

Australians at War Film Archive

Kenneth Avery (Ken) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/561>

Tape 1

00:08 **doing this interview with us. Ken, can you give me just a brief overview of your life so that we can put it in a small package and then talk about it in more detail.**

I was born in Bulahdelah in New South Wales which is, came to a little place called Tea Gardens where my mother set up a bush hospital. Through my younger

00:30 ages I stayed in Tea Gardens till high school came along and I went to Newcastle to go to high school. And during this time the Depression was really on. And when I left high school and I did a few menial jobs like timber cutting, anything where you could, you could sort of 'get a quid' as they said in those days.

01:00 And then I thought about joining the police cadets. And I went to Sydney to Bourke Street to have my examinations, medical and educational. I passed those and I met up with a young fella that was there and he'd failed his medical. And I said, "What are you going to do now?" And he said, "I think I'll go and join the navy." And I said, "Oh, I'll go with

01:30 you." So I went down and I went over to Garden Island it was, HMAS Platypus. And once again he failed his medical. I passed the medical and the educational and went home and a letter came and it had the government crest on it. And Mum was that busy,

02:00 as long as she saw it was something government she thought it was, I was in the police force. So she signed it, giving her permission for me to join, as I was only seventeen. So she said, "Well at least I'll know where you are now." Well when I went to Sydney for a final medical, that night I was on my way to Melbourne. And she didn't know anything about it until I'd written to her and said, 'That's where I am, I'm in the navy.'

02:30 And that's where life began.

And then briefly, what ships did you serve on?

Mainly HMAS Yarra, she was the main ship. Then I came back, went into the anti-submarine branch and from there I went to the Warrego, which was another sloop similar to Yarra. And I stayed in Warrego

03:00 till just about the end of the war and I was sent to Darwin. And then after the war I was sent then to HMAS Swan. She was doing the mine-sweeping up in the Barrier Reef, clearing all the mines that we put down there to stop the Japs from coming in.

Okay, let's now travel back to your mum, what was your mum like as a woman?

Very strict. We had, there was

03:30 two boys in our family. I was the elder and brought up as a girl, so to speak. And by that I mean I was taught to cook and to sew, to look after the home, to wash and iron and all stood me in stead of course when I joined the navy. But no, she was a very good woman for, in caring for her children.

04:00 And she, there was nothing she could really turn her hands to that wasn't a total success.

And your dad?

Dad was a timber worker. He worked for a firm called Alan Taylor's, which was in the saw mills. First at Bulahdelah then they came down to Tea Gardens. They had a saw mill to the north of Tea Gardens.

04:30 But because the water was so shallow they couldn't get up ships like the Allenwood which belonged to Alan Taylor's, so they shifted it down the Myall River close to the inlet, where ships could get up there and they were transferred down there. He used to leave home about half past five of a morning. Had to catch a launch all the way down to

05:00 the mill, the same back. But weekend he played cricket, was his main forte as sport. Although he was quite a fair high- jumper as well. But he taught me to ride and so forth and so on.

Were you close to your mum and dad?

Not really. Because

05:30 I was moved there as a kid, cause I had my chores to do after school, it wasn't a case of coming home from school and that was it. There was a cow to be found and milked, had to be, all the wood to be put in the baskets 'cause they were all fuel stoves in those days. And the copper had to always be ready. But when women

06:00 came in for their babies, which was never at a sensible hour, it's something like about three o'clock in the morning and all this had to be ready. And that was my job to do it and course feed the fowls and things like that. And we'd be off down swimming or playing football, one thing and another. And then at twelve, see, I left home to go to school in Newcastle.

06:30 But I was homesick in Newcastle to come back home. But no, we're not what you'd call really close. But close that I can look back and say that I'm a better person because of them both. And especially my mother for the way she tried to turn me into a female.

So was your brother brought up differently

07:00 **to you?**

Well he was the baby of the family and treated as such. He used to get away with murder. And one day they could hear him crying and screaming. And we had down the side of our place some grapevines on a trellis. And I had him tied up to it like a crucifix and he was yelling his lungs off. And of course I never sat

07:30 down then for quite some while by the time my mother finished with me. Oh no, he, very slight compared to myself. He joined the railways and he then too followed my steps and went into the navy and I got the shock of my life. Went, towards the end of war that he came into Darwin when I was there and he came up and said, "G'day," you know. But then he,

08:00 the day that he was discharged from the navy, he came from Balmoral across to Central Station to pick up a draft of sailors coming in, their gear. And on the way back to Balmoral they hit the back of a Britz wagon and he was killed and left a wife and a little boy.

What year was that?

That would

08:30 have been 1945.

The war wasn't over then or it was...?

Yeah it was over then, yeah.

That must have been a huge shock for yourself?

Yeah. Once again I was miles and miles away and it was a big shock to Mum because he and Ray, she and Ray were very close, as were dad and Ray. But he got out of

09:00 or missed out on all the things that I was taught, which I think he may have regretted, (UNCLEAR) he chose.

So were you given a hard time being brought up as you say, as a girl?

Oh no I wasn't given a hard time, I become very job-wise. See Mum'd have, she'd have a girl working there doing the cleaning. And she may

09:30 wash and polish one of the wards. And Mum'd say, "Hmmm, half done, do it again." And the girl, she used to leave the girls in tears. And I'd say to them, "Don't touch it, just leave it, just leave it the way it is." And Mum'd come back about a quarter of an hour later and she'd say, "Now that's much better isn't it?" So I had Mum worked out to a tee, that I knew all the short cuts with her.

10:00 But oh no it's a, the hardest time used to be when, as I say women came in to have their babies and they would always be in the early hours of the morning. And Mum'd wake me up and she'd say, "Go over and get the doctor." We had a government doctor at Tea Gardens, Doctor Smith-Guthrey. And he lived oh, about three or four hundred yards away. So I go over and I'd wake doctor up and

10:30 come back home and Mum'd say, "Well you better make doctor a cup of tea and the patient." So by the time I made a cup of tea and old doc had arrived then, so they'd have a cup of tea. And so the copper had to be lit to make certain there was plenty of boiling water. And I just sat around till the baby was born. And the big perk that I had, Mum would

11:00 place the baby on the, if the ward bed, just place the baby on there until the mother was all cleaned up.

Excuse me. And my big perk was I used to lay alongside the little baby, it didn't matter whether it was white or little Aboriginal babies that we used to have there and, yes, I had first cuddle of the baby.

So your mum was in charge of the hospital?

11:30 Yes, we owned [it], yes.

Was she a doctor or...?

No, she was a nurse. Done her Triple Certificate and a midwife as well.

Were you involved in the procedure?

Oh God no, no I was only a kid of, what, three, started off you know. But as we worked along it, it's,

12:00 I became involved only as much as, you know, making cups of tea. And if Mum wanted anything in particular, sheets or towels and that, to be there, to get them to her. But you know it's, I had a good life when you work it out. There's none of this graffiti or this shooting going on. Walk out and leave your door open, nobody'd think of

12:30 coming in.

Can you tell me anything about the procedure in the hospital, what the ladies lay on, was it a normal bed or...?

Normal bed yeah. A double bed, yes.

And what procedure would your mum go through to the point of delivery?

Well it was normal, see when the doctor came over he took charge. But it's the same procedure that goes on in a hospital today, I don't think anything's changed.

13:00 Although they have some more modern stuff like oxygen and so forth and so on, different medications that they can give the mothers-to-be and, but I think the procedure is still the same, everything had to be spot-on with cleanliness. And no, I think it's, nothing, I don't think much has changed.

So the reason for the hot water was to sterilise things?

Well,

13:30 no, no, in the copper, that was for boiling the sheets and things like that. Because we had no washing machines or anything in those days. And so they'd go in the copper and they'd be boiled there and properly sterilise it with this stuff that was put in it. But no the, we had a big fuel range stove and on it big kettles

14:00 and they were boiling all the time. And any boiling water they wanted, or hot water would just be there for them all the time.

Did your mum ever lose any of the women, did they die?

Never lost any of the mothers at all. The only thing we, that, we didn't lose it actually, was one of the babies was stillborn. And to this day,

14:30 it was taken and it was laid in cotton wool. And I looked at it, it just looked like a little doll. Absolutely beautiful you know. But no, they never lost anybody.

How did your mum take that emotionally?

Well that's one of the things that used to get to her. Because she could never see anyone suffer like that. It's, she never used to think about herself in those,

15:00 but how the mother would feel or how she would feel if she was the mother. But no, it used to break her up a bit although she would never show it.

How many patients or women would stay in the hospital at any time?

Oh at any given time I suppose, be very rarely we'd have two. 'Cause you've got to look at the size of the place. There was Tea Gardens and Karuah were the

15:30 two closest places. Nelsons Bay, sometimes they came home, other times they went to Newcastle which was a lot closer. Oh not a lot closer but a lot quicker to get to. But just the odd one that came in. Then we'd have people from the bush that were injured out in the bush and other accidents that happened

16:00 that occupied our time.

So was the hospital in your house or was it a separate building?

That's right, yes it was built as a hospital, had three wards and then we had two bedrooms besides, a lounge room and a kitchen and a big dining room.

So did you ever want to be a doctor, and follow in your mum...?

I envisaged at one time I would like to be a doctor. But

16:30 Mum always used to say, "You've got the hands of a doctor." But once again, that big thing in those days, pounds, shillings and pence. That was the thing that was lacking. I felt at that time too that I didn't have the education or ability to qualify to go to uni. But later on in the navy I did achieve that standard

17:00 of qualification. But I never regretted not being a doctor, although the First Aid and things that Mum taught me, I was able to apply them quite a few times to advantage.

Now was your mum a nurse and a midwife before she met your dad?

Yes, yeah. Mum did her training at the Royal Hospital in Sydney. I don't know how they met to tell you the

17:30 truth, because dad come in from Bulahdelah up in the north coast and Mum was in Sydney, although she came from the Singleton Muswellbrook area. I don't know how they actually met.

So did your dad like or mind your mum's work?

Oh no, no, that, while he was at work, she was working too. Oh no, it was amicable in that way.

Okay, so about

18:00 **age twelve you went off to...?**

To Newcastle, to go to high school because we had no high school in Tea Gardens and went to junior high, junior boys' high in Newcastle. Did me Intermediate [school certificate]. Then I came home and as I told you, did a few jobs in the timber. Went prawning,

18:30 professional prawning, because the bulk of the prawns used to come up the Myall River and the Myall Lakes. And you got, you buy a case of prawns, a kerosene, double kerosene tin, was, it came in a wooden case. Now one of those cases full of prawns, cost a pound. You'd be looking at a couple of hundred now. Yeah.

So talk me through how you actually

19:00 **caught the prawns?**

Well the, you had a net that had a size mesh in it that was governed by the government, they detailed the largest size mesh that you could have. And it had two wings on it and then came away to what they call the bag. And the prawns would sort of come down the wings

19:30 and then they'd come down into the bag and oh about six or seven feet from the end of the bag we had a rope that went around, that we could pull this rope, and that'd just block off that section. You'd lift it into the, into your boat, tip out the prawns into cases, baskets and toss it, undo the securing rope again and toss it over and let 'em fill up again. But the net was

20:00 strung across the channel in the river. And the best nights for prawning was on the darkest nights. So, you know, you've got the full moon and then it starts to get darker and dark till you get complete darkness. Then of course it starts to get lighter till it gets back to full moon. But the darkest nights is, was the prawning night. That's when they moved.

Why is that, the darkest nights were the best nights?

20:30 I don't know, perhaps they didn't think we could see them too easy in that way. No I don't know why they travelled at night. But that, never catch them during the daytime.

So is it a case that the boat would actually drag the net along?

No the net was fixed, fixed on either side. And the net went right to the bottom, it was driven down by stakes.

21:00 And then they had corks on top for floating. So the prawns would come down and had to hit the, and then go down into the bag. Now sometimes a motor boat or something like that would come down, so alongside the bag was a stake, which, we'd undo that, the top. Then bring it up and then put it on the top

21:30 and push it right to the, down as far as you could which gave plenty of draft then for the vessels to go through. And when it'd gone you just put the fork on the lead line again and tied it up top and back in business.

So what size boat were you on?

Oh these are only pulling boats, round about oh round about thirteen or fourteen feet.

Okay.

They never had any engines in it.

Oh row boats.

Right, yeah.

22:00 **How many in the crew?**

Normally you, a boat of two could handle it quite easily, in most cases only one person. 'Cause you tied it one side and you just pulled it across the other side. Tied it on there, threw the net over the side and then snaked it. So normally one could do it but generally two.

And so how long would it take to catch your prawns and how, what load would you get?

22:30 Well it depended, it's, what you had going, you had a great fire going on the bank with a great tub of water, made out of galvanised iron, the same as say a water tank. And that was going all the time and the prawns, as they come down there, there could be they get two hundred

23:00 more baskets of prawns in a night. So what they would do, bring them down, the basket, they tip them in to the tub of boiling water. And there were on the outside of that, there're these big drying racks about, oh so wide, about twenty foot long. But there was a whole heap of these with wire netting and over the top of that was put

23:30 hessian and then your prawns was sprinkled all over that when they were cooked, to cool. At the same time, the thing that gives them their beautiful taste is coarse salt, was then thrown over the prawns. 'Cause all the water up there was fresh, the tidal waters never reached that far.

So explain to me, to obviously preserve the prawns, is that why you put them in the water and then dried them out?

No.

24:00 We don't put them back in the water at all.

Sorry, the boiling...

Oh to cook, only to cook. They're a greenish, clearish colour when he's alive, the prawn. And while he'd alive you put them straight in the pot, same as the lobster and crabs and things like that. Certainly turns pink and throws to the top then, you just scoop him out and put him along the...

So how long would the prawns last for, before they became too

24:30 **old to eat?**

Well we never kept them, what were caught tonight was in Tea Gardens on their way to Newcastle tomorrow morning. So it wasn't, we never kept them around at all. Only you know to feed you, if you felt like eating a few prawns, there were some.

And how was, how were the prawns transported in a cool truck?

We took them down by boat,

25:00 down the Myall River to Tea Gardens and then it was taken by truck from Tea Gardens to Newcastle.

And was there ice in the boat and ...?

Oh yes, oh yes there's blocks of ice get freely available for it.

Just coming back to your schooldays, what did you enjoy about school and what didn't you like much?

When it finished. Well that's what I enjoyed,

25:30 I enjoyed most it. No I, I hated typing, I hated shorthand. And as a matter of fact at shorthand, I was hopeless. I think I got about two out of a hundred for shorthand. And typing, that's why my fingers are so short between there and there, one finger. And to this day on the computer I still use one finger.

26:00 But most subjects, science, maths, old English I wasn't too keen on but Australian, anything Australian, whether the, and geography, I was always keen on stuff such as that.

Were students

26:30 **patriotic back then?**

Oh yes, compared to what they are, that's the sad thing about. We had our flag that was hoisted every morning. And we sang God Save the Queen, ah King. And no and then it was taken down of an afternoon and yes, it was. I think that you know that's one of our faults of today,

27:00 a lot of our faults I think is that a lot of our younger people seem to have lost faith in themselves,

they've lost faith in our Australian flag and most of all they've lost faith in the country as well I think. Sad.

With the flag, was it the Australian flag or the Union Jack that was raised?

No, no the Australian flag. Such, so we never had an Australian flag, as, oh was it 1930 something when the blue ensign as we know

27:30 it today became the Australian national flag. But to all intentional, we always flew the Australian flag. Not in preference but because it, after all, it was Australia and what the people wanted.

Was there a great love still of Great Britain?

I don't think

28:00 it ever came to a point where love and hate came into bearing when I was a kid. Oh we used to call 'em 'Pommies' [English], plus another adjective.

What was the other adjective?

Oh well I better not mention that one.

No, no please, it helps us understand the culture.

Oh well probably what dad'd

28:30 say, "Pommie bastards'll get a belting this time." And of course we'd copy them like magpies. And, but no, as in regard to countries, no, I never felt in myself that there was no country that I felt untoward to.

29:00 **Now your dad, you said, loved his cricket and the Ashes series was on, did you and he spend much time...?**

Oh yes, in our radio, we didn't have anything too... And we sit up till all hours of the night and morning and he'd, the cricket'd still be on at, he'd be getting ready to go to work. It's yes, we'd watch it as

29:30 much as we could. I'm sorry, used the wrong word there, we'd listen to it as much as we could. No, it was, course it wasn't a true broadcast of the game, it was made up and I'm just trying to, Alan McGillivray I think it was, he was the commentator. And course his, and he had a pencil

30:00 and he'd click it on the desk there, "That's hit for four! He's blocked that one," and so forth. Or, "Played a beautiful straight back square driven," you know. But he'd use his pencil to give the effects of the ball being hit.

Did you think it was live?

Oh yeah, yeah, we didn't know any difference, no. Dad did but you know as far as I was concerned, it was the dinky-di we were listening to from... Plus we used to go to school and skive. We'd

30:30 listen to the cricket from England, you know.

Did you ever pretend you were a particular player in the Australian team?

No, no, I was never that good to even pretend. Football was more my forte and rugby league. But I played cricket but my dad, he was a good cricketer.

31:00 Batsman and fielder, wasn't much chop as a bowler. But no I liked, well put it this way, I still do, all sports.

So you were boarding in Newcastle?

Boarding in Syd-, in Newcastle yes.

Tell me about the type of, what the boarding house was like and what was it like being away from your mum and dad for the first time?

Well the first

31:30 place I stayed at was in Cooks Hill and there she had two daughters and two sons. But they were all round about the twenty mark you know, that area so they were way above my level, even to talk to or anything like that. So it got to be very, very

32:00 lonely. And I looked forward to school, to get back to some of the mates and that I'd made there, or sports day we'd go off playing cricket or football or hockey or whatever. It's yes, that's the first place. Then I went and stayed at a place, Jimmy Arnold and his wife, wonderful wife. He was a fireman

32:30 and later was to become Senator Arnold. And I enjoyed being there because although he was Labor Party, he used to talk to me about politics but never once did he ever try to ...

(Off camera: sorry...)

check it where we got up to here.

I'll throw you the question again, okay, can you tell me ...

33:00 **Okay, tell me about some of the people you stayed with when you were boarding?**

As I said Jimmy Arnold's, he, and he became a senator. But whilst I stayed at his place, although he was a, belonged to the Labor Party he never once, when he was talking to me about politics, did he ever try to sway my thinking

33:30 one way or the other. He spoke to me as though, as a teacher, as he was. Teaching me the whys and wherefores of politics as it was, applied to Australia. So that's the place that I stayed at and then went back to Tea Gardens after high school.

So how did your mum and dad pay the billets, did they

34:00 **give you money?**

No, well I got two shillings, two shillings a week and it was a pound a week board. And we had a ship that came from Tea Gardens to Newcastle, the Cowembah. And, tell you some stories about that ship, Mum'd put my washing or I'd go down to the Cowie [Cowembah] and meet her on a Tuesday

34:30 and they'd give me my washing and inside'd be an envelope with my pocket money and another envelope for the people I was staying with. So yeah that's, that'd last me a week. But course you'd buy quite a lot for two shillings but, and we'd see pictures and we had three theatres, we had the Strand, the Civic and the Royal Theatre.

35:00 Now the three blokes, we'd see those three pictures. Because we'd go, each one'd go to one and then when it was over we'd get a pass out then run like hell or if you could catch a tram, then you'd give the pass out to the other bloke and he'd nick in. And with the other bloke he'd try and bluff his way in 'cause the odd ticket

35:30 but nine times out of ten he got away with it. But that's how we did it and of course when it was over I'd get a ticket and he'd go back to the Royal, I'd go back to the Royal. And so we'd see all the pictures for sixpence. Yeah.

What days would you see the pictures?

Normally of a Saturday, if nothing was, normally of a Saturday.

And what did you spend your

36:00 **pocket money on?**

Oh usual rubbish. But lollies mainly you know, kids that age, are no different. But it was something you could eat, you could bet your life it was. It was not wasted on paints for graffiti or something anyhow.

And the ship, what stories can you tell about the ship?

Oh the Cowie, Cowembah, yeah she was only oh about sixty ton.

36:30 And she was owned by G.A. Ingle & Sons at Tea Gardens. And she plied from there to Newcastle, to bring back groceries for their big store. And I say for their big store, they had the biggest store in Tea Gardens. But then they had another boat set out as a store, the Allenwood and it used to go from Tea Gardens right up through to Myall Lakes. Generally of a Wednesday I think it was,

37:00 Wednesday and Thursday. But it had freezers on board, you could buy fresh meat and vegetables and all your dry foods yeah. But the Cowie, we, my first introduction to her was when the Duke of Gloucester came out to Australia. And a chap by the name of Hughie Thurlow he,

37:30 he's ex-navy, navy bloke and First World War and he formed Sea Scouts. So when the Duke of Gloucester came out he said, "Oh well the best thing we could do would be to go on the Cowie to Newcastle to see the Duke of Gloucester," which we did. And we're all seasick. As a matter

38:00 of fact he wrote a poem and set it to music, about Cowie, Cowembah. 'How the ship doth roll the funnel sways, above our heads there's noises in the coals, Sea Scouts laid around this ship and had a jubilee, and the fishes always said to them, we'll have a jubilee.' Oh there is a couple more verses too but,

38:30 no, I've kept those, written them down. And then course the Cowie was my main lifeline during the war, during my schooling days. And during the war, I, we steamed into Milne Bay in New Guinea. And I looked, I said, "It can't be!" sure enough there she was, the Cowie. They were using her to,

39:00 to go round to all the little inlets, 'cause she had such a narrow draft. And yeah she was, had a winch and everything else see. Yeah the old Cowie. And talking about Daz and the Allenwood. She, 'cause there was only one sixty tonner that had two funnels ever built and that was the Allenwood and sure enough she was...

(Previous conversation ends, screen returns to colour bars, time clock starts again, new conversation

begins).

39:30 ...and Kelly said, "Yeah," he said, "We will miss him." And he said, "You met my young brother Alan?" And bloke said, "No I haven't," he said, "You must be the adopted one." You could hear a pin fall. So anyhow Alan finished up his beer, he walked out. He become a drunkard, (UNCLEAR) nervous breakdown and he

40:00 died. He didn't know that Kelly and he weren't blood brothers.

Tape 2

00:40 **So tell me are there any other interesting stories about the Cowembah?**

No, they were the main ones that, that had affected me. No, I, well she was the first ship I'd been to

01:00 sea on and she was my introduction into being, seasickness. And strangely enough all the, ever since the years I've been going to sea, I've never got over being seasick. But I was not seasick the full period. Didn't matter if it was flat calm, as soon as the ship poked her nose out the heads, I was seasick for about two hours. Doesn't matter what came along after that I was right. When everybody else was seasick,

01:30 I was full of beans.

So why does a boy who gets seasick, join the navy?

Why? I think it's only in your make up. There's tablets and one thing and another you can take now, well they call them 'motion' I think medication. I don't know, I just think it's something to do with the balance in your ears that, I'm not

02:00 too sure of that but that's what I've been given to understand is the cause of you getting sick, that you become a little bit unbalanced.

So whenever you had to travel on the Cowembah from school to home or home to school, did you regret going on the boat, did you not want to go on it?

Oh no, oh no, I'm a bloke that I'd never let anything beat me. I wouldn't say, "No I'm not going to go on it because I get seasick." Because

02:30 I had trips on her that I never got seasick, I sort of paid her back. But oh no, no, I had no regrets whatsoever about my association with the Cowie because the skipper was a fella by the name of Bill Ripley. And his family, I become very attached to his wife,

03:00 to me it was Auntie Mabel and to most of the kids in Tea Gardens. No relation but she was always called Auntie Mabel. And Bruce and I, their eldest son, we played football together at Tea Gardens. No, they're about the main things in regard to the Cowie.

And what about growing up around Myall Lakes, do you have any interesting stories?

