

Australians at War Film Archive

James Constable (Jim) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/737>

Tape 1

00:35 **OK, so as I was saying before, if we just start off with a brief version of everything; but to start with, whereabouts were you born?**

Kyneton.

What did your Dad do for a living?

My Dad managed a chaff store.

Where did you go to school?

State school and then to Kyneton High.

How old were you when you left?

01:00 Approximately thirteen and a half.

Did you go into work straight away?

Yeah, actual work. During my school days I used to deliver hats for a milliner. And there was a Tour de France on and you had to guess the

01:30 time, or something like that. I forget exactly what it was. Anyhow my Dad said, "Well look, you've done pretty well". I got a carbine lamp as a present, so they put a deposit on a bike for me and I was to pay five bob a week off the bike. Well, then, as I say, the Depression came along and I came down to

02:00 Melbourne and lived with my aunt and uncle in Kooyong Road. I was an apprentice to Moran & Cato's, the grocers, a big grocery store. I was with them for some years and then eventually my family, they came down from Kyneton. I was still working and Dad was able to get a job

02:30 case-making out with Kitchen's Soap Factory at Port Melbourne. I stayed on at Moran & Cato's until the travelling got a bit much. I went around different branches and then they transferred me out to Fitzroy, and I thought, "Oh no, that's...". We were living in (UNCLEAR) at the time, and so I left

03:00 there and my mother, like you sort of keep things going and we had boarders, a couple of boarders and one was sort of an authority or held some pretty good position with Dubit & Dubit, who were bandage makers, and this sort of thing. So he said to me, "Oh well, you can come out there". Well, I went out there and

03:30 that's the toughest job I've ever been in. They load the bails of raw cotton into what was known as a keal[?], a great big container thing and the steam and everything was pumped into that and it was sort of bleached and everything, and then you had to get in with just a pair of jocks on and tear it all out and throw it. So, by this time my

04:00 sister, my eldest sister, was working at Woolworths. So, there was a vacancy came up for a storeman at Woolworths, so I was with them for some years. I went around different branches that were opening, or if they needed help or anything; and that's where I met my wife, at Footscray.

04:30 **In Woolworths?**

Yeah.

Was she working there also?

Yeah. I was sent out there as storeman, and she was Miss Davidson ... you weren't allowed to call her Betty. She wanted me to call Miss or Mr... The ball came along and I

05:00 said, "Would you like to go to the ball, Miss Davidson?" Anyhow we went to the ball and she said "Well

look, it's time I called you Jim and you call me Betty", so I said, "Alright". So then, as I say, war broke out and I went out... Well it broke out on the Sunday night. We were sitting there

05:30 with my sister and her friend and I said, "Well, I don't know, I think I'll join the navy".

Why the navy?

Well, harking back to when I was at Moran & Cato's and the Grocers' Picnic and the old Hyjere[?] and Waroona used to come down the bay either to Dromana or Sorrento, and I used to come down and ...

06:00 as well as that, my aunt and uncle whom I was staying with, they used to take a holiday house down here at Dromana. So I've always loved the sea. So, as I was saying, I went down and enlisted and a very good friend of ours, Lieutenant Rose, an engineer, he was, in the First World War, and he said to me, "I believe you've joined up, Jim", and I said, "Yes, I have." And he

06:30 said: "Where'd you join?". And I said "Williamstown". "Oh no, no", he said; "That's not for you, that's sandwich! You want something better than that; you want to join up to the stoker". And I said, "Alright", so I joined up as a stoker. Well, I did six weeks, I think it was, training down at Flinders and

07:00 I said, "I don't think I can stand this". Every officer went past you had to... spring to... So, as I said I did my six weeks training down there and I went in as a stoker and my first ship... a mine sweeper.

Whereabouts were you sweeping?

All around the coast, the Australian coast.

All the way around it?

Mm.

07:30 **Wow! okay.**

I was on that ... ooh, I can't remember now how long I was on that but I enjoyed it on there. It was pretty hard work, like on the shovel shovelling coal. It wasn't an oil burner; it was a coal... and at one stage it was that rough we had boiled eggs for a week. They put this big cauldron of

08:00 boiled eggs on the stove. You'd come off your watch of fear-naughts - fear-naughts were trousers and a jacket: I'm pretty sure they were asbestos impregnated but, to keep the heat from you - and you'd go down and watch, and you'd take your trimmer down. He'd bring the coal out onto the plate for you, out the front and my trimmer. Little

08:30 Bluey McKenzie used to get seasick, and I'd take him down because he couldn't... Seasickness, that was out. You still had to carry on, and I'd take him down with me and lay him there on the plate, and I'd do all my work until the shift was over. Then I'd get him upstairs and lie him down but

09:00 no, as I say it, was pretty hard going but I enjoyed it.

Just to clarify, so you ate boiled eggs because you couldn't cook anything else?

No, no.

Because it was so rough?

No, I'd just come off watch, get a couple of boiled eggs and go crash on the deck until it was time to go back on watch.

What was your next ship?

Huh?

What was your ship after the [HMAS] Aurora?

We were then told that

09:30 there was a new crew for the corvette being launched up in Innisfail, Queensland. So there were several other crew members went up with me, and an air force truck met us at the station and we said, "Where's this new corvette?". And he said, "What's this new corvette business?" And we said "Well, this is where we're supposed to be going". "Well", he said "you're not going to corv...".

10:00 It was another old sugar boat, HMAS Innisfail. By the way, this Aurora was a sugar boat as well. So, we pushed that back down to Sydney, and that was converted to a cable layer, so we were in and out of the harbour and

10:30 we used to always tie up at Garden Island alongside the old [HMAS] Kuttabul, an old ferry. We used to tie up alongside that, and, anyhow, we came in, and for one particular reason they sent us down, we tied up at Woolloomooloo. Well, that was the night the Japs'

11:00 subs came into Sydney Harbour and if we'd have been still on the Kuttabul, well that was damaged.

How long were you doing the cable laying for?

I'm not sure how long I was on that for; I'm not sure. Then I was transferred over and for the... the [HMS?] Marlborough was, I don't know...oh I can never think of the name of

- 11:30 this other depot like, apart from Garden Island, and I was transferred over there, as duty motorboat driver, and we used to run officers, like from there over to Garden Island. And anyhow, they put us out on another old ferry, on what is known as lodge n' com [lodgings and accomodation] . You got your... you had to provide your own meals and all this sort of
- 12:00 and they sent us out there with hurricane lamps. There was a big diesel generator there and I said to my opposite number - he was the leading stoker, as well - and I said, "I can't understand why we're walking around here with hurricane lamps; why don't we..." So, we got the generator going. Starting it was marvellous! Anyhow, I get a call:
- 12:30 "Leading Stoker Constable, report to the chief stoker's office". I reported there and he said, "You'd better go and see the engineer commander". So, I'd go and see him and he said "Did you know there was a war on" and I said "Yes, sir" and he said "Well, the Chief ERA [Engine Room Artificer] has been out and dipped the diesel tanks" and he said "I believe you've been running the generator",
- 13:00 and I said, "Well, yes sir, we thought it was safer doing that than running around with hurricane lamps". "Oh well" he said "As long as you realise there's a war on, because that's it; you don't use a generator anymore". Well, I said, "Alright sir, I'm sorry." So we get a call to take some officers over. Coxswain said to me, "Come on, away we go". As we were going over to Garden
- 13:30 Island and the [HMAS] Australia is coming in and Danny Hunter, the coxswain, he said "You see that big, lame[?] funnel bloody ship?" and I said "Yes" and he said "You'll be on that". I said, "No way, no Danny. They won't get me on that". He said, "My boy you'll be on that for a punishment draft". I said, "Oh, I don't think so".
- 14:00 Anyhow, get back to the depot ship," Leading Stoker Constable, report to chief stoker's office" so I did and he said, "Leading Stoker Constable, you have been drafted to HMAS Australia".

What sort of a punishment was that?

For using the generator.

Sure, but was that

- 14:30 **a rough trip on the Australia? Was it a hard...?**
- Well, see that was an oil burner and I was tankie and I was throttle watch keeper down in the engine room. Well then we went like to Manus Island and
- 15:00 Moratai and then, as I say, eventually up to the Philippines. Up amongst the kamikazes, and we were there for eight days, I think, and we had a crash for about five out of the eight days, I think. We had a kamikaze come in on us. I've got photos there of the
- 15:30 damage on it. We lost quite a lot of crew members. Fortunately, I was in the wardroom flat, like, for damage control and once you went into action stations, well you were there, you were sort of locked in, and meal times, well, you had to go down from there,
- 16:00 open all the bulk-head doors and one particular fellow - he was an excellent boxer - he used to say to me, "Jim, I can't go down there. I'm frightened". So I said, "Well look, thanks for coming and telling me. I'll come down with you", because you had to go through one bulk-head door and lock it, then go through another compartment and undo it and then
- 16:30 lock it and then ... but... we lived mainly on tinned stuff. Like, well we were in action stations, bully beef and that was, like sort of a camp pie, like a meat dish and the Americans would give quids for it. See then, if we were tied up alongside them anywhere in one of the islands,
- 17:00 well, they'd come out and they'd throw turkey and everything overboard. We'd, I suppose, lived pretty well in England when we were sent over there, like to have repairs done and they decided that what they were going to replace wasn't as good as what the ship had, but
- 17:30 they used to give us ox heart. Well, I'm sorry, so we'd give that to the dockyard people and they were thrilled to bits to get it but if you went ashore in England, well, it was sausage and chips or sausages. Fortunately, I stayed onboard while we were in dry
- 18:00 dock at Plymouth. A lot were transferred to a depot in Plymouth. It was all cold showers and everything. A real hat pick[?]. At one stage we went to, and stayed on leave at Gloucester House. It was like a naval refuge sort of thing, like you got accommodation there
- 18:30 but no meals. You had to get your own meals. Well, at times they gave us meals. Well then we didn't have any soap, so we went to Australia House to get some soap, and they gave us two little bits of soap, but I, a friend of mine onboard, his aunt

19:00 and uncle lived up in Aberdeen in Scotland, so he said, "Well, you'd better come with me", so we stayed overnight in Edinburgh and then went on up to Aberdeen. That's the coldest I've ever been in my life. It was bitterly cold. His aunt had a warming pan, do you know what I mean?

For the bed?

For the bed, and she went through the beds and the uncle -

19:30 a broad Scot - and he said "Will you like an old cot?" and I said, "Yeah, I'd love one". And Sam said, "A what?" and I said "Whisky". "Oh yes", so but ...

Were you in England very long?

I think I've got dates there on the thing. I think we went over in

20:00 July and came back, I think we had Christmas onboard, like, coming back, but oh no, I, as I say, we came back. I came home a bit bomb happy I suppose. I'm still, this left ear isn't much good. I've been and seen hearing specialists

20:30 and they say, well I've had one hearing aid. Well I can hear you as plain as anything but if Stella [interviewer] was starting to talk... well I, it's up in my drawer now. Well then my wife and I, when she's been with me in the car and she talks well half the time she says, "For God's sake will you go and get something done about that hearing". Well, the boys got to me as well, and they took me up to this

21:00 hearing aid place up in (UNCLEAR) and he went all over me and he said, "Look you need one in each ear", and I said, "Oh hang on", and I said, "What am I looking at?" and he said, "Oh for the good ones, James", he said "It'll be around about four to five thousand", and I said, "Hang on a minute", and he said "Maybe six". "No way will I be paying that amount of money

21:30 out"! Now, I believe that Gold Card or DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] they've got better ones for a far reduced price but as I say I can hear you and I can hear Stella so what more do I want?

When you say you were a bit bomb happy, do you mean a bit well, psychologically as well?

Well, you see you had the noise and,

22:00 with eight inch guns firing, and as well as that I suppose you had a bit of trauma because you'd have to go up on deck and if there were any bodies about well, you picked up the bodies and took them up to fo'c'sle and they'd put a four inch shell in, like the canvas that they were rolled up in and

22:30 it was ready for burial. And certain times, like there were quite a few and they were cutting lengths of angle iron, four inch angle iron and that'd be put inside so the body would sink. So, I, yeah well I suppose I did have a bit of trauma but not to the extent,

23:00 pardon me for criticising, but see, when this [HMAS] Voyager and [HMAS] Melbourne collision, now the number that are suing for compensation and, I mean, it's in Australian waters. I'm on at the moment, I think, a 70% disability. Others have said to me, "Oh, you want to

23:30 go for 100". Look, I'm happy with what I'm getting. DVA will do anymore. It will think for you and yet you'll still get a lot that criticise but the reason they're criticising is, they're greedy. I know others that are on, what do they call it, EDA [Extreme Disablement Adjustment], I think. That's the next

24:00 to TPI [Totally & Permanently Incapacitated], and they're fitter than what I am but no, it can be carried too far.

Now did you stay on the Australia till the end of the war?

Yes, yes.

Where were you exactly when the war ended?

I'm trying to think now whether we were on, we were on

24:30 the way over to England. I'm not exactly sure, but as I say I've got dates there.

OK.

But no, we went over through the Panama and on the way we went to an island between New Zealand and Tahiti, Bora Bora. It's the most magnificent place you've ever been to, magnificent.

What was the purpose of that stop?

Just an

25:00 overnight stop, I suppose, and we got ashore, had a good look around the island and the natives were sort of a honey colour, like they weren't real black and... beautiful place! Well then, as I say, over through the Panama, which was an amazing experience to go through the different locks and the water

level up and

25:30 down. I think we had 10 days in New York.

Sounds alright?

I forget the name of the wharf now, but I know, I can't think of the name of the wharf, but yeah we'd get on a train there and you'd have to watch like the carriage

26:00 because it would show what station you were at and what, anyhow, I can show you photos this particular night with, we were all up at Shag Dempsey's Restaurant, New York and I thought, "Well, I think I've had enough. I'll head for home", so I got on the train and away I went. Canal Street Wharf and

26:30 I finished up where it terminates. Then someone shook me and said "Where do you want to go, sailor?" and I said "Canal Street". "Well, if you walk around there and follow that path there and get on..." So, away I went again and I woke up at another terminus, didn't I? Eventually I got to Canal Street Wharf at six o'clock in the morning and we were due to sail at half past six.

27:00 So, but...

And did you have much to do after the war? What sort of work were you doing?

Well as I say, I sort of tankie, sort of odds and ends like any, well then as I say I was throttle watch keeping and I got badly sun-

27:30 burnt up at the islands. Came off watch in just a pair of jocks and lied in the shade of the gun tower. Well, nobody wakened me, did they? So, I was blistered all over, and we used to get comfort fun socks like the heavy, so

28:00 I used to put a pair of them on and a boiler suit and go down on watch but the heat... and they were going to send me home and I said, "Oh, I don't want to go home", so they gave me salt tablets to take. Well, the salt tablets would no sooner be down and they'd be up so I used to drink salt water and shower

28:30 in salt water and eventually I cured myself.

Is sunburn considered a self-inflicted wound?

Yes, very much so.

Were you fined or charged?

No, I wasn't charged but fortunately, my good mate who was sick bay chiefy, he bandaged me up because I swelled up and even now if I get too much sun, my ankles swell but,

29:00 no, other than that, I've kept pretty good health.

So tell us about coming home from the Australia?

Coming home, well we came around the Cape. We had, it was two or three days in Durban, I think, which was a lovely, lovely place. Meals

29:30 there, well you could have whatever you wanted and fruit, oh beautiful! We were advised not to walk about on your own but several times I'd be on, I was on my own. I was never ever worried. They used to bring the prisoners, the long term prisoners were in red

30:00 flannel and the shorter term were in yellow flannel, and they used to bring them down and they'd go through our rubbish bins for, to get what they could to eat.

It must have been a bit of an eye-opener?

It was very much an eye-opener. We had ceremonies, like crossing the line

30:30 ceremonies.

What would you do?

Oh, all used to dress up and all have different garb on and they'd be playing some sort of musical instrument. Onboard, we used to play crown and anchor or nap [card games] and if you had a good win, well I used to tuck it away and put it in the bank until I went

31:00 ashore on leave. But it didn't matter, like; I might be broke but my mates would say, "Come on, we've got enough. We can go ashore and have a few drinks". My pay onboard was £3.12. The remainder, like there was a percentage of my wages went

31:30 to Bett, my wife.

Had you been married by this stage?

We married, we've been married 62 years.

So '41?

Mm. Yeah.

And so coming back to Australia, back into civilian life, how was that for you?

Well, my wife's married sister lived up in Dalrymple,

- 32:00 which out, as you know, is out up Nimble Durip[?], so we went up there when I came out, I was still on leave and the brother-in-law said to me, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Oh, give me time. I don't know". And he said, "they want a boiler attendant with the Irrigation Trust", and he
- 32:30 said, "I know the engineer, would you like to come down and see him? Old Steadman, a Scotsman". And I said, "Oh yeah, I'll come down and see him", so... "Oh yeah, so when can you start?" and I said, "Oh, hang on, I'm... come home." "Oh well", he said... I said, "Alright". So after a couple of weeks we went up and stayed with
- 33:00 Bett's sister and brother-in-law in a picker's hut. They had an orchard. So, we were there and they had family, d we had, and... then we thought we'd buy a block of land. We'll start our own (UNCLEAR) but this time I was working at Nichol's
- 33:30 Point pumping station, and that was firing six foot billets of wood into the boiler, and you'd fire it all up and then you'd hop in the channel to cool off and by this time it was time to go again. So, I thought, "Oh I don't know", and I was a bit tough on me and I damaged this finger with a billet of
- 34:00 wood so I thought, I had an equivalent of a civilian boiler ticket so I went to the Mines Department and, oh yes, they gave me a civvy [civilian] boiler ticket so that's how I got the job up there. So I thought, "No this is too hard for me", so I did a correspondence
- 34:30 course and got an engine drivers ticket. So I was then transferred from there out to the main station out on the Murray River as engineer, engine driver. We stayed there. I used to ride the bike about three mile to,
- 35:00 from where we were living down to the Murray. You used to have to carry it about half a mile otherwise your tyres would be punctured with bindies. So the, we planted up the farm with cuttings. We had a cow and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and everything,
- 35:30 and eventually Bett said to me, "Listen, darl, you're going to kill yourself". I was working shiftwork and I'd come home, have very little break, so we come back to Melbourne and that was in '47, I think; 47 or 48, I think, and a
- 36:00 friend of mine who was onboard ship with me, and he said to me "So what are you gonna do now?" and I said "Oh, I don't know what I'm going to do now" and he said "Well look, they want an engine driver at Highlands, a big poultry farm on refrigeration. So he said "Come on. We'll go and have a look at it". Well, we're downstairs, like the engine room and
- 36:30 I said, "Oh, God, I don't know how you live down in there and work down there!" He said, "The money's bloody clean but, the money's clean though isn't it?" So I said, "Oh alright!" So I worked, stayed there and they built a new factory down in Fisherman's Bend, down at Port Melbourne, so I was looking after it down there
- 37:00 and they, the people who were installing the refrigeration and everything, they needed a hand of a welder so I went and learnt welding.

