aft gun control which was above the x-turret. I had a multiple point five machine gun which we couldn't use because the x-turret was trained right down and was in our sights.

So you couldn't fire it?

09:30 No. It was then the Captain abandoned ship. I could hear people running around. I said to my offsider well, this is it. He said, I haven't got my Mae West, and I said, you'd better go and get it. I had mine on. The ship at this stage had become stationary

10:00 and started to develop a list. The crowd down below had started to put those rafts we'd picked up over the side. I went down and as I went down I inflated my Mae West. I gave them a hand

10:30 with the rafts and put them overboard. I took off my tin hat and for some reason or another, I don't know what possessed me to do it, I laid it on the quarter deck by Y-turret…something strange happens later on… and I went to the port side to jump overboard.

11:00 I looked down and I saw the propeller still turning and I thought this isn't for me. So I went further forward and straddled the guard rail ready to jump, and a torpedo hit on the port side forward of me. The other torpedos had hit on the starboard side but this one was on the port side.

11:30 It was then that I had a falling sensation. Up in the air and floating through the air. For how long I don't know. I remember when I came to I was in the water

12:00 and fortunately my Mae West kept me afloat. There were rafts and driftwood on the water and I decided I'd swim over to one of the rafts. It was then I started to kick my leg to swim and had a stab of pain on my left side.

12:30 I thought, what's happened? So I very gingerly reached down my leg and it wobbled. I'd broken my leg. Just then, a bloke came up to me and said, are you all right? And I said, no I've broken my leg. He said, how's your Mae West? I said, it could do with more air.

13:00 So he blew it up a bit more. So I thought, what do I do? I'm in the water. I'll make my way across to a raft.

What was the sensation in your leg at this point?

It was only when I moved. It was just dangling.

13:30 Of course when I kicked it, it let me know something was wrong. I then paddled across to this raft. There were other people on it of course. So I thought I've got to get on it somehow.

14:00 I hauled myself up on this still with my leg wobbling around and a bloke came along swimming and said, are you all right? And I said, no I've broken my leg. It was…I found out later, it was a bloke by the name of Bob Collins. He said, what do you reckon we can do? I said, the only thing we can do is

14:30 cut some splints. I had on overalls and so I said cut the leg off the overalls and then cut it into strips and we'll use those as ties around the splint. He said, OK, I've got my seaman's knife, I'll go and get some driftwood. By this time there's broken cases from the Japanese ships.

15:00 Broken cases drifting around. So he picked up a couple of pieces and split these down for splints. Brought them over and cut the leg off my overalls and put them on. That kept the leg steady

15:30 at this stage. But then a Japanese destroyer came along. I can remember machine gun fire amongst us, so obviously the Japanese were machine gunning. But in the meantime of course the oil fuel started to flow

16:00 from both ships where they had sunk. I saw Houston go down and I saw the Perth go down. Then the oil fuel started to flow over us. It was a mess. Everyone was covered with oil fuel. It stung our eyes. It stuck to our skin.

16:30 Things were most unpleasant. When the machine gun opened up I slipped off the raft, went under water for a while just in case. Then it stopped and I went back on the raft again. In the meantime…I don't know if it

17:00 was the same destroyer…but a destroyer stopped and there were a couple of Japanese lifeboats still floating around and the Japanese indicated to the people in the water to get in the boat and come over to the ship. Which they did do. There were a couple of boat loads

17:30 of survivors taken on board. I was in the third load. I was helped on board and sat in the stern with my leg along the seat. Then the destroyer left us and there we were, about 60 of us in the boat.

18:00 What do we do now? Obviously we had to make to shore. The boat was equipped with a sail and even had ship's biscuits on it. The oars were pulled out and people started to row.

18:30 But there's a terrific current which flows through the Sunda Strait. They estimate it could be up to 6 knots at a time and you had to try and get this on the ebb if you wanted to try and make the shore. Unfortunately it wasn't on the ebb when we started to row, and 27 hours

19:00 after we made the shore. The men were absolutely exhausted, covered with oil fuel and drained of all

energy. We were absolutely destitute, in the middle of Sunda Strait with the enemy around us.

19:30 We would find out that the locals weren't particularly friendly either. The Japanese had warned them that they weren't to be friendly to the white man. So any rate, we got to shore. They carried me to shore. We hoisted the sail as a cover. There were five people

20:00 with various injuries. Concussed mainly because they'd been in the water when explosions were happening and we were laid on the beach. They then organised a couple of parties

20:30 to go out and scout around and see where we were. One went one way and the other party went the other way. They said they'd come back but they didn't. So the five of us were left. After a while, two of them found their legs and they went off to find the others.

21:00 There was…then the third one also decided to go. We'd been there I suppose, three or four days, and a young bloke called Danny Marr said, well…he had a crook shoulder...

21:30 no clothes…we had bought ashore the tin of ship's biscuits, and every now and then the locals would come along the beach and look at us. And we used

22:00 these biscuits as barter for coconut. They used to bring along coconuts. So consequently we existed on coconut milk. Some of them would bring a bit of rice wrapped up in banana leaf.

22:30 Eventually we had to make an effort, so I said, come on we've got to go because nothing's going to happen here. So one day one of the locals came by and we managed to…by sign language, get them to cut two forked sticks to use as crutches, which they did do.

23:00 So we lined the forked sticks with kapok from the life belts.

Can I just ask at this point, was your leg in fact broken, as you feared?

Yes. It was pretty wobbly. When we got these sticks going

23:30 I got up and away we went. We took the sail with us…Danny took the sail. And also I cut off the other leg of my overalls and gave them to Danny to wear as a cover, and we headed off down the road, not knowing where we were going.

24:00 It took us…we used to call into a village and they'd give us a banana or a bit of rice. They wanted to get rid of us so we moved on. We came to a village and there was

24:30 this shelter like a bus stop, and we settled into this. We were threatened for the sail. This bloke was very aggressive and he motioned to us that he wanted the sail, and raised the parrying.

25:00 We thought discretion was the better part of valour so we gave him the sail and he was jubilant. Away he went and we lost the sail. We got the hint and moved on. This was I suppose about three weeks on this road.

25:30 By this time my arm pits were red raw from the forks in these sticks and we just begged our way for food until we came to a town we found out was called Labuan. It was the first time

26:00 we had heard English spoken. This woman came out and said, are you from the Perth? We said yes. And she said, your friends are here. Eventually this other crowd, which had left before us

26:30 had found their way to Labuan and the chief of the village had stopped them and said, you can't go any further. The Japanese have ordered us to keep you people here, or any white people here. That was it.

27:00 They tried to clean us up a bit because the oil fuel by this time had dried and it was peeling off our skin as well. So we just stayed at this village chief's house until the day the Japanese arrived.

27:30 **Tell me what happened then?**

The front line Japanese soldier is not a very handsome creature. This particular bloke came in. I suppose he had on a fortnight's growth. He had a submachine gun and he brought this up to the ready.

28:00 We thought this was it. He started to shout at us and we could tell by the tone of his voice that he didn't like us. He was followed by another soldier with a rifle, and it was then I saw my first rifle butt being used on

28:30 people. Then more came in and they started shouting. What they were shouting no one knew but they were quietened down by the appearance of an officer. He subdued them and then he came in. He could speak a bit of English

29:00 and told us we were now prisoners of the Imperial Japanese Army, and that the Army would look after us. Which was questionable of course. We were fed. After a couple of days those of us who were fit

29:30 were moved on and the Japanese officer came back in and said, you sick people will be cared for. I have arranged for transport which will take you to a hospital. Yeah! Unbelievable.

So did you in fact go to a hospital?

So a couple of days later up pulls a pony cart

30:00 and we were trundled into this cart and taken on our way. When we came to bridges which had been blown up by the Dutch, they had carrying parties which would carry us across the river with a pony cart on the other side. So off we went again.

30:30 Finally we did arrive at a hospital. It was the Pan-de-glang Hospital, which was set up by the Dutch, and there was a Dutch Sister in charge with two Indonesian doctors. They put us into bed. There was also an

31:00 American plus a couple of Perth sailors. The doctors came along, had a look at my leg, examined it, and said we can't do much about it because we haven't got the equipment to do anything. And besides

31:30 it has started to knit and fortunately it has knitted reasonably straight. We can't put you into traction because they haven't got the gear.

Had you been able to improvise any sort of splint?

I still had the same splint that was put on while I was in the raft. It had stayed in position. Fortunately

32:00 when we set it, it went straight. So they put a surgical splint on then. They took the old splint off and put a surgical wire splint on with bandages and so forth. I was there for about a month in hospital. We had the local food.

What was that like?

32:30 Rice and I suppose a type of stew. There were locals in the hospital as well. But every now and then, my bed was in the corner by a window

33:00 and every now and then at night I would hear a little noise and it would be the Dutch Sister with bread and jam. She'd hand this through the window to me.

33:30 This used to supplement our diet. It was there that I first came across the American. He was a Lieutenant JG (Junior Grade)…what was his name?

34:00 **Was he from the Houston?**

Yes. He was in a bad way. How he got there I don't know. Lieutenant JG Wiler. From this is an extraordinary story. He

34:30 died and they took the body out and I guess eventually buried him. When I arrived at the Bicycle Camp… when they moved us from the Hospital down to Jakarta,

35:00 I was approached by an American officer who asked, "Did you come across Wiler?" I said yes. He said, "What happened?" I said, he died. "Did you get his class ring?" I said, what's that? He said, "It's the ring they give them when they graduate from the Academy." No, I didn't know anything about it.

35:30 They were quite upset that I didn't do this. Diverging for a while. It appeared, months probably a couple of years later, in the Solomon Islands

36:00 there was a medic who was going through the jungle, an American medic, and he saw a dead Jap and the sun was at such an angle there was a glitter from this bloke's hand. He went over and he recognised

36:30 a ring as being American. So he took it off the Jap and he went back to his camp and he knew there was an officer going back to the States, and he gave this ring to this officer who returned to the states.

37:00 The officer recognised it as a class ring from Annapolis. Eventually when he arrived back to the States he forwarded it on, and it was identified as the class ring of this Lieutenant Wiler. So it was returned to the Academy years later.

37:30 So a remarkable thing. This Japanese who must have been in a panic going to hospital or one of the guards had pinched the ring, then been posted to the Solomon's where he was killed and he still had this ring on his hand.

Incredible.

Tape 3

00:34 **Perhaps we can pick up the story where we left off. How long were you kept at the hospital?**

Approximately a month. By this time my leg was fairly OK. Then they put us in a truck and took us back to

01:00 Jakarta where I met up with the rest of the survivors in what we called the Bicycle Camp which was the Dutch Army barracks. From there on I was with the rest of the Perth survivors together with the Army,

01:30 the remnants of the 2/2nd Pioneers and 2nd (UNCLEAR) [possibly means 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion] who had escaped from Singapore. But mainly the 2/2nd Pioneers who had been diverted to Java on their way back to Australia.

02:00 Unfortunately their equipment went to Australia and they were landed without any equipment.

Did you have any idea of what plans the Japanese had for you?

No idea at all. At that stage they were taking everything they could get and sending it back to Japan. They were sending work parties from our camp

02:30 down to the wharf, loading ships with all the stuff that the Japanese could take.

What were the living conditions like?

Well, they were permanent buildings. No furnishings inside. We had to make our own arrangements.

03:00 There were toilets and wash facilities at the end of all the huts. But they were permanent Dutch facilities.

How long were you there?

About six months.

03:30 The Americans had a field regiment there too, an artillery regiment which was taken prisoner, and of course the survivors of the Houston. We were, I suppose, fortunate that we had a minimum number of officers

04:00 and eventually the Japanese organised work parties, one officer to twenty five men. They intimated we were being transported elsewhere, and this was how they organised the work force.

04:30 There were a proportionate number of officers to men. Eventually we were moved to Singapore, but only in transit. We were transported by cargo ships, down the holds with minimum access

05:00 to the deck. Toilets were over the side and food was pretty terrible. We were only in Singapore for a couple of days when we were moved on.

05:30 Diverting again. My brother had joined the Army and in one of the convoys which we escorted to Singapore when I was on the Canberra, I met up with him. I went ashore at Fremantle and met up with him.

06:00 There were three Dutch ships used. The Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Sibajak and the Oranje. They took the 8th Division up to Singapore. So I saw Ian in Fremantle, and also when we arrived in Singapore I went along to see him

06:30 on the wharf. We said our goodbyes and wished each other good luck and so forth. We went back on board and went back to Fremantle. Of course time went on and the Japs arrived in Malaya and so forth. The surrender was in February, so I wondered

07:00 what had happened to my brother. When we arrived in Singapore I went along to Army Headquarters and enquired about Signalman Ian Campbell and he said, yes he's alive but he's been sent away with a work force

07:30 which we believe was to Burma. So when our convoy left we finished up in Burma. Same conditions on board. Our fare of submarines and torpedoes and the conditions on board. The Japanese had a great reliance on lime. They thought lime was a cure-all

08:00 for everything. They used to spread lime in the bottom of the ships, and if you moved a cloud of dust would come up…most uncomfortable even if you could lie down. So we eventually arrived in Burma. We were transported from Moulmein to a base camp at Thanbyuzayat.

08:30 There I went along and enquired about Ian Campbell. They said, yes he's with Anderson Force – Colonel Anderson being the CO of the work force. We had Colonel Williams in the 2/2nd Pioneers.

09:00 They said he is, we believe, at the 20 Kilo Camp. So everybody was put on trucks and away we went along the line where they were building embankments and working…and we pulled up outside the 20 Kilo Camp and the Japanese said, men no speak. ['Kilo Camps' indicated their distance in kilometres

from Thanbyuzayat].

09:30 These blokes were walking passed into camp. They were bent down and I said, tell Ian Campbell his brother went through. Ok mate. So eventually I found out that this chap went back into camp, found Ian and said, your brother went through, and Ian said

10:00 which brother? So any rate, we eventually arrived at the 30 Kilo Camp and we were working. As I said there was one officer for 25 men and one officer in charge of 50 men, which is one officer in charge of two, what they call a kumi. My kumi

10:30 consisted of senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]. I had…thankfully I had three naval chief petty officers which were a stabilising force. The rest were

11:00 Army Warrant Officers and Sergeants.

How did they take to having a naval Lieutenant?