Well I never grew up

03:30 round the lakes per se. I grew up pretty much wholly and solely around Tea Gardens. And I spent my first night in jail when I was about eight. The local police constable was a chap by the name of Ovenston, a Scotsman. And there were three of us used to knock around together. There was Jimmy Kennard, Roy Honor and

04:00 myself. And we'd go out to raid, we'd even raid fruit in my own yard. And Mum'd come out, we'd be sitting up in the grape trellis which'd run down to the toilet. And Mum'd come out there saying, "You out there Ken?" There's not a word, and I'd only be about that far away from her. Said nothing amongst all the leaves, couldn't see us. So anyhow we were out raiding

04:30 some oranges and apparently someone let one fly and it went through the bloke next door's window. So Ovenston, never got us all together, he got us one at a time. He was a smart old cookie. And he said, about the occasion, I said, "No, no it wasn't me." He said, "Where were you last night?" I said, "I was home me, no I'm not allowed

05:00 out after dark." So anyhow he said, he got the three of us together a couple of days later, he said, "If you want to go raiding oranges he said, I got oranges and mandarins at the back of my place, come and raid them." So a few nights later we took him at his word. So I'm up the tree and all of a sudden a voice said, "That'll be enough Ken, come down and join your mates. They're already in the clink."

05:30 So got down out of the mandarin tree and put us in jail. So then he had to go and see our three mothers. And Mum said, "Leave him there, throw the key away," and so we stayed in there the night. So the next morning he come to let us out and when his wife saw us, Bessie flew into him about 'keeping those poor

kids

- 06:00 locked up in jail'. So I don't think he was ever game to lock us up again after that. 'Cause she gave him strife yeah. Yeah, but oh no as kids we, you had to make your own fun. We'd go out to a beautiful little place two mile out of Tea Gardens. You'd walk along this great flat where the main road is. And you'd get to the bottom of the hill and you turn off to the
- 06:30 right and there was a little gully. And in this gully there were ferns, stag horns, orchids, water running, it was absol-, birds, it was absolutely glorious. You get on top of the hill now and look down, and as far as you can see, pine trees. All that has gone, it's been wiped out. And there's pine trees the whole way through, as far as you can see.
- 07:00 And other times we'd decide that we'd go out to Yakabar Head, North Head, which was the northern entrance to Port Stephens. You got South Head on the one side and North Head on the other. And no, we'd walk out and climb right to the top which would take us about a day. But we had a sheet of iron and we'd
- 07:30 light a, gather some wood and light a fire under it. Then we'd go down get pippies out of the sand, which was plenty of them. And any of the shellfish that was on the rocks, periwinkles, and then take them back and throw them on. They'd cook in their own juice. And so anyhow when we'd come back they'd be all cooked there ready to get stuck into. There were plenty of
- 08:00 lilli pilli trees about, they're a pink berry, very dry and not something that you'd break your neck to get to. But we'd, you know, go out and collect these things. And then there were five corners. They're a tree and they had a little fruit that had five cor-, five little leaves that came down and we called those five corners. And then there was a smaller bush that's spread out, and it
- 08:30 was ten corners, where ten leaves have dropped down. And we'd get these five corners and ten corners. There was a seed in the back of it and course after you'd taken the flesh off, you got the seed, you'd squirt it and somebody'd get one in the, now and again in the back of the head. Nine times out of ten you missed. Oh no, no we did, we made our fun, but it was all clean fun. So.

09:00 **When you got out of jail, did you get a hiding from your mum or dad?**

No, she thought I'd had enough. Oh by putting there, the only thing that she said, "He didn't throw away the key so I told him to do that." So no, she thought I'd had enough punishment and embarrassment about being put in jail for the night.

Who was the disciplinarian in the family?

Well, Mum and Dad.

- 09:30 If there [it] was severe enough it was left to dad. And Mum used to go, she'd never give me a hiding out by our front gate, it wouldn't be (UNCLEAR) at the post office. And she had a piece of kerosene case and the sight of it, and I can still, I can't remember who it was, he said, "Oh getting the kindling ready Mabel." Give me a belting with this
- 10:00 piece of wood. But oh no it's, we had fun.

And what sort of discipline did your father give you when you were in real trouble?

Oh I'd get a belting. And but 'cause Mum'd say to me, "What do you want, a belting or get locked up?" "Oh give me a belting," have a bit of a ball and like you're free as a bird again. If she locked you up she used to forget where you were.

- 10:30 And I mean I was locked in the bathroom and I used to sit on the end of the bath, looking out and all, I could see down the back yard and so forth and so on. But then I got into strife one night, off our kitchen we had this big pantry and about that much from the ceiling out on the verandah side it was all just mesh. And my brother
- 11:00 was locked in there. And when they locked him in there, oh God, that was a heinous crime to lock him up. And I got outside of this, those scratches as though there was rats on top. I'd go 'squeak, squeak, squeak'. And oh, that started him off. And then Mum come along the verandah and she said, 'whack', "That'll teach you to squeak." And oh no, I got back at him now and again. But, no it was good.

11:30 **Now was there plumbing in the house or hospital?**

Pardon?

Was there plumbing, water plumbing...?

Oh no, no, no plumbing in those days. It's not as we know it today. The only water you had flowing was cold water, that came from a tank. As a matter of fact my daughter up here saw some little wrigglers in the water. And she said, "Oh look at those, where'd they come from?"

- 12:00 And I told her I'd like a dollar for every one that I'd swallowed in my day, 'cause you just turned the tap on and drink it, it was gone. But no the plumbing generally went out the back down into a big sump, it

was all sandy soil, and got away very quickly.

The Depression, how did, what are your memories of the Depression?

Well one

- 12:30 Christmas I know I never got a thing, a present. My brother didn't get anything either. But we had our three course Christmas dinner. And there were a hell of a lot of people didn't have that, were lucky to have had one course. And course we used to grow our own
- 13:00 poultry and things like that. We might have a piglet that we'd fatten up and eat it, go till just about Christmas. And then kill it and then spread it around different people and keep the leg for ourselves. Might smoke a leg or something like that. But see Christmas falling in the summer,
- 13:30 we'd all go down to the baths and we'd go for a swim and you'd all, you'd sort of forget what you may have missed out on. It's what, you were concentrating on what you had at the present time. I was upset that I never got anything but when Mum said to me, she said, "You want to remember that there's a lot of people haven't got as much as we got for dinner." And that's always stuck
- 14:00 with me. It's the same as when myself at the present time, people say, "Gee, I wouldn't like to have wrong with me what you've got." And I'll say, I mean it, I mean it most sincerely, I'll say to them, "I don't have to look too far to find someone worse off than me." And I mean it, it's, I can sit here and talk to you. I have no
- 14:30 Alzheimer's disease or, other than just my mobility. But I can get around with the wheely and so forth and I can still drive the car because sitting down. It's, no, there's a lot of sad cases you see, people in nursing homes, and it's,
- 15:00 that's why my daughter, Janine, she goes up pretty well every day to the hospital to see people and you know, people that she doesn't even know.

So, did your mum still help ladies to give birth, even though they probably couldn't afford to pay her?

Nobody was ever knocked back, at our place. If Mum'd been paid what people would have paid her,

- 15:30 she'd have been a rich woman. We had a lovely Aboriginal woman, Daisy Bates from Karuah, and Daisy was a regular customer. Every year Daisy'd be in to have her baby. If she missed out, we'd send a letter of reminder. You know but you'd bet your life that there'd be fish or oysters or something like
- 16:00 that, would arrive at home and all that sort of thing, it was a pay off. And, no, nobody was ever knocked back at our place. Course with the doctor, it was a different thing because he was a government medical officer, he was paid by the government. But in regard to Mum, no, it's although she had the hospital she got no funding, from the
- 16:30 government in any way. And but no, nobody was ever knocked back.

Did you ever notice any racism in respect to whites and Aboriginals?

Non-existent. We had Aboriginal boys that played football with us from Karuah. My grandfather, if ever he, on Mum's side, if ever you, he

- 17:00 heard you refer to the, to any of the boys on the station as an 'Abo' or a 'Black Fella' or something like that, you got the rounds of the kitchen. You're the same as us and treated them the same. No, there was no racism, no.

From again a cultural point of view, was church or religion at all a part?

Yes we were Church of England and the Catholic Church. The Presbyterian,

- 17:30 Presbyterian Church yeah.

Did your family go to those sorts of things?

We went to the Church of England and then we had also at the school the Church of England padre and the Catholic padre, they would come round now and again and those particular denominations would be segregated and they'd have a little

- 18:00 church service on their own.

Was there much inter-religious sort of division between Catholics and Anglicans?

Well I never struck it and I honestly, looking back now, there was no religious kick-back at all. There was, there was none of that stuff existed.

- 18:30 We were all people of the same. And just if we could be like that now, all our troubles'd be over. But no, we had no troubles whatsoever, racism or religious denomination, cults or anything like that.

Tell me about going to Sydney and what exam you sat and the story there?

When I joined the navy?

Just before

19:00 **you did, you sat the examination.**

Well in Sydney was my aunt and uncle on Mum's [side], Mum's sister. Uncle Fred, he was a World War I Gallipoli veteran. They were perhaps more a mother and father to me than my own parents.

19:30 Now don't get me wrong there because my mother and father did everything they could for me education. But Auntie Nora had a little girl and she died at birth, oh I think a couple of days after. And I sort of was the one that Uncle Fred wanted as a son. And whenever I went to Sydney I

20:00 always stayed at their place. And I was, Uncle Fred often referred to me as son, you know, he'd call me son. But that was my centre point, even when I was in the navy. Rushcutter, we never, it wasn't a ship per se. There was no living-in quarters. And we would pay an amount to live out. Of course

20:30 I'd live at Auntie Nora's and pay her the sum that the navy allowed for accommodation. But I, 'cause Uncle Fred he used to get in a bit of strife over me. I

21:00 when I first came back from the Yarra, the first time, and when I got home to uncle Fred's place, he took me down to Maroubra to the hotel and we only had about, oh three middies each. And when I got home, Auntie Nora tore strips off him. "Fancy taking that kid down there to the hotel, do you want him to end up like you." You know, might have a middy

21:30 about every three or four months, you know. And she gave it to 'im. And she said 'this kid' you know. Forgot that I was grown up a little bit and but then we had another chap that stayed there, Bill Tarran. He lived with Uncle Fred and Auntie Nora, oh as long as I can remember. And he was a racehorse trainer. And he trained horses

22:00 for a chap by the name of Bendroight who owned Princes Restaurant. Now I don't know whether you remember Princes Restaurant in Pitts, ah in Martin Place. Yes and I'm just trying to think of the other bloke and I can't think of his name. But they had a horse called War Eagle. And he used to win all the grand champions at the Show. But a beautiful,

22:30 a good racehorse. So anyhow I was going into town this morning, took Uncle Fred, ah took Uncle Bill in. And I said to him, "How do you think Big Boy, as we called War Eagle, will go on Saturday?" And he said, "He's a moral son." And I said, "You reckon he's a moral?" He said, "Well he's that much of a moral, I'll give you your money back if he loses." So

23:00 I thought, 'Oh yeah.' I said, "Well put this on." And I had sixteen pounds that I, to pay for accommodation and one thing and another, I was going on leave. So he said, "No, no, no, no," he said, "Just have your two bob on it." "No," I said, "I want to have this on." So anyhow time marches on. Three-fifteen on the Saturday afternoon. Cyril Angel says, "They're off!" and so was I. I went out in the garage,

23:30 what I did, I couldn't tell you, I just couldn't listen to that race or anything. Next thing Auntie Nora come, "Big Boy won son, Big Boy won." I said, "Oh that's good," you know. So we'd all have our tea and Bill'd always come in late. And he come round and he says, "Here, twenty, forty..." And Auntie Nora said, "What's that?" He said, "This is what he won on Big Boy today at the races."

24:00 She said, "Did you take his leave money and put that on that horse?" And he said, "He was insistent," he said. Well didn't she go to the town. And she grabbed the money, I thought, 'Oh God there goes me dream, of what leave I'm gonna have with this.' I think she dished out around about thirty or forty pound I think. It was a lot of money to me then, and the rest went in the bank. Oh yes but Bill never took any more bets and I've never had a big bet since.

24:30 Oh dear. Such is life.

Did he tell you any war stories from the First World War?

Uncle Fred would never talk about the war. All he used to say is, I remember long before the war started, something had come up about wars and he said, "All I hope son is you don't have to go to one." And that's, chop it off.

25:00 Or he'd get up and walk out if somebody blow up about the war. But he, when, as I say, I came to Platypus to have the medical, as I thought, past it, I was on the train that night for, well Albury, then

25:30 Melbourne, then Crib Point, down where Flinders Naval Depot is. And the only two people there to send, see me off was Uncle Fred and Auntie Nora. And he said to me he said, "I just, as I've told you son," he said, "I wished you didn't have to go." He said, "But I'm glad you're going, not being made to go." And he

26:00 cried 'cause, just that he knew what he went through, hoping to God that I never went through it.

Had you heard of any stories from the First World War?

Not so many of them. Because they're stories you hear, they were more or less what it was like in

26:30 the trenches. Well people would know by seeing war films what trench life was like. And it's pretty well depicted on film. It's muddy, rain continual, people were either wet or cold or both. So there was very little to tell because there wasn't many that got into towns and the cities.

27:00 So they're mainly out in the field all the time. And with Uncle Fred, not wanting to talk about it, I never ever pushed the subject with anyone else.

Just coming back to the story of the raids on the fruit when you got thrown into jail, did that actually, when you got thrown into jail, did that stop the raids on the fruit or...?

Oh no. Does it rain

27:30 in Manila? No it didn't stop that, it didn't intensify any more but we were more careful that things didn't land in somebody's window or anything was broken. We were most careful about that yeah. There was a place called Durness, a little bit up the Myall River where we used to get all Tea Gardens' milk supply.

28:00 And they had a big orchard alongside their place and right alongside the river and they had an irrigation ditch that flowed out into the river and they had it blocked off with big chicken wire. So anyhow we thought that we'd try it out. So we went up to Durness, pulled up in the boat, got up to Durness, got this

28:30 wire, pulled it up, tied the boat up alongside it, got over this into the orchard and oh there was gormas and gormas of real paradise. And, till Jim, ah not Jim Armitage, yeah Jim Armitage said, "Skit 'im." And this bloody cattle, blue cattle dog, he came and didn't he. And we shot out like a lot of ferrets, underneath this

29:00 wiring, into the boat, out into the middle of the stream. So she just stood on the side of the bank and we looked and there's a great stream of water coming, he'd been to the boat and taken the plug out. So all we [were] trying to do was to put our hands over trying to, put our heels over trying to stop the water. But it was a hopeless case. Oh the paddles were gone too so he'd made a good job of it. So we didn't go back to Durness

29:30 any more.

Can you tell me more about the war films, where did, the war films, the World War I films, where did you see them and what were they like?

World War I films, I don't remember seeing any World War I films when I was growing up. I was more or less relating to what you see on films at the present day.

30:00 Because the films as I first knew them, the silent films with a woman, Lauren Morrisow I think it was her name, playing the piano, putting the effects for the film. It, but once again as I say, your money was that scarce that you, it was just one of the joys that you never were privileged to get although it only cost sixpence.

Okay, now tell me the story about joining the navy?

Well that's as I said we, I went to the police cadet, the police barracks at Redfern. And went in and told them who I was and they did a full medical examination and

31:00 said to me, "Right," well said to us, I think there was seven of us, that we'd now go for the educational test. And so it wasn't a case of writing out now, 'yes' or 'no', you had to write out a full answer to the question. And he said, "Now I'm going to read you a part out of the paper and I want you to write,

31:30 write it down, and it's going to be a page full." So anyhow there, he's reading this out and course I write very small and he come and looked at me he said, "We're gonna be all bloody day," he said, "if you don't write bigger than that." So I said, stretched it out the writing, and filled up the page a lot quicker. So as I said, you mate up with a person

32:00 there and I said to him, 'What was he going to do?' And he said he's gonna have a try for the navy. So we went down to Circular Quay and caught the ferry across to Garden Island because it wasn't joined then. And the old Platypus, she laid on the eastern side. And she was the depot ship. So went on board the Platypus and they

32:30 put us through a medical and education and passed those, and course the other bloke didn't, he didn't pass again. And so he said, "Hooray!" and I was stuck there. And then we had to tell them what gear we had with us and so forth and so on. They said, "Right, you'll be going to Flinders Naval Depot

33:00 at Crib Point on tonight's express." I said, "Oh God," you know, "This is fair dinkum now." And then they took us into Central and I had phoned up Aunty Nora and told her what was happening. And they came in and as I said old Uncle Fred, he went to pieces a bit, having already gone

- 33:30 through it. But oh, in lots of ways thank goodness it wasn't the same but in other ways it was worse, from the soldiers' army point of view. But then we went, got down to Flinders Naval Depot and marched
- 34:00 off and came outside these three big barracks. And they said, "Well your floor will be on the -," our class number was Class Number One and took you up and said, "Righto, there's your lockers there." No beds. So the first thing we had to do was to learn how to sling a hammock. So we got the hammock. Well
- 34:30 the rope at the end of the hammock was just a piece of rope that was cut off. So what you had to do was to do what they call a point and graft, is that you, the end is a point and comes down oh about that length and then it went into a different sort of, different style of
- 35:00 grafting, but it was for two things, one was to tidy up the ends and two, that point, if ever you had a hole or plug coming out of a boat, you'd push that in and it would suffice as a plug.

So how do you tie it up, the hammock?

The hammock? Oh well it has

- 35:30 these ropes that come out and then you've got eyelets around the hammock. And you put the top two in on either end and get its length. And then you put, keep putting the others in until they just take an equal strain. So you don't have the hammock here going, so it's equal all the way round. And
- 36:00 they, you sling those and they have the bars alongside them to get hold of it to get into the hammock. Which, oh some of them found it a bit difficult. Luckily, I had no problems. The, and even to this day, I'll say the best night's sleep I ever had, have had, is sleeping in a hammock. Yeah absolutely
- 36:30 colossal to sleep in. Especially at sea when the ship's rolling, you're not, you're just laying in one spot so to speak.

Any jokes played on fellas by cutting them down?

Oh not so much, there was only one that I, you know, real joke, was our chief,

- 37:00 chief cook. And running foul of the cooks and few other chaps on the ship. And he used to sling his hammock under the ladder, leading down from the deck into the chief's and PO's [Petty Officer] mess. So everybody walked on, I don't know why, 'cause any stuff that was on your feet, it hit
- 37:30 on that ladder and keep on, could just fall on top of him. So anyhow this night he come to his senses and someone had tipped a bucket of oil, oil and waste all over him. And he'd dead now, he never survived the ship. And he never found who was responsible. It was one of us, Harry Raines, he was the culprit and
- 38:00 yes that was a, the night that he blamed everybody I think from the skipper down. Yeah.

Leaving your aunt and uncle when you left Sydney, was that an emotional moment for them and for you?

As I said for Uncle Fred, yes. And for me, I tried to crack Hardy, I didn't cry or anything like that.

- 38:30 And but I had that feeling that I didn't know what was gonna be at the end. It was just a feeling that you're moving into something you didn't know about. And it was a sort of a nervous feeling I got and I could still sort of
- 39:00 feel it today, at different times. But no, my aunt and uncle they, oh aunt broke up after a while. Like, she said you come home safely to me son and Uncle Fred he couldn't say anything, he just put his arms around me and that was it. I knew what he felt. So yes
- 39:30 they were the first that I, or the first people, the last people I saw when I left to join the navy and the first people I met when I came back from the Yarra fifteen months later, eighteen months later.

We might stop there.

Tape 3

00:45 So did you get a chance, Ken, to go much to the pictures?

No, as I've pointed out, it was in the Depression time and money was always pretty tight. And I know that my father

- 01:00 at the mill, his cheque every week was five pound and sixpence, the sixpence was exchange on the cheque. Very seldom did Mum get paid for work that she did for people in the hospital because it would

have run into you know, big money in those days. But that was the way Mum was, that she would never turn away anybody, if they had all the money

01:30 in the world or whether they had none and the reason being that every sixpence counted. But I used to go now and again, put it that way, if I had been particularly good.

Can you describe what it was like?

Well the first picture I can remember was a picture called, That's My Daddy with a, the main actor was

02:00 Reginald Denny. And in it he drove a red car. Now why he drove a red car, I don't know, because they're all black and white in those days. But I've always envisaged that that car he drove was a red car. But it was all piano sound to put in effects.

02:30 Loud, rumbling piano work where there's thunder and so forth, romantic stuff where there was a love scene and so forth and that. But, the, see back in those days too, they couldn't pan, as they can today. And everything that was taken was actually what was in front of the camera. With consequence,

03:00 you used to lose quite a lot because it would go out of the picture and when they tried to link it back up again or edit it, it wasn't as good as it might have been. Course you're thinking about the infant days of motion pictures. But then...

Are we talking silent films here Ken?

Silent, yeah. And then

03:30 the talkies came in. I can't recall the first talking picture I saw but it was at Tea Gardens. And of course they, when I went to Newcastle to school, they were all

04:00 talking pictures, mainly black and white but colour was just starting to come in. You may get a, one colour every fortnight or so, a month.

And what kind of, what year was this?

This is going back to 1935, '36.

So just going back to the silent films, what other silent films can you remember seeing in Tea Gardens?

04:30 I wouldn't, couldn't hazard a guess on it. No, it's just that that one stuck in my mind, and it has, like through the years. Only because of that red car. But how in the heck you could envisage that the car was red when it was black and white. All the other cars and things that were there, I didn't have a colour for them, but just this one that Reginald Denny drove and it

05:00 was a red car.

You just in your imagination thought, 'That's gotta be a red car'?

That's right, must have been, yeah.

What kind of car was it?

Oh, got me beat. A car was a car to me in those days.

So when you're describing the pictures when somebody's on the piano and someone else is running their camera through the, their film through the projector, was it a realistic experience watching a film back then?

Oh yes,

05:30 yes. Well it was something you never envisaged that you were going to see, motion pictures, you sit here and see something on the screen that's been made thousands of miles away perhaps. Oh yes it was definitely an experience. Oh course first time I heard sound, it was great, because not always was the sound in sync with

06:00 the pic-, the image. And you picked up on things like that. And but no, each of them had a, in its own little way had a lasting you know, thought in your brain.

Was it something that people would often do, go to the pictures, or was it a rare treat?

Oh some people yeah, they'd go, never miss a show, those that could afford it.

06:30 Oh yes they'd be at Tea Gardens, they'd be there every Saturday night.

So it'd be a new picture every week kind of thing?

Every week, yes.

Can you remember how many pictures, films were on each...?

Two. They had what they called an A and a B class. The A class now wouldn't be shown. Oh because it was in its infancy and the acting and so forth was

07:00 very severe and, that's quite correct. 'Oh goodness, where's he gone,' you know. Yes it's a, was very stiff. But as I say as it, as, well times like everything, has gone on, so the motion film industry has progressed with it.

When people used to watch

07:30 **the films, did they comment on how realistic it was, or did they sort of, were they still struck by the novelty of the moving pictures?**

Oh no I don't think many of them talked about the novelty of it, they were more or less struck by the fact of what they were seeing and the reason that they could see it because of the

08:00 motion pictures themselves. But no I think everybody that was a real keen movie goer, it wouldn't have hurt if you had more breakdowns than you normally did at those sessions, They never went straight through, there was always a few hitches that turned up.

What like?

Oh like the film might break or you might forget with the,

08:30 if you had in the arc days, the arc might get a, you'd lose all colour, what I mean colour, you'd lose all images on the screen. And you'd have to strike back up the arc and, or a lamp might blow and they, in the first instance they were lamps, lamp might blow and you'd have to change the lamp and oh lots of little things that used to happen.

So would there be like a particular type

09:00 **of, like these days there's popcorn and choc tops and things like that. What kind of things would you eat when you went to the pictures?**

Oh they never got to the stage of the Jaffas rolling down the aisles, that was caught say for the hoi polloi of Newcastle. But oh no you'd still get your popcorn or chips and things like that. Oh they go part and parcel with the flicks.

And can you remember how long each movie would be?

09:30 Oh dear I don't, I think the longest one would be, I'm only hazarding a guess, I'd say about an hour and a quarter. Nothings like today's, oh mainly they run for an hour and a half, but the more important shows running for a couple of hours or more.

And were they decent stories?

Well I wasn't young enough to,

10:00 to say that they were a good story or not. You were too much taken up with this stiff action that they all had. And you tried to think to yourself, 'But I've never seen anybody say that,' you know, 'Oh, gee whiz,' or you know. No, it was the antics that the actors used to put on which remain with you more than the story of the picture unless, of course, it was a western.

