

Australians at War Film Archive

William Dawson (Bill) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 21st August 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/689>

Tape 1

00:38 **So, basically to start off this overview section can you tell me briefly about where you were born, where you grew up and your schooling?**

Yes, I was born in Victoria, an outer suburb, a working man's suburb, lots say it is. A place called

01:00 Footscray. And I spent most of my life in the early times in Footscray and I used to get into different clubs and things like this. And, as I grew up, at 12 [years old] I went on a farm, collecting eggs mainly at a poultry farm and I spent six months there then moved on until I was about thirteen or a bit more, still in shorts and that, went pedalling

01:30 myself around to get a job but it didn't last long. But I went into many little jobs as I grew up, telegram boy, and that, and then I was about sixteen and I found my place in the munition works as an apprentice and I was there right up to when war broke out. Like many other chaps who were in the services we found it hard now to get out

02:00 in our jobs because they needed experienced people and we just said we won't work, we didn't go to work. And they were going to lock us up in jail and many other things. But anyway, I'd already, I was in the navy, I joined the navy when I was 14, as a cadet and I just went... then during the war they couldn't go against the government they said the servicemen are not allowed,

02:30 they were calling them up. But anyway, they got tired of us in the end and let us go. That was in 1940 and I went down to Flinders, done a course down there and then I went on to my first ship. The first ship I went on to after getting out of Flinders was a

03:00 ship called the [HMAS] Kuttabul which you probably all know was sunk by the Japanese. But we'd left the Kuttabul and the ship that we were going on was the [HMAS] Adelaide and a lot of us went on to the Adelaide, and getting on that night, which was later on. But if you like I'll come to that when I get on to it... But the navy, I went on to many

03:30 ships. I don't know if you want me to name the ships as I go. The Kuttabul was the first one and then the Adelaide, HMAS Adelaide a cruiser ship, a hard, hard, hard ship, a hard ship and it was a good training ship, a good gunnery ship, bit six inch guns, and I was rapt in guns in those days.

04:00 We went, I'm getting myself a little bit mixed there. I don't know if you want me to go on or go back to the next step, go on with the Adelaide and where they went, but just stop me if I'm going wrong. Well, the Adelaide was the only big cruiser that was left here in Australia at the time when the Japanese came into it, and what happened at

04:30 the time... first of all, my first trip on it nearly killed me, on the Adelaide. It had taken a convoy in very, heavy fog to New Zealand and I was the worst sailor in the world. After two days, it took five days to get from Sydney to New Zealand, after we'd been at sea for two days and I was very sick, but unknown to me, I was passing out and I went

05:00 and hid myself in one of the offices, right down back and they found me on the side laying there and I'd been there for 3 days. And they reported to my family and everything I was lost at sea, until the chappie went into the desk one day, the petty officer, and he heard something moving, he thought it was a rat and I was a rat all right. He dragged me out. And coming into Wellington was this beautiful statue of one of the

05:30 big statues they have there with her arms out like this. And I'll never forget that because when I went into that harbour I felt a lot, good. But anyway, getting on, after we stayed in Wellington for a few days we moved off down with the convoy, off of Tasmania, and we couldn't go into Melbourne that way because the Germans had laid 250 mines

06:00 just outside of the heads there. So we went down south of the convoy into some pretty rugged weather

and we got them right through the Straits. We went into Fremantle, had a break there and then back across to Sydney when we were told that the ship was going off to New Guinea. Our escort was a Catalina. Now this was most unusual, we thought, and this was

- 06:30 November '40, and we knew something was going on or something was wrong. But we went into Port Moresby and we were just sort of relaxing there and having a bit of R & R [Rest and Recreation] and on the 7th of December, we were all at prayers, it was a Sunday, and they said the Japanese had bombed Pearl
- 07:00 Harbor and I thought, God, now we know why we have... because they must have known all the time that this was going to happen because they came down the top of New Guinea. Anyway, we all went to action stations and that's where we had to stay and the Catalina boys, no more than twenty some of them, there was twelve or fourteen of them and they loaded
- 07:30 the Catalina up with all bombs, as much as they could get on and they were going out to bomb the Japanese. There's no hope of them coming home, no hope. But, they took off and as they took off they were right in front of our bow and they couldn't lift, they were trying to get up and up, they couldn't lift and they went straight into the mountain near us. Just completely apart
- 08:00 and just blew it apart. I got to know them, that was the trouble. Anyway, we were told to get out, we had to up anchor
- 08:30 and get on our way down to Brisbane as a ship load of, three ships altogether, of troops and they were going to rush them into East Timor where a lot of the trouble was just later. In those days it was called the Timor. We left, we left Brisbane and just before we left
- 09:00 they call for the trumpeter to sound off the "fall in" and there's no bugler and the next we see, and the Aussies they are screaming, there's these three blokes running across the swamp, and it's like a break out, and that's what it was. And the army blokes were cheering on and everyone got into it and, oh, the officers on our ship were going up and down. Anyway, it was dusk now and they
- 09:30 thought they'd get away but they didn't. They spent a long time in jail. We got these three ships and we're heading now off to, we popped into Darwin that night. We could hear the bombers, the Japanese bombers, they were looking for where we were because
- 10:00 during the war the Japanese attacked Darwin 62 times. Now not many people know that and how many people were killed in those places. We got out of there that night and the next night, sure enough, they got it. We were heading down now with these troops into Timor which was named after the Batavia,
- 10:30 and of course the Japanese took all that over then the Indonesians took it all off them, But we got out and we took them in and we stayed there for about three days. It was the Seagull force, I think was the name of the army force. We stayed there for three days and we were warned to get out. We could hear them in the background, we could hear the bombs and the guns so
- 11:00 out we got. But back to again, rush back to Port Moresby and on to Rabaul because there was a load of women and children coming out of Rabaul because the Japs were already getting into Rabaul. And then we took them to Brisbane, then out again because we had to round up all the different boats. Next was a job we were called to do was to go to
- 11:30 Noumea as the Vichy French have got two war ships in there and taken over the town. So on our way there was the [HMAS] Australia, the [HMAS] Bungaree and the [HMAS] Adelaide. The Bungaree, unfortunately, she was to lay mines but she run up a reef so she was in trouble, but we were at each entrance to the harbour and we could see the Japanese, the Vichy
- 12:00 destroyers there, at the town. And we sat at the opening and our orders were to lower your flag, the Vichy flag, and allow us to come in, into the harbour, and make arrangements. But anyway, right up until dusk, if they didn't drop their flag by dusk, we were going to have to blow
- 12:30 them out of the water. Anyway, right on dusk, down went their flag. So we went and they surrendered but I wouldn't trust them again myself. But they were ready to blow up the town after the nickel that was in the town, the French. And today, the French, I don't know if you've been to Noumea but there's a great big monument of the Cross of Lorraine. That was to dedicate to that particular incident
- 13:00 of it there. And next we're on to the Solomons. Got to get the Yanks out of the Solomons there, that seemed to be going bad. So we picked up with a convoy of them and took them down to Melbourne and Sydney, then back again up to Suva, Fiji and patrolled those areas which were becoming a bit dangerous and share it with the
- 13:30 ship that was patrolling with us, was the USS Roberts. I met up with a terrific bloke on her. She was on a patrol out, she was blown to pieces. So we headed then back into Sydney and that's when a couple of nights later or, during the afternoon, a plane flew over Sydney. We were watching this plane come flying over and the pilots waving
- 14:00 and we're waving and I said, "Oh," you know, "It must be the Yanks having a good time." Of course, that

night, afterwards, the Japanese came into Sydney and I was duty watch again that night, and of course, it was about half past ten, because lights go out at ten o'clock and they were just dozing off and the PO [Petty Officer] of the watch, he came screaming, "Come on!"

- 14:30 banging our Alex, "Get out, get out, man the guns, man the guns, there's Japanese in the harbour!" And of course we just smiled and said, "Right," what we call a dummy run, "Just another dummy run." And sure enough I get up, I went on the upper deck and there's the Chicago, that was the big main problem, the American Chicago. And all the ships that were in the harbour there
- 15:00 they were picking the Chicago as the main one and any of the big ships. It was full, the harbour was full of big ships. Anyway, I said to Dawson, "Get on the Vickers there, take over." And he said, "Anything you see moving, shoot it." God almighty. I said, "How do I start the gun? I don't know how to," because I wasn't in gunnery. I was in gunnery, but I wasn't well up on the sightings and using it.
- 15:30 So I just pointed it at anything I could see, a bit of paper or something. But the searchlights from the [USS] Chicago, really bad, she put lights on all the ships, taking it away from her. Because the town's all still lit up. No one knows what's going on, no one believed it, what went one. But
- 16:00 you know, it was wrong because the Chicago, she was making targets of it. I counted three shells that she fired - one hit the pitch, gut the fort there, and hardly put a dent in it, the big old blue-stone place. And the next one it landed in the zoo and another one just off of there and, you know, in direct line.
- 16:30 But they panicked on there. Running around screaming and everything else, but they just packed up and went out to sea which was probably right. But there was men sitting on the buoys and everything. Anyway, a break came, and I went down to have a break and I slipped on the top rung of the ladder, I whacked my head. I got five stitches in my head that night. Anyway,
- 17:00 it all quietened down and I knew we had some... a lot what I'm saying about these photos that I have and scored, I was told to we walk around the bank and see if there's anything there. So we walk around the bank and there's another torpedo alongside the Kuttubul and it was all open, so it was a dud too.
- 17:30 You know the old saying "Made in Japan". And then we had to go out then with the divers, two divers off our ship, and they used to wear all that big gear in those days, not the way it is today. And I was caught on the diving party, on the big cranking up in the air. And anyway after they got it up in the air they told us
- 18:00 we could go back and I got orders then, I was getting drafted. Myself and a couple of other mates were drafted to the [HMAS] Kanimbla. She was in there so I went to the Kanimbla. A happy, happy ship. She was a ship, in early days she was a passenger ship, and converted to what we call AMCR [Armed Merchant Cruiser Reserve], merchant cruisers, and done a magnificent job. She was involved in
- 18:30 capturing 22 ships in the Persian Gulf in one go, plus a railway station and a dry dock, without any being killed. There were Germans and everything right up around where the problems are now, around Iraq and those places. But there were no other ship that had done that. And as a passenger ship, she did a lot of things. And when I joined, of course, this was straight after the episode
- 19:00 I was just going through in Sydney. Our job was to set ourselves up as a decoy. We used to cover the guns and everything else and just plod along and hope the Germans, you know, they were very much alive in the Indian Ocean, right up through, up there. But again, our main job was to patrol the areas and then of course we was in,
- 19:30 called in to Sydney, not Sydney, I beg your pardon, into Fremantle. This particular day, I just met Norma there, and she comes from Western Australia, just to go and have a bite of lunch and all this. I had the PO [Petty Officer] screaming at us, "Get back on board ship!" And we knew there a panic because we went to sea with half a crew and some of our crew were left standing on the wharf because
- 20:00 there was this panic was on. Something really big. So, off we go, and they never tell you where you're going until you're well off the coast. So that the Japanese don't read your lips I suppose. Anyway, that was always the routine and we went, headed right up in the ocean, and we cleared lower deck, and we were told what was going to happen
- 20:30 or what had already happened. That Sydney is missing, HMAS Sydney is missing, and they didn't know what had happened and our job was to go out and look for the Sydney because we knew something had happened because she didn't answer any of the calls. But the blame came down, which is recorded, that the Sydney, when they seen the Kormoran that they were going to action
- 21:00 stations and the wireless message had to go from the ship to, I can't remember the name, but the air force base in Western Australia. The signal was to come to there, the signal would then be carried on to Adelaide, then Melbourne, where the headquarters was. This had to happen, this was the routine. But the blokes at the base
- 21:30 air force base, they just knocked off. You know, they'd just gone to dinner and no one was manning the radio station and, of course, when we found out something was wrong it was five days later and they'd already, The Kormoran, she was sunk, and she headed for the Western Australian coast, then they'd taken POWs [prisoners of war].

- 22:00 And then we went up and down, all around, for five weeks. This is incredible, for five weeks we went up and down where we estimate the battle took place and the Sydney was sunk. There was nothing! How can these ships get blown to pieces and there's nothing there? You know, there was one bloke in a raft but they don't know where he came from. You know, there was
- 22:30 624 men went down on the Sydney. No one knows, no one seen nothing. You know, it's the most amazing thing because things become loose on the upper deck and there's people working on the upper deck, there's people in the bridge. And no one was found, we didn't find anything. So we kept on heading south now
- 23:00 looking for the supply ship to the Kormoran. And we got right down, we were right down, not far off Fremantle when the Adelaide came along, she was stationed in Fremantle. She came along to join in the chase but we were sort of pushing her down and down and the Adelaide was moving across and, of course, she seen it first. She sunk it from there. But, it created a
- 23:30 lot of things because of the argument. Next after that, I guess we went back. We had to pick up a convoy off of Sydney. One of the biggest, biggest. We were going over to reinforce the 9th Division. We had the Queen Mary, Aquitania, Queen Elizabeth, all the big ships were with us, I don't know how many ships but we had to travel so far down south now to keep away from any of these mines
- 24:00 that might be drifting in the area. So, it was the worst of any, I think, seas, that you get these two seas together, the 'corners', we call the 'corner'. Anyway, we're right down, and we got, and we've taken the convoy about the middle of the way through into the southern ocean and they are to go
- 24:30 on their way to the Middle East. And it was that cold, the ice and that was forming on the deck and on other things. I was on a cross tree, just below the, doing the look out. The cross tree is down the main mast and it had all been timbered off around it and you had to do a watch in there, a look out, and also it had a Vickers gun there if you had to use it.
- 25:00 And I had to be relieved and they screamed out through the mouthpiece down to the bridge, "Relief take over!" I couldn't get down, my nose was bleeding, it was gushing. I was that stiff, I couldn't move, I was that stiff. And they sent two chaps up, someone brought some hot chocolate to me to try and pump it into me and one got down below me, and I don't know if I had have
- 25:30 fallen what would have happened. But anyway we got half way down, the three of us, we got half way down, and all of a sudden the ship's dived into one of these massive waves. And the waves were big, because the Queen Mary's a big ship and all you'd see is the tips of her mast. The swell was that great. And we go straight down and the other two look-outs and meself, we were wrenched completely,
- 26:00 we were half way down, we were wrenched off the ladder, just pulled off it. And you couldn't hold on with these, terrific force, and they dropped us then, dropped us down into what we call the focsle. And before we could stand up another one washed us and down, down into the well deck. And we're not the only ones getting swept around, there's four or five gunners that were pulled off their gun, off their watch. But this happened so sudden, and anyway
- 26:30 they collected us all together and someone on the bridge sang out, "Are you all right, everyone all right?" We said, "Yeah, we're all right." He, "Well, go and change your clothes and get back on deck." Oh Godfather, the ridiculous things they come out with. That was about the roughest, the roughest I'd ever been in. I didn't have time to get sick but it was so cold, you've got no idea how cold it was, but we got that convoy and
- 27:00 I think that would be probably coming to about the finish there, other than just normal duties on it. Of course, I was then sent to the [HMAS] Westralia, and landings, and then they were asking... I didn't spend much time with her because, the landings, they went on and they were asking for volunteers then to do gunnery and help to man these
- 27:30 ships and you don't know where you're going to go on it. And I spent the time, my first ship was a Greek, which was a filthy ship, you know, and there was nothing there to provide for us. They built sort of a cabin on the upper deck out of timber and close to the four-inch gun, and
- 28:00 they couldn't help it because their crews were so, so many of them, different nationalities, on this Greek ship. And I stayed with her for a while, a couple of little episodes there. The Greeks used to get on the ouzo and I spent my twenty-first birthday actually in the brig because the old man gave me a bottle of wine for me birthday, twenty-first birthday it was.
- 28:30 I played up, I shot his flag down, and he didn't put me in though. But the night after that, the sea, it was that rough, the lifeboat on the side got loose and it wiped half of our cabin off. You know, we were just lucky it didn't get us. Anyway, I was in Newcastle
- 29:00 after that and I asked for a change and there was this big tanker alongside us, the [HMS] Aurora, a big tanker. I went on and asked the chaps, you know, what was it like? They had a lot of crew on there and special, lovely quarters and really looked after and they were going to, heading for the Carribean, into the Atlantic
- 29:30 where they would go to a place called Kuri. And they were going to be, all the timber stuff on decks and

the timber boats and everything were going to be taken off and put steel on because the tanker was going to England for the opening of the second front, and that's the reason I went aboard her. Excellent, there was more guns on board it than a destroyer and everything.

- 30:00 Our job was now to fill up and head for England and join the fleet there. But unfortunately, we were already to go and a hell of a storm broke in Europe, a hell of a storm and it wasn't much good for the ship, us being sitting around waiting, although all the time they're fitting the ship out for this special job. So
- 30:30 they said, "All right, well, we've got to go back." So we're going back into the islands, to New Guinea and wherever we're needed to – it was aircraft fuel too, it was deadly stuff but we got a shilling a day extra for danger money. A shilling a day, we were made. You know, seven shillings for that week. We didn't get much shore leave so our money was mounting up and everything.
- 31:00 After we went to Manus Island] and things were pretty bad there then. We were going to go for a swim but I noticed in the water, it didn't look right, there's lumps of flesh, you know, had been washed in and it was icky, icky, it was terrible. So we didn't go in for a swim because, you know, the soldiers, they knew all about this but they didn't, you know, got used to it. But to see the mess that, you know, was there was terrible, just terrible.
- 31:30 So anyway from there we went back again to Aruba, at this time in the Carribean or the Atlantic, we went back down to the Atlantic. But we were too late then to join the others so we came back to – got rid of our load and then she was going back in to Sydney, have a bit of a break and I joined another Norwegian ship, the Tyan [?]. Excellent, excellent.
- 32:00 And our main job was to take supplies into wherever it was needed in New Guinea or up further, we took the ammunition and food supplies. Again, a wonderful ship to be on. Strict, the Norwegians were strict, but spotlessly clean and again, stacks of gunnery, stacks of gunnery.
- 33:00 Very important this one, on the Tyan, we're on the Tyan, we'd left Bombay, there was a bit of a ruckus in Bombay when we were there, and the ship just alongside us, it was blown up. Anyway, the skipper called us together and told the gun crews and that, that they be fully armed and go around
- 33:30 and any of the natives were smoking and that, get rid of them or shoot them. So anyway, I thought, that's a bit of a joke, so, we were walking around, the other two gunners and myself, bristling with guns and that, there's this little, harmless little bloke, he's squatting down in the corner, squatting down. And I said to him, "Are you smoking?" and he's got this cup sort of thing
- 34:00 but there's smoke. And he said, "Oh, no Sahib, no smoke, no smoke." So I go and open his hand and sure enough he's got what they call a twisty, marijuana. I said, "Listen here Johnnie, you're going to put it out now or we're going to shoot you." He said, "Sahib, you shoot me, I will not put it out." So Sahib couldn't do nothing so I had to go and get a couple of blokes to carry him ashore and he got the cheers,
- 34:30 a real hero he was. These little funny, funny things that do happen to you. It was quite, quite a - just getting back to the Kuttatubul if I may.
- 35:00 **But just to begin with we might go back all the way to the beginning, now that we've come all the way through, and I just want to talk a little bit about your childhood to begin with. You were born in Footscray, can you just tell me a little bit more about your family and those sorts of areas.**
- Yes, my father lost
- 35:30 his job. He was a first world war digger, Gallipoli, right through it, badly gassed and when he came home, not long after – they kept him in England for two years till he convalesced, after he got out. And he went with John Monash, he was one of the Generals of the day and he had gone out and they... my father
- 36:00 knew John and he went with him to Yallourn, to the opening of the big mine, coalfields and that up in - and the power – a lot of our power in the early days came from there. Anyway, he came back but when the depression came, of course for a long while with others, lots and lots of others, you know, I can still remember, you know, a few things
- 36:30 food, begging for food and doing something for a loaf of bread. We lived on lots, we lived on bread and dripping, real good solid old dripping, lovely. They were our main things, Mum – there was seven of us in the family then and, you know, my mother's done an incredible job of keeping us. Because, you get, to keep a family and everything else, you know,
- 37:00 you might get a couple of pound a week to feed everyone on a couple of pound. And I tell my grandchildren, you know, today, they were pounds but and they say, "Pa, you're joking, you didn't live like that," and I said, "Well we did and we were happy to." And we'd come home school, we got a slice of bread and jam, and that was our sweets. And its eggs and things, porridge was a great. We had a lot, a lot of porridge.
- 37:30 And stews, stews and bunnies, catch a bunny, oh, we were made, go down and catch a bunny. But they

done well. My father, in the end, he got a job in the munitions, back in the munitions again. And I'll never forget they had him - in the munitions too, you couldn't, they didn't employ people there under eighteen in those days in certain sections. And anyway, I was called up one day

- 38:00 to the finance officer and he said, "Dawson," he said, "how old are you?" I said, "Seventeen." He said, "No, you're not seventeen, you're sixteen." And I said, "No, no, no." And Fry was his name, I still remember his name, he said, "You are sixteen." I said, "No." And he said, "Well, you'd better get your birth certificate." Sure enough, I'm sixteen and he calls my Dad in and he says to him, he says,
- 38:30 "Now do you know your son here is underage, to be in this place?" And he said, "No." He said, "Well, here's the certificate you got me and he's only sixteen." He said, "Well, Mr Fry, how do you expect, I've got seven kids, how can I remember all their birthdays." He got away with it, got away with it. I still stuck to the job. We often laughed about that. But Dad, I was away at the time...
- 39:00 You want me to go a little on each do you.?
- No, we'll just stay, I've just got a bit more questions on, on the younger years. Can you tell about some of the ways your mum would just scrape by on a couple of pounds a week.**
- Well she used to get her little part time jobs where she could, at the bakery or somewhere like that but, she was very busy at home, you know.
- 39:30 I can't see her do too much but look after us, although we had nothing. We had a beautiful home, my grandmother's home, which we moved into when we were young because we lost our other home that my Dad was buying through the war service type of thing, in those days, finance. And anyway, we all went to live with my grandmother in this lovely home in a good part
- 40:00 of town and she put the house on sale, because we needed money and the -I don't know if my grandmother owned the home. My grandfather, he was fairly, you know, reasonably well off. He had his own business, a blacksmith, and he broke the speed limit in the jinker, I
- 40:30 don't know if you know what a jinker is - it's a hose with a cart with two big wheels and he, sometimes the horse would - in the pub too long - the horse would just take off and go home on his own. And this day, the horse was getting impatient and the old bloke got on, full as a gook they tell me, and anyway he took off and galloped down the street and turned it over and it killed him.
- 41:00 I never, never, met him. Never met him.

Tape 2

- 00:42 **I just wanted to ask you a bit more about your dad. How much did you know about his service in the First World War.**
- Only what we've got on records that we applied for through the government. I didn't know too much, he was a
- 01:00 hard worker, as I say, he spent time, or, a couple of years or more with the council sweeping gutters to get an extra, you know, he had to go round, little food carts, going around the streets selling food. The orchards used to supply it to them and the diggers had to get around. Clothing, clothing was a big problem and
- 01:30 I can remember my Dad too, also, a very, very good man to us, he was as well, and every Sunday their family would invite one of us for dinner and, you know, that was a big thing. Treats, we used to walk many, many miles, we couldn't afford a penny on the tram, you know, sometimes. And our Mum and Dad, how they survived, I'll never know. But getting back
- 02:00 to my father, when he did come home he was in a bad way, with the gasses, on it. When, I suppose the '40s, I got word from home that my brother had been killed, he was in the navy also. A nasty episode that was, too, because there was another Dawson lived in the street, and the son was in the navy and the
- 02:30 telegram boy had taken the letter, telegram, to these other people and they'd been suffering for a week or more before they found out the terrible mistake had been made. But I asked for service time out to go and see my mother and father but the bloody officer, pardon me, said, "What could I do?" I said, "I could help to console them, that's what I could do."
- 03:00 But Norma, my wife, it happened in Western Australia, they were coming back to their ship and a car bowled him and two other sailors and unfortunately, he was the worst of it. But my mother, she took it all pretty bad, my brother had been killed because he was just getting somewhere and getting a decent meal and clothes
- 03:30 on it. But Mum, again, she'd do anything she could, right up to the end. She doted on her family, doted

on them and as things were getting to my Mum, my brother, other brother, was in the navy too, and he was a pretty clean living sort of a boy. Went in, and of course

04:00 he got into bad habits of drink in the service and when he came out it just killed him. His innards were all rotted away and he couldn't breathe and he was only a young boy, but that's what the navy did to him. Now which family am I on to now?

Well, did your dad ever talk to you about his time in World War 1?

04:30 No, no. Just that, you know, he wouldn't let a lot out and he'd just say little bits and pieces. Never whinged and he was in terrible, terrible pain because they couldn't do nothing about it you see. Because every week he'd have to get all these dressings, they rubbed stuff on it but the big blisters used to come out and swell all over his legs and different

05:00 parts of his body, you know. But you can't get it out of them. They keep a lot to themselves and, you know, there's people going through this sort of thing today but, you know, he lost his sight in the end and again he wasn't looked after. He was a president once of the RSL [Returned and Services League] in Openyalord [?]. He done a lot for the RSL.