No problem. Some of them were quite the prima donnas but we settled in. The NCOs as I said were a sobering force.

11:30 So we started work. They sent us out with 25 men and we started work on embankments. The first day of work, if you had to dig, was one square metre per man and one for the officer. The first day was pretty tough

12:00 because you had to dig your quota.

What sort of tools were you given?

Pick and shovel, and a basket and pole. So one dug, two carried. The second and third days were a bit better because you could fudge a bit. The idea was you made as many faces as you could

12:30 about where to dig which would confuse the Jap. So you would scratch your previous face so it looked like you had worked on it. You'd do less than your quota for the day. So the progress of the rollover was such that camps used to leap frog each other.

13:00 When one camp finished their job they were sent on and on. Stores and things like that were organised the same way. So the poor people at the far end would get the worst of the food. The Japanese would take

13:30 first pick of course, then the prisoners. Beef was in the form of a local yak and one which had seen better days. The skin just hanging on the bones and these would be walked from camp to camp. So out of curiosity my brother got himself onto

14:00 a ration party.

What was a ration party?

Well these were people who brought the rations up from the camps, the previous camps. And he was given the yak to lead. In the meantime I had been able to write notes to him.

14:30 We used to have officers going back to base camp for various reasons – records and even pay. So I used to ask this particular bloke that when he called into the 20 Kilo Camp,

15:00 to hand Ian my notes and we communicated that way. So I was able to find out where my brother was. So he got himself a yak to lead up to our camp and we met again. He was surprised to see me but he wouldn't have known that I had been moved…

15:30 but then started some team work between two brothers because numbers diminished so quickly due to conditions, that Anderson Force was amalgamated with Williams Force so that meant that

16:00 Ian and I were together in the POW camp.

In the same camp?

Yes, so we worked along the railway together. Whenever I needed his boots I'd borrow them. I never had anything to borrow but I could borrow what gear he had.

When the railway was finished, what did the Japanese do with you?

16:30 I wasn't at the finish. I had been invalided back to the base camp through illness.

How was your leg holding up at this stage?

My leg was all right. I was getting around. Before Batavia my leg was OK. I had a walking stick. But it came good.

17:00 **Tell me about being invalided out.**

Food was absolutely obnoxious. We developed all kinds of disease: malaria; dengue, dysentery, and I had all the malaria,

17:30 Dengue and so forth, so due to bad nutrition I started to develop berri berri and pellagra which is vitamin deficiency and rotten teeth. My berri berri became chronic which means the body builds up fluid

18:00 and it starts from the feet and it gradually works its way through. My face was up like this. My eyes were just slits. Eventually you drown in your own fluid. It fills your lungs. So I was sent back

18:30 to the 80 Kilo Camp under Colonel Coates. I was in a bad way. The food didn't improve that much, but any rate eventually Colonel Coates said to me, well laddie we've got to

19:00 do something with you. I'll get the…there was a Dutch chemist who was very very good…Boxtall. He said we've got to get rid of this fluid, and I'll get Boxtall to do something about it.

19:30 Now he got some pomelos…we used to trade on the black market…we would trade with the locals through the back fence, and he got some pomelos which is a citrus fruit and from that he extracted citric acid and I would get dosed up with this and also

20:00 Colonel Coates ordered a bit of liver from the cookhouse, and after a while this started to have an effect – the citric acid particularly. I remember one night

20:30 …we had bunks made up of bamboo and bags, and I was on the top bunk about four feet off the deck of the hut. I'll never forget it, Bob Buchanan was below me. He was a general manager for a dairy farm at the time, and

21:00 this fluid had been building up and the citric acid was supposed to make me urinate, but the berri berri had got me so badly I couldn't move, and all of a sudden…I was lying there on the bunk, and all of a sudden

21:30 I wanted to go to the toilet. I had that urge and I couldn't move. All the blokes were asleep and I thought what am I going to do? I really wanted to go, so I thought the best way was to roll out of my bunk which I did do and I crashed onto the floor. Woke everyone up of course

22:00 and old Bob Buchanan was startled out of his wits and said, what's wrong, what's wrong. I said, I want a wee and he gets out and moves to the other side and I said, I can't move. So two of them carried me out to what we used to call…and this is

22:30 an invention of the 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion…what they call a pisser phone which was just a long piece of bamboo with sections cut through into a pit, a covered over pit. The 2/2nd Pioneer Battalion must have saved hundreds

23:00 of lives through their hygiene practice. Mostly bushies these blokes, but very practical. That's why they were in the pioneer battalion. Any rate these two carried me out to the pisser phone and I started. I could feel myself deflating.

23:30 It was absolutely incredible.

How bloated were you?

Oh I was up here, and I was only about seven stone. Just skin and bone, but an unnatural colour of the skin and an unnatural bloatedness, legs, body. And

24:00 I was there for hours because I almost felt myself deflating. I got the…the paralysis wore off and I was helped back to bunk again and that was it. I was good after that. I came good.

Could you give me another description

24:30 **of the pisser phone?**

Well basically it's a hole in the ground covered over with bamboo and dirt, and a bamboo tube going down in to the pit through the top of the pit. Bamboo

25:00 is in sections so they had punctured these sections to make it a complete tube and you just wee-ed down this tube, and it got that name.

It's quite a simple but effective concept.

Bamboo is a great timber. Well, it's a weed but it's absolutely incredible what you can do with bamboo.

25:30 The whole of our huts was made of bamboo. The decking, the floor, up rights, supports were all bamboo. And tied together with bamboo.

Did you have to build your own huts?

Not initially no. This was the problem. We used to inherit huts and some of the camps were

26:00 cholera ridden. The Indians had been in before us, and this is where the Pioneers were so good. We use to have to clean the camps up. Faeces still there in the huts and we had to make good.

26:30 There was no help from the Japanese. We had to make our own repairs and so forth. Later on when they separated the officers from the men, we had to do our own building, but as far as the railway was concerned we just inherited huts

27:00 from previous occupants.

Tell me what happened after your recovery from the berri berri?

The railway had been finished. That was finished I think in November 1942. We were then taken into Thailand to a base camp in a place called Tamarkan.

27:30 That was where everyone was…not everyone…there were camps around the area, Ban Pong and a few of the areas like that…where the prisoners were taken after the railway was finished. But fortunately Ian and I were still together. Of course, officers were paid

28:00 everyday whether they worked or not. The other ranks were paid when they worked, five cents a day or ten cents a day…occupation money, Japanese money. Incidentally talking about occupation money. Some of the cases after the Battle of Sunda Strait had been washed a shore and there was occupation money for Australia,

28:30 in boxes which didn't quite make it to Australia. Yes, they had already printed that.

What are the implications of that?

Well they obviously had ideas of going to Australia. Australian pounds.

29:00 **That's interesting because people have said that they found out later that they didn't have any intention of occupying Australia.**

Yes, that's so, but evidently one of the ships that we had sunk, one of the cargo ships evidently had this money on board.

That's extraordinary. So how long were you working in

29:30 **Thailand?**

Well, from 1942 until the war was over. They kept us there in Tamarkan. We were a little bit better organised there.

30:00 We started up canteens and so forth. The officers contributed all their money to buy supplies from Thais. Food improved. They then started sending parties back to Japan.

30:30 I wasn't nominated to go but others were. We just stayed on until…in the meantime we suffered the air raids because we were just over

31:00 the bridge and the camp was plumb in the middle of a railway junction, an ack ack battery, an observation post on a hill on the other side of the railway line, and the Japanese headquarters were on the other side.

31:30 So actually we were a certainty to suffer from the air raid.

Were you able to follow in any way the progress of the war?

Yes.

How was that accomplished?

There were radios in the camps.

32:00 They used to be operated, not frequently but every so often. The news, the BBC used to be listened to. The news was then passed around by word of mouth. The radio was limited as far as power

32:30 was concerned. Batteries were essential and they built this…I think around about the Jakarta time, they used to go down to the wharves and work at the airport, directing aircraft and so forth, and they used to

33:00 salvage any bits and pieces they could lay their hands on. They were incredible people. They used to make up radios. Simple radios. But when we used to change camps, it became a problem. They used to disassemble the radio and put it into bits and pieces. Our plumber

33:30 used to keep tins, empty condensed milk tins, and he used to put radio parts in there. Then they used to put the parts in bags of rice and get past the Japanese inspection.

34:00 **When did you become aware that the tide was turning against the Japanese?**

Things…we did notice changes in the routine of the Japanese. After a long period you get set in a routine of what was happening and so forth.

34:30 The daily routine was always the same. Work parties used to go out, then they suddenly stopped. They wouldn't allow the work parties to go, people weren't allowed to come in. Things like that

35:00 and you used to be very susceptible to this kind of break in the routine. We used to think something was happening.

Did they change in the way they treated people?

That did happen later on. Yes. The Japanese attitude did change. Not noticeably, but it did change. They began to get more friendly.

35:30 Friendly…is a bit tongue in cheek. But some of the worst Japanese started to ease up a bit.

Where were you; how did you hear about the war ending?

One of the things that really confirmed that something was really happening…

36:00 …of course the Geneva Convention had laid down that officers and men were not to be imprisoned together. They had to be separated, but the Japanese would say they didn't sign the Geneva Convention so it doesn't apply to us. And that had happened. They took the other

36:30 ranks away and then they started shifting the officers down to another camp down in Kanburi, and one day they said, right we're going to move all the officers. They will build their own camp. They called for volunteers for the advance party. So you can imagine the number of volunteers.

37:00 Absolutely nil. So right they then decided to draw for the advance party and the way of drawing was a pack of cards for various sections of the hut. So those who drew the lowest card went on the party.

37:30 So when it came to our section, guess who drew the two of clubs? Me. So my name went down for the advance party. But much to the relief of the other service people, four of the naval blokes said, if you go we'll go.

38:00 So there were four volunteers so to speak and the other four were most relieved. So away we went, we packed up our goods and chattels. Not that we had much, just out kit bags, or haversacks rather.

38:30 We had acquired a bit of clothing and they put us in trucks and took us to a place just north of Bangkok called the Nakomnayok. It was just bare ground.

39:00 We had to march about ten miles to the area, and set up this camp, get cracking with the rations and so forth. The Japanese had bamboo delivered to

39:30 the place and we had to start building huts which we did do. We set up a galley for cooking and then the camp progressed. They would bring up further parties from Kanburi and they had to build their huts, so

40:00 officers were establishing themselves in a separate camp.

Tape 4

00:33 **Would you like to tell us that story you were just about to start then?**

We were talking about Colonel Coates. The hut where I was located was about three bays along from where his bunk was.

01:00 He had an operating theatre, or theatre attached. It had a skillion roof, bamboo table and they used to bring the amputation cases along and put them there. This Dutch chemist

01:30 used to make a local anaesthetic. How he did this I don't know but it was sufficient. It was a lumbar injection. Just sufficient to dull the pain of an amputation. Where I was you could hear the operation taking place.

02:00 It was a sound you didn't like hearing.

What sort of sound?

Have you ever been in a butcher shop for a leg of lamb and he gets the saw out and cuts it? Just the same. But it was all in good stead

02:30 because this was relief for the person. It was the only thing they could do because the ulcer would be eating the flesh and each morning Colonel Coates would go along and inspect the ulcers. The smell was something to be believed but in one of his quiet moments when he was

03:00 available I went along to him to enquire about my leg, what I should do when I got back to Australia. I explained to him what had happened; that it had been set, and he took a look at it and smelt it. He used to smoke a pipe, native tobacco, and he looked at me and said,

03:30 Laddie, I've seen worse results in Melbourne Hospital to what you've got so don't do anything with it. It will be short, which it is, but don't touch it. So I took his advice.

04:00 He was that sort of chap. Very blunt. He called a spade a spade and he was excellent. In fact all the doctors were.

How important were the doctors to morale?

They were the backbone of morale in the camp.

04:30 They had to bear the responsibility of sending men out to work. Frightful conditions, frightful illnesses. Some had to be carried out. The Japanese wouldn't allow, if you were able to lift a hand or an arm, or couldn't walk then you had to be carried out.

05:00 That type of thing and the doctors were treated the same way as the workers. They were bashed because they wouldn't allow people to go out to work because they were ill. This was the

05:30 doctors. I could name a number of them but they were all so good. They were wonderful people.

Tell me about the end of the war for you and how it came about that you left.

Oh yes. Back to Nakomnayok. Yes, we had built this camp. A brand new camp.

06:00 New area and so forth not far from the main supply line to Burma. On our way up to this place we used to go by rail for part of the way, there were Japanese wounded in other trains going in the opposite direction to us, and

06:30 we used to pass them anything we had that would help them. When this camp was finished we settled down into work parties and so forth, keeping the camp going. We were conscious of aircraft flying overhead.

07:00 Right throughout the building of the railway aircraft used to fly over. We used to see the Flying Fortresses on their way to India and so forth, but there was always this one solitary reconnaissance plane flying around, and within a couple of

07:30 days there would be an air raid. This was at Tamarkan. And the same thing happened when we arrived at Nakomnayok. This one solitary aircraft would be flying. So we thought, oh well they know we're here. They know there's a camp here. There was no identification put on POW camps anywhere.

08:00 This is rather jumping your question isn't it? After we were released we met up with some Air Force blokes in Bangkok and they asked us where we'd been, and we said a place called the Nakomnayok. They said, the Nakomnayok! Oh that's where that new camp was. We said, yes. We used to fly over that.

08:30 We said, why? We thought it was a new Jap camp built to accommodate the injured coming down from Burma, and we were ready just to do you over. So I thought, just as well the war finished when it did. They said, oh yes you were going to be a target.

09:00 The Nakomnayok. We were conscious that the Japanese were up to something because we weren't allowed then to leave the camp and this was in August.

09:30 We were in camp one day and in from the jungle came this commando major…British Army. They covered the guardhouse at the entrance

10:00 and marched up to our CO[Commanding Officer]…Brigadier Vaney I think and said, the war's over chaps! By this time the radio wasn't functioning.

10:30 The officers didn't know. And that was it. So someone produced a Union Jack and hoisted the Union Jack. The Japanese were told…they were disarmed, but they were kept on guard duty to watch the camp.

11:00 So that's how it all finished. Almost an anti climax.

How did you get back home?