10:30 Then you seem to, remember Tom Mix and Buck Jones and all those blokes that, yes you seem to remember them, all the action ones. 'Cause that's all you played at school, cowboys and Indians.

So in terms of like going to the pictures, would that be a really good place to take a girl out for a date?

Would...?

Would that be a good place to take a girl out for a date, or were you too young at that point?

Well it was the only place

11:00 you could take a girl for a date. Because it was the only entertainment, other than when we had a dance. And that was, we had a, no local band, but we'd get a band from, made up of some people from Tea Gardens, Karuah or somewhere. Generally a piano, drums, a violin, maybe a saxophone now and

11:30 again, but mainly a lot of the dances were from the canned music.

When you say 'can', did you say can-can music?

No canned music, like records.

Oh okay.

Yeah.

And was it like a jazz kind of music, what sort of style?

Oh you could make whatever you like because on the record players, you had a variable speed control. If it was a waltz you could bring it down to

12:00 waltz time, quick step speed it up to quick step, barn dance you could, whatever one you could move and set this to that, the tempo you wanted.

But primarily you'd have a live band pretty much at a dance rather than playing from the records?

Yeah if we could get it, a band, that yeah. And the place, decorate the place out with palm leaves, all wrapped in ribbon and cut palm branches from the, all the

12:30 palms that grew alongside your, nail them all around the walls. That was the big occasion.

And were they all locals in the band...

All local yeah.

and everything?

Oh no, as I say, we didn't have a band in Tea Gardens. But we'd collect odd-bods [bodies] from here, there and everywhere. They formed the band, no practice, no nothing because everybody knew the songs in those days. It's more or less what they

13:00 call it, they used to lug the music, play it by ear and no, it, no practice or rehearsals or anything.

So did the young blokes get on the grog at these dances, or...

Yes, yes.

was it against the rules?

I can't recall anybody ever getting drunk.

13:30 But I know on the Sunday morning out the front and around, you'd find a few empty bottles. But no there was no getting drunk because everybody was having such a good time. It was an auspicious occasion. And so you weren't gonna let it fly by not remembering what

14:00 it was about .

And what, how many people would turn up to each, to all these?

Oh you'd get a crowd of people, fifty.

All ages, parents too, or just particular...?

No, that's parents and those that were able to dance. I was only talking to Daphne the other day about a dance I remember going to and a girl

14:30 that I danced with, it was a quick step and she had on a white and yellow polka-dot dress and with buttons right down the front. At the end of the dance, her buttons were all across, askew, almost went from here to there in a semi-circle yeah. Oh yeah, I was a great dancer. I was born with eight feet.

I've heard stories about how everyone used to be able to dance.

Well

15:00 yeah, you could dance of a fashion, yeah. You could dance enough to enjoy yourself you know. You, no-one danced to perfection. But if you got through a dance without treading on your partner's toes, you did alright.

So where did folks learn to dance? Where did everyone learn to dance?

At the dances, where else. There was nowhere else you could, didn't have any dancing schools.

15:30 There would have been in Newcastle but not our way. No you used to learn to dance at the school, just passed down you know, from your families.

I'm just curious about Tea Gardens, was that actually a name given to it for a reason?

No, Tea Gardens, there's a couple of reasons why it got the name Tea Gardens, is that the

16:00 pitchment and the punts going up the Myall River used to stop there and they'd have a, might be their lunch or a meal or something. And so it got you know, the 'Tea' and so forth, it was left behind. That's the main one. But I don't think it's ever been clarified, not to me anyhow as to why it got the name Tea Gardens.

16:30 **You were saying before that it's changed a lot now from what you can remember it?**

Oh yeah. Yes, it's a, as I say from on top of the hill, big hill outside, you look down as far as you look to

the north, up towards the Myall Lakes it's broad water, it's all pines, there's nothing else. But pines, you look down to the southern, down Pindimar all that way, nothing but pines and pines and pines.

17:00 And the last time I was up there we went out to the Hawks Nest Beach, which you go across the Myall River and out to the beach. And there's a big motel built there. And some idiot has, with the sand dunes, has used a bulldozer and pushed the sand away the length of the motel, so as they can see out to sea.

17:30 And Broughton Island and all that, that sort of thing. Well I'm certain that one of these days, some of these big seas are gonna roar in there, same as they used to, and there could be troubles I think. And it doesn't go with the look of the place, you've got this great landscape of

18:00 sand hills and 'bang', you've got a gap missing out of it. It's spoilt it.

So the ocean used to come right up to where those dunes are, sometimes?

No, no, no, no. See it's about two mile from Tea Gardens out to the beach. But with the big tides at Christmas time,

18:30 the front street of Tea Gardens, the water would be almost covering the street, it came up that high, when the tides, that's, they're the highest tides of the year.

Almost onto the street?

Pardon?

Onto the main street?

Onto the main street, well the main street runs along the waterfront.

Did people have problems with flooding?

Oh no, no, nobody ever got flooded out or anything.

19:00 They were just high enough to defeat that. Cause you had a double bunker. At the back of Tea Gardens there was a great moor out there and when these tides would come it was like Lake Eyre when it rains, no water in there at all, all of a sudden you get some rain and it's just one big lake. And that's what out in these moors looked like, just one big lake. And they'd come up to the back

19:30 of Tea Gardens. But the back of Tea Gardens is up a bit and consequently none of it got into homes or anything like that.

It's quite a haunting landscape around there, quite unusual.

No, it's, I don't know what you mean...

Around the lake area and stuff, it's quite flat and...

What, around the Myall Lakes?

Yeah.

Yes it can be.

20:00 But once again there, so much building going on up at Dirty Creek, over at what they call Legs Camp and Violet Hill, Brambles Reach. There's so much going on that it's out of kilter

20:30 with the area, the way it was, nice and easy. It's the, the things up there are, it was so natural, you had all the wild ducks about the place. Wild turkeys up on the Milne Bay. And lots of

21:00 the fish that went to Newcastle came out of the lakes. But no all the beauty I think that was associated with the Myall Lakes is slowly deteriorating and these pines are taking over everything.

You, before you described the fresh

21:30 **water as opposed to the salt water, and was Tea Gardens on the fresh water front?**

No, Tea Gardens is salt water. Now the Myall River flows out of Port Stephens and then it winds its way up and see it's about twenty-two miles to Tamboy which is the entrance to the lakes. And

22:00 I think for about fifteen of those miles, then it gradually goes from salt, and gradually goes into fresh water. The height in the lake and the upper side of the river is affected by the tidal. Because the water when it comes

22:30 in on a rising tide, keeps on being, once it hits the cold water, it's not gonna stop and just keeps on then pushing the cold water on the ebb tide, so it all flows back down again. And getting back to prawning, you, the lake has to be higher than the river itself. Because the prawns won't move until the water is flowing from the lake into the river.

So did

23:00 **most people live on a diet of seafood and things like fish, things like that?**

Oh a lot, not as a diet but you'd always have your fish and prawns. As we, I resent buying prawns because Mum always used to get them given to her. Prawns and fish and,

23:30 and oysters and things like that. And during the, during what they call the travelling season, for the fish that would travel up the coast in the different inlets and keep on moving up, this is when the westerlys came, now they used to come when I was a kid, just about on Easter,

24:00 just in time for the fish for Easter. And anyhow, when this was on the fishermen'd go out waiting for a great shoal to come along, and they were catching them by hundreds of baskets, the fish. And the mullet'd go, then the black fish. And so what you'd do after school, I'd race round and do all the jobs I had to do, grab some newspaper, run down to the, to

24:30 where the punt was, go across to Hawks Nest, run all the way round to where they were hauling on Jimmy's Beach. And you'd go down, you'd look round, you'd see, and you'd pick up a big sea mullet, wrap him up in the paper still alive and go up to the fisherman's fryer, pull back the sand, put the, your paper and mullet in it, cover it back over with sand. Go down and help the

25:00 fishermen by getting in their road. And after a while you'd go back up to the, up to your fire and there just drag out, you'd find that the paper was just a charred mess and all the scales and gut in the fish had gone up the back of the head. So all you, break that off, and all you had was beautiful meat, and sand. And it was absolutely glorious

25:30 you know. And...

Are sea mullets better than mullets? Sea mullets better than mullets?

Well sea mullet is the same. With most small mullet, you get, they come down out the rivers or off mud flats, they have that particular taste about them. Whereas the sea mullet has a totally, a clean taste about it. And they're big enough to do,

26:00 well, what Mum used to do, she would, we would fillet them the way you would fillet a fish to smoke. That is instead of filleting it along the stomach, you'd finish along the back bone, open that out, take all the other muck out, season it with, oh if you had prawns, whatever you had, season it, fold that back over,

26:30 put it in the oven and bake it, and you had beautiful baked fish.

What other fish would you eat?

Oh there's, they got the whole lot, black fish, whiting, out on the beaches the flat head, round various other parts you get the dhufish, by hand line mainly. But no they're the main eating fish.

27:00 **And how would people normally cook fish or did it...?**

Oh generally fry it. Fried or grilled.

So it sounds like quite a beautiful place to grow up?

Oh it was, it was. There was no muck in the air, it was all beautiful clean air and you were

27:30 all in pretty good nick playing football or cricket or something, swimming mainly. But no there was a lot to be said for good old Tea Gardens.

Just might cut that there 'cause of the sound of that rain. I wanted to just ask one last question before we wrap this tape, is ask you about the talkies. When they came out and

28:00 **what your recollections are of those kinds of films?**

The which?

The talkies?

Oh the talkies. Well as I said it, I don't recall much about when they first started. And then we did see some of them down at Flinders Naval Depot. But prior to going down there, no I didn't see many of the talkies at all.

28:30 Although they, that's all you could get before I went into the service.

Is that 'cause you were taking girls to the movies and you don't remember what you were watching?

No, no, it's...

I'm only kidding.

...it's, I wasn't that enthused about going to the pictures, the same as I'm not now. But it's

29:00 my wife, she likes going but never seems to get there. But of course with the advent of television and now with the pay TV [television] well you're seeing all the good films and a lot of the old films. As a matter of fact, it was only a couple of days ago there was a couple of the silent films on, the Australian ones.

29:30 So I can't see any reason why to go out and pay all these dollars to go and see a picture that you can, in the comfort of your own home, you'll see 'em in twelve months or so.

True point. So what kind of, what were the main things that young people used to do, what are the main things you used to do in Tea Gardens, the favourite things you used to do?

Well virtually there was, during the week, there was nothing.

30:00 We had like going to school, you had your homework and stuff to do. But most of us were up pretty early of a morning and so you'd, you know, you're ready for bed by the time nine o'clock came around. We weren't allowed to roam the streets. But no, there was virtually nothing to do until the weekend

30:30 came around. Well then you had a few activities, that was normal. We had tennis, tennis courts at Tea Gardens. And in the football season we were playing football and in the cricket season, cricket. Had a lot of people there swimming but never had a swimming carnival or anything like that unfortunately. So it was a case once again of make your own fun and

31:00 what you got out of it well, well and good. But there was nothing programmed for you.

Did you have any special mates?

Yes I had a couple of very good special mates. Jimmy Kennard was one, he was killed during the war. Phil Ingle, he's left us now but

31:30 he wasn't service, he was Tea Gardens. We kept pace with one another through school, but when we got to high school he went to Central Industrial School and I went to the commercial school at Newcastle High. But oh there were different, you know, different ones that you could call your mates and,

32:00 but once again you were all sort of in everything together. It was a, if you wanted to do something, there was always somebody you could go to and say, "Oh do you want a game of cricket or do you want to do this or do something else." Yes, there was quite a few things to do.

And any special girls or good talent in Tea Gardens?

Special girls?

Yeah.

32:30 Well I didn't know what they were about at that time. That's what I say, that that part of my life was spent in the services at sixteen and seventeen. I joined the services and the type of women that we're coming across over where we were didn't induce you to, to follow

33:00 in dad's footsteps sort of thing. They were all Afro nationalities and so no it's, I'm afraid there was no special, oh there was one but she wasn't a girlfriend. She was, I've spoken just a while ago about Aunty Mabel Brippoli, her eldest daughter, we were mates.

33:30 And but no, nothing romantically linked or anything like that, we're just real good friends.

When you were just describing the Afro women, where was that?

Oh this, over originally in the, in Amen, Aden, which is now Yemen. And oh different ports on the Red Sea.

34:00 Even when you got up to the Egyptians at Suez Canal, they were all coloured people. But no there was no, nothing romantic at all.

People would have been, the Australians would have been used to that though wouldn't they?

Oh no.

But Aboriginal, but they would have been used to Aboriginal people? And they wouldn't, would they have been negative

34:30 **towards the coloured people?**

Oh no, no, there was no racism about it. I'm just saying that there were all Afro, I mean there were no white people, they were ninety-nine point nine percent Afro. And, but no it wasn't until, you know, pretty much the end of the war that

35:00 we went to Java, well then you struck the Dutch that were there, the quiet people. No, they were mainly coloured people that were ringing about.

And was there, were they popular at all with any of the men or didn't they, didn't you, wasn't there much contact?

There wasn't that much contact with them, although on board the ship

35:30 we had Adobe Waller, we called him, from, we picked up in Aden. And he was to all intentional purposes a very rich man. He owned a couple of camels and a few donkeys and a house. But like, he had about three wife-, or wives. But he come aboard the ship and he used to do our washing of clothes and stuff like that.

36:00 When we'd get into Aden, Ali'd go ashore with us to buy stuff for the, for our messes. He knew where all the buyers were and made certain that nobody was trying to rip us off. Oh no, there was no, I never come across any racism at all.

Well in, just going back a little bit, back to Tea Gardens, whereabouts were you, can you recall where you were

36:30 **when the war was declared?**

Where I was when war was declared? I think I, yeah, I was, I was at home, home when war was declared. No, it was the day before that I got the telegram to

37:00 report to HMAS Platypus.

And can you remember what happened that day?

What, that I got that...?

That the war was declared?

Oh well it was a case of being young, naive. I'd heard of stories that, Hughie Thurlow, that, on about the Cowie. It,

37:30 no, it was, I've lost my track now.

After war was declared and what you thought about, what, where were you and what happened?

Oh yeah, no well I don't, I never gave it much thought about what was going to happen. All I knew was that I was going into the navy if I passed the medical.

38:00 And I never thought of the dangers or it wasn't a patriotic gesture, it wasn't a gesture of because I needed money or anything like that. It was just sort of that I fell into a trap because this chap that I mated up with at the police cadets, him failing and going with him to when he wanted to join the navy. And

38:30 I went too, as I've said. He failed again and I passed, well I was in and he was out. So that's how I come to be in the service. Although Hughie Thurlow, who I've mentioned earlier, he was ex-navy, Royal Navy. And he always used to say to me, "If you ever have to join any of the services, join the navy."

39:00 And then it was through him that I learned boat skills, how to steer a boat, start an engine, how to, which was port, which was starboard and so forth. Showed me how to tie knots and so forth, do splices. All which stood me in excellent position when I joined the navy,

39:30 for advancement. But no, there's no feeling of elation or anything like that that I was going. That was less than, when I, a couple of days when I, I made, they made certain I was standing on Central Station ready to catch the train for Melbourne. Yeah.

Indeed, that might be a good point to...

Tape 4

00:42 **Ken I'm just interested to know a little more about why you chose the RAN [Royal Australian Navy]?**

Well as I've mentioned, Hughie Thurlow, in World War I he was a World War I Digger [Australian soldier]. And when he came,

01:00 the war finished, he went to sea and eventually received his deep-sea mariner's ticket which allowed him to take command of a ship going overseas or anything of that nature. He then in later years became the pilot for Port Stephens. So any ship which mainly came in was from New Zealand, he would have to go out and board this ship and

01:30 bring it in through the channels and have it anchored over in a place called Duck Hole by Port

Stephens. And then the punts would bring the timber out to load on them for trans-shipment over to New Zealand. And through the course of the Sea Cadets, he had a boat called the Poilu. And

02:00 I'd spent a lot of time with him on this boat. And he used to take parties up to the lakes and I used to go with him, maybe away four, five days. And we'd, once again he showed me the different points in handling a boat. How you told where there was deep water or where there was shallow water, where there were weeds and where there was not.

02:30 And we often, you know, got to talking about the navy. That's why he said, "If ever you are going to join the, any of the services, join the navy." And this was pushed into me quite a lot. And as I've already explained, he taught me all this boat handling and how to

03:00 tie knots and do splicing and so forth. That it was to put me in good stead when I first joined the navy.

What would you say Hughie was like, like a brother or like a dad almost or...?

Oh no he was, you could say he was like an uncle that you got on

03:30 very well with. But nothing was too difficult for him to explain it to the best of his ability. And no, there was a few other of the lads around about that liked him and he helped them. But he was a, he'd never been married

04:00 until, he married about 1939 I think, '38, '39, to a woman over at Nelson's Bay. So no, association with Hughie has been mainly to do with the boats, the Poilu and boat handling craft and so on.

What, so how old would he have been when he got married

04:30 **in 1939?**

Oh God, I suppose he'd be, well he must have been close on I'd say sixty.

So was he more forthcoming about telling you stories about the Great War [World War I] then, than your other uncle that served in the Great War?

My other uncle wouldn't talk about the war.

You mentioned that, and was Hughie more open about it?

Oh yes he'd be more open about it.

05:00 But you could always bet that he'd end up by saying, "All wars are a mug's game." Just about his phrase at the end of his little talks that. He, it's like Anzac Day, lady was talking to him, people say, "Oh you only get out there to get on the booze [alcohol]," and so forth and so on. Try to win battles all over again. It's

05:30 nothing like that. It's meeting up with friends again, and the strange thing about, you talk about the funny things that happened during your service. The sad things you, they've been, they've gone. Although you've still got it in the back of your mind, you're not there to mourn again for the, for those that were lost. You pay your homage to

06:00 them when you go to the services and then when you start to play then you played on the humorous side of your service.

So did Hughie tell you more of the happy, funny stories or did he tell you everything that he could remember?

Oh no he, it, well I was only young and he respected that. No he didn't go into

06:30 any graphic detail or being crude or anything like that, to say what was done, what wasn't done. But he'd tell me about the trenches. They'd, he'd say, "You could look up over a trench and," he said, "round about thirty or forty yards away there'd be the Germans doing the same, looking at you. Next thing you're firing at each other." He, that's what he used to find incredible that you're supposed to be human beings and here you are trying to kill each

07:00 other, for no other reason than some higher up says do it.

What made Hughie you think, think that the navy was better than the infantry?

Well you gotta walk too damn far in the infantry. But as Hughie said to me one day, he said, "In a ship you've only got so far to run," he said, "to either side or to the front or the back." No, he, the

07:30 infantry was not, I don't think he was cut out for that foot-slogging.

Do you think he was scarred by his experiences in the war, or...?

He...?

Do you think he was, do you think he had a good time or a bad time during the war?

I think he had both. 'Cause anybody that was at Gallipoli didn't have a good time. When he got into France, I know different occasions he said, 'Oh he had

08:00 a great time at so-and-so,' or, "We had a colossal time at such-and-such, we had hard battles there, we had no food for so many days," but didn't expand on it, just left it to your own imagination.

So he survived Gallipoli. He was a Gallipoli survivor?

At Gallipoli yes. Yes he was at Gallipoli.

Did he tell you much about Gallipoli?

08:30 I think the only reason why he didn't, because I'd read and knew quite a bit about Gallipoli and I didn't feel like embarrassing him. And you might say why, how could I embarrass him? Well we know what a fiasco Gallipoli was. The generals were right out of

09:00 step, where they landed them was in impossible places, the wrong places, and they just didn't stand a chance from the day they got in their boats really to go ashore. And so no, I never pushed the Gallipoli side of it at all.

Do you think with men of that generation it was difficult for them to talk about those kinds of things?

I think in

09:30 most generations there's a reluctance to talk about the war. You ask my kids. Well, "What's dad say about the war?" "He doesn't talk about the war." Because I think in the back of your mind too much there's people that you've lost.

10:00 See that photograph there of the ship, I knew every one of those. In the small ships it's more intimate than it is in a cruiser. Because the cruiser's so big, six hundred and some odd men and upwards, as against a hundred and thirty-five, well you've got to know everybody in the small ships. Lot of blokes, myself included,

10:30 I'd sooner be in the small ships than the cruiser. I's only in one and that was the Perth, only a short period but I didn't like it then and I still don't like it now. But the small ships you're closer together and yeah.

And the closer together means you get to know people better, it's...?

11:00 Oh you get to know people better. You talk to one another about your home life and so forth and so on. If they want to get something off their chest they know they can go and talk to somebody. And there was no gossip spread around about, but from one to another. But it's just like that, you're one big family in the small ships, were. In the big ships you're five or six

11:30 different large families.

Did Hughie recognise those kinds of positive things about being in the navy when he'd tell you that?

Oh yes because see he, when he went into the merchant service, he learned a lot about the navy then. Because a lot of the merchant services were made out of naval people.

What were other blokes enlisting to do in the Tea Gardens area

12:00 **when the war was declared?**

There was, when the war was declared, I was the first to enlist. And I was gone. And then I think Albert Ingle, he was killed in action. Melvin Butler was another, he

12:30 joined the navy at Fair Miles. I think Jimmy Kennard, he joined the services. And my brother, he joined the navy. But that's about as all as I can remember that did serve last, World War I.

Was that because there wasn't a lot of young men in the area?

13:00 Yeah there wasn't so many, no. No, there wasn't so many.

So pretty much all of them joined up?

Well all those who were able, yes, yeah, could have. Yes it's, I think all those who were capable of going went.

What were the mothers and fathers thinking about it?

Well I think that's a very, very difficult question

13:30 to answer because you can say to a person, "I know how you feel." But you don't know how they feel. People react in certain ways, might be the opposite to the way you would react. So it's a question that you can't answer because you just don't know how that person feels.

Did your mother say anything to you, or she didn't know?

Oh she didn't

14:00 know. It wasn't till she had word from Auntie Nora that she knew that I'd gone, when she got home that night. Auntie Nora phoned, we lived next door to the post office. We didn't have a telephone but we were very, very good friends with the Browns who was our postmaster. And he went in and told Mum that, where I was and so forth and

14:30 so on. And I think he said something along the lines, or Mum said to him, "Well at least I'll know where he is." And she didn't know where I was from that day till the war ended.

Do you think she might have tried to stop you?

No.

Was it just that it worked out that way or that...?

No I think that Mum was very patriotic and

15:00 if I wanted to do something like that, no I don't think she would've stood in my way. Although the way I did get in was by trickery, you know, I must confess. So, but, no I'm certain that she would not have stood in my way.

So neither parent knew you'd already left, didn't have a chance to talk to them?

No. The only ones that knew was Auntie Nora and Uncle Fred. I was on my way before anybody knew.

15:30 It was the same when we left Australia, we came back from overnight leave and expecting, you know, to go ashore that afternoon. But we're told there'd be no further shore leave, that the ship would be sailing at, I think at twenty-three-thirty we sailed, that's half past eleven

16:00 at night. So come dawn or day break, the Yarra wasn't there, she'd gone, it was a bare spot in the Sydney Harbour where she was and course then she was never to come back.

Indeed, which we'll talk about later.

Pardon?

Which we'll talk about at length later. Do you think that Tea Gardens was too small a town for you at,

16:30 **at that age?**

I'd rather put it this way, the opportunities available to you at Tea Gardens were nil, compared to what I'd been taught at school, commercial bookkeeping and all that sort of [thing]. At Tea Gardens there was no, none of that available at all. As I say, I told you I hated shorthand

17:00 and type-writing. I could have been the best type-writer and the best shorthand writer in the world but it wouldn't have done me any good in Tea Gardens. So unless you could swing an axe or tend a net or something like that, well you, all your skills are superfluous. So that's the, that's what I would say more, that the availability of,

17:30 to utilise the skills that you had was just unavailable.

So did any of the other young men feel the same way about Tea Gardens, they recognise that as well?

I don't know. When I left Tea Gardens to join the service, I never again was to see any of those who joined up.

18:00 Oh except my brother, I saw him. But the others no, I didn't see. I've never seen them since.

Were you and your brother quite close?

