

Australians at War Film Archive

Henry Thompson (Max) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/75>

Tape 1

00:20 **Max it's great to be with you this morning and we'd like to begin with where you were born.**

00:27 And it's nice to say hi to you. I come from Bendigo in central Victoria the gold fields city. My family went there about 1857 about six years after gold was discovered and the family stayed on up there. I broke the sequence around during the war years and then came down to Melbourne shortly after the war but Bendigo is my home town and indeed my wife's.

00:52 **You went to school in Bendigo?**

00:53 Yes went to the Bendigo Senior Secondary College there and indeed had some wonderful memories of that wonderful place for northern Victorian education.

01:04 **And did your father... was he a soldier in the first World War?**

01:12 No he wasn't. He was too young for the First World War but he had an uncle who was at Gallipoli and France and died the year after he came home and I've researched well what happened to him and read it with great interest but that was the only family association with World War One. He was a great uncle in the 8th Light Horse and it was a fascinating story to read.

01:39 **And when you were growing up in Bendigo what were the conditions like in those days?**

01:43 Wonderful city to grow up in. Wonderful sporting facilities good education nice lifestyle plenty of clubs wonderful cricket clubs to play with. Most enjoyable. I guess you have to come down to the metropolitan cities to try and make a scratch but I did enjoy those years in Bendigo.

02:03 **And tell me a bit about your family. You've got brothers and sisters?**

02:07 I have one sister who regrettably died very young. My father was a journalist all his life. He was originally on the old Melbourne Argus which was a wonderful newspaper in its day and he was actually Federal Parliamentary roundsman for them in those days when the Federal Parliament sat at Spring Street in Melbourne. He used to spin me some wonderful stories about it. He died fairly young but didn't leave me a great deal of archives which I regret but a wonderful journalist. He was a wonderful original journalist. He could write a column of original material quicker than I ever could. It was good stuff.

02:47 **And did he work all through the depression?**

02:51 Yes he did and I did ask him about that on occasions and he said well I was never out of work during the depression and he said people were able to pay a penny-halfpenny for a newspaper. Maybe they didn't buy it every day but they bought the papers and one way or another he was never out of work during the depression but he spun me some incredible stories about what life was really like during those very difficult '30s.

03:20 **And when you were growing up did you have any idea about war and what war entailed?**

03:27 As a young lad we lived at a lovely family home at the corner of Brouwm and Calvin Streets Bendigo and the Bendigo army battalion headquarters were across the railway line. They held wonderful military balls and they often had marches and came past our place and that was about my sole interest and knowledge of the army until the war broke out but it's interesting you should say that because and I don't know why these things stick in your memory anyway I was standing in front of the fireplace in the dining room of our

04:00 family home in Bendigo listening to the radio with my father on the night the Germans invaded Paris and Dunkirk was about to take place with all the sadness of the British trying to get back across the channel. I remember my father saying to me fortunately you'll be too young for it which wasn't to be

quite the case of course.

04:22 **And did you have any thoughts at that time of joining the military?**

04:27 No I didn't but of course everybody had to go into the services at the age of 18 when the war got really serious. I often wonder why I joined the navy but amongst his journalistic interests my father was also at one stage the shipping roundsman for the old Melbourne Argus. The daily newspapers in Melbourne had their own launches and they went up the bay in them boarded the big liners which came with clockwork precision into Melbourne and they interviewed VIPs on board having

05:00 in mind that communications in those days I'm talking about the 1920 three four five era were very very limited compared to today and it was a big thing to be able to interview big people coming to Australia from England on a liner coming into Melbourne and he spun me some wonderful stories and he kept a few books which I've read on occasions about people he'd met on the P&O liners. Remember they arrived with clockwork precision in those days but

05:30 I think afterwards that probably motivated me when the time came to choose the navy. I never ever thought of any other service. The army didn't cross my mind nor the airforce.

05:42 **So tell me about the circumstances when you left school. Did you leave to start work?**

05:49 Yes to get a cadetship. I wanted a cadetship in journalism and the Bendigo Ballarat Geelong newspapers were great recruiting grounds for the Herald Sun, Age and Argus but to get a cadetship you had to serve your time in what we call the front counter sales taking advertisements and things like that then graduating to night work there which was behind the counter and then from there you were graciously promoted to be a copy holder in the reading room where the head readers would read and check every word of the copy and that sort of brought you up to speed a little bit until you were hopefully qualified to get a cadetship in journalism under the terms of the Australian Journalists' Association which I was lucky enough to get.

06:34 **And so how long were you working on those papers before you had to enlist?**

06:39 I worked as a cadet journalist for about a year and a half and then actually went into the services having in mind the Melbourne papers used to arrive in Bendigo having gone to press about midnight so original dailies like the Bendigo Advertiser used to

07:00 keep their printing until about 3 a.m. which meant we could get the latest war news from the Russian war front and in pre war days the latest cricket scores from England in the Bradman era so that when people read the Bendigo paper they had later news than the Melbourne papers which were sold in Bendigo which had gone to press about midnight and in the reporter's room of the Advertiser it was a wonderful team of reporters we had in those days. A colleague of mine wanted to go into the airforce and he built a

07:30 Morse code assembly keyboard etc and in between the calls from the Old United press office in Melbourne with the latest war news we taught each other Morse code. He went into the airforce and sadly he was killed while serving in Europe. I kept the Morse code outfit and years later I had it mounted and presented to the reporter's room of the Bendigo Advertiser with the names of all the reporters who did go into the services during

08:00 the war years. A fascinating little piece of memorabilia but that Morse code training steered me towards wanting to become in navy communications.

08:11 **So that's how it began?**

08:12 Yes.

08:13 **So your motivation for enlisting? What made you want to go and enlist?**

08:18 I guess every boy loved ships and pictures of ships. I don't know that see the world is the right term to use but the

08:30 thought of going on a ship and going to distant places in the comforts of the navy fascinated me greatly and I filled in all the papers and I came by train from Bendigo down to Melbourne and actually enlisted in the old Older Fleet Building in Collins Street which is very historic and they were wonderful guys who interviewed us. They summed us up pretty well. The one old chap said to me what do you do son I said look I'm a cadet journalist just on my way and he said

09:00 have you ever thought of navy communications and I said well I thought of being a coder. He said we desperately need good navy signalmen and he steered me into it. I was eternally grateful to him for that cause you worked on the bridge you knew what was going on. It was a wonderful lifestyle in the navy being a navy signalman and they gave me a badge and a whole heap of forms after poking needles into me in all sorts of directions and I went back to Bendigo for about two months and

09:30 I got the very dramatic letter from the Royal Australian Navy mobilising me for service eight days before I turned 18. I was 17 years and 11 months and one week and came down to Melbourne on a train

and back to Older Fleet. Went through all sorts of rigorous medical and other examinations there. Lined up with a heap of guys out in Collins Street and marched down to Spencer Street station. On a train down to Flinders Navy Depot as HMAS [His Majesties Australian Ship]

- 10:00 Cerberus used to be called and of course the moment you got off the train thousands of screaming sailors down there were yelling out to us you'll be sorry you'll be sorry and I don't think we really were but it was a funny welcome to Flinders Depot and that began an unbelievably intensive four or five months of day and night crash signalling courses. Navy fleet manoeuvres navy signallers navy
- 10:30 flag signals, semaphore, light messages, the navy way of doing things by day and by night, all rather foolish in a way Annie which I reflect upon and indeed a bit blowing my tune about. The navy in those days was very much the British bulldog background in the Royal Australian Navy. Everything was based on the Royal Navy which you know had parented the whole thing out in this part of the world when the ships of the Royal Navy were out on this Australian station and
- 11:00 we marched around that enormous parade ground at Flinders Navy Depot carrying little flags representing battleships and cruisers and things we didn't have in the Australian Navy and we're never likely to have but indeed a lot of Australian ships were serving with British forces in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic working with carriers and battle ships but it was that remarkable interim period when the Australian Navy and those of us involved in
- 11:30 navy communicating were about to become part and parcel of the United States Navy an entirely different lifestyle an entirely different way of doing things an entirely different signalling format for the entire spectrum of it all. Japanese midget submarines had arrived in Sydney Harbour about the time I enlisted on I think the 9th May '31 1942 I enlisted in June I was called up in September and the big
- 12:00 Japanese high-class submarines were rampaging off the east coast of Australia very forcibly sinking ships at a far greater rate than the public were ever told about. And the authorities had instituted the convoy system to get ships safely from one port to another and even to this day people don't know that on some occasions the ports of some of the key east coast towns were actually closed to shipping because of the submarines. But the point I was making was because of that
- 12:30 the convoy system was being implemented and they desperately needed navy escorts navy signalmen on those escorts and a lot of navy signalmen on some of the merchant and troop ships.
- 12:42 **And so what was your first ship? When did you first go to sea after your training?**
- 12:49 Yes the Australian destroyer called the Nestor had been sunk in the Mediterranean very sadly so and an absolutely remarkable young man of signals off the
- 13:00 Nestor survived the sinking and was brought back to service and was then our instructor. An unbelievably wonderful guy. He was a rare fellow a wonderful navy signalman in the best sense of the word and and a great leader of young guys. Never spoke to us about his drama during the war things like that. But I remember he took us the Americans of course were in Melbourne in enormous numbers in those days but no-one could
- 13:30 talk about it and I must just add Annie that they were in our home in Bendigo. It was never publicised but about the time I joined the navy the United States marines had encountered ferocious fighting in Guadalcanal and they were brought down to Australia for some respite and they were loaded on a train and they were taken to Bendigo and our my mother and father had two in our home in Bendigo and the whole area had
- 14:00 one or two and they formed up outside our home one morning as a marine core unit with their band and they marched off to Ewing Park and did their exercises at having in mind that they were basically there for rest after terrible war in Guadalcanal and it could never be publicised that Americans were in Bendigo. It was an unbelievable scene for a provincial city. Back here in Melbourne of course they took over Melbourne. While I
- 14:30 was training at Flinders Navy Depot we took part in the very first march ever of American forces in Melbourne. It was unbelievably colourful. The United States navy, army, airforce and the women's services marched with Australian navy, army, airforce and the women's services in a unbelievably colourful march. The first time the Americans' uniforms had been paraded in style with
- 15:00 the American colours and the full regalia of the colour guards and of course the American bands which played such magnificent music and the marches were rather interesting. They started at St Kilda Road went across Princes Bridge past the Town Hall where there was a wonderful gathering of the top brass of the Australian Government the Victorian State Government the Town Hall and of course all the heads of the American Services and a big band to have the
- 15:30 saluting base along Collins Street past Myers down Elizabeth Street up Collins Street to Martin Street over the bridge and right along the bank where the big casino now stands and under Princes Bridge to the boat shed. A very long march. A remarkable piece of history looking back on it all and the crowds were enormous because they were not only wartime morale marches but war loan-raising
- 16:00 agistors as well so I was happy to be involved with that first American march in Melbourne.