They then arranged for us to go down to Bangkok and would you believe, they accommodated us in the Oriental Hotel. But the Oriental Hotel in those days

11:30 wasn't the Oriental Hotel it is today. It was just bare walls. We stayed there for some time. Mountbatten and Lady Mountbatten came down to see us. The food of course changed very rapidly, although the kept us on rice

12:00 which was augmented by a diet which we knew fairly well. Then they flew us from Bangkok to Singapore. We were in camp there, and one evening someone came around calling my name.

12:30 I acknowledged and they said, get ready in the morning, you're flying out. I said, oh no I would rather go back…because Ian was still with me. They said, no you're flying out. So next day I went to the CO and we were sent down to

13:00 …I don't know if Changi was operating then…yes it was in a small way, down to the airport and flown on the first stage to Morotai in a Dakota. Then we hop stepped our way to Australia.

What was your state of health by now?

13:30 As I said before I went down to seven stone. The rate of recovery was quite good.

Did that surprise you?

Yes. The diet of course made all the difference, and the time we had. It think they kept us back purposefully so we'd look better when we arrived back in Australia.

14:00 Recovery rate was…I wouldn't say rapid but it was quite quick.

And what was your port of entry back to Australia?

When we arrived at Morotai I looked out the aircraft window and I saw a ship which looked very very familiar. I couldn't believe it because the last time I had seen it

14:30 it was along side Garden Island as the Depot ship. The Platypus, and there it was in Morotai Harbour. So after we got to our accommodation I found my way down to what they called the Port Directorate and asked about the ship out there. They said, it's American called the Platypus.

15:00 So I said, is there a boat? And they said, yes there's a boat due soon. So I went out on board. They had kitted us up in Singapore in jungle greens, khaki hat and so forth, and when I went on board I made myself known and introduced myself to the officer on watch. He took me down to

15:30 the supply officer and they said, what are you doing in that gear? They said come up to the slop room and we'll kit you out in proper gear.

What were you wearing when you came on board?

Jungle greens. Green shirt, long pants and boots.

16:00 So they took me up to the clothing store and kitted me up with tropical rig, khaki in those days, cap, even a raincoat. I went down to the Wardroom, had lunch, my first beer for years,

16:30 and eventually went ashore all dressed up in naval rig. You should have seen the expressions on the faces of the other blokes. They said, you Navy blokes look after each other. But I suffered.

How was that?

The climate! Flying through

17:00 Papua New Guinea was cold and there was me with shorts on, long socks, black shoes. All I had was this raincoat. We arrived in Cape York, refuelled, flew to Brisbane then to Sydney and Melbourne. It was raining. The raincoat

17:30 came in handy. I was the only one…the only one who got off the plane in Melbourne. You can imagine, there I was standing on the tarmac not knowing what to do…this is at Essendon. Finally I thought I'd better go over. The Air Force blokes were right there.

18:00 They had their headquarters there. I saw a Red Cross hut, so I went across and a very nice lady said, yes can we help you? Would you like a cup of tea? I said, yes I would. She said, where are you from? I said, I'm a repatriated POW.

18:30 Well. Whether they had the wrong picture of what POWs were going to look like when they came back to Australia I don't know. I can almost see her draw back when ex-POW was mentioned. I think everybody thought we were going to be absolutely

19:00 senile, absolutely mental. This was the… I suppose it was the idea they had at the time that POWs were an emaciated lot and weren't in control of their faculties. There at I said,

19:30 I wonder if you would mind contacting Naval authorities and tell them I'm here. Yes she would and she went inside and rang up HMAS Lonsdale, which was the Depot down at Port Melbourne. Eventually a car came and picked me up. No one had been informed that I was coming.

20:00 They were so emphatic that I should fly from Singapore. That was the last message. So everybody then turned themselves inside out at Lonsdale to make me comfortable. No one knew that I was coming back.

So when did you see your family?

20:30 I stayed at Port Melbourne…well they kitted me up with naval uniform blues and so forth, and then they contacted my family and gave me a railway ticket to…a rail ticket to (UNCLEAR).

21:00 There was petrol rationing you see. There was very little petrol for civilian use. So a friend of mine from the family had saved a few ration tickets, scrounged a few more. He drove my family, my mother and father across to Warrnambool, that's where the train terminated, and that's

21:30 where I met them.

What was that like?

One of those things. You try to remember the emotion of the moment. It's very very hard to think back on. Yes, it was emotional.

22:00 I said to my friend who drove my parents over, what was it like Theo? He said, I don't quite know….I said, why didn't you take a photo.

22:30 He said, no it would have been an invasion. That was it. He said to me, have you had lunch. He said, all right…it was a Sunday, I think it was. No Saturday, the pubs closed at twelve o'clock.

23:00 We pulled into a little town, Yambuk I think it was, and he went across to the pub and said to the bloke, can we have lunch? The bloke said, we're closed. Theo said, look I've just picked up an ex-POW from Warrnambool. He hasn't had lunch

23:30 what are you going to do about it? He said, I'll get lunch! So we had lunch there and then proceeded to Portland. Ian in the meantime was coming home by ship. I met up with his wife, my sister-in-law, and his daughter whom he

24:00 hadn't seen after he was a POW, and everything settled down. They dragged out clothing I had worn before the war, and went back to the shop and got new stuff.

24:30 No, it was one of those things that you would like to remember, but as I said, the emotion of the meeting…my memory is very hazy.

Was it hard to talk about what you had been through with them?

No.

25:00 I don't think so. No one asked. I suppose no one really wanted to know, or didn't want to embarrass us by asking, and the only way they would find out was when we told them voluntarily. No, on recollection

25:30 I didn't talk about it a great deal. I think they probably read more about it in books and articles later on when it came out. But, no…

So you were still in the Navy at this point, having enlisted?

I carried on in the Navy.

26:00 **How long did you stay in the Navy?**

Until 1951. They gave me the option of leaving but I decided to stay on. The next posting I got was to the Australia,

26:30 and would you believe it was part and parcel of the occupation force in Japan. They gave me the option of opting out on going to Japan. I thought what the hell, I'll go to Japan and see a beaten nation.

Tell me about Japan?

We stayed there for…the occupation forces, I think it was six months.

27:00 Based in Kure which was the big naval base for Japan. My first sighting as we were going into the port was of a sole Japanese in a dug out canoe

27:30 fishing. I thought, there goes one of our so-called masters trying to probably gather food for the day by fishing. So we went alongside

28:00 in Kure and we operated out of there. I went up to Hiroshima, had a look there. It was devastating. But, if it wasn't for Hiroshima I wouldn't be here today. So it was an experience seeing Japan.

Did you feel your feelings towards the Japanese change

28:30 **now that you were pretty much in charge?**

Well the feeling I got in Japan was that the men were quite aggressive. MacArthur really laid down the occupation laws. There was

29:00 always a carriage set aside in the train for occupation forces. Occupation forces had priority everywhere and although the population probably accepted this, men were inclined to show their aggressiveness.

29:30 The women were a bit different.

How were they different?

Well, they were always polite. Willing to accept the fact that we were victorious. But the blokes used to look at us from the corner of their eyes. However,

30:00 the atomic bombs were the saviours as far as we were concerned.

At the time what were your feelings about the decision to drop the atomic bombs?

I thought it was the right one because the alternative…

30:30 …I don't know whether you've seen or heard about the alternative…the landing on Japan, which would have been the only way you could have taken Japan. The Americans were prepared to put ten divisions in and their firepower and so forth…absolutely horrendous what they were going to do to occupy Japan.

31:00 And also all POWs were to be killed. Mountbatten did have an idea to arm the POWs so they could fight their way out to the coastline - which would have been almost impossible to do in our condition. So all in all, although it cost a lot of Japanese

31:30 lives, it did end the war.

Did you come across any feelings of resentment amongst the Japanese men up there?

Yes, it was…I suppose aggression is a bit strong, probably resentment would be a kinder word. Yes, resentment more than aggression.

32:00 **How were you feeling about them…I mean you must have…having gone through those experiences was it difficult not to feel hatred towards them?**

No it wasn't hate. Dislike probably.

32:30 Mainly because of their attitude. It was all right while they had a rifle. The way they treated other human beings was absolutely incredible. How they could treat other human being like that.

33:00 It was something to…I felt that these people I was seeing would probably have had the same attitude if they had had a rifle in their hand. They would have probably done the same. It was

33:30 the way they were brought up. The Banzai. There's a book written by…he's a POW…called The Other Hundred Year War, and he

34:00 really tells the story…well not tells the story, he illustrates the feeling to the Japanese, that the Banzai attitude is in business as well. How they've been so aggressive in their business dealings. That the Banzai spirit still exists.

34:30 **What were you told about the Japanese before you encountered them?**

We weren't told anything. No. I'd seen Japanese before, but if they had failings, no we weren't told. I regarded Japanese as the same as myself.

35:00 They could see at night, although it was accepted…or it wasn't accepted, but rumours were that the Japanese wouldn't fight at night because they couldn't see in the dark. This was just stupid.

What about their brutality?

35:30 Well the brutality as I said before, you can't help but think how could a human being treat another human being like they did? It was I guess hatred of the white man

36:00 if it could be so. Their attitude was that you shouldn't have been a prisoner of war; you should have died for your country. And because you didn't die for your country you were no body. You were just a slave and should be treated as one.

What was that like to learn that that was how they thought of you?

36:30 Well it was of course resented but if you showed your resentment you would cop a rifle butt or a bashing.

Did it come as a surprise to you… their attitude?

Yes, I can still see that chap in Labuan when he came in

37:00 with the rifle butt and he got stuck into one of the Americans, and it was a shock to see this type of thing happen.

When you were in the camps how did you keep up hope; not knowing it would end?

37:30 Morale was always high. We'll be home my Easter, or we'll be home by Melbourne Cup day, or Christmas, and then it would go the whole cycle again. We never doubted despite our condition or so forth. The old motto was the ticket home's at the bottom of your

38:00 dixie. And it was perfectly true. No matter how abhorrent the food was, how distasteful it was, you had to eat it otherwise you wouldn't go home. We'd come back at night from work

38:30 and you'd just be absolutely dog tired, not caring much at all. Whilst the best meal of the day was still distasteful, no salt…salt was a prime requirement,

39:00 but if you had salt you could win friends easily. But it was a salt free diet.

Tape 5

00:39 **Gavin, could I ask you to start by telling us a bit about your decision to enlist in the Navy in the first place?**

Well it was mainly out of frustration because I couldn't pursue a flying career and it was just an alternative that came up.

01:00 I was living in a town which was on the sea and I was interested in the sea and ships. An ad appeared in the Melbourne papers for a cadet midshipman, so I thought I'll apply. I was accepted in January 1939 and

01:30 I was taken down to the Naval College.

It wasn't a military leaning that you had was it, you were interesting in being a commercial pilot?

Yes.

How far towards that goal had you come?

Well the only airlines that operated in Melbourne at that stage was Holloman's, and they wanted a five hundred pound bond to train people.

02:00 And of course five hundred pounds in those days was a lot of money. My father couldn't afford it. I was advised to, if I wanted to take up flying to fly multi-engined aircraft, and the Air Force was the only one, but the Air Force didn't have any. They were on a promise to get some Avro Ansons which eventually did arrive, but

02:30 not earlier enough for me.

So how did your parents feel about you involving yourself in the military; were they concerned at all?

No, I don't think so. I can't recall any resistence. They went along with what I wanted to do, and possibly my father

03:00 probably thought I should go into a bank or a post office for security. No, they were fine. It was my decision.

Did you really want a sense of adventure with what you were doing with your life?

I guess the Navy did tend towards that. Yes, ships and sailing

03:30 and going around. Yes it was just the desire to go to sea.

And once you found yourself at the Flinders Naval College, how did you respond to the discipline and the military aspects?

I had been to boarding school for two years so I was already accustomed to

04:00 discipline and living with other boys, so it was nothing really as far as I was concerned. It was just

another step forward.

Were there quite a few boys who went through the boarding school system who ended up going into the armed forces?

Not in my class.

04:30 There were five of us who were accepted and I was the only one who had been to boarding school. The others had been living at home and it was a bit of a shock to them.

Could I ask you when you had to choose your specialisation and why you chose to be a writer; or if you did choose to be a writer?

05:00 Well the positions advertised were for the supply branch for the Navy and that was branch that I went through during my service career, in the supply branch. The supply branch looked after the clerical

05:30 duties, stores, records, secretarial work and so forth.

Did you find that frustrating at any point; would you have been keen for anything more active?

No, not really. I was just that way inclined anyway. I wasn't aware of any of

06:00 the other types of departments. This particular department was advertising and it was a new thing as far as the Navy was concerned. They took…we were Special Entries, being 17, whereas at the College itself they took boys in at 13, 14. And they

06:30 served four years and finished up with the equivalent of the Leaving Certificate, after four years. Well we went in with the Leaving Certificate or HSC and were then classified as fourth year, so we were up there with the senior cadets.

And how did they accept you into that fold; or was there any resentment of you jumping in at that level?

We were a bit alien

07:00 because we had come straight into their midst from outside. We were a squad in ourselves. We were five. There were five of us and we just performed as a squad of five. We did different training to the other cadets because they had to do the academic work. We just did ordinary naval

07:30 training, signals, torpedos and just basic principals of the various departments. Torpedoes, engineering, gunnery, parade ground drill, PT [Physical Training], all that terrible stuff.

Were you quite a tight unit, the five of you?

Yes we were very good. As far as I know,

08:00 I'm the only remaining one. There was one lost on the Hobart, one lost on the Sydney. One or two retired from the Navy. I was the only one who continued on.

Did you go with the gentleman who went down on the Hobart together?

The ship…the cruiser Hobart.

08:30 He came from Sydney and he went to school here in Sydney. We weren't together on the Hobart. I was there before him and unfortunately he died under terrible circumstances. He dived into a Stinger off the Queensland coast. That was tragic.

09:00 **Could you tell me of your first impression when you arrived to board Hobart as your first posting?**

That was in September 1939. I was the only midshipman on board and it was different. There was no cadet mess, so

09:30 I was put in the wardroom as a very very junior officer, and it was a bit of a turmoil as far as I was concerned to try and assimilate with all this brass around me. I got on fairly well.

Were they quite excepting of you?

10:00 Oh yes. There were a few reserve officers on board, sub-lieutenants and so forth. Yes I got on with them well. My size counted.

Did you have any mentors on board who you looked to for guidance in those early days?