When were your children born, when were your kids born?

Well, the eldest one is 61

- 37:30 '42 I think, yeah '42 the first one, Duncan.

During the war?

Yeah.

Where were you when, when he was born?

Sydney on, I don't know where I was...yeah, I was still in Sydney. When we married I was still on the Aurora and Bett came back to Sydney.

Oh, she went up to Sydney?

Mmm.

- 38:00 **OK, so she was nearby?**

Yeah. We had a flat at Potts Point and that's another story.

I think that will have to be for later on when we get back to it. We're just about to change tapes, just wondering how you found Australia when you came back?

38:30 Well, it's hard to say really because, I don't know whether I found it a great deal different, really. No, I don't think I actually found it a great

39:00 deal different.

OK, then...

Tape 2

00:31 **I was wondering if your family had anything to do with the First World War?**

No, no.

No uncles or ...?

No. Bett's brother, he worked out at the ammunitions factory and Bett was out there as well, assembling gas masks, I think she was doing.

And, in the First World War,

01:00 **had your father served or ...?**

No, no, no.

Were your parents from Melbourne, or Victoria?

My mother was born in Benalla and Dad was born in Brighton, and his father owned the general store in Brighton. He

01:30 knew Tommy Bent and he used to go to Caulfield races and they had a stone under Newton's Fence and they had a way that they'd go in. Well, see a lot of down that way was all market garden.

Is that what your Dad worked on?

Mmm?

Did your Dad work on those?

No. Oh, no, no.

02:00 No. I think my Dad and his brother, they went to Western Australia for some years, I think. His first mother died and his father married again, and I don't think they sort of got on too well, so they disappeared for the time.

02:30 Well, then I think when Dad came back. This is when...then went to Kyneton and I'm not sure how Mum and Dad come to meet. I'm not exactly sure of that.

When you were a kid, was there a noticeable difference between servicemen and ex-servicemen? I mean, and non-servicemen?

03:00 Only, I suppose, if you were an ex-serviceman, well, you'd have no problem to get a job. The same as if you were in the Masonic Lodge... no problem. My cousin, Bill Bartram and his

03:30 brother, Johnny, they were in the First World War. He was a member of Ellesmere RSL [Returned and Services League], St Georges Road, Ellesmere. Well he'd say, "Come on, you'd better get down..." but it was mainly First World War, and they didn't sort of, have a great deal of

04:00 time for you.

When you were a kid, what did you know about the First World War?

Oh, well see I was born in '16. I didn't know a great deal about it at all then.

Sure, but in school were you taught or did you have people telling you about things or...?

Well, we used to go to the Anzac Day Service but no, no, really speaking it was

04:30 more English history and all this sort of thing we were taught at school. There wasn't a great deal of Australian history taught at school. I admit I wasn't a good scholar. I preferred to be out playing or, but... no, I survived, I got through. French I loved. I'd

05:00 loved to have stayed at school to do French. We had a marvellous, Bertie Sheave, he was. Oh, I loved it.

Were any of your teachers veterans of the First World War?

Robert, our youngest son, he was in the call-up for the Vietnam War. Like, he was 21 so he was in the call-up and he went to Scheyville up in

05:30 New South Wales to do an officers' course and he did the wrong thing by one of the officers, I think the major, but, anyhow, he failed it. Bett and I drove up for his ceremony but unfortunately he didn't... but he was then transferred back to Puckapunyal as

06:00 a gunner instructor, so he didn't get out of Australia. The other one, Duncan, he was with the CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation]. He went there from when he left school when he was 18, and he was there; well he was more or less classed as 'essential service'. He was a mineral chemist.

But when you were a kid, when you were at school,

06:30 **what ambitions did you have?**

I wanted to be a champion bike rider.

It was pretty rare to have a bike in those days, wasn't it?

Oh yes, this was a Malvern Star, yeah.

I had a Malvern Star.

Yeah, yeah but oh no, I used to ride that to work but when I used to... I thought, "One of these days

07:00 I'll be champion bike rider". No, other than that I, I used to love work. I used to love to go to work.

In the early days? The hat delivering job? Is that the job you loved or...?

Yeah, and when I went to Moran & Cato's, well you started work at nine, half past eight, I think till six o'clock at night. Friday night, it was nine o'clock.

07:30 I used to ride around on the bike and get the orders. Sometimes deliver them. You had to supply your own white coats and aprons. Sawdust floor. We used to put, what was it? Horacic acid, I think it was, on the floor behind

08:00 the counter that you'd slide up. Price was a pound of salt was a penny, a pound of sugar was four pence-eight. Cheese used to come in the big blocks with the cheese skin on them and you'd have to peel it off and then cut it up. Butter used to come in the big square boxes and you

08:30 had the butter pads and if you wanted half a pound, well you... Biscuits used to come in tins, loose.

What were the credit arrangements with that grocer?

Mmm?

Well, I'm guessing it's heading towards the Depression during this period...

Oh yeah.

Were many people getting credit accounts?

They used to get a susso [sustenance]. What was known as a susso card and it was seven, six.

09:00 Well, some would come in and say, "I'll have a quarter of a pound of tea, and I'll have a pound of salt and a pound of sugar". Others would come in and they'd have tobacco and cigarettes. Potatoes, I think from memory were threepence a pound. They used to come in the big, like potato bags, delivered.

09:30 **What did you have trouble getting, what supply, what items were you having trouble getting?**

It's hard to say now. I think, one thing I can remember.

10:00 Coming home on leave, like from the navy, and Bett said, "I've got a special surprise for you tonight" and I said "what's this?" She said "I was able to get a beautiful tin of sockeye salmon". Well we said, "Salmon!" ...and everything onboard ship. Oh yeah salmon, sardines, fruit, plenty of fruit. Once again, going back to England and

10:30 if we got an orange or an apple then we'd take that ashore and see kids this high and they'd say, "Oh, what's that?" because they were well and truly up against for fruit or, and if they did have it, it was that expensive to buy. Fortunately, whilst we were in England, we went over onto English money so we finished in front.

11:00 **When you were a young lad working at the grocer's, how much of your pay could you keep?**

I started on 7/6 a week, and I think I advanced to 17/6 a week. I can, I'm not exactly sure, I suppose I was getting three to five pounds, which was a hell of a lot of money in those

11:30 days. I can recall Dad when I was a kid saying, "I've put money up there, under the... and there'd be five pound notes. Well, going back to when I was working on pumping stations and I was getting £9.5/6 a week, and that was top money because that was shift work

12:00 and we had the two boys and we didn't go short of anything.

And when you were working as a young lad, what would you do with your money? Would you send it home or was that board or ...?

No, well I used to pay board.

Did that take a bit of a chunk out? How much did you have left over?

Well, I think when I got up to

12:30 17/6 a week, I put all that in, like gave that to Mum and Dad. They might say, "Well, you keep 10 bob and give us 7/6" or that sort of thing?

What do you remember of the Depression in the way it affected your family?

Well, where we lived in Kyneton

13:00 and there were these two gentleman that used to, Maxwells, Maxwell was their name, Maxwells' paddock and they used to tether their cows or run their cows...and they used to walk past our house, like, where we were renting, and Mum said to Dad one day, "We should, instead of renting, we should be building our

13:30 own home". So it was arranged that we bought Maxwells' Paddock. Three blocks, and it was on the Campaspe River, like you walked out... So they built and I think, from memory, it was £750, the house in Kyneton,

14:00 and they got in touch with a builder: Yes, he would build it. Well Mum and Dad were paying it off, well then Dad was put off work and they lost the lot. That's when they came down to Melbourne, and Mum took in boarders to keep things going until we sort of got on our feet a bit... but

14:30 I, Rob and Viv, they took me up... My wife's relatives live up near Echuca. Echuca on Tonya [?] Island and they were going up to Rich River, to the big golf links on the other side and they said, "Well, you'd better come up". So they arranged for me to stay in at Echuca with Bett's cousin and his wife, and

15:00 I stayed overnight with them. Well, he drove me all around in Echuca. You've never seen a place go ahead like it; marvellous!

When was that, when you were in Echuca?

Oh, that's only recently.

Oh okay, sure.

So I spent overnight with them there, and then I was taken out to Tongala to the other niece and her husband.

15:30 So he said to me, "What are you going to do tomorrow, James?" and I said, "Oh, I don't know", and he said "Well look, there's trotting trials", and I said, "Oh alright, I'll have to go to that". So he took me over to the trotting trials, and then it was arranged we would, Rob would pick me up on the Sunday from Echuca and all the rels [relatives]

16:00 were going to be there. Well, I was informed I was a great-great uncle because there was, this high, and they'd come in, "Who are you?" "And who are you?" No, it was a great reunion.

When you were a young man, when did you first begin to notice that a war might be occurring?

What, the Second?

Yeah, when did you first get a sense that a war

16:30 **might be about to erupt?**

Well, you would hear Chamberlain and Churchill and Hitler and all this sort of thing, and you'd think, "Oh well, it's more or less inevitable, it's going to happen", and as I say, it was on the Sunday night when we lived in Ripponlea.

17:00 That was before we were married and, as I say, war broke out and I said, "Oh well, down I go".

Why, if you...?

Well, I felt that I should go. So I went and, as I say, it

17:30 was 12 months before I was called up.

Did you feel at that stage that you'd be fighting for, or serving Australia or England?

Australia. I don't know, I wasn't...

Well, you mentioned before that you enlisted at Williamstown but your friend, Lieutenant Rose was it?

18:00 That's right, yes

How much a part had he played in your life before that?

Only that he used to live next door when I first came to Melbourne, like to work for Moran & Cato's.

Did you know much about his service in the First World War?

No, not a great deal. Only to say goodbye to him. That was all. His...I'm trying to,

18:30 Cora I think, Cora? Cora was his wife's name, now what was his daughter's name. I'm trying to think of the daughter's name. But no, they lived next door, Kooyong Road, Gardenvale.

Do you remember enlisting? Do you remember the process involved?

Yeah, you had to

19:00 pass an exam.

What was involved in the exam?

Arithmetic, mainly. Arithmetic and English. For instance, what's half a quarter or what's half an eighth and this sort of thing. You had to go, do a stoker's exam at Flinders

19:30 and you'd go to class and you'd have to... so I passed as an OD[Ordinary Seaman] stoker and then you got your stripe, or your star. That was first class, and then when you were leading stoker, you got the...

Now, when you sign on, and in your case you had to wait a year to be called up? Did you spend that whole year in limbo sort

20:00 **of waiting to get word or...?**

Now you got me thinking. See, I said to Rob, well he couldn't help me but, I can't sort of recall what I did between...

20:30 **What job were you working at then, do you remember? That might help you? I think it was Woolworths?**

That's right. I left Woolworths.

Did you notice in those first days of the war the affect on the working population, I suppose, working men due to enlistment? Did you see a big depletion?

How do you mean?

Well I mean you were working in Woolworths, you'd signed on, had

21:00 **lots of other people signed on or...?**

Oh yes, yes.

So it was affecting businesses and ...

Well, I guess it would have been, yes. I was in Bourke Street when I signed on, and then I was transferred out to the depot out there but -

Did you think the war would last long?

21:30 No, well you signed on for three years or the duration or otherwise, like a perm [permanent] you sign on for 12 but in my case it was three years or duration.

Which did you sign on for?

Well, three years or duration.

Oh I see, you didn't get a choice?

No.

It's a matter of, OK, sure.

As I say, I could have signed on for 12 as a perm but I thought,

22:00 "Oh no, I'm quite happy". Had I not had visions of marriage, well I might have.

Well, what did Betty think of you signing on?

I don't think she minded a great deal. I think she might have been more or less proud of me that I did

22:30 sign on.

What did your parents think?

Well, the police came to the door didn't they? To find out if James Joseph Constable lived there because I hadn't told them that I'd signed on.

And what, were the police doing, just a check up to make sure that you were who you said you were?

Mmm.

OK, ahead of that?

Yeah, they didn't know. They said "Oh, has

23:00 he?" "What's wrong, what's wrong? What's he done wrong?" "Well, he's signed on".

What was the fall-out from that? Did it hit the wall?

Oh, I don't think they worried a great deal more about it. They probably knew that if I'd signed on, well that's it but no, if I had to live my life all over again, I

23:30 wouldn't alter it. No, I'm sure I wouldn't alter it. The only thing I would like to offer alter would be to have my wife home with me. But at least I've still got her; but also, it's a bit hard, after 62...well Bett's 85 and I'm 87 and,

24:00 well, see the boys say to me, "Poppa why don't you go here and why don't you go there? It wouldn't be the same. They took me to Queensland just before Christmas, Rob and Viv and they said, "How long since you've flown, Poppa?" Well my youngest sister was having a child when we lived in Dalrymple and I flew down from there.

24:30 And they said, "Well, they go a lot faster now, Poppa; and they're much bigger". So I said, "Alright", So they said, "We'll take..." So we went to Coolum. Stayed in a beautiful unit there overlooking the 18th hole of Coolum Golf Course,

Just, you mentioned before, you that had a lot of

25:00 **trouble with the discipline or getting into service life in the war and your training?**

When I first went to Flinders?

Yeah, can you tell us about that?

Well, I mean your bedtime was such and such and you had to get up at such and such a time. You had to go to drill at such and such a time. I had one experience, I got toothache and old Ben Dixon was

25:30 chief petty officer in the First World War so I said to him, "Chief, I've got bad toothache. Can I go to the dentist, please?" so he ripped up his shirt and he said, "Do you see that?" and he had this great scar. He said, "I got that in" - pardon the adjective - "in the bloody First World War!" He said, "I didn't complain did I?" and I said, "No"

26:00 and he said, "No. You'll wait till the drill's over". I had to suffer with toothache until the drill was over. Another night, we were all in bed. Well, lights out was supposed to be nine o'clock. We were up in the dormitory hall and there was, I forget what magazine it was... it was Dorothy Dix [lonely hearts columnist] tells...like there were different

26:30 questions and answers and we were all in our hammocks laughing and giggling and tittering about it and, what was his name? Oh, a big diver, he was, and he said, "Right, all out", so all out of our hammocks and he ran us around the parade ground and then

27:00 he said, "Are you finished? No more Dorothy Dix. Into your beds". I thought, "My God!" We were treated like school children. I used to have to go on guard duty down near the lake, it was; I think it was a lake. You'd have bayonets or anything

27:30 and anybody that comes "Halt, who goes there?" Anyhow, I'm on duty this night and an officer came and I said, "Stop, who goes there?" and he didn't stop, so I put the bayonet and pulled him off his bike. So I had to front up and they said, "Well you were doing the right thing, he didn't stop

28:00 did he? You stopped him", but ...

Who was it?

A lieutenant that was, like, checking to see if everything was alright.

He would have had a few words I guess?

Oh yes. But, no, had some good experiences and some fun down there, I suppose, but it was

28:30 sort of discipline. Like, certainly while you were going to work; but I mean, an officer would pass and you'd spring to attention and you used to have to wash your own clothes and all this sort of thing. You see on the Aurora, there's all this talk about asbestos. The Aurora,

29:00 where we trained as boilers, well we'd wash our overalls and clothes and the pipelines, they were covered with asbestos above the boiler but you could feel the heat there. Well, you put your clothes in on there. As I say we wore (UNCLEAR) and they were asbestos impregnated.

Now when you were at training, you were about 23 or 4, were you one of the older men

29:30 **among the group?**

Yes and no. Some were younger, some were my age and some were older. One, Roy Lorry, he worked at the Herald office, and he was older than me again. Bill Pringle, he lived in Yarrimal[?], he was about

30:00 the same age as me, and as a matter of fact I only saw his death in the paper not long back, W.R. Pringle. No, I would say it would be mixed. I'm not sure whether you had to be a certain age. I'm not exactly sure. I know

30:30 some that I know, like some of my friends, and they put their age up so they could join. For instance, my next door neighbour and my neighbour down further, he put his age up, altered his age, and when it was getting printed out on the computer, and Peter said "Oh God,

31:00 I didn't know..." and it was all sort of new to him. This is what he wanted to find out, so he got it all in print. But several things he queried, and he said, "Oh, I don't remember that".

When you were training together in the navy, are you expecting to all serve together as well? Expecting to go on the same ships?

31:30 Well on the Aurora, yes, there was quite a lot of the crew went from there to Innisfail. For instance, when we came back from the Philippines and there were several of the crew that didn't get the trip around the world. I was fortunate but there were several that

32:00 went up through the Philippines with us and they didn't get a trip. They were discharged in Sydney.

And did many of the people you trained with at Flinders, did they go onto the Aurora?

Yes, yes.

So you all went together?

Some went onto [HMAS] Canberra: that

32:30 I knew, and like they were transferred to different ships before we went up to the Philippines.

And in training, what sort of training did you get for being a stoker?

Different sorts of pumps, different sorts of boilers for

33:00 instance there's garro[?] boilers on the Aussie and the pipes run that way. On the Aurora I got stuck in, like getting to clean the boiler out and I got a shoe or boot caught in between the pipes. Eventually they got it

33:30 out. Another stoker got in and took my boots off because you used to, there no shoes only when you went ashore other than that it was boots.

Before you were drafted to the Aurora, did you get a final leave or a, from home?

I don't think. Like, you got leave when you came

34:00 in, you got leave. For instance, when I married I was supposed to go on leave and then it was cancelled so our wedding day was altered.

That must have been quite difficult?

Yeah, it was. The church arrangements and the reception arrangements, the altar, but ...

You really give your life over when you join the services, don't you, so it takes up everything?

34:30 Yeah, yeah.

Did Betty have trouble with that?

I suppose she would to a certain extent. She was living with her mother and brother in Ripponlea, and whilst I was away she was with them; and even when I came home we were still living with them and her mother and

35:00 I, well, her mother had three sisters, I think, and her daughter, Bett's sister, and they come down and stayed with us, but Bett couldn't do the right thing by the mother and sister so

35:30 we weren't really a very good... on speaking terms.

So, where did you get married?