Not so, not that close. But we were, well pretty much like most brothers. One, I was four years older than he but

18:30 he'd been used to getting away with things at home where I used to cop the punishment for his blunders. But I never ever held it against him. I used to start a chain reaction. He'd do something that, which I didn't do and Mum would give me a hiding, and then I'd give him a belting. Then Mum'd give me a belting because I'd belted him. And then he'd get another one back. So I guess it just went 'who's gonna get tired first'.

19:00 **So, can you describe the basic training that you did at Flinders Depot when you first arrived as part of the navy?**

Well first morning, you were up and our instructor came round and introduced himself. And the first

thing you had to do was to do this point and graft and learn to put your hammock

- 19:30 together properly. You were taught to, how, when the hammock was folded up, the way it was bound and the knot that was used to bind your hammock up. And it took most of that day to do that because it's a, it's not something that you could do in five minutes, unskilled, whereas you could do it in five minutes with
- 20:00 skilled hands. So that was the first day what happened. And on the forenoon of the second day, we went down and we were kitted out. And that took, oh, all the forenoon to get your kit and so forth and so on. Then you had to take it back to your dormitory, stow it away properly in your locker. Know what every piece was
- 20:30 that you had been issued with, why it had been issued. And that took up well pretty well all the forenoon. And then in the afternoon you come under the instructor again and he took us round or marched us round to show us the different parts of the,
- 21:00 of the establishment, starting off of course with the parade ground, which almost come to learn to every blade of grass of it. Then down to the gym, gymnasium, the gunnery school, torpedo school, wireless and telegraphy school, signal school, sail loft, showed you all around, which took up, you know, all the afternoon.
- 21:30 On the following morning you started to get down to the nitty gritty. You were fallen in, fallen in by size, tall down to, and you were taught how to march, step off the left foot all the time. If you're going to make a turn, your left foot was
- 22:00 the main thing. So you spent the next thirteen weeks doing parade ground work and work on the range, for rifle. Also a little bit of explosives. But, and then at the end of that thirteen weeks,
- 22:30 you then went off into your various categories. For argument's sake, the seamen, they would all go off to their section. The cooks would go off into their section and so forth, the stokers would go off into theirs. Then you, they'd be taken away to their various departments where they were going to be trained. As seamen we were trained then, it was the last time you marched
- 23:00 together as a body, as we did when we arrived. So that is about the strength of like when you first join up and your parade ground work. It was pretty arduous to start with but then you get the knack of doing things and becomes quite easy.
- 23:30 But especially if you did something wrong and you had to double around the parade ground a couple of times with boots on, it's not a happy experience. But no it's, once you got into the swing of it, it was good yeah.

Ken, tell me about the kit that you were issued with, what was in there and...?

The which?

The kit that you were given, the equipment, of all the, your kit-up?

Oh your kit. Well you

- 24:00 were, we'll start from the bottom up. You're given a pair of heavy, parade ground boots, which were studded. They're about a size bigger than what you normally took because your feet swell when you're doing so much marching. Then you were given what you would call 'number one' boots. They for when you were going ashore or something like that.
- 24:30 Your socks, underpants, singlets. You were then given a, what they call 'number sixes', was a duck-type white suit. And then you received two of your ordinary naval uniforms. One was a 'number one' the other one was a 'work'.
- 25:00 One set of bib and brace overalls, gee you're trying me out now aren't you. A combined knife and marlin spike. A 'Seaman's Manual', the manual we trained under. Oh dear, this is shocking.
- 25:30 Your sewing kit, it's got a special name, I just can't recall it. And then you had your cap, your cap tallies and a Burberry overcoat. That was your kit.

You mentioned there were two types of uniforms, you said a 'number one' and a something else?

'Number one', 'number two'. Your number one is what you would wear on parade and when you were going ashore.

- 26:00 The difference between the two, if you had any badges at all, your number one uniform, they always used to be gold. Your number two or three was red. You see, might see some chaps with red, that's, well that's not their going out uniform. Same as you see an American forces, how they have a different uniform for special
- 26:30 occasions. So virtually you get three uniforms. With the exception is, that with the duck uniform you

don't get an extra collar, that is the collar with the three, three bars on it.

You mentioned also about the hammocks, tying the hammocks, did you find that easy?

Yeah because I'd been shown how to do it before I joined the navy.

By Hughie?

Yeah.

So just for our,

27:00 **for my benefit, so I can understand what you were doing, what, how did you tie it and what was the sort of dimensions of what you had to do?**

Well you took the rope, your lanyard around and you went over and under so that, and you pulled it so that it tightened without slackening off. And you went out the next one round, underneath and pull it and when you pull it, it tightened the other section.

27:30 So by the time you got down to the other end, you had sufficient to tie a small one, to tighten the ends and sufficient then to secure it. But no it was a knack to doing it but once you got the knack, it's like the whole lot went.

So they were preparing you for sleeping in hammocks, once you were in a vessel?

Well that's right your hammock, that's why I say it became, it's the most comfortable thing I've ever slept

28:00 in, in my life. Oh beautiful sleeping in a hammock. Warm.

And did you actually do any sea work during that initial training time at Flinders Depot, were you on the water at all?

Well you did boat work on Western Port Bay. And that entailed sailing in a cutter,

28:30 sailing in a dinghy, sailing in a whaler, then you had your power boats if you learned how to use them. And the only other time where you actually got on the sea is one day you went out on one of the ships, the commission ships. In my case it was the HMAS Adelaide. She

29:00 took us out for one day and, as a matter of fact, I was sitting down with two other blokes, I can't recall who it was, eating our lunch, 'scrans', as we call it in the navy, and the commander walked past, he stopped and he came back. He said, "Do you know who I am?" I said, "Yes sir, you're commander." He said, "Well if you don't stand up when I walk past," he said, "I'll never let you go to sea."

29:30 And I often thought, 'Geez, I wished he'd have kept his promise.' That's, you know, yes, it's, but we always said that what Hughie taught me as a kid stood me in good stead, good stead, was the fact that they, every class had a class leader and I was made the class leader of our class for the reason that I was aware

30:00 and able to do much more than any of the others, and the only person I could thank for that is Hughie Thurlow.

Just, just to, are you feeling okay Ken?

Pardon?

Are you feeling okay?

Yep.

Would you like a sip of water or anything?

No.

Just in terms of the knots and things that he taught you, what was, what are some of the knots that are really useful when you're at sea?

Well you'd use practically all of them. Like a

30:30 bowline, a bowline where you make a loop and no matter how much tension you put on that, it never tightens. You'd use a sheep shank which is used to shorten a rope and also can be used to put tension on a rope. That's what we used to say is a sheep shank, is short legged sheep through shallow water.

31:00 That was the definition of a sheep shank. A double bowline was another one, you never used it, I don't think I ever used it, whereby if somebody was going to be lowered over the side, you could put his legs on one side of one loop and sit him on the other. And lower him down that way so he could use his arms freely. Then you

31:30 had your reef knots, your ordinary knots. You, then you had fancy knots to do, which, unless you were going to decorate something, you never worried about them. Such as a Turk's head. Well you see them

on some of the lanyards on

32:00 gangways at the end. It's a round ball but it's done round with rope as a Turk's head. And there's other knots that you can do to beautify. Say that lampshade you wanted to, you could just have a half inch that way, half inch that way,

32:30 and keep going down and it comes out feathered all the way down in one length, plain behind but all feathered in the front. But there are a heck of a lot of knots and splices. But the ones that I mentioned earlier on, they're the ones you commonly use.

What's the difference between a knot and a splice?

Well a splice is when you're joining two ropes together, two wires

33:00 together. Or making a loop in a wire or rope. So there's no, there's actually nothing the same about either of them. Splice is not classed as a knot, and a knot's not classed as a splice.

Okay,

33:30 **so in that first initial training you mentioned at Flinders Depot, did you realise at that point that you would get sea sickness?**

That I would...?

That you were prone to sea sickness?

Oh I knew this back in, from the old Cowembah days. But I was soon to find out again. As, that, when I went back to sea.

34:00 **Did you have any reservations about that, knowing that you would get seasickness?**

What, when I went back to sea, we went over to Perth, or to Fremantle to join the Yarra at the outbreak of war. She was a training ship then and mine-sweeping. So we joined ostensibly for, to learn mine-sweeping, as part of our seaman's duties. And

34:30 we went over there and went out of Fremantle Harbour and sure enough, I was sea sick. Then of course we're out sweeping the channels, we didn't know what for, but outside of Fremantle and Bunbury we swept these channels right backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. And then we saw these big troopers

35:00 coming up. And it was the first troop-ships that ever left Australia for the middle east. The Aquitania, Mauritania, Empress of Britain, Empress of Japan, Empress of Canada, the Awatere. I think that's about it. And they went out at speed, met, when I say speed,

35:30 their wash wasn't just a little ripple on the water. And yes they took our first AIF [Australian Imperial Force] overseas.

So that was actually straight after your basic training at Flinders Naval Depot?

Basic training, I went from there straight to Yarra.

Right. So when you're in the basic training, did you meet any sort of friends there that you then went down

36:00 **to the Yarra with?**

Yes, there were three of us, four of us went to her. But I was the only seaman. The other ones were three stokers, three stokers and a signalman I think it was. If I can remember correctly it was Jeff Bromelow, we become mates later on with Jeffrey.

36:30 **When they divided you into your different areas, you described the seamen and stokers etc., were you, did you choose which one you wanted to go into or did they put you in there?**

Oh no, no you elected which branch of the service you wanted to go in. But oh no, they didn't give you that nicety. No, you elected what branch of the service you wanted to serve in and that's the branch

37:00 you went in. And when you were divided up into those groups, there was a lot of those fellas you never ever saw again because I say there were three out of ours, well I was the only one out of our class that went to the Yarra. Others went to other destroyers, cruisers and so forth. And the same thing happened to the other boys. So it's a, you, that didn't all end up all on the one ship.

37:30 Wherever there was a shortage, that's where you went.

Just for my benefit, do you mind just describing the different roles, the stoker and the seaman and just how they were different from each other?

What do you mean, the difference between a stoker and a seaman? Well a seaman does all the upper-

- deck work. And a stoker, he
- 38:00 is, oh the word gets back to stokers when they were using coal. But of course all oil burners these days. And they're down in the engine room, they check with the boilers to see what pressure of, is on the boilers and so forth. Then you have other, that's in the engine room itself,
- 38:30 making certain that, checking the oil levels on the turbines. And then they do, go down the propeller shaft, checking the oils on the bearings there, to make certain it's not overheating or anything like that. Well your cooks, they stand for what they are. Sick berth attendants, they man the sick bay in the ships or the sloops above.
- 39:00 They carried a doctor as well. Stewards, they were for the officers' quarters. The wireless telegraphists, they and the 'bunting tossers' as we call them, those that hoist the flags and do semaphore with flags, they all more or less belong to
- 39:30 the one branch but they're sort of split. They, while the telegraphists go into their wireless telegraphy section of the ship, and the bunting tossers signalmen, they actually went into their section of the ship.
- The wireless telegraphers, what kind of stuff do they do?**
- The wireless?
- The wireless telegraphers?**
- They,
- 40:00 they take, all traffic in and out of the ship goes through them. When the war come you had an extra person to, now the word's gone, to de-code messages and code messages. Before they got enough of those
- 40:30 trained, the telegraphists used to do it. And that was the, their main activity to, all signals going to and from the ship, they sent and received, after it had been coded. Then they handed them to the de-coders, they de-coded the messages, who handed it then onto the officer of the watch or the skipper.
- Okay,**
- 41:00 **thank you that's probably a good point to cut this tape.**

Tape 5

- 00:42 **Okay so, you mentioned before Ken mine-sweeping. Do you mind defining that for us?**
- Well mine-sweeping is exactly as the name says, is that you're sweeping
- 01:00 mines that have been set by, well, could be your own people, but naturally enough, mainly by the enemy. You keep, try to keep your sea lanes open, lots of them around our coast, we used to try and keep our coastal lanes open. On the Barrier Reef, we had certain outlets through the reef to the open sea,
- 01:30 we mined those. There's one that was open was the Grafton Passage, that was out off Townsville. And it was a case of where you had a, you put over the side a thing called a paravane that
- 02:00 when you put it in the water, it tended to pull down. Now from higher than that, you then have a wire, a special serrated mine-sweeping wire that came down into cutters, shackled onto a cutter. And that used to go way up to a buoy.
- 02:30 So the distance you wanted to mine-sweep was governed by the distance of the buoy down to the, not paravane, oh dear, I'll think of it in a minute, because they set mines at different depths, depending upon the depth of the water at the channels. They wouldn't set them all at
- 03:00 thirty feet if the depth of the water was only twenty feet. So they're set at different depths so you've gotta be able to judge the depth of the water and from your echo-sounder you get that. And you set your mines. So your deepest one we'll say was sixty feet and the majority of them were, say around about thirty feet. So what you would do would be to set,
- 03:30 your first day you swept around about twenty-five feet, five feet below that one. And when you went through it would cut all those mines off, as it hit the wire that was holding the mine, hit that one, it'd either cut it off on that serrated mine- sweeping line, or force it along the wire till it got to the cutters down here, and then it went to the surface.
- 04:00 Once it got to the surface it's up to some sharp-shooter on board to put a bullet in it to sink it. The, then if you had other depths or what, you'd have to lower it further down again and do a sweep so that you collected the lot. So it's a business that you've gotta be

- 04:30 on your toes all the time doing it. Now for argument's sake, when we were doing the mine-sweeping on the Barrier Reef, after the war, we had to have a motor launch, which is non-magnetic to come along with one sweep out one side and come in as close as it could to the rocks. So that in that channel
- 05:00 or that coral I should say, and it would sweep all the mines along there, which would then allow the bigger ships to get in that safe water, that clean water that had been swept and so they'd run a wire out the starboard side. So you generally might have two or three ships. So you've got one ship operating there and sweeping out to here. Now the next ship would be in here
- 05:30 and sweeping out to there. And the third ship would be in here, the ship is always in swept waters. And its wire is out there. So it's a difficult job in the Barrier Reef where you've got coral and you're forever rescuing some of the equipment,
- 06:00 or losing ninety-nine percent of it. And you're splicing wire or going back to base to pick up more mine-sweeping wires. But that is one sort of mine-sweeping. The other one is what they used on the cruisers, using a paravane. That comes down the stem on a shoe, that fits around the stem and
- 06:30 a paravane wire goes off each one of the side of it. So they stream out from the sides of the ship. And depending upon how deep you let that shoe go down, go right down the stem, so that's the depth you're going to sweep at. So if you do that, you find that the mine would've been set that would've exploded, you
- 07:00 would have been, hit it above that, that height because the ship would come in there, rather than down this side. You've got the stem of the ship coming in there and you've got your mine there and so it shears it off below the mine. So once again the same thing applies there, it's cut and comes to the surface and once again a sharp-shooter
- 07:30 would use a rifle or machine gun to sink it. The Geneva Convention, it stated that every mine that was cut loose or broke loose automatically switched itself off. That is to say that it become inoperative. If you went up and smashed a horn off, it wouldn't work because there was a switch, at the bottom. And it was
- 08:00 connected to the mine wire. So that when the mine cradle sank, hit the bottom, it trips the mine wire and it floats till it gets to the right height and when it, the strain comes on, it breaks that switch. So it's, until such times as the mine
- 08:30 is broken, that switch is made all the time. But once it's, the wire's cut, well the mine breaks loose then automatic, that switch should open. Unfortunately the Germans and Japanese did not adhere to that principle. As far as I know, we did, because all mines that we swept were all safe. And
- 09:00 there's, oh another way of, not actually of mine sweeping but in protecting a harbour. For argument's sake, supposing you're going to attack Sydney Harbour. So what you would do, let me, no, get away from Sydney Harbour. Suppose you were going go attack Manly Beach and Collaroy, up through there. So what you would do, you would saturate
- 09:30 that with mines. And that would stop any boats getting in or out or along those beaches. Now when you set these mines you say, "Oh well we're going to set these to explode or we're going to land on the twenty-sixth of November at six o'clock." So you set all these mines to implode at, on the twenty-sixth at, say, five
- 10:00 to six. So all those mines, inside the small charge would blow up and sink the mine. They didn't want the mine to go off because if they heard all these explosions, they would have known that's where you were gonna land. So the one inside exploded and blew a hole in the side of the mine and the mine sank. So that when they were ready to come ashore, they came ashore and all the mines were laying on the floor, useless.
- 10:30 **There's a couple of questions I wanted to ask you about these mines. The first question, how were the mines placed in the first place, did you, were you at all involved in placing the mines or only sweeping them?**
- No, we had one mine layer, the Bungaree. She was converted cargo ship to, became a
- 11:00 mine layer. I think we had, did have one other but I'm not aware of it.
- In terms of actually the mines themselves, can you describe them and how much impact would one mine have when they detonate. What would be the cause, what would be the effect of that?**
- Well one mine could sink a ship, if it hit it in
- 11:30 the right place. But it's only, see they bought out different types of mines during the war. Now I'm not an expert on these by any ways, but we had to have our ships degaussed. And that was to try and negafy the
- 12:00 electrical or the magnetic imbalance of the ship. So what used to happen with the, before we got the degaussing, that a ship passed over these mines and the magnetic fields set by the, down by the ship

would attract the mines and automatically set it off. So with

- 12:30 the degaussing, it negafied that and the ship would steam over the top. But of course this degaussing, we'd go over Black Wattle Bay in Sydney. You'd have a ship she'd be point down and go round three-sixty degrees, almost take a day to degauss. Then they ran a cable right round the full length of the ship, oh about that size. That was
- 13:00 that one, the other one was the one I just told you about, lay mines to protect a harbour where you want to infiltrate at a later period, acoustic mines. Once again they'd have a mine that was laying on the bottom or could be on a string. And the sounds in the ship, as it goes over,
- 13:30 would set off the mines. But what they would do, because the most important ships are in the centre of the convoy, they may put a delayed action where they'll say, "Oh well the fourth or fifth ship that goes over, that's when it'll go off." And it'd be a tanker of something they're hoping. So there was that, the acoustic mines as well. But that's about all the mines I can,
- 14:00 you know, been to (UNCLEAR). But as I say, I'm no authority on mines themselves.

And what would be the effect of them if they detonated, if, what, did you see one explode?

Oh yes, yes. Oh they, you've seen movies where a bomb has hit the water, great spout, well that's what it looks like. But when the,

- 14:30 once again it depends upon the depth, the deeper they are the less volume of water will come to surface. But it's, it was a tricky game there for a long time, mines and mine clearance.

Indeed. Now Ken, just in terms of

- 15:00 **detecting the mines, how was that achieved in the Yarra?**

Well it was done with what they call the ASDIC [Submarine Detector]. When we started off initially, it was called the one, two, three, set. And on, up on the bridge you had a compass with a pointer on it, and a steer, a wheel you'd turn, that

- 15:30 drove a bowden wire right down through the ship down to where the oscillator went through the ship's bottom. And it was a case of just going around and wherever the transmission was sent, you'd know where the echo was. But it was all done by hear, there was nothing, you couldn't look down and say, 'Well that's such-and-such.'
- 16:00 So what you would do, you'd get an echo, you'd report as echo bearing and then you'd go until you missed, didn't get an echo back. And you'd say, "Right cut, say ten degrees." And you come back again, no signal, there it is, "Left cut zero degrees, extent of target ten degrees.
- 16:30 Submarine." Because you tell whether it's a submarine or not by the sound of the echo that comes back. It's very much like the sound of throwing a tennis ball at that wall and the wall is standing still. The ball would come back off that wall at the speed that it hits it. Now if that ball, if that wall, at
- 17:00 the time I threw that, the ball at it, was coming towards you, the ball would come back faster. So in the case of your sound it comes back at a higher pitch. Consequently if the wall was going away, when you threw the ball at it, the ball would sort of go with it, then come back at a slower and a lower pitch. So you've got three pitches that you look out for, the same,
- 17:30 lower and higher. And you've got to be able to tell, pick out the difference of what those sounds represent. Whether they're, a wooden or whether it's a steel, or something like that, you've got to be able to determine that. Now...

So... after you, sorry.

... there's only one way that you can say whether it's a

- 18:00 submarine or not, is because when you do your sweep across it again and you go off the end, you say, "Right cut, one five." So that means from one zero, it's moved to the right one five. So you say, "Target moving right." So it's not a fixed object on the bottom, so it must be a submarine.

And this is the same way you detect

- 18:30 **mines? This is the same way you detect mines?**

Yeah the same way but if you only have one mine you would get the same effect. But it would be fixed, it would be just sitting there. But if you was to hit a field of mines, you get this 'ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping' as it hits one and then, then you know it's a minefield.

- 19:00 **Now what about these acoustic mines? Would this way of detecting them ever set off acoustic mines?**

No, you can still detect them with your, with the ASDIC. It's only the way that they're exploded is by acoustic.

But would they explode once they were detected by this ASDIC device?

The ASDIC won't explode them.

Right.

All will detect them and say that's where it is. It's up then to the ASDIC officer to decide what he's

19:30 gonna do to render it, well, harmless.

So just to explain the acoustic difference, and between this ASDIC device and the acoustic mine, what exactly is the signal that's being sent out by this device, in the, it's under water is it?

Under water oh yes.

And what, can you describe what's actually happening with that device?

Well when you transmit it, you

20:00 can hear it going out faintly. If it hits nothing, you don't hear anything. Comes back and you transmit again. And it'll keep on doing that and when you hit something it'll go out and go 'ping'. 'Ping'. And so you detect them there. But until you detect it, there's nothing you can do 'cause you don't know it's there.

So what's it literally sending out?

20:30 Sound beams.

Sound waves.

Yeah. High frequency sound waves.

Through the water?

Yeah.

And it's a different sound wave than the acoustic mine?

Oh yes, it's all the same. The only difference being that, all ASDIC sets do not have the same frequency for obvious reasons. If you had them all at the one frequency and the Germans got hold of one, pulled it apart and said oh that's set for ten thousand

21:00 KC's [oscillator], then he's all he's gotta do is to go round and set all their sets and things to hundred thousand then that'd be it. So...

Set their mines to that frequency?

No, yeah, their detection, yeah.

Oh okay.

So they know that all your ships are fitted with a hundred thousand KC

21:30 transmission. So each oscillator oscillates at a different frequency. And that frequency is only known to some people in London. And I'm going back, used to be when I was, of course everything's different now. So...

So that wasn't so that they could then set acoustic mines at a certain frequency that would, there was no way that the ASDIC could

22:00 **detonate acoustic mines, it was a different type of sound that it was responding to?**

No, there was no way that the ASDIC could sink anything or detonate anything.

It was just detecting?

Detection.

So just in terms of the actual structure that you described, the actual mines and the way that they're formed, with the wires and the cutters and various things, how do you

22:30 **then determine the depth of where they are in the water, is that done by the ASDIC as well?**

No, that was done by (a) by either your charts mainly or guess work. It wasn't till, oh about 1941 I think, '42 that they brought out

23:00 another ASDIC set that they called 'the sword', and it stood vertically under your ship and as you, it tilted it, so that the transmission is coming down that way. And that way you could turn round and say, "Right the submarine is such-and-such a depth." Because it's

23:30 transmitting vertically instead of horizontally as the ASDIC is. So between the two of them you could say that the object is bearing well, let's just say due north, at a speed of so-and-so and the sword is saying at a depth of a hundred feet. So you've got the course of the submarine,

24:00 its speed, its distance and its depth.

So there were two threats you were looking out for at any one time, and they would be mines as well as submarines, or different things?

No, no the one, no the one, the ASDIC set picked up both of them.

They picked up both?

Yes, wouldn't matter which one of them.

Okay.

And other ships as well.

Okay. So just before we talk about the submarines, with just a few more questions about the mines themselves,

24:30 **were there any accidents or things that happened when you were detecting these mines and sweeping for mines?**

Not during the war to my knowledge. We did have one when we were clearing it, the mines off the Barrier Reef. We lost the Warrnambool. Because as I said, the ship astern she came in when the cleared water, and we lost our sweep.

25:00 Instead of her turning and coming straight behind us, she stayed out there in unswept waters and down she went.

So who would put these mines there?

We did.

The Australians put them there to protect the shores?

To stop enemy...

Submarines.

shipping coming into the Barrier Reef. Yeah.