- 16:06 **I'm sure. We'll come back to the relationship between the different navies the Royal Navy and the American Navy later on. I'd like to get to your first ship now and when you first embarked and where you went on that ship your first experience at sea?**
- 16:26 It was a great day when the announcements came out following our examinations which were very solid examinations from what ships we would be drafted to. The submarines were busy off the coast and the Australian Government was building submarine chasers patrol vessels and several of us in a class were assigned to those. They were being built in Sydney and Brisbane ship yards and I was drafted to one the very first one that was ever to go to New Guinea. It was patrol vessel
- 17:00 ML817 and the man who was the Captain of it had been involved in the sinking of one of the Japanese submarines in Sydney Harbour. He later became Australia's Minister of Defence in the Menzies Government Commander Athol Townley a wonderful guy a wonderful skipper and I remember we had the thrill of getting to number one platform at Spencer Street and getting on a troop train for Sydney with a change of trains in Albury and we got to Sydney various ones of us going to different
- 17:30 dock yards and berths to join our ships and we looked out on the harbour and there was a giant American cruiser there called the New Orleans. It had had its bow blown off completely in the Solomons and it steamed to Sydney all the way stern first backwards. The crew had gone ashore and cut down coconut trees and they shored up the bow that it had steamed the stern first to Sydney and we looked out on the harbour and I remember one of the boys saying
- 18:00 gee what have we got ourselves into but they patched it up put a stub bow on it in Sydney and it stand too back to America to have a proper bow fitted so I joined that ML817 working up trials up the coast then at the fleet working up base at Jervis Bay and we put out to sea one day with another patrol vessel and a lot of other vessels sweeping along the sea lanes off Sydney and the Captain gave me a nudge one day and he said to those of us on the
- 18:30 bridge keep your eyes peeled son you'll see something you can tell your grandchildren about so we braced ourselves and clapped our binoculars on the horizon and three ships and ten funnels loomed over the horizon the Queen Mary the Aquatania the Ildafance and a huge escort of cruisers and heavy stuff bringing the 9th Division AIF [Australian Imperial Force] back from the middle east to take up the war against the Japanese in the Pacific so we saw the Queen Mary arrive in
- 19:00 Sydney which was quite memorable. Not many people know that early in the war the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth actually passed each other outside Sydney heads and it was a a rather interesting piece of history that the two super liners of the world passed each other outside Sydney. So anyhow the day came when we were due to go north and you know the war was raging in New Guinea at that stage and it was a
- 19:30 long haul to get a navy patrol vessel to New Guinea. They were built for quick dashes across the English Channel for commando raids on Dieppe and places like that and we had a couple of thousand miles of steaming to get to New Guinea which was a long way for a small ship.
- 19:47 **So how how many men were there on these patrol boats?**
- 19:50 About 20, 21 if you counted (UNCLEAR)
- 19:53 **So pretty small?**
- 19:54 Yes they were. They were fairly good anti-submarine ships. They had pretty good anti-submarine detection equipment on board quite a number of good depth chargers. Not a lot of hardware in the form of good guns but they had a job to do in coastal patrols and surveillance and enemy barge traffic along the New Guinea coast so we set off for Port Moresby via we got off at Newcastle and went into an unbelievably awful storm and we did put into Newcastle for a couple of hours and then to Brisbane then to Townsville then Thursday Island and eventually got to Port Moresby.
- 20:33 **And how did you find it when you first went to sea? Were you seasick?**
- 20:36 Seasick yes I was for about three weeks yeh unbelievably so and of course the navy showed no sympathy but on those small ships though it was a terribly wet lifestyle and they really belted into the seas and when anything heavy was running all sorts of horrible things happened. It had its funny side Annie. I remember being that day that we were looking
- 21:00 waiting for the Queen Mary to pass by with another patrol boat the Captain said to me one day "Make a signal to the other patrol boat with a to close me which is a navy term for come in closer I want to talk to you with a loud harness system" so I got on the light and belted out the message close me but the other ship dipped down into the trough of some huge seas and the signalman told me later he said "Max all I got was lose me
- 21:30 lose me he said that's why we chugged off over the horizon at a great rate of knots abusing the Captain of your ship and naval officers in general." so instead of close me, he got lose me, so he disappeared over the horizon. There was a touch of McHales Navy about it on occasions.

21:46 **And when you got to Port Moresby did you know what your role was going to be?**

21:54 Yes indeed we did. Moresby was being raided practically every night by the Japanese airforce from

22:00 Rabaul and elsewhere. We used to love to try and get the pictures out of Bamarn [?] I think it was. The army used to take us out there in trucks and you would sit on the side of a hill on a rock and ogle at the screen down below with its 16 or 30 mill 35 millimetre projectors and then the Japs would come over and the film would be cancelled for the night or it would rain. It was terrible it rained every night. But the main goal was

22:30 to be on the convoy from Milne Bay from Port Moresby to Milne Bay which was a wonderfully pretty run because the convoys went through China Straits and they had to come down into single file. Not a good feeling because the Japanese had immense men and supplies and airforce at Rabaul and you could see Japanese planes strafing along the line of ships you know getting through China Straits into Milne Bay which was a fallen valley and terribly deep.

23:00 I remember it was very primitive I tell you. When we got to Milne Bay the signal station known in those days as the Port Moresby signal station was a corrugated ramshackle thing built on a branch of a tree that hung out over the water and in it were a couple of signalmen with a signal lamp and that's where we made contact with the authorities in Milne Bay and alongside them was the old Anshung a Chinese river steamer which had been

23:30 bombed by the Japanese and was lying on its side and it was a very forlorn place I can tell you. We did go ashore there. The airforce kindly occasionally asked us to come out to their quarters and we could get off the ship for an hour or two and they had put metal strips down in the mud and the slush that was New Guinea so they could land their aircraft on actual metal strips and it was an amazing sight and to see and to listen to these planes

24:00 landing on these metal strips and taking off on them but great to get off the ship for a little while but the army trucks that were ploughing around Milne Bay honestly they had to bow away from the mud and the slush. It was a terrible place. It rained every afternoon at four o'clock and I mean it was really very heavy rain so that was Milne Bay.

24:22 **And you were still on the ML187?**

24:26 Yes yes.

24:27 **At this time and you didn't stay on that ship for the ... ?**

24:31 Yes I was on it the best part of a year. We did all sorts of convoy runs. The war went on up to Eroro Bay through treacherous reefs and dreadful place to get to and then Buna Gona Sanananda which were famous in AIF history. Well they always fascinated me because there wasn't a coconut tree along the foreshore that didn't have the top blown off it because the Americans and the AIF used to take the tops off the trees to make sure there were no Japanese snipers up the tree waiting for them

25:00 but we did the convoy runs up and down there and I remember General MacArthur arriving in Milne Bay one afternoon which was about the second or third time I had seen him. He nearly ran over me in Brisbane I was walking along the street in Brisbane one day and this great cavalcade with flags flying and everything with bugles blowing came hurtling around the corner. It was General MacArthur with his big posh car so all I did was jump back and salute and that was the first I saw of him but he arrived in Milne Bay one day on a

25:30 torpedo boat and created a great deal of consternation there and formality but the day came when the Australians wanted to invade Lae the first of General MacArthur's real beachhead landings and there was a huge convoy by the standards of those days assembled at the back of Milne Bay and at Buna for the AIF landing invasion of Lae and we had on board

26:00 this small patrol boat quite an array of very specialised and very high ranking officers who had certain roles to play in the assembly of the convoy and intelligence reports and we took off with them and we put into a place called Morobe just south of Lae and made contact with the HMAS Shepparton which had been doing some surveying work up there under cover of darkness and

26:30 we were just alongside it and there was no radar in those days I hastily emphasise you had to see it and then had a few seconds to do it. We got caught by nine Mitsubishi bombers and they dropped 40 really substantial bombs in a pattern right across the two ships. None hit either ship directly. They put 40 holes in our patrol boat and they were quite decent sized holes. I was down

27:00 underneath in the mess deck having a bit of a wash and a clean up and the guy next to me had been in the Mediterranean he'd been bombed lots of times on the Tobruk ferry one as they called it and he said dive Max dive and I went flying out of the wash room into the mess room and a great thud and a huge piece of the side of the ship disappeared and the metal embedded itself in the back of a cupboard that we had and