10:30 Well, the Supply Officer was a Commander. He was to give me instruction and training and so forth. I was moved around the ship to various sections and departments to learn the proper procedures and so forth, how to deal with them.

11:00 **It must have been quite a good position to be in to understand how the ship operated.**

Yes, basically naval stores is all the hardware involved and supplying parts and so forth. Catering as the word conveys was food and provisioning

11:30 the ship. Making sure that what you ordered came on board. That it was checked. The secretarial work was done by the Captain's secretary and the ship's records, pays and so forth was looked after by the Ship's office. In those days

12:00 of course everything was done by hand. Senior ratings were charged with various main ledgers and they made up pays every fortnight and the supply officer, when the pay was made up would collect the money. There was a lot to do.

12:30 **Did the outbreak of war occur before you went on board or was it occurring as you …**

No, before.

So do you think that environment and atmosphere would have assisted you in being embraced into the system in terms of getting the ship functioning?

We had come back…I was on board Canberra before. When we came back

13:00 war broke out…I think the whole of the Navy was rationalised, in that all the available people were spread out to the various ships and with full crews, and that was the

13:30 whole primary function when the Australian Navy was taken over by Admiralty, and we sailed with the Admiralty forthwith.

Is it possible for you to explain how the outbreak of war added to your urgency or attempts to become assimilated and become part of a functioning

14:00 **powerful unit, I guess?**

Well certainly it went from peacetime to wartime and attitudes changed. Things became serious, but as the war was in Europe, I think the urgency of war wasn't felt as much in Australia as it was in England.

14:30 **Were you surprised when you heard the news?**

Oh yes. At that age you don't follow the political comings and goings. Yes, it became rather serious after that.

Were you fearful?

Not really. As I've said, possibly because we were in Australia and the war was in Europe.

15:00 And we hadn't been sent to any danger area.

Can you tell me about being in the wardroom as a very junior officer. What was the experience like of being surrounded by all those people?

It was difficult. You are a junior officer

15:30 and when commanders and the Captain speak…although the Captain was in his own cabin…yes, I think you've got to respect the rank, and this applied to me. It is difficult when you get senior officers throwing their weight around.

16:00 **Hobart was a cruiser so there would have been a large officer contingent on board?**

Yes. It was a six-inch cruiser. I would say there was about 30 officers at a rough guess. Same as the Perth and the Sydney. I hadn't thought of the number of officers, but yes there would have been about thirty.

And do you recall the other officers'

16:30 **response to the Cabinet handing over command from the Royal Australian Navy to the Admiralty?**

No, it was just an accepted thing. The Australian Navy was just under control of the Royal Navy and that was just an accepted thing.

Do you think that may have been embraced by a lot of the officers; do you think they may have

17:00 **had more confidence in the Royal Navy administration?**

Well we still had our own command. Admiralty just sent us where they wanted us to go. On from that the Australian Naval Board had control over us, but the Admiralty disposed the ships where

17:30 they wanted. But we were still responsible to the Australian Naval Board.

Yesterday you gave us quite a good description of your tour up to and ending in the Middle East, one thing we didn't cover which I read in the notes was the evacuation of British Somaliland?

That was an experience.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

18:00 When Italy came into the war they invaded Abyssinia from there own section…from Italian Somaliland to Abyssinia and went southeast along the Horn of Africa into British Somaliland. And it was quite a formidable

18:30 force because the Abyssinians were that strong and the British didn't have much more than a handful of Army and military people. So consequently they were pushed to the sea. The Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean then

19:00 appointed our Captain as the Senior Officer to supervise the evacuation of the British Army, and this included Camel Call and the Indian troops. British Army of course. He had the responsibility of evacuating all our troops

19:30 out of a port called Berbera. The Italians had tanks and the British didn't have any anti tank guns so they came on board and said, this is the situation, it's desperate. The Italians are coming through just outside Berbera, have you got anything that will stop a tank. Other than pick up a turret and take it ashore, all

20:00 we had was one of our three pounder saluting guns, which is only used for saluting purposes. And I think about 12 high explosive shells. So they called for volunteers to take this gun ashore. There were four, but one was enough. So Petty Officer Jones

20:30 and… I'm trying to think of the other names…they took this gun ashore with 44 gallon drums and half a dozen bags of cement with which to make mounting for the gun, and they positioned themselves at this pass where the tanks were coming. They did remarkably well.

21:00 They stopped a couple of tanks which blocked the pass and held up the troops for some time. But 12 high explosive shells don't last long and eventually the Italians cut them off . They took these three as prisoners of war…they were our first prisoners of war.

21:30 And they then advanced towards Berbera. Well in the meantime we had given them a bit of time and all the troops had been taken off. We had cargo ships there and the troops went aboard the cargo ships.

What did the evacuation fleet consist of; there was the Hobart?

There was the Hobart and two or three cargo ships. I'm not too sure if the Parramatta was there.

22:00 Anyway, the Hobart was the directing ship. We took the Indian troops on board the Hobart and the others went aboard the cargo ships. It was quite an experience insofar as there's a climatic condition

22:30 that occurred at that time of the year. Very high winds come in from the continent, and once the Hobart went aground on a sandbank and you couldn't control the ship. It was a bit dicey. The sand started to enter all the water outlets on the ship,

23:00 and we thought if the Italians fly over now and see us we'll be in a bit of a mess. One plane did approach and we fired a gun at it, which was a bit risky, but it turned around and went away. So we spent the next ten hours waiting for the tide to come in

23:30 before we could get off. But we got off. The port was cleared. We sent a demolition party ashore to blow up any essential services, radio and so forth, and when we pulled out of Berbera we bombarded the advancing troops.

24:00 **Did you have any personal contact with the Indian troops that came on board?**

We had to feed them and bed them down. That was a bit chaotic.

Why was it chaotic?

Well facilities on board were only meant for a certain number of crew and there were a couple of hundred people on board and things began to be strained.

24:30 **It was obviously directly affecting your job?**

Yes. By this time we hadn't been able to replenish our food stocks in Aden from the supply ships that used to service the Navy, and we were down to bully beef and rice, which was the last food in the line.

25:00 But the cooks made a good effort. We used to have bully beef and rice in various styles.

I'd just like to ask you about the Italians. The Army didn't seem to have a lot of respect from the Australian Army. But when Italy entered the war was there any respect for her seamen and her fleet?

I don't think so.

25:30 When the Sydney was in the Mediterranean, when they sunk the Bartolomeo Colleoni, they …the Italians just didn't have their heart in the conflict. I don't think they wanted to be pushed into war by Mussolini

26:00 which was illustrated by that submarine that we captured. The moment a depth charge was dropped, the submarine came up and everyone surrendered. I think they were quite happy to be out of the conflict.

Was she quite a sophisticated fleet; beyond the seamen; the actual Italian fleet?

Oh yes. They had a very big fleet. They had battleships.

26:30 Oh yes.

Can I ask about your respect or fear for the German seaman and the fleet; the equipment and ships at their disposal; and the fighting seamen?

Yes, different all together. The Germans after the First World War lost their fleet,

27:00 which was a condition of the Treaty of Versailles. When the National Party took over, the Nazis, they started rebuilding their fleet. In World War Two the Royal Navy had 1914-18 battleships, which were totally outdated, and the Germans were able to rebuild with

27:30 modern equipment, modern gunnery practice which far outweighed the Royal Navy as far as ships were concerned. Although they did start to rebuilt their own. So that was the whole picture. And of course they had the U-Boats

28:00 which were very determined to stop the supplies from the United States. They were very good.

Did you have quite a lot of respect for the personnel manning the fleet?

I never came across the German Navy.

In terms of their skill?

Oh without a doubt. When the

28:30 Kormoran sank the Sydney. That was outfoxing our ship. They had the determination and they had the equipment.

Yesterday you spoke with quite a bit of admiration for the pocket battleship that you were hunting on board Canberra…the name's just slipped beyond me.

29:00 This was a case in point. Their ships were built in the late '30s. They were modern ships, and their gunnery was absolutely accurate because they had the right equipment. Their battleships: the Gneisenau and the Scharnhorst, they were magnificent ships and of course they were bottled up

29:30 by the Royal Navy by frequent air raids, so we had a certain amount of power to stop them operating. A few of the battleships got out but not for long.

You talk about the potency of their gunnery, when you finally bombarded the two supply ships…

30:00 **…the name of the pocket battleship you were hunting?**

Admiral Von Sheer [Admiral Scheer].

The Von Scheer … and you came across the Coburg and the Ketty Brovig, when it took 200 rounds to sink her, what were your thoughts about the capability of the ship to defend itself.

Let me say this and you can draw your own conclusions. Canberra was built in 1928 and

30:30 it hadn't been modernised. It still had war equipment that was available in 1928. A case in point, aircraft in 1939 could fly 200-300 miles an hour. The Canberra had an aircraft control table

31:00 which was to control the four inch guns in case of an aircraft attack. The table only went to 100 miles an hour. What could you do if an aircraft was coming at you at 250-300 miles an hour like a Stuka dive-bomber, you just can't cope.

31:30 **Did you have concerns then for the ship's ability to defend itself; was that a concern for you?**

Well they then decided that they would take the four-inch guns out of the control table and appoint what

they called ‘Spotting Officers’ for each of the four guns, and each spotting officer

32:00 was to direct the gun to a particular target or whatever target you saw. This was my action station on board Canberra. I was Spotting Officer on one of the four-inch guns. This was the only way we could overcome the direction of firing at the aircraft.

32:30 Unfortunately it was a pity that these ships were neglected so much. The Australia was the same, although the Australia had a refit in England and it had different equipment.

The Canberra then would have had quite a heavy reliance on her escorts; how many escorts would she have been constantly accompanied by?

No, Canberra was the escort.

33:00 Part of the escorts for convoys. There were no escorts for Canberra.

While you were on board Canberra you were working in the captain’s office; can you tell me about the nature of that work?

It was partly training and in the ship’s office.

33:30 **Who was the CO of Canberra at that time?**

You should have given me notice of this question. Captain Farley, Fearless Frank we called him. [Probably confusing Captain Harold Farncomb who assumed command in June 1940, and Captain Frank Getting who assumed command in June 1942]

After whom? The Collins Class…the Second Collin’s Class was named after him.

That’s right, yes. [Farncomb had a Collins Class submarine named after him].

And was he a well-respected Captain?

Next question.

34:00 **Thank you for that answer. While you were on board Canberra, towards the end Japan entered the war. Can you tell us about hearing that news; your personal reaction and the crew’s response to hearing that Japan had entered the war?**

Well things started to get serious of course. We followed the progress of the Japanese

34:30 down in a southerly direction into Malaya. Yes, we were in the situation where the Canberra couldn’t be spared for a big refit. I think the Sydney was in the Mediterranean. Perth was in the Mediterranean. Australia was in

35:00 the Pacific, so Canberra was operating in the Indian Ocean on convoy duties. We were pretty well wide spread. The attitude was of course, how can the Japanese be stopped. The answer soon came.

35:30 Particularly when they sunk the (UNCLEAR). [most likely referring to the two British ships, Prince of Wales and Repulse, sunk on 10 December 1941] So it was very worrying.

Can I ask about yours and the crew’s respect for the Japanese fleet; she was one of the World naval powers. Was there a respect for her technology and secondarily, her crew?

36:00 We didn’t know much about them. They had monstrous battleships. Their bridges were like towers. There wasn’t much known. A good case was the Lance Torpedo which was rejected by the Admiralty but developed by the Japanese. No one knew about that,

36:30 until they used them and people started to realise that they had something. Because these things never left a trail. Our torpedoes left a trail. You could see them coming. But these didn’t. The fuel I think was hydrogen and peroxide or something like that.

37:00 A very volatile fuel. A very dangerous fuel and this is why the Admiralty gave it away, but the Japanese must have done something. They were a monstrous weapon.

Can I use that opportunity to ask your thoughts on gambling in warfare; the risk that was taken by the Japanese to use technology that was considered too volatile or too dangerous by the British;

37:30 **and the gamble for the Americans to use the atom bomb; the potency and the significance of the gambling spirit to warfare?**

We’re beginning to philosophise now, well warfare is a gamble isn’t it. If you’ve got the stock of weapons you’d gamble that

38:00 you’d win. But up to the stage of the atom bomb, I think the balance of power was in the aircraft and

that was borne out by the Battle of the Coral Sea which developed into a battle of aircraft carriers, and no one saw each other. And this I think was the biggest gamble

38:30 of all, that aircraft were the deciding factor of the war. Ships were vulnerable. We proved that…to aircraft.

Did you feel that?

Oh yes. It was horrendous being bombed from the air.

39:00 It makes you feel so vulnerable. When you see an aircraft coming down at you, and you wonder if he's going to release the bomb and your ship has got to manoeuvre out of the way. Yes, a bit hairy.

I bet it had you thinking about that pilot's licence again.

39:30 Yes, but still, I was still alive.

It was probably a lot more dangerous up there than the overall scheme of things.

Well, I guess I'm lucky in a way, despite the fact I was a POW. That action station I had on the Canberra… Canberra, after I left it, went back to Sydney and did a bit of a refit, then went to the Solomons.

40:00 It was there at Guadalcanal, with the American… Might just stop there before you get too far into that question.

Tape 6

00:33 **I might just ask you about the deciphering work you were doing on board Canberra and the Hobart. Can you tell us what the job involved?**

Every ship has a set of confidential books, and periodically these

01:00 books would be changed so that the codes which they contained would be changed as well. Now these codes were a numerical code and the signal department would bring this

01:30 signal down to just a series of numbers. You had a book and you then matched up these figures and that was translated into a word. You just carried on doing that and

02:00 you made the language signal. These were classified as confidential obviously and it was only for the eyes of the captain. When the signal was completed you would then hot foot it up to the captain and he would tell you what to do. This was part of our function and

02:30 there would be two people involved.

Two officers?

No, one officer and one senior rating. That was how it was done and according to the priority of the signal

03:00 was whether you got woken up in the middle of the night to attend to it. That happened in the Canberra and Hobart. It was quite a responsible job to do.

Of course you would be sworn to secrecy?

Oh yes.

Did any of the messages ever scare you?

03:30 Yes, some of the contents were about current events. Various shipping movements. Various enemy movements and the latest intelligence on enemy movements and so forth. Warnings of

04:00 enemy position. Everything that involved a secret message was always put into a cipher.