And was this a common practice generally by most countries, the allies as well as

25:30 **everybody in the war, to use different mines or...?**

Well I would expect that to be true although I couldn't speak on that. It was somebody else's decisions those, to make. But were it left to me I'd, and I could protect the harbour by laying mines across it, I certainly would.

Just one other question about the mines, what at the time, were there any

26:00 **considerations or ramifications of a mine explosion on marine life?**

Well a strange thing, when we were exploding mine or clearing the mines up in the Barrier Reef after the World War I, the number of fish that came up after the explosion of a mine, wouldn't have fed

26:30 a dozen people. Now that was always strange to me. That they never, you'd have thought it would be teeming with fish. No. And not a decent size fish amongst them. Nor a shark or anything, you know.

What would happen if a fish was to touch one of the mines, if they swam into it?

Well he'd have to hit it pretty hard to break one of the horns.

27:00 Have to hit it fairly hard yeah.

So it'd have to be a huge fish?

Oh yes, yeah.

What kind of fish would be able to break...?

Oh a shark'd be able to do it chasing something. A dolphin'd be able to break one off.

Were there any incidences of marine life setting off a mine?

Oh I couldn't tell you that one.

Okay.

No it's, the only

27:30 other incident happened that while we were sweeping down the reef, out at Townsville. We, as we came into Townsville to pick up more wire and do a boiler clean, oh the reception we received, they were gonna tear us apart. So what apparently had happened off Magnetic Island, I suppose you've heard of that have you? Well Magnetic Island's a tourist resort just off Townsville

28:00 and two blokes in a boat fishing on the outer side of it, moored the boat to the, a floating mine. And course the boat hit one of the horns. They ain't with us no more. They reckon we should've been there to have cleaned it up. Well anybody with a bit of sense wouldn't have gone,

28:30 you know, within a hundred miles of it.

They didn't realise it was a mine?

Oh they must've known it was a mine. But I don't know.

Was there just not the time to lay, like warnings out around the areas and things?

Well you didn't know, see there's...

'Cause you couldn't, it'd have to be secret by its nature?

Yeah there are warnings sent out, mariner's notices.

29:00 There, at this present time, there are mines breaking away from the bottom somewhere. And notices to mariners will come out and say, 'A mine was sighted such-and-such a position.' So if you're steaming in that area you know there's a floating mine somewhere, where it could be in this area, keep a watch out for it.

And it's still likely to detonate?

Oh yeah, well it, if

29:30 it's gone through the drill of opening the circuit when the wire broke or, then, it shouldn't detonate.

So even though you might sweep for mines, you may miss a couple or...?

Oh God, we went to New Guinea to sweep the reefs off the

30:00 south-eastern side of New Guinea. Now it became almost an impossibility to do it. Because with your echo-sounder, you might see five fathoms, sixty fathoms, ten fathoms. And this was brought about by what they call 'nigger heads', which are coral which have just grown in,

30:30 in spires, like that. You got one there, you might have one down here, another one up here. As a matter of fact you could see them when you looked over the side of the ship. Beautiful clear water but they were well down. But you could see them as you went past. And so there would be mines down in there that you could never get out to sweep.

So they'd sunk down or that's where they were originally placed?

That's, well that's

31:00 where they originally ended up, down in one of those crevices.

Right, a mine that's actually come loose of its, off its wires?

Yes, when the cradle hits the bottom, it's set to a certain depth, the wire mine rises. And soon as it comes, that pall drops in, locks it. When it locks, it closes that switch. So that the,

31:30 the mine now is active. Until such time as that wire is loose, is tight, then that switch should be closed. Immediately it is cut, then the pressure is taken off the switch and it opens, and renders the mine safe.

So the mine then could sink down...?

No. It'll go straight to the surface.

So how would a mine that's been

32:00 **released of its wires end up in a crevice in a, in the Great Barrier Reef?**

Well it never happened in the reef, but I'm talking about up off New Guinea.

Right, sorry, in a reef in New Guinea, how did that happen?

Well it gets right down in these nigger heads. You can't say where these nigger heads are going to be when you're laying mines, 'cause it's done at night and it's very difficult to be able to ascertain

32:30 what's, it's not as though you're going across a flat bottom, or a slanting bottom. This is going up and down all the time, it's, you're lucky with some, you're most lucky with the majority of them.

Okay. Well just coming back to the HMAS Yarra, just, could you describe for me this vessel and your first impressions

33:00 **of it when you realised this was where you were going to be stationed?**

I think I was a bit too excited to know, notice too much about it. What I did notice, that she didn't have too much armament up top. As it turned out she only had three old four inch, high angle

33:30 stuff, four saluting guns and a set of four point five inch machine guns. So it wasn't until I started to walk around her that I felt, you know, that, 'This is my ship,' you know. 'This is gonna be my home till the - , ' yeah. Nobody spoke ill of the Yarra from then on.

34:00 Not to me.

So what kind of vessel was she?

She was a Grimsby class sloop. The information's on that picture you took there. That's still going isn't it?

Yep.

There is a photograph there of it in that book. Bit over a thousand tons, she was launched in,

34:30 in '36, sunk in fourth of March '42. So as a ship she didn't have a long life. She had a speed, oh about sixteen knots. That's about the main, she had a crew of I think a hundred and thirty-two. Our captain

35:00 was Captain Hastings Harrington, who later became Rear Admiral Sir Wilfred Hastings Harrington, DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and Barr. And also Chief of the Naval Staff in Australia. So and he started off in the Yarra as a lieutenant commander. That's

35:30 two-and-a-half stripes.

So what were the main duties of the Yarra?

What was the ...?

Main duties of the Yarra?

Uses of her?

Yes, apart from mine-sweeping?

Well we had, we went to Bombay for a refit and we took all her mine-sweeping gear off her. And she was then wholly and solely an escort ship. Taking convoys

36:00 and so forth and so on. Actually the Davidson, all the mines, taking up extra space and weight, causing more weight, but, was no use to us and we, they got rid of that in Bombay. And we then became wholly and solely an escort ship.

36:30 **Just before we come back to just some other questions about the Yarra, what's the purpose of a convoy ship?**

Convoy, ships in convoy?

Yeah, what's the purpose of being a ship that's escorting a convoy?

Well a ship on its own is pretty open slather for a U-boat [Unterseeboot - German submarine] or a Japanese submarine.

37:00 To put them in convoy, it means you can have more ships protecting them and they've got more chance of keeping the submarines away. One of the drawbacks, and they exploited this, they used to dive underneath the escorting ships and come up in the middle of the convoy, and cause a hell of a lot of damage there,

37:30 then dive again. And they couldn't attack them 'cause you didn't know where they were under the convoy. But they, the convoy system proved to be the most successful way of getting ships to and fro on the oceans.

Okay, probably a good point to finish that tape.

38:00 **Thank you.**

00:49 **Can you now for me Ken, imagine you're walking on board the Yarra and just talk about, walk around it in your imagination, and tell me**

01:00 **about what's on each deck as you walk round her.**

Right. The taking for granted that the gangway is about level with the officers' mess. That's, oh bugger, you...

Oh don't worry about the book, just describe it.

Well, where the whole superstructure comes, down this end is the,

01:30 the officers' mess. And when you come on, that's A Deck. That goes, that's the first deck that goes the full length of the ship. So as you go along the port side, you come to the different messes. It's all accommodation on the port side and the starboard side up fore head. So you've got seamen

02:00 on this side, port side all the way up. Then on the other side you have the engineering stokers. So you come down and that's all that's on the sides. The engine room doors come off that deck. That goes down first up. And then you go along to the next door, that goes down. I'm forget, not mentioning bulkheads, one

02:30 thing [and] another. That goes down into the dry stores room and the refrigerated area. And then you go next up into the paint locker. And you come down the starboard side, is a continuation of the stores area.

03:00 And then you come to, yeah that goes right down to the boiler room. And the boiler room then into the engine room. The engine room then goes to about where the officers' mess finishes. And in that

03:30 area, it contains the direct steering equipment. If the, if you gotta steer by hand, there's the big wheel there, also the gyro-compass is there. The temperature gauges for the sea water, the sea temperature is there. And you go aft there, you get wet. So you go down on the next deck which is C Deck.

04:00 You have the engine room, it only goes to, for a certain section, then there's the propellers and so forth. For'ard of there is the boiler room still. And for'ard of that,

04:30 for'ard of that is the cable locker. Where all the two anchor cables feed down into there. And below that is the ASDIC compartment, the main ASDIC gear, not the,

05:00 not the direction finding. But the oscillator and all that kind of stuff is down there and the amplifiers and everything else. Above that, oil tanks and I think it's oil tanks all the way along then. Yeah pretty much so, oil

05:30 tanks all the way along. Although that's going from thoughts, 'cause I never ever been down there. You never go down, oh we wouldn't lower ourselves to go down amongst those stokers. God! That is lowering our, getting down amongst the dregs.

So when you left Fremantle, you've just arrived on the new ship, did you know where you were going?

06:00 No. No. The only time we knew where we were going, in the first six months of the war, that we were sweeping off Fremantle then we went down as far

06:30 south as Bunbury. And we were, swept all round that area to clear the channels going back to Fremantle. Cause the ships coming west would come round the bump there. And that was as

07:00 far as we went on that trip. We came back to Fremantle, we topped up with oil and foodstuffs, milk and stuff like that, that we don't carry a great deal of it with us. And then we went, put out to sea and we were out about six or seven hours, and the skipper

07:30 come on the blower and said, "We are now heading for Melbourne." Next stop after that would be Sydney. Now the reason why of course that they don't allow you to look at your orders or for anybody to know, is that they didn't want anybody to get the chance of being able to give it to the enemy. So you're at sea and

08:00 on your way before you, anybody else realise. Even the skipper, he doesn't know. Although, is that on? One of the funny things about going to sea and not knowing what you're doing, I spoke earlier about Ali, Ali our daily Waller on board. He used to go with us as I already said, to

08:30 assist us in buying stuff for the mess and so forth. I'd say within twenty minutes of being ashore, Ali'd come back and say, "We are going to Suez and we got...." Where he got his information from and how he got it was, no, he knew where we were going, it's, astounded everybody. But he'd only tell our fellas, he wouldn't tell anybody else. He was a true Aussie you

09:00 could say. But yes it's, and of course we got to Melbourne. And from Melbourne we went to Sydney and Sydney we did a refit. That was the big refit.

So, what did the refit entail?

Well it, they tore out and we received the latest ASDIC set. The 128.

- 09:30 Oh lots of things done to the wireless room and yeah, no, we didn't get it that trip. Lot of done to the engine room. Lot was done in regard to, oh to various structures on the ship. She was gone
- 10:00 over with a fine-tooth comb, although she was only launched in '36. You're only looking at a ship now that's only three years old, four years old. And but it's amazing the amount of work that they find, anything that's rusted, then you've gotta go into dry dock. She's scraped right down and given a coat of underlay. And make
- 10:30 certain she's clear there. With the ASDIC set they check it out manually, you can't check it out until you get to sea. But there's a hell of a lot of work that goes into a major refit, to bring her right up to the fighting strength expected of her.

Did you get any more speed

- 11:00 **out of the ship after that?**

Mosquitoes?

No, any more speed out of the ship?

No. She stayed around about the sixteen knot until later we were coming down the Shatt al Arab [waterway] and it runs at eight knots. Like we had a bit of (UNCLEAR) pushing us. But no, she could even tow, tow a vessel at almost the same speed because that's what she had power for,

- 11:30 for mine-sweeping, and so she had power to, not for speed but for power to pull something.

So was HMAS Yarra designed for mine-sweeping or for something else?

Well they generally were mine-sweepers, they come off the Grimsby class sloops which are British designed. Modified slightly for out here. But I think ostensibly they were for mine-

- 12:00 sweeping and for escort work.

Now I understand you went eventually to Bombay?

We went, left Sydney went to Melbourne then to Fremantle and Colombo.

Colombo, can you tell me about that journey across?

On the trip across to Fremantle, when we hit the,

- 12:30 just off Albany, we hit this storm and she was a beauty. And strangely enough I went down with double pneumonia. And wasn't seasickness as everybody else thought. But anyhow they ended up putting me ashore in Fremantle and in the hospital there.
- 13:00 And the skipper came round and said that, to say goodbye. I said, I begged him, almost got out of bed to plead with him to get me back on the ship, I wanted to go with him. Anyhow he did, I got, sailed with her. And buggered if I didn't have a relapse. So they got me to Colombo and put me ashore again. And that was my first fatal mistake of ever going ashore in Colombo. I was in Colombo hospital and this
- 13:30 nurse, "You drink, you drink?" and I said, "Oh yes please." And she said, "You drink milk, eat milk?" "Yes, yes please." And so anyhow she brought me this glass and it was cold and I said, "Oh you beaut," and I took a good swallow of it: bloody goats' milk. And I never ever, ever again took them at their word about anything, I wanted to know, wanted to see. Goats' milk, vile stuff it is, I don't know how people can drink it. And
- 14:00 yeah, so anyhow I was there and I joined the Perth to go, she was going into the Med. that time. And yeah she was going in to relieve the Sydney, that's right. And they put me on twin guns on the Perth. Now I'd never ever had
- 14:30 any instruction on the, on loading or anything else about twin, four inch guns. And course they had to put me on the right-hand gun as well. And so anyhow when we started to shoot, I got the first shot away alright. The second one went and it sorta jammed and I turned over and punched it in right hand, and as I did, the right-hand gunner, the other fired,
- 15:00 smacked me in the fore-, and ended up back onto the bulkhead underneath the vegetable locker. And there was blood everywhere and all I could think of, they said it'd kill me if I got hit with a recoil of the gun. So anyhow they reefed me out of there and took me down to sick bay and stitched it up. And it's, ended up putting me back on the guns again
- 15:30 for some unknown reason and 'cause I shouldn't have been on there in the first place. So we finally reached Aden and the Yarra wasn't there, she was on her way to Suez. So we sailed from Aden and we passed the Yarra on the way. And they, I left the

- 16:00 Perth in Suez and then the Yarra came in a couple of days later and I rejoined her. And from then on we did various convoys up and down the Red Sea and had our moments with high flying Italian aircraft. But
- 16:30 mainly about twenty thousand feet, they just little silver specks you could see. And one night we were also attacked by Italian destroyers. But we had the Achilles and the Leander I think it was, the cruisers. And two of the British
- 17:00 destroyers with us. Anyhow as soon as they attacked this, there's a bloke on board, Bluey, what's that, Bluey Bartlett, come from Ambercrombie Street, Redfern, big red-headed Irish man, hardly any teeth in the front. And he reported that they had twin guns. And I said, "Well how do you know they've got twin guns?" He said,
- 17:30 "They're firing port and starboard." Port and starboard. What he could see [was] tracer fire, yeah. So anyhow the Kimberley was the British destroyer. As soon as they passed us, the Kimberley took off towards Massawa. And when the two Iti [Italian] destroyers come
- 18:00 steaming in to get into Massawa, there was the Kimberley waiting for them. Stuck one aground and sunk the other. Yeah, so we had our moments there and the other...

Were you nearly hit then?

Pardon?

Were you nearly hit at that point?

No, no. Oh nowhere near it. They weren't anywhere near us. About as good as the bombers they were.

And you never fired your guns in return at them? Did you fire your

18:30 **guns in return?**

Oh yes, yeah. But they had the surprise on their side. But with our guns they were, as I said, they were superseded wire-wound old four inch guns that Nelson wouldn't take on board his ship. But they proved their worth in the end, that they were high angle, low angle guns. And ...

What's

19:00 **high angle, low angle?**

Well high angle for anti-aircraft gun and low angle for surface. We were in Aden, brought a convoy back and a report came in of an Italian submarine, was in the area. So the, our ship was told to go to sea, pick up, see if we could pick up this submarine. And

19:30 oh, one of the other sloops was in there too, British sloop, she was sent out. And a old trawler that was sent out with us. So we've got our ASDIC going looking for, and we put this, not the, I'm a devil on names, put her over by a mud flat.

20:00 And so we're out there pinging away in the channels. And the next thing we see a signal come up from, oh dear, and sitting off her bow was a submarine. It gave itself up, surrendered to us and she only had an old three inch gun on board. So anyhow, yeah, all our sophisticated stuff's out there pinging away and she was over by the mud flats and that's where

20:30 the sub was. So we towed it into Aden, she lay right ahead of us. And yeah, I'll never forget the blank look on people's faces, you know. The heck the name of that ship? But old trawler she was, useful to nobody, yeah.

So just coming back to your cap-, your CO, your Commanding Officer, your captain. What was his name and what was

21:00 **he like?**

Starting off with his name. His name was Wilfred Hastings Harrington. His rank when he joined us was lieutenant commander. He remained a lieutenant commander until after the Iraqi and Iran, just and

21:30 he was promoted to commander. And he came, stayed at that, and awarded the DSO. As a skipper, if I had my choice of any skipper to sail under he'd be my number one pick. He was a disciplinarian, but he could temper it with mercy

22:00 as well. He, you could talk to him, but he'd make you feel that you knew your place when you were talking to him. But you could just talk freely to him and he'd weigh things up. But in action as a cool head, God, how many times he saved our lives, I'll never know.

22:30 **Can you tell me one of those occasions?**

Oh well look, there were, we're being attacked by dive bombers outside Tobruk. There was a big blitz on all over the Mediterranean. And we had a British sloop with us and she got a near miss, and so we

had to take her in tow. But Harrington wanted to bring her

- 23:00 abreast of us, on the side rather than tow her astern. So anyhow the senior officer said, "No, tow astern." This time we were trying to fight off these damn dive bombers. And he's on the bridge there with his binoculars. "Starboard five, starboard ten, two hundred and ninety revolutions, hard o' starboard, full ahead,
- 23:30 slow." He was a bit of ice he was. But yes he saved it, well our lives so many times. He was good, very good. Well his potential to end up as a vice-admiral, Sir Wilfred Hastings
- 24:00 Harrington, DSO and Bar, Chief of the Naval Staff of the Royal Australian Navy. And that's where he died. He was buried off Sydney Head, off Sydney Heads.

And what were the petty officers like on board?

One of them, they were, Willward, he was my instructor at when I joined the navy in,

- 24:30 in, at Cerberus. He was captain of the top or captain of my part of the ship. And I was then a leading seaman. And he said to me, "Geez, you must know somebody." I said, "Oh I'm gradually getting there." And so, yes he was a good bloke. I
- 25:00 struck him up in Darwin. And he said, "God, stone the crows." I said, "What's that?" He said, "What, are you trying to pass me?" 'cause I was a petty officer by then. But no, he's a good bloke. Smouch Smythe, he was a British gunner's mate. He was a real Pommie, no, disciplinarian is the word I was looking for.
- 25:30 But oh, for a Pommie he was alright, Smouch. But the old buffer, he was, all round they were, you know, I couldn't say anything bad against any of them. They were good. L.G. Quicken, he was the signals' chief. Yeah.

Explain to me

- 26:00 **an attack drill from an aeroplane, what your role would be when a drill was called?**

Well all guns are controlled by a director on top. And that hooks onto a plane. Though, I'm just talking now about a single plane. And what is received by that director is transmitted to your three guns. So that you follow, the

- 26:30 order'll come through, follow director. And you keep your needle on your gauge in line with the needle, it comes down from the director. So your gun is moving whichever way, by the trainer or the layer and so all your guns should be more or less on the same target and in the same area. And when they, you get on you say, "Number,
- 27:00 number A gun on, number B gun, number X gun," which was the aft gun, "on." Then the director takes over to fire and the next order'll come through director firing, so all three guns'd go off together. And soon as the shell was automatically ejected, the next one was brought over. The fuse was set for the distance or the time that,
- 27:30 before it exploded, that was set, into the gun. When the director was ready, 'bang', and away she went. So ...

Would the director give you the length of time for the fuse?

Yes. Yeah.

So when would he prep you to tell you when or how far the distance the fuse was, when would he give that information?

Yeah well they, see, it's actually the director's the range finder. With very high-

- 28:00 powered binoculars on either end. And yes, they give you, everything that they receive is transferred down onto your gauges. And the chap that sets the fuses he sits there with a pair of headphones on. He's told what the fuse is, five-oh, sets it, fuse set, loaded.

Okay, and what if you're under attack by a ship, such as the Italian

- 28:30 **ships?**

Well once again, it was a single ship and you're broadside firing, then you still come underneath the director firing. If the gun is, the target is for'ard, then the two for'ard guns would come under the director, well the aft one wouldn't come to bear. But you still follow the director, because your gun will only come around so far,

- 29:00 it's a stop. That is it'll not go any further to do damage to the ship. So it'll come round at that stop, until such times as the director needle starts to move back off that, then you're still following it and your gun is still on the same as the ones on for'ard. So then they all fire together. Now if you're firing at two or more ships, you may get,

29:30 there may be one large one that you want to concentrate on. They'll say, 'Broadside firing.' Which means all guns on one side will fire. Or they may say, 'Fire independently.' Now if you feel that your gun, like your aft gun is not...

Can I just ask you about that. The, Claire [interviewer], the black's fallen down from behind, do you mind if we stop?

30:00 **Sure, no worries. I've moved my mic [microphone] stub. So what happens when an order comes through, fire independently?**

Well you pick out the ship that's, that you reckon is closest to you. Or you may find that the director'll come through and say, 'Fire independently but X gun fire on such and such a target, bearing so and so.' That

30:30 may be done for reasons to confuse us, the enemy. But normally when they say, 'Fire independently,' you do, you pick out the target that you, that you can handle and you fire as quickly as you possibly can. See on ship you're not using any fuses. You're using either semi-armour piercing or armour piercing stuff. The

31:00 armour piercing is just a solid steel round, whereas the semi-armour piercing it'll go through and then explode. So it's, it all depends what you're firing out that.

So when would you use the two different shells, what choice would decide which shell you use?

Well it all dep-, if you were using against a,

31:30 anything less than a cruiser, you'd always I would say use semi-armour piercing. Because you've gotta, will work it out that in a ship such as that you're gonna lose. So you're gonna concentrate on the bridge. It'd be useless the Yarra trying to concentrate on the waterline, because they've

32:00 got amour plating down there and you've got nothing that's going to even put a dent in it. So you'll go up, try to wipe all the officers out on the bridge. That's the main time you would use it. But for any light armour and things like that, you could, you'd use it. For armour piercing, well

32:30 anything that was light armour below the waterline would, you would probably use it there. But...

And what was your particular role in firing the gun on board the Yarra?

All I did was to keep the shells going in.

How quickly could you turn over shells?

What in ordinary firing? Ten seconds.

33:00 **And in extreme circumstances?**

Oh in extreme circumstances, say about twenty.

Now if you were being attacked by multiple aircraft, would the same call be made?

Well it could, would, could be yeah, engaged independently. So you pick out whichever aircraft that you want. But you try and

33:30 and work out which is the bloke that's gonna try and cause the most damage to you, and is the main danger. So...

And who would make the call about the fuse and how close the plane was?

Well that's something your captain of your guns has gotta work out himself. But you will find that in a case like that, that you wouldn't be worried about fuses. It'd be more or less a direct hit because if they're coming in that close, it would more

34:00 a direct hit, a bit of shrapnel wouldn't stop them. So...

Was your gun that accurate that you actually did have any direct hits?

Oh yes, yeah we got two. We shot down, I think, four air-, five aircraft I think all told, with possible another two. That was up off Singapore, but, the Japanese. But

34:30 that would be the main thing where you've got multiple aircraft coming in, is you'd have to more or less get a direct hit in them. That's, they're getting in too close.

Can you talk me through, as if you're there right now, how the aircraft were coming in when you hit them, what angles they were attacking you and...?