27:30 it was followed by that dreadful smell of cordite and explosive stuff from the bomb and then the sea bed came up with it. Made an awful mess and I thought this is no place for me so I scampered up to the

upper deck to my action station just in time to see the lines thrown off to Shepparton and our guns went into action and we got a few shells amongst them but you haven't got much hope. They come in with the sun at their back at high noon and are very hard to pick without

- 28:00 radar to warn you so the Captain looked at the mess and he said well the port engine could give us three knots the starboard engine was stuck tight. There were 40 holes in the ship's hull which was twisted and the ancillary equipment the generators and things to provide light and power and sewerage and that sort of thing were all thrown out of alignment so we put our boats ashore and we cut down the jungle and we hid the ship for the afternoon and
- 28:30 we slunk off down the coast of Buna at night time at a steady three knots and the army said look there's nothing we can do there's no slipways in New Guinea. So a tanker called the Trinity towed us all across the Coral Sea to Townsville an unbelievably awful the ship was virtually sinking with the holes we'd patched up but which weren't much good when we got into the heavy seas and then an Australian corvette called the Dalawain took us in
- 29:00 tow from Townsville finally hauled us into Brisbane to get some more repairs done and eventually hauled us down to Sydney and the Captain said there's no way I'm going to Sydney under tow so we threw off the tow line and at a wonderful three knots we made our way through the boom gate and berthed in Sydney with a small degree of pride but at least we made it under our own steam. I never saw that ship ever again. I was drafted to guard on the signal station which was
- 29:30 good for me because Sydney was chock full of warships and at the signal station unbelievably busy by day and night. It brought me right up to scratch and a lot of types of signals I hadn't done too much of because I was drafted then to a new frigate called the HMAS Hawkesbury which was just about to be commissioned.
- 29:54 **And where did the Hawkesbury take you?**
- 29:56 It took us to Milne Bay non stop whereas on that patrol boat we'd taken an awful long time to get to Milne Bay.
- 30:05 **Bit of a different size yeah.**
- 30:07 Yes we had a crew of 160 odd in it. The Hobart our cruiser had been torpedoed over in the Solomons and she was back in Sydney for repairs and about 30 of the Hobart's crew formed a nucleus of our new ship's company plus guys from specialised departments in the navy from other ships and our Captain
- 30:30 Commander Weston he was later in peace time became the Senior Pilot for the Port of Sydney and I wrote his life story for him many years after the war. He piloted 8,463 ships into or out of Newcastle, Port Jackson, Botany Bay or Port Kembla and he spun me some wonderful stories about his later post-war life as the Senior Pilot for the Port of Sydney. But
- 31:00 getting back to Hawkesbury they were wonderful anti-submarine ships. The corvettes had done and were still doing a fantastic job with the convoys but the convoy runs were getting very long. As the war got back towards Morotai and onto the Philippines the convoys were very long and needed long range warships to escort them and the frigates had won wonderful reputations in the north Atlantic against the Germany boats and could stay at sea a long time and were
- 31:30 wonderfully equipped for anti-submarine warfare and Hawkesbury was the first of them that among I think it was about the first of them that went to New Guinea and from then on we operated with a task force of the United States Navy.
- 31:50 **And were you on the same run from Port Moresby round to ... ?**
- 31:54 No the war had moved on to Manus Island an island to the north of New Guinea became the big United
- 32:00 States fleet base an incredible base. A safe harbour for five or six hundred ships well protected by reefs and I kid you not it was like a forest of masts in Manus fleet base. It was the headquarters of the 7th Fleet in those days and Manus was eternally busy with battleships, cruisers and enormous range of convoy ships coming and going and it was
- 32:30 an American-style fleet base. Almost a city ashore they built it was an incredible place to be based and we operated out of Manus Island fleet base as the war progressed up to Morotai to Leyte Gulf in the Philippines where most of the paraphernalia for Manus was transferred to the Philippines. I know General MacArthur whom I spoke of earlier he decided to move his headquarters
- 33:00 from Hollandia in New Guinea to the Philippines and they assembled off Hollandia probably the most incredible convoy that's ever been assembled in the Pacific. I've written the story several times. It was an unbelievable convoy. It had floating cranes huge floating docks, supply ships, oil tankers, tugs there were barges and I mean barges of probably 100
- 33:30 steel cubes lashed together with bulk petrol tanks on them being towed by barges but amongst the paraphernalia of the convoy was the old paddle steamer Wewuna. Now she was Melbourne's favourite paddle steamer. They'd brought it up the sides of Wewuna and she was being taken to the Philippines to

be a sort of convalescent ship for the United States Army and I looked out on this convoy it took

- 34:00 the best part of a day to be set to assembly the convoy in five enormous columns and I think there was about 104 vessels when it was finally put together and this the navy escorts were spread around it. Big escort group and the senior officer of the escort group put up the signal speed of advance four knots which is pretty slow anyhow but I don't think that convoy ever achieved four knots. We set off
- 34:30 and on the second day we ran into an unbelievable storm a terrible storm. The toll lines kept breaking and we were constantly going to the rescue of floating docks that had broken adrift and all sorts of dramatic things that happened not just in the day time but at night time and of course at night time it was all blacked out. What probably you generally recognise even to this day is that every day that we spent at sea during the Second World War
- 35:00 was entirely every night under black out conditions. There were heavy black out curtains to the exit to the upper deck at all stages. No-one could light a cigarette you certainly couldn't smoke because the glow of a cigarette I think you can see for about two miles to light a match is a little bit further and on the bridge and remember we had open bridges there because there was no atomic fallout in those days we had the sea aircraft coming so the bridges were wide open to the weather and the elements and
- 35:30 the storms and terrible crashing of the waters off the bows which was salt water and it was all done in blackness and at the back of the bridge there was fancy contraption with three holes. One to put your head in and one for each arm and you could look inside and see the charts and the officer of the watch used to encourage those of us who were on the bridge or the signalmen anyhow to have a look at the charts every now and again because if the ship got torpedoed
- 36:00 or we collided or had problems at least some of us hopefully the life boats would know where the nearest land form was and as a signalman I kept a pretty good set of notes and it was based on knowing where we were at all times by being able to study those charts and the charts themselves weren't too crash of course because a lot of those waters hadn't been surveyed properly even up to those years but we eventually went into dreadful strife
- 36:30 with that big convoy to General MacArthur's gear being shifted to the Philippines. We broke radio silence one day which was unusual for the very short message to fleet headquarters in the Philippines asking for some help. They sent down two more big ocean-going tugs and two more warships to help us and we eventually got the convoy into Leyte Gulf in the Philippines which was equally a huge fleet base.
- 37:00 **So this is was quite late in the war by now?**
- 37:03 Yes the war by this stage had moved up to the Philippines and MacArthur had stepped ashore you know" I have returned."
- 37:10 **And do you remember when the war finished where you were?**
- 37:14 Yes I do very well. We had been at sea a long time and done a pretty large number of miles by the standards of the day and we were actually entering Sydney at 8 a.m. on the morning that
- 37:30 the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The idea was that we were coming back to Australia with a few other ships because the invasion of Japan was being planned and not many people know to this day but recently in the United States archives they brushed the dust off the plan of invasion of Japan. There were to be two enormous invasions. One in September and one in
- 38:00 March and all the beaches that were earmarked in Japan were to be named after motor cars. Old mobile, Studebaker, Dodge, Pontiac Beach and an enormous plan was put together for the actual invasion of Japan with incredible loss of life because the Japanese were fanatically prepared to defend their homeland but the point I'm making is that some Australian ships that were down this way were putting into Melbourne to have a quick refit and bring themselves
- 38:30 up to standard to go back up north again and we'd been away from Australia for a fair while at that stage and in Sydney we unloaded all the 160 odd depth chargers the heavy gun ammunition and everything heavy on ship sent about two thirds of the crew on leave and we got a sudden message to say steam to Sydney we can't do the refit in Melbourne so we had about enough on board with a few we dragged in from
- 39:00 navy depots to steam the ship out of Sydney down towards Melbourne. Off Gabo Island the radio men received a signal return to Sydney instructions will follow. So we sat on the quarterdeck and watched the ship carve a huge U in the ocean we thought all that leave's gone and something dramatic's happening and we went back to Sydney picked up all our depth chargers all our ammunition and trucks and trucks and trucks of stuff came alongside the wharf and were being loaded
- 39:30 on board and we weren't sure what was going to happen. We had a rough idea that prisoners of war might be involved and then the announcement came out that the Australian Government was going to send a relief line from Duntroon to Singapore with a huge hospital unit on board all sorts of medical specialists. Australian troops to help garrison Singapore and we were to be its escort

- 40:00 to get it there safely and without spoiling your sequence in any way that was how we heard the war had ended. We were off to Singapore to bring home the 8th Division prisoners of war from Changi which I'll tell you about subsequently.
- 40:24 **End of tape**