We got married at All Saints; I think it was, in Chapel Street, near the corner of Dandenong Road. It had a choir and everything.

Any of your new army mates attend?

36:00 **Not army sorry, navy.**

Two of my navy mates attended, yeah. They attended. Stan Seymour and Bill Pringle. They attended and they took my sister, eldest sister, they took her after reception, which we had in St Kilda Road. I can't think of the name of the

36:30 place. Magnificent place, it was, and I forget how many guests we had there and...our honeymoon, we went up to Buxton Farm up near Marysville to a guest house, and we arrived there and the next morning that's right, there were children there

37:00 and there was still confetti all over... the kiddies were all over it. We met good friends there as well, and they took us over to Marysville and different places.

How long did you get off to get married? How long...leave?

Two weeks.

Two weeks.

Well then we came back from our honeymoon and Bett came to Sydney with me. This is when we

37:30 lived at Potts Point.

In terms of your wedding and the reception, at that stage of the war, was it hard to get certain things?

Well, Bett's brother was a member of Footscray Bowling Club and he got a nine gallon [keg of beer] through the club somehow, and I think he got wines through the club. The club could get special supplies,

38:00 Gardenhurst[?] I think, no. Gardenhurst[?] was a big place in... but that's, you asked me if did I notice a big difference. Yes, from when we had our wedding and up until now, the number of beautiful homes that used to be along St Kilda Road are all gone now and here are these

38:30 flats... oh, no. There used to be some magnificent homes along St Kilda Road; but not anymore. But they say that's progress.

So we're just about to get to the end of this tape again. So when you got married, you knew you were going to Sydney, and you and Betty were planning?

I took Bett with me, yes because I was still on shift in Sydney,

39:00 **So you'd already been there?**

Yes and if I got leave, I'd come home to Bett and we'd go to this little café in Macleay Street, and I think you got a three course meal for two quid.

Sounds alright...

Tape 3

00:33 **So let's talk about the Aurora. How did you find it when you first went onboard?**

A bit strange, for a start. Like, your first ship, and there again, well, you had to get used to ship life,

01:00 and think, "Well, I'm here, so I've got to make the most of it".

What in particular do you have to get used to?

Pardon?

What in particular do you have to get used to?

Well, being a ship is more or less a confined space, isn't it? I mean, by saying that, I mean; you're not in a cell.

01:30 You've only got a certain area that you can ... certainly you could walk anywhere you wanted on the ship. Maybe the wardroom, you weren't really invited into that. That was the officers' quarters, but no, other than that you'd do your watch and come off and that was it. Maybe

02:00 read the paper or do your washing or have a sleep or no, for a while, it took a bit of getting used to but as I say, you joined it and made your bed, well you've got to sleep in it, haven't you?

And on a ship, I suppose if you didn't get along with someone, there was nowhere; you couldn't get away from them, could you?

Oh no,

02:30 no, no.

How was that, on the Aurora? How was the...?

Oh, very friendly, we were all very good mates. As I say I've got a photo there of a lot of my mates onboard, it's all the signatures.

So tell us about an average day for you. You're talking about, well what time would you get up and how long would you work for and so on?

03:00 Well, you'd do four on and eight off on watch.

So four hours on a boiler then eight hours off?

Yeah.

So how much of that would be watch, of the eight hours off?

Well, you'd read the paper or, like magazines or...

03:30 we used to play crib [cribbage - a card game], I used to play crib.

Did you have other duties to do in that eight hours off?

No, not if you were a stoker, no. No I, I sort of can't recall

04:00 a great deal of what I, what we used to do. As I say, we used to play cards or read a book or do your washing or that sort of thing. I mean you had to fill in your day somehow. I mean you were onboard and that was it.

Did you enjoy

04:30 **letter writing?**

I used to write quite a lot, yeah; and strange that you should ask me that, Jacqueline our grand daughter - Bett was showing her some of my letters that I'd written to her all over the world, and she said, "Grandma, did

05:00 Poppa ever come home?" and Bett said, "Oh yes, yes" 'cause she said, "I wonder, with all these letters, how I've got a Dad".

Well, when did Bett become pregnant?

Well we were married in '41...

05:30 when she came to Sydney with me, she came home pregnant.

Were you able to see much of her during that period before your son was born?

Well, if I got leave, yes. Duncan was born in Hopetoun Hospital in Putty Road, Ellesmere and I used to come in and I'd go

06:00 up the back stairs. Anyhow, Bett was in the labour ward and they heard me coming up the stairs and the sister said, "Keep that stoker bloke away from here! Keep him away!" 'cause I used to sneak up the back stairs because they wouldn't let me go in some of the times, so I used to sneak in. Well, then I'd get home and I'd see him again but

06:30 I missed a lot of their lives, as you can imagine. Like, six years away; but fortunately, I'm sorry, Bett's brother was very good with them. He was a great reader and he'd read books to them. Consequently, both of the boys are great, great readers. I,

07:00 well, I'd had books given to me that I just...look I can't sort of sit for any length of time and I think that I could be out doing...in the garden and doing this sort of thing. Bett was a great reader. She used to say to me, "Why can't you sit?" See, I get the paper of a morning, but I read that at night and do the crossword. I can't

07:30 sort of sit about. I've got to be doing something.

Was that true when you were a stoker and you had eight hours off? Did you find it hard to, to rest then?

Hard, yeah. Well you had to sort of find something to do because you couldn't get off the ship. You were there and that was it.

And in terms of who you would spend time with, would it just be the other

08:00 **stokers, or would you be able to see much of...?**

Oh, mainly the other stokers. Certainly you could see the seamen or signalmen and - oh yeah, you got to know... I suppose I knew pretty well the crew on the Aurora, but strange in Sydney, you'd come off at Circular Quay and you'd have your cap on with your taliv[?],

08:30 "Oh, do you know so-and-so?" and I'd say "What, where is he?" "Oh, he's a signalmen". Well, I mean there was 1500 crew on board and you were flat out like knowing all of your own engine room branch, but they used to look at you so strange that you wouldn't know somebody that was crew.

09:00 **Now where did you go exactly with the Aurora?**

The Aurora? We were only around the coast, the Australian coast, mine sweeping.

But all the way round? You saw all of the coast?

Mm.

Wow, that must have been... did you enjoy that aspect of it, about seeing Australia?

Oh yes, yeah.

Were you able to get off and get onshore very often?

Strange you should say that, we went to Toora which is down the Gippsland coast

09:30 And I'd written a letter to Bett and on the stamp it looked like Toorak and I was home on leave and she said to me, "What were you doing in Toorak?" I said, "I beg your pardon?" She said, "What were you doing in Toorak?" "I haven't been to Toorak". "Well", she

10:00 said, "the letter I got was stamped Toorak". "That's Toora down at Gippsland. We called in down there". Welshpool, we went to Welshpool. Collingship, that used to be a great thing in Sydney, in Newcastle. You'd cull the ship, you'd be there, to make sure it went down into the bunkers...

10:30 **That would have been pretty hard work?**

Yes, it was.

Did you, what did you see north of Australia?

Not a great deal. See we went up by train.

But on the Aurora, did you not see much north of Sydney?

No, no.

Ok and in terms of mine sweeping, were

11:00 **there many mines to sweep?**

I believe quite a lot of them were German mines, that were laid during the Second World War, but if they were swept up... and the riflemen would be there and puncture them, and down they'd go. There was one case, I'm not sure which ship it was, it would be one of the flotilla, it might have been the [HMAS] Doomba I'm not sure

11:30 and they tried to get a mine onboard.

Why?

Inexperienced. And thought they'd try and get it onboard. I mean, if you detonate one of the horns well that's it. No, there was [HMAS] Matilda, there was [HMAS] Swan, [HMAS] Warrego, [HMAS] Yarra, Doomba ...

12:00 I forget the other one now.

I heard a story of when, of mine sweeping that sometimes they would try to detonate them from afar with rifles. Did you see any of that?

What, to sink them?

To actually set them off as well. Would you do that, try to set them off with a rifle?

Oh yeah, they'd try to sink them.

But would that make them explode? Would they try to actually set them off?

No.

OK.

No, not unless you were a good shot

12:30 and hit one of the horns but...

What would be the scenario when a mine was sighted? Was that 'action stations' or...?

Well, the paravanes would shift them away from the ship. I might have a couple of photos in one of the albums of a mine that we had swept up, but

13:00 no, I don't know how many mines we did sweep up.

From your position as a stoker, would you be alerted when a mine was sighted?

Well, you'd find out. Like, if you were on watch, they'd tell you like when we come up off watch, that's when you'd know.

But not till afterwards, you

13:30 **wouldn't find out till afterwards then?**

No, no.

Right, okay.

We had a canteen onboard. 'Guts Galley', the POs[Petty Officers] used to run it, and we used to get gofers. They were like a, oh you

14:00 suck them, like an icy pole or a drink and peanuts or chops or that sort of thing. Just a canteen.

Sounds like you did alright really for food?

Oh yeah, we were well fed. Excluding, as I say, when we were on the eggs, but oh, no other than that, good but at some stages the bread would get a bit

14:30 mouldy. Well, you'd cut the mould off and go down to the onion locker and raid a couple of onions and make an onion sandwich for yourself but no, you, we were well fed.

What did you have in the way of regular meals or cooked meals?

Well, you had, well they were breakfast, dinner, oh yes, and you'd

15:00 make yourself a cup of, it was like a cocoa, what was the name of it?

Was it copha?

No, it was a type of cocoa sort of thing. You used to get issued with that. I can't think of it.

Were you at this stage, were you worried about,

15:30 **well, enemy activity in those waters?**

No, I was more worried about the people at home. I mean, I was there in it, but the people at home sort of didn't know what was going on.

Were you actually, you were worried for their safety at home?

Oh,

16:00 not a great deal, I don't think. I mean what's to be will be, this it. I mean if you're going to be worrying and worrying all the time, what's your life? You see, I was - getting off that subject - I was in hospital

16:30 with viral pneumonia and I was in a two bed ward with this other chap and they'd taken me away to have tests and he'd say, "Did they find out anything?" and I'd say, "Look, I don't know". And I'd have more tests and..."I don't know", and he said, "Aren't you worried?" and I said, "Listen, Roy, I'm here. I'm getting the best of attention. Now what's the

17:00 use of me lying here worrying. They'll come down and take my blood pressure, and it will be up in the air and they'll think, "Oh, oh, oh..." and I said, "They'll start to worry. No,..." So, eventually I came home and Bett and I went on holidays up to Pambula Beach, we used to go up there every year and I, every day I looked

17:30 down to see...the death section to see if everyone's still alive and he's dead! He used to worry, worry and worry. He had to go and have, oh I forget the name of all these things but you sort of go in and lie flat on your back and this archway goes over the top of you.

Like a CAT [Computed Axial Tomography] scan or something?

Yeah.

Do you reckon you got that attitude from the navy or

18:00 **was that ...?**

I think. I, people still say to me, "Don't you worry?" and I say, "Look, no". As I'm repeating myself my only worry is Bett and she's getting exceptionally well looked after. Some of the sisters over there call her Auntie Bett, but as I say, she knows me, and then she mumbles on and...

18:30 away with the ...no, that's alright. My only worry.

Now, when you were on the Aurora, sounds like you worked pretty hard. Did you have much energy or interest in the rest of the war? Were you able to follow what was going on?

Oh yes, you'd get news bulletins. Oh yes, yes, of what was happening and what wasn't happening.

Do you remember the Japanese entry into the war?

Oh yes. Well, as I say we were in

19:00 Sydney Harbour when the Japs came in.

That was a very close call, wasn't it?

Yes, it certainly was.

Before they bombed Pearl Harbor and entered Malaya, what do you think you knew about the Japanese?

Not a great deal, only that their products were rubbish. I mean, anything that was Japanese was ughh!, you wouldn't have had that.

What did

19:30 **that make you think about them as an enemy?**

Well, I don't know; I suppose war's war isn't it?

Sure, but if their products were rubbish did you then think, oh well, they won't have decent planes or...? What did you know about them as a potential threat?

Oh nothing really. See,

20:00 my son, Rob, as I say he trades with the Japanese. I, you see there's a lot now that say "Oh, the Japanese, they committed this and they committed that and they..." but I mean war's war and

20:30 that's - how many years ago? Surely it takes two to tango, doesn't it; and surely you forgive and forget? Well, that's my outlook on life. See, in America, we went down to Little Italy and

21:00 Chinatown and we got marvellous reception. It was still 'out of bounds', we weren't supposed to go there but we went there... negroes, they were exceptionally good blokes, all the negroes, but - and there again, see - they're supposed to be a down-trodden race the same as like the Aborigines here. They're supposed to be

21:30 apologising...What have we got to apologise to them for?

Now on your time on the Aurora, any notable instances, anything you remember especially that occurred during that period?

Yes, I can. Strange you should say that. I came up off watch - this was in rough weather -

22:00 and our raincoats were known as 'Burberrys', the navy belted coat, and it was just hammock, locker and I saw this old Burberry lying there so I thought, well, that will do me for a pillow, to lie on the deck, on the pillow... anyhow, the owner's name was in it and this's

22:30 big Guts Galley, as I say, he saw me lying on it and reported me to the lieutenant for damaging somebody's property. Arch Vermich was the lieutenant. So I go up before him

23:00 and I sat looking at him the same as I am standing looking at you, so I explained to him what happened and he said, "Well, look I mightn't put a black mark on your papers", but he said, "You never ever are supposed to look at an

23:30 officer straight in the eyes and I said, "Thank you", but I can't recall any other instances.

You mentioned that rough weather, how did you go with seasickness?

Never seasick in my life. We had chief stoker on the Aurora,

24:00 Brown... as soon as we went out, he was as sick as a dog but he was a perm. But no, it's shocking to see them...

It would have been shocking for them too I suppose, trying to...?

Oh, yeah, and you can't, can't sort of do anything to help them. Quoting back to seasickness,

24:30 Bett and I went to Tasmania on the old Taroona, on a government tour in a big dodge sedan so, we get onboard at Port Melbourne and we're down in the dining room having the meal and she started to just move a bit and somebody said, "We're going through the heads" well,

25:00 the dining room was cleared. So, I said to Bett, "How d'ya feel?" and she said, "Not good, not good", and I said, "Well look, come on, we'll get up on the deck and walk up and down until you get your balance back", because it's only your balance that causes you to be sick. We walked for a while and she said, "Oh no, take me down to the cabin". Coming home,

25:30 it was as rough as rough and here she is up, on the fo'c'sle, good as gold. A lot say it's mind over matter whether you do get seasick, but as I say it's, I've been told it's balance. Well, I'm never, ever seasick like when I've been on, never.

You mentioned that the head stoker was

26:00 **quite sick?**

Mm.

How did he go running the show if he was...?

Oh well, he was in his cabin most of the time.

So who took over?

He was there, oh you could go and talk to him but he was never, like 100%, he was always, as soon as we got out through the heads, he was... The same in Sydney, like he was the same ...

26:30 **Now, what was the trick with running the boiler on the Aurora, what do you remember about that?**

Well, you had to keep a certain head of steam. You would watch your pressure gauge and your water gauge. You had to make sure that your pump was working properly to make sure the boiler was kept full of water.

27:00 You had to make sure you didn't get too much 'clinker' which is coal that melts and sticks onto the bars, like the grating of... your boiler, like of your furnace, because it sticks on there and you're not getting the air through to keep the flame going.

27:30 You had to rake the ashes out of the ash pit before you went off watch and there was an ash disposal in the boiler room. You'd rake it out onto the plates and then you'd shovel them into that and it then went overboard.

28:00 Other than that, I suppose there was nothing else only like, keep the boiler room clean.

How many people would be on a shift at the same time?

Only two of us, oh yeah.

OK. So how many stokers were there onboard?

Oh, I'm not sure now

28:30 how many there were onboard. If I saw a photo I wouldn't be able to say, well, he was a stoker, he was a, he was...

I was just wondering if you had any, if you had the exact right amount of stokers or if you actually had backups as well?

No, I think we would only have, like for instance if we needed 12 stokers we'd have 12 stokers.

Ok, now what led to your transfer to

29:00 **Innisfail?**

I don't know whether I was pretty well experienced, although I say it myself, like as a stoker and they thought, "Oh well, he'd be a good one to bring the ship

29:30 back". See, as I say, we thought we were going to a new corvette, an oil burning corvette, but it was this... so, I think that might have been why I was sent. There were other stokers went up with me.

How was that trip going up by train?

30:00 Quite comfortable. I enjoyed it. I love train travel. We went over on the Indian Pacific, Bett, myself and her cousin and husband. Everybody said, "You're mad, you'll be driven mad". We used to play cards and, oh no, there was always

30:30 something to do. Beautiful meals, your own cabin and toilet and everything. We hired a car over there in Perth and saw quite a lot of, like surroundings and that.

So sorry, just to get back to the Innisfail. So the Innisfail was a cable layer, how did that change the role, the job that you were doing? How was your work different?

I was still stoker.

31:00 It didn't make any difference. I was still stoker.

And the journeys it was taking, were they much different to what the Aurora had taken?

Oh yes, we were only in and out through the heads, through Sydney Heads.

Does that affect the type of working you're doing, I mean in terms of how hard it is or how long you have to work for or...?

No, no, we used to come in.

Every day or...?

Everyday.

31:30 **OK.**

Oh yeah.

So where were you living?

Then? Potts Point.

Oh, so you had the unit at Potts Point then, sure. Gee, that's quite a difference isn't it, to be able to get off at the end of every day?

Yeah, yeah.

And was the crew much different on the Innisfail in terms of size or...?

Yeah, I think it was. I think from memory it was smaller, a smaller crew.

32:00 **It's quite a different social change, isn't it, to not be confined to a ship and to be able to go home at the end of every day?**

Mm.

How did that affect the running of the crew, I mean in terms of getting along and so on?

Oh, I don't think it made a great deal of difference to us.

32:30 No, I don't think so. Certainly, I suppose I had, well, Bett was there and I didn't spend a great deal of time going ashore with the crew. I'd go home; but no when,

33:00 other than that, we'd go ashore and have a few drinks and...

Was there a mood before the Japanese actually came into Sydney Harbour of fear of the Japanese coming down?

I guess, yeah. Well, yeah,

33:30 that they'd try and invade? Yeah, sure, but little did we know that we were going to be there in the harbour when they were due to arrive.

Can you tell us about when you heard that news?

When I heard that news? I slept through it, I didn't even know until they told me next morning that the

Japs had been in

34:00 to the harbour. I knew one of the divers that went down to... Shortie Hill, and he went down and investigated a few subs.