05:30 And I called in at the RSL, I was home on leave once, and I picked up pop [grandad], from the gasses, he completely lost his eye sight and he should have been entitled to a bigger pension. But we didn't know in those days, how to get into the [Department of] Repatriation it was called, and help him. And, you know, they just wouldn't listen.

06:00 They mainly thought it was for the officers only, sort of thing, and like later on Legacy and that, but he didn't speak, for years I suppose, four years, he lasted. For a while, his mates used to take him up to work, smuggle him in and they'd do his work for him and take him out. Until he got caught. And they

06:30 should have taken him in and gave him, because I couldn't get any information then on all his papers and everything else, I couldn't get hold of them. But he was a good man and, as I say, he used to walk miles to go to work, just to save this thing. And all his kids, because we were all, you know, we were getting to be able to look after ourselves but,

07:00 the early days, as I say, there wasn't much history I could tell you because the main part I missed of it. Between 40 and 45, I missed it. And I did what I could for him when I came home and went and had a talk to Legacy and a few of the others. But see Legacy in those days were pretty hard to get into. I finished up, I shouldn't be jumping, but I finished off doing a lot with Legacy because they were doing a good job.

07:30 But Mum, see mum had to go to work then because pop's sitting at home and, a terrible life, he's sitting home and just couldn't see and the barber shop, three doors down, he'd go down there and Maxie would keep an eye on him and make sure, you know, he got a hair cut and make sure he had cigarettes. And because I used to smoke, I used to bring home these cartons of American cigarettes for him

08:00 and that but, he went at 62, and he was still a young man. It was peace for him though to have gone when he did because he was living in a dark world. And in those days there wasn't many friends around that would take him here and there and mum being away.

There were 7 children in your family.

08:30 **Did you fight?**

Well, we had our arguments. I said to my sister one day, how old would I be then, about sixteen or seventeen? I bought myself a camera, my sister and I bought it between us, a Brownie, and I said one day, "I'm going out," and I said to her, "Mary, where's the camera? I want to go and take a few photos."

09:00 She said, "Well, you can't because I've got a film in it and I'm going out to take some photos." And I said, "No you're not," and she said, "Yes I am," and she said, "All right, half is yours isn't it?" And I said, "Yes." We agreed to that so she took it out on the chopping block and took the axe to it and gave me my half. Oh, we often laugh about that, we often laugh about it.

Did you sort of, when times were hard as kids, when times were hard get together and try and...

10:00 More so than we are today, more so. But they knew, just they way they grew from young kids up into the depression years, but they knew nothing, no one knew better than to help one other, no better at all. They had their fights and scrabbles. And toys, you see, they didn't get many toys because we'd go to the RSL and all the old toys, we'd patch up and take around the Salvation Army and give them to the

10:30 the kids, some toy. And this was one toy, one wooden toy it would probably be, but that was it, that was it. We probably go and fly a kite, a kite. But we were playing cowboys and Indians one day, with bow and arrows, and I think I was an Indian or something but it might have been the cowboy because I finished up with, palings you see.

11:00 We used to pull up palings off the fence and sharpen them up and, this is no joke, it stuck in the top of my head and mother got a bus, I think it was, so we could get to the doctors quick. And everyone was

laughing at the kid with the lump of paling in his head. Maybe it's what's made me today, I don't know, wood head.

- 11:30 or something. But anyway, he got that out but that was only a bit of fun. But if you were short of something and one's got something they shared and still, what's left of the family they will share. And I try to bring the grandchildren up to share what you've got. I say, you're lucky, other people haven't got that. And it's getting that way again today, people
- 12:00 relying on others. We can't, all of us were delivered by a matron, they don't call them matrons they call them someone else that goes to your house. Because I had to give away our WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Every time she brought a new baby into the world, under that cabbage it was, she took one of the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s for payment and then I run out of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s so she didn't come any more. She'd had enough, seven kids they said. But, I believed it, the cabbages, because we all had curly hair and we had this curly cabbages, it was a great story.
- 12:30 I must have been ten or twelve odd before I knew – today you walk the streets and you know whose having them – you know, all these latest shirts and that. But they were happy days, we had our squabbles but I wouldn't have asked for any better, they were a good family. Most of the kids,
- 13:00 but the kids, going back and thinking about it. They were all the same. Especially in the area I lived in, it was a working-man's area. The people, the Jewish people did well out of it, he made good friends with pops because he'd buy anything. Old Izzy Schwarz, he'd be about five foot one I think, and he always used to wear his bowler hat. A real character. He was a good friend of pop's
- 13:30 but without those people and knowing, you got nowhere. You'd see things disappear in the house and not know where they'd gone. My grandma, she had some beautiful stuff and she sold it all to keep us going. Never mind, we go on.

Can you tell me about the school you went to and how you...

- 14:00 They hated me. Not really. Yes, I went to the same school as my mother went to. It was in Geelong Road in Footscray. It was the State School. I don't know what age I went but again it was during the depression because we got the shoes and socks which we had to wear to school, so we carried our shoes and socks and weren't allowed to put them on until we got to the ground
- 14:30 because that's how tough it was. And sometimes they'd issue you with a pair of shoes or something and they wouldn't fit but you had to make them do. And you had to walk and I walked a fair way, with others, there and back to school. But again, you'd pinch fruit or something like that one the way back. Quinces were the red, favourites in those days and you'd get chased by the blokes down the road and it was all in good fun and we'd come
- 15:00 home and we'd play in the street. We'd play cricket and kick the footie around. There was no parks like there are today and everyone had a dog of course. Pretty normal time until as I say I got work and my sisters and that. We were all pretty close in times, you know, twelve months or so behind one another and
- 15:30 so well all grew up and still help one another where we can and worry about one another if one of us isn't well. Most of our family's gone now. My other brother, he died up here through getting too fat and eating too much, and loved this and love that until it got to him and he just
- 16:00 had, just driving the car, and just had a massive heart attack. No warning, no nothing. But he was a character, a real character. Out of the lot now, I've got two sisters. One lives in Canberra and the other in Melbourne and they keep me sort of up to date and everything, and come up quite often for holidays and it's good to see them, see us grow up.

16:30 When did you go out for your first job and how did you get it?

My first job. Well, my first job, I can't class it as a job. I was boarded out to this poultry farm, it belonged to an aunty and I worked seven days a week there. Every day, because I had to go and get eggs and clean the pens out. And they provided me with food and enough to go to the pictures on a Saturday which was about

- 17:00 sixpence. And I stuck that out for twelve months and I thought well, it's not getting me anywhere, so I came back to Melbourne and that's when I got my first job here, when I get back here was in a radio factory. I was still wearing my shorts and that and the bloke there was a terrible bloke. I used to have to clean these radios,
- 17:30 they had a frame and they had to be cleaned and that. I used to bend down and clean and this bloke had, not his fault, but he had one leg shorter than the other, and he used to go by and, just for fun, he'd give me a kick in the bum. Yeah, so I can't think of his name, he'd say, "I'll have you." And that was my first job and then I went from there into my second job, that would be a telegram boy,
- 18:00 delivering telegrams and I didn't mind that so much. I jumped one then, the grocer. I used to deliver groceries, working for a grocery shop that's another one. Then at 16, I went into the munitions and I was really happy there because I was with nearly all old diggers. I had two of them there at the inspection chamber and I used to get along well with them. We used to go away crab fishing and that

18:30 but he looked after me too. Made sure I was all right.

Can you tell me what sort of duties, like what your job was at the munitions factory?

Yes. I was a viewer, what they call a viewer. I was doing mostly shells, like I was in the fuse shop where they made fuses and things and all the reject stuff come in and I was being trained to pick up ones that could get past. I learned to understand calibres and

19:00 mics and right down to decimals, that these things are not going to blow up in a man's face. They had to be correct. And that's what we used to do and the old blokes there, the two old blokes had artificial legs and I used to take their leg off once a week and put it up on the bench and work it for them, polish it, and the stump would be hanging on the chair

19:30 on the chair in the factory. The boss and that didn't mind, you know, these poor old blokes and their artificial legs. Terrific blokes.

Did they ever talk to you and tell you war stories?

No. No. They'd tell me places they'd been to. He wouldn't tell me where he'd got his leg, where he was, we was, you know, dragged here and dragged there. You just can't get it out of them. You know, your mates and all and go away and have a few beers and things like this. And again

20:00 going back, I had a reunion on Anzac Day back in Melbourne when I went down there last, about five years ago and we were all in the big shed, and we're having a few beers and they're laughing and joking and this lass, we were asked

20:30 would we mind if some reporters came in and done a story on us. Said no. It was for a, I'm just trying to think of the name of the film now, it was for 'The Sullivans'. And Frank was there, he's still doing stuff on television on things, but anyway we're all laughing and joking and this girl came along and said, "Why are you chaps laughing and

21:00 joking? Why aren't you talking about the war?" And I said, "Well we don't talk about the war." And she said, "Well what do you talk about." I said, "We tell jokes." I said, "Do you want a beer, another beer?" And she's listening and laughing at the jokes. Not dirty ones, not really. But anyway, then we went to a reunion down at another place have a few beers there, meet a few guys. She comes with us in the car, and the crew came with

21:30 us. It would be four I think, cameramen and that. And anyway, she got as full as a gook. We put her in a taxi and sent her home and she rings me up the next day. She rings me up the next day and says, "Bill, what was I doing last night?" I said, "Well, there's nothing to be ashamed of but did you like those jokes?" And she said, "I haven't stopped laughing. I can understand why you don't talk about the war," she said, "you've got so much fun to tell of the things

22:00 that happened, the things that you done during the war and the mates you made." That's what it is, if one of them goes, you feel sorry. It's going on. I don't know if it's always going to go this way. Some of them talk a lot about it, like the girls and the sailors crying on the wharves and gee whiz. I would have had a ball if they'd had anything.

22:30 like that in my day.

So how long did you spend at the munitions factory?

Three years I think it was, three years, about three years. I left on my eighteenth,

23:00 I left them on my eighteenth birthday and I went straight in and fixed up all my papers and got them under way. And then, of course, I went into the depot. Then I went in there just after Christmas

And you mentioned before that they didn't want you to leave the munitions factory?

Well, that's right, because we were in special conditions that we signed

23:30 because we had the knowledge of what we were doing, most of us. And we wanted to go and they couldn't afford to do it. And this was called a sheltered job or something, they couldn't take you away from where you were, in the government, and they had to reinstate you when you came home. But when I came home, they reinstated me all right, but there was fights

24:00 between the blokes who didn't go because all these blokes were frightened of their jobs. All these blokes coming back and taking over. And there was argument after argument over it, and nearly stand up blues in the workshop and I said, "Oh, I've had this. I've had this," I said. I couldn't stand being locked indoors and I still can't be.

24:30 I've got to spend my life outside. Then I went into rehab and learned to be a carpenter which was very good. But again, this pushbike job, when I finished training - I'll go back a little on what we were earning. For 48 hours a week as a carpenter it was five pounds.

- 25:00 It was a standard price. I love it, five pound. And you have to live on it and we were paying off a house, a loan and had two kids and, you know, it wasn't much and it didn't grow much. That little book I've put out there with some of the wages and that we used to get in those days, how we lived, we never knew. In those days, you'd buy a pair of pants
- 25:30 and that's your twelve months pocket money gone. But you had get up and go. You wanted to work. Like today, they don't want to work. It's not their fault it's the things that are happening but they should go more into it, the government, and instead of paying them something making something useful to them, an apprentice or get into something because it's out there. You only pick up the paper and see these days, but
- 26:00 you take on something and you work your way up. But they're quite happy they way they are but I fear for my grandchildren on the way the world is going because they're breaking their heart to get into uni and everything else and what for? You don't know where you're heading. I'd hate to go through
- 26:30 the last ten years when I was a young lad. It's sad, sad, because everyone these days should be jumping with joy, and patting them on the back and, you know, picnics and everything else but, never mind.

So if the munitions was a protected industry, how did you get out of it?

- 27:00 We, we wouldn't work. There was eight of us in services. Jack, big Jack, he was a navy man. There were about three naval blokes that were in cadets and the others were may be army or air force. We were all in something and we just got together and said, "We won't work." "We compel you to work, we'll send you to prison." It was pretty hard and, you know, in the end we said, "Well send us to prison." Anyway,
- 27:30 in the end they called us to a meeting and said, yes, and all your holiday pay and sick pay will mount up for when you come back and wish us well. And when I was home on leave I used to go up there, see my mates in the factory and have a few laughs. And they had girls working there, a lot of girls there. And they used to run out and rub my collar,
- 28:00 because basically it was lucky to rub your hand on a sailor's collar. So basically, I was having a ball.

When had you joined the navy cadets?

Fourteen. There's a photo in the book out there of me when I was fourteen. I was into that. Used to go down regular, every weekend, until such time as the war broke out and I didn't have the chance of going down there and there was no training to be on. You're either in or you're out. There was no

- 28:30 cadets trainings. Once we were old enough we were all called up and - I've lost the trend of that one there - the navy - I was thinking about a couple of mates then, about how we got out and what we did. A couple of them didn't come back and we went back and they all were the same as me,
- 29:00 but we went back mainly to get what they owe us. Our sick leave and our holiday pay. They paid us right up to the date. But I was starting to argue with the blokes that had been there. Calling me names and others names and I was getting a bit tired of it. And I went over to see Mr Fry who was still there and I said, "I just can't take anymore of it." I said, "I'll give it up." He said, "Don't give it up." He said, "You'll still get paid,
- 29:30 because," he said, "use your holiday pay and your sick pay." So I went over, talk about making dough, I went over to a bakery and I worked there then till that was up. But I made application then to go to a tech school to do carpentry. But it wasn't easy to get out. They also had a German there that was very, very good on these big machines,
- 30:00 automatic machines. And he didn't want to go back or be interned but he'd work and fix these machines up and keep them running and they had a flat for him but they had to have a guard with him all the time. Even when he went to the machine to make sure he wasn't sabotaging them. But they needed him because these machines were new ideas and Karl, Karl, and the
- 30:30 funny thing with Karl. I ran into him years ago when he was tied up with a very good friend of mine. They were tied up - he went to Holden Motors, this Karl. He had new ideas, into the Holden and Eddie and that they're in their
- 31:00 - old as me and they're still doing drafting for them because he's got the ability, he gets ideas, even an old man. But the old Karl, we sat there and when we used to go to a friend's place and I didn't know it was him for a while. We'd start talking and he asked me a similar question. You asked me about getting out of the service and it rung a bell that he was the Karl that used to be there at the machines with the guards when I was there. Harmless little bloke.

Talking about the navy cadets, what sort of things would you get up to in the navy cadets?

Well, unfortunately you didn't know much about girls in those days. The girls were there but you didn't know much about them at fourteen. But no, one good reason, I got fitted out with some clothes, a uniform. Boots and shoes and socks I could wear.

- 32:00 Later on in life I had to pay for all those. That was the first time I had a good pair of boots on my feet, you know. They used to, week day, one night a week from about 8 o'clock to ten o'clock, you drilled. They taught you drilling and how to handle weapons. And if you were going in for seamanship you'd go for knots. And every Saturday I used to go
- 32:30 sailing with them down in Melbourne, a crew there, and it was enjoyable. I used to ride the bike with two or three others down there and it was enjoyable. We learned a little bit about knowing about the navy. We could tie knots and different things and, away you went. But I would have probably gone a lot further places I wanted if they had let me go when I wanted to go.

33:00 It passes you by though.

What had made you decide to join the cadets?

Mates, mates and something to do. That was the one thing - I don't think it was - it was pride really. And, you know, we used to go there, I was only a little bloke, we had to go to marches and that and by the time you stood alongside your rifle and put the

- 33:30 bayonet on, you know, it's pretty high, it could be right up around here. And you're supposed to pick that up and do all these exercises and drills with it and you could hardly lift the jolly thing. Other than that it was - a lot of sportsmen, making mates and you'd meet them days and go down there sailing and a lot
- 34:00 did go away in the early piece because some of them were a bit older than me. But they went away in the early piece and I still used to see them when I came home, if they were home on leave I'd always check some of them out and go and have a bit of a chat and whip off and have a few beers. But you can't beat mateship. You can't beat it.

Where were you, do you remember, when you heard

34:30 **that war was declared?**

When war was declared with the Germans. I was on at work then at the munitions and it came over while we were at work. About 9 o'clock at night I think it was. They picked it up on the wireless, someone, it must have been between bout

- 35:00 8 o'clock and 9 o'clock that we heard about it. And of course, the next day, I said, "I won't be in tomorrow. I'm off to join the navy." But they said, "No, go back." Again, they wouldn't take me until I was eighteen and my birthday is on December 22nd and I got everything there at once. But there were a few of us there.

- 35:30 And I was talking about the mates we made, we were just standing by and doing odd jobs, waiting to go in.

Why were you so keen to rush off and join the navy?

Well, I think it was the challenge. I think a lot of it comes back to the challenge and you've got a chance of learning something. You've got a chance of making mates, which we did. And they,

- 36:00 to run off and do it. I think getting the uniform on and making you feel big and proud, I think that's got another thing to do with it. And the after life that you got with your mates after naval life, it never loses you and its comradeship, and I'm involved with the naval Association on the committee there and veterans,
- 36:30 on the consultative committee with Veterans Affairs. And these are things that help one another there. It goes right through your life. A bloke's crook - the trouble at the moment is the old blokes are still looking after the old blokes because we can't get the young blokes to come in. And it makes a big difference if you can get them to come in. Like the Vietnam blokes, they're going to find it tough because there's no one to
- 37:00 tell them what to do and how to go about it because they don't want to learn. One thing, they're getting a lot of money, a lot of them, for all their problems. But no one will look after the widows and that's a big thing, and the kids that are left without a Dad. I spent, in Melbourne I spent a lot of time with - and I was asked, you had to be asked in those days, would I join Legacy, working for Legacy,
- 37:30 and they explained what it was all about, and you had to be asked in those days. And I was about twenty-six, I suppose, when I was asked. I had a business and I was doing all right in the business and they asked me would I come to a big meeting on Legacy. And I went and I'm about twenty-six
- 38:00 years of age and I'm helping people, married women of all ages and their kids. I had five women and I had eleven kids to look after. And I had to go and see one at least once a week and see if everything's all right and then take them to gym. I enjoyed it, looking after all these young kids and everything else. That was business and all the trauma of these...
- 38:30 I had a couple of baddies that I had to see, you know, come with the axes. But I stuck it out for five years and I just couldn't take any more, a bit of a turn, and I had to give it up. Having, doing it physically to helping them, I had to change my way around like firewood day and everything, for them.

When I come up here, I still help them

39:00 but, you see, because they're here, they've got these things here but they won't go and, you know, to them and help to keep it going because Legacy does a wonderful job on it.

Tape 3

00:46 **So tell us about your enlistment process?**

Well, as a cadet, way back when I was fourteen. Well it was something

01:00 I think a lot of us young ones got into. Mainly because we were, the beach area and that's very close to us. And I think a lot of time was spent there and you'd see the cadets going along in the uniform and you'd say, "I'll have to get into this," which I did do. And I was in it right up till the war started, and of course was in protected industry there, and

01:30 I couldn't go away and, gain, being a reservist, I had to be eighteen and at the time I was seventeen. And if you wanted to join straight away you had to sign up for twelve years. And I wanted to just leave it as I was and go along during the war period. I had a lot of trouble getting out because, I'd turned eighteen, or

02:00 that was coming up, but they wouldn't let us under the protection of the government, allow us to leave and join up to the services that each one was involved in. The army, navy or air force. But they just wouldn't, when we got to that stage, wouldn't release us. And we just said all right. And we got together and said, "Don't any of us go near the work." We had the

02:30 government patrol come out and tell us they were going to lock us up if we didn't go there. And we said, "We'll go there but we're not going to work. You can't make us work." This went on for a while and they could see we were pretty determined and they let us out. And that was a great, great thing. And I often went back there to say giddy to a lot of me mates there when I was home on leave and go and have a few beers. But I was then eighteen and that's when I

03:00 went into the navy in early '40.

Describe that process for us, going into the navy at first?

What, when I was fourteen?

No, No, During the war time when you got out of the munitions job?

Well, I got out of there and I went and done carpentry at the tech school,

03:30 a rehabilitation course and I went into, and passed all right and used to push me bike with others, with the great big box of tools on it. And many a fall we had and tools all over the place. But we had to do it, and that was about ten miles either way and we did it and were successful. And then I got the opportunity to go with another company and with a chance of improvement. So that's what I did do. So I learned carpentry and a chap and I

04:00 were doing work, or sub contract, for a boss and we decided to go on our own and get these odd jobs and pick them up and go. We'd become specialists in roofing and that was a big thing for us because a lot of people building their own home couldn't pitch a roof and we used to spend our weekends then going around, we didn't do it for nothing we did it for money, but

04:30 cutting it all out for them, pitching the first part of it and various other things. They found it hard to do. And I was doing pretty well with that and then I took very ill with dysentery I'd picked up in India and I had to give it up because I couldn't lift. Every time I'd lift I made a mess of myself so after a bit of leave and that, I give it away and I thought well

05:00 a chance came up near our place at the time. A big service station was going to be built. And I thought, knowing all the people in the area, I'll have a got at it. And I built a fantastic place and was doing all right, nice home. But the business, and not just because it was me, when I got out of that place they went broke. The service station, no one would go near it after that. They promised me when I did leave, they promised me all sorts of things,

05:30 they would hand over the station to them, or stick it out for another six months for no rent. But I'd had it by this stage anyway, they were nasty about it because they promised me good will in there, they didn't give me a cracker. So I made sure it got sabotaged naval style, commando. No, not really. But then I went back, I'd also

06:00 got a real estate agent's licence. I was managing a real estate company there for quite some time. And then I went back into me old game and what I could do was in real estate, plus design and construct which I was offered a job in and I went into design and construct on a leasing basis,

06:30 leasing basis and made a success of that. I stuck to that for fifteen years and I was fairly happy there but I was getting old and that caught up with me.

Well, back to the war. Tell us about your initial training when you joined the navy when the war had started and you'd got out of the munitions factory.

07:00 **Tell me about what happened, where you went and what you did initially, at first?**

Well, of course the starting point is to sign up. And we'd go, sent then down to Port Melbourne but that's where most of the navy went, stokers went to another place, seamen and others went to, and I finished up at Lonsdale there. We were there mainly to be

07:30 set up with gear and everything else which would be marked and ready for us when we go to Flinders. That was for about a fortnight we got there, just drilling around the streets and this sort of thing. Going out boating and, for a couple of weeks then down to Flinders and got kitted up, all our kit was there, and kitted up and, as seamen we done all the jobs, training there, for about four months I think it is,

08:00 just training and the basics of saluting officers and bowing and scraping a little. Mess cook a few times, washing up the dishes, and all this sort of thing, but we didn't mind. You know, saying oh bugger this we're not going to do this any more, washing up dishes after everyone, but you had to take your turn. But being young, we all, I think, made a lot of fun out of it and exciting to get to go to sea.

08:30 **What was some of those basics of training for someone who wouldn't know?**

Well, if you go to the gunnery school, you'd be doing everything at the double and learning the basics of your weapons. The big guns, the small guns, being able to pull one apart, put it back if something goes wrong. And also, then you'd be

09:00 mess cooks. You had to take your turn there in the scullery, you had to take your turn.

What did you do in the scullery?

Washing and collecting the plates and dishes and that. Torpedo school, through the torpedo school. It was mostly gun drills and knowing a little bit on weapons and the basics on it. Not in a big boat. It depends on then what part of the ship you're going to go for. You want to

09:30 be a seaman, you want to be a wireless operator and of course, stokers, if it's their branch, you go there and you learn the basics there. But other than that you learn knots and things that you'll mostly need, but things come to you after a while that you're supposed to do. You make a few blues on it. I made two or three nasty blues, got myself into a bit of trouble

10:00 a couple of times but they're the sort of basics that you need. You go to sea, of course, it starts off again on those. But every ship it does it a different way. I was always in gunnery, mainly in the big guns, the six inch guns, mostly involved in those and then I got into, when I come to gunnery course again, I was put into different locations and would be the captain of the gun

10:30 or the layer or the trainer. But these are things they taught you, but other than that you're not taught sometimes very much. When I was first gunner, behind a six inch, and I was a ramming number, just an ordinary seaman growing up, and that's a big ram, and you've got to dip it in the water because if you don't all the explosives inside will heat up and blow back, which has been known. And I'm

11:00 right up against it and the big bloke behind me, Old Tankie, he gets there and he says, "Don't be frightened of it, you've got to get up to it," and when the bloody breach was open, I nearly fainted. The thing just touched me and he said, "That's how it's got to be." And, you know, when it recoils. I felt a little trickle run down me leg that day. It's the way they are and gunnery, to be in gunnery, everything's done twice as fast. You know, if you go to gunnery school

11:30 you double, double every where. Same as on board ship, if you go across quarter deck, you double. I always tried to get to an office one but I never made it that far.