They were attack-, oh yes they were all dive bombers. They were coming in off the port,

- 35:00 ah, the starboard bow if I remember correctly. They had to come in off the starboard bow and, or along the starboard side. Because we had the Empress of Asia on fire the other side. And we took thirteen hundred and thirty-four troops off her. We had them everywhere that the, it got to such a stage that Harrington had to order everybody to lay down while we tried to fight this ship. And
- 35:30 so anyhow, yeah, that's where we got the majority of them off Singapore, in that action.
- There were multiple aircraft there or...?**
- Yeah, oh yes, there were a whole heap, big, twenty or thirty aircraft. But then again they weren't all attacking us. We had Colombo, a British anti-aircraft cruiser, the Sutledge a,
- 36:00 the Indian sloop. It, so there just wasn't us that, and the Colombo she had something like about twelve fourings that she could fire. So...
- Now you did sink a boat did you ...?**
- Did?
- Did you ever sink a boat?**
- No,
- Right.**
- No. No. Not per se but
- 36:30 we did, I did sink a boat. 'Cause times are moving on and we're up laying on the wharf at Townsville. And on the other side of us the trooper cargo ship, the Katoomba. And we're over the ship's side painting, you know, the black that goes around the ship's side, the bottom of the ship. It's,
- 37:00 so we're down, two of us in a little duck punt with about that much free board, painting this strip around. So when we come round we're under the wharf, one of the wharfies yelled out, he says, "You got room for some grog mate?" "My bloody oath." Next thing he said, "Well stay here," he said, "and I'll organise one for you." And he organised a keg, eighteen gallon keg, and lowered it over into the duck punt. I said, "For God's sake, don't drop it."
- 37:30 So we lowered it in and I reckon she must have had about that much free room above the board. So we got over to the ship's side, yelled out to, we had battle doors on each side and got 'em to open that by Eleven Mess. And said, "Pass out some Dixie's, we've got some grog here." So and I said, I said, "See Withers and see if he's
- 38:00 still got that ginger beer tap." So they found Withers, 'Yes he still had it.' So we used it as a, to draw off the grog. And we drilled a hole down through the bung to let a bit of air in. Now we got this beer off and bloody beer flowing everywhere, this bloody whatcha call 'em. So anyhow the smell of it must have got (UNCLEAR).
- 38:30 So Smithy, the purser (UNCLEAR) he said, I could hear him, "Can I smell beer?" And somebody said, "I don't think so sir." And he said, "I'm bloody sure that I can." No, we, when he come on to (UNCLEAR) we thought well we'd better paddle off. So by this time there was, got a bit more free water, got about that much. So anyhow we got it to the bows of the ship, nobody could see us. So we
- 39:00 thought it'd be safer if we went back under the wharf. So we went back underneath the wharf, came back down opposite this, the gun, our gun ports work. But the thing we forgot was that the bloody tide was coming in. And the next thing, this keg is just resting on the beam, and so she went up and so gradually she went
- 39:30 down the, all the grog and everything on board. So that's the day I sunk a ship. A boat I should say. Oh dear.

Tape 7

- 00:38 **Okay just coming back, when you were on the HMAS Perth, what year was that?**
- That was 1940.
- 1940, okay. Now the Yarra went on several convoys into Tobruk.**
- Yes, yes.
- How many convoys did you go on,**
- 01:00 **and can you talk me through them?**
- Oh dear I couldn't, you know, say how many. I'd say at least half a dozen. But we never, never ever went

into Tobruk. I say that, that wasn't our original aim. There was a pylon outside of Tobruk and our objective was to take the convoy to that pylon.

01:30 And then the tugs from Tobruk would take over and take them into Tobruk. We would then go back out to sea. The navigator of our ship was Lieutenant Commander Western. And he used to be the navigating officer on the Awatere. Big passenger liner that ran between Australia and New Zealand. And Agi Western, he's, I reckon if we

02:00 kept on going at speed, we'd have split the pylon right in half each time. So that was what we did but we did eventually get into Tobruk.

Where was the pylon in respect to Bomb Alley?

Well Bomb Alley was of course from Tobruk back to oh roughly about Mersa Matruh. That was...

So you actually went into...?

Oh yes, oh yes we went through there. Yes right up

02:30 you went from Alex, see we were only, you could see Tobruk from where we were. But we never went in, as I say we went back out to sea. We waited for the signal that the convoy was ready to go back and we'd steam in and pick them up and get them under way.

So how were the convoys organised out at sea for the run in?

Well that would have been organised

03:00 by the commodore of the convoy or, in other words, the officer in charge of the convoy.

Did they, all the ships converge on one point and then...?

Well they were all in formation as they come down. So they're pretty much dispersed because don't let's forget that they're dive bombers that mainly strike around there. And the ships themselves are not big ships. The last convoy we took

03:30 in there was the Shantla. And she would have been about ten thousand tons. But she was hit by a mine while she was in there and she never came out. So whether she did later on or not we don't know. But we had to meet the commitments of the rest of the convoy. But no all that area, you could almost go right back to Alex,

04:00 Alexandria as Bomb Alley. But up nearer Tobruk or Mersa Matruh and there was the danger point. Not just for bombers but for submarines as well, German submarines.

They were rife through there or there was a few of them?

Oh yeah they sunk the Parramatta. There. We were on our way back from

04:30 Tobruk, she was on her way to Tobruk, that's when she got fished. And Harrington asked Admiral Cunningham if he could be deployed to search for the submarine, and he said my brother was the surgeon on board. And anyhow Cunningham wouldn't let us so... but he was determined, he said, "I'd have got her."

05:00 Yeah.

How many ships were in the convoy at any time?

Now, when you talk about ships, the main ships would be oh in the vicinity of maybe two or three thousand tons. Mainly I think because

05:30 the smallness of them, all had a decent turn of speed. So they could get in, get rid of their cargo and get out. The Shantla was by far the biggest ship we ever had in any of the convoys. As a matter of fact it amazes to think that she went in because we'd had her so many times, coming up the Red Sea or going down, and we couldn't understand how she was going into Tobruk.

06:00 So, yeah, they were small, only small ships.

So they were small ships, how many were...?

Oh we'd have about half a dozen, at the most. Generally about four. But we struck a couple of snags too, dust storms. And the only way that they could stay in touch with the,

06:30 the convoy was by Morse code blown on the ship's horn. So you'd get your dots and dashes in plain language on the ship's horn to find out where they were. And you didn't want 'em to come rushing in on one-another and sinking yourself before the Germans had a crack at you. Yeah.

Were, what time were the convoys in respect to the day?

We'd get there any time.

- 07:00 Didn't matter, mainly of a day we'd get there. But on one of the trips that I said we got into, is when they did a blitz along the whole of the Mediterranean coast. And we'd just sent the convoy in and we headed out to sea with a British escort. And the next thing
- 07:30 she got hit and, oh no, near miss I should say. And we had to take her into Tobruk. So we took her in and put her alongside the battle wagon that was sunk, earlier in the war. And we were there overnight, closed up at action stations. But there's not a light to be seen anywhere. And looking up into the sky,
- 08:00 you could not but hazard you know, what these poor buggers had gone through. Because you could see Junkers 88s [medium bomber], Blenheims, our Blenheims, trying to knock them about. And the Stukas coming through, in the middle of the night. And you could see these damn things, you could almost, as I say, you could touch 'em. But the other thing we couldn't understand was why they had these
- 08:30 British Blenheims flying you know, through there overnight. Whether it was not to disperse the Germans or give them a crack at them. But they couldn't drop any bombs naturally on our own troops so. But everybody wanted to go into Tobruk. Nobody, there wasn't ever one of them that ever wanted to go back. But what they got there, pounded night after night, day after, it was, must've,
- 09:00 oh I don't know. Hair-raising.

Would the captain say anything over the loudspeaker before you were about to take the convoy in, to prepare you for what you were about to do?

No. He'd probably, see on every gun there is an officer. So he'd probably call the officers together and say, 'So-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so.' And he would come back to the ship,

- 09:30 back to the gun and tell everybody what was to be expected. Like for argument's sake, when we were taking the first convoy up into the Persian Gulf, up in the Shatt al Arab, he didn't close, lower deck. He just sent the word down that there was an eight inch naval gun at Faour which was the entrance to the,
- 10:00 to the waterway and we expect to give us trouble. But it was only sent to the gun's crew what to expect and where it was. There was no announcement over all, say, 'Put it that way.' So as it turned out there was no gun there, so all breathed again. But no gun that we saw anyhow.

- 10:30 **What was the, well, were the guns given a field of fire coming into Tobruk, that they had to...?**

No, no never given a field of fire.

Okay. What was the policy if one of the ships you were escorting was hit, would you slow down and save the crew or you just keep going?

Yeah well it all depends on the circumstances. We, in regard to

- 11:00 the Falmouth, we just slowed down and slung them a heaving line, they pulled across a hawser [heavy rope] and they hooked it on their blake [type of connection cable] slip and away we went. But as for stopping for any period of time, you'd be drawing a pretty fine bow, because you bet your life there'd be aircraft operating in the area,
- 11:30 that submarines are not going to be too far away. But you gotta bear in mind that the submarines down there and the aircraft up here dropping bombs down, and there could be one of his submarines under a bomb that missed, that could cause some strife. So you know there's tricky business goes on there.

Okay, okay.

- 12:00 **Okay. Can we just stop there for a section? When you did the first convoy into Tobruk, did you realise how dangerous it was?**

Yeah. Yes we'd spoken to other fellas on the Scrap Iron who'd been ashore

- 12:30 and they gave us a pretty graphic description. But their escapades into Tobruk was totally different to ours. They used to leave and get up to Tobruk just on dusk and steam full speed into Tobruk, and go round the battle wagon and they'd have the, these barges that would lay alongside. And they'd unload off say, the port side
- 13:00 load injured and so forth on the starboard side. And by the time they'd done the round, all personnel had changed hands. And she just steamed out at full speed and away. There was no stopping at all. So that, but they used to go into Tobruk every time. Good luck to 'em.

So were the boys afraid on each time they went into

- 13:30 **Tobruk?**

Well we only went in the once. I don't think exactly afraid, because we never saw any bombs dropped, when, whilst we were there. And had they started indiscriminately dropping bombs, well then there was a good chance they're gonna get one or both of us, laying along, abreast of one another.

- 14:00 But look, anybody that says that they weren't scared, to me is a bloody liar. Because you may not be

afraid but you can still be scared. And when we'd get there, you started to pay particular attention to the skies around you more than you normally did, to see that there's no little black specks coming along.

14:30 But you weren't afraid. I think if you were afraid, you wouldn't be able to do your job. And I never ever got to that stage. I feared what could happen or may happen. But you think that once your mind settles down, gets back on the job, that goes out of your mind. It's something that

15:00 you feel rather than know, put it that way, I don't know, it's - . But you could be, you could fear something without being afraid of it.

Again, as you're going sort of down Bomb Alley and stuff like that, did aircraft ever come down and obviously try and bomb you or even strafe you with their machine guns?

Oh yeah, well not, strangely enough

15:30 none ever tried to strafe us at all. And only once in my experience were we ever strafed. And that was, we were going into Singapore. And this Japanese he was coming and I could see the tracer coming across the water. And I was about to take a

16:00 shell, to load into the gun. If somebody said, "Here's a million pounds Ken, put that shell in the gun," I would not have been able to move. It mesmerised me to see these bloody bullets coming, went past about from here down to the cabinet down there, from me. But I thought they were gonna go right down you know, and slice me to, in half. But I could, I was mesmerised, I couldn't move. But

16:30 after they'd gone I sort of, you know, hypnotist said, 'Wake up,' and you know. But no it was the nearest thing, well I suppose you could say I was afraid because I couldn't do my job, I couldn't do anything, it's, only yell out for Mum. No it scared the hell out of me. But getting back to your story, no,

17:00 I never heard of anybody being strafed on the water.

Now did the Yarra ever sink a ship during your time?

Oh yes. When we first went up the Shatt al Arab, we were anchored off Basra or Asharr. The port of Basra, Basra's some distance in,

17:30 inland. And we were anchored right in the centre where the Euphrates and the Tigris meet, and they flow at about eight knots. So if the ship didn't swing, the stern wasn't swinging on the anchor, she was laying dead into the tide, into the current.

18:00 The, with Iran, well that was, Iraq was a different affair, but with Iran, we commandeered an old motor boat called the Calypso. And we used to get down the river alright because the current took us. But when we turned round to come

18:30 back, it was a bit of a wish and prayer to get back. But this particular day, she wouldn't start. So Smithy said to Lieutenant Commander Smith said, "We'll take it over to the army barracks and get them to fix her. So we took it over to them. They said, "Look, it's gonna take two or three hours to do." So we thought, 'Oh well we'll go up the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] canteen. Which

19:00 we did. And got stuck into the grog which was hot and didn't improve our equilibrium that much. And we came back towards the Yarra and Harrington was down on the quarter deck. And he said, "Get! and don't come back." So we got and we went down the

19:30 Shatt al Arab and I was on the wheel going down and so I turned over to Rusty Baker when we were coming back. Now the channel down at ... very, very narrow, a lot of mud bank. So with the grog and the heat, I immediately passed out after relinquishing the wheel. And

20:00 the next thing, I was wide, and wide awake, all I could hear was the rattle of a machine gun. And wasn't ours 'cause we didn't have any on board. So we got and here we are hard and fast in the mud on the Iranian side. So down come the, this gun boat and it's bristling with guns and blokes all aiming at Ken Avery I thought. So they took us in tow, took us up to

20:30 Corum Shah, the naval depot, the base and took the three of us ashore. And George Lloyd was the coxswain. They took George and they interviewed him and they left us outside. And I looked in the gun rack and they're all muzzle loaders you know the real old muzzle loaders. And I said, "Geez, I've never seen one of them before." So I just went over and pulled one out of the rack and I was having a look you know,

21:00 put it up and, just as one of the Iranian officers turned up. Here's an Australian with a gun and I'm pointed at him. And I put it down, put it back in the rack. Oh Geez, didn't he lay into me in Iranian, what he said I don't think was very nice. But so anyhow they, oh must have had George there for two and a half, three hours. So they let us go. That's why I tell blokes I've

21:30 been a prisoner of war. And we got back on the old Calypso, she kicked off first start and went back to the Yarra and George reported to Harrington, that, what had happened. And Harrington said, "Righty-oh," like, "You can have a, make amends." Which is, means, you can have the rest of the day off. And we

thought, 'Oh you beaut this'll do us.'

- 22:00 Hardly got our heads down, "Clear lower deck, muster in the mess decks." So we're running, everybody, clear lower decks, all mustered up in the mess decks for'ard. And Harrington came down and he said, "Well I have news for you." He said, "We have the Falmouth ahead of us, she is the senior ship, and
- 22:30 we will be declaring war on Iran at midnight tonight. And here's the bludger ten minutes before said you can go and get your head down. Yeah so anyhow, yeah that was the start of the war with Iran. So we're to get under way and the Falmouth turned her screws about twice and ended up flat in the middle of the mud bank. And
- 23:00 so Harrington just swung out into the main channel and we went out on our own. And he just sent word along that, "Open fire on the flag ship if your gun'll bear." 'Cause the two for'ard guns they could bear, and they blasted and sunk her. So just for good measure, when we
- 23:30 swung round and our gun would bear, we gave her a couple as well, for good measure. And I was, just worried me a lot that thing. And we went down alongside three gun boats, moored down our blokes, we had Gurkhas [Regiment of Nepalese fighting uner British Army] on board then. You know company of, squad of Gurkhas. Over the side onto the gun boats, the Gurkhas were ashore, captured the gun boats. And the gun, the
- 24:00 the Gurkhas they captured the naval base and it was all over in about an hour. And when we looked around on the other side there's this big palace place and this lady were there waving this towel or something, sheet. And course we're there waving back to her. Later did we find out that her husband was on board the ship and we'd killed him and it was his wife and she,
- 24:30 you know. Now well it was months later we found out about that. But it worried, put me in hospital that thing about the Bahr. Because I always felt that we murdered those blokes on there that... But then again, if you're gonna tap him on the shoulder and say, 'We're gonna shoot you,' well he might have a gun hidden under his pillow say, 'Well I'll get him

- 25:00 first.' But it worried me for a long time.

Do you think you fired too early?

Well you can't, in a case like that you can't fire too early. If you give the other fellow half an inch he's gonna take a mile. So the bloke that gets in the first hit is the bloke that's really gonna win. And let's put it this way it was gonna be a war. And it was a war that

- 25:30 had to be won because the Germans they were out and out to get the Iraqi and the Iranian oil. And of course we denied them getting the Iraq oil and as it turned out we stopped them from getting the Iran oil as well. But yes the Bahr she didn't completely sink, there was about, oh a quarter of her superstructure,
- 26:00 she was laying a bit on the port side, starboard side. And but still could be seen. But no it's a bad business. But so anyhow we sailed from there.

Did your captain do the right thing?

Pardon?

Did your captain do the right thing?

Yes. Yeah.

Why do you feel that?

It was only just the way I felt personally. It was, I don't

- 26:30 know why, I've always been a bloke that believes in fair play. And I subconsciously must have believed, but yet I supplied the shell that was first to go into her, from our gun. And the, no, it never ever sat right with me for a long time. Oh, put
- 27:00 me in Concord Hospital. But they call it now, 'post traumatic stress disorder'. So, but anyhow that's just one of those things that happened.

Coming back to the declaration of war, was that a result of what happened to you, or were there other effects that the declaration was called between Iran and ourselves?

Oh no no, oh no it was made too quick, like

- 27:30 for it to have bounced off us. It was only that we were able to supply information to Harrington of displacement of stuff at the naval base. Like for argument's sake, once the Bahr was sunk and there was no use for the big guns again, these little two pounder saluting guns, I asked the gunner if I could go on it, he said yeah grab that starboard one.
- 28:00 Well this dirty great water tower, I thought now, I've said this right from the word go, 'Ever get a go at any, I'll spray it with water.' And I fired on that bloody thing. Buck Taylor come over and he says, "What

are you trying to do?" I said, "That water tower." He said, "Give it to me," and 'whoof', and away it went. I couldn't hit the side of a bathroom, of a wall with a hand full of wet - . Very embarrassing. And yet

28:30 I stuck a couple of shells into the parade ground which played a bit of havoc I believe. But as regards hitting that tower, I had no chance.

And the Gurkhas, what were they like as troops?

Oh I've said Australia committed the greatest offence when they didn't snap up the Gurkhas that were in Hong Kong and brought 'em out here

29:00 and let the Japs know that the Gurkhas were up north. You wouldn't have seen many Japs come out. And these boat landings, let 'em know that these Gurkhas were there. You wouldn't need to have 'em in any patrols. They're, they, I don't know, they're uncanny, and clean. God love a duck, they're clean people. And they'd sit, they sit down

29:30 on the quarter deck, they'd either be singing or cleaning their, oh what the hell is the knife called, I can't think of it. But honing it right down you know. And just on dusk you'd look down the quarter deck and there'd be nobody there. They'd go ashore over into Iraq and they'd come back later on in the morning. And

30:00 report to the skipper, here like I say, their captain reported to the skipper what they'd done and what they hadn't done. So, oh they used to give us something for our (UNCLEAR) . "You Awsties," they used to call, "You Awsties," was for Australians. And we'd

30:30 say, "Alright we'll dump you mob somewhere."

Why were they assigned to your ship?

Well I think that by virtue of the fact that we looked like doing a bit of commandeering of ships. See there was ships laying in port oh dear, in,

31:00 well there were ships laying down at the oil refinery, at Aberdan. There was one ship we knew that was laying at Mers-, not Mersa Matruh, Bandar Abbas. And then was another one laying further around, two laying further around.

31:30 So what happened, we, after we'd sunk the Bahr, the Kanimbla and the Wollongong, they didn't come up the waterway, they came into the south, down Banda Shapura. Played a bit of havoc down there. And we sailed, then went round to Bandar Abbas, where was a

32:00 Italian freighter. And when we come in she was on fire, they'd scuttled her. So we went back out to sea. And so that night we came back in and she was cool enough that we could get by. So we got on up to the cable and slipped it, joined our own onto it and towed it out to sea. And I've often wondered what these people in Bandar Abbas

32:30 thought when they got up the next morning to think, 'Gee that ship was there last night but it's not there this morning you know, is it a ghost?' So we took her and she had a cat on board and a Barbary goat. The Barbary goat, we took it on board the Yarra, the same as the Hilda, ah same as the cat which we christened the Hilda. So anyhow

33:00 our first lieutenant, Tom Spinner, he was up on the fo'c'sle and there was a water break and he's bended over and this Barbary ram went, and I did go. So we took it out down to Bahrain and gave it to one of the Sheikhs down there. But the cat we kept it, oh and a monkey, there was a monkey too. So the cat, the Hilda, which we kept her. And

33:30 they tell me that the day before she sailed, last trip, the cat went ashore. Yeah. Must have known something. Yeah so anyhow that's the only ship we sunk was the Bahr, B-A-H-R.

Just in respect to

34:00 **the Bahr and obviously how much it upset you, why was the fact that that upset you so much, yet you've seen so much action everywhere else?**

Well I think the thing being that we came round, they didn't know anything else that was going on, they were all asleep. And we just opened fire, 'bang'. In some respects there was very little difference between what we

34:30 did to them and what the Japanese did to the Yanks at Pearl Harbor. But different circumstances perhaps, I don't know. But I know it upset me for a couple of years, few years.

Did it upset you at the particular time or in hindsight?

More or less in hindsight. Oh

35:00 had me in Concord Hospital with truth drugs. And on this particular day he said, "We're just about to

give up on you." And I said, "What was that?" He said, "What time do you think it is?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "It's around about twenty to four." Well I remember going in there at half past nine. So he said, "We're just about to give up on you," he said. All of a sudden out it came.

35:30 He said, "What's your feeling about the Bahr?" And I didn't know, why (UNCLEAR) or what 'bar' you know, I knew what he was talking about. And although I don't know anything about talking to him or, and I said, "The ship we sunk up in Iran that I think, you know in my opinion, we murdered a lot of those blokes." He said, "That's it." He said, "We'll talk about more of this tomorrow," so,

36:00 saw the shrinks for a few weeks. And I don't think about it, oh some nights I'll wake up and think about it but get back to sleep again.

What sort of pulled you through? What pulled you through, getting over the...?

Getting over it? I think that the main thing that was the,

36:30 that we had a job to do and we did it. It had to be done. But it nevertheless, it still gives me the right to have a feeling as to whether it was right or wrong. So that was the only answer that I come up with, that it was a job that had to be done and we did it. And so

37:00 it was just one of those things. But then the Hilda we took it out to sea, put the fire out and started to tow it towards Karachi and one of the ocean tail going tugs. Towed it out, took over the tow and towed it to Karachi, where they dismantled it, refitted

37:30 it and put it to sea again as the Hilda.

Just with the Bahr, were any of the other boys upset by it as well?

I don't know whether I ever discussed it with anybody else. I thought it was such a personal thing that I didn't discuss it with anybody. But not that I wasn't game or whether, you know, but it was to me it was such a personal thing.

38:00 So, yes, so, that's the story on the Bahr. But they gave us rifles and one thing and another and to shoot at, if you saw any Iranians. All we were aiming for the cups on the power lines, things like that. No, I'd have been no good in the army.

38:30 Shooting at, oh well like it gets back to something I said earlier about this bloke who said, "Here we are, civilised people in the First World War and shooting at one another, trying to kill each other, because somebody up top says to do it." I had a very good mate, he was a Rat of Tobruk and he was dying of cancer, and he got very, very close.

39:00 So I went off to see him I said, "Now what sort of burial service do you want?" "I don't want any bloody burial service." He said, "Why should I have a burial service?" I said, "Well you've got mates and one thing and another that want to be there." He said, "Well they can come if they want to. I don't owe 'em any money." I said, "No it's not a case of that at all, they want to

39:30 pay their respects to you, say goodbye to you." And so one thing led to another and he then condescended that he would have a funeral. I said, "Do you want me to do the eulogy?" "Yeah, if anybody's gotta do it, you do it." "Righto. Leave it with me and I'll fix things up." He said,

40:00 "I'll fix up the padre." I said, "Yeah righto then." So the day of the, his funeral came round, the cremation came round and I did his eulogy. No I'm sorry, before I did the eulogy, this preacher turned round, turned out to be his brother. He didn't want a funeral at all,

40:30 just his brother happened to be a chaplain. And he said he never changed, even up to the minutes before he died. "I said to him, 'Do you know why I pray for you every night?' He said, 'So you should, that's your bloody job isn't it.'" He said, "That's the sorta bloke he was. And he said

41:00 he didn't want to have this funeral. He said Ken's talked to him about it." He said, "We talked to him about it, the family talked to him about it. In the end he saw a bit of sense." But no he didn't want anybody kicking up a fuss about him. But yeah his brother turned out to be the chaplain yeah. I can imagine him saying that too, yeah.

Tape 8

00:49 **Ken I understand the Yarra was involved in an accident, can you describe that for me?**

In an accident?