What did he tell you about what he saw?

34:30 He was amazed that they could live in such a confined space. But no, it's amazing that there wasn't a lot more damage done to Sydney. Well, there was an American ship that was hit but not a great deal of damage was done to it, I don't think, but

35:00 no, like I suppose Japan was there but was it going to get any worse? Well, fortunately it didn't, not for Australia and Sydney it didn't.

So when their subs came into the harbour, were you expecting follow up attacks?

Well yes they were, yes, because the mother was out the other side of the heads.

35:30 But what happened there, I don't know whether... I can't recall now what happened.

What preparations were being made for follow up attacks or invasions?

Oh, I don't know, really. I think it was just be prepared as well as we can. I don't think

36:00 there was any extra provisions like, made for extra protection.

What plans had you and Betty made if that should happen?

Oh well as I say, Bett was living with her parents, well with her mother and her brother so accommodation wise

36:30 well, she was alright.

Just wondering if you like an evacuation plan or an attempt to get out of a dangerous area?

No.

No? OK, sure. Well, how did that change things in terms of your work once the Japanese had come into Sydney? Extra security measures, anything like that?

37:00 No, I don't think, no. See, there was, well I suppose there was as much safety measures there as was possible to have. They had the fortress there out on the heads,

37:30 but other than that, no I don't think there's any extra, like only the normal things that you would think would be necessary to do to try and protect...

Now, you weren't a worrier, but was the rest of your crew a bit edgy the next time you went out?

I don't know.

38:00 I've never bothered about it, really. As I say, only as I'm saying this, the bloke on the Aussie that was scared stiff to go through but no, I... I didn't ask, to be truthful.

You'd had such a close call, though, by luckily docking somewhere else when the Kuttabul got hit, it must have

38:30 **made you think, you know, "it could have been me?"**

Oh, I'm lucky to be alive, lucky to be here, yes, yes.

That's extraordinary. Well, I think we'll just stop on this tape and...

Tape 4

00:31 **One is, you mentioned that your Dad knew Tommy Bent[Sir Thomas Bent - politician]?**

Yes.

I wonder if he told you much about him?

Oh, not a great deal, Stella; only he was very gruff but very good natured man and his statue still stands down there.

Indeed it does. I wonder when your Dad was his mate, how much of that area had been designed already?

- 01:00 Oh, not a great deal, mainly I think, how can I put it? There wouldn't be any modern-type homes down there at that stage; and as for flats and units - no, I don't think...
- No, I'm trying to imagine... there would have been a little Nepean Highway and a...?**
- Oh yeah, yeah; well, we
- 01:30 lived on Nepean Road early on in the piece, like when Mum and Dad first came down from Melbourne and Nepean Highway was cobblestone and the old market gardeners would go along and sleep in their truck and the old horse would be trudging along.
- 02:00 **I wanted to ask a little more about your father's journey into Kyneton and on the land?**
- Into?
- You said he bought some land in Kyneton?**
- Kyneton?
- Is that right?**
- Yes, yeah I'm sorry I thought you said Clayton.
- No, sorry.**
- I am a bit...
- I'll articulate a bit better. I know you were working at that point, but did you spend much time**
- 02:30 **down there?**
- No, no. When they bought the block of land and built, it was soon after that, that I came down and worked.
- I've heard before how men and women had to walk off their land because of the Depression but I wonder if he talked to you very much about that?**
- No, no,
- 03:00 no not a great deal, no. Only that I knew that the builder had foreclosed on them and they'd lost the lot.
- When he came back to the city, what possessions did he and your mother still own?**
- Not a great deal.
- Did they have anything left to make a new start?**
- 03:30 I don't think there was a great deal of furniture we brought down, Stella, because, you see, we'd have to pay for it to come from Kyneton certainly. It's only, what, about 50 odd mile from Kyneton to Melbourne, but I can't recall whether they brought a great deal with them
- 04:00 or not.
- It must have been shattering for his spirit?**
- Oh yes it was. Well as I say, Mum took in boarders to sort of keep things going.
- And afterwards, where did he end up working when things got a bit better?**
- Well as I say he, at one stage
- 04:30 one of the boarders we had, I can't remember his name but he worked for Bailleau Allard[?] and, like some of the, what should I say, the well-to-do's such as Sydney Myer. Well, they were away
- 05:00 overseas and Dad was out their caretaking.
- Really? In Toorak?**
- Yeah. I was still working at Woolworths at the time and I used to stay out there with him.
- You stayed in the home in Toorak?**
- Yeah.
- I don't suppose you could describe it for me, could you?**
- The ballroom was absolutely magnificent. We used to have to go all
- 05:30 around and check it out every night to see that everything was alright. There was a cottage there with a driver who, like the chauffeur and Dad's job was, if Sydney, or the young minor wanted anything,

06:00 Dad would ring the chauffeur and the chauffeur would pick Dad up and put the son in and... up and go and do the shopping.

Were there any portraits inside that you recall?

Oh, I guess there were, Stella, but I just can't recall. I guess there would be some beautiful paintings and all that, but I guess at that stage of my life I wasn't

06:30 really interested in them.

What about the garden?

Magnificent. They had the garden, like, they had a gardener there,

Oh right, you didn't even have to do that?

Oh no, no, no. They had a gardener there.

Did you ever have a chance to sit down at the dining table and have a meal while they were away?

Oh yeah, yes, Dad used to cook the meals.

So you could kind of live it up a little bit?

Mm.

How fantastic!

Tom Hocks

07:00 stew we used to make... Dad. Like lamb chops and vegetables, Tom Hocks stew.

So did he, did his spirit survive losing his land at Kyneton?

Yes, yeah and then there was another place we stayed at along the Esplanade there at Ivanhoe. That was another

07:30 beautiful home, and when we stayed out there we used to go out there and see him there; and another one in St Kilda Road. I can't recall all the names, Stella, but there were different places he would... then it was after that I think, he was caretaker for Marx Brothers in

08:00 Connors, Connors Place.

Do you know if there was much of a problem with theft then, during the Depression?

I don't think so, certainly there wasn't as much as, stabbings and murders or that sort of thing.

I guess I wondered if he was looking after all of these nice treasures in these homes...?

08:30 Oh well, yes, yes.

I guess that's what he was there to do?

That was what he was there for, yes.

And animals, did he have to look after those as well?

No, I don't think there were any animals there to be looked after.

Ok, I was curious about all of that. It must have been quite opulent?

Oh, yeah.

Still is. Now, I needed you to explain to me a bit more about why the

09:00 **police officer turned up after you enlisted?**

I had, well I suppose they wanted to check if I was James J Constable and I was the son of Charles and Ethel Constable.

So does that mean that fellows would have joined up under false names and...?

Quite possible.

Oh, OK.

And I think this could have been the reason, Stella.

Did you not have any

09:30 **identification when you joined up?**

No, only to say I was James Joseph Constable.

That's interesting, perhaps the police did that on a regular basis?

Well, I would imagine so, yes. I could have been running away from home.

Or the law?

Well yes, yes.

For bad driving maybe?

Do you have to?

10:00 **I wanted also to ask a little bit about Port Melbourne and how it looked at the time, when you joined up.**

Oh, God! it's an entirely different place now! Oh, Port Melbourne, if you lived in Port Melbourne, oh that was... you were in the slums - not anymore! Not anymore.

You're in 'café latte' land now?

Oh yes,

10:30 yes, yes.

So, down at Port Melbourne there's these three, they're not lighthouses but there's three beacon points down there, they've been there for a long time and they've now built houses around them and the like but I wondered if you could describe the railway that must have gone out?

Well, the railway went down, right down to the pier.

And was it

11:00 **a train as you would see it on the ordinary gauges or...?**

Oh, the normal old 'red rattlers' as they were called, yes.

It must have been a pretty busy place down there then?

Oh yes. Oh gosh yes. See all the ships used to come in down there and oh yeah it was a great place, Port Melbourne pier.

11:30 Oh yeah, you'd get down there and you were, you were with somebody.

Really?

Oh yeah, quite often you'd get the train, get out at Port Melbourne and have a look around the ships. Oh yes, it was a day out.

Did they have ferries operating across the port then?

What was the name of it?

12:00 Rodney, Rodney I think it was, used to go from Port Melbourne across.

And Port Melbourne's got a lot of pubs.

Oh yeah, yeah. Plenty.

If it was such a sort of down-and-out neighbourhood back then, were you able to gauge

12:30 **the kind of clientele in those pubs?**

Well, they were all sort of workmen. You would very seldom see collar and tie.

I'm sure you wouldn't. No, they were all over in Camberwell, weren't they?

Yeah.

So I guess what I'm driving at is how people were coping during the Depression and whether they resorted to things like petty crime or black market or...?

13:00 Oh, they'd be black market for sure, oh yes. "Fallen off the back of a truck".

And I know that you were a good clean young lad but if you're hanging around ships, you probably see all sorts of sights to the world so did you ever bump into unsavoury types around Port Melbourne or Williamstown?

13:30 No, you wouldn't call them unsightly. There was a lot. For instance, Bett, when I was courting her, lived at Footscray, and invariably I would miss the last train wouldn't I? And I'd think nothing of walking in

along Diamond Road and you'd meet some bloke and he'd say "You gotta fag mate?"

14:00 You get into Flinders Street to the pie cart and pie... sometimes you fluked the all night tram out to St Kilda, then I'd walk home from St Kilda to Ripponlea. But no, you'd, they were battlers and as I say, if you had enough money to buy your

14:30 smokes and you could... and someone would say, "Give us a fag mate?" well, you thought nothing of it and even if they were drunk, there was none of this stabbing and that sort of thing in those days.

Where are some of the places where you took Betty while you were courting?

Well,

15:00 I can remember Dorothy Lamour [Hollywood actress], Dorothy Lamour, Jungle Princess at the Capitol Theatre, right.

What did you make of her costume Dorothy Lamour?

And Dorothy stooped down to get a drink out of

15:30 the creek or the river, did I drop that or you, girls?

You can have it.

Bett let out a scream. Well, everybody saw it... looked around. I used to meet Bett,

Hang on a second, why did Betty scream at Dorothy Lamour?

16:00 Well, she thought the crocodile was going to eat her head off, this crocodile you could see it coming through the trees. I know we were married when we went to see Gladys Moncrieff [singer] in Merry Widow at the Princess Theatre I think it was, or the Majesty's, I'm not sure. Anyhow, couldn't get a seat

16:30 so, they had a box. I said, "Come on, right up on the box" well I think, "Blimey!" I think, and his wife and all the celebrities were sort of down at the front seat and Mama and I were up in the box overlooking the stage: and me in a sailor's uniform.

You could have spat.

Yeah, but I'll never forget that, she was absolutely... I've got records of her,

17:00 Gladys Montcrieff, beautiful. No, then as I say when we, I worked at Woolworths and I'd invited Bett to the ball. She was Miss Davidson. That was at the Mansion in St Kilda.

Oh yes, it's still a shell.

Yeah.

They've kept

17:30 **the facade there.**

Or it might been the Palais, we danced at the Palais or pictures at the Palais. We used to go square dancing to the Mansion. Ah, what was his name? Walker, somebody Walker, I think it was, and he used to teach the square dancing. There used to be a group of us go and one

18:00 fellow, he thought he was a better dancer than we were and he went into the group... but no, we used to have a lovely lot of fun square dancing.

And when you were getting married, did your mother or father offer you any advice about married life?

No.

Did they more or less say, "You're on your own, son"?

Yeah, well as I say,

18:30 see, from when I left home to work, and then I didn't see them for quite a while; but Dad and I were great mates. I worked for a bookmaker for 20 odd years and Dad, I was telling the young guy, he used to go to the races from when he was that high. From

19:00 Brighton he'd go to Caulfield and I'd take Dad to the races. He used to take me when I was younger. He used to come down to Minto Race Course which is now a housing estate. Williamstown Races, I used to go with him to the races. No, we were great mates, had a great

19:30 friendship with Dad.

What did you do for the bookmaker?

I was payout clerk.

You're the man they wanted to see?

Yes and I started working for him when they had the greyhounds out at White City and then we got into racing, Mooney Valley, Caulfield, Flemington. Then when the trots were still at the Showgrounds,

20:00 I worked from there, at the trots.

What equipment would you have?

What equipment, would I have?

If any, just a bag?

Just a bag, yes. I know we had a good night at one Inter Dominion Trots and he said to me, "Well, you'd better go out and get the car". So I went out and got the big Buick and we hopped into the car and he said "You'd better take the bag

20:30 in with you". So, he said "Now fill your pockets". I filled up all my pockets with money and drove him to his place and emptied all, went into the garage, like self opening doors on his garage and then come inside and just throw it all out on the table and he would also, if he wasn't working but there might

21:00 be a particular trot meeting and he'd give me all the money at the races, to give me the key to the bank vault to drop it into the bank. Dad would be with me and I'd say, "Well, give me that from under the seat and give it out to me" and he'd say "Oh son, you shouldn't be doing this" and he's holding back the money. "Dad, give it to me, please so I can get..." "Oh no, no.

21:30 You shouldn't be doing this. You..."

What was he worried would happen to you?

Well, anybody could see me and knock me over but if you grabbed the bag and went straight and put it in the...oh no, but I'd like to have the money that I handled for him.

A huge amount of trust that that fellow placed in your hands?

Well I suppose, yes.

I mean,

22:00 **you look pretty trustworthy. You never can tell!**

Oh, I handled thousands.

Did, I can imagine there would be some dangerous times for fellows?

Oh well yes, yes. See I'm, what am I? 87 well, see I've worked I've been retired when I was 62,

22:30 but I suppose I'm going back about, a fair while when things were starting to get a bit tough.

I guess, and can you tell me how it operated between legitimate book-keepers of the day and the SP [starting price bookmaker]...?

He started off as an SP.

Well, you gotta start somewhere.

And that

23:00 was when he worked, he was working out at the aircraft factory.

I wonder if he ever got nicked by the police for...?

I don't think so. There was another one, I'd better not mention names but he was a Stawell Gift [professional footrace] and I owed quite a lot of money and he took the knock... owing quite a bit,

23:30 he then, I don't know how he got back to be a bookmaker but he became another leading bookmaker, but the most miserable man you've ever met in your life. We used to loan him one of our stands on [Melbourne] Cup Day and you wouldn't get a thank you or he wouldn't buy you a beer.

So are you a bit tinny [lucky]?

A bit tinny?

24:00 Well I've been lucky in life.

And at Cup Days, especially Melbourne Cup or Caulfield Cup, how would you set yourselves up for the day?

Well, we used to work at Flemington, we used to work on Sydney and Adelaide, well one of the bag men, like

24:30 that took the money out the front he used to take his car around to Arthur, that was the bookmaker's place and we'd get all the gear and everything. We'd get all the stands and everything set up and boards and everything and have it already for Arthur when he got out there.

Would he have a name up?

Oh yes, yes, Arthur Woodward was his name, who I worked for.

Because some book-keepers would have a

25:00 **better reputation than others, I imagine?**

Oh yes, yeah but see now, it's all computerised. See we noticed the difference when it changed over to decimal currency because somebody "Oh a dollar each way" well that was five bob each way and it took a while like, for people well, including

25:30 myself to get used to it

These days there's quinellas, trifactas, boxed trifactas, you name it, what could you bet on back then?

Well you could have, well you had the tote. There'd be doubles bookmakers. When I first started to work for him out at Flemington on the flat, well you could have two bob each way.

26:00 Some races, for instance if there were only seven starters, well there's no third place. Some races they'd bet each way, other races it would be win only. It was amazing Cup Day the amount of drunks that used to bet and they'd come up

26:30 and say "I'd say" and I'd say "Now, hang on a minute, there's your ticket. That's how much you're gonna get". There used to be little Maltese chap and he used to bet with us, he was a big better and he used to come out with that much and he'd come over and he'd say to me "Lend us 20, Jim?" Next race meeting, he'd be straight up with it.

27:00 I, well I got to know quite a lot of friends sort of, only racecourse friends. What was his name? The Black Knight, I think, he was a detective and he'd be down there talking to me and he'd say, "D'you see that

27:30 bloke, Jimmy?" and I'd say, "Yes, yes", and he'd say, "Best safe cracker in Melbourne".

Best safe...?

Best safe cracker in Melbourne. And he said quite often, "If you need a safe, get in touch with him; he'll tell you". And another one used to stand on the corner of Flinders Street and

28:00 Elizabeth. Well, he used to come out and bet with us. I can't recall his... a big...and we used to work in the Elms at Flemington, and the bar would be from here across the road or something, and there'd be Arthur, two out the front, and one on Sydney book, one on Adelaide book,

28:30 two bagmen, another bloke, Pensley, and "Time for a drink", so I had to go up to the bar and, "Hello Jimmy, how many do you want?" No trouble. Anyhow, one particular day this policeman said to me, "Jim, ever have a whisky?"

29:00 I said, "Now and then I do, why?" And he said, "Well, I'd love some of those whisky glasses", and I said "Oh, would you?" And he said, "Yeah, can you do anything about it?" and I said "Oh, I don't know whether I can or not", I said, "Pretty tough question". Anyhow, I said to the barman, "Any chance?" He said,

29:30 "How many do you want?" I think it was a dozen that I got. "Oh," he said, "It's for old so-and-so", and I said, "Oh yeah, no worries", so I got them. He put them in my bag for me. Left them down on the ground and he came back the old policeman and he said, "How did you get on?" and I said "Some bloke left a parcel here for you and I picked it up

30:00 for you", and then I'd say... and different other ones I'd meet, "How ya going Jim?"

Bent [corrupt] cops?

Yeah.

And you with the name Constable!

This fellow, like this other bagman that used to pick up the gear and everything he knew, I think he knew all the detectives and everything. He used to go around

30:30 with them sometimes.

Was there any, what do you call it?

Pilfering?

Well, protection money paid to the cops?

Well, there might have been. I don't know about that. I don't know about that, no.

And also, you must have seen a lot of fellows lose their livelihood and they...?

31:00 Yes, yes, yes.

Heartbreaking at times, I'm sure?

Yes, well look at the pokies now.

It's the same I guess.

But I mean nobody tells you.

Did they have any laws about whether you were allowed to continue to take bets off intoxicated men or men you knew...?

No, no.

Just, what did you call it...?

I used to have a fair idea of

31:30 what, when he, Arthur's written the ticket and I could say to the clerk who was ticking off, "It looks like so-and-so", and he'd say, "Oh yes, that's right, Jim. That's right, that's right" but I know quite a lot would try you. For instance, they might have had to get six dollars, but they'd say, "Oh no, I've got to get 60". They'd try you out, oh yeah.