Why gunnery?

I liked it, I always did. Right from the word go. And another thing, I wouldn't have liked to have been down in the stoke hold. I wouldn't have liked it. My brother was a stoker. We weren't on any coal burners or you could have

12:00 copped it because they still had a few coal burners and that would have been the toughest job. And the worst job, well today, is diving. Diving's very important today and anything that you touch, ships and that, but they don't do the same works as our days of seamanship. It was a lot harder than it is today. Climbing the masts and...

So what exactly,

12:30 **what exact skills would you learn at gunnery?**

Well, I don't think you'd learn anything that would be good to you out. Like the gunnery would learn anything from a small revolver and upwards to the ack ack [anti-aircraft] guns of 3 inch, 4 inch. Ack ack

- guns. But, I did because I liked the shooting. I liked to go down the range and do a bit of shooting. I got
- 13:00 into a bit of trouble there once, during my course to be a gunner, to go into DEMS [Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships] which I went into. And I was watching them and taking a tally because I'd been on the guns for three years and woke up to what it meant, you know, the overs and unders. The skipper, not the skipper the petty officer gunnery, we go on to the 4 inch first and the target and
- 13:30 hitting the target. And I had me little book here, it said two over, four over, two down, two up. And I went, Jesus, if go one over in the centre there, I've got this target. And it was a pile in the water that they just used for it, practice, and things like this and to teach you. And I got spot on, blew his target to pieces. But he gave me a terrific good write up for it, he wanted to know how I'd done it. And I said
- 14:00 well just subtracting on the numbers that you were firing on. And the aircraft goes along with this big balloon behind it and I nearly shot that to pieces because I'd been taught 3 years at it. I knew spot on how to get on to me target and I nearly took the aircraft as well. That was the trouble. But all the other blokes there, they were too slow at getting on target.
- 14:30 But I've always like it, gunnery. Most seamen finish up in gunnery.

Now tell us, where were you drafted once you finished the course?

My first draft was to the Kuttabul. That was the ship that got sunk there in Sydney. That was a

- 15:00 holding ship. The ship that I was to go on, the Adelaide, hadn't arrived, she'd been out on a job, and hadn't arrived and she would just come alongside and we'd just change over.

Describe that ship for us?

It was a good ship really. But it was hard and tough. There were a lot of old-timers on board. She was an old ship made new or done their best to. She was one of the first coal burning ships, coal burning ships in the world, naval ships in the world, when she done in 1922. It was strict though. The ship was very, very strict. And gunnery was very, very important to them and anyway, my first job was on

- 15:30 fore control, aft control. That's on the phones and that and up on the bridge, fore control and aft control and a very important part of the running of the ship because they take all the readings and everything else. So first day at sea, you've got to go through all the exercises, that's when she's got out to sea and we went to dummy action stations
- 16:00 and up to fore control I'd go. And it's very far up and overlooks everything. And the commanding officer it was, the number two, and he said, "Dawson," and he told me what it was and what it is, he said, "that's the fore control and aft control. All you do is to just follow what I say to you and you'll transmit that to where it's got to go." So anyway,
- 16:30 that's all right, so he says, "This is going to be a dummy run. You've got to act as if you're dead and you're not to say a word so that the other one can have a go at knowing what to do, similar to what you're doing here so that both of youse can work in." And they kept it up, "Fore control, aft control, what's wrong with you?" And I got sick of it and I said, "Because we're all bloody well dead!" Oh Christ. Did that bloke get me off.
- 17:00 That commander he never forgot me for that. They didn't explain enough. See we were worried, getting back to the drills, drills and doing drills but when it comes to the real thing, they've forgotten what to tell you. He got me out of there quick smart. Got me back onto guns which I was happy about because he made me a little bit nervous, the old Jimmy. But Benny the Bastard, that was his name
- 17:30 and that's what he was and everyone dreaded him, everyone dreaded him. One block that came on, Chokko, he was an old bloke, he was old, he had three badges. And he came back full one night and he'd pinched a bike. And he went down, come on board, and no one took any notice of old Stripey, so he goes into the commander's cabin.
- 18:00 He's got this push bike and he goes into the commander's cabin and shaking him, waking him up, calling him all the so and so's in the world. And the old commander he gets out and he's got him on the upper deck, this is no lie, and he's chasing him around on his push bike. Oh Christ, talk about laugh. But poor old Stripey, I don't know how long they put him in prison for but no one looked after him there because they reckon he was a terrific bloke, you know, what he done to
- 18:30 old Stripey, oh Christ. But lots of things happened. But getting back to your gunnery there was a lot in it, a lot in it. Being able to call the shots and that. I'd go back tomorrow if they asked me I suppose. Especially the way the navy is now, fifty-fifty.
- 19:00 **Well back to the Kuttabul, what was that like?**
- We looked after ourselves. It was only a holding paddock sort of thing. You went on, you clocked on, you cleaned up all around your mess and everything, what you're doing and you could go ashore. There was no watch to do or anything. We were just sitting there, there's blokes going to, could be fifty or sixty blokes billeted there at the one time on it.

19:30 She lost, well she went and got hit by the subs [submarines]. We was just on the other side of her and it was very, very lucky for a lot of people.

So what was that time like in Sydney before you went on the Adelaide?

It was quite good because we had nothing to do. You know, we used to go up town all day. We were sailors and we had a cigarette and we had couple of beers and, you know, the jolly rogers, we were big men.

20:00 If our parents had of seen us. That was a lot of fun, going for a beer and a cigarette and, of course, it followed us right through. You weren't a navy bloke unless you had it.

What about, any girls in town?

Oh yes, but I looked the other way. Yes, of course there were. We used to take them to a dance but half of us didn't know how to dance and we used to take them to a dance and, of course, our bell bottoms were a problem too

20:30 because when you were dancing, they were 32 inches wide. Your other foot used to get up in there and over you'd go so we had to roll them up and tuck them into our socks. But I used to like dancing when we were ashore. I'd take a girl home. I'll never forget her, she was a lovely, lovely, girl at the dance and no one was talking to her. She was a very attractive girl, she was in a wheelchair.

21:00 And anyway I went and talked to her and that and she said she liked to come and see them. And she'd had paralysis, I can't think of the name of the paralysis they used to get. But anyway, I got talking to her and when it was over I said, "Where are you going? I'll walk home with you." And she said, "Not far down the road." So I walked down with her and I went to give her a kiss on the cheek and she said, "There's no

21:30 need to do that," she said, "Look we got a picket fence." She said, "If you can just lift me up and hook me belt on the picket fence." And she's like hanging there. And I said, "Oh yeah." "And now," she said, "You can give me a nice kiss." And I give her two or three kisses and then when it's finished I put her down into the wheelchair and she thanked me very much and she said, "Bill, you're a gentleman. Other blokes leave me hanging there." True.

22:00 I was the number one boy. You said did I get in touch with girls. Yes.

Tell us about what people would think of you in Sydney being in navy uniform?

They didn't seem to worry. There was that many servicemen there. In those days they were more interested in running after the Yanks [Americans] with their big bunches of flower and things like this. We had to put up with terrible things. And hostels, many a night of being ashore, slept in a shop doorway or something because I was foolish. I used to meet girls and they were right out in the never never [a long way from town] and I had to find my way back. All these little things, you know, I've forgotten most of these little things

22:30 that your mentioning. It was fun. We never really got any girls in trouble. Some of the other blokes did because, while we were in harbour, anyone played up really with a girl and she reported it, they'd bring her on board and she'd point you out, you know, you're the bad boy. But I never got that bad.

What happened to blokes who were pointed out?

24:00 **What would they do to them?**

The ones that were pointed out? They'd do time. They'd be punished. It depends how bad they were and what they did. You know, if they got to the rape stage or something like that they'd be in real serious trouble. If they, if the girl said, "Don't kiss me," and he insisted on kissing her or he tries to get his own way with a girl and hurt her,

24:30 he would do time but other than that they'd get punished on board to do extra duties. Instead of every second night doing so and so you'd do it every night and you might spend some time in the brig. But sailors will be sailors. That's what they all say. It's not always true, I was a pretty good boy.

With those girls that you'd meet was there some

25:00 **kind of feeling that you were always going to leave?**

Yes. They understand that. They do, you know, they say, you'll be gone tomorrow night and things like this. That's similar to how I met Norma. I met her in West Australia and it grew from there when I got in and out. But she thought, just another sailor,

25:30 you see, out to have a good time. And that's all there was. We'd go to the pictures and go dancing, you'd go have a cuddle and things like this, certainly. But men in those days respected women, respected them. And if she said no, she meant no. I only mean kissing now, I'm not getting involved in anything else but that's how it was and they did, they respected and not many sailors did get in trouble.

26:00 The Yanks, they were murder, they even raped a boy if he stand still. They did make a hell of a

difference to our way of life though when they came because, but they couldn't see eye to eye. Yet, I've met some good guys, I've been on patrols with them and on some of the ships I was on you'd meet them.

26:30 What were some of the difficulties with the Yanks?

Oh lots, lots. There was fights all the time. I was having a beer in Newcastle we were. I was on the tanker, the tanker called in there and I was, Duke of Kent, Duke of Kent. That was the name of the pub up in Newcastle we used to make as a favourite when we were in Newcastle.

27:00 And two lovely girls there, barmaids. And we were in there this day and there were a lot of Yanks in there, I wouldn't know how many. Anyway, one of the barmaids said something. This Yanks singing out, "What about serving me and not someone who's bloody Australian. I should be served first," and carrying on. And Keith, he was the first one to go over, he said to the Yank, "Now look, don't talk about our girls like that, they're doing a good job,

27:30 you take your turn." And he started to get a bit abusive. Then I went over and he's still getting - and then the other mate of mine, Keith, he came over. The Yanks pushed us away like this and we went up and he's a great big brute of a bloke, I couldn't have reached him anyway, and then there's a bit of pushing going on and he threw a punch at me, and it missed me, and I'm into him. I've got my head down and I'm into his tummy because that's all I could,

28:00 like I could reach. I'm going down and I'm belting into, and anyway the proprietor rings for the police and he says to me, "You and your mates get out of sight." He said, "I've dobbed these in, the way they carried on." And my hands, his belt buckle, and me hand was all cut, blood running everywhere and he gets a towel out of a thing and he wraps it all up. Anyway, the police

28:30 and it wasn't the ordinary police it was the service police. And they're going over asking the blokes about it and we're right down the end, trying to keep out of sight. And anyway, they came down and Australians they were, fortunately, and he said, "What have you blokes been up to?" We said, "Well nothing, chief. There was a bit of a scuffle over there for a while but we tried to keep the peace." He said, "What happened to your hand?" "Matter of fact," I said, "I got that done on board," I said, "and I just put that on

29:00 because I didn't want it to get dirty." He give us a wink and he said, "You look after it there and just watch out there's no more scuffles around here," and he walked out. But they'll back you but what about the place up in Townsville. It started up there too and a bloke, a seaman, went into a brothel and he couldn't get his turn until the others had

29:30 finished and then they didn't treat him too good so he went back to the ship and went and got a hand grenade and blew it up. That was a hottie that one. He did time.

Was anyone killed?

I don't think so, I can't remember back that way. But I can remember this in the paper and all, about the Aussies and the Yanks, they used to like getting on to it. I don't think they knew it was him who'd done it really, I don't think so.

30:00 And then there was a big fight at the trains. Not with the navy so much but the army and the Yanks. Going south to north and Albury I think it is, you change trains at Albury. And they've got Yanks going one way and the Aussies going another way. And the Yanks are singing out, "Good on you Aussies," we're going down for R & R. "No good seeing the girls,

30:30 we've done all the girls," he said. "Don't go down there." And they got out and, boy, it was a big fight. It was a really big fight. It took a lot of knocking down and stopping them. And they were crude in their ways and talking about the women as if they were all sluts and this sort of thing. And it used to get under our hide, used to get under your hide. But they're little things that did happen. Again, I kept my hands clean, kept out of

31:00 mischief.

We'll get on to the HMAS Adelaide again. Tell us about some of your initial work that you would do on this?

The mess deck, you got your own section of mess deck to look after, you've got to take it in turns.

31:30 You've got to do a certain amount of scrubbing up on the deck every morning. Paint, chipping paint, because there's a lot of pass time goes on on a ship that you're not doing anything, so they've got to keep you busy. You chip paintwork and you put anti-rust on it and you paint that. Round all the guns, like you do every day, you clean them out and check them that they're all running all right,

32:00 everything else. Ammunition lockers, no water getting in there. Look out on the crows nest, look out on the bridge. Gunnery, plenty of gunnery. But every second day you get a break and Sundays especially, Saturdays and Sundays you don't work. You do your mess duties and you do what we call "make and mend".

32:30 During wartime a ship is split in two, so you've got a port and a starboard. You've got four on of your

watch and four off, unless it's in the middle watches, but you've got four on duty and if you're the off, in that four, you'll also be required to do work below decks. Make and mend. Make and mend means washing and

33:00 mending clothes.

So tell us about getting assigned to the HMAS Adelaide. What were you thinking, what were you feeling?

Well, we didn't know anything about her. She was a - I've lost the track.

33:30 **O.K. When you first were on the Kuttabul and you were in Sydney, tell us about when you were assigned to the HMAS Adelaide. What were you thinking?**

I was thinking, you know, I suppose, once I got used to it, it was a good life. But again it comes back to your mates. Your mate, you know, when you're growing up in life and like little kids and that, and these blokes everyone, about eighteen, about those

34:00 young ones in the aeroplane, no more than twenty. But you're growing together, so you help each other. And if you see your mates in trouble and you can't do anything they'll come and show you how to do it. But the main thing in the navy, if you're off watch it's a different matter but if you're on watch on the deck you've got to keep yourself working. Of course, once upon a time you had to polish the brass work. They found out how

34:30 far from the flash a bit of brass would travel and you could pick it up right away especially the subs where they'd see something shining and you started painting all the brass work then. And that was another job you didn't have to do. Scrubbing, scrubbing decks early of a day, every day. And anyone spilt any paint on the lovely wooden decks was in trouble. I never forget we'd finished doing all the top deck

35:00 one morning after we scrubbed it all down, everything's looking good and the pipe came over, the decks now will be painted grey. After all that work scrubbing too. And again, when you're on watch, you got so much idle time just standing by your gun just to create something to do with your mind and you know, you'd sit around in a circle and you'd have a quiz show and things like this that

35:30 keep you going. We weren't allowed to gamble in the navy. You get caught gambling you're in big trouble. They used to overcome it with matches and each match you bought for a penny or something like this and they played tombola and betting on cockroaches and we used to have our little pet ones. And again,

36:00 Jimmy comes into my mind on the Adelaide, commander on the Adelaide. We had a dish, this big dish that they used to use in the galley and they all had their pet cockroaches and they put a little bit of colour on who it belonged to. And you'd put it in, and of course the first one over the top wins. And they had one called Jimmy the Bastard, the commander.

36:30 But anyway, it's getting a bit exciting and the officer at watch is inspecting that everyone's been around and the commander's behind him going around and putting their hands on things to see there's no dirt and they're supposed to say, attention on the upper deck, when the commander goes through and there's these cockies and they're going. And we're watching them and we're standing to attention as the officer goes through and the bloke says,

37:00 come on you black bastard, and there's the bloke right behind him. He got troubles. But they confiscated our cockroaches. That was a bit of fun. But he wasn't a man to play with because he took it nasty.

What would he do?

He'd give a stoppage. Stoppage of leave for being subordinate.

37:30 See it breaks monotony. You've got to do something, you've got to do something. A new recruit came on board one day, a new bloke, and introduced himself and he gets his locker. And normally you put up your girlfriend on the locker door and the blokes come in and he puts her on the locker door and all the blokes go, "Hey Harry, who's the girl mate?"

38:00 "Oh, that's me fiancée." Everyone here knows her. And they all open their doors and they've got the same girls Poster. True. Everyone knew this sort, she wasn't too bad of a sort either. It was nothing but kissing you know, but this poor bloke. MacInerny, MacInerny. I'll never forget it. I don't know if he ever caught up with her again but she was quite nice

38:30 I think she might be getting a little few dollars - they come and buy her this and buy her that. It was just funny, they all opened the doors at once, at least six photos.

Six?

Yeah at least six. Six. Because they get pass times. One sailor goes away, "I'll tell you mate, here's Shirley's number, give her a buzz when you go,

39:00 keep her happy and that, don't let her get depressed." You know, the next time you're going away you'll

say to your next mate who's staying behind, "Listen look after Audrey," or whatever the case may be. That's how they got, they had no troubles and girls get to know sailors. There's no hanky panky you know, they're just good mates. The mind wanders a bit though sometimes.

Tape 4

00:38 **O.K. Could you tell us about some of the first jobs that the Adelaide did when you first left Sydney Harbour out to war?**

Well, that was everything put back in its place. Ropes rolled up and hung

01:00 Any bits and pieces laying around the upper deck may have to be made secure. Make sure the motor boats and that are all maintenance free, put the covers on them and make sure that the food, there's enough food in there for any that has to get sunk and they've got emergency food. You've got to check that every

01:30 time you leave, you leave harbour. Some of the wharfies and that used to pinch ours, anything they could lay their hands on. So, and the normal duties. Again, there's your duties on watch. You've got to do look out watch, you got to do watches off the bridge, guns got to be checked every day and then you've got your own washing to do or dhobying to do and

02:00 uniforms and that to clean and get ready for your next run ashore. But there's pretty standard routine day after day, you know. But again coming back to most of it once we get it all done it was pretty easy because, remember, in war time they have, it's generally, normal, sailing, they've got no

02:30 real heavy duties but when it becomes war you've got double the amount of sailors on board. It might only carry one hundred and fifty normally and now we've got to double up because there's always got to be someone on watch. Those guns have always got to be at the ready. You never know when they're going to pop out of the blue out at you and you've just got to stand by. Your depth charges, they've got to be right as well, there's a lot in it,

03:00 to go around but it fills in a lot of time. And if you can't find time, they'll find time for you. Start all over again. That's what they do.

So where do you head at first?

When I joined her we headed out, we headed up to, with a convoy to Western Australia. Oh, I'm sorry, New Zealand was our first port of call, that was me first trip, New Zealand, in Wellington. Then I went from, we picked up another convoy

03:30 coming out of Sydney. This was the big one that I was talking about. It was one of the biggest convoys that's gone across the ocean for a long time with the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, Aquitania, about half a dozen of the big, big ships that you knew. But once we got around off the Australian coast they would leave us because they could travel at, nothing could

04:00 hit them, the torpedos and that, because they could do about 32, 32 or 35 knots and that's moving pretty fast.

How many ships were there in this convoy?

I reckon there'd be pretty close to 30 odd. It was a big, big thing to get these supplies. It was reinforced for the 9th division. And that was the one we were told it was in the freezing, it was so damn cold

04:30 way down south where we were because the Germans had dropped mines all around the entrance into Melbourne. Two hundred and fifty mines were collected So we had to go right down south to Tasmania, right up into the Southern Ocean and that's where I got wiped off the bridge, off the ladder. But it's, we're only two it was

05:00 happening all the time, you know there's people goes to sea, and yachts and everything, what we call the corner where two oceans meet, [Cape] Leeuwin. It's really nasty in there. Blokes get washed over the side very easily. We were just lucky the blokes that I was with, just lucky.

Describe that corner for us?

Ah, Leeuwin, there's, that's the point, the lighthouse point.

05:30 Albany, it's called. You've got, coming down through, you've got Fremantle, goes right southern of Fremantle. Where Fremantle turns around Cape Leeuwin, which was called the corner because why the two - and then you go into the Australia Great, the Bight. I went to the Bight. But it cools off a bit in there. If you're way down south, you're right, you're getting down towards the icebergs there, you know, and it gets

06:00 pretty cold. Especially if you're not moving.

Tell us about your first trip to New Zealand. How were you feeling and....?

Oh well, that was as I explained, it was a five-day trip but mostly every day it was in fog, we were in fogs. And the ship's, we had buoys, big wooden buoys which sort of churn up the, as we're being pulled along it churns up the water

- 06:30 and the bloke behind you, that's what he's got to keep his eye on, day and night. And you're pretty close together and there was five ships, five, six ships in this convoy but after two days, I was that sick, I was just that sick. And every time I was sick the PO made me get down and clean it up, but I couldn't help it. But after two days I disappeared, and I was reported missing. I got in behind a,
- 07:00 like as if you were a desk there, behind you and hid. The PO sits there, but right at the back there, I got in, squeezed in on my side apparently and I squeezed right around on my side. And that's where I lay for three days and no one knew. The PO, he thought it was rats or something scratching around in there. And they pulled it out and it was me. And Christ, the news went round the ship and the skipper, they got me down to sick bay and that but
- 07:30 when I came to, on the upper deck and I look, and we're just going into Wellington and there's this great big statue of a, a Christian type of statue with, I don't know if it was the Virgin Mary or not, but it was a woman, an angel, with her arms greeting the seamen. Seeing ships coming into, you know, blessing them and I thought, Oh Godfather, I'm in heaven.
- 08:00 And anyway, they got me down to sickbay and they got me back up. But the old man, the skipper, Showers, he was a good bloke. And he came down to see me and sat alongside me talking to me for a while and he said, "Now, will I put you on a shore station?" And I said, "No, I'll try and get over it." And he said, well he'd been to sea for 32 years and every guy, for two days, he feels crook after they go to sea. So he said, "You're not the only one," but he, I sort of made a pal
- 08:30 in some ways with him because little jobs that were going and he needed it and he'd say, "Come with me Dawson," out of respect for me. And I was his runner sometimes, anything he wants done, I had to run and get it. But he was a good bloke. Most of the skippers [captains], Benny the Bastard, he was a commander, he was second in charge of the Adelaide but there was a skipper above him, but he had, the skipper doesn't have any say, these blokes take over, these commanders. They run the ship.
- 09:00 Oh, he was nasty, nasty.

How was he nasty?

Well, the way he talked. He practically called me a silly bugger, you know, or worse than that up on the bridge and that's the first time he met me. And then another time I was on, up on the bridge as a runner and look out and he, and this is when

- 09:30 Showers too, asked again for me to go down to his cabin, I think this was the first time. Yes, he asked me to go down to his cabin and I said, "Excuse me sir, but where is your cabin? I thought this was your cabin." And this Barwick, he just, "How dare you talk to the captain without first asking permission." And I'm getting really scared at this bloke, he's only a little runt. And then he was lashing out his tongue
- 10:00 at me. "Don't ever, ever do it again. Don't ever do it again," he said. He said, you know, "For the next few weeks I want you double round here and don't carry on, don't try," you know, "To dodge past me," and things like this. They're the sort of things he used to say. But Showers, heard him say a lot of this to me and he said and he didn't know my name
- 10:30 of course but he said, "Come along with me and I'll show you where my cabin is." And he marched down; we were on the upper deck, with me along side him. And the other blokes are saluting him and saluting him and saluting him and I'm going down there. I was only first time at sea and walking down alongside him there and he took me into his cabin and he said, "This is my cabin," he said, "and they are the papers I want. That's the papers there, you pick them up now and we'll go back down." I was number one. All the blokes were smiles all over their face. But, oh,
- 11:00 any, if ever I was on the bridge for little jobs, he'd make sure I done them, Barwick. But, he was, no one like him and that's a terrible way to go through life. I made some good friends with, like the officers because sometimes on duty at night time it was raining heavy, you cuddle up to one another and all to keep warm. And, wake up, you know. You'll see someone, sometimes you'll see the officers ashore
- 11:30 but you're not allowed to go into the normal bar, you must go into the, an officer must go into the saloon bar. And, Hackford, Hackford, he was the gunnery officer, but anyway, he called us in and said, "Have a drink." We said, "We're not supposed to be in here," and he said, "You're my guests." But that's the sort of bloke he was. He was a good bloke. And all this on deck of a night, and all this, you've got to,
- 12:00 rain, hail or shine. I got up between, a funnel, the funnel and a big float out of the weather and again I slid in under this spot there but, I must have dozed off. In the morning when I was going down for a shower, and taking a strip, and taking a towel in me hand to go down to the shower, they all start laughing at me, all the mates around me in the mess, I said, "What's wrong?".
- 12:30 He said, "Isn't your bum sore?" I said, "No, there's nothing wrong with me back side." And he said,

"Well put your hand..." and I put me hand round and, fair dinkum, there was a great big blister. I'd been in this one spot, you see, laying up against one spot and the heat it created this blister. I've still got the scar there. You want to look at it? No, it's true. You ask Norma. It's a beauty. And that was my scar. And everyone on board, and when I went down to sick bay, to get it, to get it fixed,

13:00 he got a big needle and he stuck in it then just got a pair of pliers and whipped the top skin off. Bit of iodine and away you go sailor. All these sort of things used to happen to you and you put up with that, being a seaman. Otherwise you could be sitting back in the nice warm engine room couldn't you? I enjoyed it, I enjoyed me mates.