Well it was sunk.

01:00 Oh, when she was sunk.

When she was sunk.

At last she was on her way back to Australia. And she had a small convoy and bits and pieces that had to come back, the Wing Puh and a couple of little boats to bring back with her, give, for her to give her back to some other

- 01:30 thing for. And she ran into three Japanese eight inch cruisers and four destroyers and this was part of the task force that attacked Honolulu. And they had been ranging right down there. Well she spotted these
- 02:00 ships and turned toward, gave the order for the convoy to scatter, knowing full well that they had no chance in the world of getting away. Course any one of the cruisers could have shot 'em down. Any one of the destroyers could have run them down. And as for Yarra, any one of the destroyers could have outgunned her and outshot her and everything else. So she was,
- 02:30 so lightly armed. So they turned towards her, Lieutenant Commander Rankin, and he opened fire. At the same time he laid a smoke screen to try and shield the convoy from the Japanese ship. It was so ineffective, because
- 03:00 all the Japanese destroyer did was run, go round the flank of the smoke screen and there they were just sitting like ducks on a pond. And but they then opened fire on Yarra and the, they got pretty well hit straight away. And
- 03:30 Lieutenant Commander Rankin was killed almost with the first salvo. The bridge was put out of action so all the steering went because they didn't get down aft to put the hand steering to work. And they just kept on bombarding her and still couldn't sink her. So they ended up sending in one of the destroyers to torpedo her.
- 04:00 So that was the fateful end to the Yarra and also the convoy. Now there was something like about forty odd people survived the initial sinking. But of that there was eighteen, I think, finally got to the rafts. And through,
- 04:30 taken by sharks or delirium setting in and this type of thing, that there were the thirteen that were left. And it just boiled down that a Dutch submarine
- 05:00 the K-9 was operating in the area and surfaced quite close to the raft. Then they found out they were Australians and they took them aboard and dropped them off at, in Fremantle. One of the ship's company of the K-9 now resides in Perth, Geez, Bruno oh, Bloembank,
- 05:30 or some name like that. But anyhow the, of the thirteen that was picked up I think there's, of the Yarra ship's company, there are only five I think, six, six of us left that left Australia,
- 06:00 is still alive, yeah.

So the Yarra was trying to protect the convoy?

Yes. But she knew she had no hope. Because as I say, any one of those ships, the destroyers, any one of those destroyers could have out gunned, out sped Yarra because they had six, I think five point five guns, plus their torpedo tubes plus

- 06:30 thirty knots. See, work that out against three wire wound four inch and a speed of sixteen knots, you don't stand much of a chance. So...

And you're saying that even though they tried to be a smoke screen and protect the convoy, it really didn't work?

Well it didn't work because the other ships were too fast, they just went round it. It's,

- 07:00 it's very much like when the Perth and the Houston and those were sunk. I haven't spoken to anybody about it but they laid a smoke screen but as they, ships came out of the smoke screen, so the Japanese just picked 'em up. And the same thing was happening here, they didn't have to come out the smoke screen, they just went round the end of it and there they were sitting like ducks. Not one gun amongst the lot of them.
- 07:30 The old Wing Puh [?] might have had a rifle or something but that'd be about the limit.

So when a torpedo hits a vessel like the Yarra, what happens when a ship sinks like that, is it instantaneous?

We weren't told about the torpedo. It was much later

- 08:00 that I heard about it, that they'd fired a torpedo to finish her off. But as regards to hearing it on, whether (UNCLEAR) no. But it doesn't make that much of a noise anyhow, although it does travel you know, pretty well across water. So it's,
- 08:30 oh no.

Why do you think they didn't tell you about the torpedo?

I'm thought you were talking about at the time?

Yeah, but like why do you think they didn't tell you about the torpedo until later, or tell people about...?

Well nobody knew about it.

Right.

Nobody knew about it. See the only people that were there were those that were on the raft and the Japanese on the cruisers and destroyers.

09:00 It wasn't until that, I don't know whether the Japanese told the British Admiralty or not, I don't know. But whether they intercepted the Japanese code which they had broken and found out from there, so, there's a lot.

When you mentioned just before about the Japanese

09:30 **picking off people, what did you mean by that?**

No, picking off the ships. That is that they were just concentrating on one ship, then go on to the next. Instead of higgledy piggledy going after the lot in one sort of salvo.

I thought you were talking about the people in the water, once the ship was sinking, you weren't

10:00 **talking about...?**

No.

You weren't talking about them, about people being shot in the water?

No.

Okay.

No. Oh no, no.

So they were all left there, just to fend for themselves. So how did you, you were on the Warrego at that point?

The Warrego.

And were you in communication, how did find out about the Yarra?

Oh God the Yarra

10:30 went down long before the, I joined the Warrego.

Sorry, I thought that you were on the Warrego when the Yarra went down?

Oh no, no.

Okay.

Oh no, I was in Sydney, Rushcutter.

Right. So what, when did you find out, you found out at Rushcutter soon after this happened, when did information filter back?

Yeah I was going

11:00 into Rushcutter in the tram and I saw the headline on the paper, and I reached across and grabbed it out of the bloke's hand. And I was, I remember I said, "I'm sorry mate," and I give it to him back. Then he saw the, on my cap tally, HMAS Yarra. Yeah. Yeah, that's when I found out. So.

Can you describe that day?

11:30 I'll tell you what it was, it was a, had a mate that came off the Yarra with me, Arthur Parry. And we, I don't really know much about what I even did that day. It, I know pretty well every time

12:00 I'd see Art, we'd just sit down and shake our heads at one another. Cause it was just something that we never envisaged that could happen. It was, the feeling was way beyond words to explain. It's,

12:30 Arthur almost broke down over it. And he, we tried to talk about it but you just, when it comes to do it, you just can't. It's, everything was too close, it was, it didn't matter who you talked about it, they were all mates. They were, that's why we were

13:00 such a efficient ship, we were a happy ship. And it's just one of those things that you can't explain, I'll

never be able to explain it. It's perhaps a death in the family, a bit close family or something that come near it. But it was something that

13:30 I wouldn't like to experience it again. It's, I don't know, it's, I just don't know. It's, but I know that we couldn't talk much about it, that's for sure. It was,

14:00 I know Art did burst out and said, "Why couldn't it have been some other bastard?" Why put it onto somebody else rather than your mates, you know, but. But I don't know I just can't tell you the feeling. It's,

14:30 it's one of shock, well shock for sure, shock. Shock, incredibility, it's to think we'd been through so much together and, but it, just seemed one of those things that could never happen to us. Happen to somebody else, would never happen to us.

15:00 But the powers that be had other ideas about it.

Is it almost like being with a family of brothers when you're on a, is it like being in a big family of brothers when you're on a ship like that, is it like having a whole lot of other brothers?

It, as I say, when you, well, the photo's gone.

15:30 Everybody on that ship, I knew. Everybody on that ship knew me. And it's different to a cruiser, people will say to you, "Oh did you know so and so?" And I say, "What was he in?" He said, "He was in a cruiser." And I say, "Oh no, I wouldn't know him." If they'd said, "Oh he was in the Vampire, the Waterhen, the Stewart," or something. You'd say, "Oh yeah, I know him," because once again you're

16:00 just a tight-knitted crew. You're depending, each is depending on each other more than what you are in a cruiser and things like that. You, the day sets off and you go about your work and you never know what's ahead. But if anything eventuates you know that your mates' are gonna be there to back you up. So, but it was,

16:30 well the bloke I grabbed the newspaper off, he was astounded when he looked and saw my cap tally, yeah. No I was, I joined the Warrego, I did my HSDs [Higher Sound Detector] course then I went to the

17:00 Warrego. Then I came back from the Warrego and I went to Darwin.

Okay. Well I might ask you some questions about that, I just wanted to ask you one last thing about the Yarra. Was it also quite shocking at the time because, just to get my head around it, was what the Yarra did like a sacrifice,

17:30 **a very brave sacrifice for their convoy?**

Definitely. You see, it's, it was a sacrifice and it was a brave sacrifice. But then if you like to look at something and say I've got two choices. One is that I go down fighting or that I go down as a corpse.

18:00 Because there's no doubt about it, if she, if we hadn't have fought, fight, stuck up a fight, they would have just blown us out of the water. Irrespective of whether we're fighting it or not. They would have just blown us straight out of the water. You got one ship with three, see in those photographs, three old

18:30 guns, and you've got six ships, five ships. Now let's just work out some tactics. One stays on one side, one goes for'ard and the other one goes on the other side, and one's sitting on the stern and no gun can bear on it. So just lays there with eight inch guns and, you know. So it's, it was a brave act

19:00 to know that what you're doing is virtually sentencing every man on that ship to death. But he also knew he was gonna be one of them. And did you know that not one of them on the Yarra got any decoration whatsoever. You know why?

19:30 Because no commissioned officer survived. The Japanese vouched for what happened. But not one. If anybody should have got the VC [Victoria Cross], it should have been Robert Rankin.

You mentioned Captain Harrington,

Yes.

he wasn't on the ship at that point?

No. No he'd left the ship then. Yeah.

20:00 You know it broke him up too. But it was some time later on, I found out from his wife, Janette. And she said, "I couldn't talk to him for weeks." And then it, see, to say how close you are, Harrington went and joined the Australia, the eight inch cruiser.

20:30 And he was hated on there. So Arthur Parry and I, one day, said, "What say we go over the Aussie [HMAS Australia] and see Arch," as we called him, Arch Harrington, you know. And so we went over in the, the work boat took us over. And so got to the top of the gangway and said to the officer of the watch, officer of the day,

- 21:00 "Could I, was it possible to see Commander Harrington please?" And he said, "See who?" I said, "Commander Harrington." And he said, "What's your business?" I said, "You know, just personal, private." He said, "And you want to see Commander Harrington?" I said, "Yes please sir." He said, "I'm afraid not." And I said,
- 21:30 "Well could you do me a favour then sir, would you please tell him that Ken Avery and Arthur Parry are at the gangway and would like to see him." So he says "Yeah, righto." And he went away and came back, he said, "Oh you're one of them," meaning one of the Yarra mob. And he reckoned that nobody else had got in to see him, other than blokes off the Yarra. Yeah, officer of the watch, yeah.

22:00 "You're one of them." Yeah.

So you, so it was quite use, it was quite healing in a way to meet up with the other blokes that were on the Yarra?

Is it?

Was it good to get together with the other blokes from the Yarra?

No because I'm really a coward at heart about certain things.

- 22:30 I have a mate who lives at Lithgow and he's suffering from cancer and I'm not game to ring him up because I don't know whether he's alive or dead. And I'll get, pluck up the courage and I'll ring him up and, and Lanzo said, "Why don't you bloody well write to a bloke and let me know?" He said, "Well," he said, "I'm alright." I said, "Well I'm not to know that."
- 23:00 And the same thing goes with other things. I get a bit of a coward when it comes to finding out about people being alive or being dead. And seeing people that's so close to it. I saw a photograph, yeah I saw a photograph of,
- 23:30 of Bromolow in the, oh in some photographs I showed Daphne the other day. And I said, "He doesn't look a day older." But you see that some of the, two blokes that's left in Queensland, Manthey and Turner, they're, I don't think they're, well I'd say within three months I don't think they'll be here. Arch Campbell he's a
- 24:00 mate of mine. He lives in Queensland and he told me the last time he said, "No I won't ring 'em up," he said, "I'll send a card," but I don't... He said, "I can't ring 'em up because I don't know whether they're gonna be there to talk to me or not." So it's, I think if the ice is broken you know, yeah I could do it. But to
- 24:30 voluntarily do it, I think I'd need a bit of pushing to get to talk to them. For no other reason than that I know that not too long they're not gonna be here either. So.

What was it like getting together with Captain Harrington when he was obviously really cut up about it?

He

- 25:00 said very much the same, along the same lines as I said. He said, "You always think things are gonna happen to somebody else, never to you." And I said, "Yes sir it's - ." He said, "Well, we put up a good fight anyhow." But she did, she, we fought our way out of a lot of strife. And every job that we've been given we,
- 25:30 we carried it out to the satisfaction of everybody. But we never lost one boat on the Tobruk run. We never lost any up in the Persian Gulf area. The only ship we did lose was
- 26:00 the last ship, of the big convoys to Singapore, when the Empress of Asia caught on fire. And bombs, they bombed her and set her on fire and she ran herself aground. So that was the only ship we ever,
- 26:30 ever come near, come to lose.

Do you think Captain Harrington would've made the same decision ...

Yep.

in the circumstances?

Yeah. Yeah. No doubt about it. No doubt about it.

Did he say the same thing when you went and saw him?

How?

Did he say something like that when you saw him?

Oh yes, yes, yes, almost along the

- 27:00 same lines as I said just a while ago. Oh no, there's no doubt that Arch would've taken them on. He'd, I think he would have been a, he's a bit more experienced than Robert Rankin and I think he may have attacked in a different manner. He would have tried to single out one of the destroyers and tried to give it hell while... but then
- 27:30 again it had the speed to get away from him so it didn't matter which way you went, you, like a cat playing with a mouse. It's, yeah.
- Did you catch up with any of the other blokes?**
- From the Yarra?
- Yeah.**
- Oh I'm secretary of the Association for about twenty years. So give it away now, the Yarra Three blokes have taken it over.
- 28:00 But oh yes we always used to keep in touch, have our reunion every year. But then it gradually dropped down, the numbers got too few then a lot of them have been sick and one thing and another that we sort of let it drop. But then Yarra Two paid off, Yarra Three she paid off and they had the
- 28:30 numbers again. But oh I'd had a pretty good run in it over twenty years. So we turned it over to them so to have all the troubles to... but, you say troubles, but they're not troubles. When you're helping your mates it's not trouble. Might appear so at the time.
- Just one last question about the Yarra, were there any**
- 29:00 **Gurkhas on board at that point?**
- No. No the last of our Gurkhas went off in Khoramshar. When they went off to take the depot, that was the last of our Gurkhas and Ali. He left the ship then because he'd bought himself another wife. And they were gonna go down the
- 29:30 waterway with in a dhow. And I said, "Oh give it," you know, "Let's know when you're going mate and we'll give you a tow." Yeah. He had to go down by dhow, all the way back down to Aden. Yeah.
- So you, after your, you went back to Rushcutter. And what was happening**
- 30:00 **in, at that point?**
- Well the only times I went back to Rushcutter was to do a course. The higher up course.
- And this was still during the war?**
- Yeah oh yes. It, when we got a month's leave from the Yarra and then I went back to Rushcutter and did my HSDs course. Then I went to
- 30:30 Warrego, ah to ...
- Darwin?**
- did the HSD, went to Darwin then. And Darwin I came, oh I came back to Rushcutter's Bay.
- So what year was it when you were first there for that course?**
- Pardon?
- What year roughly was it when you were there for the first course?**
- '42.
- Okay. And was there any sort of**
- 31:00 **feeling of threat from the Japanese in Australia at that point?**
- No. No. No.
- What about when you were up in Darwin?**
- Oh well there was then cause they'd already been.
- Right.**
- It, yes they knew about the threat there then. But the
- 31:30 threat back in those days, see it was a hard thing to try and reconcile. Because it was like that, how the Japanese were going to go. See all the Japanese Navy are British trained. Yamamoto, he was British trained, but he had been to Harvard University. And had
- 32:00 the navy been in power in Japan instead of Tojo, who was pro-German, then Japan would have gone in the war once again on the Allies' side. So that was the difference between the two.

Had you been to Darwin before the attacks of the Japanese?

Had I?

Yeah.

No.

So when

32:30 **you went there, just in terms of the mines, had they already been positioned at all, you know the mines you were talking about before?**

Oh yeah.

Had any mines been placed around the coast?

Oh yes, well out off the entrance to the two channels leading into, they were mined. They were the only two,

33:00 round the other side of Bathurst Island, I believe, were mined also. But it was a thing that didn't become widely known and for obvious reasons. That where mine fields were laid. As a matter of fact I didn't have an idea that there were mine fields up in the Barrier Reef. Because we used to come down, we came down inside the reef.

33:30 When we, when we'd take a convoy out, we'd go out through the Grafton Passage and drop outside the reef. Only for the simple reason that the skippers of the Yank ships in the convoy, didn't have a clearance to navigate the Great Barrier Reef waters. You must have a qualification to do that. And that's, that goes for anything, naval officers and everybody else.

34:00 They've got to pass that, oh have those qualifications before they're, they can take a ship through there on their own. Otherwise they must have a pilot.

So were the minefields, were they before or after the attack in Darwin?

Before.

Did they help to, so there was a feeling of

34:30 **fear about the Japanese invading?**

Well there wasn't I don't think there was any, so much as a fear, but people had that feeling perhaps that they were progressing or advancing too quickly. And that every war you take notice of, the Germans advancing on Stalin-

35:00 grad, their lines of communication got too long. Rommel and his lines of communication in North Africa, they became too long. And you find that nine out of every ten of these big campaigns, where lines of communications miles too long and they'll lose out. Because all a person's gotta do is to come in the centre, and they had sort of with

35:30 us.

So can you describe Darwin when you visited it that time?

It was pretty-well, well not as devastated as I thought. I thought it would have been a lot more battered than Darwin was itself.

36:00 Especially with the number of bombs that were supposed to have fallen on it. Because there were too many places standing and you know, rows of houses, and you think one of them'd be knocked out or damaged in some great way. But I stayed up there, I lived in a leper's house. And...

You lived in...?

Pardon?

What was that, you

36:30 **lived in?**

A leper's house.

As in someone with leprosy?

Yeah.

Really?

Yeah. Apparently you can't catch it.

Yeah, yeah.

But they'd all been completely passed by the navy before they took them over. And places around there they all stood across the road, they were all there. All the oil refinery, the oil depot, it was all

37:00 intact. So I got to know very well the man in charge of BP [British Petroleum] in Darwin. And he said, "No," he said, "They left us alone."

So what wasn't intact?

Well lot of the ships down in the harbour. See there was the Neptuna, she,

37:30 I believe, is still floating around somewhere. A Yankee destroyer and there was a couple of cargo ships, they went down, the Neptuna. But otherwise I'm rather surprised in myself that I didn't see more carnage than there was. So...

38:00 **And what was, can you recall what the impact, what kind of impact that made on Australia?**

Well I can only go by what I know about it. And when you think that the Japanese are bombing Darwin, it seemed as though it was

38:30 a lost cause, because if you're gonna bomb Darwin I think it must be a red herring. Because when you look at the north of Australia it's a pretty savage place. And if they go to the west of, ah the east of Darwin well they come down through all those waterlogged fields, through Kakadu, there's, it's not

39:00 just like coming down through Sumatra. They've got all those croca-gators and there're a lot of snakes and that wandering around up there. That, I think'd it'd be foolhardy to attack anywhere around Darwin. You know, course the other way is that you have the Great Barrier Reef, it's guarding the

39:30 east side. And I think that they had too much of a belting at Pearl Harbor when the, they took a caning there to try to steam two thousand miles south to come round the reef to come into round about Brisbane somewhere. So the only logical place would've been over the west. So what do they run into there, all they's gonna do is run into desert. But

40:00 it's, but then again you work out all these theories, but for every one you think about, they think about six or you know, to negafy what you're thinking.

What about the, what about people you spoke to, what were they thinking about the bombing?

Oh well everybody, course, it was a natural result is that how devastated people were to think that,

40:30 'God,' you know, 'They're getting close now. That's Darwin, where's the next place going to be.' You only saw what happened in Sydney when the submarines fired a couple of rounds. God, you'd have bought any place there at Potts Point for two dollars or two pounds. Everybody shot through. It's, so it'll tell you the

41:00 state that the civilian population was in. And yet they had no cause to be like that. I couldn't see any, see cause. The, I suppose the best, the greatest thing that upset me about the Japanese in regard to those subs is when I came into Rushcutter and

41:30 they said, "They want you, chief." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "The Kuttapul's been torpedoed." I said, "What's your next funny joke." He said, "The Kuttapul's, go and have a look." And I looked across and all I could see was the funnel and a bit of the bridge sticking above the water. So we were out chasing around, trying to find submarines in Sydney Harbour and yeah. But every time it got anywhere near I'd look over me shoulder,

42:00 couldn't believe that the Kuttapul was...

Tape 9

00:36 **Ken, can you tell me what happened in Sydney Harbour when the submarines attacked?**

Well I came into Rushcutter, as I just said and the quartermaster said, "It's about time you got here." I said, "Why?" He said, "The Kuttapul's been

01:00 torpedoed." I said to him, "Oh what's your other bloody joke for the day." He said, "It bloody has, go and have a look." So I looked over me shoulder and there I could see the funnel and part of the bridge showing. I said, "How'd that happen?" He said, "Some midget submarines or something in the harbour. And they've put a fish into the wall, it looks like under the Kuttapul.

01:30 Because they can't see any, if the fish had hit the Kuttapul straight on, she'd have broken in bits you know." So I said, "Oh well they must have been after the Chicago out there," which turned out to be right. So I went up and saw Lieutenant Commander Quince and he said, "Well I want you to grab one of the boats, the work boats," and he said, "Just see what you can scour."

- 02:00 But he said, "I want you to do this east side and I said you mean the south-east side, sir?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Right. Well," I said, "I've got no, we got no ASDIC or anything." And he said, "No." He said, "I want you to take a couple of grappling hooks." And so we took, got two grappling hooks and got round
- 02:30 into Elizabeth Bay and threw the grappling hooks over. And Christ, in about two seconds flat, they were snagged on the bottom. So we gave that away, we, the bloke who was supplying the grappling hooks would have made a bloody fortune out of, we'd have kept on going. So we just went around the foreshores and tried to see now what we could see. No, couldn't see anything, went right down as
- 03:00 far as Watsons Bay and down to the boom. And went across to the boom, 'No they hadn't heard anything.' 'Cause that's how they reckoned the sub came in, when they opened the boom, it followed in another ship, (UNCLEAR) of them. Course one got tangled up in the net. The third one they don't know where it's, fourth one they don't know where it is. But they still think there's one in Sydney Harbour, sunk somewhere.
- 03:30 So they said they hadn't seen or heard anything. I said, "What about outside, have you heard anything on the loop?" And they said, "No." So I said, "Oh we're going back around the sou'east side again. 'Cause they've, if we can see anything, it's gonna be pretty difficult to try and pick a mini-sub up." So anyhow we went around there, had a look,
- 04:00 no, still couldn't see a bloody thing. Got back round by Rushcutter and I thought, "Well bugger it, I'm not gonna see Quince to get another stupid bloody assignment." We went over around oh Geez, the island, nice memory, where they fire the one o'clock gun from in Sydney.
- 04:30 **Shark Island?**
- No. Just the little one just out from Rushcutters Bay.
- Oh, Fort Dennison?**
- Mmm?
- Fort Dennison?**
- Fort Dennison, yeah. So we went round and we had a look around there. And my heart stopped for once, I thought oh Geez, I thought I could see it. But turned out to be some skeleton of some boat but not of a submarine, it was pretty rusted. And
- 05:00 they'd tried to put it aground. So anyhow we went round, had a good look around. So I thought the one that did it, follow through and then try to get up into the north arm. So I thought I better go and tell Poppa Quince what I'm doing. So went over and I said, "Well we did two sweeps along the sou'east of the bank. And
- 05:30 there was no, we did one round the island," I said, "There was nothing there we could see." I said, "Do you think that if we did a run up to the western side of the Harbour Bridge ...?" He said, "Oh, I don't think there's any point in going up there." I said, "Well if the sub had nowhere else to go, you'd think that he'd say, 'Well this is where they're gonna look for me down here. If I've got enough room to spare, I'll get, if I get up there, I'd have
- 06:00 much more of a chance of success to surface and get away.'" So he agreed with me, we went up a bit, went up as far as Cockatoo Dock, circled the dock a couple of times and came back down. But no there was nothing, we never saw anything. But it's, it was disturbing
- 06:30 to think, to know the reaction of the civilian population. How they were, they sort of, were willing to shoot their hands in straight away over a couple of lousy looking bloody subs that landed amongst them and took off for the bush, let's go to the hills. So, as I say you could have bought a beautiful house for a hundred dollars, hundred pound, so.
- 07:00 **How many crews were looking for the submarine like yourself?**
- Oh there was about, oh eight or ten of us. 'Bout ten boats, small boats, because we had nothing fitted out that was suitable for what we wanted. There was nothing that you could do to go to Sydney Harbour. Because there was that much bloody stuff laying around the bottom and, of Sydney Harbour, that
- 07:30 you, it, you'd be getting that much bloody echoes, you'd think you were in a minefield. It's no, it's, I don't know what the hell happened. But a lot of the patrol, the naval patrol boats they were out, looking. But it was only really something that you could see, that, if his periscope was
- 08:00 sticking up or something like that. I thought at the time that if he's been submerged for that length of time he's, he'd have had it by now. He'd have been suffocated and sunk.