32:00 **And you did know the bookmaker, Hamilton?**

Yeah, Archie Hamilton wasn't it?

And I believe he died under slightly mysterious circumstances related to... I don't suppose you remember that?

Mm.

You do?

Mm.

What do you recall about that event?

Well not a great deal. Only that I heard that he...Dave Prince, I worked with

32:30 him; Williams I worked with him. I think I used to pick him up from his flat in Dandenong Road and take him down and he used to say to me "Now Jimmy, don't go calling odds, please. Don't go calling odds, people will come along and they'll have a look at the board

33:00 and they'll say yes, I'll have that bet. I don't want... You're not working for Arthur Woodward now, you're working for me and that was it.

And one final question about this, who was the champion of the day when you were working as a bookmaker, the horse champion? Was there a great horse you loved most?

Yes. God, girl, you've got me thinking now. Purcell used to ride it. Comet Court.

33:30 **Melbourne Cup winner? Did it win the Melbourne Cup?**

Yes.

I think we'd better get back to sea. After the incident of the Kuttabal, I think you mentioned that you studied for your first class stoker's ticket?

Oh, no, no.

34:00 **No, I got that wrong; sorry about that.**

I studied for engine driver's ticket .

Much, much later on.

When I came home.

Yeah.

When I came out of the navy, I had a civilian boiler ticket, and I went to the Mines Department and they gave me a civvy ticket. Well then when I was working on the pumping station, I thought, "This is too

hard for me firing (UNCLEAR)", and this is when I

34:30 studied and got an engine driver's ticket.

OK, what about this bit of business with the Hogan lanterns, the hurricane lanterns on this motor boat? Can you tell me that story?

It wasn't motor boat, darl. It was an old ferry that was anchored off, shocking you know I was there, Maryborough, Marlborough, or some name like that.

35:00 Anyhow, it was on similar lines to Garden Island so, we went there and, as I say, we were lodging, what was commonly known as lodge n'com on this old ferry. We had, supposedly had to supply our own meals and everything, yeah.

What was that about, the lodge n'com? Why weren't you supplied your own food and

35:30 **accommodation?**

Well, we got more money for being out there but we got very matey with the cook. He used to look after us very well. As I say, the hurricane lamps were for us, like to walk around at night. If we were called at night or anything and this is what I say, I said to my opposite number "There's a

36:00 diesel generator there, why don't we use it?"

Did you know that would get you into hot water?

No. Oh no, no. As I say, the lieut [lieutenant]commander said to me "D'you realise there's a war on? You're wasting diesel fuel". Oh no, no, I didn't... see, we

36:30 weren't told that we weren't allowed to use it. If we'd have been told, well that's it. No.

What instructions did they give you when you went on this old ferry?

None, really. We were there at lodge n'com and we were at call for any duty in the motor boat. Like, we had to run backwards and forwards to...

So you

37:00 **were just told to stay there and wait for the...?**

Yeah, yeah.

Can you tell me a little bit about, a little bit more about the response that you got from using the hurricanes and the dressing-down that you received for it, like were you worried that you were going to be thrown out of the navy?

Oh no, no, no. Or as I say, as the coxswain said to me the, "punishment draft"

37:30 for doing something really that you shouldn't have been doing which, as I'm saying, it was more of a safety sort of thing.

Does it go on your record or in your pay book?

I don't know, I'm not sure.

OK, so it wasn't that serious a deal though?

Oh no, no, no. Thank God I hadn't committed a murder or anything

38:00 like that.

On the harbour in Sydney at night during the war, what were the restrictions in terms of lighting and...?

Very little, very little.

So there was no sort of black out or brown out regulations?

Oh I think yeah, there would be brown out, yeah.

So from where you where on the harbour, if you looked out, would you

38:30 **see craft out on the water or would they have their lights out?**

Oh no, you wouldn't see...

So it was quite dark out there then at night?

Yes, yes.

OK.

You'd see the flashlights from the heads like, that was all you'd see.

Everything else...?

Mm. Yeah.

Let's change tapes...

Tape 5

00:54 **Let's talk about HMAS Australia, what were your immediate**

01:00 **impressions of this rather large boat?**

I thought, "How am I going to survive on a ship this size?" and try to, like

01:30 make friends on the ship. I mean it was different coming off the two ships that I was on but to get onto that with all the crew. I thought, "Ge, like going into a strange land", but I think I accustomed myself pretty well to it. I,

02:00 people would say to me, "You've got the gift of the gab", 'cause I love talking to people. I get a lot of interest out of talking to people and have a chat with them and, as I say, used to go ashore with them, oh yeah.

Is there an official navy procedure when you transfer one draft to another?

Oh, I don't think

02:30 so; it's only that your papers go.

So you just turn up and they say...?

Yeah, yeah. "Leading stoker Constable, there's your locker and that's..." I don't think I ever had a hammock. I used to sleep on the bench, I used to

03:00 take a hammock cover out and roll up my overalls and that was it, 'cause I thought, "Well, by the time you get out of your hammock, tie up your hammock and go on watch..." so I used to just lie there on the bench.

Each ship probably has different conditions for its men, what did the Australia have

03:30 **that suited you?**

Well, you had this huge bath, bathroom and shower area so I suppose there would have to be at least six or eight wash basins along and mirrors and, as I was saying, that

04:00 I used to shower all the time. Strange enough, we were coming home from England and we brought, oh I forget how many soldiers back, and they slept up in what was known as our common room and I don't know if they ever got undressed or not, to be

04:30 truthful, and they'd come down in bare feet, fully booted and spurred, well not booted but fully dressed and just stand there and wash their face and that was it. I didn't even see one...

A bit smelly?

Well, this is it. Thank God they were up in the other common room.

I think I've read that navy men, by their nature, are, you know, quite, to take pride in their ...?

We had one bloke, I can't recall

05:00 his name now, went to Flinders Street 'cause he wouldn't shower so, I don't know whether you recall 'soft soap'? It was a brownie colour, it was a soft soap like a jelly sort of, so we put him in the shower, pardon me, fully booted and

05:30 spurred and we showered him. We rubbed soft soap all over the clothes so we got him out of that and put him under the shower again and... soft soap. He showered every day from then.

You said before that you wouldn't wear boots on the ship while stoking?

You did. You had boots.

Oh you did have to?

06:00 Yes.

Oh I thought you might have had an alternative bit of footwear?

No, boots.

And also, what happens with your uniform, 'cause I imagine HMAS Australia would have had it embroidered on your cap? Did you get an allowance to change uniforms?

No, we were issued with your uniform and your cap sort of thing. Harking back to that,

06:30 I met Bett at Footscray Station when I got my uniform. It was an odd jacket and an odd pair of trousers and I'm standing there at the subway at Footscray Station and the kiddies are standing looking at me. From then on I went into, there was a place in

07:00 Elizabeth Street, I think, and you got tiddlies, which was like the real thing, and as I say, you had to pay for all your tiddlies; but no, my first one was odd.

I wonder if you could explain to me what tanking is?

What?

Tanking.

Tanking?

Yeah, you said that

07:30 **you were in charge of water tanks?**

Water tanks?

Yeah.

Well, you'd come into port and you'd check what water we had on board. Well then I'd go down to find out where the water main was on the pier and I'd have somebody else up on deck, telling me how it was going, like,

08:00 to, for me to turn the hydrant off or on. The boilers, they were fed with the salt water we used to condense in, what's the word? and that was used for the boilers.

08:30 I suppose it was more or less like purified water.

Distilled?

Evaporated.

I would imagine maintaining the right water levels on a ship that size would be quite a mathematical challenge?

Oh it was, yeah.

Were there ever times when the ship was running low on water or...?

09:00 **No, I don't think so, no. Like, I guess we had a fair idea what usage there would be daily.**

What sort of upsets could occur on a ship that size to interfere with its routine?

How do you mean, like machinery wise, engine room wise or....

Yeah, like you can imagine a massive storm would obviously do some sort of damage,

09:30 **but I bet there would be machinery problems or mechanical or human problems that would upset the running of something that size?**

Well, it would only be that you could have turbine breakdown, but there again, you've got two lots of turbines.

10:00 No, I don't know really, I don't think...

Did you ever get into any pickles onboard that you had to sort out quick smart before you ran into some trouble?

No, no.

OK. You said a minute ago that you wondered how on earth you'd get on or you'd survive

10:30 **on that ship, how did you then? Did you sleep easily...?**

Well, as I say I got to know the, all my stoking crowd. We used to play crown and anchor. We used to play nab. If you weren't reading a book or the papers or something like that, that's what you would be doing.

I believe that men

11:00 **onboard well, men in the navy, were very good at getting along with each other and managed to live in a small space?**

Oh yes, yeah. I don't think I had one bad friend in all the years I was in it.

What would happen if fellows did have difficulty with each other, who would sort that out?

11:30 Well, it's a good question, Stella, because I mean you can't sort of take sides. They'd have to sort of come to some sort of truce between them. Like shake hands and say, "Well, look, we only go this way once, why are we carrying on like this?"

Would there be any kind of pressure...?

Interrupting you, I guess if

12:00 anything became that serious well, one would report it to one of the officers and he would in turn try and sort it out.

I guess so. And there were other distractions like boxing onboard ship, did that occur?

Oh yes, they used to have boxing matches.

Were you much of a pug [pugilist]?

No, I wasn't, no. As I was saying to Bianca, this fellow who was,

12:30 well, fight like a thrashing machine, but get him to go down and get the meal... no, scared stiff.

Let's talk about sailing into the Pacific and on to the Philippines? I'm wondering whether you were very well up to date down in the hole where you were with what was going on with the Japanese?

Well yes, we'd be informed,

13:00 like, other than the speakers, the commander would say what was going on and we were heading off to so-and-so and hope we get there safely and that sort of thing. I think it was Moratai, when we were heading to Moratai and we were all out on deck playing tombola [a lottery],

13:30 which is the same as lotto and this, we were all in convoy and a plane came down and sunk an American ship.

How far away?

Oh well over, we could see it and you could see them jumping overboard but we couldn't stop, like we were in convoy and we had to keep

14:00 going.

That's a strange thing, I'm sure?

Well, that was it.

Did you see the plane that hit it?

As I say, it sort of come down under the, out of the sun.

Had you seen any Zeros before that?

No, no.

What sort of a discussion does that prompt among the men if

14:30 **you're busy playing tombola ?**

Oh, you think, "Oh no, are we going to be next?" sort of thing. Well, then I'm not sure whether it was on the way up to the Philippines where we got one on the bridge.

I read a little about that and you were really...

The skipper, Dechaineux, he was killed. I forget the other, I

15:00 can't think of his name, I believe he is now an admiral. Peak - he was a terrific bloke, and he got badly burnt. And he'd come down and sit on the deck, and any one of us who was walking past, I forget who it was now, that made him this wire that a cigarette would fit in, and stick it in to the bandage, and if any of us went past, well, we'd put a cigarette in his mouth.

And another fellow died

15:30 **who wasn't a navy man, John Collins. Do you recall that?**

He, well, John Collins, during battle stations, he would go to his cabin and I, at times, they'd have a guard outside his cabin.

16:00 **Why was that?**

Whether they thought he might do something or whether he was just scared stiff.

Was he the fellow that flew the plane onboard, I'm not quite sure of my history?

I don't think so...

What was John Collins' position?

He was admiral, I think.

Oh, I'm

16:30 **sorry. He was the admiral?**

Mm.

How did it work with the admiral and the captain, then, onboard?

Well, I think it was Admiral Collins [Vice Admiral John Augustine Collins, KCB, CB], you'd better not quote me for sure on that.

No, no.

No, you'd better query that, Stella, I think.

Could you take me through that day when you were hit and Dechaineux was killed, like from your

17:00 **perspective, not from...?**

Well, there again, "Are we going to be next?"

So were you down, you were down stoking at the time or were you off duty?

No, I was off duty.

Having a kip or playing or ...?

No, I forget now. I know I was off duty.

And from your perspective, what were the kind of chain of events that occurred?

17:30 Well, we just kept going in convoy.

When you were hit by the kamikaze, were you anywhere in eyesight of that?

Were I?

Could you see it?

No, I didn't hear it but... well, I heard the crash, yeah.

Were you able to come out

18:00 **and see the wreckage?**

Yes.

What, can you describe that for me?

Well, all we knew, like the bridge had been hit. We weren't allowed to go up and inspect it or anything. Well, only from the bow, like sort of look back and see it. There was great

18:30 playful[?], like running around to get the skipper down and any of the others that were injured; but certainly it was a very, very frightening experience to start off with; but it was only minor to what

19:00 we copped when we got when we got further up.

What was the left of the, I'm assuming it was a Zero that crashed into you?

Mm.

What was left of it?

I don't think there was a great deal; don't think there was a great deal left of it.

What provisions are there onboard for fire, are there fire hydrants?

Oh yes, yeah.

And these days they use a chemical substance. In those, what was in those

19:30 **fire hydrants, do you recall?**

There'd only be the old ones that you punched.

I was just wondering, 'cause

Yes, yes.

... water solution?

And of course you had pumps that you could bring water onboard.

On a ship that size you might not know anybody personally that was affected by it, but what happens on a moral level, I mean you've been hit by a plane?

Oh,

20:00 well, as I say, I think we were all a bit worried about...as I say, I don't worry, but I mean, you think well I hope we're not going to cop some more of this but as I say, we did when we got further up into it.

Did you have drills for evacuating the boat?

20:30 Oh yeah, yeah life boat drills.

So is that something that you carry around with you, the plan of where you'll go?

Oh yes, yes, yeah and you've got your life jacket as well, but if you jumped overboard with them you'd choke, they'd kill you. You had to inflate them when you were in the water or otherwise they'd come up and break your neck. Mae Westers.

21:00 **What about, did you form unofficial buddies with each other, so that if something like that happened and the ship was going down, you made sure you looked after each other?**

Well, as I say, I had several with me in the wardroom flat, like we were a damage control party there and had any damage been done there well it was up to us to do something about it. Fix it up, if possible,

21:30 and as I say, if there was a bit of a lull, well they'd go up on deck, and if there was anybody, we'd pick 'em up.

What, what was the outcome of the death of Dechaineux, was there an official burial at sea onboard the Australia?

You've got me thinking.

22:00 **I know I do do that, I apologise.**

I wouldn't like to say, Stella; I'm not sure but, I'm not sure.

No, 'cause I heard you said before how you would bury...?

Mm, yes. So whether he was, I wouldn't like to have a guess.

OK,

22:30 **and what about his replacement?**

Black Jack Armstrong.

You must have been without a captain for a bit though?

Not, I forget for how long it was now but I guess Shiner Wright, our commander would have taken over.

Sure,

23:00 **the scuttlebutt at the end of that day must have been rather something, you know when you finally got a meal you must have all had quite a lot to say to each other?**

Oh yes, yes. Well as I say you were in damage control party most of the time.

Black Jack Armstrong?

Mm.

Did you get a chance to meet him?

Yes.

Or size him up?

Yes.

What were your impressions?

Oh, entirely different

23:30 man to Dechaineux. Dechaineux was more of a, sort of a friendly sort of a, natured bloke like...but Black Jack was always supposed to be very, very hard. Tough skipper

24:00 and harking back to Dechaineux, oh it would be a few years back now and Australia Association were meeting at St Paul's and there's a plaque in there of who was killed on the Aussie, and I was fortunate after to meet Dechaineux's son.

At St Paul's

24:30 **Cathedral?**

Mm.

In Melbourne or?

Oh yes, yes. And strangely enough I was on tele.[television]

Is that right?

I had people ringing me saying, "You were on tele!" and I said "I beg your pardon?" Oh yeah, on tele in St Paul's Cathedral. Rob was with me but I didn't know, so I enquired, "Could I could get a video?"

25:00 which I did do.

You said Black Jack Armstrong was firm but fair, I guess that's 'round about the way of saying it, how was that defined on a ship with the amount of men, how would you be able to ascertain what kind of a fellow he was?

Well, in speech, yeah. Straight and to the point, no messing about.

25:30 **Any sort of encouragement to you all?**

Oh yes, yes. Oh yes, yes.

And when would the captain make a speech onboard?

Well, after action, after an action and I think from memory he would state like how many we'd lost and how many were injured and that sort of thing.

26:00 **You went fairly quickly into another hairy situation in the Philippines; could you talk about that a little bit more?**

What, when we went right up to the Philippines? Well, it was very, very hairy. There were battleships American and English, quite

26:30 a lot. Fifteen inch guns, we were eight inch guns. We had four inch guns, we had boats with guns and well, it was bombard, bombard anything. I think we had, I'm not sure

27:00 whether it was five, I think, five or six crash onto us. I, if ever you're in Canberra, go to the War Memorial. There's a boat with a gun, I think it was, that I grabbed from one of the planes that came onboard, it crashed and I thought, "I'll have that"

27:30 so I took it right down into the engineers store and put it down there. Anyhow, one of the lieutenants came to me and he said, "I believe you've got a gun?" and I said, "Yes I have", and he said, "Where is it?" and I said, "I've got it planted". "Well" he said "Look Leading Stoker Constable you won't be able to

28:00 take it with you when we get back". "Well," I said, "Who's going to get it?" He said "It will go to the War Memorial". I said, "Alright, I'll tell you where it is" ,so it's in the War Memorial with a bent barrel

And you said it was a Bofors gun?

I think it was a Bofors I'm not sure.

And you, you'll have to help explain to me 'cause I'm not entirely sure of all the...?

Well it was in the plane.

28:30 **It was in the Japanese plane?**

Yeah.

Oh, OK.

When it crashed onboard and the gun was there and I thought, "I'll souvenir this", but I couldn't.

Someone shocked you?

Yeah.

You must have been up on deck then when this plane crashed. How far away were you when it actually impacted with the ship?

I was down in the wardroom flats; damage control.

You came back up afterwards. Can you describe

29:00 **that scene for me when you came back up again?**

Well, there were bodies, dead bodies lying there. Some with no clothes on, only their boots. There was damage to the ship. Matey Hughes he was a gunner, he was killed. There was another mate of mine, he was up

29:30 on the fo'c'sle and coming down through, he was getting through the barrier sort of thing, well he was shot dead. No, it was a frightening experience while you were there, I mean it was gunfire, gunfire all the time and as I say, if there was a bit of a lull well you came up and had a

30:00 look around.

Chaos and smoke, it sounds to me?

Mm. Yes.

The sound of it, was it so loud that you kind of just go into your head?