13:30 **How did you find the hierarchy, the structure of power?**

I found that the permanent blokes, being permanent navy blokes, officers, they were pretty good. They were genuine sailors and had been to sea a long while and made lots of, lots of friends. I found that we used to call them the Rockies, which I was, a Rockie,

14:00 A reserve. They used to be smart buggers. You know, they got their first stripe up as a sub-lieutenant and they were trying to take power too quickly. Most of the, I'm not saying them all, but quite a lot of them, took this, that they were someone, you know, got one stripe up. But there were a lot of hard men,

14:30 it depends on the ship. Now on the [HMAS] Kanimbla it was, right, I never struck, the officers were terrific, they were like the boys. That's why she was a happy ship. And when the skipper left it, he'd been on it for three years, and when he left it he sat and he, we let him off at Bombay, he was a Pom [British] going back to RN [Royal Navy], he cried and he had tears and the other blokes dropping tears, you know. 'Cause they were his men, his crew and he didn't want to, didn't want to go

15:00 on it. And when you get that, they're genuine and all the crew, I never struck a bad one, and if a bloke got into trouble, the officer tried to get him out of trouble. Well, that's how I find, anyway, mostly, just the difference, the midshipmen, they got a rough time with the blokes when they're cleaning up top.

15:30 But you'll always find it, when you're living so close together you can't run away from them. You've got to stand and listen to them and take the punishment.

Was there any kind of psychological mistreatment?

In what way?

Kind of with punishment, like you said, take the punishment. Were there ever times when they went overboard?

16:00 Ah yes, yeah. There can be, again, I've got to go back to me old ship, The Adelaide, at first. She was like that, she was more of a training ship, she'd was going to make you or break you. And a lot of the blokes, the crew had been on it, they were old timers and they'd been brought back into the service to train us. But the Adelaide was a real, real toughie. But you appreciate

16:30 that later on, that they were tough with you because you can expect sometimes a little softie, or you can start calling an officer by his Christian name and, that's not, you know, that's not good. But, there is, well, it's class distinction and I don't know if they've got it today, but you must respect, and they did respect the officers because the officers, most of them were good to them.

17:00 On the Ad's tour, one of the officers nearly copped it there of a night. Someone dropped something from up on the bridge and just happened to be sitting there and this article dropped right at the time, you know, it wasn't meant to be there it was something that was going to the shunt. And it was bloke up the mast, someone that was supposed to be doing work up there in the crows nest. I don't know if he was looking for eggs or anything but he dropped, I got an idea it was a tin of something,

17:30 he dropped and it landed right near this, what's his name, never mind, dropped it right alongside him. You know after the war, I've jumped from one to the other but after the war, Jimmy James was a commander on the Kanimbla. He used to ask every year, he'd ask his sailors, his sailors were seamen, not the stokers, and no officers, to a party at his house with, to bring the wife and our children,

18:00 not only just me but all his seamen. And ever year, he done it for years until he died, poor old Jimmy, but that's the difference to me, he was one of the boys. And his wife and that, they were wonderful, wonderful. Dear little thing, you know, you appreciate, but you know, he was a good bloke. Good bloke, Jimmy. But you know, you played the game, you didn't make a, you know,

18:30 any fool of him. But he'd been in the navy all his life but he appreciated people, his sailors, sailors.

Did anyone ever lose it at sea, like?

Over the side?

No, just kind of mentally. Kind of, be out in the ocean and not be able to cope anymore?

Yeah, yeah, There's been many a time a blokes gone over sea

19:00 on his own accord. Many a time. Especially, the sea is very dangerous, and you've got to watch it. This is

what happens to a lot of people 'cause it hypnotises you. If you stand there and watch the ocean, and just the lull of the ocean and that, it's fatal. And any sailor will tell you that, it's fatal. Especially if you stand at the stern and it's just swaying up and down. And

19:30 I don't know how many but I know it must be a few. I know of two that just walked straight over the side, straight off. West Aussie bloke, and his wife got a hell of a shock because it just happened, just gets you like that. And Archie Price, another bloke, he didn't, we thought he did, but he didn't, he got off the ferry the wrong side and we found him floating, heading out to sea and there's his sailor's

20:00 hat sticking up above the water and he's singing out, "Help me, help me, help me. Kanimbla, don't go, don't go." And another bloke comes along in a little boat, picks him up, and he fell over the side. Everyone thought he was committing suicide but he fell over. But the old ferry come along. I'll never forget that. There was a big write-up in the Sydney paper on him. Chasing the ship, trying to get aboard. And we had to stop, you know

20:30 and just drift but we got him on board and did he get a cheer. We used to get up to some mischief.

And what's the feeling like when you're out in the middle of the ocean, miles from land?

You, I like it, I like it. It's a funny thing, you know, sailors are dying to get ashore, this is my feelings, get ashore but after a week they want to go back to sea. It's not a matter of cash

21:00 or anything, you know, they've had it, they just want to back to sea. And the sea can be a terrible enemy to you but the sea is beautiful at times when you got these calm seas. Just cruising along, night-time, guns crew, we had to sleep on the upper deck. Rain, hail, or shine. And there was nowhere to hang your hammock but we used to lay it on the deck and, of course, we've got our blanket and that in it

21:30 and roll it around us. And at night time we used to look back and the nights are so black, there's no light around, black, and all the stars seem to be around you, you know, sort of coming down on you. And at nights we'd be picking out different ones. And we were learning navigation by just laying there at nights until you started to drop off. You know, some people count sheep, some people count girls, we counted the stars. And it was so peaceful. But

22:00 getting back again to you saying, no, the sea, I'm not frightened of the sea and I can't swim. Sixty per cent of navy men can't swim. What's the good, if you go over the side and you're miles off the coast, how are you going to get there. So they don't, all they do in the navy, when I went through, you put all your gear on, it was all ducks, canvas ones, boots on, sea boots

22:30 and a Mae West [life jacket]. They've got Mae West 'cause you've got to blow them up, you see, and they're breast fit. I always say I'll have size seven but that's where Mae West got her name or they got the name of these things from Mae West. What did I get up to then? My mind was going back then.

Yeah, you were talking about

23:00 **not being able to swim and putting on Mae Wests?**

Yeah, that's right. Well they just get you up on the edge and push you in the water. You sink or swim. As long as you can tread water, they reckon you're safe but it'll get you to some bit of sullage or something floating in the water you can get hold of. But again, what's happened to our six hundred and twenty-four sailors, they floated, but where were they?

What were some of the procedures for

23:30 **going overboard in those days?**

Well, once you get the word, every man for himself. You know, you just get to a bit of raft, a bit of something, sometimes it depends if they get the lifeboats down quick enough. The low boats at sea in the war time hang over the sea and you just come along with your axe and just chop through the rope and jump over the side and get in her. If you're lucky. Floats, floats are the same

24:00 but, never thought about it, you never give it much thought that you couldn't swim. It's just that they used to say, like, do the best you can.

What about in a situation where an individual is swept off?

Happened a lot of times. You see, we, I think it's on there. I thought

24:30 I had that, that's the Kuttabul one.

Don't worry about it, just go off memory?

Again, it is quite common but you don't know someone's gone because you're in the dark and there's, 80 guns crew and they might be having a sleep and the bloke'll go down. There's blokes just pushed off the side, there's a,

25:00 quite often there's blokes been over the side. We don't know how many blokes were thrown overboard. There was a story there, true story, of, this was to do with two stokers. Anyway, a bloke came down off watch and he seen these two chaps, two stokers, having a little bit of nonsense. And this bloke come off

watch and he looks and he says, "Ah, ha.

- 25:30 I got youse, I got youse," you know, "I'll tell the boys." And with that. they grabbed him and they threw him over the, tried to throw him over the side. And he got hold of the gunnels, the edge of the deck and he's hanging by there and they're stabbing him. And he's screaming out, you know, "Help, help, help, help!" And the officer of the watch came running down to see what was,
- 26:00 this was at sea, see what was going on. And he shone his torch on this bloke that's over the side. And he made the two blokes drag this bloke in board. He died of thirteen stab wounds and when they got to Sydney, it was well known, that when in Sydney he was to be hung from the yard arm at dawn on a particular day. This is really true. And anyway,
- 26:30 the papers got a hold of it and when they got in, the papers had been going at it, the people said, "No, they are not to be hung from the yard arms. Their time must be spent in a prison." And, you know, that's one of the horrible things that can happen. But how many times does it happen? Jock Norton. Big, big, man. He was pushed over the side. And, you can't afford to
- 27:00 have enemies on board ship because something will happen sooner or later.

What nonsense had they been up to?

Touching their toes. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. There, you made me talk, I didn't want to say that. That's what they were doing. It's well known through the, that was on the Sydney. But it's happening, you know, they say sailors are a bit queer and everything else but they're not, you know.

- 27:30 They get up to, you know, at sea. But you know, sea life, you know, when I was on the DEMS before the Aurora, the tanker, they're in 24 hours, they're out again. And every place they go, they can't, it's in and out and you never get a chance to go to shore. But sometimes you don't want to, you feel, you know, it's safer to stay on board.

It's quite a hefty reaction those men had to

- 28:00 **this man?**

Yeah, Yeah. But ah, yes, it was as I say and the fleets were lining up to see. The navy were serious about hanging them, they were really serious. They should have done the job while we were at sea instead of coming in. But one bloke I know, one bloke in the prison over it, he dropped a, deliberate, dropped a shell on his foot. So they had to look after him and

- 28:30 he never got his foot fixed. It was always a club on it, the way it had grown because he smashed it. He was the bugler. He was a naughty boy, naughty boy.

How would they deal with disputes out at sea?

They have what they call regulating petty officers, or officer, whichever the case may be. And they,

- 29:00 everything from, they have what they call defaulters, defaulters, fall in. They are men who are under punishment and under punishment is stoppage of leave, that's how it was said. And, if it was a serious one it would go to a tribunal. But a normal everyday problem on it, you'd go and see your commanding officer in charge of your quarters, like a ship was divided
- 29:30 into four quarters, and you'd tell him what had happened, your case, and if he couldn't fix it then it goes in front of the commanding officer who in turn says, no it's too big for him, it's got to go to the captain. And then the captain will make a decision if he can handle it on board or if it's got to naval headquarters and be tried, tried through the navy.

What about

- 30:00 **what kind of practical jokes would happen on board?**

Gee whizz. Practical jokes, yes, yeah, I'll tell you about myself now. When I first joined the ship and the PO of the deck, the quarter I was in, forecastle, where I was quartered, or the quarter deck, and he said, "Dawson," you even get the Michael Jarver Dawson sometimes, "listen.

- 30:30 Grab a bucket out of the locker there will you, and go down and see the chief down in the engine room and ask him, tell him you're going to make smoke shortly and will he give you a bucket of smoke. Go on, away you go, on the double." And away I'd go down to the bloody engine room. And I told the chief, he said, "Stick around, I'll get you some in a moment. I'll get you some but don't go away." And anyway, away he went, he,
- 31:00 he never come back and I was standing there saying to one of the blokes, I said, "Well where's the chief gone." He said, "He's gone off watch." I said, "I've got to get a bucket of smoke." He said, "Listen mate, you've been had but don't let it worry you." But, darn, not long later, I get caught for putting green oil in the starboard lamp. He sent me down for oil for the
- 31:30 starboard lamp. And other times in gunnery, go down and pick up a gun and take it around to so and so, he wants it. You're walking all around the ship with this gun on your shoulder and they do these things

and they get away with it. I was standing there with this bottle of oil to go in the lamp and they don't run by oil do they, they're all run off electricity. What else

32:00 was I caught with. I just can't think of anything. But all jokes. The blokes that lay there of a night and they'd be thinking. I've got little stories, I've got a stack of them in me, in me drawer inside. Some of our reunions and that I read some of these little stories out. "Mary was a servant's girl, she lived down Flinders Lane," and it goes on and on and on but

32:30 I'd better stop there.

Why?

Well, if you want to hear it, it was "Mary, poor simple Mary." Oh Christ, I had it just a while ago.

\n[Verse follows]\n "Poor simple Mary was a servant girl; she lived down Flinders Lane,\n Her mistress was so kind to her, her master was the same.\n

33:00 One night she met a sailor, invited him for tea,\n

And that was the beginning of all this mystery.\n He asked her for a nightcap, no.\n Poor simple Mary, thinking it no harm,\n Got into bed beside him to keep his tummy warm.\n How early in the morning, before the house awake,\n He took from his pocket a dirty five pound note,\n Saying take this my darling for the damage I have done,\n For soon you'll have a daughter, or a son.\n

33:30 If it be a daughter, bounce it on your knee,\n

If it be a sailor, send that sailor out to sea." \n

And that's the little sort of ditties they go on. But that's a clean one, you can tell that at parties. But you do, you sit in a ring, you sit in a ring like this. You know, nothing to do, and you've got to tell a little story and I'll go from, from one

34:00 it's a major for instance, what was it, I forget most of them now. But they sit in a circle and each one's got to say a part of a joke and, I'll get it in a minute, it was quite all right too.

34:30 I've lost it but, it goes on and each one he says something like Jo, Jo, and the bloke has got to fill it up, something else until you fill it up, a story and it goes around and some are quite clever and some are quite funny. But it's just in the spur of the moment you've got to think and that and it keeps the old mind working. And the officers are up on the bridge and that, all looking down, and they all started to get in on the act, you know, of it.

35:00 They're simple things. But you're ready all the time, your mind's ready in case something, you rely on your look outs because in those days we didn't have radar system, there's no radar system. It's all done by the eyes and you couldn't pick up, like today, they can send out off, or even I think, I think they started to get it in '43. I know the first one on the Westralia, the aerial they put up was a coat hanger, they got an old wire coat hanger

35:30 and they got it up there and they used to have to wind down below and wind it around so that the coat hanger would pick up any disturbance. Then they just started to get the good stuff in.

What kind of things would you talk about with your mates on board?

Oh, just generally, if you'd been out, or you ran into so and so you'd served on the last ship with, and he's going all right and

36:00 things at home. You looked forward so much to your letters from home. The little parcels you used to get from home, you looked forward to that. 'Cause they sit there, you watch 'MASH' [American television series set in the Korean War], they you sit there, they act the fool a bit but you look for the letters and you talk to your mate about, you know, your sisters going well and Julie's going to have a baby. 'Cause when you're ashore and your in your home town you always take, and your mate's not billeted in that town, you always take him with you when you go home. And they gradually get on

36:30 I got a, what's the chap up there? My mess boy, or the gunner's mess boy, when I was in DEMS, that looked after us. He was fifteen when he went to sea. In the merchant navy, some ships will take them. And his job was just to look after the gunners. Look after them, make sure they're fed and their clothing and everything is tops, got to be tops and when I left that particular ship, since he got eighteen, he went and joined the navy. And

37:00 many, many, many years later I ran into him. He'd been trying to find me, where I was. 'Cause I used to take him with me when I was going up on deck of a night and talk to him about the things. And he came from Melbourne which was another big thing and, anyway, he'd been through a lot since then in the police force and everything else. But he still writes to me, every month I get a letter from him. And there's another chappie up here, comes up from Melbourne every year

37:30 who first joined the navy with me. And they're still mates, you know, still talk to one another. Talk about the times and things like this. How's so and so, and you get to know their wives, and we used to have a

lot of barbecues and things like that up here and the ones that were on the same ships and that, we'd get together, and the women down at Twin Town and just sit around have a couple of beers and a few laughs

38:00 on it. And you do, you think of things as you go along and you think, Jesus. My wife's often heard me, seen me sitting there smiling. She says, "What are you up to?" I say, "Oh, just sitting here thinking of something." She says, "You and the bloody navy." You know, something happens and it just clicks that you know that, a fun time and wonder where they are.

Tape 5

00:43 **I just want to, after you got to New Zealand with the Adelaide, where did you head for after that?**

To Western Australia. We picked up the convoy off of Tasmania and went through from there. The convoy came

01:00 down from Sydney, out of Melbourne, and on its way across to the Indian Ocean.

How does a convoy of ships work. Can you describe that to me?

A convoy of ships. Well, depending on the size of the convoy, it'll go from one or two, it can go up to fifty or more and the, and when they were

01:30 at the Philippines, the ships there that stood by to invade the Philippines, I don't know how many was there, there was hundreds there. But in, mostly normal convoys carry maybe thirty ships and there are ships that are left out of convoys, like tankers and dangerous loads and things like that, are kept away

02:00 from the convoys. They've got to find their own way. They've got a better chance because like, on convoys you get picked up very easily by submarines or other ships because a little trickle of smoke will come out of it. We brought, again with convoys, we brought the people out of Singapore when Singapore was taken by the Japanese and the people got out earlier and met the convoy, some how to be towed out because they were

02:30 under repairs. And the convoy again, there's fast ships and slow ships, but when you can't hold them together too long, or let them scatter too long but there wasn't enough ships sometimes to look after the convoys. And this is why we lost so many up, up on the western coast here. But a lot depends, we had the one we brought in to get the people out of there, there was

03:00 a ship, it was an American ship which had now joined up with us, a big cruiser, a lovely ship. It was getting too slow, we were getting in dangerous waters with the slow ones so we said to the Yanks, well you take a group that's the fast ones heading for Melbourne and we'll take the balance, we'll just plod along and we'll go to Western Australia. Which we did, we dropped them off at Western Australia. Then back up into the Isles again.

03:30 **Where were you when you heard the news that Singapore had fallen?**

Singapore. Let me see. Oh crikey, I should know that. When it did fall, I was in Ceylon and we got into it pretty quickly to get the ships out of the way.

04:00 Well, that's where I first heard, it was in Ceylon, where we, because that was sort of our station, Bombay, Ceylon which was known to those, then it was Sri Lanka, something or the other. But anyway, that's where we were stationed and we'd get a couple of days break there, then off again.

04:30 **So tell me about going into Singapore?**

Well, we couldn't get right in, we had to wait until they got out a bit from the harbour. And they, a lot were coming out on their own steam. You wouldn't have got in there if you'd tried to get in on your own because, going on all reports of people who were there, it just went mad. People just pushing and shoving and trying to get on. The army blokes, most of them done the right thing, they stayed behind but there were a lot of them

05:00 Didn't, push their way and forced themselves on board.

Was it a shock when you heard?

It was, it was. Because we couldn't, we were not supposed to be able to, or Singapore wasn't supposed to get it because all the guns, all the big heavy guns were all there to defend it. What would happen, what mistake did they make? What would you say, what

05:30 mistake they would make. All their big guns are pointing out to sea. They didn't worry about what was behind them or at the side of them. They didn't expect the Japs [Japanese] to come in the way they did, well, on push bikes. We lost a lot of men in there because they only had their Vickers and Lewis guns to fight with and the Japanese were bringing in decent sized weapons and

- 06:00 they just, you know, they had no guns, big guns in there to defend them. And here today you see a lot of these guns, it was incredible. Nothing would, definitely, no, they'd never get taken, Singapore, and yet it got taken all right because, you know, they just come through, they didn't worry, a lot of them were on push bikes coming along the road. And the Aussies [Australians] were the
- 06:30 last to get out of there. They stuck around and they worked hard because they were taken then. The whole of the 8th Division. That was the army division from Australia. But, they had a bad time, the lot of them. But we would never have got in but we waited outside and we were able to hold them together and, you know, we just had to take our time but the Yanks didn't, they wanted to get moving.

07:00 I don't know how many ships were in it all together, or how many got out.

Did you see any action with the Japanese on the Adelaide?

Well, I seen, whilst I was on the Adelaide, there was the action in Sydney and Newcastle and I was caught up here with that. We just seemed to be on the skim of things all the time with

- 07:30 with the action. Well, say, Singapore or that alone, most of the things we had, we were running close and we got out and took people with us before most of these. Darwin, for instance, we got out of there. They were hitting Thursday Island but they hadn't reached Darwin but, Darwin got wiped out and all the big ships and
- 08:00 things like that. I got, I took photos there of the day, last day that was, of the post office and the pub. That night, or morning, morning it was, they were all blown to pieces. I managed to get a few photos, not so much of afterwards, but the day before they hit, we got it. .
- 08:30 What else, the Darwin, well, they brought in, as I said, they brought in 62 bombing raids there. Suva, in Rabaul, we got in there. Where else? Well I didn't do the Persian Gulf one, on the Kanimbla, that was done before my time
- 09:00 No, that's about all I can remember on there.

So what other places did you visit with the Adelaide?

Adelaide, well, we were kept pretty busy. She went, she was working very hard, especially when the Japs came in on the 7th December. We were all over the place trying to, the first thing we had to try to round up as many of the Japanese

- 09:30 that were around as we could. And they were, you know, we don't know if they were laying mines or anything. So we had to get rid of them and we caught as many as we could and they got locked up. We had a skirmish there in Timor, but that wasn't much, the boys had got caught afterwards.
- 10:00 They created a lot of them but Ambon was getting to be a hot shot. But we had so many things and getting the women out of Rabaul, getting the women and the children out of Rabaul.

Can you tell me about that?

Well, it was so quick, they, when it came, because the Japs were moving in fast. They were first at the Solomons and we went and got them out of the Solomons, we brought in the convoys back to Australia to

- 10:30 each, some went to Sydney and some went to Melbourne and then there was, to get this, pick up this, it was a big early day passenger ship and it got all the people because they knew the Japs were on their doorstep, which they were. But they got a pretty bad time but all the women and children we got out of there. A little baby was born on board and we named it after the ship, I never forget that.
- 11:00 I can't remember the name of the ship but we named it after the ship, born on board. Finschhafen, well, we followed the, as much as far as we could go up, around Finschhafen and things like this but all the time you could hear the noise in the background, especially the boys who went up the Kokoda Trail and that, you could hear, in the distance you could hear the thumps, thumps, thumps and the guns crackling along. But,
- 11:30 we didn't do much firing from ship to shore. That wasn't our job. It was to let the army do their job without interference. Later on, it became this way to work together that the navy went in first and done all their bombardment, then it was followed up by the troops. Things have changed. But Australia, again, it didn't have enough ships right to the end. They were getting, they didn't have enough ships.
- 12:00 Most of them were over in Europe anyway, Middle East. And they didn't get home, a lot of them didn't get home until '43. They were stationed there. The army too, we wanted army back here because it would have went under. But they always said that they were saving, saving Australia because they need it and they missed out.
- 12:30 Instead of going to Pearl Harbor they could have walked into Australia because there was no one home. Just could have walked in the back way through Brisbane or that. Which it did, it didn't come in but it was, we had a line, the Brisbane line. From Brisbane right across to the border of Queensland, I don't know if you knew that, and they were getting all the women and children out.

- 13:00 And whilst they were doing it, they got those raids and took, I don't know how many, but they took most of the women out as they could. It really copped it. The other was Samoa, well that was, that was pretty hectic. That's where the Yanks, you see, they got wiped out of there. And Samoa and Honiara,
- 13:30 and that's where there's trouble now again. But the Yanks, it amazed us really for the yanks to get kicked out. The Japs came in and the Americans had a far bigger force with them but they didn't have the equipment and the back up. And, of course, they're the ones we brought down, down south on it. And I've been through Suva.
- 14:00 Oh, I think I've told you and covered the one about the shelling of Vanuatu. About the coming into the port, and holding the Vichy French up. And, that was close, that was close that night,
- 14:30 or day it was. But, no, but it hadn't come fighting because I think the Vichy would have got a hiding that day. The Adelaide and the Aussie [Australia], were our main back up. But they, it was blowing up the town, you see. In war, that could be, it was a French, a French colony, Noumea, and the
- 15:00 Vichy is the nickname they got. But they didn't like us, and they still don't like us, the French. I don't know if you've ever been to Noumea but they don't like the Aussies that much. But it's the Aussies that got in there that saved them on it. But it's so close to our coastline, you know, and to have Vichy right on our doorstep.
- 15:30 **Can you tell me what a typical day on the Adelaide would have been like just when you weren't sort of in action or on a special...?**
- Just an ordinary, what, at sea, on shore?
- Yeah, can you walk what you'd do me through from the morning to the evening?**
- Well, you'd get up. All hands get up at dawn, an hour before dawn. We get up and we man our stations.
- 16:00 And then, after dawn has broken, everyone has settled down and we're sure there's all, count the convoy, the ships in the convoy if we were doing any convoy. And then duty watch stay on deck and the other half go to their tea, breakfast rather, they go to their breakfast and clean up their mess deck and clean up around them and take over from the ones that are on watch. And so that goes over. And
- 16:30 the ones that was on watch from say 8 o'clock until say 12 o'clock, they do all the work on the upper deck, all clean and polished, and then they've got the afternoon off, if they're not on duty, they've got the afternoon off to do their, what we call, dhobyng [washing], or read books or write letters and they take over again at, in first night watch that goes from 4 until 6,
- 17:00 only two hours until it breaks up and goes back to the four hour watch.
- Would you do a four-hour watch?**
- Four-hour watch?
- Yeah, how does that work through the night?**
- Well the clock runs every four hours, except the dogwatch, to break it up as two hour watches. So you do,
- 17:30 all your hours are done on a four hour basis. In harbour it's a bit different.
- How does it work in harbour?**
- Well, in harbour, there's no dogwatch. It just goes two on two off to go ashore. And if you're going ashore you get to, two liberty cards instead of one. So you've got, then you come back and you do your one and they have their two,
- 18:00 two day break.
- So when, when did you get the news that you were transferring to the Kanimbla?**
- On the night, I should remember that, the 31st, 31st, 32nd, of June, I think it was. I've got it all out there. It could be, and, it was the day after, it was probably about the 1st of
- 18:30 May, it might have been May. But anyway, it's while the subs, we were still working on the subs and that's when I got notice. And I think I slipped down and hit my head in enjoyment I think it was. But she was a good ship, I was happy to serve on her.
- Were you happy to leave the Adelaide?**
- No, I wasn't happy. I'd learned a lot. But, a
- 19:00 terrible lot in a short time but I wanted something different again, you see. And I was transferred for a tour and it was, it was quite different the type of operation we were doing like, as I said, we were doing, sort of, setting ourselves up as decoys and checking different ships out to see if we'd got the right ones,

that they haven't got the right signals and this is what happened to

19:30 the Sydney, you know, she ran, you know, this other ship, the German ship was too good for her. Her seamanship was too good, and it was cunning and they, that ship had everything, torpedos it had everything a big battleship would have and you didn't know, it was all submerged. And they were about from here to the corner from one another and the Sydney should never let it do that.