Tape 2

- 00:11 **Max we got up to the point where you were sailing up to Singapore to collect prisoners of war. Can you just give me some detail just briefly about the time that you spent up there and taking on board prisoners of war?**
- 00:29 Yes there were 12 days there actually Annie which wasn't intended to be originally. The trip to Singapore itself was quite interesting because no ships had gone through there during the war except Japanese ones of course so we assumed wartime status even though the war had ended and standard night blacked out and with the anti-submarine acoustic gear operating all the time and the gun screws closed up. There were 52 miles of mine fields to get into Singapore.
- 01:00 The British eastern fleet had sent minesweepers through and opened up a channel but a lot of the mines were very old Japanese ones and we worried about the wires that were holding them and what might have drifted into the channel into Singapore roads. It was rather interesting being a signalman on the bridges listening to the echoes coming back from the anti-submarine equipment with the ripples of mines to the left of us and the right of us and the Duntroonist journals with all these
- 01:30 people on board tucked in tightly behind us as we pinged our way through the mine fields. Before the anchor dropped off Singapore hit the bottom the Australian bush telegraph had worked fantastically. There were Changi prisoners of war on I don't know on boats logs of wood anything that floated around the ship. They'd heard that an Aussie warship was coming in and it was one Aussie it was
- 02:00 the only Australian warship there for the surrender. All the rest were British navy British Eastern Fleet. Massive ships the Nelson the big battle ship the Richelieu which actually hit a mine coming into Singapore but she was so massive it didn't damage her and we set up a plan. These guys had come off the Burma railway and they were out of Changi. They had their rags and tatters that they'd survived in and they were as
- 02:30 you see in you know the pictures of them working up on the Burma Railway they came on board. We had about 200 men of a day time and 200 of a night we tried to give them a meal which they couldn't really hold down they'd live on a couple of bowls of rice as you probably well know. We tried to give them at least a glass of Aussie beer but we had immense stocks that we were taking up there we were loaded down to the gunnels with supplies and they sat about on gunnery platforms depth charge racks
- 03:00 bollards all between decks in the mess decks and they wanted to know what had gone on in Australia and we wanted to know what had happened to them. I've often wondered whether the Australian authorities were rather astute. In their own way the prisoners of war were fairly well organised but the authorities seemed to keep delaying the departure convoy I think hopefully to await more uniforms to come from Australia
- 03:30 so that when they eventually stepped off in Sydney they were decently attired and maybe hid the skeleton frameworks that the poor chaps had been reduced to but we were actually there for 12 days and we went out to Changi and saw the conditions out there etc but on board just to sit and talk to those chaps and listen to their experiences I wrote reams of material about it later
- 04:00 on because as a journalist I felt I had an obligation to do it. One prisoner of war gave me a copy of the report that Colonel Callaghan had submitted to the Japanese on the dreadful conditions his men were suffering and what should be done about it. That's an amazing document to sit down and read so that went on daily each day we hoped that the convoy would sail but it took time and
- 04:30 when the convoy the first convoy eventually sailed it was an unbelievable experience. A hospital ship called the Aranji took the first sea-going prisoners out. Some of the bad cases and I think the amputees were flown to Morotai and some to other places having in mind a lot of the prisoners of war from further up in the Burma Railway area came out of I think Hong Kong and places like that. But there were thousands of them in Changi
- 05:00 and we found that we were to sail with the Duntroon and the Arowa a big British transport and a British ship called the City of Worcestershire and we stood out off the docks and waited for the transports to warm up in line of stern of us and we had a problem. The Australian warships in those days flew the same ensign as the British Royal Navy flew. There were no stars on the Australian
- 05:30 white ensign in those days and we wanted everyone to know that a Western Australian warship was going to take you know prisoners of war back home as escort to the transport so we hoisted two outsized Australian blue ensigns to the mast head which is rather shadowy naval protocol say and coupled up the loud hailer systems to the amplification and played 'Waltzing Matilda' with the best

decibels we could muster

- 06:00 up and circled each of the ships a couple of times while they yelled and cheered and clambered to every vantage point and but the warship in front and three big transport behind us the convoy started to get under way and I was up on a bridge with a couple of other signalmen keeping watch and as the Singapore skyline began to fade Captain asked me to make a signal to all prisoners of war aboard the
- 06:30 transports astern and it read and so we say farewell to this shining jewel of the Orient famed for its luxury, beautiful women and music onward to Aussie land of the blessed Captain and Ships Company HMAS Hawkesbury and a little while later these signal lights came up on the leading troop ship and it the reply read the boys appreciate your message
- 07:00 the kindness of the local people in their immaculate slacks will remain always in the memories of the prisoners of war. Luxury is all here but bankrupt. The Royal Airforce flew overhead with wonderful farewells. The battleships the Richelieu and Nelson and the (UNCLEAR) Cleopatra which was a flag ship turned out their bands and guards played the national anthem at the convoys sort of steamed by
- 07:30 and I could see the Captain he was concerned with all these guys on the troop ships the stern of us it would survive the highs of the prison and the Burma Railway he wanted to get them through those 52 miles of mine fields and it was not a nice feeling having in mind that those chaps had survived so much that we couldn't have one of them damaged in any way with those mines. Not that we didn't know where the mines were but the wires holding them were very old.
- 08:00 Anyhow we got through the 52 miles of mine field and set course for Australia and we steamed around the troop ships a couple of times each day just to give them something to look at and the Australian news and information cameraman on board took all sorts of films and off Darwin we received a sudden radio message transfer mail and return to Singapore so without going in to Darwin we fired
- 08:30 a line across to Duntroon and passed our mail and saluted the ships and we turned about and steamed hard back towards Singapore and off Java in the small hours of the morning in darkness we made we passed the British destroyer Veralyn escorting the Larges Bay and the Esperance Bay with hundreds more prisoners of war and just bade them goodnight in the darkness and
- 09:00 about 400 miles further back we met a British destroyer called the Paladin and she had a very big troop transport behind called the Holinchiefdon with the remainder of them and we took over escort from Paladin and bid them goodnight and set course for Sydney via Darwin once again. Well Annie we nearly got into Darwin with that lot but outside Darwin the radio crackled again and asked us would we go to the
- 09:30 rescue of Liberator bomber that looked like coming down in the ocean. Darwin was virtually over the horizon so the troop ship was safe. So we hurtled off to rescue the bomber which managed to stay float and eventually got it to Darwin and when we put into Darwin all the troop transports were lying over the far side of Darwin Harbour all safe and sound there and we were rubbing our hands in glee thinking how wonderful it will be to finish the escort assignment back to the big welcome in Sydney
- 10:00 but that wasn't to be. We were sent next day in great haste down to Timor for a very big Japanese surrender ceremony. The Japanese had huge numbers of troops down there and there was a very big ceremonial parade and we were at that one at Timor and then we took off took on about 40 AIF troops and on our own we did an unbelievably incredible
- 10:30 tour through the Dutch East Indies. All the little outposts where the Japanese were to make sure they knew the war was over. We had 14 smaller Japanese surrender ceremonies some of them wonderfully colourful in those throughout the Dutch East Indies there were some very picturesque old Portuguese forts. They were old and the fort you imagine in the stories of the South Seas and the Dutch East Indies
- 11:00 overgrown with colourful bougainvillea and on a parade ground out front we managed to get the locals to cut a couple of nice coconut trees and put them up as masts and we hoisted flags up there to make it look colourful and good and we had surrender ceremonies there of the Japanese. Checked on the welfare of the local natives. Dumped all the Japanese stores that they had in deep water made them into working parties dumped all the stores oh they immense stuff in all those places
- 11:30 and then steamed onto the next little port and did the same thing all over again and that took two months we did that for. Just money couldn't buy that trip through the Dutch East Indies. The names have all changed now but places like Manado and Giantalo and Perrigi and Soonano incredibly fascinating places especially for a young bloke. The war had ended. A lot of the Japanese there we had a little bit of drama with here and there.
- 12:01 **We'll go into all that detail later that sounds fascinating. So you spent two months steaming around the islands in Dutch East Indies and then was that finally over for you? When did you finally get back to Melbourne?**
- 12:19 We took a ship to the Vogalcop on the west coast of New Guinea and they'd built a lighthouse there and we gave them some help and we were told to steam back to Australia and the ship delivered me all the way back to Williamstown. I got off the ship at Williamstown. I didn't have an enormous number of points as they were known in those days. I'd had short of four years in the navy but my father being a

good journalist with good contacts wanted me to get back into journalism at a great rate of knots and pulled a few strings and the Captain agreed to let me go seeing the ship was in Williamstown dock