Now just coming to your work or, I think it was the Yarra's work in Singapore?

Singapore.

Can you talk me through what the Yarra did there?

- 08:30 We left Colombo, heading for home. And of course the, they got on the Morse code and said, "Oh no you don't. You're going to pick up a convoy outside of Batavia and take it up to Singapore." So we took the convoy
- 09:00 up to Singapore, brought another few ships back and came back down to Batavia. We went out and picked another two ships out of the Sundra Straits. And we took those up through the Bangka Straits to Singapore. And if, they had these
- 09:30 poles, and I never found out what they were. They were sitting out of the water about that high. And I didn't know whether they were on explosives or what the hell, were the fish trapped? But there was a lot of them about. And I wouldn't like to have come down there through the night to find out. But we got round them but I don't know to this day what they were.
- 10:00 But they were too obvious too, if somebody had leaned over the side to find out, he mightn't be around to say, 'Yes it was a mine,' or was not. But, yeah they were there, but mainly down to Java side of the Bangka Straits. But we went back to Singapore this, up till this time
- 10:30 we hadn't seen an aircraft or anything. And our next trip, the next trip we had the big convoy, feeling through Zal, the Empress of Asia, the Empress of Japan,
- 11:00 was it, the Andes, I think was the other one. And the Japanese must have known they were coming. So they attacked in force, all the troopers. And more so they attacked the Empress of Asia for some unknown reason. She had,
- 11:30 what, who'd she have onboard her, Northumberland Fusiliers or somehow I think they were. But anyhow they scored a few hits on her. At the same time we were fighting the dive bombers that were attacking it. And we shot down a couple of them. Then the skipper put the Yarra underneath the starboard
- 12:00 port of the Empress of Asia, and just held her there and they come over the top. A lot of them dived off the stern into the drink. And quite a few of our fellas dived into the drink to drag 'em over to scrambling nets and anyhow we ended up taking thirteen hundred and thirty-four from the Empress. So many so, that they were stowed everywhere, down below in store rooms, and Harrington had to send the word around, "Lay
- 12:30 down." 'Cause if you hadn't have lay down she'd have got top heavy and could have turned over. So we took all these bods on board and then go and steamed up to Singapore. And we berthed, and when we berthed there was Sutledge ahead of us,
- 13:00 then Yarra, then the Colombo, HMS Colombo. The Sutledge was an Indian sloop. And, I'd like to know who's gonna hear this tape. Because I don't know if this has ever been told to any-
- 13:30 body. We asked for food and oil and ammunition and received a signal back, negative. So when we berthed, as I said, there's some Aussie SWATies [Special Weapons Attack Team] guarding these warehouses. And one of the boys said, "What's in those warehouses?" They said, "Oh there's all the food you could think about the bloody
- 14:00 place there. And Singapore's just about ready to fall." Meanwhile our motor boat had gone out looking for ammunition. The engineer, chief engineer, he'd gone down to the oil storage, saw a bloke down there, "How much oil are you steaming or what have you got?" And he said, "Oh," he said, "How much do you want?" And I think he wanted a hundred and fifty tons
- 14:30 or something. "Oh Christ," he said, "Do that easy." Yet we got this signal back to say they had nothing. We found enough ammunition to re-stock our magazines. In these stores, it, they had everything. You name it, every type of
- 15:00 bloody drinks and all the cocktail frankfurts, oh not frankfurts, cocktail mushrooms, everything you could think of in tins. Cases and cases of salmon, Christ, we'd lived on salmon for bloody six months, off the Persian Gulf, so that's, that gave the bypass after, we had salmon every possible way you could have it. And
- 15:30 oh there were radio, clothes, God knows what wasn't in these, what, and then cigarettes. So the skipper, he smoked 'Du Maurier'. So didn't say anything to him. They just got two cartons you know, two cartons, went up and plonked 'em in his cabin. He's up at the Sutledge. So we
- 16:00 plonked these in his cabin, he didn't know what was going on. And the food we bought, bought stuff on board, and just about like we, all gonna be like Christmas to us. So we stocked us up pretty good. But I'm afraid I'll have to leave a little bit out here because it's, it may, questions could be asked. And I don't know whether there's people
- 16:30 still alive that could suffer because of it.

Yeah.

death, they can't bloody take many more years off me. Yes well of course we started off the wrong end of the, of the, where all this stores was.

- 17:00 'Cause there was all the drink you could imagine, there were cases and cases of 'KB' [Kent Brewery - beer]. There was cases and cases of every bottle of beer that's made in Australia. There were bloody cases stacked up and, so needless to say that a lot of those were on board, down below. So I tell you earlier on about the battle doors, on the side of the ship. So alongside there was Eleven
- 17:30 Mess. So you, what you did, everything come on board, you took it along and put it on the mess there. They had a look at it, if it was worthwhile they kept. Anything they didn't like, it went out the porthole. And so this and then there was rum and Scotch whisky, 'Johnny Walker Black Label', there was other stuff that'd, 'O.P. Rum'. Oh
- 18:00 look you name it and it was there. And a lot of it went on board the Yarra and of course a lot of it went on board the Yarra inside some of the Yarra crew. And one thing that happened, George Aldey, he staggered on board and he had this case. And he said, "I've helped all night and I'm gonna have this one to meself." So he put it on the mess deck and he opened it, and he opened
- 18:30 this thing and it's full of bloody bottle tops. And he got 'em and he flung 'em round all over the mess deck. And these bottle tops flew everywhere. And then he went up and pressed the alarm for the, you know, for everybody to close up at action stations. What blokes were in their hammocks dived straight on top with his bare feet on top of these hard bottle tops. Gosh I'll never forget that. Yeah so,
- 19:00 yeah so they never found out who turned the rattlers on. But there was a few blokes with sore feet in the morning when these, all these bloody bottle tops. 'Cause Worly, Worthy got it then, "Anything you'd like to select, George," you know. Yeah, "Oh this is mine," bloody caps, thing and bottle tops. But we, so when we got to sea the next day
- 19:30 Harrington must have found out but he said nothing about the cigarettes that'd been put in his cabin. And the grog that'd been put in there. And he said, he cleared lower deck, and he said, "What I want you to do is to label every bottle of drink you've got
- 20:00 and put it on the quarter deck, and it will be stowed down in the tiller flat and given to you when you get to Batavia. Now," he said, "I want the lot." 'Cause the bloody Yarra was getting along like this. And he started off by, like there was four, yeah there were four bottles of 'Johnny Walker Black Label'. And he
- 20:30 showed us, he had a ticket on top, and Harrington. It went down with the rest of his, he was fair dinkum with what's good enough for the crew. And so anyhow that was alright, so we're steaming along alright. And two of the old three badge men, Rupert Brookes and, oh Christ, Rupert Brookes and
- 21:00 he was the painter. They were still getting around, pretty much half full. So Harrington said over the loud speakers, he said, "Last chance for anybody who has any alcoholic beverage to put it on the quarter deck and it'll be given to you when you get to Batavia. Now this is the last chance you'll
- 21:30 get, otherwise if any more's found you'll get fourteen days stoppage of leave and fourteen days stoppage of pay." And so, bit more turned up down on the quarter. Old Rupert and Sam Wainwright, Sam was still getting around and it, they searched the paint locker, no, they couldn't find any
- 22:00 bloody drink up there at all. So they gave it away as a bad job. So, oh it was four or five days later that Rupert said, "We were too smart for those bastards." I said, "Why is that?" And he said, "That Johnny Walker just fitted in one of these pots of paint, and paint and all still there."
- 22:30 And he's put the bottle in it and put the lid back on all the way around. And then got, pick it up, oh yeah full tin of paint, plus one bottle of Scotch whisky. Ah Jesus, a funny night that.

So coming back to the troops that you picked up off...

Off the Empress of Asia.

Empress of Asia, did you get everyone?

- 23:00 Yeah, everybody came, got off her, yeah.

Oh okay. What year was this?

That was in 1940, '41. Could have been early '40-... yeah could have been early '42.

And when you're actually in the harbour, Singapore Harbour, were you bombed at all by the aircraft?

No. No, never saw a plane of

- 23:30 any description. But the, with the Empress of Asia, although we took off, as a couple of other ships took off everybody that was on board, we had the bulk of them. The unfortunate thing was, they lost all their

equipment, ammunition and everything else and stores that she had on board. So whether or not they did anything to destroy it, I don't know.

24:00 But yeah.

And why do you think you received orders at Singapore that there were no supplies for you?

I don't know. We don't know. 'Cause it just seems strange that all of a sudden that you'd run out of everything. Yeah these warehouses, and God knows what the other two big warehouses contained. Might have had a couple of jet planes or something in there. But...

24:30 **Were things chaotic in Singapore?**

We never got ashore, that's as far as we got. And we weren't supposed to be there. Yeah. No we weren't allowed ashore.

Now just focusing a little on anti-submarine, what was the training for anti-submarine and what were your postings?

25:00 What was the training in?

Training for, you're in anti-submarines?

Anti-submarines, yes.

Yes, what was the training for that?

Well you started off what they call an SD, which is a Submarine Detector. And you are taught to what the name of your rating says, for the detection of submarines. Once you,

25:30 you had a contact that resembled or could be a submarine, an HSD, Higher Submarine Detector, would take over. And you'd both work together with the ASDIC officer and work out then what, this is in the early piece. You'd work out what would be done.

26:00 If it became a contact then the HSD and the ASDIC officer, the HSD would report direct to the ASDIC officer. He'd say, "Cut right, target moving right, target moving less, target moving away," or coming towards us, whatever. And he'd give the course of it, its estimated speed.

26:30 And only thing you couldn't give it, was the depth. So then you had two throwers to, on either side of the quarter. And you had two rails that dropped two straight off the stern.

Two depth charges.

So the idea was to put a pattern down of two, throw out two on that side, throw out two on that side, steam ahead drop another two.

27:00 So you have them in a, well virtually a square with two lots of charges going off at the one time. That was the standard pattern. If you were doubtful about what it was, you might just drop one off the rails to see what the target would do. But then

27:30 things changed then. And they bought in a set that had a sword on it, that's the one that worked vertically, and that gave you the depth. But we still had to work out a way of getting the depth set

28:00 on the depth charges, although most of them, they done away with depth charges and they were using the hedgehogs. They were a mortar bomb and twenty-five to a spread. And they were automatically set, like ten seconds or something before. And the other piece of equipment that came in was a recorder. And as you tracked the submarine, I'm doing it manually,

28:30 listening, and he could see it on paper, what the submarine's doing. And as the, setting it, this arm, it's moving where the submarine is. So as it's coming across, if it's, you know, might be this way, it hits, fires. If it was, you know, a bit more to go, it come across, fires. Now that was alright but they found out that the hedgehog

29:00 wasn't powerful enough. So they bought in what was known as the hedgehog. And the, sorry, God, the new one that was bought in. But it was fired from pretty

29:30 much three quarters the way down the ship and fired over the mast. And would land for'ard of the ship. But that, that one in conjunction with the sword, the recorder and your ASDIC set, the depth of the submarine was set on it, five seconds prior to firing. As soon as it was fitted on, it automatically fired and it was

30:00 shot, shot over the top and your ship maintained speed and went through. And of course it went off the stern of your, and they were, shocking memory, not the hedgehog, the hedgehog's twenty-five, it'll come back to me some year. But that was the latest when I

30:30 left the service.

What was the shocking memory? What was the shocking memory?

My memory?

Yeah.

I can't think of what the names of the last two mortars are that they, that replaced the hedgehogs. You fired from aft, fired over the mast and down. Yeah so they were the last that

31:00 I came into contact with before I left the service. I've been out on the Yarra Three and course your mind boggles now when you see it can handle up to forty targets at a time. And their idea is not to sink submarines but to keep them away from the

31:30 targets. So what the procedure is now I wouldn't hazard a guess because I just have not a clue.

So you were trained in Sydney ...

Yes.

you went to Darwin.

Darwin.

And you were training there or instructing?

No I was in charge of the ASDIC base staff at Darwin.

Training other men?

Yeah.

So was that in the form of lectures or...?

32:00 Certain lectures. But I, primarily I was there to make, if any ship, whether it be allied or anything, came in with problems with their echo sounder or their ASDIC, was to go out and fix them up for them. And the Americans always had trouble with their echo sounders. I don't know why but they always did. The only time that I was a real

32:30 instructor, was I was sent down to, this was just after the war. After I came back from the Swan as a matter of fact. At the middy's school at Flinders. And there was, we were commissioned to the aircraft carriers. And to, my job was instructing the

33:00 pilots in different theories of explosives and Whitehead torpedoes. And then I'd, everything, my wife was down there, and all nice and cosy. And came with a tempo one morning and Herbie Scales was there and he said, "I've got some news for you." And I said, "Oh Geez." I said,

33:30 "What is it?" He says, "You're going to England." I said, "Who pulled that one Herbie?" He said, "Well you fell for the three card trick." I said, "What was it?" He said, "Well you're the only TASI [Torpedo and Anti-Submarine Instructor] in the Australian Navy aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, you're it, you're going to England to the Sydney." So

34:00 what happened is that whilst I was waiting on classes of air force blokes to come through, I, at the torpedo school which I was attached to, I got tinkering around with torpedoes and shown how to pull 'em apart, put 'em together. Do this, do that and do something else. So, anyhow this morning the torpedo officer

34:30 said to me he said, "How long would it take you to qualify," he said, "in Whitehead?" which is for torpedoes. "Oh," I said, "If I had a bit of a rub up in control I'd be alright." He said, "Righto." He said, "Well you'll start school tomorrow morning under Chief TI White."

35:00 So I said, "Oh right." So we spent that, those, that week just doing torpedo control. We finished in three days, which took us up to the Thursday. So torpedo officer said to White, he said, "How do you think Avery'd go?" He said, "Oh," he said, "He should pass this easy enough." He said, "Right,

35:30 tell him when he comes in tomorrow morning that he goes straight to the classroom because he'll be sitting for his Whitehead exams." So I went in and White appeared and set, started the, my exams. And by midday I was finished. Two o'clock I was called down to the commander's office and taken

36:00 before him. I was rated TASI. At three o'clock my draft was out to England.

And what air, what were the names of the aircraft carriers?

The Sydney, the carrier.

Okay.

Yeah, so when I get over to England, who's supernumerary, muggins. Because they weren't gonna put ASDIC or anything else in her. Bloody hell.

36:30 So I came, I came back I was asked to sign on. And he was Commander Beacher, he's commander of the

Sydney. He said, "You going to sign on," he says, "Your papers are there to sign on." I said, "No, no, I'm finished." So walk along the pier at Melbourne, he says, "Your last chance." He said, "Are you gonna sign on because your papers are there, all I gotta do is you sign em,

37:00 I'll witness it." I said, "No thanks." He says, "Righto, glad to have known you." So that was it. I snatched my time and I got back to Sydney and that was it.

So that was it in respect to...?

The service.

Did you still suffer injuries from the Perth when you were...?

Oh yeah, yeah.

What was that?

Shoulder's all my neck, neck and

37:30 shoulders, this one still plays up. I suffered oh, hellish headaches, still do now and again. And I put that down to being cracked on the skull. But then I've got other, my heart is, got a wonky heart. And I've got very low

38:00 blood oxygen and respiratory system could be, or may be affected by asbestos, but I've never been tested for it yet. 'Cause there was asbestos all through our ships. So...

Were you transferred off the Yarra or did you decide to go into...?

Oh no, no, no, I was transferred. Yeah.

How'd that make you feel when you received that

38:30 **news?**

Oh well it was, I didn't want to go. Got that far and, but the skipper was going so I went with him, sort of thing. Yeah.

You're probably aware that in Garden Island Chapel there's a stained glass window?

The windows?

To, yeah, the Yarra.

Yeah.

Were you there when they...?

Yeah.

39:00 I was a driving force behind raising the money for it. Yeah, oh yes. Yes, it's, that one, yeah we raised a lot of money towards it.

So your heart's still very much with the Yarra?

Pardon?

Your heart is still very much with the Yarra?

Oh God yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yeah.

39:30 And the boys they'll never sail again in there but. Just a little side to it that, Simon Harrington is Vice Admiral Harrington's youngest son. He has two sons. The other one is over in the Caribbean and he runs shipping party, got a yacht for rent. The other one

40:00 is Simon, he's in the Royal Australian Navy. And he is now rear admiral and he, oh he's gone now, head of some big department down there. So I just hope that he'll make admiral before he finishes. But the point that I wanted to make was that he was being sent to England

40:30 by the navy. And it'll happen to be on the fourth of March. And he said to the Qantas pilot, he said, "This is the fourth of March," he said, "the day HMAS Yarra was sunk." He said, "I got its position, would there be any chance of getting down low enough that I can throw a wreath out?" Wreath. And he said, "Certainly." So he gave him

41:00 the position and when they got down and de-pressurised the cabin, he went up to the cockpit and he said, "Now!" and he tossed the wreath out, yeah. It's got, yeah. Yeah she still sails with us.

00:42 What's, 'Chloe'. 'Bull Bull Amir'.
Can you do any renditions?
Eh?
I know you've got a good voice.
Oh no I,

01:00 I don't fall into traps like that.
Can you do any renditions?
Mmm?
Can you any, do us a rendition?
What, of those? No.
Of any of them?
Of those, no.
Of any song that you can remember from the boats, the ships?
Oh there's songs, 'When your hair has turned blue mouldy you'll be on the dole.'

01:30 Know that one? 'I'll get the old age pension, you know we're gettin' old.' Oh.
Are there any songs that the boys used to sing?
No we were clean living lot of people. We didn't go in for this

02:00 mish mash of the Queen's, King's English. You probably get all that in the air force mob.
Believe me, that's true.
I know bloody well it's true.
But I mean they don't have to be crude songs, they can be any songs. They can be crude songs as well but anything that you can remember, that'd be useful for us to know what you guys used to sing when you were on the ships.
Just one.
Alright.

02:30 It's a straight song.
Alright.
Janine. Would you ask my musical director if she'd come in please.
What about any sea shanty songs?
Oh they, I've been away from it so long love, it's, can't remember the... play a song on there for me

03:00 please. (Off camera: Which one? Which one?). 'When I Weave my Golden Dreams.' (Off camera: It's a while since we've done that isn't it?).

03:30 **Unless we do it, just unaccompanied, without the piano?**
Can't I?
Oh maybe, it might be, if it's easier to do it without the piano?
Oh no, it's alright. She hides the mistakes. (Off camera: Tell me when you're right, are you right?). Course you know this. 'When I

04:00 weave my golden dreams, I'm a kid again it seems, living in a world that used to be. Gazing at her smiling face, no-one else can take her place, she's the one that I love best of all.

04:30 Silver hair, heart of gold, what a treasure, to behold, silver hair and heart of gold. I never realised that she, meant the whole darn world to me, silver

05:00 hair and heart of gold. I've travelled east, travelled west, no more will I roam. For the place that I love best is happy home sweet home. Now I know she's growing old, my two arms just yearn

05:30 to hold, silver hair and heart of gold. I've travelled east, I've travelled west, no more will I roam, for the

place that I love best is my happy home sweet home. Now I know she's

06:00 growing old, my two arms just yearn to hold, the silver hair and heart of gold.' No air, no wind left.
That was fabulous. So now that you've given us this rendition, what about, are you okay?
 What?
In need of oxygen? Are you okay?

06:30 Yes.
Yep, sea shanty songs?
 Look I wouldn't have a clue of the words now love, is that... God, love a duck, it's not yesterday.
Can you think of any of the verses, they don't have to be all of them?
 (Off camera: I would if I could). Yeah.
Can't think of any of them?
 Jan.

07:00 **Do you want to have a sip first? So, you don't need to think of all the verses, but just one or two. Any sea shanty songs?**
 No. I'll give you one.
Okay.

07:30 'I would if I could but I gotta be good, because I'm not that kind of a girl. T'would be rather nice to roll you over once or twice but gee honey baby, you're not nice to know. I've been out dancin' with feathers and tansin' and that's a fact everyone knows. I've been out dancin' with old Tommy and

08:00 everyone knows he's a dirty old man. I would if I could but I've gotta be good, because I've got that kind of a girl.' No air.
Thank you.
 No air.
No air, you okay? Do you want to cut it for a sec?
 'That half way lump of a sooner beam, as the good old ship sailed on, as sea scouts

08:30 laid around the ship, some half, some nearly gone. The fishes swam around the ship and had a jubilee, let's hope we, said we hope such good sea scouts, will often come to sea.' Oh I've got it all tangled up here a bit, that's

09:00 the last bit. 'The half way lump is still a beam, as the good little ship sailed on, as sea scouts laid around the deck, some half, some nearly gone.' No, can't think of it.
Any dirty ones?
 No, I don't...
Come on. That's it, pull the plug?
 No I don't sing or tell dirty yarns.
Really? What about if we get rid of everyone else?

09:30 **With that reaction I don't know if I believe that? No, just kidding.**
 She gets like that when the truth hits home.
Indeed. So no chance of getting any of the dirty ones?
 No.
Oh okay. You sure?
 Positive.
Hundred percent?
 Hundred, I'll tell her one of your jokes.
No, we want to hear sea ones, we want to hear marine ones.
 No.

No marine jokes.

No love I'm...

Closed lips.

Fresh out of those

10:00 today. If you'd have given me notice well...

Alright. Okay, well we might just ask you just two more questions. I just wanted to know what was the bravest thing you ever saw during your experiences in World War I?

The greatest thing I ever saw?

The bravest thing.

The gravest.

The bravest.

Oh the bravest thing. In World

10:30 War II. Gee, the bravest thing. Yeah, I think it'd have to be,

11:00 I think it'd have to be Bob Rankin in the Yarra. Lieutenant Commander Robert Rankin. He, incidentally, was a surveying officer and he found an uncharted reef off Western Australia which now bears his name, Rankin Reef.

11:30 **But he should have got the VC?**

Mmm?

But you think he should have got the VC?

He, his wife is well (UNCLEAR). I never sent her a card last Christmas, for know why, but I have to find out whether she's still alive. She's a lovely woman, she lives up at Charters Towers. And

12:00 for our fiftieth anniversary of the sinking of Yarra, we arranged for Ansett, Ansett flew her down from Townsville to Sydney and the RSL [Returned and Services League] taxi cabs said they would pick her up

12:30 from the airport and take her out to Elizabeth Bay to a, oh a place out there that would give her the best room in the house. And her meals would be, well, all on the house. And she had a lovely time Molly, yeah.

What about the scariest experience?

The scariest?

13:00 Oh Jesus when I saw these bullets coming at me. Strafing by the Japanese.

How would you sum up your World War I experience?

Oh comme ci, comme ca. No, it taught me a lot.

13:30 Made something out of me that I never thought I could have been. Achieved things that I never thought I could achieve. And I've been able to follow them through into civvy [civilian] life and...

14:00 ...what, when you were born. Can I have a, oh I'm sorry.

You're still on.

Oh I forgot that's still on.

Just one more question. What would you say to future generations about war?

Send those who want to

14:30 go to war, to go to war, and leave every other person out of it. Not sit at home and do nothing. You go to war and leave everybody else at home. You wouldn't have any wars. No I think the, I can only go back to what Hughie said to me, "Wars are for mugs.

15:00 There's no winners, they're all losers."

Any final words Ken? Any final words that you'd like to say to future generations?

No I've enjoyed this going back over things and I appreciate the opportunity of being able to do so and I've enjoyed your company and no it's

15:30 a real eye opener what you can think of when you don't think your brain is operating at a hundred percent capacity.

Well thank you very much, I appreciate the interview, it was very good, thank you. Michael [interviewer] and I are very happy, thank you Ken.

Now when do I get paid?

Oh.