20:00 But they've done it and it was history again.

When you said you were decoys, can you explain what that is?

A decoy is, you camouflage your ship. It's all changed now, like when I first went on it but the idea was, where your guns and that crew, we put up false walls of canvas and got a toggle if you were going into action you'd

20:30 pull that toggle and there are these big guns. And on the Kanimbla there were five of them. And also then you've got your anti-aircraft guns, then you've got all your light ack ack guns but these were all covered and the German was too, you see, and we kept on, I'm only repeating what I read and am told, and they were getting in closer

21:00 and the Sydney was signalling, you know, tell me who you are, tell me, identify yourself and let's keep this up. And of course it's radiating also to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] in Western Australia but they let the team down. Of course, there was never any love between the air force and the navy at times. But anyway, I've lost where I got to then.

21:30 **About being a decoy?**

Oh, right, I'm sorry. And it just sort of come around, and again, it should have, steaming like that to each other was wrong. And this bloke here, our German friend, he just let her go, and the Sydney should have been coming in this way but then she turned around like this and the torpedos went into the water. They were already under

22:00 the water, you can't see it, didn't know it. They just pressed the button and that's what got the Sydney in the first place and then they hammered the dickens out of one another. But where did all my brave men go? But again that's, that was the Kormoran, that was, you know, just an ordinary freighter but millions spent on her making a battleship out of her, may as well say,

22:30 because she had everything.

So why would you hide the guns?

So they wouldn't know we were a raider, we were supposed to be just a cruise ship on our own, we had no back up, and we were on our own. And they'd say, let's just get in closer and closer to the ships and if we got to put them down, we put them down. Like

23:00 that day, the one that we were following, the supply ship, the Adelaide came out and got her. We'd been chasing her for five weeks. Going up and down because the ocean's a big place. We didn't have helicopters and that in those days to go out and look for these players and let you know. It would have been easy. This German raider and the other one that was in the battle, it used to sit just off the seaway

23:30 at Fremantle and listen to the music and that. They were lit up, or dimly lit, and they could hear the dances and the music and the captain was telling them in this interview, it was nice and relaxing, he said. And quite a few nights, I see the Japanese in our harbour here, up the coast, they used to go hiding in all the little coves for an overnight to charge their batteries. People used to hear them

24:00 buzzing, their batteries charging. And the fuel used to be brought in by subs, put into these little caves and there's a little supply depot there, you know, they helped themselves. But they got away with it. And, the midget submarines, on these big ships, they'd bring them in, the big submarines would bring two more with them.

24:30 And they've got aircraft on board with them too and so, you know, they had brains. And, again, we found it hard to back but, you know, things change.

So when you heard the news you were going to the Kanimbla you were quite excited?

Yes. The skipper of the ship, you see. I had a turban on me head where

25:00 you know, I had the stitches in because I only just had it done that morning and anyway, I was just coming to and they told me that I was off to join the Kanimbla and a couple of me other mates, close mates, was on it too. But everything was good on there and, happy, and no arguments.

Why?

25:30 They knew what they were doing because they were professionals, the blokes on it. But they'd been on it since '39 at battle areas. But, it was a break, I'd say, it was a break. The discipline on the Adelaide was very, very strong and there were some nasty people on board that I wasn't unhappy about leaving.

What kind of a ship was the Kanimbla?

She was, what,

- 26:00 type of ship? She had been a passenger ship and converted into what we call an AMC, an Armed Merchant Cruiser. She, I'll get it. But as a ship it was a good ship, spotlessly clean, knew what we was doing, experienced crews on board
- 26:30 and they accepted you. And we used to have a lot of laughs, create our own little concerts on board and act the fool to break the monotony. Crossing the line, crossing the line and all that but we kept, we kept ourselves busy because once you get down in the dumps and things like this and, when is it going to happen, and you get a bit of a low. Especially if you've been to sea for a while. They're the types that generally
- 27:00 just walk over the side. A lot of them think they got, you know, they can walk on water but they're not, they've got holes in their feet.

What's crossing the line?

Crossing the line. It's where we got circumference of the earth, split into two, you've got a line, an imaginary line, well around the world, it divides two, two areas,

- 27:30 they've got a name for it, but every time they go over that you feel the bump going over it, you know, well that's what they used to tell us. That chappie I showed you a photograph of, the big chief with the big moustache. He was our King Neptune and he took the part. We made all the gear, made all the gear that we used for Crossing the Line and we had a lot of fun.

Can you tell me what you did?

- 28:00 Well, they had the bears, the bears were the ones that goes out and gets people and brings him to the King and Queen. But they were, the King and Queen are terrific the guy that took the part of the Queen, he was a beautiful looking woman. Laurie, a lovely fellow he died at a young age, nice bloke, very terrific. But, yeah, we had bears
- 28:30 and then they'd call out your name and you had to go up, if you hadn't been christened you'd go up and you'd get christened. Generally, they'd, the skipper and all, he was in it, and he had to be a seaman that day, the skipper, Adamson, and he, anyway, he had to get dressed up in a sailor's gear as an ordinary bloke. And the bloke that was taking his place would be the youngest boy on the ship,
- 29:00 used to have to take control, wore the captain's gear and everything and he was in control for the watch. But they'd go up the mast and they'd go up the mast after you and they'd be tossing water all over you and grease all over you and, oh Christ. They'd go mad but everyone has a laugh and a joke. And then you get the nice certificate, I've got mine somewhere in amongst me gear but, just to say that you had crossed the line.
- 29:30 But they're the little things, you know, that help to make life living. If I hadn't got married I probably would have stayed on in the navy and that because the blokes were good and I thought, Oh, no, I'll get out and get into something before it's too late.

What kind of concerts would you put on and that sort of thing?

Oh, some blokes played mouth organs, some blokes would have

- 30:00 tins on the drums and we'd just sit up on the upper deck and when we were in no problems, but if we are we're right alongside all our equipment but there was all sorts of - wrestling, wrestling was a good one. And boxing, we had boxing tournaments. Deck hockey. Oh, I used to make off for the... gym work was always good, we'd always go in there as much as you can, they had a good set
- 30:30 up in the gym. And, you can't have sing songs, big sing songs. If you have it, you keep it down a bit because people over the horizon could hear you. They could hear these - in lots of cases on ships they've had, we had too here, a Scotsman and you'll often find they've got their bagpipes and they'll get right, especially coming into harbour, they get right up on the bridge and there's this, or on the gun turret
- 31:00 and there's this piper piping away. But the convoys right out at sea could hear this piper, the pipes translating across the ocean.

Is that a tradition, I've heard about that before having a piper?

A lot of ships, yes, McElrays had one because it belonged to a Scottish company in the early piece. It belonged to McElray and McKechran. And we were at times under the Royal Navy

- 31:30 because of this and things changed around and Kanimbla became an HMAS and the, again, all these ships with these names, a list of them, as all McElrays and everything else and they do have their pipers. Oh, all sorts of chanters and mouth organs and banjos and the old squeeze box and we used to
- 32:00 make up a bit of fun, a bit of fun. And when we came into places, different places around the islands and that, we got a night ashore, there was always concerts ashore somewhere that you'd go and join in and

have a bit of fun, hold hands and all that.

What did you do in that off time that you had when you were still on the ship though when you were at sea?

Well, if you got your time off, the first couple of hours of your watch,

- 32:30 you'd clean up, then the afternoon, if everything's clean you're getting ready to go on watch again. So you might have an hour break, or lunch or whatever the case may be and you clean up and then you go on deck and take over from that watch and he comes down and does it for you. It's only a four-hour watch and you've got to go in to them and their four hour watch. And then what you call, you go into night clothing and you
- 33:00 take your collar off, it's to do with respect for Nelson, and you take your collar off and you don't have a collar and that's the watch of a night. But the collar, you know, it just sorts of takes and ties it around your waist. But, well, as I say, everyone, depending on the time you're up and out on deck.
- 33:30 Or, they might take a pack of cards, the blokes on watch and sitting around the gun, a pack of cards or we might have a game of bingo or, all these little things we play. But you're not allowed, no money is to take place on the upper deck. Of course, I told you about the cockroaches, they're another story. I didn't have any named after me but we had a lot of fun screaming at them. It breaks the monotony, you've got to break the monotony. Blokes get into trouble if they
- 34:00 don't, if they just stick at things, it's the monotony of it.

Where was the first place that you went with the Kanimbla?

First place? We left here and then we went our first stop was Ceylon. That was to be our station. We operated around Ceylon, Bombay, all in around that particular area. And India, spent a lot of time in and out of India and

- 34:30 if we hear of anything - we got people like stationed in and around Fremantle and that and in the middle, and we were up the top end if anything was going to happen around the top end. And, well, it did, a lot of ships went down up around there. And the Japs were pretty strong in there then. They got away with everything until, you know, early '45 it caught up with them.
- 35:00 **What did you see of the general area around Ceylon. Did you get much shore leave?**
- Yes we did but you didn't want to go ashore there after a while. Although, we made friends with the natives, we done very well, I had a police boy used to always wait for the ship to come back in because I'd always find him something to eat and I'd take it down to him and he was my mate.
- 35:30 But the people there were very poor. We used to give all our bread, save our bread for them and give them the bread or anything else we could afford. But the trouble was they used to fight one another to get it and it makes it awkward. At night-time, at night time you wouldn't want to be wandering around too much, you'd get knocked over and dropped. We stopped at a, used to go to a hostel, stop at a hostel but they,
- 36:00 while you were sleeping - and we woke up to our money belt, leaving our money belt on. They could come in during the night and take that money belt off you and you wouldn't know it. Wouldn't know it. So, we didn't know how we were going and stopping it when we were going to have a break, how we were going to overcome it, what were we going to do. They went right through you and you didn't even know it. And at night, it could become a little bit hectic.
- 36:30 The things I didn't like, like there were big black, like big black crows, much bigger and they were dirty and they used to go along and drop what they want to drop. Anywhere, all over cars and things. And of course then you've got to put up with the, with the bullocks and that. They've got the privileges, they're allowed to go where they like, in the main street, and no one's allowed to touch them, they're sacred, sacred animals.
- 37:00 But you get used to it. Rickshaws, we used to have rickshaw races. We put the rickshaw bloke in the rickshaw. Instead of him pulling us, we'd race the others, we'd be pulling him. Get a straight street or something, you'd have races, they didn't mind as long as we didn't hurt anyone but we'd belt up and down and relay, you know, change runners and
- 37:30 oh it was, you know, because we were kids. We were only kids, twenty, twenty-one. Today at twenty-one, you know, they know a lot of things but these things had gone through us since eighteen, you know, and up and again you make your own fun and a few other things, I suppose we used to get up to. But they
- 38:00 were all right. They were friendly people but until night-time when you just don't trust them. And this was in a church motel where we were too. I don't think they were called motels there, some sort of settlements. Clean, that's the main thing and we'd have a couple of beers or something but, no, it wasn't, you were better off on board because there was, no. We were able to buy one bottle of beer a day.
- 38:30 Monks. I've made up with a couple of monks, a mate and I used to visit them but they liked us very much and I don't know if you've ever been in a Buddhist Temple and, we become members I think of it,

but we used to go in and these two Buddhists, they were terrific because we used to take them a bit of food and they'd take us out, back there, where they have the village and, you know, they've got great big fireplaces and they've got a

39:00 big bit of stew cooking and you just scoop it on then you've got to eat it with your rice with your fingers. And that's where I got dysentery. I've picked up dysentery there because we shouldn't have been eating, although we did wash our hands before and after, but everyone else was digging in and it wasn't very nice. But these Buddhists were pretty kind they, we went up to the Buddhist Temple there,

39:30 there was only half a dozen there, but these two we took a liking to. And they used to show us a lot of things. But, and we'd hide a bottle just outside and, they said they didn't drink, you know, but we hid a little bottle round the side for them. But inside the temple was overbearing, the flowers, beautiful, magnificent orchids and everything else around this, inside this temple. But the smell, the perfume would get you down, it really rushes to you.

40:00 But we used to go in there when we were in the port and he'd take us around and talk to us and we'd leave our shoes outside, hoping they wouldn't get pinched, but they were nice people. And up around Trincomalee and all round that area. Bombay, people were a little bit different. And you got this lovely big temple at the end of it when you get off the ship. Oh, it's well known, well known,

40:30 India - big temple, it's got the big water race going right up to it. Oh, Taj Mahal. Taj Mahal. So that was the, all around there was quite nice. They hadn't been bombed much at all there. The few ships in Singapore were down, and also in Victoria docks in Bombay we had a bit of a hammering. But

41:00 most of them seemed to be getting along in their normal life.

We'll just change tapes there.

Tape 6

00:42 **So tell me about what was happening before the midget subs came into Sydney Harbour?**

Well, we were in for a break. I was on, as I said, the Adelaide then and

01:00 the harbour was filling up with ships coming in to get ready to go off and it was just peaceful and that, and I'd been off shore the night before and it was, I was duty that night. But everything was peaceful, it wasn't a full blackout, it wasn't a full blackout before it happened, it was sort of a brownie. They even had lights shining on Sydney Harbour, you know, and all these ships in there and

01:30 they said, oh, they won't come down this far, won't come down this far. And that was the belief and even the day after, the next morning, people didn't believe it, what they read in the paper. Didn't believe it. They said, we didn't hear a thing. And here we are blasting away with great shells to the Yanks and machine guns going off. Depth charges make a terrific noise and no one, of course they might have lived out of town a little, but they didn't know what was going on until they seen these silly looking sailors and that sitting out there

02:00 on a boat. Left for dead and the Chicago gone. And then of course, well, no one panicked. That I will say, it was a shock to everyone but no one panicked. We went about our work and when we did catch the Japs of course, I give them full praise, I praise them for being wonderful seamanship. But not that as to having the guts to do what they do. Because, here today it's just become the in thing but the Japanese they were all, all

02:30 officers that handled those crews but that was the beginning. But as I say, they knew then that they could get down that far.

Describe what you were doing exactly and walk us through?

I was in bed when it happened. It was at 10.15, all lights out on board were, at 10 o'clock. And we just, a lot of us just got into our hammock, and had a little chat, when the PO come down.

03:00 And I was in my pyjamas actually, and so were a lot of others because at sea we don't wear pyjamas we wear overalls in case we go into action. It's sissy anyway to wear pyjamas but Peter said, "Don't worry about your pyjamas lads, get up there." Half of us are running up there in our pyjamas. Well, I think they all had their pyjamas on, there might have been a few nudies but it was just

03:30 you know, it was just a bit of a shock Because we thought we were just going, again, you know we were just having practice. And everyone, even the PO, until we seen, we could at one stage see the periscope come up out of the water and they knew it was fair dinkum, and how they got in there, and they were brave. They got two of them,

04:00 the third one there, the fourth one got out. Even the people down Manly didn't wake up to what was going on. Probably a lot thought it was a practice run. And the ones who did, in my book, do a lot of

work was the little launches, you know, in the harbour, go round, customs blokes and things like this. They were auxiliary patrols.

- 04:30 They had depth charges, didn't have any main weapons but depth charges. One of them would go over there. They'd get a signal to go over there so they'd go and drop a depth charge. I wonder they didn't blow themselves up. I don't know if you've ever seen a depth charge go off but they make a hell of a mess. And to get away from it, you know, it's not a couple of seconds job to get away from where you drop it.
- 05:00 But all the little ships, where we were, the Kuttatubul was there and we were there. There was only a little pathway between them, us, the Adelaide and three other ships, an Indian ship and a couple of our own. But it was, it's still hard, you know, hard to ring a bell, especially when the guy going across waved to us when he was going across the day before.
- 05:30 Waving, waving around to us and everyone's waving him and we blamed the Yanks for it, it looked like a bit of a Yankie seaplane to me, fighter. But it was quick. I don't know if I've jumped but now that plane had to go out to sea, and we don't know if they sunk her but they'd have to pull her apart bit by bit because they've got sort of half a hangar on these big subs and they just slid them out,
- 06:00 and when they got out they could open it up because they'd slide it over the side, you see. But to get it back on, the only thing I can think of, they must have sunk it or something because... and again, people at the heads, you are a Sydney bloke aren't you? The heads, they seen the light flickering right out and they thought it was a fisherman. That's how slow we were,
- 06:30 and the Yanks too, no one took any notice of it. But that's what it was. It was signalling their pulling it apart and that because it was dusk when it was happening and it's just incredible. To see that, that's those, I forget the name of the headlands, they had big forts up on them at the heads there.

07:00 **And describe the plan again for us, the scene, what happened the day before?**

Oh well, you've got a piece out there if you want to look at it. They had just a plane, just coming in, probably. We thought it should have been challenged because it was coming up the harbour from sea. It was just coming up the harbour, gets up round the bridge, turns around like that and just comes down. You could see that man, plain as day, he had goggles on and that. I could still see him out there,

- 07:30 yeah, looking over the side, waving and that, and everyone else waving and that and it wasn't until it got bombed we knew what it was. It had no markings. And that's another thing, it should have been pulled up but it wasn't. But it was. I think everybody's been laughing about it ever since because they were taken like that. But the Japs done the same thing in Melbourne. They flew over Melbourne one day.
- 08:00 They couldn't identify themselves, they were flying too high and there was lumps of shrapnel dropping in the street and everything. And Sydney, you've got Sydney, then Newcastle and South Sydney. I was up at Newcastle one, I didn't get to the others see but I was up at a shipmates up at his home, we went up for the weekend and they start bombing there. They were real fair dinkum bombs there, too, a few duds but we volunteered
- 08:30 to help with loading. They said, "We don't need you." And I said, "Well, we're not going down below." He said, "Go down into the dungeon and wait." And I said to the sergeant, "Oh, give us a break Sarg [Sergeant]," something like that, and he did. And we stayed up there and seen if we could give them a hand with the supplies.

And describe what you saw when you got on deck that night.

09:00 **Describe the scene for us?**

The night it happened. Well, it must have been, by the time they all knew something was on it was about midnight. And the chief, he was running around chasing the blokes up, because he'd been up on the upper deck and seen what was going on. And see, there's no rush or tearing or anything else, you see, another bloody dummy run,

- 09:30 that would be the norm [normal], that's what we used to call them, dummy runs. And he says, you know, in harbour this is different. And then the chief starts screaming at us. And of course when we got on the bridge we could see there was something going on and that's when he stuck me up on the bridge, up on the Vickers up there, out of the way, and told me to go bang anything I could see. Jeez, I would have been in trouble. Because everyone was having a go at something and you didn't know what was going on.
- 10:00 You're frightened of hitting someone on it because when your light shells, like the Oerlikons and things like this, they would just skip along the water too at times if you were at a low angle and they could hit anything. God knows what was beyond down there that night. Rose Bay that was pretty hectic out there, too, getting ashore.

10:30 **What about when you said you saw a periscope or something?**

Yeah, yeah. We were, what was next to us? Oh there was corvettes and that. But we were poked right

out and you see it there going up the harbour. It was going, when I seen it, towards the Chicago. So it was heading in an easterly direction. Then it changed around on the

11:00 other side of the Chicago and it was up close. They could see it when it fired its torpedos. But they were too low, it went too low or it was side on and it missed it and one went one way, the other went the other way. One was all right, the other one wasn't any good though. Well we got around to it and marked it and it was just all opened up.

11:30 And it should have exploded. But there wouldn't have been anything there to explode because they run where there was no ships. It wasn't fun but, hitting Pinchgut [Fort Denison], the fort there with shells. But they did panic a little because they probably thought they were, they probably thought they were big subs. Big subs would have got in, they could have done as much damage and got out easy.

12:00 That's about all I think I can -

What about the sights and, what about the sounds, what were you hearing?

Ah, well you'd hear the boom of the big gun, then the crack of the light guns and when, of course, they hit the Kuttatubul it was a pretty decent bang there. They lost a lot of men that night. A lot of men.

12:30 **And what were you talking about with your other mates?**

The ship came alive really. Well we stayed up until dawn. We couldn't go anywhere or do anything but they knew there was more there and they didn't want to move. And of course then, I was, when it was daylight I went round looking for any damage around the place

13:00 or find anything off the ships or the submarines and then asked to go and give a hand on the pump. Pumping the air down to the diver. So I stuck there for an hour or so I suppose. Once they got up out of the water they didn't need us. And that's when I went back and they told me I was going on draft.

How did this diving crew work?

Well it's the big old

13:30 type of diving gear they had. You know, with the great big helmets on and rubber suits and weights around their waist and that's the sort of thing. And they couldn't carry their own air. We used to have to get on a pump and pump, keep the pump going, keep the oxygen down to them. And you'd do it for a while and someone gives you relief for a little while longer but you must keep that, the one strength just going down and down and just getting

14:00 enough. It wasn't that deep where they are, where they brought, Shark Island, where they brought it up, it wasn't that deep. You could see it by standing on the jetty there where they brought it up, you could see it sitting on the bottom. It had broken in half on it, it wasn't completely, but they did put one together and that and I think that's down at Canberra. I think they've got it down there,

14:30 assembled it.

And what did you think when you saw the mini sub?

Well it was, it was quite amazing to see it, the size of it and to see it, and see the damage it could have done. It didn't do it but it could have done. And the couple of poor blokes, you know, knocked about a bit by the shock of it but, well, once it was over you just sort of dropped it

15:00 and went on with something else.

Tell us about the ceremony for the Japanese.

I wasn't in Sydney when they did that but it was just a 'buried with honours'. I don't know

15:30 which cemetery they used, the one that's down Cowra way, the one down there or the one here. I'm not sure if they came back and took home the bodies or not because there was talk of it, letting them take their men home. But they gave them a complete naval funeral like they should have, and I don't know

16:00 just exactly where it was. There was one in Sydney I know but other one was at Cowra where the big breakout was.

O.K. Changing tack a bit but there's a story I've been told about one time where you saw a flight of aircraft?

Yeah, my day. Yeah, it was in Port Moresby it was the day

16:30 after Pearl Harbor being hit. And they detailed watches on the bridge for look out, they consisted of an officer, petty officer, a leading seaman and, there was another one there, leading seaman, and

17:00 probably myself. But anyway, I was only a kid, a kid there and I didn't know but they drummed with, up with the look out. But anyway, all these guys were on the bridge and I can still see it, and, I'm looking out with these great big binoculars that I can hardly hold up, looking out. And I seen, coming over the

mountain, between the two mountains actually, in a beautiful formation, beautiful, coming down from over the hill like this,

- 17:30 down towards us, looking straight, straight at us. And I didn't know how to speak. I pressed the button and I sing out, "Look out, starboard, look out." And they say, "What's the trouble? What's the trouble?" and I point, "Aircraft, aircraft, aircraft." And the officer on watch runs over, presses the button
- 18:00 and everyone's running, "Action stations, action stations." The buzzer's going and everything else. Anyway, while that's going on these beautiful birds, birds still came down at me, they started to flap their wings. I still laugh about that. I don't know what they were, pelicans or not, but their formation was so perfect. They just glided down over the town.
- 18:30 Oh, what a fool. Everyone laughed. Anyway, the old man came upon deck, he came up on dock and he said, "Officer of the watch, who gave that signal?" And the officer of the watch said, "Petty officer, petty officer who gave that, did you give that signal?" And he said, "No, it was leading seaman." And this is how it was going on, they were passing the buck. And they said,
- 19:00 "It was ordinary seaman Dawson gave that, said there was aircraft, pressed the button." So, you know, they weren't going to get stuck for it so the old man came over to me and he said, "What's your name son?" And he shook my hand and he said, "Good to know you're on the alert," and he said, "You know, keep up the good work." And he walked right past the others and he didn't even speak to them. Because they all wanted to pass the buck. If it had of been
- 19:30 planes and we knocked them down, the officer of the watch would have been a hero. But poor old Dawson, and I'm sure there was something watery trickling down my leg that day after the skipper spoke to me. But, no, that was a good one, that was quite funny that, quite funny. They all used to give me hell on the mess decks and that over that one. You know, I can still see those bloody aeroplanes. That was fun, that was fun.