Oh gosh yes, yeah.

Are you worried for your life at this point?

Well yes, you were starting to get a bit worried, whether, "I was going to get

30:30 out of this lot" or not.

Are there still planes flying around, circling?

Oh yes, yes... trying to bring them down. I don't know how many our gunners shot down but it was BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG all the time, yeah.

When you say that you can come up and have a look, what is your

31:00 **duty at that point?**

Well, if you can be of any assistance.

Did you help with removing the bodies then?

Oh yeah, yeah and then they're lined up when there's a lull and overboard they go, on a slide, and in.

31:30 **I imagine it's somebody's job to remove their personal affects?**

Oh yes, yeah. Well you haven't got much personal affects on you, darl, only your dead meat ticket.

What about the injured, did you meet, did you find many wounded up there?

Oh yes, we had quite a few wounded. Well, they were down sick bay being looked after.

Is it part of your responsibility to help with the medics there, to get them down...?

32:00 Not really. Only if you could help somebody into sick bay but as I say, you had your own section to look after that you were responsible for.

Does it offer any chance to look out over the sea and take in what else is going on?

At times yes, you could have a look around and you could see all the battle. The

32:30 ships, destroyers and battleships. Oh yeah, that was like, heading onto the beach some of 'em.

Did this particular battle, was it called anything?

Well, the 'Philippines Liberation'.

So that was the battle of the Leyte Gulf and...?

Yes. Mm.

OK. So I'd read that there was more fire power

33:00 **used in that battle...?**

Oh, than any... I think it was the biggest sea battle, yeah for sure.

Can you describe the smell in the air?

(UNCLEAR) smell and it sort of gets into your clothing as well.

That grit?

Mm. I was fortunate enough, I forget her name

33:30 now...from the Philippines awarded us with a Philippines Liberation medal which I've got up there if you'd like to see it.

And what about, what happens to you physically in a situation like that, I mean I'm sure any thought of appetite or relieving yourself, all of that is probably out of the picture but I'm wondering whether your

34:00 **body sort of copes with the situation or you get the shakes at some stage or...?**

I suppose I did to a certain extent, but you'd go to sleep standing up because you had no hope...you couldn't get back to get your hammock or anything, there was nothing. There was just the wardroom flat and that was it.

And,

34:30 **I don't suppose you recall anyone saying anything to you in that confusion?**

Well, as I say, the crew that I had with me, yes we'd talk amongst ourselves, yeah.

About how long did that particular battle go on for you?

We were there eight days, I think. We were in strife every day.

35:00 **What happens to things like meals and sleep and so on, you said you could sleep standing up but how, are you on 24 hour watch at that point?**

Yeah, you're there and that's it.

So what do you do when you need to, you still need to eat and sleep so, it happens.

Well as I say, you'd go down to the galley and get whatever was on, bully beef or whatever was on, bring it back. Well then, as I

35:30 say you'd have a doze off if possible.

It seems so funny that the cooks are still down there, putting together meals?

As I say, it was mainly tinned stuff that we got because I guess cooking could be, maybe the officers got it, I don't know; but we got a tin of bully beef.

I just have this sense that if something like that was going on, the last place I would want to be is anywhere underneath. I'd be up,

36:00 **ready, life boat close behind. When you came out of that, how damaged was the Australia?**

You can see it on there, darl!

I could; but I might get you to describe it for me, on camera?

Was it port side? I'm not sure but one of the planes was carrying a 1inch naval

36:30 shell. Well that went in... ah, the centre funnel - one crashed into that. I was up in that with the ERA and cutting off pieces that were flapping. Well its, well you could see all along the side like

37:00 where we'd been hit but not badly damaged, there was only this one there. Certainly a lot of the decking was damaged, well, fitments on the deck, more or less like a site of total destruction; I suppose you'd call it.

Did it

37:30 **look bad enough to wonder that it was still afloat?**

Oh yeah, yeah. They tried very, very hard. I've been told we copped the brunt of it, the Aussie. I think we had more crashes onboard than any of the other ships.

If you were in damage control, what sort of equipment do you keep with you?

38:00 Fire extinguishers. Not a great deal of anything else, really.

I was just caught by that image of you up on the centre funnel trying to fix things and, when you had hammers or ...?

With the ERA and we had oxy up there, and cutting bits off the funnel.

Quite remarkable, staying kind of

38:30 **focused and calm under those circumstances?**

Well you had to.

Did anybody really just, not cope?

I mentioned a name before, darling, so I won't mention it again.

OK, no problems.

You know who I mean, I think.

Yeah, yes. Gosh, was there any sort of a celebration when you survived it?

39:00 Not a great deal, I suppose.

Just business as usual.

Yeah. Just...back home.

OK.

Tape 6

00:32 **I was wondering what sort of change in the crew, the survival of something like your action in the Philippines might have. What sort of effect did it have on the crew?**

It's hard to say. I think it was more or less

01:00 that we'd been through it and thank goodness we were alive and let's get home out of it. Get back to lead a normal life. I couldn't sort of well, you sort of didn't talk individually. Say, "What do you think about that?" or "What do you think...?" I don't know.

How about in terms of the unity of the crew?

Oh, marvellous.

You've lived through

01:30 **that...?**

Oh, yeah marvellous, marvellous. As I say, I had a hell of a lot of good friends, we were all good mates, we'd go ashore and have a few beers and that was it.

And how does, sorry... go on.

But, oh yeah as I said, in all my six years in the navy, I didn't have one bad friend.

And how does living

02:00 **through something like your action in the Philippines, how does that change that bond you have with those men?**

Well, I suppose it was strong, but it would even be stronger, I would think...that they survived, that we survived. As I say one, a very good friend of mine, he was shot, getting through...

02:30 somewhere, but I would, you can take that out, Stella, if you want...

OK, I will. We were just looking at the 'before' and 'after' of the Australia, it's incredible isn't it? How much damage it sustained...

They did a strange, well it used to be timber deck and before we went away, they pulled all the boards off and it was

03:00 just... steel deck.

Well lucky, 'cause with a kamikaze it would have just went up, wouldn't it?

Yeah, yeah.

Do you think they had some sort of idea that that was...?

Oh, well I suppose when you're going up into that you don't know what to expect?

What sort of damage did the Australia have in its hull?

In?

In the hull, in ...?

Well, as I say, you can see on one

03:30 side there where the naval, supposedly it was a naval shell they were carrying, and it sort of did a fair bit of damage but we were still able to patch it up and sail, thank goodness.

What can you tell me about the patch up process; were you involved?

No, no, no. That was the ERAs, like Engine Room Artificer.

04:00 They...

Was there, how did it affect your area and the way that ran?

Oh, well not to any great extent.

No damage?

No, no.

All systems go?

Yes, yes.

That's lucky. In terms of, when you've lost men and buried them at

04:30 **sea, what was there said in terms of a ceremony?**

Oh, so-and-so, "James Joseph Constable, leading stoker, has done his duty, and we now commit his body to the sea"; and strangely enough -

05:00 it seems strange to me - we had a Church of England padre onboard, and I think, don't quote me for sure on this but I think it was the Commander Farncomb was Roman Catholic and there would be a... they're,

05:30 they're Roman Catholics there and two different services... and I said, "Well, I suppose this is the way that they wanted it done but it seems strange to me; and yet again, I suppose it shouldn't because my Dad was Congregational and

06:00 we used to walk to church with Mum. I used to pump the organ down there, and then when we came to Melbourne - Mum was Anglican - and we used to go to the Anglican Church. We were married in an Anglican church and I go down here to St Mark's Anglican Church, sing in the choir and work in the op shop, etcetera,

06:30 etcetera.

How much did you have to do with the chaplain onboard the Australia?

Oh, not a great deal. You might have a service, but not any great length of service. Just a service and that was it, and as I say, if there were bodies to be committed to the sea well... I guess if you had

07:00 any queries or any complaints, well he was there if you needed him. But no, I never had any cause to go to visit him. Interrupting... some of those wedding photos...

And before that, well before or after that action were there prayers said then or...?

No, I don't,

07:30 can't recall that, no. It was only like the service, the burial - oh, not burial, but committal service. But other than that, no. Well, as I say, if we had a service, ah yeah.

Would you say you were a religious man then?

No, I'm not.

Were many of the men onboard religious?

Well,

08:00 that I don't know, I don't know but here, my main reason for going to church here is I meet all my friends there, we have a chat, we have a cup of coffee, I love to sing. My faith is in my friends. It might be a strange thing to say but that

- 08:30 is... at one stage I used to help clean the church and I had this other lady who has been in there for a long while. I think there's stained glass windows there of her relatives and she used to help me anyhow, she said to me one day
- 09:00 "Why don't you take Communion?" I said "I don't want to". I said, "When you go to the Independent Church, they bring Communion around to you if you want it". "Oh," she said, "I know where you'll go". And I said, "Well look if I go up there, I'll have friends. If I go down there, I'll have friends". She said, "No worries, I know where you're going". And I said, "Where?" and she said,
- 09:30 "Down there". Well, I said, "Margaret, I've got friends down there". So away she went, and she said, "Look, I'll be back in a minute", and I said, "Alright". Away she went and brought back some, oh, the Bible and there was a verse, St John or something, and she said, "Now, you read that". So I went home, and I'd see her at church again, and she said, "Did you read that verse?" and I said, "Look, Margaret, I'm too busy,
- 10:00 too busy to be reading Bibles, I've got other work". Anyhow, word got round that she tackled me and the vicar came and apologised to me and said, "I'm sorry it happened, Jim, we love you very dearly. We love you to come to church and sing in the choir but ..." and that was the end of that conversation, but as I say, no.

The faith in your friends, that sounds like, well it's such a service

- 10:30 **ethos, the idea of reliance on your mates. Do you think that came from the navy in your case, or was that something you've always had?**

Oh, I don't know; I've always, as I say, I love friendship. The majority of people say I'm pretty easy to get on with, which I hope I will always be

- 11:00 As a matter of fact, when I was up at Rob and Viv's there over the weekend, I got out, weeding the garden and all that, and she said, "Don't overdo it JJ, you're 88, and I want you to be around when you're 100". I said "Oh..."

After the Australia saw so much action, well what happened then? You were obviously

- 11:30 **heavily damaged?**

We came around the Cape, home. Went into Durban.

How was it travelling at that stage, was it limping along or...?

Oh no, we still had full sail sort of thing, yeah, oh yeah and went to Durban, I think. I'm not sure how long we were in Durban and then back, there's a photo in one of those I think of, back to Western Australia

- 12:00 and then back down here and I was discharged in Melbourne. They would give me, I'd passed out as a Stoker PO and if I would stay on they would give me a rank. And there was a young sub-lieutenant there discharging us, and I said, "Oh, I think I've had enough, thanks. I've had six years". "Oh, we'd love you to

- 12:30 stay on, and we'd give you your rank", and I said, "No, I think I've had enough thanks".

So from the Philippines you went to Durban?

Yeah, we went over through the Panama and back around the Cape.

How come?

I don't know. Well, we went to England. We refitted.

Oh okay, so after the Philippines with all that damage you went to England to be repaired and refitted.

Yes.

- 13:00 **So how was it travelling between the Philippines and England? Was it...?**

Well, no we came home to Sydney. Like came around and then we were sent back to go to England to be refitted and, as I say, they found that well for instance, the steel

- 13:30 in the turbines, they reckon what was in them was better quality than what they would be fitting up there...so as I say, I think it was, we left in July and had Christmas at sea on the way back from England.

So you had a break after the Philippines in Sydney?

Not for long.

How long did you get?

Oh, I don't think we were home very

14:00 long in Sydney and then over to England.

But a chance to see Betty and Duncan?

Oh yes, yes.

Did everything seem a bit different after coming through something life threatening, something where people hadn't survived?

I guess I was more than pleased to get home to Bett

14:30 and the boys, yeah.

In that sort of situation, how much would you tell them of what you'd seen and done?

Not a great deal.

How interested were they to know?

Very.

Why was it you wouldn't tell them?

Well, it wasn't a selfish sort of thing, but

15:00 I suppose I should have. Like I, for instance, they might ask me a question and I say, "Yes", but I wouldn't go on and on with it, no. There was one bloke used to be onboard, Salty McCabe, well he'd go, he might be with us when we'd go to the pub well, he'd sunk that many ships and destroyed that many planes but... no,

15:30 I suppose at the reunions, when I used to go to the Aurora reunion and the Australian, well we'd sweep up a few mines but I mean, this was friendship, came into it again remember when we were in so-and-so and somewhere else but...no, to me it's 50 years ago, so

16:00 I think I'm very lucky to be home pretty safe, pretty fit and well. As I say, I've a bit here and I've had a minor stroke and I haven't got my balance back properly but no, there's a lot of people worse off than me.

I was just wondering, I suppose, about how easy it is to relate to people you haven't served with, say when you come home to Sydney and you see Betty again

16:30 **and your sons, how hard it is to communicate to them what life has been like for you?**

Oh, well they asked me and to the best of my ability I would tell them, I guess. For a while, I had a few sleepless nights. I would go over what had happened and what hadn't happened but

17:00 no, I think I adapted back pretty well. I don't know, that's only my thoughts.

What helped you adapt? What helped you get over those sleepless nights?

Well, I'm home aren't I? Home with my wife and family and friends so what more, and as I say pretty good health, so what more do I want

17:30 in life?

Well in that situation when you're in Sydney that time and you say it's great to be back with your family, how hard is it again to leave and go away again?

Well yeah, it's not too good because once you're back on the train after leave and at Spencer Street Station invariably they would play the Maori's farewell.

18:00 **How does that go?**

"Now is the hour that we must say goodbye..." Well that used to be not the best. "Soon I'll be sailing far across the sea" but no, they were times that you can sort of think back on and think, well at least I'm still alive, I'm back

18:30 but no, invariably, the Maori's farewell and I still love it.

There wouldn't have been a dry eye in the house, would there?

No, no. This was on Spencer Street Station when you were... farewell and didn't know if you'd be coming back home again or not but as I say, I've been very fortunate and yeah, I am back home again.

19:00 **After leave, how many men would go AWOL[Absent without Leave]?**

Not too many I don't think. I think the Kuttabal, turned out there was quite a few I think. Onboard Kuttabal there were several that served on the what did they call it? The cast iron flotilla

19:30 or the tin flotilla or something?

The scrap iron?

Voyager, [HMAS] Water Hen, [HMAS] Vendetta like the destroyers and some of them were a little bit, a bit bomby but all terrific boats but...

How would that show itself, being a bit bomby?

Well, sort of get the stutters and you'd be talking to him and all of a sudden it started to get all fluttery

20:00 and you sort of think, "Oh, I hope I don't finish up like that". But they went through hell, those blokes on those destroyers.

Was it pretty well understood what caused it, why they were the way they were?

Well, I suppose they'd been under gunfire, and onboard a destroyer, I don't think life would be

20:30 as good on a destroyer as what it was on the cruiser, on the Aussie. I suppose what should I say, I suppose we're not all built the same. Some things will affect some and others it doesn't.

When you say life was easier on the Australia, did you

21:00 **consider yourself lucky to be on there, on that ship?**

Well after I got onboard and sort of got to know all my mates and everything, and I thought, "Well, yes, I think I'm bloody lucky to be on a cruiser that can sort of look after itself". Like it's got eight inch guns on it and four inch guns and, like,

21:30 the best of armourment and I thought, "Well, I think I'd rather be on this than I would on a smaller ship". For instance, harking back to the Aurora. Well, we could have missed a mine and if the mine had hit us, well...? But at least on the Aussie and you hit a mine, it would just be like a breath of wind... and would be all over and done with.

22:00 **Well then, when you were on your way to the Panama Canal on that trip, how worried were you about Japanese activity?**

I don't think we gave it a thought much.

What sort of evasive patterns did you take?

Well see, it was all over when we went through the Panama.

That was after the war?

Oh yeah, yeah.

Well, okay -

That was

right...

22:30 That was to, a round the world pleasure trip. As I say we went to Bora Bora Island and then New York and then London. Oh yes, this was after the boiler.

So whereabouts were you at the end of the war?

I'm trying to think whether... poor old Plymouth, we were in dry dock there at Plymouth. I don't know whether it was in one of those

23:00 photographs, it might have been on the damage at Plymouth and how they survived it, I don't know.

Well what did you see in postwar England, what was it like?

Hard to describe really. I mean, we went to different

23:30 places and had a look at them. Like, they weren't damaged or anything.

Were there any, I mean what did you see in the way of destroyed buildings, or ships or...?

Oh plenty. Plenty down around Plymouth, there were whole areas. There would be... just flattened and that's all that was there.

24:00 Pubs were still the same, they were a great experience and one of the dock out mateys, we were talking and he invited us to go to a soccer match. It was the greatest experience I think I have ever had. There were crowds and crowds there, Aston Villa and I forget, somebody else

24:30 and after the game there were buses lined up and I would hazard a guess within quarter of an hour, there wasn't a person. They were all... amazing how they cleared them away.

So, they got back onboard from the soccer matches, then, obviously. The system's working for those...

Yes, now harking back to the pubs, it was a real family

25:00 turnout. Like you'd meet your husband and then the wife and may be the eldest son or son and they'd chat on and you could play dominoes and you might only have two pots of beer and you're there until about 11 o'clock at night but they were marvellous to talk to. It was a real sort of social gathering to go to the pubs.

25:30 Met quite a lot of my good friends in pubs, particularly a lot of the dock out fellows because, as I say, we were there for pardon me, six months.

What did you think of the local beer?

Not bad, reasonable. The actual beer itself was like treacle but ale,

26:00 I forget now what brand of Scottish ale it was. That was the best brew of the lot so no, the actual beer was like treacle.

What did you see in the way of returned soldiers or sailors or air force men coming back into society in London or England?

There was the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute],

26:30 National, what was it? National Army Air Force and something else, well there were all nationalities in there but there again, "Oh gooday, how are you?" and you'd have a chat with him "Oh, we've been to so-and-so and we've done that" or "Where have you been?" and that was a great club. NAAFY, Navy Army and Air Force I think it

27:00 was from memory, the name of it. Then as I say London, we went to London and stayed at Gloucester House and I think I've told you all this anyhow. Hyde Park, you'd go there and there'd be somebody talking or lecturing and you'd go and listen to that.

Really? What would

27:30 **they be talking about?**

Oh, different subjects. They'd be there and they'd get heckled and...

Oh I see, the speaker's corner sort of area?

Yeah, yeah, Hyde Park.