Was it difficult to carry that burden alone sometimes; not able to share it with anyone?

Yes, you had to do it, train yourself to do it.

04:30 **I just want to move now to your transfer to the Perth and what must have been a mad couple of week in terms of what was going on in the war, what with the allies being pushed back down on Singapore Island just a few days before you were transferred on the 11th. Can you tell us about the unfolding events around the time of your transfer to the Perth?**

We were at sea between Singapore and

05:00 Fremantle. We were aware of the invasion of Malaya, but as we were heading back to Australia the concern became less because they had the Prince of Wales and the Repulse up there to look after things and they

05:30 had naval guns for sure. It was highly volatile.

Did you come alongside before being transferred to the Perth, or…what was nature of your transfer to Perth?

The Perth had arrived before us

06:00 and then sent to sea but she came back in again, and in the meantime we had arrived. The Perth then sent a signal saying Sub-Lieutenant Campbell to join. We asked on what authority and evidently the signal had been made but

06:30 we hadn't received it when we were coming down the West Australian coast. It was at that stage a blind spot off the coast of Australia where radio wasn't picked up. So anyway they quoted the signal and I packed up my goods and chattels and joined Perth as of the 11th February.

07:00 **So it all happened very quickly?**

Oh yes, within half an hour.

Did you know anybody onboard the Perth?

No, I didn't know a soul. Oh I knew the Pay Master Midshipman. Yes I knew the Pay Master Midshipman.

07:30 When my predecessor left, he took over the job temporarily. I joined on the 11th. The ship didn't sail until a couple of minutes after midnight on the 13th. The Captain was superstitious. He wouldn't sail on the 13th.

08:00 So we sailed on the 14th, turned north and went up to Java.

Was that a very work intensive period for you; was there a lot of work going on onboard?

Yes, I had a lot of catching up to do. This was my first real job, having been appointed to the ship as the Captain's Secretary, I had

08:30 a lot of catching up to do. My predecessor had left two or three days before and there was a lot of records and correspondence to look after. I never had a chance really to make myself known to anyone except the

09:00 Captain.

Could you tell me about Captain Waller; just a short description of what he was like?

He was a great man. When I came on board I went up and made myself known to him. He said, sit down Campbell. I sat

09:30 and we had a bit of a talk about my experience and where I'd been and so forth. He told me then that he really didn't like the cruiser appointment, that he was used to destroyers, which he was. He was Captain D in the Mediterranean in charge of a squadron of destroyers. I asked him why

10:00 he didn't like the cruisers. And he said, well there's 650 men here, whereas on the [HMAS] Stuart and the other destroyers, I got to know every man. Not only that, I knew their families as well. He had been on the Stuart for 3 or 4 years.

10:30 If you're on a ship for that time you get to know everyone on a small ship's company. I could understand how he felt with 650 because that was his characteristic, getting to know people. He would know about them, and with 650 people you just couldn't.

11:00 So he handled the ship so well. Just like a destroyer.

Was he well respected by the men?

Oh yes! I think he only joined the ship in Sydney…I wouldn't be sure of that, but I think he joined the Sydney when the Stuart came back.

11:30 He was almost just as new to the ship as I was.

You were obviously quite familiar with the Leander Class from your time on board the Hobart. Was it an easy transition for you to the Perth?

The Perth and Sydney and Hobart were a modified Leander. They weren't …

12:00 they were called modified Leanders. Various arrangements, different arrangements for the engine room and boiler room. Perth had engine room boiler room, engine room boiler room, hence the two funnels.

The Leander only had one funnel with the boiler rooms together. It doesn't take long to find your way around. It was different to Canberra. Canberra was almost a luxury ship

12:30 compared to Perth because there's so much space in those 8 inch cruisers. With a modern ship like Perth there's more room taken up for equipment than there is allowance for accommodation.

As you were heading north up to Java, were you receiving news as to the progress of Singapore;

13:00 **did you hear about the fall of Singapore?**

Oh yes.

How did that affect morale and the crew members?

Well everyone was…I wouldn't say pessimistic but we were upset at the fact that the Army hadn't been able to hold

13:30 it. So we just thought, well we've got to look after Java. So we joined up with that force.

Was your brother in Singapore; is that how he came to be captured?

Yes. He was in the Army, 8th Division, signals.

What was his rank and role?

14:00 He was a Signalman. He just joined…I think he joined around about July and we took the convoy up around about September.

You were actually part of the convoy that took him?

Oh yes. I saw him in Fremantle and I saw him in Singapore. I was anxious at that stage

14:30 when Singapore fell about what had happened to him. It wasn't until we were POWs that I was able to contact him.

And in terms of a naval perspective in particular…the idea that Singapore represented the Royal Navy's foundation in the East, was your faith in the Royal Navy's ability to win this war shaken?

15:00 Yes. It was all due to lack of aircraft. The Repulse was lost and the Prince of Wales was lost.

But it was very symbolic wasn't it, in terms of the Navy?

If we had had the aircraft it it would have been a different thing, but hindsight has told us that the Brits were quite prepared to lose Singapore in any case.

15:30 It was a shame that we had to sacrifice a whole division of our Army, and a good cruiser like the Perth. That was what it was, just a token presentation with a good ship. She was the most modern ship in the navy.

What do you mean token presentation?

16:00 We were sent up there I think as a unit quite prepared to be wiped off, and it was a shame. It was just politics putting on a show for the Dutch.

16:30 **I'd like to ask you about the ABDA Command and the integration of these four separate units. I guess the RN and RAN were quite close. Can you explain some of the**

17:00 **difficulties and the lack of coordination and administration between the Dutch, Americans, British and Australians?**

Basically language. The RN and RAN understood each other. The Americans had different words of command.

17:30 The Dutch of course, there was a language there. We had some of their officers on board but by the time they interpreted the words and so forth, you lost time. The methods of carrying out orders were different.

18:00 So it was a whole hotchpotch, the whole thing.

And had there been any exercises and training involving the combined forces?

We arrived in Tanjong Priok. I think we refuelled and then we were sent down to Surabaya. No sooner were we in Surabaya than we were sent to sea with this ABDA Force.

18:30 No training. No coordination at all. With Admiral Helfrich ashore and Doorman aboard, it was just a calamity.

Were you able to get a sense of Captain Waller's faith in Doorman, or the way he was feeling

19:00 **about the situation?**

He was very angry. I wasn't on the bridge…that's another thing where my luck held out. My action station would normally have been on the bridge with the Captain, taking notes. The cadet midshipman who was on board, Trampy White he was retained up there

19:30 because I hadn't been on board, and while the Perth was at sea he went up there and was retained there. I had a gunnery position. Well, Trampy White was killed…

20:00 but during the manoeuvring and so forth, Captain Waller, as I said was a destroyer man, liked to throw his ship around, but he was absolutely frustrated when we went within range of the Japanese - from a 6-inch cruiser and the 8-inch cruisers were capable of firing which they did do. As I said yesterday, we were just an

20:30 Aunt Sally. Seeing flashes on the horizon and hearing an express train coming towards you and wondering if it was going to hit you was pretty daunting. So he was absolutely frustrated and finally he broke line and went

21:00 in and opened fire. That was short lived because Exeter was hit and we had to lay down a smoke screen to shelter Exeter.

Were you aware of Captain Waller's frustrations on the way to the action; was this something that was well known?

You could see him on the bridge and the people's reaction on the bridge

21:30 with Captain Waller.

And was the line ahead that was taken, the single formation, do you think it was just the most simple formation that Doorman could take under the difficult communications?

We had a destroyer screen with us, but that was dealt with by the Japanese. I think they sunk most of the destroyers…six destroyers.

22:00 And we were still going line ahead. I'm no naval planner or capable of manoeuvring ships, but I could still understand Captain Waller's frustration. He's got a six-inch cruiser with an eight-inch gunnery range

22:30 and you can't do anything about it. So he did something - which was fairly typical of the character.

Can I ask you about your action stations. Had you had any experience in gunnery before you were placed on the machine gun?

On the Canberra I was spotting officer directing the 4-inch gun on to the target.

23:00 On the Perth they put me on the .5 machine gun with a seaman, and that was what we were at when we had action.

How do you create a smoke screen?

Just tip a lot of oil down the boiler to burn as much oil as you can.

23:30 The ideal…whether a ship was steaming, is you had the right proportion, like a car air and petrol, is that you had the right amount of air and fuel coming in, so you don't make smoke. Smoke is a hazard at sea. So when the order is given to make smoke you open up all the burners and you just burn a lot of oil.

24:00 And it just belches out of the funnel.

Before becoming involved in the ABDA Fleet, do you recall the respect that the Dutch fleet had?

We didn't know anything about them. There was a Dutch destroyer down in Sydney, the Van Trop I think it was at the time. That was the

24:30 first ship we had seen of the Dutch navy.

You didn't have any direct contact with them?

No. That was the first I saw them since Surabaya.

What about the Americans?

The first time I had seen the Americans too.

Obviously most of the fleet would have been quite pleased they were involved in the campaign, were they…

Well it's all very nice having an 8-inch cruiser to back you up.

25:00 **Were they respected as seamen?**

Oh yes. The Houston was damaged of course in the bombing of Darwin. She had one turret out, but they were very good.

So you retreated with Houston and pulled into refuel?

That was after the night action.

25:30 Captain Waller then took over command and withdrew back to Tanjong Priok. We had been ordered around to a port in the south of Java, Tjilatjap. They weren't keen to lose us.

26:00 They wanted us to stick around. We were ordered then to go around to this Port Tjilatjap, but of course the Sunda Straits stopped us.

I'm sorry, I just rushed ahead a little bit. One more question about the initial action on the 27th, were you manning your action station around the clock; was there any relief from that, or were you at your machine gun post…

Yes, all the time.

26:30 **And you could see the various ships being hit?**

Yes.

Can you describe that scene, seeing ships in your convoy being hit and sunk?

It was in a way, rather spectacular. When you see a ship blow up it's horrendous really.

27:00 It was so with the De Ruyter and Java. A terrible sight really but spectacular. It was fortunate as far as we were concerned because we could have collided had not Captain Waller been alert and avoided it.

27:30 I remember going past them and they were in such a mess. People were calling out and screaming. They were in the water but you couldn't stop. You just went through them. It was a terrible thing. Terrible.

28:09 **You were just telling us about retiring to port to take on fuel.**

Yes we arrived back at Tanjong Priok and went along side. We needed ammunition, we needed fuel.

28:30 The Dutch withheld both, so we decided we had best get out. In the meantime…

Can you tell us about that lack of cooperation?

Well, they were a bit panicky. They were anticipating that the Japanese were coming and

29:00 were quite their normal selves…to realise that ships needed some necessities. During that action in the Java Sea one of my duties was to record the

29:30 action proceedings – what had happened during the action. Captain Waller told me he would like to take this ashore when we arrived in Tanjong Priok because Captain Collins who was

30:00 the Australian Liaison Chief of Staff, was in Jakarta and he would be heading back to Australia. I then had time at my disposal between Surabaya and heading into Tanjong Priok, and had to get this report

30:30 done. So I had to contact the navigator, the gunnery officers, torpedo officer and collate their reports, what they did during the action and what had happened during the action from the various departments and so forth. So I collated those and got them to shore. Fortunately

31:00 I was able to do this and send the report to Captain Collins, and that was the only thing that got back to Australia. It's been recorded in quite a number of books since…as to what actually happened, because with subsequent events there was no hope of getting anything back to Australia.

31:30 But at least they got the report on the Java Sea Battle.

Did the compiling of that report help you deal with that situation; to deal with your fear and your nerves, or did it give you a focus during that period?

It was a job I had to do and you concentrate on these things,

32:00 and get it done. It was a relief when I finished it and got it ashore. There was a runner, I suppose you would call it a runner, an offsider, a car and driver alongside, and I gave it to him and he gave it to Captain Collins and he took it back to Australia.

32:30 But I couldn't go with it.

Was time moving very quickly at this stage?

Yes yes, because there was an urgency. We were trying to get supplies of course and we tried to get everything possible

33:00 that was around the wharf on board. Yesterday I told how we picked up rafts and things like that which came in very handy because all our motor boats and rafts were all destroyed. So these rafts came in very very handy. Then we set sail and ran into the Japs. Captain Waller having been told

33:30 that it was all clear. But being the good captain he was he closed everybody up to action stations – relaxed action stations. Subsequent to all this, in the POW camps we were…we were together with

34:00 the Air Force…our Air Force, Australia's Air Force…we got talking to them, and these chaps used to fly out from Java doing reconnaissance flights, and one particular bloke reported this fleet preceding down the coast of

34:30 Malaya, and when our Captain went ashore he was given the all clear.

Who did that intelligence come from; was that Australian or Dutch?

Despite the fact that this aircraft had reported the fleet being there.

Can I ask about the training or preparation you had for dealing with

35:00 **a multiple target engagement like the one you were about to sail into?**

Yes the…well you closed up to action stations. Your turrets are manned. Your magazines are manned and you select your targets. Everyone's on their

35:30 preparedness for action. Training then takes over. You've been trained to do this. You do it automatically and possibly without thinking because it's been drilled into you time and time again. And the executive order is given to open fire, and when your target comes on

36:00 they give the order to open fire.

Were you spotting on the machine gun; is that what you were doing?

Well the machine gun was only a close range weapon. That has a very limited range and it's only an anti aircraft weapon. There were no aircraft around.

36:30 In fact even the ships were out of range. Besides x-turret was trained right round so you couldn't…the barrels of x-turret were right in front of you. So that made it very difficult.

So you had a lot of time to think? Can you tell me about that sense of helplessness of not being able to do a job?

37:00 Well there was frustration. You see what's going on and you're just a spectator hoping to hell you get out of it OK. But when you see enemy ships all around you then you begin to wonder what are the odds? You can see them diminishing very very quickly.

37:30 Then when the torpedo hit, you wonder what the extent of damage is. The next torpedo hits, the odds have gone.

How do you control your panic in that situation; when you don't have your job, you don't have something to do directly; how do you control yourself?

38:00 I think this is where training comes in. You've got to control yourself because panic isn't going to get you anywhere, so you've got to be lucid in your thoughts. Do the best you can. Try to survive. Give assistance to who ever needs it. But panic won't get you anywhere.