20:00 **What was the general reaction to the news of Pearl Harbor?**

We were shocked. We were shocked. There was no cheering, rejoicing or that. Everyone was stunned, stunned, absolutely stunned and they were talking about it. It was church day, it was either the Sunday, and we were just sitting around and we couldn't make out, you know,

- 20:30 'cause a lot of us didn't know about Pearl until all of this brought it into our minds, to what it was, until we were fully explained what it was. But we didn't and what started to bring it home was we had to get out and clean up the places and go here and go there, and the radio was all we were getting out of what's happened, and the terrible, terrible thing. And, of course, when you had that poor bloke and that that was

- 21:00 going out to look for them.

Sorry, what was that?

The bloke on the Catalina that was with us. We knew something was wrong because of, we had a Catalina escort to go to New Guinea. We don't normally need an escort of any description but we had to take this Catalina, a brand spanking new one. I think there was about fourteen blokes

- 21:30 on board, all young blokes, eighteen to twenty I suppose. But they were with us until the day they hit Pearl, and he had a big conference on board the Adelaide that day and he said him and his men are going out after the Japs. And they loaded up the plane with bombs and everything else. As much as they could get on. And just at dusk they started to take off and they
- 22:00 couldn't rise. Couldn't get any higher. And they went right into the mountain. Every one of them went. Every one of them. And it was a shocking thing. And, there was just, you know, we started to realise then we were in war. But they were going to go out and look for them. They had enough, they could last for thirty-six hours, that's their limit. And that's not bad, you can go a long way on it. You can just, it had no, no
- 22:30 hope of coming home. I took photos of it and no one else had. I happened to have the camera on the deck and I took photos of it and it took a while for us to find his parents, the skipper's parents. And of course, they could lead it all on. But eventually I put them on to a boomer I got and to the Catalina Squadron or Association here on the coast and I sent them copies of the photos and everything and I got a nice letter
- 23:00 back inviting me to come over and tell them more about it but I didn't. Got a nice letter and everything else from them but it was never, ever mentioned. Never, ever mentioned. And of course they lost contact with the family but eventually they got photos and everything of it, and I've got his name and everything now. But that was a terrible, terrible thing.

23:30 **You said they had no hope of getting home anyway, what do you mean?**

Well, because they're going to run out of fuel and the strength of the Japanese fleet would knock them down in one go. They'd send up a couple of fighters and bring them home. But their main object was to bomb a ship. To land on a ship, and just bomb it. One big bomb. But they'd pick the biggest one out.

They'd get a hell of a shock seeing this lovely little Catalina plodding over the horizon looking for them.

24:00 Well I did it with a plane, we did it with a plane, why couldn't they have a go. They'd think it was a friendly plane coming at them.

It's a tough job?

Yeah, yeah. Well it was, we were kept pretty busy then for the next couple of months or more, around the clock sort of thing with one thing or another we'd have to race to. And she was quite capable, quite capable.

24:30 **It's a tough ask of the men in the Catalina, too?**

Yeah, you know, to say it's our duty to do this, to go and do, have a go at it, don't sit here and look at it. And if they had have used all their bombs in the bomb centre or even gone without them, they'd have had no hope of getting out because the fighters would have got to them, two or three of them and knocked them out of the sky. But they knew

25:00 what they were doing on it. They were heroes, no doubt about it. I don't know how many ships were in the Japanese fleet but there were destroyers and everything else. I might just go back, one little thing that you asked me before about Singapore. We lost some big ships, the [HMS] Hood, the [HMS] Repulse, the [HMS] Renown, battleships. There were five of them in the Sunda Straits just off of Singapore

25:30 And we lost the lot. And the Hood, the big, massive one. Two men, two men that's all that survived her. And she was a big battleship, she carried a big crew. But there was fellows on there that got caught. We were more frightened of China than what we were Japan at the time. China was tying up with the communists and various things and she kept her well, clean after that.

26:00 I just thought I'd mention that because that was very important.

You were more worried about China?

China, China was - they thought China was going to invade them, not Japan. And they were ready and waiting. The Yanks had a base set up in there later on. Can't remember the name of it now. All the squad, the fighter squadron had big sharks teeth and that done on their machine and things, but I can't remember.

26:30 That was before Japan came into it, they set up base up there, they wanted a base up there because the Chinese were getting restless.

Did you know any of the men on these ships?

On the?

Singapore Ships?

No, what, the...

Singapore based ships?

No, we didn't get time to

27:00 talk to them. We didn't get into Singapore much at all because it was always busy with troops and that. We picked up a, just off of there again, they diverted the ships into Bombay and Colombo.

O.K. On to the Kanimbla. You mentioned your captain before but not in detail. Tell us about the captain of the Kanimbla?

The captain. He was a gentleman really, he was a

27:30 Pom. He was not a big man. Loved his golf when we were in port. He used to play a lot of his golf. Never heard him with a cross word because with the Kanimbla you didn't get a cross word and things, they passed them by. But no, he was a gentleman really and he'd talk to you. He'd walk up and have a chat to you and introduce himself and things like that whereas a lot of captains don't. I was the lower deck, but anyway,

28:00 he used to walk around, and church service, when we'd line up he'd walk around us and waited and have a little chat about us, how we were going and everything else. And he was rapt in his crew because, as I say, at that time he'd been together with them for three years. And that's at sea for quite a lot of time. But no, he was, all I can say really, he was a top class man.

28:30 And he went home, when he went home to England to be made an Admiral he wanted to take the Kanimbla with him and all the crew. But they said, no, the Kanimbla is due for something else to be done. And anyway, he left us there. A very, very sad day. Very sad day. He spliced the main brace for us and had a shot of rum and that was, he was off. And he broke down, broke down.

29:00 **He spliced the main brace did he?**

Spliced the main brace, that's having a tot of rum. But as I say, he went home. Kanimbla was being sent back to pay off to be converted into a landing ship and he just went

29:30 sort of on his way. But he kept in touch with the association, he used to drop lines to Jimmy and pass it all on to the boys. And he would have liked to have been back on board because it was a moulded crew and they all knew their job and they knew where they were going and he could rely on them and that's very important. But they broke us all up

30:00 when we came home and 'cause they wanted experienced men on others. I was drafted to the Westralia, but the Kanimbla was my joy, she was a good ship. Not a big warship or anything else, but it done a marvellous job.

Tell us the story of the Gulf again?

Yeah, well they, they, she was again, Kanimbla was

30:30 stationed out of Bombay in this area and they got the alert that up at the top of the Persian Gulf, at Bandar Shapur was the name of it, this place, there was a lot of ships up there. Twenty two ships. Twenty-two ships and a railway line and a dry dock which is very, very important. But anyway, there was the [HMAS] Yarra and the Kanimbla, a couple of other ships loaded with

31:00 Indian troops and that. And they crept up there during the night, without any word, and a few of our blokes, they dressed up like Arabs and they went up first to line up the land. No one took any notice of them. They just chugged along [walked] like seamen. And below our decks the holds, with old fish and goods and that, you've got all these old sailors are cramped down in there. Because they're going to go up there, they'll shoot open and

31:30 out they'll come. But anyway, they got all the way up there, and Kanimbla's got up there. Then they had to, they had grappling hooks, like the old days, and they were throwing them over to pull themselves together. And everyone's asleep, everyone's asleep. And the crew, the gunners and that went down and they loaded their rifles and tell them to get out of their bed and line up on the deck. And one, a couple of them actually started to pull the plug out and started to

32:00 set fire to the ship which they eventually put out. A couple of them sunk but most of them got out and no one was hurt really. But it was just the surprise and, you know, spot on. And yet all that, the books have got the, but you never heard much about what she did, the Kanimbla did in Bandar Shapur. Because they didn't think a ship like this could perform like that and do it.

32:30 Because the two of them were fighting, the Yarra. And it wasn't long after that the Yarra got sunk. And the Kanimbla she still lived to tell the tale but, I was sad, well, I hadn't joined her earlier than what I did. But, never anyone in trouble on that ship. If you got into trouble the regulating PO, a terrific bloke, lived near me at home, in Melbourne, and he'd get them out of it.

33:00 He'd write it down but he'd say, yes, he done his punishment. It's hard to believe you can't have one grudge against any man that you got to know on board that ship. It was so close. We had good gunnery, five, six inch, and all the ack-ack stuff and the chaps were pretty good gunners.

33:30 **And did you feel a special bond with the physical, with the ship itself?**

You do. All the time. You do. It's a part of you, it's a part of you. It still is now with me at the meetings and that, and I still got involved very deeply with the association, the Naval Association. At the moment, I'm fighting for, I'm jumping off the wrong tram, I'm fighting for to stop them desecrating our flag.

34:00 I'm involved in that one at the moment. But no, she was, I don't think one member of the crew could come here and say that they were crook at all. Because we meet, well I used to meet in Melbourne every Anzac Day and then in between our reunions. But she took over, she was a different type of ship when she took over because she took the landing barges in. The three of them went into, into that.

34:30 **Then you were assigned to, when you finished with the Kanimbla?**

I went to the Westralia. I spent a bit of time on her, trained with her for a while then I just decided to volunteer to do the DEMS for a while, with the ships. You know, they just didn't have enough guns to go on these ships. But what intrigued me the most

35:00 was being able to do the trip, I thought would be to the second front in Europe. I was a bit keen about it and that was one reason I marched on. The Greek ship was, to me, I wouldn't have stayed on that too long because, but I finished up on five different DEM ships. Going from one to another. I could stay on the others. You get caught all the time because ships are going say, some ships are going up north

35:30 and that and are fully loaded and that and they need guns crews. They take them off the others that's come in and it'll be a couple of weeks before it's ready for sea again.

So how long were you on the Westralia?

Oh, it wasn't long, let me see, about three months. And I thought I'd take this on and they were asking for volunteers to do it and they pay you a shilling a day extra. That's not bad, it's seven shillings a week

- 36:00 I've got up me sleeve. It bought a deposit on a block of land back home. But we had nowhere to really spend our money except for when we did get ashore in some places. But you've got to go to the hostels, you get lovely food, you might have to spend five shillings or something on a good dinner, but that's all right. We got well fed on board, no one could complain.
- So tell us about the DEMS,**
- 36:30 **what that was and the training?**
- Yeah, well the DEMS, the DEMS, it's Defence Equipped Merchant Ships, that's where that comes from. And the training is to go back and do a higher course in gunnery, handling better, various guns and that and be allotted to a ship. We had a lot of work we had to do
- 37:00 to look after our aircraft, our ships and that because we didn't have the men to help us. We had to train people off the ships themselves and you get with a bunch of Greeks and you say, "Right, pick that shell up there." And they'd shake their heads because they weren't all Greeks, they were all nationalities. And how the Dickens can you ask one language, that's all. And I'd say,
- 37:30 "Bombs," and they'd, I'd say, "Bombs," and they were off like a shot, you know, they'd leave you, leave you. But a lot of them put it on though, but the master was very good and the skipper, the skipper was very good, and the first man. I arranged a wedding for one of he blokes on board, I can tell you that. I'll tell you about that poor bloke.
- 38:00 A couple of trips we did to the west on it, and I made pals with the chief mate, nice bloke, nice bloke. Didn't speak much English but I got around it. A good bloke. And he said to me when we were going around to the west, he said, "Bill, do you know how to propose to a girl? What you do?" He didn't say it in those exact words but that was what he was getting at. And I said, he said,
- 38:30 "I want to get married," he said, "to a girl in Fremantle I've known way back from before I came to this ship." And he said, "I want to propose to her and get married." So I said, "Oh crikey," and I got the other blokes and we sat down and we said, "How can we write a love letter?" And the stewardess was on the ship, she had some old 'Peg's Own', I think was the name of the little magazine. And it had all these love letters in it.
- 39:00 So I go through, we pick out a beauty he could understand, this love letter, and wrote it all in English and everything for him. And he asked me to read it and everything else and I read it all, and the skipper, and we thought it was a beautiful letter. So we post this letter, and he found out the date he was going to go into... wanted to
- 39:30 get married at that time the ship will be in Fremantle. And anyway, the letter comes back and she accepted this proposal, it was beautiful. Anyway, Norma and I, we weren't married then, in Western Australia, but anyway he asked us to the Greek wedding, the Greek wedding. I wasn't bad because I'd been getting immune to curries and all this sort of thing and black
- 40:00 coffee that you stand a spoon up in it, you know, and you've got to have a glass of water and you sip and sip. But anyway, we came, and all these rich cakes and everything and they're all patting me on the back. I'm the only dinky di [true] Aussie there I think and the only sailor. But anyway, we got crook, Norma and I, she was terribly crook, from the spiced up food. But you couldn't say no to them you know, you couldn't say, I don't like your food. But anyway, I left the Greek ship.
- Sorry Bill, I think we've run out of tape.**

Tape 7

- 00:45 **So can you tell me about how the merchant navy is structured and how it works?**
- Well as a what, as a naval guns crew, part of a naval guns crew or how I come to be on a Greek ship?
- 01:00 **The first one.**
- How I come to be on it, why I went on it, I thought it would be a change, not only a change, but I loved gunnery and by being on those ships I'd be my own skipper. Plus the loss of life came into it, but you've got to take it with the good or bad, you could be like the [HMAS] Sydney, the [HMAS] Perth or anything else.
- 01:30 Being on a Greek ship you've got just the same chance of coming through. But there's always at least three, three, four, five, six, if you went to the Queen Mary, 250 gunners on board. On the count that was taken, I don't know what the losses were with the DEMS gunners, but
- 02:00 there was only 1300 of us and we had the job to train our guns crews and put them to the best on the ships. And they mainly become gunners because there's always a layer and a trainer and the other, if there's only three, he gives the orders. And that was one of the things that I got pushed into, or went

into it and

- 02:30 I couldn't have stayed on the Greek one too long because it wasn't my style on there. They ate different but they were chatty and so everything on the ship becomes chatty. The only way we could wash ourselves on it, which we done daily, was by showering with a bucket. Which, you could still get clean by a bucket, I'm not saying that but there were no good facilities
- 03:00 on board. It had a six-berth cabin but they were like that, one that way and one that way and there was just enough, just a length or six or seven feet they might have been wide. And there was a little table, the size of that, just sitting inside the door, where we had to climb down off the gun deck and go down the mid ships to get our meals and bring them up and eat them.
- 03:30 And the meals weren't that good. My first day out at sea with them. For my breakfast, I went down to get my breakfast because, we stay out to keep our watches and everything, just as if we were on a warship, and he give me a dish. I took the lid off and there's, you know, first day out at sea and been and had a few beers the day before, and I open it
- 04:00 and there's a great bowl of fat with, with oil rather than fat, with two eggs, fried eggs and they both had big bloodshot eyes. And I just couldn't eat it because they're floating around in all this oil and that so it went over the side. But they didn't cook much of Australian type of flavour, it was all Greek or whatever the other people come from. And it didn't worry them.
- 04:30 You know, again, getting back to the chief mate, and the skipper, they were pretty good to us but it's what the shipping companies themselves decide. The ship itself wasn't old, it was fairly new but it just, you know, unhappy ship in my book because there would be so many fights. And they don't mess around, by taking knives, you know, they'll pull knives on you
- 05:00 or anything. But they treated us, most of them did treat us all right, the crew. They used to, they'd see us ashore, they'd take us up to the Greek Club or things like this. But it didn't give me the same pleasure as I'd been used to on the warships.

What sort of fights would they have?

Sort of?

Fights would they have?

Oh, you daren't go near them. One bloke come on board one day and

- 05:30 I was standing on the gang plank doing the watch to see that no one gets on the ship without permission. And anyway, they come back on, they're arguing and scrabbling and they get on the upper deck and this bloke pulls this great knife out of his side, he has round the belt. And, stupid me, they were in a bad mood too, stupid me, I walked over and took the knife off him. I've still got it somewhere at home amongst my gear. And he didn't know
- 06:00 that I'd taken it and he's looking for it. And I said, "You had it, you dropped it over the side," and I said, "You dropped it over the side." And he thought that's what happened. And, of course, they was fighting along the gunnels and that, oh he's taken to you there. But anyway, then I spotted this, the Aurora, that was about all I could tell you on the Aurora. That was Aurora. That means 'god speed'.
- 06:30 This was a big Norwegian tanker, a big one, and they told me as I was, I went on board to find out how the, you know, where were they off to, and was there any berths. And there was a big, great big cabin that they'd built, 'cause they were going to have a lot of gunners on there and then, I don't know how many they'd taken, a lovely big dining area they built for us.
- 07:00 Everything we wanted there, nice showers and everything they put on it because we were siting on top of high octane, that's aircraft fuel. He was going to give us, you know, look after us, but he did. You know, anything we wanted he'd see, he'd get it and he decked us out, our cabins. But we went to drill every day, and getting back to more like eight but there was a few of us on there. And done your watches just the same.
- 07:30 Didn't do any work, no work on the ship but it was, the watches had to be kept and maintenance of your equipment had to be looked after.

When you went from the Kanimbla or the Westralia to the Greek ship, first up, was there, can you sort of explain the difference of going from a warship, you know, an Australian Navy ship,

- 08:00 **was there a difference in the discipline?**

Couldn't compare them. Couldn't compare them. Well the navy ship is built on its own and its, you know, the equipment and that it's got which they didn't carry except the big ships, some of the big ships carried a lot of equipment. The [Queen] Mary, the Lizzy [slang for Queen Mary], Aquitania, all those, they were fairly well equipped and that but, see, radar didn't come into, we didn't see radar until

- 08:30 about 1943 on it. But the discipline, there was no discipline for us on the Greek ship or the Aurora or any merchant navy. See, they didn't have any hold over us although we come under their ruling but we

knew what we were doing and they never interfered. We went up and we said what we want and that and he got it. Because the skipper knew that we were there for the defence of his ship.

- 09:00 And he did, he found little things for us to do and that, so he could give us some extra pocket money because our bank book was back in Australia. We didn't carry it with us. And we'd got to go up to the navy, go up to the navy and get it, but he done all of them, the old man did a lot for us. Because the Norwegians, before they went into the ships and going on the merchant ships and that
- 09:30 they were all being trained by the merchant navy. You got used o it. The way that the slap-happy [undisciplined] ship is not a happy ship. But, no, he was good. We used to have our Sunday prayers if we wanted to, on board ship. The equipment, we had a lot of, a lot of equipment on board and
- 10:00 look after it and guns and everything else. Mainly because we were looking to go to the big do in England, you know, the second front, that's where we were going to go. But it didn't. I stuck with it for two gos, but the first trip going across the Pacific, about mid-way across, I woke up during the night with this terrible grinding noise and the whole ship started
- 10:30 to flood and everyone was awake by this time because there's no light, we can't put lights on and things at night. And, I said, "What the hell's happened? We've been hit by a torp." And we were all ready to abandon ship. Because if it goes, it'll go. And anyway, it stopped dead in the middle of the ocean. Anyway, our chief went up to the bridge to find out what was happening, and
- 11:00 a busted piston in the motor, and of course nothing, we had no power no light, no nothing. And they've got an auxiliary light down in the engine room but they had to watch what light they shed, but they worked for 48 hours I think it was, they worked to get this motor repaired. And we're just rolling, we're losing, no good dropping an anchor
- 11:30 because it would just be dragging along the ocean floor. We dropped it just to stop it a little bit but we're wandering and we can't start the motor until it's fixed. It was 48 hours and full credit to all the engine room blokes they never stopped.

What did you do for 48 hours?

Well, stayed at our guns and watched and waited until it was done and never left them.

- 12:00 **So you just sat at the gun?**

Just saw where we were and kept a look out.

Can you describe how those guns worked if you had been attacked what was the first thing you would have done?

Well, depleting of its aircraft or of its surface ships. Surface ships, well we'd go straight to the station of the gun allotted to us, either a 4 inch or a 6 inch, whatever the case may be, and then we've got our anti-aircraft guns

- 12:30 and then we've got just our ordinary small guns, Bofors guns. It depends on the size of the ship and what she's carrying, what armour she's going to have. But this is, well, the reason I wanted to get into the DEMS I got all this chance to be right up in the front line with them.

You mentioned your chief earlier. Was there a team of gunners and how was that structured?

- 13:00 Which one was that, I've got to get back on to that one?

You just mentioned that when the ship stopped that you, you said?

Well, up to see him. And he just told us what was wrong and what was happening and just tell the boys to settle down, we haven't been hit and just to stay at their stations.

Was there, how many gunners were on the ship with you?

Then there be about, about twelve. But we, we'd pick up, if we went to England

- 13:30 we'd pick up probably another, probably another thirty or forty gunners plus getting the crew to work on supplying the ammunition to us.

Was there someone in charge of these gunners, like a hierarchy amongst them?

Yes, there was a lieutenant, a Norwegian. The Greek, no, he didn't have any discipline or anything. The Aurora, or the Norwegian ship, a lieutenant, sometimes

- 14:00 they'll have, but generally it's a Norwegian Navy lieutenant you go to and he tells you what you're going to do, and what not. And if we want to talk and see the skipper we go through him. And some of the crews also have Norwegian gunners. We had one on the Tyan, we had half a dozen Norwegian, naval Norwegian gunners, and they sort of worked one part of the ship and we worked the other part of the ship.
- 14:30 And this kept everyone happy.

Back on, just to the Greek ship, you mentioned earlier, and can you tell me the full story of your twenty-first birthday on that ship?

I forgot all about that. Well, we was heading up the coast and, towards Newcastle. And, it was me twenty-first birthday

- 15:00 on the 22nd December and the old man heard about it, the skipper. The Chief told him I think, I told him and he gave me a bottle of ouzo and that and the boys were carrying on a bit, and there were a few other ships around us. I think we had a convoy of about six or seven ships. And I get on to some of this grappa, grappa they called it, grappa, home made red wine, he said, "This is for your birthday."
- 15:30 And he didn't tell me not to drink it, because we weren't allowed to drink at sea. But anyway, I had a couple of sips and a couple more sips. And I felt crook, really crook, not crook sick, but really funny, bad, what was in this drink. And anyway, it must have been late in the afternoon, anyway I'm running around doing stupid things and the Marlin gun was just there
- 16:00 along side, and the flag was just there, and I was having a hell of a good time. And I never missed many either. I put a hole through his flag. He got a hold of me, he didn't get a hold of me but his chief grabbed me and he said, "Come on you'd better come with us. I'm putting you in the brig, you'd better cool off" And he said, "The Navy's going to know about this, what am I going to tell them?" I said, "Well I don't know." And I didn't know too much because I just wanted to have a sleep.
- 16:30 Anyway, sure enough one of the leaders of the convoy rattled off a message, "What is happening on board the ship, why is that?" And he said, "Well, one of the machine guns broke its safety catch and it was swinging around like this and we had to get up to it very cautiously and put the pin in which had come out."
- 17:00 So, he accepted that, he accepted that. So the skipper gave me quite a talking down the next day and I said, "Well, you gave it to me chief. You gave it to me, you let me have it, didn't tell me what was in it." But oh, it was deadly, deadly.

Did you learn to speak any Greek on the ship?

- 17:30 (UNCLEAR - speaking Greek). 'Kalimera', that's an easy one for you to look at, 'kalimera', (UNCLEAR - speaking Greek), 'kalispera', afternoon and, what would you say, 'kalinikta', that's night. But I was taught some naughty words and it got me into trouble on that ship. They were telling me I could go up on the bridge, when you go up on the bridge
- 18:00 to check the guns on the bridge, just say, so and so and so to the skipper. And I said why? He said, "It's just like saying good morning," he said, "You just do that." I said, "All right, I'll be going up in a minute." And I seen blokes, you know he's calling blokes over like this, and they're just sitting there. And I walk up and I walk over to the gun and I look over to the skipper and I said what they taught me to say. And his face, his face, did it change colour.
- 18:30 And he sung out to the man there on watch, "Bring that hose over here and turn it on." And he washed me down from head to toe. And he said, "Do you know what you said?" And I said, "Only what I believe I've said." I said, "I thought I was saying good morning to you chief, sir." And he told me and he said - and all the crew, they're laughing, they think it's a big joke. And the old man's going crook at me, going on and you know, he had every right to.
- 19:00 But I was soaking wet because the hose had tossed me about and everything else. He was really upset, I don't blame him.

What had you said to him?

I won't say what I said to him. I don't want to know again.

Was it insulting?

It was, it was quite rude. Yeah. You see there's a big difference. The Norwegians, they don't swear much. The

- 19:30 worst they can say is, it's something, I can't remember the first word but it's, 'damn the black devil', which is the devil and that's one of the worst things they can say. If anyone says to you something far for the black devil. And that's naughty. And I learned
- 20:00 that much. It's got a couple of letters before it but I just can't remember them.