Yeah, sure

Piccadilly Circus. You'd walk through there, well there would be gays

28:00 and lesbians and prostitutes, you name it. I had two or three mates onboard that went and stayed with gays. It didn't cost them a cracker and they were taken everywhere and lived like kings.

Was anything required in return?

Well, I didn't go into that. I imagine there would have been but, oh no, I mean

28:30 they were older than me and I thought, "Well, why not, if it's a good time?"

How much had you seen of gays or lesbians or prostitutes before London?

None, really. None. As I say, Piccadilly Place, that was the place...

Did you get propositioned?

Oh yes, but I'm sorry it wasn't my

29:00 scene but for the others, they reckon they had a marvellous time, terrific place.

Just to indulge me, do they actually say, "Hello, sailor?"

Yes, "Hello, sailor"! Oh yes, prostitutes and the lot: "Hello, sailor"! Well, if you wanted to be sailor and sail along, well, you were there. You were in it.

You don't have to name names, but did many of the men indulge?

I can recall

29:30 three and as I say they were older than me. More than happy.

What sort of education had you got about sex or sexual diseases or anything like that in the navy?

Well yes, for instance there were two or three married men

30:00 and they got the 'pox' as the saying goes. Oh yes, they went to the wrong place.

What sort of treatment could they get?

MBs or M&Bs[?] I think it was, was the cure supposedly to... I guess it did cure them because they were still alive to tell the tale.

Were

30:30 **condoms standard issue? Would everyone get them?**

If you needed them; but no, I don't think they were issued, no.

So you might have to request them?

I don't know. As I say, it wasn't my scene.

Sure, I'm just trying to get the dirt on your friends I suppose. What did you notice about London, especially in

31:00 **terms of rebuilding the time you were there, was there anything going on?**

No, no.

Was it all just still rubble everywhere and...?

Yeah, yeah. We went to the Abbey, Windsor Castle, Loch Lomond in Scotland, Edinburgh Castle and I'll tell you a funny story about that. Duncan our eldest son, he was taken by

31:30 his uncle up to the barber to have a haircut and the barber said, "How's your father, have you heard anything about your father?" and he said "Yeah, he was in Mary Scott's bedroom", this is Mary Queen of Scots Room in Edinburgh Castle. We were in there like... "Mary Scott's bedroom".

How was that, being so far apart from your

32:00 **young kids?**

Well as I say, I missed it a great deal.

Were they starting to write letters, were they able to...?

Oh no, no, no.

Probably still too young?

Yes, and they were still only young when we went to Dalrymple. Duncan started school in Dalrymple, we used to ride... Bett had a bike, I had a bike and the boys or

32:30 Duncan had a bike.

When you were in the navy, how regular was the mail?

I don't know. See everything was censored.

What affect does that have on writing letters to your wife?

Oh, I suppose it used to tend to bring us a bit closer by writing,

33:00 or as a sort of sense, "I'm corresponding, darl", and you'd read it and think we're sort of together, I don't know. But I used to write quite regularly.

How often did you, or how often could you expect to receive letters, was that a problem?

Oh well, that was a different proposition,

33:30 different proposition. You didn't get a great, I think I wrote more than I received back, but we sort of formed a bit of a code, and I'd write and, "How's Auntie Lizzy and Uncle so-and-so", and sort of put letters in

34:00 that would tend to correspond with where I was.

And how was that established? Was that like the first letter of words or...

Mm.

You had something like that?

Mm.

OK.

Well, see it was censored but I mean it was aunt and uncle, Harry and Joe and all this sort of thing and it gave her a fair idea at times like of where I

34:30 was. For instance, I told Stella, when I wrote the letter from Toora down at Gippsland, I got accused of being in Toorak.

And how did you find the fact that a censor was reading your letters as well, I mean in terms of how did that affect your sense of privacy when you were writing to Betty?

Well, there was nothing

35:00 really that could be censored in what I would write. I mean, for instance if I wrote "I'm in the Philippines at such and such..." well, that would be out straight away.

Sure, but in terms of writing, well, personal letters of a personal nature and you know that somebody else besides your wife who has to read them, did that play on your mind a bit?

35:30 No, not really, no. It was "darling" or "lushy", I think at one stage but no,

What did she call you, what was your nickname?

Oh, well I was, always been "Darl" or "Darling", and now Viv, our daughter-in-law, I'm "JJ". I'm James Joseph

36:00 and quite a lot of people... well, "JJ, how are you?"

What was your nickname in the navy?

Boonga.

How come?

Well, I grew a black beard and, as I say, up in the islands and I was black like with the sun, I loved the sun and I was christened 'Boonga'

36:30 and it didn't worry me.

Everyone had a nickname in the navy, didn't they?

Oh yeah, yeah.

What were your mates' nicknames?

Oh, one was Salty McCabe - that's the loud mouthed bloke, oh what was his name on the...? Shortie, Shortie I can't recall his name.

Was he a big bloke?

No,

37:00 only a little fellow.

He was little?

Yeah he was only a little fellow, yeah.

Because Shorty's always big and then Tiny...

The stoker PO on the Aurora, he was 'Guts Galley' because he'd... The commander was Wright so he was 'Shiner Wright' that's a photo of him in there, he was Shiner Wright a

37:30 terrific man he was, too.

Just getting back to London, what did you notice about their availability of food and basic goods?

Very light on, you either had sausages and chips or sausages and as I say, onboard we did pretty well. Now and then we'd get the ox heart and we'd give that to the dockyard natives. Fruit we used to do pretty

38:00 well with, like onboard, and as I said, we'd take it ashore and give it to the kids. But no, we were always well fed.

Was there anything besides food that they had trouble getting, did you notice?

No, I don't think so. Maybe toiletries. As I say, when we went to Gloucester House in London and had to ask if we could have some

38:30 soap.

They didn't seem to worry too much about that, did they?

No, no.

Tape 7

00:33 **You were telling us about a march with (UNCLEAR), can you explain how that came about?**

Well, we were invited to do that after the finish of the war.

Where did you march to and from?

I don't know whether we marched to Hyde Park, I think.

01:00 I can't recall properly now but I know we did.

Was there much of a crowd?

Oh, packed. Talk about marching! Well, I'd never, ever marched, but Bett's cousin and her husband lived in Adelaide, and he joined the army

01:30 from Adelaide and Anzac time, we'd go over with them and stay there. Anyhow, Frank and I were in the pub and this Anzac sailor was in there and we were chatting away and later on, "Are you gonna march?" and I said "No, I don't". I'd never ever marched. "Oh you better be in it, you'd better

02:00 be in it. Some of the Aussie crew will be marching. Anyhow, if not them, well there'll be... "Oh", I said, "Alright". Frank was marching with his lot. I thought, "Oh well..." and we were marching and the heavens opened up. Got soaked to the skin. It teemed and teemed: couldn't get back to the pub quick enough! I've

02:30 marched twice down here; I'm a member of the RSL. I was more or less talked into that, joining that, so and I don't know if it was last year or the year before. I think Rob said, "I want to march with you", and I said, "Oh alright". So Jacqueline and Christopher marched with me as well. Since I've been unwell, I drive

03:00 down to the Cenotaph, get a chair and sit down there and watch. And then Stan, my friend, who - I don't know whether you and Stella interviewed him, or it might have been your other mates down here in the - drove me back in the car and we went to the RSL and had a couple and then he drove me home, but ...

Why was it you hadn't marched before that one time?

03:30 Oh, I don't know; I think, I was a bit excited thinking, there was too much being made.

Did you not think it's important to get recognition or to remember every year?

Yes, I suppose it

04:00 is; but I don't know, as I say, I've marched twice down here and once in Adelaide, but no, it doesn't appeal to me.

Is it your sort of pragmatic nature with getting on with things; I mean, have you thought much about your experience or talked much about it since the war?

No, no.

04:30 As I say, this Stan, call him Stan again, Probus, they were at me and at me and at me to do a profile and I said "No, I don't want to be..." Well, eventually he said he would interview me, so I just said where I was born and I'd been here and done that was it but no, if people know where I've been and what I've done, well

05:00 I'm not going to sort of make myself a big fellow and say "Oh yeah, I did this... and I did that..." I went because I thought it was my duty to go, which I did do and to the best of my ability I did serve in what I thought was the right thing to do but as for boasting

05:30 about it, "Oh, I've been to the Philippines up in amongst the kamikazes and all that"; no, I've been there, done that. Maybe I'm a strange sort of person, but as I said before, we're all built differently. If we were all of the same nature, what a horrible world it would be.

After the war, how much have you seen of boasting, as you put it?

Have I?

How much have you seen of men boasting about their

06:00 **experiences ?**

Oh well sometimes you'll get, for instances down at the RSL you might get "... been there, done that" and that sort of, no, not me. As I say, I've told you well and good but I wouldn't be running around saying "Oh yeah, I've done this and ..." That's not me.

How involved

06:30 **have you been with the Australia or Aurora reunion groups?**

Aurora I used to go to when we lived in Melbourne. I joined Australia Association, I pay my subs to that but I haven't been since we've come down here. The reason being that naturally I like to have my few beers and if you

07:00 drive up you have to, well you can't have a drink, this is it. Otherwise, if you're on the breathalyser, you're gone so no, as I say, I get my satisfaction and I go down there to the RSL on Anzac Day and there's quite a lot I know, like... people and we chat away. Well, there's one, he put his age up to

07:30 join the navy, well he just dropped dead recently. He was a member down there. Another one, he was a member of the church and he'd gone to Western Australia. Stan Nugent, quoting him again, he was air force. There was another one, Ted Larkin he was air force and now and then they might

08:00 say, "Oh, you were on there? Where did you go?" and that's as far as it goes. You don't go into any long elicitation, they don't either. I think Ted got some decoration. He didn't tell me, but somebody else told me so... Once again, I've got a marvellous lot of friends.

08:30 **It sounds like you do. What would you do when you went to the Aurora Association meetings, what did it entail?**

Well, it was how many mines did you...? It was sort of a general conversation "Have you got any family, Jim?" or, "How's the wife?" and, "How's the kids?" "What have you got growing in the garden?" "Have you been or done anything interesting lately?" and you'll have a beer and then you might have another

09:00 beer; but up there like you're on the tram or get a cab. See here, as I say, well we've got the bus that goes from Portsea to Frankston. You could get on that for \$2.50 and go to town for \$2.50, get on

09:30 the tram or bus or anything as long as you were out of the city by four o'clock but no, I don't. Did I tell you, I don't think I did, that Rob took me to his club in Toorak, The Heroes and they had a grand final dinner on Friday night. "Oh you'd better be in it, Poppa", well, he's taken me out there and there was quite a lot I know. They had

10:00 Connell, I think his name is, he was the leading sports journalist for the Sun Herald, well he spoke on and talked on and very, very interesting. Then when he finished, he said, "Any questions?" so I can't help it so I got up and I said, "I would like to know what verdict

10:30 should be taken, is it the umpire's verdict or video verdict?" I said "If it's video verdict, why have we got a tribunal?" And I said, "My idea of it is," I said, "Although it don't interest me much now, but once that whistle has blown, that's the finish. You've got three umpires,

11:00 you've got boundary umpires, goal umpires now, surely all those eyes should be able to see what happens". And he said, "Very good point, very good point" so we're sitting at the table then, Rob and I having a meal and he said, "Where did he go? Which was him because I'd like to thank him for the talk".

11:30 The next thing Rob's brought him over to me and we chatted on and on. Well I'd followed South Melbourne, when they were South Melbourne from when I was 17, 17 or 18 and we were talking about all the old time footballers and he said, "Oh, it's been lovely talking to you", and I said, "Ditto, but now you better go back and have a couple of beers with your other mates"

12:00 but no, very enjoyable.

Do you find or have you found that you've got more in common with ex-servicemen than with civilians?

No, I don't think so, no I don't think so. See for instance, down the church, there's only, well, Stan again, and another one, Jim Turner who's President to the Probus,

12:30 ah Ted Larkin. I can't recall any other servicemen.

Ok. Just to get back to London after the end of the War, you also had a reception at the Guild Hall after the march?

That's right.

Can you tell us more about that, what was the procedure?

Well, it was only a dinner and the

13:00 Irish Guards.

Was it a big night for you?

Well no, not really. Well it was something because I've always been told that if you go to Guild Hall, well that's something, to go to the Guild Hall which was a very enjoyable experience. As I say, went to Windsor Castle, another great

13:30 experience. Westminster Abbey, Tower Bridge, you know, quite a lot of places like that were interesting to go and see, to be able to say, "Oh well, yeah I've been there, done that", but ...

And your reception at the Guild Hall, were there speakers?

Yeah, I think there was.

14:00 From memory now, I think it might have been some naval, I'm not exactly sure about that, you're going back a bit too far.

Well, I mean was it basically in recognition of the Australia's work?

It was in recognition of what, Australia's contribution to the war?

In your time in England, how did you find that the local's perception of Australia

14:30 **and their input into the war?**

Very good. In New York we were known as limeys.

Is that good or bad?

I don't know. On a train going from London to Scotland and there were people there in the cabin and they said "Where are you from?" "Australia."

15:00 "Oh, we thought they were all black people there". That's honest.

And what did they know of the war over this side of the world, in the Pacific and so on?

I don't think they knew a great deal about it. I think they had plenty on their own minds on what was happening in England but no, they were a very, very friendly

15:30 lot, oh yeah. A very friendly lot. As I say, the night of the pubs was a great social night. Chat on with one another. Oh no; I enjoyed it very much in England.

Those families you met in the pubs?

Pardon?

The families you met in the pubs...?

Oh, it would be dockyard blokes, they'd be there and then

16:00 they'd bring their friends there, I suppose. It would be the same if, for instance, you went to Young & Jackson's and all your friends sort of went to Young & Jackson's, and they'd be there, well, oh meet so-and-so and somebody else and, "How's things?" and "Where have you been?" and "Where are you from?" and as I say it was like a

16:30 real social evening I would say.

There can't have been many families that weren't affected by the war, in terms of loss and...?

Oh no, I think people everywhere, they were affected by the war, oh yeah, and they survived it a lot of them and a lot

17:00 didn't. But no, they, I couldn't say a word against them.

Did you meet any families who still didn't know what had happened to their sons or brothers or...?

I doubt whether there'd be too many that didn't know what had happened

17:30 to them. For instance, they might be posted "missing" or you'd been "shot dead" somewhere or you "drowned at sea", or this sort of thing but I don't think there would be too many that were on the Missing List. I think it was pretty well supervised right through.

18:00 Like, to quote back to our plaque in St Paul's Cathedral, well they've got all the names there.

So you were in England for about six months did you say?

Yeah I think, Stella, wasn't it? In England? Yeah, I think May we left here and then we had Christmas coming back

18:30 from England that was on the way back to Australia. As I say, we left England and come around through Durban and then Western Australia and then Sydney.

You must have been pretty keen to get out of it all by then?

Yes I, as I say, they told me they'd give me my PO's Rank if I stayed in and I said "No, I've had six years. That's enough, thanks". As I said maybe, if I wasn't married, I might have

19:00 considered to have stayed on because I enjoyed it. But as I said earlier on, the initial discipline, I said, "Oh no, I'll never cope with this" but I mean it sort of came as second nature to you. My opinion is that I think a lot of these, I

19:30 don't know what you could call them - 'hoons' for want of a better word, they should bring back in compulsory and put them into either navy, army, air force. Clothe them, feed them, they'll get their pay and a bit of discipline has got to rub off onto some of them and learn a trade. I mean,

20:00 instead of giving them the dole and half of them, they don't want to work nowadays. They don't. I used to love to go to work but, no, they ... to me, if they were put in army, navy or air force, then get a bit of discipline into their life because... well, Rob and Dunc say to me "Oh, you're an old square, Poppa" but

20:30 I mean, the younger people today don't seem to have the same respect for their elders.

What did your time in the navy do for you, do you think?

It taught me friendship, taught me faith in people - in my mates onboard knowing that

21:00 they wouldn't do the wrong thing by you. As I said earlier, discipline. And I've got no regrets. And as I said to you before, if I had to change my life over again I wouldn't alter it. I think I've had a very good and happy life. Sometimes

21:30 we've had our ups and downs; but other than that, I've lived through it and as I say, I had great support from Bett, my dear wife, from my family when I was younger, from my sons and wives and grandchildren now and all my good friends so, what more do I want?

22:00 After you came out of the navy and, like you say, discipline had become second nature to you, how did you find it leaving that environment?

Well, it was strange, strange for a while. Certainly I went to work but you weren't in a

22:30 confined space like you were out in the open air and going to work and more or less 'come and do what you want to' whereas onboard ship you were allotted that to do and that was your job to do it. If you didn't do it, well you'd be in trouble which, thank goodness, I was never in trouble only

23:00 lying on somebody else's Burberry, and on the diesel generator; but other than that, no.

What did you miss about your life in the army, ah the navy?

That's a good question! Well, there

23:30 again as I say, you were leading a life that you had to live, that you had to lead; I mean, you were there in it so you had to do what you were told to do. This is why I said earlier on, the discipline for a while takes a lot of getting used to, whereas

24:00 at home, you more or less do what you want to. If you want to have your dinner at eight o'clock at night, well, who's to say that you can't do it? If you don't want to get up out of bed until eight o'clock in the morning who's to say you can't do it? Whereas if you're regimented to a certain... well, you are because you're there and that's what you're to do and that's it.

It must

24:30 take a bit of getting used to, I suppose, that sort of freedom?

Well, it did yes, yeah my word it did.

Now, in London the mood's changed so much at the end of the war, did any of the men have some quite serious girlfriends, any marriages eventuate?

No I don't think so, no, no I don't think so, well as far as

25:00 my stoker's crew, as I can remember, they all had girlfriends or married. I don't... may be there was a few that went out with girlfriends but no, I don't think there was any, you know like,...coming back to Australia. Not the same as when the Yanks were here. The number that they married.

25:30 How much did you have to do with the Yanks?