- 13:00 and I got off the ship on Friday afternoon caught a train to Bendigo found a few clothes and I started work on the Bendigo Advertiser on Sunday night. The Journalists' Association had carried on our cadetships and our gradings but of course we didn't know anything. We didn't have to go back to our cadetships we you know went back to D or C grading but then we had to do light work and bring ourselves up to our normal civilian jobs and that was a very quick end to my time in the navy.
- 13:35 **And how did you feel about that? Did you consider staying in the navy at all?**
- 13:39 No the Captain asked many of us would you consider staying on but it was not my scene at any stage. I liked the navy. I often wondered it would have been rather interesting having worked with the American Navy so much to have got a job where the American communications network maybe me in Hawaii which I like immensely
- 14:01 **Nice spot.**
- 14:02 and taken out a career in that area but I'd written a lot of material during the war. Now that was not easy. I wasn't an accredited war correspondent. I was a serving member of the ship's company. I had long talks with the Captain on what I wanted to do and what I wanted to write and he said well I have to censor it which he did and then a civilian centre put their pianola holes through it and I've got copies of it still upstairs but I had a lot of
- 14:30 stuff published as a journalist on the ship because having in my words seeing it all the time the ship's were very much over-worked. They were expendable they desperately needed escort ships for all the convoys and without a word of a lie we were spent 26 28 days of every month at sea. You would come in the morning with a big convoy re-fuel the ship re-provision the ship and go out at night with an outbound convoy and with
- 15:00 all that time at sea I had plenty of time to sit down and write and being a signalman we had a ship's signal officer we had a typewriter and I could churn out this stuff I wanted to. Getting it off the ship was the hard part. Even getting mail off the ship was unbelievable. You'd put mail on a ship that was going somewhere in the hope that it might go somewhere where there was civilisation because it was unlikely north Atlantic where the Royal Navy boys went to Nova Scotia or American Ports we went to Pacific island
- 15:30 outposts where there was nothing. It wasn't really worth going off the ship if you could have got off it because there was nothing ashore plus the dangers that the Japanese were there anyhow. So the communications of it getting mail to a warship and getting mail off a warship and getting stories off a warship the stories had to be written in a special way because they might not be published for quite a while but an awful lot of them were published and I'm very proud of the stuff and I was also very proud that when the ship got
- 16:00 back to Sydney the Sydney darling newspapers there was no television in those days of course only radio announcement came on board and there was a big press conference in the ward room on board the frigate and the Captain asked me would I write something to give the guys for the guys and would I come to the press conference. I always appreciated him doing that. It was a wonderful day and we got a lot of publicity.
- 16:28 **And you got off the ship in Williamstown on the Friday you were back at work on the Sunday night on the Bendigo Advertiser and how long did you work for the Bendigo Advertiser after that?**
- 16:40 I got engaged and then the following year got married so I was there about three or four years working up to the gradings I wanted. As a kid the Bendigo High School had been closed down because of a paralysis epidemic poliomyelitis and
- 17:00 my father said well you know do something useful while the school's closed down learn shorthand and I became a very proficient at high speed Pitman shorthand. I wanted to be a Hansard reporter at one stage in my career which you know was quite something in those days and I could write high speed shorthand and that got me a lot of jobs that were good. I remember without breaking your sequence
- 17:30 the Chief of Staff one day said to me were you in the navy? I said yes the navy might have thought otherwise at times. He said we've got somebody coming here into Bendigo that is good for a fantastic interview and he gave me two days' notice that I was to interview Sir James Bissett who was the wartime Captain of the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. He'd retired as Commodore of the Cunard line he'd come out to Australia and he and two colleagues had brought him to Bendigo and or were bringing him to Bendigo in that wonderful old Shamrock Hotel at Bendigo.
- 18:08 **Wonderful spot isn't it?**
- 18:09 I'd done my homework well and I remember sitting down at the table with him his two mates and myself and I thought the greats of the world of scheme connive for the privilege of sitting at the Captain's table and somehow I seemed to hit a high note with him. He gave me two and a half hours over that lunch

and

- 18:30 the most wonderful collection of shorthand notes I've ever had in my life. He first came to Melbourne as an apprentice on a sailing ship about 1895. His next trip to Australia not to Melbourne because the Queen Mary couldn't get into Melbourne was as Master of the Queen Mary and he gave me chapter and verse of his whole life beautifully presented in nice sequence in a wonderful way and he told me all about his time
- 19:00 as Master, Commander of the Queen Mary. The time that he had Churchill on board. How he was flown secretly to Lord Scotland to take the Queen Elizabeth not quite finished across the North Atlantic for safety from the German bombers but he said the most dramatic time he has in his life really was as Master of the Franconia off the French coast when the German bombers attacked it but he went into all this in great detail and I've written that story
- 19:30 many many times in the years since that. He was a wonderful interviewer too that guy who he really opened up to me that day and I seemed to hit a right note with I wasn't even game to tell him that as a young 18 year old Navy Signaller on about the smallest ship in the Royal Australian Navy I saw the magnificent Queen Mary go by off the east coast of Australia but he did spin some wonderful material and I think it's great stuff to have preserved.
- 20:00 **Absolutely. And then you left Bendigo?**
- 20:04 Yes I applied for a job on The Herald the Melbourne Herald which was a bit basic everybody wanted to get on a Melbourne paper. I had an interview with Sir Keith Murdoch bit of a daunting interview but a wonderful guy and he gave me a good interview but I'd also about a fortnight earlier seen an advertisement for a journalist for a big American oil company which was setting up a publicity bureau in
- 20:30 Melbourne. I'd been married and I wanted to get away from night work and the money was marvellous by the standards of those days superannuation and all these goodies and it turned out to be Vacuum Oil Company which later became Mobil and now we know it as X on Mobil and I joined their publicity bureau about 1949 and stayed with them about 32 years on publicity and public relations and all the big promotions. The oil
- 21:00 companies get mixed up with an unbelievable array of things that they in those days sponsored around Australia car trials Chinese archaeological exhibitions South Pacific Games in Fiji the Mobil economy runs the Royal Silver Jubilee train. I toured Australia for four months with that train. Had seven hundred million dollars worth of the best of the antiquities out of the British Museum the palaces of England even the bullet that killed Nelson and Nelson's eye
- 21:30 shade, Princess Anne's wedding gown, all this sort of stuff on a train that toured Australia for four months. Mobil sponsored it and I went with it and I enjoyed all those years with Mobil and I never went back to newspaper work again.
- 21:44 **So that was 32 years with Mobil and then you retired?**
- 21:49 Yes I did and when I retired I had all these I had a wonderful diary of notes I'd written during the war in shorthand. You weren't supposed to keep diaries. I think the Captain knew I had it but in the signal office on the warships we had a big steel box with lots of holes in it very heavy. If the ship got torpedoed or collided or looked like sinking the very very very secret code books for the Royal Navy's codes and ciphers were to be put in that box and thrown overboard and the officer on watch was to mark the latitude and longitude and I kept my shorthand notes in that. No-one could read them
- 22:30 I hope and I had everything I wanted and when I came home I took them with me and working on the morning newspaper mainly from 7 pm to 3 am I spent the afternoons one football season writing it all into a wonderful diary and for my own family of boys and that's been the basis of around about without being modest under 400 feature stories and
- 23:00 fortunately the Department of Defence has now accepted that collection and they are in the naval history defence directorate archives in Canberra.
- 23:13 **Excellent. Well that's really vindication for all that hard work.**
- 23:17 Mainly on the lifestyles at sea and how things were. No people don't realise that life on a warship see is an unbelievable life. You've got 160 guys locked up in a steel warship. They work four hours on and eight hours off. It sounds great but you do the midnight to 4 am watch and the action stations took place at dusk at dawn and every morning at sea the whole ship's company had to turn out at dawn for dawn action station which lasted about 40 minutes and it was great to see the light come up and you could look out and see all the ships in the convoy still there and that they were in position because until radar came it was a big job keeping echelons of ships together.
- 24:00 Once radar came the officer on watch could tell you to make a small signal to the fourth ship in fifth column to come up a few evolution for a few minutes and get back into position but you couldn't do that till radar came so I wrote a lot about the lifestyles at sea and life on a warship was interesting. There were guys who were they were they would cut hair you know if you needed your hair cut. Others manned the canteen of a night time. Some of them

- 24:30 would play music through the music system on the ship. My little contribution to the ship's company used to be to tune into the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] or the Hawaiian fleet base news services and shorthand note the news type it up and put in on two ship's noticeboards that they you know we were at sea away from everything.
- 24:52 **Was this on the Hawkesbury?**
- 24:53 Yes. We didn't know what went on around the world and we could put the news casts up on the board and the blokes would queue up to read them what the war news was and everybody did their little bit in that way to survive the difficult circumstances.
- 25:08 **Well now we're certainly going to try and get some of that detail from you that's gone into those 400 feature stories and what I'd like to do is take you back now we've reached that point where you've retired but take you back right to the beginning and material that I'm very interested in is when you first enlisted and became a signalman. Did you know what signals involved at that stage? Did you have any idea what your job was going to entail?**
- 25:42 None whatever no. All I knew at that stage was Morse code dots and dashes. Cerberus Flinders Navy Depot taught us the problem of keeping large units of ships together in complex situations in wartime conditions where they had to make emergency turns and it was all done with signals. Radio was taboo you couldn't use radio because the enemy can pick up your transmissions.
- 26:10 **When you say it was all done with signals do you mean lights?**
- 26:14 Flag signals in the main.
- 26:16 **Flags?**
- 26:16 Yes flag hoisting combinations up and down masts and that conveyed all the news that the officer of the watch needed to know and that's the way it was mainly done. The general routine stuff was done with semaphore
- 26:30 if you were close enough and the trick of that was to be able to read semaphore backwards. If you're on the east course screen of a convoy with the ships scattered around it the ship in front would be making semaphore and he might be making for the ship ahead and you had to read his signal to the ship ahead from behind. Now you know it all became back the front semaphore but we came very adept at doing it backwards and we could get signals down behind the ships almost as quick as
- 27:00 the originating ship transmitted it. Lights were used lights were taboo at night time of course you couldn't use a light at night time but that was uncanny the steam at night 70 or 80 ships lumbering along in dreadful conditions in some sort of line with column leaders and they'd be behind the line of stern not being able to stray to the next column and not to catch up on the ship ahead because they'd collide with their stern.
- 27:30 **Were there many collisions?**
- 27:32 Oh yes there were. There was drama. Remember all the ships were loaded with either troops, fuel the tankers were laden down with gasoline and aviation supplies oil and the rest of them were stores and ammunition you know the paraphernalia of war and when two ships hit it was always dramatic. I remember one night just diverting on that subject we were lying in Manus Harbour in this great fleet base I spoke about
- 28:00 earlier and ashore there were three signal towers and each had two decks and on each deck there were two signal projectors and your eyes stuck out like hawkers stops trying to find out which ship they were addressing with your identification signal and I ran down to the officer of the watch on the quarterdeck and I said urgent signal sir cap put to sea immediately instructions to follow.
- 28:30 Now we had to gather up the ship's company hoist the motor boat and the whaler inboard they were lying alongside the ship. Some of our crew were ashore and we gathered up the ship's company and we made steam down the harbour. It was about 14 miles to get down the harbour and out through the boom anti-submarine out to open water and the shore signal station starting giving us the instructions with a 10 inch signal lamp and then a 20 inch signal lamp which was like a really big like
- 29:00 a searchlight with a signal shutter and the final few words of instruction to us were made us by a 20 inch search light dots and dashes on a low cloudbank which we were able to read at great distance and we thundered off into the darkness and a troop ship had collided with a tanker and there were men in the water and there was great drama. Another Australian warship called the Berteken had been on its way to New Guinea and raced in and some American
- 29:30 destroyers came with us and we spent that night pulling men out of the water and trying to save one of the ships which actually was saved by spraying immense amounts of fire hoses onto it and so forth and so forth and we saw the ship towed in the harbour the next day but it was a very dramatic night but we came out an unusual signal that was finished off with the final instructions off low cloudbank.