On, I guess, the Greek or the Norwegian ship, well firstly, could the Greeks speak much English?

Well they were all mixed. The skipper and the officer and one or two blokes on board, yes, a bit of broken English. But the others didn't want to learn anyway.

Was it hard to, how did you communicate day to day?

- 20:30 Tried to help but they weren't interested. You had to battle it out for yourself. And if you've got three

gunners on board you can do it, slowly but you can do it. It was an interesting job but I didn't enjoy it so much until I got into the good class.

Where were the other gunners from mostly?

Well the ones we had, well...the tanker

21:00 I was just telling you about, it was split up between Norwegian, English and Australian. The Norwegians, they lived in their own quarters and looked after themselves and, of course, they used to work part of ship as well. So, we didn't have much to do with them. Most of the Norwegians can speak fairly good English.

Did you get along with the British?

21:30 Let me see, I shouldn't say, yes, I shouldn't say, no. Because we had a few differences. I liked them and the fat, fat bloke, he was a bit lazy on it. We had a little bloke that used to be on my watch with me and we used to talk about things but they run down the Australians a bit too much.

22:00 And they can create arguments and when you've been a while at sea, sometimes you can create this bit of a hate session between them. And it got a bit willing a couple of times and we had to be told to cut it out because we had nothing else to do. And we got talking on little things and, Geordie, that's right, one was a Geordie, and

22:30 they come from about the middle of England somewhere. But the other one Cockney, and I can't remember all that they were. But I can see them with my eye but I can't remember their names.

Even with like all the language differences amongst those ships and stuff, is there something like a commonality of all sailors is there some sort of?

23:00 Well there's always been, the first thing to understand, what they're onto, you see, and doing. No, I've never sort of thought about it. Never thought about it.

What were the main places that you went on the Norwegian tanker?

Just about everywhere except I didn't get as far as England, but all down the Atlantic.

23:30 The Atlantic down to the southern Pacific through to Panama, up towards the Panama Canal, through there. Then we got into the lower Pacific. Right through there, Australia, all around Australia

24:00 many times. Then into the Indian Ocean again, down around Colombo and that. Then the Southern Ocean, that's right down south, into the Bight which was very cold and that down there. Except right up around - South Africa, I didn't get to South Africa but that particular line there, where the Atlantic runs right alongside, but we kept on one side. We avoided it

24:30 as much as we could because there was too much action going on around the area. If you had of been spotted by one of the bombers, you're gone. You see, they can only, the bombers, same as the submarines, they can only go so far, a certain distance before they've got to refuel and that so you just kept clear of that particular line. Most of the convoys, of course, they just won't have the tankers with them because of the danger of

25:00 the tanker giving them away if it gets hit.

Were you aware of that danger?

Oh yes, yes.

How often did you think about it?

I think the first time it was gone. It was a part of the job. You've got to take the feeling, you know, there's nothing you can do about it if you get hit. If you can get out of it, well and good, but it's a chance that you're going to take. And that's what they paid us a shilling a day for, that extra little bit.

25:30 **You mentioned before that you'd kind of swapped to the Norwegian ship because you were interested in seeing the second front?**

That's right.

Can you tell me about that?

Well, it was towards the, in England, they were getting prepared to build up all their stocks, their troops and everything else ready for the big push into Calais in France.

26:00 I think the Germans definitely knew it was coming but our job would have been to go out and meet the Fleet and go in behind, say the first wave maybe, and try and get ourselves up as close to the shore, or near there, as we can. Before we had left Curacao they would have, that's right over in the Caribbean, just the

26:30 first lot would go in, we'd be following up, and the idea was to... there was jetties there, if we could get alongside the jetties well and good, if we can't just beach the front of the tanker. So their tankers can come in, which would be trucks with big tanks on, would come in and syphon all the fuel out. And then we would probably go on back to England and across back to Australia and pick up more goods. But it didn't work that way and a big disappointment to me that,

27:00 and the rest of the crew because we volunteered especially for that, to do that job.

Why were you so keen?

Well, we wanted to be in the history of the front being conquered. Terrible lot of people lost their lives there but that's a gamble you've got to take. I don't pat myself on the back or anything but, but it is risky. You join and you join for the excitement in lots of things, to be in this,

27:30 and didn't want to be, you know, your mates are all going away and you're stuck at home. You had to be in it. But I was disappointed not going there. And I thought, will we go back for a second load, they might take us. But we couldn't do it because a lot of money went into preparing the ship. But we were just working for the Yanks at that stage and that's where I said, she was going to be laid up for a while and that's why I joined

28:00 another ship. And the others were British and Dutch.

On the Norwegian ship you mentioned that you didn't have to work?

We didn't have to work part of the ship, we had to work just our own equipment. You didn't go to scrubbing decks or anything like that, we didn't have to do that. We weren't sent to do that, we were there to man the guns. And

28:30 as I say, they used to do a lot of things for us in that respect. When we got to port they'd give us the job of being on guard duty at the gangway to watch who goes on and who goes off the craft.

So just during the days on the Norwegian ship you...?

We done our duties around the, well there'd be a watch on, a watch all the time, but while you're off watch you'd, we fitted up a bit of a gym, you'd do a bit of gym work.

29:00 On the tanker we'd run right around the big deck a few times. They said that we were all made, got a touch of the sun and all that. But time went quick, time went quick, because even 4 hours, you'd sit alongside your gun. On long trips it can be a bit boring because you haven't got enough action going.

Did you sometimes wish that you were seeing more action?

Yes, quite often.

29:30 I happened to be on ships that were dodging the issue all the time and plodding around and going elsewhere. And you kept away from the others. You'd take people into ports and, as quickly as you could unload you got out before trouble started, because it's different on sea than land. Because if a ship sinks you're a ship short plus crews. But

30:00 some of the destroyers, I wasn't a destroyer man, but destroyers they got into quite a lot of action. The big ships with big guns. The type of ship where we were, we weren't, except the Adelaide, we weren't a real fighting ship. We could put up a decent, like the Kanimbla did, put up a decent front but we weren't meant to be there. We were supposed to be...there's a lot of cases

30:30 taken place on something like that. Korea, for instance, the sailors bombarded the coast for the Aussies and because they didn't go ashore, they weren't recognised as being in that battle. One ship shot 240 shells one day and they reckon that they were outside the limit. That's how stupid we are on it. But I've been recognised for the

31:00 work that I did do, although you weren't in heavy battles every day and that. A few shots here and there, this was the one, you see, it was right on and chased the [USS] Cauldron's supply ship. We had to destroy that if we could but we spent five weeks looking for it, you see, and those are the sorts of things that happened. The Adelaide, or Westralia, the...

31:30 Well I was going to start from the top one. The Adelaide, we were in and out of places all the time dropping off troops and everything. We could hear what was going on but we wanted to get out. This was right through, we wanted, you know, to be here another day and we got them unloaded as quick as possible. Ta, ta, chaps, nice knowing you, I'll look your girlfriend up when I go home, or some stupid thing like this. And there's Darwin,

32:00 you see, we got out of Darwin. We wouldn't have survived. The troops wouldn't have survived if, by one day late but it was just right on, just right on. Rabaul, when we went to get the people out, we just got in and got out. It's like the Rats of Tobruk, they just creeped in at night and got out at night.

32:30 **I guess across all of the ships, on the shore leave, I mean you hadn't been on shore for a while, what sort of, I guess, high jinks and things would you get up to?**

You don't miss it after a while at all. Let me see, we used to like, you mean, like going ashore and

enjoying yourself?

- 33:00 Well, it's a funny thing but when we first step off. Maybe it might be about, if it's a normal day one would go off about 9, 10 o'clock. Go in for a walk and then we'll wander around and have a shore feed, just steak and egg and things like this, and enjoy it, and a couple more beers. And if we don't go a dance or social or something, we'll go back on board. Because, you know, even though its wartime
- 33:30 there's plenty of people there to make friends of, which we did in lots of cases. But, you know, a lot of us just, you know, we've been off about three hours anyway...and sometimes you'll give your pass, if it's a chap you know, your pass to go ashore, if it's his day off, and he can't, he's on the other watch, so you'll say, "Listen Harry, do you want to go home? I'll give you my pass and I'll do your work for you."
- 34:00 And that's how it used to work. You know, you don't have a big pocketful of money but you go off shore a couple of days and you've done the lot. You've had a feed, a drink, and you might have stayed overnight. They weren't very dear, but the bugs used to crawl all over you. I think I,
- 34:30 I don't know, but I spent, didn't have many breaks ashore was on the move all the time. It all came out all right in the end anyway.

You were seventeen when you joined up?

Just seventeen but I had to wait until I was eighteen until I signed my papers.

That's right. Can you tell me about ways that you, I guess, you might have grown up in the navy?

- 35:00 Yes, yes, twelve months in the navy and you were a different person, different person. You grew up. You grew up. It was amazing, when I first came home afterwards and people didn't realise the change it had made in me manners and the way I spoke and the respect I had. And it does, not only navy
- 35:30 but in all cases. Navy are very strict and always have been with their discipline and the Aussie digger, he likes his freedom. The air force blokes liked their. But discipline was always tough in the services, in the navy anyway.

So it was an improvement?

Oh 100%, 100%. I'd learned to talk a little bit better I think, and used to crack jokes a little bit more and

- 36:00 go dancing and things like this. And everyone said, what a difference, what a difference. And the women used to say to their daughters, "You go with that bloke Dawson, he's going to be a good thing later on in life."

I'll come back to that. But just while we were talking about shore leave before, was there much of a difference between when the navy

- 36:30 **would have shore leave to when the DEMS would have shore leave?**

No. As long as there's one of us on board in port, one on board, we can go ashore. That's the ruling, one man ashore to keep an eye on things in case there's any sabotage. And the rest can go ashore, like I say, one or two days if the ship is stopping in, that's ok, as long as they report to the skipper that they'll be going off and

- 37:00 permission to have two days off.

I guess, was there any difference between people's behaviour, between the navy or the DEMS behaviour?

No, no, the air force used to, we used to get a bit of trouble out of...but the navy and the army blokes, we picked like hell out of one another, but it doesn't mean any harm. We still do, if you go somewhere with a navy bloke but there's no ill feeling amongst anyone, we just have a few laughs.

- 37:30 **How about, say, when you went ashore with the Greeks.**

No, no, well we never, we met them ashore, when they've seen us and asked us, you know, to come with them and be their guest but you didn't see much of them. They used to head straight for the Greek Club and that would be it. You'd have to carry them home some nights and get them back and this is where the fighting starts. They get too much into them. Because if you're at sea for a

- 38:00 couple of months or something like this and haven't had a drink or something, it just goes to your head. Two pots, two big pots and you're on your ear. I used to be anyway. But that's how it is, that you don't, you're not used to it. It was good, nice beer. Cigarettes we used to have cigarettes at sea and we'd smoke in there. Otherwise, I would have taken them, 'cause you've got to because you're not a sailor unless you got these

- 38:30 cigarettes and that with you. Often get pulled up by girls, you know, got a cigarette to spare and everything else, you know.

How about going on shore with the Norwegians?

Again, oh yes, we could get in a lot of trouble with some of those Norwegians. Especially on the tanker – Luther. You know the story of Luther, big, strong, big bloke 6'3 and built like a giant. He was the gunners guardian, he reckoned, he was the chief engineer.

- 39:00 He was going to look after the gunners and he did, when we were ashore he went with us everywhere. And people were afraid to pick on us. But I never forget, we were at this place, crikey, in Curacao. We were up on the first floor of this place, a restAurant, and up top was a drinking place to have a drink and that. And there were waitresses and that going around. And anyway,
- 39:30 Luther, and Bluey, Bluey, red-headed bloke, anyway Bluey, a DEMS bloke and he had red, red hair and he had this great red beard there, great flaming beard. And him and Luther had their eyes on these couple of girls and start flirting with them. But in came their boyfriends with their knives. And they jumped
- 40:00 out of the first floor, into a car. There was a car sitting there with a canvas hood. And they both jumped out of the first floor on top of the canvas and they went like hell. And I thought we were going to cop it, I thought the rest of us, there was about another four, yeah four, gunners were still there. But Luther, he was protecting us and goes off on his own. We got on the ship but they came down they were on the wharf looking for them. Yeah, but they done nothing. They done nothing. But
- 40:30 maybe he could read their minds and see what they were thinking. But no, no, they were quite, that was funny. But that was a dry place and the Norwegians, no, the Dutch owned it, Curacao and Aruba, they were two Dutch stations. And they were pretty good to us. Big yankie base there, too, because of the oil and that there.
- 41:00 And we used to, every day, we'd do an hour gun drill with the yanks and the Dutch, the Dutch, a lot of Dutch army blokes there.

We'll just stop there and change tapes.

Tape 8

- 00:39 **Tell us about these places in the Carribean, what were your impressions?**

Well the Carribean, well it was very good there although it's in the middle of the Carribean and the Atlantic Ocean. And it was a dry, completely dry island.

- 01:00 It was off the coast of Peru, it was off the coast of Peru. There was two islands there we used to visit. Curacao and Aruba. And it was Dutch, the islands all through there, were Dutch. There was a lot of Dutch soldiers and a Dutch embassy there. And the Americans were also in there
- 01:30 in a big way. The place, the island itself, a lot of oil fields and that in there. They get a lot of oil and that out of there and it's good refined oil that they could refine it to the type of oil, fuel that they needed for aircraft. That was most important, that's why we went there to get it. But the second time, that's the first time of course, we were picking up the good stuff and going to go on to
- 02:00 England. What else can be happening there? They have lovely little donkey carts, with donkeys pulling them around with big barrels of water that they get off the ships, the water ships that bring them in. It's not a pretty place it's pretty barren. We got into, or didn't get into mischief. I was mentioning it to the girl, regarding
- 02:30 Luther, me big mate Luther, who looks after the gunners. He was a big Norwegian and no one could tackle him, but him and one of he gunners were getting a bit chased and they jumped out of the first window of this restAurant we were at and lobbed on the roof of a car, which was canvas, and went right through that. Because they were off down the road and on the ship as quick as they could get because these Dutch men, they were
- 03:00 really going to get into them. And they thought Bluey and Luther were, they thought they were making eyes at their girls and suggestions. They probably were, they probably thought they were naughty girls but they got into trouble for it and they daren't ashore again. We were all right, we didn't know who they were, or so we said, and we just wandered on our own way back. But they didn't get ashore until the
- 03:30 ship was finished and completed. Which was there a few more weeks, just finalising it all and just waiting to be told where to go.

On that fact, how did you deal with not having women for long periods?

I don't know, you hear, the navy, the Australian navy in one way, the Australian navy didn't believe in you having these sexual urges,

- 04:00 or urges or sexual, because in the navy, when you've been to sea for four days, they check you out. You've got to do a VD [Venereal Disease] test and lord knows what. And if anyone's got it, or caught something, they get isolated and a good talking to. I think it costs them so much because they don't, didn't supply condoms or
- 04:30 anything. Some ships did. They did later on but not in those days because they seen the sailors you know, they've got to look after them like. And I remember going ashore with a patrol to see that our sailors are not doing the wrong thing. And you walk around town and you check, a lot of British and everything there, you walk around town to see, you know, you're doing the patrol and
- 05:00 if you caught a sailor that's one of the crew, you got a number, you know a number 8 or number 28, whatever the case may be, that's the number of your ship. And if you got in anyway, you'd give your mate the drum, you know, pack it up and get off it because the military police will be down this way checking it out pretty soon. And, you know, they grabbed their hat and didn't bother to pay and back off to the ship.
- 05:30 But you know, you'd tell so many lies to them, you know, about things. And the natives and that didn't like us because we used to pinch their clients by putting the wind up them. But we did it for devilment.

But what about the brothels?

No, well, I can honestly say, I know, I've seen it up in Queensland at the top part,

- 06:00 up around Cairns and that - the Yanks were, you know, from here to the corner at least, standing outside waiting for their turn. Now, if the Aussie were standing there and a patrol come along, he's gone. They don't, you know, they're not all for the brothels but up there they were, everywhere. And just lined up to go in and if you stand around long enough you'll see the same bloke who's been in, his ten minute price. I think one of them came out and he said,
- 06:30 "I was doing no good so they gave me a pass out."

What about in some of the foreign ports?

I think most of us, I'd say 99.9 of us were too weary getting into a lot of those places. And it was rife, we know it was rife with... but some of them I suppose, some of the brothels are higher class than the others.

- 07:00 But it didn't seem to worry us, you know, we had the luck, we got the luck, ok but watch your step. And it didn't worry us, you just accept it. When you come into port, been away for a while, you say to your mate, "Where you going tonight?" He says, "Oh, we'll go and have a couple of beers and a feed, and if we don't go to a dance we'll go back on board." There was no great hassles
- 07:30 except the girl that I left on the picket fence.

Well, speaking of girls. Tell us how you met your wife and how you managed?

What, like on the sexual side.

No, being away?

Being away.

Tell us how you met her first?

All right. We was in, this is very in the early piece,

- 08:00 and we called in to, I was on the Ads [HMAS Adelaide] then, too. And we called into Fremantle, we were going to be there a week. And anyway, a mate and I joined together, pretty thick mates together. Anyway, we just happened to be walking around, we thought we'd take a walk down through the gardens and the little zoo that was there. And, a little cockie [cockatoo] I was talking to...
- 08:30 And these two girls came along and they had a bit of a grin on their face about what was happening. And we got talking about Fremantle and everything else. And then we went to the pictures. And that was a big deal. Upstairs, I think it was sixpence, so I shouted Norma upstairs and made out I was a big bloke for sixpenny seats. And after that, you know, Bob was going to take,
- 09:00 Bob, I've forgotten me mate's name. Les. Les, he was going to take his girl home, see her home and I was going to take Norma home. Norma lived at Fremantle and her father, he was killed in the desert with the 9th Division. And her mother had a nice, she had a little shop that they had and
- 09:30 she kept it running and she worked hard, and they asked me to stay for dinner, and the next day I think we were off. And the mother said, "You're welcome to come here any time," you know, and we were just friends then. And next time in, we did another trip up north and back into, Fremantle seemed to become the harbour, it was the harbour of the submarine base there and everything. And I gave her a buzz there and said, you know, "Would you like to go out tonight?" And
- 10:00 anyway it got to be pretty thick, our partnership. And this went on. Anyhow I was at sea, and I got

thinking about things, and it was '45, and I said, you know, it all be come to a big head one day and I said to her, "I'd like to get settled where I'm going." And I said, I didn't write the letter to her, I wrote it to her mum, asking

10:30 permission to ask her daughter could I marry her. And, I said, "And don't bring a shotgun" or something silly I wrote. Her mother was terrific to me. And her mother never drank and didn't like drink or smoke but she always had a few bottles in case I come around to have a drink. But anyway, we made the arrangements for the next trip in, we found out from Sydney roughly when

11:00 we would... got off board, they put me on another ship to go across to get married. English ship, I forget the name of it now. Never mind, forget the name, because it was to be only one trip, and doing me a favour. So anyway, they got everything ready, big wedding it was going to be and everything else because Norma wanted the best. And all the gear

11:30 and everything. And this was to be on the 10th, 10th of January, and the 9ths come up and there's no sign of me. And Norma's mother said, "He's done the bunk on you, you're not going to see him again." And it went right through and the next day and still no sign, so Norma went down the naval office to ask them. They said, "Sorry we can't tell you anything," he said,

12:00 "I still can't tell you anything but your fiancé will be home in another six days." They detoured us, there was a scare out there, where we were, and we had to dodge it. We went out to sea again and came back in and we got married on the 20th. I didn't see Norma then until the war was all over, it was 12 months later. And I didn't see her, see her then, and I said, well I had a piece of land, and I said to her, "If you'd like to

12:30 settle over here, we'll design it and get a loan," which we did. And we never looked back. Never looked back.

What was it like to see her again?

Well, a lot of joy because, you know, it was a big thing for me and the excitement was on and the gunners on the ship they formed me groomsmen. And

13:00 one of the gunners had been following me around on the last two ships so Frank and I get along pretty well together. We didn't have much time. We had two days to prepare ourselves and get everything straight. Because they had to go to the caterers when they knew and get everything going because we had to change the hall, they understood and had a good wedding, a good wedding, it was.

13:30 Everyone was there, it was quite good. The skipper of the ship and the first mate, they came along to it. Then we went on our honeymoon down south, a beautiful place. First day we rested and the second day we were, everything went along, and then the next morning we heard this terrible banging, did I tell you about this did I?

14:00 Terrible banging on the door. You know, of course the bed was only in singles, we wanted to get together so our bed, we'd tossed the mattresses on the floor so we could be together. Anyway, I jump out of the thing and I'm looking for something to put on. I wrap my towel around me and, I did want to go decent, and anyway, I open the door and there's two big naval provos [Military Police]. And I said, "Cor, struth, what have I done?" "Able Seaman Dawson?" I said,

14:30 "Yes." He said, "You've got one half hour to get dressed and get ready." And I said, "But we were just going to enjoy life." And he said, "Son, I suggest you go and have a cold shower and forget what you have in your mind." I said, "Righto, chief." So after half an hour they came back and took us and I had to get back on the ship because there was trouble brewing and we were off. And then they took me back to Sydney and then I joined the Dutch packet just to finish

15:00 it off. They were going back into the islands, and the troops and that. And so, that's where I finished up with Norma and we've stuck together for 58 years or something, so we're not going too bad. I'm not going to change now I'm too old.

How long was it till you saw her again after the, they arrived?

One year. A year, yeah. A year went by. I told her she could have me or leave me. She said, "I'm after your deferred pay."

15:30 She'd go crook if she hears me talking like that.

So, where were you when you heard that the war had ended?

Steaming out of Sydney. We were heading back out to pick up a mob of army blokes out of

16:00 New Guinea and also Finschhafen. And we got them out and we took them down to Brisbane and a navy came on board when we... Bowen, we stopped at Bowen, they had a big night at Bowen when we arrived back. And it was all in the streets. They had beer, it was all free and they had beer and cakes and everything else,

16:30 and the street was all lit up and the bands were playing. And anyway, we cut the cards to see what

gunner was going to stay on board. Of course, I lose don't I. First back on board, they let me ashore. I said, well you know, this is for us all and if I had of gone and asked the skipper he would have told me to go. But anyway, I stayed and Jack, Jack, the petty officer, he was in charge of us actually. And anyway he come, he was full, full, full, he was full. And

17:00 staggering everywhere and he had an army sergeant with him and he was full. I said, "Righto, Jack, I'm stepping ashore now." He said, "No you're not." I said, "You're back on board." He said, "I'm going up to get my head down, you're still on duty." And I said, "No I'm not." I said, "Jack..." And this army bloke, he was having a shot at me too. And I was in no mood. I didn't do anything but I was in no mood. But anyway, I walked ashore, went ashore. And I told the other boys what had happened and they said, fair enough. But

17:30 next morning I had to face up to the captain. Now we've got the ship full of army blokes, full of army blokes and he's marching me up to see the captain for disobeying an order. So, anyway, I had to go up to the captain, take me hat off, up on the bridge, and all the army blokes are clapping and singing. Anyway, the skipper said, "I don't see anything wrong with it." He said, "You could have asked me and there'd have been no troubles but," he said,

18:00 "it's not up to me now. I would have made discipline," he said, "but the war's over." And he said, "I would suggest, Jack, you forget about it." He said, "That's my opinion." And when we got down below Jack said to me, "I'm still going to report it Bill." I said, "That's up to you and I'll tell them the way you came back on board." And anyway, we were catching the train, and he came from Melbourne too. We were catching the train taking us down and

18:30 he said, "Bill, I've decided we'll forget about all that and shake hands." And I didn't, didn't mention that any more. But he knew he'd done, but he was still willing to take me to the skipper. But I felt good with all the army blokes on my side, "Go 'em", you know and cheering, like, the war's over and, oh Christ.

Were there any particularly unusual events that happened at sea?

19:00 **that you can remember?**

Blokes thrown over the side or blokes walking over your side. Quickest way of getting rid of your problems is to dump them over the side. And there's the other one is you get mesmerised by looking at the water, it will take you over the side. It's very surprising, you feel it coming on, you've got to walk away from it because it happens. Time and time again.

What about animals?

What?

19:30 **Sighting animals?**

What in the bush?

No, at sea, like whales or?

Oh whales, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon. Oh crikey yes, especially if you're down south. And they frighten you because you see a spout of water coming up. You'd be looking and you'd see a spout of water coming up and you'd just see it and you'd say, a sub.

20:00 It looked like the leading edge of a sub with the mast when it goes up in the air, cuts through water just like it. And then action stations, quick smart, would go again because you don't know, it might be a sub, we don't know.

Did you ever shoot at one?

No, no. We were too far into the south at times to run into them because they'd get tip well down at times.

20:30 But no, we never hit any of them that I can remember.

How close have you been to going over the edge yourself?