Once that torpedo had hit

38:30 **is that what you then set your focus too…trying to assist?**

Well there was only this senior and I up at this position. And he said, my Mae West lifesaver is up in my locker. And I said, well that's a silly place to have it, you'd better go and get it and hurry up.

39:00 That's the last I saw of him. He survived.

Tape 7

00:36 The machine gun mounting I was on had a shield in front of it. Not much protection but it was a shield, and we were worried about the flash from the turret along side, or just below us.

01:00 And one particular moment I felt something whiz past my ear and there was a clang on the deck, and I thought, what's that! I looked down and there was a hunk of metal and it was red hot.

01:30 I put a hand up to my ear and there was blood. This thing had whizzed past my ear, taken a bit out of my ear and fell down at my feet. Where it came from I don't know. Luck again.

A tiny piece of shrapnel?

Oh it was big and red hot.

Someone was looking after you.

02:00 Yes, yes. However…well the same thing happened…going back a bit onto the Canberra. The four-inch gun deck…when the Canberra was in the Guadalcanal on the bottom sound there. The Japanese came down.

02:30 They opened fire on Canberra and the first thing that was hit was the four-inch gun deck. No survivors. What would have been my chances. So, you wonder don't you. All these lucky breaks you get. It must have been worthwhile being a POW after all.

03:00 **Can I ask you about the call to abandon ship from Captain Waller; how the men responded to that and how one maintained calm?**

I didn't get the…our communication had broken down. I didn't get the order, I could just hear people yelling out, and the story goes

03:30 that when the second torpedo hit, Captain Waller said, well that's torn it, abandon ship. Then everyone went to their stations and did whatever they had to do to guard the ship. I first became aware of it when people started running around

04:00 down below on the quarter deck. I said to Doug Finlay, we'd better go and it was then he said, I haven't got my Mae West. So I climbed down and as I climbed down I started inflating my Mae West and by the time I got to the quarterdeck it was semi inflated.

04:30 I assisted people to throw those rafts over which we had picked up in Tanjong Priok.

Was the crew still fairly focused or was there an air of panic creeping in?

Not where I was. Everyone was calm and just taking things in. The ship had begun to list.

05:00 No, there was no panic. Everyone was doing what they had to do, and I decided I had to go for it too.

05:30 The ship's propeller stopped me from jumping from the first spot I was going to jump from, so I went forward and as I said yesterday, straddled the guard rail and a torpedo hit on the port side. I reckon it hit around about my cabin and I've often said to my cabin mate

06:00 I wonder what it did to our clothing and everything. I reckon it was spot on at our cabin. The blast of course sent me up in the air and I can remember falling. Like a dream…sometimes you experience falling through space.

06:30 Going…going. Then I came too in the water, floating with the Mae West under my chin as it should have been. This bloke came up to me – PO Wrighter as a matter of fact from the Ship's Office and said are you all right? I said my Mae West needs some air and he put some more air into it.

07:00 So I started to swim and I had broken my leg. But we've been through all this.

Can I ask you about watching the ship go down?

Yes.

07:30 **Just before you drop back and pick up the story, I just wanted to ask, having been in your action station out on the decks at the midship and been exposed to what was going on, would you have rather been above deck or below deck in that sort of action?**

Obviously the post to be was up on deck. But people escaped through

08:00 the engine room, the boiler room, the magazine…although some of them didn't. There are horrific stories about people who didn't. Hatches jammed. They couldn't open them. People trying to open them. It's a lottery.

08:30 **You were beginning to tell us about witnessing the ship actually go down.**

I was in the water. I remember the ship going, then the Houston later on. The ship went down gradually and of course then all the oil fuel

09:00 came along. Yes, it's a sad sight seeing a ship sink. As a matter of fact, the Ketty Brovig and the Coburg,

that was sad. Seeing the bow or stern being the last thing visible. It's been your home.

09:30 It's a sad thing to see.

What was left on the surface when she went down?

Lots of wreckage. Lots of oil fuel. There was more wreckage from the Japanese than us, because there's not much loose

10:00 on a war ship. Because all our boats were wrecked. I guess there's lockers and things that are fairly heavy but float. So the wreckage was fairly thick

10:30 but I think it was mainly Japanese. Cases and wood and that type of material. A couple of lifeboats, Japanese lifeboats came in handy. One of the things that did float was the main boom

11:00 which the …which when you're in the harbour, the motor boats and cutters are moored up to. That evidently came loose and floated. That was the last I saw of our Executive Officer, Commander Martin who was sitting astride this. He's the father of Admiral Martin.

11:30 He was lost. Just carried out to sea. This probably happened to quite a few who were in the water. The current was so strong it just took them away. Those who were close to land made it.

12:00 But there were others who didn't make the mainland but made islands, small islands that are in the Sunda Strait. They made those by swimming across the current. There were a lot who I believe were washed out to sea.

I wanted to ask you a question at this point which relates to the sinking of Perth, but I guess

12:30 **stretches across your entire war time experience; that's the fact that you were, or I imagine were in no position to grieve or to deal with the situation that you faced, or the trauma of what you faced, due to the need to survive and to get out of the situation; does that trauma and that grief just become accumulated as you try to keep pushing through to the next stage, or does it catch up with you?**

13:00 No, I think the basic instinct to survive takes over. You've got to, as I said before, there's no good panicking. You've just got to accept the situation and do the best you can…accept the situation you're in, the circumstances you're in, and

13:30 face it.

So how far down the line were you able to deal with the trauma or the grief that came with the sinking of Perth?

I don't think I grieved that much. It's a shame to see a ship sink. It's an inglorious thing. But

14:00 I guess if there was going to be trauma, it was the trauma of coping with the situation you're placed in. And you've got to face it. The situation I was in was that I didn't want a broken leg, or anything else, because under the circumstance you've got to be mobile.

14:30 So that was my handicap. Fortunately I got assistance; Bob Collins put the split on my leg. I was hoisted into the life boat with my leg laid along the gunnel

15:00 People insisted on sitting on it, however you coped with that with a few yells, and being carried ashore and coping with what was ashore.

Can I jump ahead to the Bicycle Camp in Batavia…the first camp you first stayed in where you were

15:30 **in a working party; can you compare this to what you were to face later on. How did it fit relatively to the conditions you were to face later on?**

The Bicycle Camp was an established army camp for the Dutch. Why it was called Bicycle Camp I don't know. I believe they had a bicycle unit or battalion. That was the established

16:00 camp with permanent structures and facilities, galleys and things. But compared to what was to follow later on, you couldn't compare it.

What were the small things you did at Batavia that presumedly?

16:30 **would carry on. The small things you did in terms of civility or normal life. Keeping track of dates, or keeping track of table manners or things that you did in those incredibly harsh conditions that allowed you to hold onto the civility?**

Well you always tried to conduct yourself properly no matter what the circumstances were.

17:00 You must also remember we had nothing. We came ashore in what we had. I had overalls that I lost both legs from. I gave one leg away

17:03 to Danny Marr for a wrap around. We had no eating utensils. We had to make do with fingers. If we were given rice, bananas, people coped.

18:00 But when we got to the Bicycle Camp, the Army was there and they had a ton of gear. We got dixies, Army dixies. Spoons, forks. We built up a wardrobe. People died and their equipment was spread out around those who didn't have any.

18:30 So we had the bare essentials eventually. A bit of Dutch clothing came into the camp. Blokes would go out and scrounge things from outside in the area. Bits of metal were brought into the camp and made into plates and things.

19:00 We just had to be innovative and try to get back to what we were used to.

Can I ask you about your transportation from Batavia to Changi? I was wondering if you could give us a detailed description of what conditions were like in the hold of the ship?

19:30 Well we were stacked into the ship. The Japs had made I suppose, a mezzanine level to hold more men of course. If you were lucky you got onto that but if you were right down in the bowels of the hold

20:00 there was barely room to lie down and they just kept stacking men in…more men, more men, and you just had to make room for the people that came down. There was only one ladder right down into the bottom of the ship.

20:30 This was very very difficult to try and get out of in an emergency. That was also on your mind of course. Food wise, that was cooked by the Japanese and distributed around.

21:00 The conditions on board were absolutely terrible, atrocious. You were allowed up for ten minutes a day for fresh air and to go to the toilet that was slung over the side. They were our creature comforts.

21:30 The Japanese were of course armed. Guards on the hold and there was no way you could take over the ship. We thought about it. We were equipped to do it.

22:00 We had engineers, we had stokers, we had navigators, but the armed presence stopped us.

Was there talk of escape and ways to get out of your situation; did that remain a constant focus in the early

22:30 **days of your incarceration?**

No. I believe when we were at Burma, a few tried to escape but the Burmese gave them away. They were caught and shot. Java being an island made it very very difficult.

23:00 No. I think everyone agreed it would be impossible. Besides there was a party who took over this other life boat in the Sunda Strait the day after. I think there were seven of them.

23:30 The boat was equipped with sails and they decided they would sail back to Australia. They got around on the South Coast to this port Tjilatjap. They called in hoping to get some provisions, and they were taken by the Dutch.

24:00 That was the situation. Instead of getting back to Australia they were arrested.

Did you just try and lay low, keep out of trouble and keep below the radar?

No, there was not much hope for me

24:30 with my incapacity. We wondered just where all the others had gone too. They said they would come back and get us, but they never came back. We of course wondered what had happened to them. It wasn't until it was down to two of us left on the beach that

25:00 we decided that we had to do something. And the only thing to do was to get out on the road and see what the road led too.

I meant in terms of the camp situation and surviving under the Japanese guards? Did you try and lay low as opposed to trying to escape or being

25:30 **bullish in your approach?**

No, I think we all just accepted that, OK we were POWs and this was it, and the Japanese of course with their attitude didn't recognise POWs. To them we were absolutely the lowest of the low because we had surrendered.

26:00 The Japanese wouldn't do that and therefore they treated us in a particular manner. They weren't signatories to the Geneva Convention. They didn't recognise prisoners of war. So they

26:30 disregarded all those laws of humanity.

Was that particularly so for the officers?

Yes. In the POW camps they took everyone, officers and other ranks. Then they did what the

27:00 Geneva Convention said they couldn't do which was put officers in charge of their own people as prisoners of war. Officers should have been segregated. But they put officers in charge to carry out their discipline in the camp. And if

27:30 any problems cropped up then the Japanese would go against the officers. So this was undermining all the time. Although they put us in charge of the discipline within the camp, which was wrong, they undermined their own directions in not supporting the officers

28:00 carrying out their own, the Japanese instructions. So we were in a cleft stick. Not that there was much disciplinary action required. But every now and then someone had to be reprimanded or something. There weren't many avenues for punishment. The Japanese were sufficient for that

28:30 in their own way. They disregarded all regulations.

Can you tell about how it was for you being a relatively young and inexperienced officer in a leadership position in such a difficult and responsible environment?

It goes back to training.

29:00 The training in Flinders. You go through all that training. What to do? How to handle a situation and it's instilled into you from a service angle, and you should be able to cope when

29:30 circumstances arise. So you just do it according to the drill.

Did you feel quite comfortable in that position in that environment?

Yes. My kumi, Japanese for section

30:00 I guess were senior army warrant officers and sergeants and naval chief petty officers. No I had no trouble. I think you have to respond

30:30 to them and work with the services really. You couldn't enforce the Naval Discipline Act or anything like that. You just had to go along with them, convey to them what the Japanese had told you. If there was any

31:00 disagreement you just had to try and find a compromise.

What about communication back from the men who were working with you to the Japanese; was there a strong hierarchy in terms of who you would go too?

Well everyone understood the situation.

31:30 It wasn't a matter of sometimes being bolshie about it. We were all in the same boat. The job had to be done and there was one officer responsible and the job had to be done. If it wasn't done then that officer took the brunt from the Japs. The work

32:00 was allocated and some times the officer had to allocate the work. The Jap wouldn't. The officer had to. The supervising Jap would come along, how many men? And you'd say 20. OK 20 cubic metre men dig. Right. The first dig was the worst because you had to do the whole lot. But the second and third dig was easier because you didn't do the whole lot,

32:30 you just created as many faces as you could which would confuse the Jap when he came along to measure what you had done, so you went all over the place and the work you had done the previous day you'd scratch the face so it looked like it had already been dug. So you would finish up doing half the job.

Were you fairly lightly supervised compared with the work you were doing on the rest of the railway?

No it was always …

One per kumi?

33:00 Yes, he would take you out. Normally…the Koreans. It started off with the Japanese and then the Koreans came and that was the worst.

Was that just in terms of their brutality?

Yes. The Japanese had taken it out on them. You see this is the thing about Japanese discipline.

33:30 There were three classes of privates. First, second and third class. If something went wrong the first class private would take it out on the second class private and then he would pass it down to the third

class private. So the third class private would take it out on the Koreans. What happened to the POWs? The Koreans would take it out on the POWs. We were last on the line.

Was their last line the Australian officers or the

34:00 **prisoners?**

Oh it could be the officer or the prisoners. There was no…if one of the men did something wrong the rifle butt would go in. They would come up and say, what's the matter? although you couldn't understand what they were saying.

34:30 Though some could speak broken English, sufficient to make you understand. They wanted to show that they could speak English rather than let us speak Japanese. So you would ask what was the trouble? And they would turn around and speak in his own language, and you could tell by the

35:00 tone of the language he didn't like the situation. So you would get a kick or a rifle butt or something like that, and then the whole thing would be finished. But if it was a serious thing you would report it to the Colonel when you got back and the Colonel would go to the Japanese Headquarters with an interpreter.

35:30 **That cycle of violence you talk about being passed down from Second to Third to Second class privates…**

It went right up…from the officers right down the line.

And then it came to the Australian officers yeah? There was no transfer of that from the Australian officers to the troops?

Oh no. The officers were treated like one of the POWs. The fact that you were an officer…you were the one in charge so you were the one

36:00 responsible, so you had to suffer.

What answer have you found if any for why that cycle of violence was continued?

It just overflowed. You just had to understand the Japanese mentality. These are peasants. They weren't intellectuals. They were peasants who had been conscripted into the Army I guess.

36:30 Their mentality was pretty low.

Did you come across those who were willing to stand up against that and break the cycle of violence?

There were a couple of Christian Japanese we came across, but I think they had forgotten their Christian principals. They could speak reasonable English. They

37:00 had a slightly different attitude but they were still Japanese.