- 29:54 **So does that mean that you've got the 20 inch light on the shore which is pointing towards clouds in the sky?**
- 30:02 Yes slow dots and dashes.
- 30:04 **And you had to read the?**
- 30:06 No trouble either no they were made solely of dots and dashes and we read the final sentence of the instructions from the cloudbank.
- 30:13 **That's pretty inventive signalling isn't it?**
- 30:15 I've written that story a few times. It was a very interesting night yes.
- 30:20 **And did when you were still training at Flinders Navy Depot you'd learnt semaphore and new Morse code anyway and you mentioned that there was a situation where you had to be on a parade ground or something pretending to be certain different types of ships?**
- 30:42 Yes that's right the Royal Navy's training was for a fleet. We didn't have a fleet out in this part of the world of course. It was quite stupid looking back on it and but I suppose they'd presumed we'd go back to Britain and the North Atlantic and the European war and the change over hadn't then taken place. We carried little pennants around with us representing whether you were an aircraft-carrier or battleship or a cruiser and learnt the way they'd turn the fleets when they want to it's a complex
- 31:12 **You mean to get them all to move together?**
- 31:14 Yes when you see aircraft turn together in unison they do it with warships but it's a very complicated process. I might add on that score that for navy signalman the hour before dusk at sea during the war was absolutely frantic. In the big convoys,
- 31:30 the Commodore in the convoy used to issue his night instructions. He'd know that signals with lights couldn't be made at night time except in a dire emergency and all his instructions for what was to take place from dusk until dawn were issued in the last hour before the sun went down. We worked like crazy getting all these instructions particularly if there were changes in course involved and lots of columns of ships and
- 32:00 what the escort screen had to do. Now the interesting part about that Annie is that while the convoy steered a straight course the escort ships steered a zigzag in and out of the convoy to give maximum protection against the submarines but at the same time maintaining themselves with the file of the master body of the force. Now this sounds good except that in dreadfully rough
- 32:30 conditions and I mean rough and up in the Philippines where those typhoons rage it's horrendous. You'd be blacked out at night you can't show a light anywhere and the officer of the watch swings the ship around to come in on the leg of in towards the convoy and then it has to come about and steam out and for a short time you beam onto the crashing waves and many a time we thought there's no way this ship can right itself again and you know it
- 33:00 was tongue in cheek and hang on with all you could. They used to rig safety lines in the ship and when the weather and the forecasts weren't too bad we could you know get a bit of an advance warning of what was coming up but if you had to move along the upper decks they used to rig great steel horses from the front of the ship down to the stern of the ship. They had another wire with an eye at the top and you could hold it and slide along so you couldn't go over the side because to go over the side was hopeless you there was no way you could rescue anybody.
- 33:33 **Was this on the patrol boat or on the Hawkesbury?**
- 33:36 No on the Hawkesbury. The patrol boat didn't get as far as the Philippines and we didn't run into those typhoons up there but the Hawkesbury and many other Australian ships all know what I'm talking about here. Those safety lines when they were rigged you knew you were in for a real belting.
- 33:51 **Did any of the ships ever go over?**
- 33:54 Yes the American Navy and it's a story that was very much hushed up but when the Lingayen Gulf Campaign was raging off northern part of the Philippines an American taskforce had been at sea a long time and it was fairly empty its fuel tanks were fairly low which meant the ship was fairly well out of the water. They ran into a dreadful typhoon and five American destroyers were lost and I think one aircraft-carrier ran into all sorts of strife from I'm not too sure on what happened to it but it was
- 34:30 a very sad loss of many United States navy guys because they were hit by this dreadful typhoon in conditions that they couldn't do much about because they were riding high in the water whereas you know six to seven hundred tonnes of fuel settles them down into the water fairly well.
- 34:48 **And during these convoys when you were there basically to protect the ships against submarine attack did you have any air cover at all was there any?**

- 34:59 Occasionally was wonderful to see a Catalina flying boat come out over the convoy and just keep an eye on things Martin Mariners and the airforce did a good job where they did keeping an eye on things but it was just absolutely wonderful to see some air cover over the convoy. That took a strange twist that escorting of convoys. It's a rather interesting story. From Leyte Gulf in the Philippines
- 35:30 we assumed the opposite role. We were sent many times to a point well north of the equator to a sea rendezvous latitude and longitude to make rendezvous with American submarines that had been operating outside Japan itself and which needed a safe escort back through what we called the submarine safety lane so that their own ships wouldn't sink them when they were trying to get back into their own bases and it was an interesting process. We
- 36:00 would come to this latitude and longitude and hopefully what would happen a periscope would eventually pop to the surface take a good look at us eventually come up expose the conning tower finally someone would come up and make a signal usually what speed do you want to steam at and they would form up in line behind us and we would give them a warship's escort back to the fleet base so that their own ships if they were on their own wouldn't mistake them for something of the enemy and sink them particularly at night time you know it's easy.
- 36:36 **So there's no way to tell if the submarines was ours or theirs?**
- 36:41 No there were complex codes Annie and that they changed every four hours but they were fraught with problems. I was unfortunate enough to be the signalman on watch one night in the central Pacific. We used to go across the central Pacific and meet aircraft carriers coming
- 37:00 from the west coast of America they were called Jeep carriers and they ferried aircraft out to the airforce base in the Philippines and we'd make rendezvous with them and bring them back to the Philippines area but we were on our own night going out to one to one of these rendezvous and we were challenged. Now I hastily looked at the list that was given to us on the side on the wing of the bridge for recognition codes for the next four hours and gave back the one that was listed and could not get
- 37:30 a response. They challenged us again which is a bit serious when you get challenged twice in the darkness and lights challenge you at night time?
- 37:41 **So was this a sub challenging you?**
- 37:43 No it was an American warship a destroyer and I gave back the code that was about to be superseded plus the new code and we still couldn't get it. Now one of the problems we had was that Australian
- 38:00 warships look different to American warships. Why our big cruiser the HMAS Australia got attacked six times by Kamikaze bombers was because she had three enormous funnels. She looked like a battleship. She was different from American ships and they just attacked the Australian and she got hit six times by dreadful Kamikaze bombers. Now here we are out in the middle of the Pacific at night time we were being challenged by we don't know what but we figure it's
- 38:30 certainly one of ours and if they put a searchlight on us we're going to look different to what their books have trained them in. We don't look like an American warship and if you try and tap out the word Australia it's a long word to tap out to identify yourself. You send K363 which were the warships identification markings which were on our bows and hope that that will enable him to look at his list and see oh we've got one of those
- 39:00 damn Australian ships stuck up this way. He fired a star shell at us. Now to be on a warship at night in blackout condition it's absolutely riveting you just about rivet yourself to the deck when a star shell explodes over you. It illuminates everything which you don't want anyhow and in the midst of it all I kept making doing K363 and he eventually got the message. He looked up his list and realised who we were and wished us good night.
- 39:30 **Just in time.**
- 39:30 Yeh just good night but it's not a good feeling. The captain asked me he questioned me heavily about it afterwards and I said well that's the situation so I said I gave him the full letters on the list that the fleet base gave us. He wouldn't accept those. I even tried to give him the four letters on the previous four hour coding which were about to be superseded and it's awkward with one changing over the other and I said they were transmitted clearly and sensibly but I said to try and make HMAS Australia wouldn't mean anything to him.
- 40:00 I gave him K363 our identification on our bows. He fired a star shell and he saw K363 and suddenly he realised that's OK wished us good night but it's something that needs tidying up.
- 40:15 **So were you getting the changes in codes the four hourly changes did you know those when you sailed?**
- 40:22 Yes.

40:23 **Right and his challenge was coming to you over the radio or by?**

40:27 No by small signal light yes. Small signal light.

40:31 **A signal light so he issues you a challenge which says what identify yourself?**

40:37 What ship what ship.

40:37 **What ship what ship oh OK?**

40:42 And it's not easy. Some of the Americans are not easy. They're a little bit different in many ways.

40:54 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:17 **OK Max now I'd like to take you right back to before the war back to Bendigo and we'll just talk about some of the things some of the things that happened there. Perhaps a bit about your family and a bit about your**

00:30 **journalism on work working at the Bendigo Advertiser. Just to start with you mentioned that your father hadn't he didn't serve in the Great War but you had an uncle or was it a great uncle?**

Great Uncle yes.

A great uncle and he was in the 8th Light Horse?

He was in the 8th Light Horse yes.

And would he have been at the Battle of the Nek then?

I wish I knew Martin. I really can't answer that.

Did he serve at Gallipoli

01:00 **That uncle?**

Yes he did he served with Gallipoli and Syria and France yes.

Right OK.

He was gassed and came home and died the year after he came home. I don't know a lot about him I wish I did. I must research it more heavily. He was the only family member that was involved in World War I. My Dad was too young for the World War.

Lucky for him that's good. So you didn't know that great uncle of course he died before you?

No sadly yes he died about

01:30 1919 and I was born in '24.

OK. You said that you were always interested in boats and stories about the sea and that sort of stuff and that your father had worked on the Argus is that right?