Well, I can't recall the islands that we were on and the Yanks would be there. We got on very, very well. Well, I did and I thought we all did. For instance, I can't recall which

- 26:00 island it was now, and the Yanks would be there with us and we'd line up to get our rations of beer and sit and have a chat with me after you got your ration of beer. No, I found them very friendly, very good. There again, I can't recall, we went into this island
- 26:30 And they had a big American base there and we had the four inch guns rerifled there and a tradesman would say to you, "Do you want that, mate? Do you want that spanner?" they'd give you a kit of tools if you wanted it but I mean you only had locker space and you had no hope of getting it home but I know several that did
- 27:00 bring home kits of tools from ...
- Did it cause a bit of resentment knowing how much the Americans had in terms of equipment and...?**
- No, not that I saw, no.
- Were any of the men worried about the American presence in Australia when you were away?**
- I don't know
- 27:30 to any great extent; I mean, you wouldn't sort of ask, like, "Are you worried about your wife at home?" sort of thing, no, I don't think so. Not, well not any that I have come in contact with, like onboard ship, no.
- 28:00 **Did you hear any tales of girls or girlfriends, going off with Yanks?**
- Like, when I came home?
- Yeah and...**
- There might have been two or three I think that got very friendly with Yanks. Well, strangely enough, an English officer
- 28:30 boarded with Bett and her mother, yeah he was navy, I think - can't recall his name - and they got on very good. He was a great help to them there and - Archie
- 29:00 no, can't recall his name - no, he was very good with them and with the boys as well so, it never worried me.
- What differences did you notice between Americans and Australians?**
- 29:30 Not a great deal, no.
- Not in attitude or...?**
- No, I don't think so. You'd meet them in the bars at New York and chat away with them and no, I... a lot have said, "Oh, they're loud mouthed and .." all this but I didn't strike any of that. Others will say, "Oh they're real loud mouths and..."
- 30:00 they'd carry out about what they'd done and what they hadn't done; well, no, I didn't strike any of that. Maybe, as I say, some people think they're loud mouthed but no, I didn't find any of that.
- Did you see any difference between the American Navy and Australian Navy then?**
- 30:30 Only that they had much better food. Much more luxurious food. I wish I could think of this island where we had the guns rerifled and they had preserved tins of figs. God, they were beautiful and they'd give you a tin, like a big fruit tin, full it was.
- 31:00 They were beautiful, lovely and sweet and juicy and ice cream and all that and turkey...and they'd come out : "You can have it, mate, if you want it"; but Bully Beef, they'd give quids for.
- It doesn't seem to make sense, does it?**
- No, it doesn't.
- So how did you spend your 10 days in New York?**
- Well,
- 31:30 mainly sightseeing.
- Did you have, how much shore leave did you have?**
- Practically every day or every second day. I mean, you were only committed onboard to sort of keep the ship clean in your section and that sort of thing. As I say, we'd tie up at Canal Street Wharf and you could
- 32:00 look straight across to Statue of Liberty and the prison there that was on the island...

Alcatraz?

Yeah, it could be.

No.

Yeah it could be, I'm not sure but there was a prison out there on this island but oh no, where we were you'd look straight over at Liberty.

I mean, New York and London after a war were very different situations weren't they?

Oh,

32:30 yes.

What was the sort of spirit of New Yorkers in the war?

New Yorkers, they were pretty good, pretty good. You'd never see a down faced one, like grim faced one and, as I say, you'd meet 'em in the bars and chat on with them and no, as I say I couldn't say a word against them.

And in terms of their food supplies or goods supplies,

33:00 **it would be quite different from London again?**

Oh yes, yes, I don't think they wanted for anything. Oh no, there was plenty there.

What did the local New Yorkers know about Australia in terms of the war?

Not a great deal, not a great deal.

Did you find you explaining it to them a lot?

Oh yes, yeah as I say and, quite a lot of

33:30 them were under the impression we were all black.

How much did you feel that you were a, a sort of ambassador for Australia, a representative?

Oh quite often it was nice when they'd say, "We thought you were all black". Well, you'd be able to say, "No, no we're not. We do have Aboriginal tribes the same as you've got Indians and

34:00 Negroes"; but no, I used to think it was great to be able to tell them that we were white people.

Did they expect that, did they know anything about kangaroos, did they think you had kangaroos in the backyard or something?

Big rat? "You've got the big rats over there?"

The big bouncy

34:30 **rats?**

Yeah, "The great big rats you got over there". Oh no, I couldn't say a word against them.

What did you notice about the difference between the white and the black cultures in New York?

I think they got on pretty well. Maybe it was only during war time, but as I said, I got on with

35:00 the black Americans very well, I mean, does skin colour really make a difference?

Well, we all know it shouldn't but it frequently does.

It does, yeah I know, but I'm saying it shouldn't.

But at that time, what was the situation?

There were, there were Negroes serving in all of the armed

35:30 forces navy, army, air force, quite a lot.

I heard they got a bit of a rough treatment, a bit of a rough go some of the time too.

Well, I don't know about that but as I say, the ones that I've met, I couldn't say a word against. They all seemed very friendly and interested to know where you came from and what...

36:00 pleased to know you're not all black people that live there. No, I couldn't say anything against them.

Sailors have got a bit of a reputation for 'running amok' in port, do you think you got up to mischief on shore leave?

- I don't think so. I think we created our own mischief
- 36:30 if we had one too many... now where was it? I'm trying to think where it was... in Tasmania, I think. We used to, they had
- 37:00 shelves for ashtrays and we'd souvenir them.
- Was that in your navy days?**
- Yeah.
- I didn't know you went to Tassie as well?**
- Yeah, the Aurora went over there.
- Oh, okay.**
- And then, I forget who it was with me, and we tried to souvenir a mirror with 'Cascade Beer' on it and the owner said
- 37:30 "Oh no, you'd better not take that boys. You'd better leave that where it is".
- It's probably still there.**
- Yeah, it would be.

Tape 8

- 00:30 **I was looking through your photographs and then I was wondering how you had a camera onboard?**
- No, all passed by censor.
- I wanted to ask about that, what was the process to get photographs passed by the censor?**
- I'm not sure whether we had an official photographer onboard. And strange of you to ask me that: Rob said, "How did you get them?" Well, I can't recall whether
- 01:00 they were given to us or whether we had to pay for them or not. I don't know.
- Just for our interest, to get a photograph was it, did you have to go through, I know you said you didn't know where you got them from but did you get them during the war or after?**
- During.
- I'm just curious to know, I saw the stamp passed by censor 'not for publication' does that mean somebody**
- 01:30 **onboard was doing that?**
- Well, I'm not too sure; well, I don't know, Stella.
- That's okay, especially the photos of Leyte Gulf I'm wondering when they released those but it's not for you to say?**
- No, I can't help you.
- Did other fellows have cameras onboard?**
- 02:00 I guess some of them might have, yes. Could have done.
- And what about diaries, I believe they were contraband, that a lot of fellows kept diaries?**
- That I don't know.
- OK, looking at your record you had an assessment every year and curiously it was on New Year's Eve, do you remember getting your assessment signed for conduct?**
- 02:30 No.
- Alright.**
- But I hope it was all good, was it?
- It said very good every year. I just couldn't help noticing it was on New Year's Eve every year and I thought, "there's an interesting thing". Did those things get celebrated onboard a ship, New Year's Eve?**

- Not to a great extent, we might have got an extra beer or something,
- 03:00 an extra bottle of beer at Christmas and New Year.
- Well, what happens at Christmas onboard a ship that size?**
- Well, see we had, coming back we'd left England, we had Christmas on our back at sea. We might have had turkey and an extra few beers and plum pudding and that sort of thing.
- So, it's noted. It's not just another day, it's a special day?**
- 03:30 I think, well, we did celebrate a bit. We might have had an extra beer or something; but to talk about that, we never got 'rum ration', that was a known, supposedly a known thing like
- 04:00 England, the navy always got their 'rum ration'. and we got our bottle of beer.
- How did they pay you?**
- You went to the paymaster and put your cap down and he put it on your cap. You had to line up to get your pay.
- I understand there was ritual involved, but why did you have to put it in your cap?**
- On top of your cap.
- Why is that?**
- I don't
- 04:30 know why, what the reason for it was; I suppose it was tradition.
- It must have taken a while then for every man to...?**
- Oh yeah, you'd be different sections. An officer would go, like - from memory I think my number was W1720 - well,
- 05:00 it might be called W1720 onto such and such a number and up you'd go and get it.
- I can't help thinking how nice it must be to live most of your days without need for money or all those accoutrements, you know wondering around every day?**
- Well, as I say we used to play nap or crown and anchor.
- I'm familiar with crown and anchor I don't know nap. What's that?**
- Nap is
- 05:30 more or less like black jack; an ace and a jack or something like that. crown and anchor, well you've got the crown and anchor board there and you put so much on there, the same as like, no it's not the same as baccarat because you've got the board there, and then he spins, if it comes up crown, well whatever you've got and away you go.
- Is there any other game like crown and anchor so people would know?**
- 06:00 There could be another one, recently Probus had a trip to casino and we arrived there about quarter to ten, I think, in the morning, and you were invited in, had a cup of coffee, blue slip so they'd know who you are, and Stan had been there
- 06:30 and he said to me, "Have you been here before?" and I said, "No, I haven't". So we wandered around but it amazed me the number of young people there at that hour of the morning and there were these boards, I don't know what they were, but a similar type of thing to crown and anchor. I, Stan said to me, "Are you going to play the pokies?" and I said, "Oh, I'll have a go, I suppose".
- 07:00 So from memory, I think I have four \$2 coins and two single coins, and I walked over to the cashiers and I asked for \$10 and she hands me a \$10 note and I said "No, I want coins please". "Oh no" she said "You put the note in the machine". "Bloody hell". So
- 07:30 I said to Stan, "Right, well, I'll lose \$5". Anyhow, I finished up, I lost \$8, I thought, "Well that's fixed you" so we wandered around and then walked up to have our lunch, a beautiful lunch and we met one of our mates and he said, "Did you get your crown card?" "What's this crown card business?" "Oh," he said, "You get \$9 credit on the pokies". "So, where do you get
- 08:00 that?" So, "You go down there to the Information place" and, "Have you got any identification?" "Yes, I'm Jim Constable", and showed her. So, that was that and over she goes to the computer and then she gives me the card which you go and put in the machine. By this time all the machines were just about

full and there was a row, or two or three, well two separate machines there and

08:30 Stan said, "Will we have a go at that?" and I said, "Yeah, why not?" So, poked the \$9 in and I thought "I'll play two or three lines", and it finished up I got \$18.

Playing crown and anchor on the Australia, there must have been some fellows who couldn't help themselves gambling?

No, it was a fact and one little fellow, can't remember, well he won pounds and pounds

09:00 and at one stage, big bloke that used to run it, I think he was in the game as well and he was going to bar him, he was winning that much.

Would there be repercussions if someone was winning too much, someone was losing too much?

Well, I suppose, it's really illegal. You're not supposed to be

09:30 playing it onboard.

Would the officers ever play it?

Oh, I don't know, darl. I don't know.

'Cause another salty once told me that you had to get permission from...?

Well, whether he might have but it was illegal, cards and.... Whilst we were in dry dock at Plymouth, well naturally enough the boilers were out and

10:00 we used to get down there with the lamps and get in under the boiler tubes and play cards.

Which leads me to my next question: what does a stoker do when you're not actually sailing, in dry dock?

Well, you're off. You've done your shift so you're off.

You were in Plymouth for a long time?

Yeah.

You must have still had duties of one kind or another?

Oh well yes, as I said

10:30 you help out cleaning up or anything like that or go and have a yarn to the dock yard fellows and if they wanted a hand with anything, well you'd give them a hand with it.

I guess I just wondered whether if, in dry dock whether it was a bit of a slow time?

Oh yeah, as I say, we used to get ashore and you could go, well

11:00 if we got any reasonable leave as I told you, my mate and I, Sammy Bennett, we stayed a couple of days in Edinburgh and then went on to Aberdeen to see his family up there. Other days you might come in to have a potter around. There's a lot of photographs I've got there of different

11:30 sort of beauty spots where you could go, and bus travel was pretty cheap for us. Like I think the majority of our travel was free.

I wonder, I get the feeling that after the war's finished in Europe there must have been a fair number of idle men just wandering around just out of service or...?

Yes, there would have been, looking for work, yeah.

12:00 **I bet. Did any fellows ever go AWOL when you were in dock?**

No, as I say, the Kuttabul incident, there was a few went AWOL there.

Yes, indeed you did. I know we're jumping around a little bit, I apologise for that.

No.

I'm prompted by some things I saw in your album and one was the

12:30 **concert put on at what was called the 'Globe Theatre' at the barracks, and it was...?**

That was in Scotland.

And the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] put it together did he?

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little about that?

I can't recall a great deal of it, only, I forget now whether it was like a stage act

13:00 or whether it was singers, I can't remember a great deal of it, Stella.

That's alright.

But Sergeant Grapes is the one that's got the name on the front of it.

Would you have concerts onboard the Australia or the Aurora?

No.

Were there any musical talents among you or clever fellows that put together events?

Not that I can recall, no.

13:30 **You said earlier that you really loved to sing and I was wondering whether the navy gave you a chance to sing at any stage?**

No, I don't think so.

Not even with your mates down in the boiler room?

Oh well, might have occasionally, but not to any great extent. Harking back about singing, I had a beautiful soprano voice when in Kyneton,

14:00 and I went to learn music and all the piano, learn singing and I was invited to come down and sing at St Paul's choir and the family thought I was too young to leave home.

Dear oh dear, and how old were you when you're soprano career became unstuck?

About 10.

Did you

14:30 **take up any other singing though? Did you become an alto?**

No.

But there was a lot of music around during the war?

Oh yeah, I've got records and records and records.

Were there opportunities for pub singalongs in dock or...?

Maybe at the pubs, we might have had a bit of a singalong yes.

I find it hard to believe, you worked in a Celtic country

15:00 **singing somewhere. And I appreciate you talked a little bit about this before but I wondered if we could talk a bit more about Bora Bora given how much you loved it?**

The people were marvellous, the natives. As I told you, they were sort of a honey colour,

15:30 the tropical fruits, to walk around the island, through the groves and everything, beautiful place.

Were you given any special instruction before they let you off the ship?

No. Well when I say no, we were more or less told to be on our best behaviour, yes.

But you were still allowed to fraternise, I guess

16:00 **is what I'm asking?**

Mm. Mm.

No, it really looked so stunning. It must have been odd for the local people there seeing...?

Oh yes, it must have been. I don't know whether any other ships would have called there, I don't know. As I said it was a marvellous experience. I'd love to drop back there again.

Well, it's never too late. Oh gosh, it must have been hard for the fellows to get back on the ship after

16:30 **that experience though?**

Oh yeah, yeah it was. Beautiful place.

And I asked before about AWOL but what about in the reverse? Were there ever any stowaways that decided to catch a lift on the Australia or any of the other ships that you were on?

No, no.

You know when you go, I think you went through the Panama at one stage?

Yes, we went from Bora Bora through to Panama,

17:00 New York...

I don't understand how those locks work?

Well, you go into one and you've got full water then the draw gate goes down and you go through. Sometimes you're a way down there and you're

17:30 looking up there, until you get through into the next lock. As well as that, I don't know whether it's in there or not, one of the photos of an island and you could see the crocodiles over on the island from the other side of the Panama. No, it was an amazing and you've got -

18:00 I forget what you call them now, but they were motor driven things on rails on either side that towed you through. Like you went through, you didn't have engines running when you went through.

So effectively, you were free to go up and have a look then, I guess?

Oh yeah, I didn't miss a trick. As I say, it was a marvellous experience.

How many ships

18:30 **can go through at one time?**

Only one because the locks go down and then it fills, and go down then it fills.

It defies logic I guess, just extraordinary?

It was a marvellous, marvellous experience to go through it; and the engineering that

19:00 has gone into it is absolutely marvellous.

When you were little, did you read those 'boys only' adventure books and magazines and comics and things like that talked about life at sea and...?

Mainly comics, I read, Film Fun and..., Film Fun and Tinnerman comics I think it was and it was all sort of,

19:30 I can't recall the characters but along similar lines to Dagwood, that sort of thing.

Well, did you have any childhood imagination about what life in the navy would be?

Well, it's called childhood was when I first started to work, yeah.

Well, that depends on you I guess?

20:00 Because grocers' picnic, when the old ferries used to come down to, down there, my aunt and uncle whom I stayed with in Kooyong Road when I first used to come down and they used to have a holiday house at Dromana, no I've always loved the water.

Well yes, I guess I was wondering whether

20:30 **your experiences at sea lived up to your hopes and ambitions?**

Well yeah, I enjoyed every minute.

Why wouldn't you ever choose to go back on the sea for example?

Why did I what, darl?

Why didn't you ever choose a sea life after the war?

I was married with two children. As I said, when I was being discharged and he said

21:00 to me, "We'll give you a petty officer's arrangement if you stay in". I said, "No, I've had enough thanks, six years" but if hadn't have married, oh yeah, I'd have stayed in.

When all was said and done, and you were out of the navy back home again,

21:30 **did you start catching up on all of the other battles and politics that happened while you were away?**

No, I don't think so. Not a great deal, no.

So did you come away from your service thinking that Australia...?

Was the best country in the world?

22:00 **Apart from that, I guess my question is "Was it a just war that Australia fought or were they pushed into it by other means?"**

I think Australia thought, "Well, England is the Mother country, and we're entitled to

22:30 hop in and do our bit". See, on similar lines, I was definitely not in favour of this American invasion. Now, you've got the United Nations, supposedly they have Weapons

23:00 Of Destruction and all now ... they still haven't found them. Now, pardon me, George W. Bush is appealing to Congress for so many billion dollars to put the country back on its knees. Well, why was it necessary to go and upset them, all their lives. I mean.

23:30 No, I think it was wrong and they still haven't got peace there. There's still Americans and civilians being killed. They said it was going to be a short war, but I can't see how they're going to shorten it.

So, has our country changed or has the way we fight war changed, do you think?

24:00 In quite a way more a sport now; darl; it's an entirely different proposition to what it was. You have all these nuclear weapons and all that sort of thing. See, it's only since World War II all this going to outer space and all this sort of

24:30 thing. Now they're talking about going to the Moon. What advantage all this? There again, all the millions and millions of dollars that are being invested or used to build these spacecraft, what, what advantage is it giving to human life? To find out

25:00 whether there's water on Mars or I don't know, to me a lot of that money should be spent on helping people that are up against it. Such as, for instance, down here people who are disabled and unable to get about and they haven't got enough nursing homes.

25:30 Spend the money on that, to help people. I don't know, this is only my opinion of it. I can't see what advantage it is to find out whether there's anything on the Moon. No, I don't know...

Well just one last question then, when you joined up, you said as soon as the war was declared, you decided to join up.

Yeah.

You did talk a

26:00 **bit before about your motivation for doing that but I was wondering if we could just recap now what it was that made you decide to put your name on that piece of paper?**

Well, I felt that it was my line of duty to go and help it, if I can do it anyway, and

26:30 I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.