Tape 8

00:39 **With the Japanese and Korean guards, was there any particularly unjust incident that you were involved with that sticks in your mind that you would like to put on the record?**

It didn't happen to me, but I can remember

01:00 two incidents. We had an interpreter, [Captain] Bill Drower who was British Army and he took a lot of the brunt with problems with the Japanese. He was about six foot six, and the Japanese didn't like tall people

01:30 because they had to look up to them. He was a lovely chap but he would get into trouble because they would blame him for the wrong interpretation, and they put him…I don't know what camp this was, I think it was Tamarkan…they

02:00 put him in the pit, a hole in the ground. The put an iron top on it. They kept him there for days with one cup of water a day, and a cup of rice. He was there I think for over a week under these conditions. And this is what they used to do.

02:30 Colonel Williams our CO was made to stand outside the guardhouse for two days at attention. Now, it's bad enough standing to attention for ten minutes,

03:00 these are things they would do. Just sheer bastardry. People were made to kneel on rough surfaces and this is a whim of a third class Japanese private.

03:30 And no matter how you protested or your commanding officer protested, it didn't carry any weight at

all. This was what they wanted to do so you had to do it. It was a terrible thing with Bill Drower. He came out absolutely emaciated.

04:00 He couldn't stand up. He was in terrible condition. But the Japanese suffered. The Japanese was hanged after the war.

The guard was hanged?

Yes, at the trials after the war. He was the person responsible.

04:30 **Did you ever witness someone who was no longer after to cope mentally with what they had been put through?**

No, I heard of one case. Our latrines… and these are dug by indoor work party. It consisted of a big ditch.

05:00 And over the top of this ditch was a bamboo platform. This is another use of bamboo. A bamboo platform and there were gaps in this bamboo, a couple of feet by eight inches across so you could

05:30 squat over and to give a bit of privacy they put split bamboo screens on either side. After a while the smell was absolutely dreadful and the sight was absolutely worse still, but this was the best we could do.

06:00 Incidentally no toilet paper. And this one particular chap committed suicide. This is the only incident that I can recall about someone losing his marbles. He just lifted this thing and jumped in.

06:30 Then we had to get him out and so forth. But that was the only incident that I heard about. There may have been others along the camps, but this happened in Tamarkan. One chaplain was asked to bury him and he refused.

07:00 Another chaplain, in fact the Perth chaplain agreed.

Was that due to the fact that it was suicide?

Yes.

How did the Japanese respond to that?

They couldn't care less. He was just another death in the camp. So you just carried out your own burial

07:30 and recorded it on your record. I don't think the Japanese were really worried, only the work on the railway.

Were your services on a writer ever utilised either by the Australians or any of the others?

No. No. I was

08:00 always out on the railway with whatever men I could take out. One thing about the naval people, they carried out their job. I can go through workers with the exception

08:30 of a couple who were totally loyal to the kumis. Always went out with them and were always their to go out whereas other service people just did their best to avoid it. We did our job.

09:00 **Was the railway at any point, or the work you were doing on the railway, at any point a source of satisfaction or pride?**

Oh no. We used to do anything we could to sabotage it. We used to build bridges or culvert covers and they used to drive the piles down into the ground.

09:30 They would have scaffolding up there with a steel dolly pulling ropes while the Japanese sang a song to keep time with. We used to go with the camp to fill in the culvert, we

10:00 used to go into the jungle to find all the white ant mounds and toss them in. Not that the white ants would consume the whole thing but it was just little bits of sabotage I suppose we could do. And if there was timber

10:30 which would rot after a while we would fill that in the embankment so that in time the thing may cave in. I don't think anyone was proud to work on the railway, or proud of the achievement.

Yet it was such a significant engineering feat wasn't it?

To the Japanese it was, because the Brits

11:00 surveyed this years before. They had carried out a survey and come to a conclusion that it was impossible to build a railway from Thailand to Burma. The Japanese did it in 18 months.

You did it in 18 months.

The Japanese drove us.

11:30 Well it cost a life every sleeper. The bridge they built down in Thailand was absolutely a pack of cards bridge. It was an incredible thing. You know how you build a bridge with a pack of cards, well this was three tiered.

12:00 And it was all held together by dog spikes. It shook a bit when you went over it but it's still there. It's not used now of course. The only non….only mechanical thing they brought in was

12:30 a rail truck which used to bring in some of the light stuff. It ran on the rails. But other than the manpower they had, they brought in an occasional elephant. If a pile was going down crookedly they would whistle in this elephant

13:00 with a Burmese on it and push the elephant in to straighten the pile. But other than that everything was done by hand. I don't think I ever saw anything mechanical.

Can you tell me how important your brother Ian and your relationship was for getting you through the experience?

13:30 We teamed up. Officers were paid whether they worked or not. They paid in occupation money which was reluctantly accepted by the locals. After a while it wasn't. You had to have Thai money. But you had to work things for yourself. Ian

14:00 got on a ration party. He would go down to Chungkai by barge for rations. And I used to give him money and he would do a bit of bartering down at Chungkai or Kanburi; whichever way the barge was going. He used to come back

14:30 with food to supplement what we were having. And that way we coexisted. Incidentally going back to when we didn't have anything, I didn't have a toothbrush.

15:00 When I met up with Ian he asked what did I want, and I said I haven't cleaned my teeth for a couple of years. Oh he said, I've got twelve. So he produced these twelve toothbrushes. He said, how many do you want, and I said a couple will do. So we used to get ash out of the fire and clean our teeth with ash

15:30 or before I got these toothbrushes I would use a stick. Also I bought a cut throat razor from the navy clothing store. It was a Bengal razor which I think cost me about seven and six, which I gave to Ian before he

16:00 joined the Army, and he brought this with him. When we were in Tamarkan they opened up a barber shop and Ian gave this razor. It so happened that this was a good razor, it wasn't a cheapy. Just one of those things. A fluke. Good steel. This barber was using it. He

16:30 used it everyday for a couple of years and he had a stone and so forth, and by the time Ian got it back the razor had been honed right back to a tapered blade. The end of the razor was almost a point

17:00 but the heel of the razor was almost normal, but the blade tapered. So when I was able to get toothbrushes in Bangkok I gave the toothbrushes back to Ian. He brought these back to Australia, wrote to Johnson and Johnson, recommending their toothbrushes and sent these 12 along to them. They sent 12 back!

17:30 So that was just one of the silly things that happened. He had a mania for cleaning teeth.

Was there a solace you could find with each other or a strength you could draw from each other?

He was seven years my senior. I was a boy.

18:00 During air raids in Tamarkan we used to share the same slit trench together, and we sent off those Japanese cards together and would combine the messages so they would complement the other. Then of course

18:30 we got cards back. Yes, we used to work together and tried to work the system as much as we could. The opportunities for him were better than me as an officer. He'd be in the know while I wouldn't be aware what was going on.

What do you mean by that?

19:00 Any rorts going on of course an officer wouldn't know about it or be told about it.

Wouldn't want to know about it?

Not really. People avoided tell you whereas another rank would know what was going on.

19:30 Having his eyes and ears open.

Was it strange being baby brother but officer to your soldier brother?

My other brother was in the Navy too. He was to be the next crew in the Krait to go up to Singapore. Remember the Krait – the ex-Japanese fishing boat

20:00 which sunk ships in Singapore. Well he was to be the next crew but it was cancelled. So there were two brothers in the navy and one in the army. No, I don't think it daunted him. I was still Junior.

Why were you being paid? I don't understand why you were being given money.

20:30 Yes, they decided to pay all officers and all the OR's that worked. So they had to keep a payroll. But we were paid in occupation money which was useless. For a while the locals accepted it,

21:00 but that was another indication of course that the war was changing.

What when they stopped accepting it?

Yes. They wouldn't accept it. It was a long term thing, but also an indication that something was happening.

You mentioned an illness or a disease yesterday, pellagra…was that right. Can you describe that?

It's a disease

21:30 of the gums. Vitamin deficiency. It's just one of those diseases that occurs similar to receding gums or … I would get ulcers in my mouth.

Was that quite wide spread amongst the men?

Yes.

22:00 Not as much as malaria or Dengue. It was one of those things that happened.

It may be a strange question but I was wondering if you could compare whether the men generally would have rather been in a working party or to have been ill; is it possible to compare those two quite terrible options?

The illnesses were so bad.

22:30 If you became ill you were considered one step to the finish. Because the illness were so bad, dysentery, cholera, all killers, and to see

23:00 a dysentery patient or a cholera patient is dreadful, dreadful. Skin and bone. Always …can't control yourself. A dreadful thing. And of course malaria. You could cope reasonably well with malaria.

23:30 They used…well I got it. I would heat up stones in the fire and take these to bed with me. Cover myself up with whatever I could find, blanket, bags and just sweat it out. The hot rock would help you sweat.

24:00 The same with dengue [fever] which is more severe than malaria. You just have to sweat that. It's debilitating. But you recovered in due course.

You spoke yesterday about the pisser phone as an innovation.

Well it saved going outside the huts

24:30 and peeing everywhere.

What other innovations can you remember; interesting or morale lifting. Things that the lads came up with?

Well the usual one was of course was – was it big enough! It was just one of those things that the Pioneers put in and it was a hygiene thing.

25:00 Another use for bamboo. It was just like going to the toilet here. The trough or porcelain. We had the same thing in bamboo.

But can you recall any other interesting innovations that they did, beyond the

25:30 **pisser phone; that the Pioneers or anyone else came up with?**

Oh yes. Sometimes we wanted rice flour. So Clive Mason who came from Wangaratta in Victoria, a real bushie, he was a grazier, decided to make a pestle and mortar. So he gets a log of wood

26:00 lies it flat. It's a big log, this round and that deep. Then lights a fire in the middle of it. Burns a hole in the middle, then gets a scraper and scapes out a cavity in it. Then he gets a log

26:30 of wood and shapes it as a club. Cleans out all the burnt bits and pieces in the cavity and makes this thing and thumps out…puts the rice in and thumps…breaks up the rice. It's almost flour. You can't get it perfect.

27:00 It's almost like a broken grain, but it made the rice taste different. Different things like that. They made boot laces out of the hides of the cattle. Innovations everywhere,

27:30 and it was these pioneers that did it all. Buckets…if you get the big bamboo, cut it off at the section so you would have the top open but the other section was there, a hung of wire with two holes, you've got a bucket.

Did the Japanese used to pinch

28:00 **this gear?**

No. The only thing the Japanese used to pinch was to come down to the doctors and in some cases demand any medicines the doctors had. They weren't Japanese medicines. They were medicines we had brought from Singapore.

28:30 No, the Japanese had their own…they used to pee out the side of their huts. They didn't have pisser phones.

Can you talk about any other nationalities you came across on the Thai-Burma Railway, or were the Australians kept to themselves?

No

29:00 we worked with the Dutch, we worked with the Americans. Didn't work with the Indians. No, no.

What were some of the cultural peculiarities of the Dutch?

They were Dutch. They were the Nordic

29:30 characteristic. Germanic.

The relations weren't too great between the Australians and the Dutch?

There were…Ian made a friend…what was his name? Isn't it dreadful. I was only thinking about him the other day. Hans Willems.

30:00 His parents…his father was Dutch, his mother was Eurasian. They had six children and Hans was black. He was just a throw back. The others were white, but poor old Hans.

30:30 He was a funny chap. Ian made a friend of him. He was a boxer. Hans and Ian got on very well. He used to come down and stay with Ian most of the time. But friendship with the Dutch was the exception. There were one or two I can remember

31:00 Bill Roberts, one of our engineers became friendly with one of the Dutch officers and he was learning German from this Dutchman, but that was the exception. The Dutch kept to the Dutch and the Australians kept to the Australians. The Americans mixed,

31:30 but they were in their section of the camp, the Dutch were in their section and so were the Australians.

Was Ian a guy who used to like being the exception?

No he was surrounded by his own company. Blokes he knew in the section. I met them.

32:00 I used to go up and we would play cards and so forth.

Was he well respected as a soldier?

Oh Ian got on well with anyone. He was a good mixer. Quite a personality. His main characteristic was that he could talk race horses and of course there were a lot of other

32:30 people the same way. He got on well. Very pleasant.

I'm not sure if you would know, but interesting when you were talking about the BBC broadcasts yesterday, are you aware whether they were setting up transmitters and broadcasting for specific purposes…propaganda?

33:00 No. It was the World Service.

How could it be that far out or were there already transmitters in place prior to the war?

Yes, the BBC transmitters were worldwide. They could go anywhere, reach anywhere. You still have it.

33:30 BBC World Service. It is still broadcasted.

I was wondering if you heard news of Canberra going down at Savo [Island, Battle of], or not until your release?

No. (UNCLEAR)

You heard that news once you had been freed?

No, didn't know until…they

34:00 lost five cruisers…the alias. Absolutely dreadful. No, I didn't know.

When you eventually heard that news, did that impact on you quite strongly given the relatively long period you spent on board?

My reaction was, who of my friends were lost! But other than that it didn't worry me.

34:30 **Could you compare what it was like with the troops and then when you were given your own officer's camp; can you compare those two experiences of being a POW; were they dramatically different?**

Not really.

35:00 Perth people still stuck together as I said yesterday. Four volunteered to come with me on the initial party. No we stuck together, and then when the others came we were just back together again. No, sometimes

35:30 things got a bit strained but that was to be expected.

So there was no real change to your experience once you were moved? How then were you reacting with the troops, were you kept separated permanently at that point?

Yes. The troops were moved out to the other camp. Some of them still stayed in Tamarkan or

36:00 (UNCLEAR). No, I suppose we were glad to get rid of the responsibility I suppose. The troops had gone. There was…air raids were a problem in Tamarkan because of its locality. As I said yesterday, Tamarkan was there, the railway line

36:30 and marshalling yards was over there. Ack Ack battery was over there. The Japanese headquarters were there and the main road went over there and we were plumb in the middle. When the air raid was on they'd bring all the locos up and park them outside our camp.

Was there any attempts at signalling to the air at all; that there were POWs there?