On the Argus yes.

I don't know if you can remember George Johnson you know who wrote My Brother Jack

Yes.

he worked on the Argus at those times too

02:00 **didn't he?**

Yes of course they had a big journalistic staff and they did was the newspaper in Victoria for many years the Argus.

Yes. I just remember that he wrote a lot of stories about the sea that he published in the Argus. Did you read that sort of stuff newspaper stories?

No I didn't then. What I read was the back page of the Melbourne Herald every Saturday night they had a full broadsheet page of shipping news of rivals' interviews with Captains cargo that came into Melbourne the history of ships.

02:30 I just loved that inside back page of the Herald of a Saturday night. It was full of shipping. It was a

wonderful roundup of the shipping scene as it was in those days. When I came down to Melbourne from Bendigo the first thing I did was walk down North Wharf and see all the ships along North Wharf loading and unloading. I just loved it.

So you'd know when a ship came in where it may have been and?

Yes and of course there was so many ships then because one ship today does what five used to do in those days.

03:00 **At school in Bendigo you went to Bendigo High School is that right?**

Yes.

How was ANZAC Day treated at school? Can you remember were there any?

Very reverently. Very reverently indeed because there at the time I went to school there were ever so many of the First World War diggers around and it was a big ANZAC Day parade and very well done

03:30 with the accoutrements of the First World War that was still around then and the men and ANZAC Day in provincial cities was really big and of course it is today the one just up in Bendigo last week was very big as it was indeed in Melbourne. I know working on the paper in Bendigo we worked 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. I know the young journalist and myself got a request from the Air Observer Corps asking us

04:00 When we knocked off could we fill in two hours at an air observation platform on the top of the gold mine poppet legs up near the Queen Elizabeth Oval. They had a on the second platform they had a great big building erected there and they used to log every aircraft that went over Bendigo as part of the wartime scene. There was a big ordinance factory in Bendigo during the war and there was a good reason for it so we used to knock off work about three o'clock in the morning and

04:30 go and sit up there for two hours and log the aircraft that went over Bendigo. Not too many in those days of course but we felt you know it was a contribution that we could make and we worked these oddball hours and that's what we used to do when we knocked off crazy stuff.

You've talked about how the first edition to the Melbourne paper would arrive up in Bendigo and you'd see what was there and try and make your own you know page one

05:00 **Look pretty stunning. Were you involved in anything to do with censorship? I mean how did how did that work?**

Censorship was stifling sensible but stifling. Newspapermen never ever came to terms with of course because it inhibited what they wanted to tell. I saw it first as a young bloke working in the reporters' room of a daily newspaper and everything had to be written in accordance with tight instructions were issued by

05:30 the censorship board of the day and I remember at one stage and I perhaps shouldn't record this too severely but I think the army Commandant in Bendigo I won't give his name but he was a pretty pompous sort of a character he came marching into the newspaper office one day and he was going to dictate a little bit how things should be written and he got very short shrift.

From the editor?

My word. He was told that we will abide by what Canberra

06:00 tells us and what Spring Street tells us but don't you know don't come that in Bendigo. We know what we're doing and showed him the door. He tried it on but didn't get away with it. But during the war itself I wrote a lot of stuff that I thought was very sensibly written but even when it reached the newspapers including a lot of stuff for the Bendigo Advertiser I wrote for their magazine sections got pianola holes in it or great black pencil gashes

06:30 in it and stuff that I thought really could have gone through but some enterprising censorship said no you can't say that.

So was there an edit was there a censor appointed at the paper or was it just the?

All the material you wrote every letter off the ship had to be censored. Technically the officers read the letters. I don't say they read every letter but they'd browse through them if you know it was personal family stuff to a bloke's wife they'd pass it on to the next one but

07:00 whilst that was a bit different and on occasions and the officers knew what I was up to and I had many discussions with them over it and they liked to see the ship get a bit of publicity but I couldn't mention the ship and I couldn't mention the ships in company and I couldn't mention where we'd been and it was a masterpiece of journalism really to be able to write a story without saying the specifics that were so key to the story. Now they went to the censorship people in Melbourne before they reached Bendigo.

So these were pieces you wrote

07:30 **under your own name?**

Yes yes.

Life aboard ship which were published back in Bendigo?

By Max Thompson RAN [Royal Australian Navy] yes.

Sorry what was that?

By Max Thompson RAN yeh identified correctly yeh but they were heavily censored firstly on the ship secondly in Melbourne or Sydney. There were a lot of good main stories published in Sydney but they welcomed stuff from you know guys at sea and then the army and the airforce and certainly the newspaper itself had to watch what it did because there were

08:00 drastic penalties if they published anything that they shouldn't. Names of ships in company destinations army troops in the convoy all that sort of stuff. It was very hard to write that way Martin it really is but yet as a young journalist you know bristling with enthusiasm there's so much you want to say about what's going on and you've got to do it within the confines of this inhibition.

08:30 **It must have made your parents pretty proud though to see your name in the local paper with you on service?**

Yeh my Dad was wonderful really. He encouraged me with it all the way. He took some of the stuff I had which I didn't think much of myself and he eventually turned them into feature stories himself wrote them over my name but he saw angles in stuff that I told him about even years after the war that he felt justice should have been done with the preservation of the stories and he

09:00 was a good journalist. I wish I was as good as he was but he got twisted angles on it. Often I'd think why didn't I think of that?

Well you probably had a few other things to think about at the time I imagine. Before when you're still doing your cadetship what were some of the other things that you had you had the war news as you said. Things like Italy joining the war or latest news from the Russian front.

09:30 The night Italy joined the war is a little piece of master journalism for me. Since the gold was discovered in Bendigo in 1851 and the newspaper started up in 1853 it's 150 years old this year they had always published advertisements on the front page because the advertisements were the key note of the community right back to the gold mining days. The advertisements were the prime reason why people brought the local paper. Later on it became news but they always had

10:00 news inside them. In the reporters just along from the reporters' room in the Advertiser we had about 15 or 16 reporters there was a wonderful phone room full of material now that would be an antique dealer's delight. Big brass wall telephones, dictaphones and wall telephones wonderful old stuff. It rang about two o'clock one morning and the bloke down in the United Press Office in Little Collins Street in Melbourne

10:30 said can you write shorthand quickly he said Italy's just entered the war and he gave me about 50 words and I raced back to the reporters' room typed it up. I hurtled downstairs past the reading room which was in darkness into the big composing room which was boy a theatre with about 15 big liner type batteries in it and all composing room gear paraphernalia it was all in darkness. I struck a compositor just docking off and I said look Italy's just entered the war. Here's about 50 words can you

11:00 do anything? Leave it with me mate I'll have a go and he set about eight lines of type raced into the printing where I they were about to clamp the big lead cylinder drums onto the press to push the button.

This is hot metal type?

Hot metal days yes you're with it Martin and they managed to clamp it up in the top right hand corner and we were very proud of the fact that we published that morning for Bendigo people the news that Italy had entered the war they it was to be known as the Axis of Power Germany and Italy.

11:30 The management met next day and they eventually decided to put some news items on the top right hand corner and to cut a long story short that became the top quarter page and before long it became front page converted entirely over to news and that's how it started.

Oh yeh. What about some of the other things casualty lists and things like that? Did that all have to get published?

Oh it used to be very sad. Outside the newspaper office

12:00 all the wonderful pictures that came from the News and Information Bureau and they were wonderful pictures after they'd been published in the paper they mounted on great big sliding panels and the Pall Mall facade of the newspaper office and people just used to pour by to look at the pictures and with them of course was a cut out of the casualty lists that were published long casualty particularly from the Middle East and the Siege of Tobruk and El Alamein Bardia and those

12:30 places and that was a very sad you know saga of newspaper work in those days. There was a bright side to working on the newspaper. I loved covering City Council meetings. I could write speed shorthand.

Bendigo City Council used to meet every two weeks. It was a long meeting. Two of us had to do it one in the first half and I did the second half and we could write a copy up until about maybe 10 o'clock at night in those days probably couldn't do it now and

13:00 I loved covering the Bendigo City Council but also delightful were Eagle Hawk Council Strathfield Council Huntley Council I used to love because they used to meet out at Huntley and in the winter time it had to end fairly early because the Huntley Council didn't have electric light. It was a strange thing I remember even after the war when I came back from the navy towns throughout northern Victoria were still having ceremonies we occasionally used to cover of the

13:30 turning on of the electric light in some of the small towns up there but I loved that sort of thing it was good.

What about letters to the paper too. Were there was there much debate was there room for debate about the war?

There is always somebody likes to write a letter to a newspaper that knows a little bit about something that you know is currently controversial you would know what

14:00 the scene's like. To a newspaper editor's credit they've always devoted a good space to public opinion. Mightn't always agree with it because some of it was pretty awful and some of that that wasn't published was even more awful but an essential part of any newspapers. I've been a great lover of newspapers. During those early years I knew lots of the men who published small papers in small towns. They've nearly all gone now Martin but the

14:30 salt of the earth were those guys in not hamlets but they weren't towns even much less cities but for years they published on old flatbed presses. You know they were the salt of the earth churning out the local scene for the local people and I reckon they were wonderful. A shame that most of them have been amalgamated now into regional newspaper groups and syndicated to some extent but I think the community's lost a lot because of it. Although on the other hand the suburban newspapers you get today

15:00 are incredibly wonderful you know you've got a wonderful collection of suburban newspapers.

Did you have aspirations to perhaps I mean you figured you wanted to become a Hansard reporter at some stage. Did you ever think of becoming a war correspondent?