I haven't been close because I went there purposefully to get the feeling that you can get from the water and then you know, what troubles you can have. But having your mates, you know, that takes your place when you go off watch, not turn up of a morning

21:00 or not turn up for his watch, or like me hiding under the table and thought I'd done it, it's more of it than you know. You hear the people talk about it but there's so many of it.

Could you swim?

No. From here to the front fence, full stop.

21:30 They didn't worry about that because if you're 200 miles off land, how are you going to get home? You can't call a taxi or anything like that. And you can't swim that far. There are good swimmers and they didn't make it. But if you can get your Mae West on and blown up you stood a chance.

Did you have any superstitions yourself?

Superstitions.

22:00 I go back to all the old things, black cats and all this. No, not on ships I didn't. When I was away, I don't have anything like that, now, no.

What about lucky charms?

Well, lucky charms is a different thing. I had some nice charms around me neck with my dead meat ticket, and it's

22:30 a boomerang, it had about five different things on it. And they had an inspection one day and the old man walked along, it was on the Adelaide, and he said, "What's that you've got hanging there, son?" And I explained and he said, "Yes, very good, I hope it brings you luck." And everyone wore some little, some wore teeth and some wore little photos with their wives or girlfriends in. Yes, well I did have

23:00 a few little mementos there, mainly as good luck. It is a bit superstitious I suppose.

What about rituals, did anyone have any rituals?

Rituals, yes. I seen that in Colombo and went to their dinner and ate their rotten food and had a beer and carry on. And the Buddhists used to

23:30 do a few of those when we used to visit him, with Neil there, and I think he was hoping to catch us but he didn't.

A bit off track but, tell us about the various uniforms you wore?

Yeah, well there's all sorts. All right, you're wearing your blues, that's the full navy jacket and coat, tie, collar. That's number one, they're number ones. Number two,

24:00 you take your, of a night time, you take your collar off as the sun goes down. That's just the, not the collar under, it fits onto the collar but it's the collar with the three tapes on. Then there's the ones with just the trousers and white jacket and then there's the one with the vice versa,

24:30 with white and black. Just depending what ceremony that you go to. Then there's the tropical rig. Your whites, the white uniform, white socks and white shoes. What else have we got? There again, too, there's just the white pants and your square neck shirt.

25:00 There's your tropical rig that's just shorts and shirts, long stockings, black shoes.

What about on the merchant ships?

No, well we only wore our own. Well, we pleased ourselves what we wore, we weren't piped. We had our nice tropical rig, we had our white rig and we had our blues. Weddings, of course, were different.

25:30 We had a white tape.

Did this help with the ladies?

The?

Uniform?

Help?

Impress them?

Impress them, oh, all the girls love a sailor. You've got to impress them. Gee whiz, yes, they were well impressed. I'm very impressed with women too.

26:00 **This is really changing the track a bit but you mentioned some of the missions that you were on, including one in Rabaul, where you had to evacuate people. Just take us through the details of what you actually did in that in a bit more detail?**

Well there wasn't much because she was all ready to go. We laid off, we didn't go in, we laid off in case there were any surprise attacks which they were expecting. And we were all ready to go,

26:30 all ready to bombard the town if...in front of the Japs and that. And it was rush and go. There was no clothes to be taken and things like this. It was just, get aboard and let's go, like the Manly ferry.

And how did they get aboard?

Well, the ship that they were going to go on was a passenger ship. It was lying alongside the jetty and

27:00 they just had to come on and go straight on and get in anywhere they can, there was no first or second classes. But she did carry all the people that we seen on board and, of course, we just had to head out to sea and just sort of do circles around her and make sure there as nothing coming in. Got her down to

Brisbane and off again.

And who were evacuated exactly?

Where were they?

No, who were they evacuated, like

27:30 **army, locals, any local people?**

Yeah, well there was, the army, I was just trying to think of the battalion and that there. They had a lot of Australians there and that which were captured by the Japs when they came in and they were given a pretty rough sort of life. But I don't know how many were there. I can't recall the battalion, the guys that went in there.

28:00 I just can't. And then, of course, when would it be, about '44, the Yanks invaded one side of it and the Aussies went in and got a foothold in there but they didn't go any further, they didn't push any further into it. They just wanted to hold the beach head there and the Japs had no hope, no hope at all of getting out of there. Because

28:30 they'd stopped all the shipping. The Yanks and the Aussies, you know, when they got down to New Guinea and that, they were finding it hard. They were coming in around the back way and they were still there, well, they were still there at the end of the war. A lot of Japs were taken prisoners in there.

Take us through what you consider one of your hardest missions?

29:00 Seem to put them on par.

Just give us an example of one of the ones. It doesn't have to be the hardest but a particularly hard mission?

Well, I think personally, mainly because of back up and that.

29:30 I would think both my trips on the Norwegian, the Aurora, into the Atlantic. It was a dangerous area we were in and what we were carrying. And the only back-ups you really had were your own gunners and to do, it can, up all the time,

30:00 it's a bit different. You get a little tired, but you get, not frightened, but sort of blessing, especially with what fuel we were carrying, that we don't run into big troubles. We could put up a fight for a while, a good fight, but we had the weapons to do it. We didn't have enough gunners with that but we would have had more on if we had been going straight through to England but they took some of them off,

30:30 platforms and that. You're on edge all the time, on edge. Now let me see what, they're there, but I just can't put me finger on them. They were all - the Greek, of course, we got a good scare on her but that was, that was nothing.

31:00 No, I think, I think when we were looking for the Sydney, I think, being a very small crew and we had to, we didn't get much sleep or rest there for five weeks because we only had half a crew. But we had to stay very alert because the Indian Ocean was a big playground for Germany. The Germans used to come right up, knocking at your door and things like this. And they used also, the ship's ID [Identification],

31:30 the AMCs, they used that and they used it very well. But they seemed to get the good information. But it was one where you had to be on your toes with just half a crew and you can, you can get tired.

Tell us, were you aware of how dangerous it was on some of the merchant ships?

Well I signed up to go on them,

32:00 I had to go on them, you see. They nearly all had some, carrying some sort of explosives and that with them. More so to the Norwegians than what it was to the Greeks and the other ship I was on, but I can't remember her name now because I wasn't on it long enough.

Tell us

32:30 **about settling back in?**

Well, it was, I think I might have mentioned there, about going back to my work which was promised to let us carry on when we finished, when we went away plus all our holiday and sick pay would be paid to us. And it made a big difference because I was going to go on leave that day and they told me not

33:00 to take me holidays that were there and think about it, which I did do. Number one, I couldn't stand working inside again and number two, the people that stayed behind were very selfish about the people coming out of uniform and looking for their jobs back. I found that very real and it created a lot of tension between the two.

33:30 And whilst I was on holidays I went and worked in a baker's shop making dough. That's about the closest I'll get to dough I suppose.

Did you find it difficult settling back in?

Yes, yes.

In what way?

Lost. Looking for your mate, you know, and dwelling on him and, no, it didn't give us much time, you know, to do this. When you're

34:00 sitting down and thinking about it, you get a bit of a laugh to yourself and things and you wonder where Joe is and Charlie is and how they're getting on. Do they need any help and this sort of thing. But it was a big life they'd done and many servicemen just couldn't settle back again after what they'd been through because their life had been controlled by them. They done, you know, exactly what was told and even if you had of been

34:30 30, 40 years of age you done what you were told. And you miss that because it becomes a part of your life, that discipline. And I tried to bring my kids up the right way and that discipline was there but that's as far as you can go until they got old enough to please themselves.

Did you miss the ships?

Yes. Yeah. A percentage of them.

35:00 A big percentage of them, missed them, and the crew that made them. And again, the discipline that's on them. If you step out of line, I prefer that to come and go when you please. They know what you're up to and what you're doing.

What about the ocean?

What, it being fair?

Did you miss it?

Oh yes, yes. Everything, when I got, every weekend we'd spend down the beach.

35:30 It wasn't far from us and, yes, you can't beat the ocean. The ocean is something and you can't master the ocean. She'll do what she wants to do. Well, that's why we're on water here because I liked it and like the feeling of it. The seas and the oceans and that, just lovely.

36:00 The little seals and that would come along the ships and rubbed up and dolphins and that would come up and that's what sends you off. You can be looking at them for a long while and you start to feel a bit drowsy. Looking at the beautiful little pod, dolphins and that, it was, you know, it was terrific. But the sea can pull you in.

What did you think

36:30 **of the other services?**

They're all right. They're all right. The army were terrific blokes, terrific blokes. We got on well together because we took them there, we left them there and we bring them back. They used to say, "Yeah, you drop us and leave us here and you'll go somewhere else won't you, and leave us?" And I used to say, "Cheerio mate." And we did, if you want a good drinking mate and have a few beers, pick up an army bloke. Or if you see an army bloke on his own, ask him, "Do you want a beer?"

37:00 Come on over and join us." The air force kept to themselves, you know, they sort of kept to themselves. And yet my brother-in-law was a top man in the air force. He was No. 3 and I thought I would dislike him but he's down to earth now. It took him a while to relax and get out of giving people orders, but he spent 34 years in the air force and he didn't know anything else.

37:30 But army blokes I had a lot of friends and brother-in-laws and that, in it. My brother, he was killed in Western Australia. I come back one night late, he and his mate, coming back late one night and a taxi knocked them over and killed them. And that always stuck in my mind but never mind that's part of life.

Your brother was killed by a taxi. What about your brother in the navy?

38:00 Yeah, he was in the navy. And my other brother, other brother, he was in the navy also and the navy destroyed him. He was a servo and used to be on the navy servo ships all over the place, and they used to spend a lot of time on the shore taking things and they were given all the grog in the world you could take. Whilst they were on the shore, on the island and that,

38:30 buy as much and go over there and grog on, have parties. But it became deeper with him. He got into cigarettes pretty bad and he was brainy, he had a good brain. He was rising up in the ranks and he could have got a good job with the water surveyors. But no, he went the wrong way and drank too much and it killed him. But before then he was such a pure young lad.

Tape 9

00:40 **O.K. Bill, as I mentioned to you, can you describe some of the physical attributes and structure of some of the ships you worked on, maybe starting with the Adelaide?**

The Adelaide, yes. The Adelaide was getting on in years, she was.

01:00 Naval architecture had probably changed a lot since the Adelaide was commissioned. Because she was a solid looking ship and she had big thick plates on her and they were riveted, not welded, they were riveted. And she looks good and it looks like the warship, you know, that we knew. And everything spic and span and everything

01:30 a good style. Then, of course, I've got to cut out the Kanimbla because in the ship in itself, without looking at it as a ship of war, it was a good-looking ship. A good-looking ship. The Westralia, for instance, not a good ship. Well, in the ship itself, the architecture, the look of the ship, put the two side by side and

02:00 you'd say, she's an ugly duckling. But she still done the job. Ships, ships, say, ships of war, I love the destroyers, they're beautiful, they're sleek, they can move and, well, it just gives you a good feeling when you see them. There's so many different designs

02:30 of them. America's got some but Australia's been building their own, they've got some lovely designs. But they can affect you because most navy men that I, I'm talking about navy men now, love their ships, no matter what. They love their ships and anyone that was down on their ships, it would be on, it would be on. Because they're rapt in it. That's their life in that ship and

03:00 you know, after you've been 12 months or more on one ship it grows on you, it does. You're starting to look for a bit of dirt or something so you can go and pick it up and this sort of thing. You appreciate the ship and you learn to be where all the things are and what to do. Big cruisers we used to have, they're gone. Some lovely ships, cruisers, have vanished now. Our aircraft carriers we used to have, they're not around any longer.

03:30 And this is a big problem, it's a big worry to us. Like regarding the elements today, we've got nothing to stop anyone coming in. We've got a few ships and all our troops are all overseas and that is a bit frightening. But getting back to your question, each ship has got its own liking, it's a good sea-going ship. The little corvettes, they're marvellous little ships but you wouldn't get me near one. I couldn't

04:00 work with them but they done a wonderful job during the war, and we built them all here. A lot in Queensland and down in Victoria, we built our corvettes. And they're building a few of these Anzac class destroyers now and they'll be all the go. Get in and get out. The big ships like the dreadnoughts and that which we lost to the Japanese up in the

04:30 Sunda Straits. Four big battleships go down in one go. They're all right for bombardments but you gotta get, you know, to come in, heat up and go. Landing ships have come in and it is changing but the guys who live on the ships still fall for them. As we call them, 'she', that's the reason you fall in love with them.

05:00 **What about the Kanimbla, what did you love about the Kanimbla?**

The whole lot. She was a good-looking ship, she had good quarters, good discipline, good crews all round, all round. I couldn't complain about one, I couldn't even, going right back I couldn't. The good things about it, you know, your mates and Old Tanky used to be our regulating petty officer,

05:30 he was a god to us, the things he used to help us with and you looked at him as your big father and doing things.

What about physically, what did you love about it?

Well physically in the ship, or physically in yourself?

Physically in the ship?

I don't know, that might be a hard one. Do you mean in the way she goes or?

06:00 **What did you like the look about her?**

Well, a good style. The style which she's in is still the style of today. It's a well-balanced ship. Everything's in the right quarter and easy to get at. Good quarters in the ship itself. Although we carried on the Kanimbla, we carried 45,000, 44 gallon drums. That's a lot of drums. And why did we carry them? Buoyancy.

06:30 If we get hit it would keep us alive for a little time while those drums will keep popping and popping out. And we didn't have, that cut out a lot of the sleeping quarters, because we had, even in cabins, filled with these drums. The [HMAS] Moreton, it took on the Graf Spee, I don't know if you know all these ships, but that was a big German battleship.

- 07:00 Magnificent, magnificent. And she attacked the convoy going to the Middle East and this little ship, a bit like the Kanimbla, in that class, she had tackled the Graf Spee. Had no hope but she tackled the Graf Spee, a big battleship, so that the convoy could escape. And they got hit, got hit.
- 07:30 They went in close as they could to create a...well, they knew they were gone. But when it went all the holds and everything were full of little round, those plastic balls, what do they call them, like a little shuttlecock ball. It was full of them and it helped to keep them afloat a little bit longer so then that was, but all our AMCs would all be full of 44 gallon drums.
- 08:00 A little story there, of when we arrived home, because they wanted the Kanimbla, they wanted her stripped because they were going to rebuild certain sections. We tied up alongside and there was a wharfie strike on then and they were bolting the sailors up and god knows what. But the army came in to protect us and we were told by the admiral that we had to unload this ship on a four on, four-hour basis until it was done.
- 08:30 He said, "There'll be no, not one leave." And he said, "There's no leave until this is done but the reward will be, when it's finished, the money they're going to save on loading this ship, a lot of it will be given to you, each one of you, officers and all," this was everybody, "you'll all share in it
- 09:00 and give you a good holiday." That picked us up away we went. So, next week comes and we're still hard at it. The admiral comes on board. Admiral Gill, the bastard. And anyway, he's told us the same story, he's patting us on the back and telling us the same story. Week three, we're well on our way of it now and the admiral comes off, clear lower deck, the animals there, he said, "Thank you boys. You'll be going on leave at the end of this week. You get cleaned up."
- 09:30 And everything else. He says, "I'm very proud of you," he said, "to have done the job that you've done in the time and not got into any brawls." And anyway, he said, "Now the canteen trust fund. Oh," he said, "I'm sorry, I've jumped ahead of myself now," he said, "the money that you've made through the shipping company of not employing the labourers," he said, "we have decided instead of passing it around is to put it into
- 10:00 the canteen services trust fund." Now how do you like that, that's the admiral, and all the promises to get us to work and then to take it from us. So that night the four, I was on the watch going on at 4 o'clock, four until eight, and we knew where the grog was, we knew where the cigarettes were. And the skipper of the ship, he just closed his eyes to what
- 10:30 we were about to do. We had a party. Boxes and boxes of chocolate, we got grog. Our watch was spent grogging on. And when we were on our way back we were all over the road and there's the skipper standing up on the bridge watching us. One sailor pulls out his tossle and has a wet on the road, a wet on the road. Singing merrily, the petty officer in charge and all.
- 11:00 Oh Godfather, I don't remember now how many was in the, it would be about 20 or 30, in the gang. But anyway, we all staggered up on board and the officer of the watch said, "Fall in, the commander wants to speak to you." And he come out, laced us up a little bit, into us, and then he, he put us on captain's report and
- 11:30 he said, "I won't stop your leave but whatever badge you got, paid for, won't be paid for 3 months." I don't know, it wasn't long. They still had to wear their badge but the money, threepence or sixpence extra for that badge, that was his punishment. And he walked away, never another word said. And I think I told you, we used to go to his place. All these sailors were invited to his home and that, Jimmy, a terrific bloke,
- 12:00 but he wouldn't really fine us, he told us we were a bloody disgrace and put on a big act and walked away. But they are just little things that could happen, I thought I'd just throw that one in for you.

How were your relations with the wharfies?

Relations?

Relationships like?

The wharfies, they were deadly to us and yet we kept them working. They were commos, red, white and blue commos and

- 12:30 they wouldn't fight and they said, these ammunitions ships going up the islands, well we will not load it. And, you know, that's complete sabotage. Do that in Russia. And these are the sort of things, you don't know whose working. When the ships going in for repairs they used to get steel pilings and put them in amongst the oil and stuff and wreck the ships. And they didn't know who, they were the wharfies and everything else, but they didn't know who was doing it. All the sort of things that
- 13:00 were sabotaged. Divers would go down at night and file, or do something to your anchor so it would be off balance, not anchor, your propeller. The duty watch had to watch over the bows and god knows what for signs of these people, they were terrible. Sydney was the worst.

You didn't get on well?

They weren't, you know, the things that they used to do,

13:30 and you couldn't trust any of them, none of them.

We were talking about the physical nature of the ship and you mentioned sleeping quarters, what were they like?

Well, all of them except the, getting back to the Greeko, all the ships, the naval ships were very good. Kanimbla and that were very, very good, because a lot of the stuff from her passenger days were still on there. Baths, who'd put in a bath on a ship for silly sailors. And we got lovely bathrooms and

14:00 we still had an area, like an open area like this through here where we strung our hammocks, and 8 had a mess deck, a mess in one area but we didn't get any of the cabins and that, it was mostly the officers, petty officers up that got the cabins.

So how would you sleep?

In this passageway, like it's a big room,

14:30 there'd be one, two, they'd be about forty feet wide I suppose, and running along a corridor sort of thing. And they had hooks welded on to the deck head there that you hung your hammock up to and underneath where you hung was your mess deck table. Plenty of room there.

15:00 Some of the ships there weren't, the corvettes and that, they had nothing, they had no room.

What about the physical nature of the structure of the Adelaide?

Well, it was, in my book, a ship, she had done a good job even by the time we picked her up but she was fairly good-looking for her day.

15:30 It was designed, it was built in Australia and it gives you a good, you know, gives you a good look at those because at the beginning of the war we didn't have many of that type.

And how does this compare to, just compare with us some of the physical structures of the merchant ships you worked on starting with the Greek ship?

Ah well, it was just a normal, normal type of cargo ship, carrier.

16:00 It hadn't been registered very long. When we got her she was only about 5 or 6 years old. Again, the Aurora, she was a tanker, a good tanker, a good-looking tanker, nice bridge, good space for his crews and good quarters for the gunners. The Tyan, we lived in the passengers' quarters

16:30 for first class passenger quarters, for running mid ships, and that was given to us plus a mess boy to look after us, and he did a good job. He was only a young kid, he was 15, 16, and joined the merchant navy and he stayed until he was 17 and joined the permanent navy, which took him on at 17. But he had medals on his chest before

17:00 he went in and they used to pick at him because he was only a young lad, and he got three medals up on his chest and they used to, they'd pick at him.

And just take us through also as a gunner some of the hard parts of that job physically?

Well the hard parts was, well if you were a loading number, ammunition carrier, that was the heaviest job of it

17:30 because those shells we were putting in the 6 inch guns, they were about 106 pound and you had to get them and lift them right off the deck, this high, and it's a wonder we didn't have hernias because we were kids. But we were grew into it, grew the knack of it, they showed us, the oldies used to show us, this is how you get it and hold it up and slide it and I'll do the rest. But yeah, the smaller arms, the 4-inch, there's not much hard work on them.

18:00 But the big guns with the big shells and that, they were a bit heavy. And all the big cruisers, they'd lift their shells up on a, it's down low, and they'd put their shell in there and, of course, then it's taken away on a conveyer belt but they didn't have to lift it up at all high. Then it went through the shaft into the gun onto this slide and then the bloke, just, again, just winds it over to the gun, puts it in

18:30 pulls it back for the next one. But on most of those ships, even the ones I was on, the Norwegian and that, they didn't have anything like that, it was open guns and we were exposed. We didn't have shields around us. We were exposed to any of the gunnery or guns and that around.

19:00 **When you were in a convoy or close by to other ships, would you communicate with people on board?**

By flags. Oh, if you were close enough over the sides, you'd say, "G'day George, how's things?" And they can, at times, get up very close. Not so much, more so of a day time but of a night time they can spread out.

19:30 But at night time, you daren't, you daren't whisper even, it travels so much, you've got no idea. And you

can hear the propellers on the other ships just plodding along. But that's a bit hairy, at night, you've just got to keep awake because that's a good time for your subs to be sneaking in among the convoy.

So you're listening?

All the time, all the time.

What would a sub sound like?

20:00 Oh, if it's on the surface, you'll hear, phit, phit of the propeller and that's the sort of thing, and if it's moonlight at night you can pick them out. But they sneak in with just the periscope up. But you've got to watch the water all the time for that little, phit, running through the water.

What if they were down low?

Well, down low, see if they've got radar and that they can pick it up but so can we pick up what they call.

20:30 It was Asdic, was the name of it and it was sending signals down into the water, a way of getting them back. I don't know if you've seen any naval shows at all but you'll see the bloke looking at his ping. It's different today, a similar system but it's more modern and different today.

O.K. This is moving on. Did you feel a part of the Anzac tradition?

Did you feel a part of it?

Yes?

21:00 I am the Anzac – yes, yes I do. I work quite a lot for the Anzac tradition, and I don't know, all around today if it's changing or not. The real tradition we got into of protecting the British, protecting it, like we're trying to protect our flag. That to me is Anzac, the things that we grew up with, our grandparents and that

21:30 and fathers and that all, you know, have been a part of it, and they are Anzacs. And it's – well anyway, I think I'm an Anzac.

Did you experience bring permanent personal changes?

Did it bring it, the war?

22:00 **Yes, what kind of personal changes?**

It made me grow up. I was a bit of a bloody sook I think before then and I started to get a few friends together. We used to go out on our bikes and I started to grow up but the navy put the cap on it. There were a few baddies, there were a few baddies, and can cause trouble but I never. The blokes away in

22:30 Brisbane, you know, they came to hate.... but they tried to escape from the ship, and that was a funny night when all the army blokes were cheering blazes. But they'll go to prison them, they'll be sent to prison and that to stop there for I don't know how long it was. But they all, just a silly thing to do because the first thing, they couldn't find the bugler, they switched the light on and picked them up straight away.

23:00 Oh boy, we were ready to hit the sea we were on our way to Darwin so we just had to pick up these loads of army personnel.

And does the navy enter your dreams still these days?

Quite often, quite often. Especially as you get older and you get to settle down, your mind is not as active as it was because you're not letting it be.

23:30 You're slowing down and you want to sit in a chair all day and look at television all day and, you know, that's not the way to go. I just keep on the move all the time.

Do you have any final words that you'd like to say about your time or your experiences?

No, except I don't think I'd change anything. It was my decisions what I done and I don't think,

24:00 I don't think I could have changed anything. Well, the way it was, was to be. The goodies and the baddies, it was to be. A lot of people during the war were killed for no simple reason and you were, you felt it your duty to go out and try to even up the score. As you say,

24:30 you don't have your pick of ships, where you're going, and you could be in calm waters, but not many sailors like being in calm waters. If there's something on they want to be in it. Like you take the poor blokes on the Bass Strait, you know where Bass Strait is, going into Melbourne? The Germans dropped 250 mines down there and the blokes, they had old fishing boats, coal burners, they had to coal it all themselves and everything else.

25:00 Terrible hardships. And they had to go looking for these mines. There was the divers, and the divers were different all together from today, they went down in the old suits diving. But they were there, they

were changing them every six months and they got big money, but that was dangerous. That was dangerous, they only need, you know, to rub in the wrong direction and you've blown up the whole lot.

25:30 And I reckon, you know, they were bloody game. But again, you were drafted, you were drafted to the ship and that was your draft and you can't get out of it and you accept your draft. And as I say, I don't know how much they got paid extra but it was a dirty job and, you know, the - these fishing boats would go out a little bit, you know, they were a reasonable size, it was all manned by the Aussies and

26:00 it's just, to me, a dirty job. But again, it's a job that had to be done and it's a job that had to be manned. I don't know, but that was nasty down there. They found it in time, the field, minefield, but it was nasty and, of course, some of them were floating up towards Gabo Island, up towards New South Wales.

26:30 Could have put a couple under Sydney Harbour and could have had a good time, couldn't we?

Right, I think that's it.

I was just getting warmed up.

I think that's it.

I hope everything works out all right on it.