We would watch this aircraft come over and we would see the bomb dropping and we would say here it comes. The first air raid

37:00 we were on parade, muster, evening count. We heard these aircraft. We looked up and there were these nine aircraft coming over and we thought, hello the Japanese have got bombers, and all of a sudden we saw the bombs drop and everyone scattered, as well as the Japanese. The ack ack battery opened up

37:30 but they would go for the bridge, you know 'the' bridge, we all know it, Colonel Bogie and all that. And they overshot the bridge into the camp and I think there were twenty killed. POW's who were excused from parade because they were sick. So that shook

38:00 us a bit. Then later on with subsequent air raids, we would hear them come. They would come right up along the railway, drop the bombs on the bridge, and it got us to a certain stage that if anyone made a noise of an aircraft or a whistle he'd be lynched. Our nerves were on edge.

38:30 If anyone rattled the platform, people would run. This went on for some time until one final day a lone plane flew over and it dropped smoked bombs at each corner of the camp, and we thought, ah that indicates something.

39:00 They must know we're here. Then the Liberators came over. Well…they absolutely dropped everything on this bridge. The ack ack battery, everything. But one bloke came up, what possessed him to, but he opened up a machine gun.

39:30 He went straight up the parade ground, hit a few of our blokes, a couple of the sailors and flew away. So that rather disillusioned us for a while. We thought well he must be a bit of a rat bag that bloke. Then we had to

40:00 look after those who had been shot up. Some were badly wounded. A call went around the camp for a blood type O. We were still in the slit trenches and the Adjutant in our particular section said to me, you're a Blood O aren't you? So what else could I do?

40:30 I went along and it was one of our sailors as a matter of fact. So they took blood from me and they gave him a transfusion. But whether it was me or the shock, he died. But after that the planes avoided us. They would fly around us.

Tape 9

00:33 **I just want to move to the post-war period. You had been liberated by the British commandos and went to Bangkok and then, was it Morotai?**

Bangkok, Singapore.

At what point did you farewell Ian?

At Singapore.

Was it difficult to have made it that far together and then not go home together?

01:00 Well I wanted to, but for some reason or other they brought me on board the plane. I had no option.

It must have been a very lonely experience stepping off the plane in Melbourne?

Yes, in the rain. Particularly so when they eventually sent a car to pick me up.

01:30 We were driving through the city and it was the first ship load of POWs, repatriated POWs to arrive back into Melbourne. Most of the streets were lined and there was poor little me going across the street unheard of and unheralded on my way to Port Melbourne Depot.

02:00 **Were you uncomfortable with the public focus with POWs in any way?**

I think this is shared by most of us. We thought they thought we were going to be some demented individuals

02:30 which funny, would be affected by privation and malnutrition and so forth for three and a half years who had developed into strange people. What gave them this idea I don't know. Oddly

03:00 enough there were POWs who were picked up by the submarines who had arrived back about 18 months before, and they were sworn to secrecy. They weren't allowed to reveal themselves. This was… one particular bloke on the Perth, Arthur Bancroft, he was sunk at (UNCLEAR)

03:30 and a week later was picked up by the American submarine Queenfish. He was taken to Guam, then shipped to Saipan then back to Australia and he wasn't allowed to tell anyone. Extraordinary.

04:00 He just disappeared into the way of things. He continued in the Navy. He went to Flinders Naval Depot and he was put on a work party would you believe, to clean up the railway line. He refused to do it. Paraded before the Captain and told the Captain, look I've worked

04:30 three and a half years building a railway line from Burma to Thailand and you expect me to work on a railway line here in Flinders. Case dismissed.

What do you think was the reason for the Government or the Defence wanting to keep that secret?

I don't know. Well look at the Perth sinking. It sunk on 1st March and no one knew about it until the 13th March.

05:00 **Were you uncomfortable with the prominence that the POW experience was given in terms of Australia's overall world war experience as opposed to things like…I guess, was your POW experience focused on more so than your service on Perth and your other ships?**

As far as the Navy was concerned, no I don't think so. I

05:30 fitted back into the Service. They gave me the option of leaving the Service and they also gave me the option of not going to Japan, but I decided to continue on and things became normal. It was just a matter of catching up on what had happened while I was away.

06:00 Thinking back it probably wasn't much, but things had changed. They had women in the Navy. That was a big change.

What about in the broader community, what were some of the major changes you did notice?

Well initially of course, rationing was still on, both clothing and food.

06:30 I was issued with ration tickets. It was back to normal. It didn't take me long to settle back in. I must admit I went up to sixteen and a half stone

07:00 after 12 months. I lost that quickly but this was only due to I suppose a change in conditions, food, riotous living.

Do you feel that you buried those bad experiences or had you had such bad experiences they just didn't matter any more when you got home?

07:30 **Why did it have so little impact on you?**

I think it became, well that's what I've been through; what have I learned from it; how could I apply

those experiences if I could apply them at all. I think it taught me

08:00 to look on my fellow man better. My tolerances were better, but I think the worst things were forgotten, the better things were remembered.

Was there any bitterness left with you?

Bitterness towards the Japanese?

08:30 No. No I look…I play golf and every time we finish on a Saturday about mid day, I go past the first tee where the people are waiting, ninety percent are

09:00 Japanese. I look at them and think, well they are totally unaware of what their grandfather, maybe their great grandfathers did to me because this has been the system in Japan. Not telling the newer generation what exactly they did. And

09:30 no, I don't hold any animosity to the present generation of Japanese. I don't go out of my way to speak to them. Probably if I could quote a few Japanese words, they would take a bit of notice…no I don't go out of my way. I've got a Japanese car, Japanese television. All Japanese electrical appliances.

10:00 **You don't feel anything against the younger generation now, but what about when you went back in the occupying force?**

Oh that was a bit different.

Why did you decide to stay in the navy and take on a potentially emotional experience?

I stayed in the Navy because

10:30 I wanted to continue my career. I had got my second stripe by then so it was all go. I had been through the fundamental training, so why not continue.

11:00 Then for the occupation, I thought I was curious. I wanted to have a look. We had come out victorious so why not have a look at the vanquished.

Did you need answers. Did you need to try and make sense of what sort of culture had been able to do the barbarous acts you had experienced?

11:30 I read about the causes. What had made Japan do this and so forth. So it was understandable but I think it could have been avoided. Japan brought this on themselves by being aggressive.

Did you find any answers in Japan? Did you find any on your trip?

12:00 **Or did you find answers or settlement within yourself about those issues?**

No. I could see all around that what they had would be insignificant to their war effort. Everything had been taken for their war effort. They had nothing.

12:30 This was the ordinary man in the street. But it was just…not pitiful, as I said yesterday, there was a chap out there in his dug out canoe fishing, who to me portrayed the situation that the Japanese were in.

13:00 He had to go and get his food as we went passed. He didn't look at us, he just carried on fishing. It just didn't matter to him. It was just another passing ship while he was catching his fish. It was just significant that the

13:30 attitude of the people themselves was apparent. As I said yesterday the men were reluctant to recognise us. The women were polite.

14:00 It was just a matter of resettlement and trying to adjust yourself into a new world.

As far as you know were the local population treated quite well by the occupying force?

I don't know. I think so. I think the MacArthur poured a lot of economic help

14:30 into Japan after it was all over. I think they needed it.

How did you feel about that?

Well I didn't know to what extent it was happening. MacArthur certainly ruled for lack of a better world. His word was the law.

15:00 The Japs obeyed it. He was the power and unfortunately he kept the Emperor.

Do you feel they deserved the more medium term success of their economy and success of the society during the rebuilding process post war?

No.

15:30 The development of Japan since the war, of course all their military build up is classified as a defence force, but what they've got now, I think they're the third or fourth biggest military force in the world.

16:00 Their shipping is big. Their naval force is big and their military would probably be the same. This is all classified as a defence force. They've got big defence spending.

Can you describe your visit to Hiroshima?

Yes, it was awe-inspiring.

16:30 It was absolutely incredible seeing the destruction. You couldn't imagine anything causing so much damage. We drove down the street.

17:00 The tower was still there of course. Forget what tower it was now. It was the most prominent remains of the city. Everything was just…they were trying to clean away rubbish and stuff.

17:30 It was pretty horrify to think of the damage that was done. Not only the material damage but human damage. But it saved POWs.

Was there a catharsis in that visit, in that overall trip to Japan; was there any catharsis for you?

18:00 No, I had seen enough. There was nothing more I wanted to see. I saw the Naval Dock Yards absolutely destroyed.

18:30 Tokyo was a nightmare. Trains still ran all right. Resentment was there but no…

Have you since that time found a forgiveness for what you were put through?

No I don't think you can forgive

19:00 what they did to other fellow humans. But the same thing is happening everywhere else. Bosnia, Iraq, Israel and Palestine. It's happening everywhere. We don't seem to be able to learn.

19:30 China and Tibet. It's everywhere. Swans and Collingwood!

Can you try and describe the evolution of your feelings for the Japanese before you knew anything about them, before you were involved in the war, through your engagement with them in battle,

20:00 **to being a POW and to that point in visiting as the occupying force? Can you describe the evolution of your feelings?**

Well the only Japanese I saw before the war were merchant ships that came into port. I knew them as Japanese. They seemed to be nice

20:30 people. Friendly as far as the ships were concerned. We used to go on board and acknowledge kids around the ships. Then I suppose the next chap I saw was

21:00 in the Chief's house in Labuan. Fortnight's growth, a submachine gun, shouting. He was a different Japanese. The same attitude was through the

21:30 POW life; belligerent, arrogant, cruel. And when the tables turned, a different type of person. I guess though that's human nature, when you're given power you want to exercise it.

22:00 And once things go against you and someone is victorious over you, you want to be friendly. Other than that, after the war, I accepted the fact that America built up the

22:30 industrial power of Japan and given it the potential to manufacture all these mechanical, electrical goods which we have now accepted. So it's been a transition right through.

23:00 I think we've all learned to accept the fact that the Japanese economy is part and parcel of ours.

You spoke about a major lesson you learned from your experience was the better treatment of your fellow man, what other lessons did you walk away with from your war time experience?

23:30 We are getting very deep aren't we. As I said before I think we've learned tolerance; to listen to the other bloke's point of view

24:00 and to really accept the fact that there are other people who have the same right as you, and who want to coexist with you. It's sometimes very difficult to accept that. But it's good to tuck it in the back of your mind and try to remember it.

24:30 **What were the best times during your wartime experiences?**

The best time? I liked the Hobart. The Hobart was good. It was tough. It was a happy ship. I

25:00 had to sleep in a hammock which wasn't new – I had slept in a hammock in the Canberra. But I did think I had grown out of that particular episode in my life, but it wasn't to be. I slept in a hammock. I was the only midshipman on board and they hadn't had a midshipman before. They

25:30 had to try and fit me in. There was a spare cabin and that was the Sick Officer's cabin. I wasn't allowed to use that. But I liked the ship. I got on well with most of the officers, senior officers.

26:00 And the people in our section, the cooks and I used to get the bits and pieces up from the galley.

What was your proudest moment in the war?

26:30 I think the proudest moment was the fact that…in our POW life, that I stuck by my kumi. There wasn't much really.

27:00 The fact that I carried out my duty. I didn't have much to go by. Loyalty was the only thing.

What was your most fearful moment?

27:30 I think the air raids at Tamarkan. There were several most fearful. Could be when I felt my broken leg. Making our way towards

28:00 Lamwon with Danny Marr. Yes I think there were several.

Any regrets in your wartime experience?

No. No.

Did you feel that your contribution was appreciated by the community?

That's a pretty big question. By the community?

28:30 **By the public. By the people back in Australia? Do you feel it still is?**

I don't think so. I suppose the mere fact that they contributed to the war effort…

Do you feel that the Government appreciated your contribution in terms of their assistance?

They gave me a few medals.

29:00 No I don't think so. No one's come up to me and said thanks old chap, you did a fine job. No. It was just one of those things, you did your job.

29:30 You join the Navy these days and accept what comes. You don't join up for the glamour or to avoid anything. If something comes along and you're in, you've got to put up with it.

Have you ever been back to any of the places?

Yes I've been back to

30:00 Singapore.

Can you tell me about that experience?

Yes, we went to Singapore. We went to the War Cemetery. Went to Changi Jail. I didn't go in but went past. Although you weren't in Changi Jail, we

30:30 were in transit in one of the British Army barracks. We were there for a couple of days before we moved off to Bangkok…before moving on to Rangoon rather. Bangkok, well that had changed. The Grand Oriental Hotel is now a five star most expensive hotel in the world.

31:00 It wasn't like that when we had straw pallets to sleep on. We took a car out to Kanchanaburi to have a look at the bridge. That had been exploited. There are restaurants there now, conference centres.

31:30 Floating hotels. Railway trips up through Hellfire Pass. All commercial. You can buy railway spikes said to come from the railway. You can buy bits and pieces of sleepers.

32:00 Dreadfully commercialised. The old Tamarkan camp is gone, it's now (UNCLEAR), a truck sale depot. We went down to Kanburi Cemetery.

32:30 Through the museum. I don't think I'll go back again.

Was there any catharsis in that trip?

I took photos. There were Perth graves, Perth personnel. We took photos of those, seven I think.

33:00 I don't think…no desire to go back.

Was there anything else you'd like to talk about? Anything we haven't covered that you would

like to put down on record?

I think we've covered 11 years of naval service quite well.

33:30 We do keep in contact with each other. The Ex-POW Association brings out a magazine, Barb Wire and Bamboo and I contribute the HMAS Perth Section

34:00 for New South Wales every two months and any news I get I put through this, so it's circulated around. We have a get together every second Thursday at the Bowlers Club.

34:30 Three of us in Sydney. There's two others who don't come along because they're unable to. But three of us get together and have a beer or three. So we keep in touch that way. Of course since the war everyone's gone

35:00 their different ways. Probably reverted back to their old jobs. Some took ex-service rehabilitation via further education. Ray Barker who was my cabin mate on the Perth, he's taken a PhD. We've all gone

35:30 our different ways. Ray and I often think what happened…because I lost all my photos. I had magnificent photos of the convoys. And that's a thing that's changed in the Navy, we had no photographers. Didn't have a camera.

36:00 And these days you get fantastic photos in magazines. All the action photos that could have been made. Incidentally it's just crossed my mind, this Battle of Java Sea was the first battle since Jutland in 1915,

36:30 so up to then it had all been aircraft I guess. But this is a truly naval battle and it was probably the only one…oh

37:00 the Coral Sea, but that had aircraft. It was just one of those historical thing where the ships were just firing at each other. So

37:30 I think that just about covers the whole lot.

I think we could stop there.