No never. No I was in the services and I couldn't. I wasn't old enough really to qualify with the experience behind it to be a fully I was 18

15:30 years old not old enough to qualify to become a naval officer really to do that I would have had to spend you know more time learning and training and all us young bucks wanted to go to sea and see something of the world which was sad in a way really but I never had aspirations either to stay on in the navy or to become a fully blooded war correspondent which I couldn't be but I did meet a lot of them during the war. Some of the bigger warships carried them. The News and Information

16:00 Bureau guys from Canberra used to flit around the battlefields and we saw quite a bit of them particularly the photographers but no I never envied their life.

Who were some of those blokes? Can you remember some of them?

Oh Darryl and Parr had lost his life over at Plough in the Philippines and Jimmy Aldridge I remember oh look I wish I could remember more but you're testing my memory now.

That's OK. You said you met General MacArthur a number of times?

16:30 I could hardly say met him.

Well saw him. Almost ran over you one day yeah.

Saluted him.

What were your impressions of MacArthur?

The right man in the right place at the right time. When that poor guy landed in Australia we had nothing. He had awful battles with Washington to whip up something. He fortunately hit the right note with the Australian politicians of the day and I think they backed him to the nth degree and said we will see this thing through together.

17:00 He also had that terrible involvement of rivalry between the services the army and the airforce. He had to justify his escape out of the Philippines which was quite an incredible undertaking in itself. I put that question to a guy called Sir Asher Joel in Sydney. Now Sir Asher was on board ML817 the day it got bombed heavily and I knew him very well and Asher was one of MacArthur's intelligence staff

17:30 and I said Asher the allegations have always been made that MacArthur didn't want the AIF in the Philippines he wanted it to be a totally American outfit and shuttled us off to the Borneo which campaign which should never have taken place which would never have lost 700 guys in Borneo

according to many. He said Max there's two answers to that. The British interests certainly wanted Borneo recaptured for the oil fields therefore the Borneo campaigns were scheduled.

18:00 No-one knew the atomic bombs were to be dropped shortly afterwards. Had they know that they probably wouldn't have invaded Tarakan Labuan and Balikpapan but he said getting back to MacArthur he said I'm going to tell you and this is my version of the story. MacArthur slotted the 9th Division for two landings one at Luzon and one at Lingayen Gulf and spoke to Blamey and the top authority

18:30 about it. They wanted an Australian corps. Now I'm not too well up on army terminology.

Two divisions or more yeh.

They wanted a full corps and MacArthur allegedly according to Asher Joel said I can't go along with an Australian corps because your Corps Commanders would be then senior to my men and I can't sell that to Washington and as it worked out the Australians were shuttled down to Borneo and the Americans did the job

19:00 with the help of the airforce and the navy and a limited number of Australian and military personnel specialists in the Philippines. I like MacArthur. I like the way.... I loved his island hopping campaign. We would have had a terrible job to dig the Japanese out of Rabaul so we by-passed it. That's the way it went virtually all the way back to Japan until they got to Iwo Jima and Okinawa which had to be they had to dig them out of there but the Philippines campaign and the island hopping campaign

19:30 we wanted the Japanese and they were by-passed. I remember many islands we by-passed on runs out into the central Pacific Kuching and places like that where we steamed past them. We knew that all that island was still occupied by the Japanese but they couldn't go in there they couldn't do anything. They weren't a danger to anybody. I remember some convoys passing close to Rabaul oh one of them was a troop convoy actually the American 81st Construction Division

20:00 a big convoy of important American troops and a tight navy screen around it basically American and ourselves and a couple of other Aussie ships and we got a flume ping on a submarine and the convoy command said no don't break the convoy screen. The safety of the convoy is more important than the supply submarine running into a bow and that's what it will be a submarine that's the way they try to keep the Rabaul going. So reluctantly we missed that one.

20:30 **Now you were involved at Tarakan. Is that right?**

Mm.

Tell us about that?

Tarakan was the first of the three Oboe operations in Borneo the convoy of the assault force of about 11,000 men assembled in Morotai and those troops were on the ship for about two days and it took two and half days of steaming to get them to Borneo.

21:00 Now you contrast that to the short dashes across the English Channel to land at Normandy. I'm not knocking Normandy by any means but I'm saying that the AIF boys were on those troop ships for about two days then they had two and half days of steaming to get to the objective. That would be an awful thing to undergo knowing that you're going to have to hit the beaches after being on these big transports. Now the convoy was assembled off Morotai with the big American destroyer screen around it and three Australian frigates on which

21:30 I was on one and the cruiser squadron which we never saw at any stage pounded hell out of Tarakan from off shore with their big guns American cruisers and the Australian cruisers Shropshire etc. We steamed towards Tarakan and the airforce flew over each day and dropped photographs of what the landing area was currently looking like after the shelling

22:00 but it's still an awful feeling when you've got to go into a tight headland into Tarakan Bay and I think we were the third ship in there and see them all form up. The Japanese were fanatical. They'd had years to build unbelievable obstacles along the beach line. Our radio room was loaded with explosives ready to blow it up if anything went wrong and so was the ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] and the secret radar equipment and most of the warships did the same thing.

22:30 We were frightened of Japanese swimming out and putting limpet mines on the ships at night time so all the warships and I think the big transports put their motor cutters over the side with machine guns in the bow and they were told they could steam within 15 yards of the hull but no further and they could be sure they could open fire on them but if you go 15 yards further than your own hull you're likely to be fired on yourself so they just wound their way around the ship all night. In the morning the bombardment opened with an unbelievable bombardment

23:00 on Tarakan which had an interesting effect. The three big oil tanks on the foreshore exploded and the burning oil ran down onto the beaches our guys were to land on. I've seen the diorama at the Canberra War Memorial and I tell you it's absolutely magnificent. It's spot on and perfect in every sense of the word. I saw the troops go over the side from the

- 23:30 transports and go ashore and to actually land on the beaches after the sappers had done a an amazing job trying to clear the obstacles in the water and under the water close to the bridges. Tarakan was a disaster from start to finish. They captured it for use of its airfield but it was all a quagmire and the construction boys tried hard but the couldn't stabilise the airfield. It really was a sad state of affairs.
- 24:00 The army used to come aboard and they would indicate the foil of shot where they wanted support fire and we would fire over the top of the bridges into specific targets behind the odd radio station and Japanese posts that they wanted and a couple of things further down the coast a little bit and we were there about eight days I think and the fleet started to run a bit short of fuel so a huge American oil tanker
- 24:30 called the Winooski was detailed off and we were sent with it as its escort and we made a very fast trip back to the Philippines very fast trip fuelled the Winooski with all sorts of aviation fuel and marine fuel and raced back to Tarakan to refuel all the ships again and I was back at Tarakan on that Australia Remembers project. There's a pier at Tarakan now and there's also a hotel in Tarakan. No-one would ever believe that there
- 25:00 is a Plaza Hotel in Tarakan but in that Tarakan landing I saw an order issued that must be unique in navy history. Four huge LSTs the Tank Landing Ships they were about 4,000 tonne very heavily laden. They ran in onto the mud flats and just gorged all the tanks and the trucks and guns and paraphernalia and war and men but they couldn't extricate themselves off. They nearly made it but couldn't and they were sitting targets
- 25:30 and the Fleet Commander said he detailed off an emergency destroyer and ourselves and asked the Captains to steam in water as deep as they felt was safe as fast to try and make a good wash and with the ships dragging on their stern anchors which LSTs had hopefully they would extricate themselves at the right tide and all this was timed down to the minute and we made two or three runs and on the third run it succeeded and they all got off. It was quite a

26:00 unique sight to see that happening.

Sending a tidal wave in to shore to raise the?

Yeh yeh just at the right moment hauling on their stern anchors with their motors going they got off this dreadful morass of mud. Tarakan was unbelievably awful.

You said before that you thought that there was no reason for these landings.

We didn't know that at the time because we didn't know about the bomb and Borneo was there to be recaptured

- 26:30 but MacArthur didn't have his eye on it then these days he was headed straight for Tokyo he went up through the Philippines to Okinawa, Iwo Jima destination Tokyo. That was the side play for the Dutch who owned the Dutch East Indies the British who had interests out there and sad to think he went there really.

And perhaps to think that the place he might have done some good was another couple of hundred miles north up at Sandakan?

- 27:00 We knew nothing of Sandakan. This amazed me. I don't doubt navy officers and the hierarchy of the naval command knew about it but us guys on ships we didn't know about Sandakan and what was going on there and it is sad that we'd be comparatively close particularly on the run around to Labuan for the landing at Labuan but as the guys we had a couple of survivors with us on that retrace went on the Sandakan
- 27:30 death march and they said look if you'd have tried to rescue us they'd have shot the lot of us anyhow which wouldn't have helped us which indeed was the problem with the Changi prisoners of war. They felt at the moment the Japanese looked like losing the war they would be taken across the causeway to Johor where there were tunnels into the hills there and they would be put in there they would either be shot or they'd be entrenched forever in the tunnels but they would have no hope of getting out if we tried to invade Singapore.
- 28:00 They were very firm about that the prisoners of war. They said that was their greatest danger. The bomb made it all so quick. They were sort of caught well napping.

I don't think anyone expected it did they?

And we knew nothing about the bomb. Had no idea about it at all.

After Tarakan where did you were on the Hawkesbury at this stage?

Yes we went back to the fleet base at

- 28:30 Morotai and then got geared up for the landing at Labuan around the top of Borneo through the Balabac Straits rather treacherous navigation there with the 9th Division again to attack the bridges at Labuan. I saw an amazing thing happen there. We got there with the big assault force and the barges were racing ashore with the troops on board to go onto the actual invasion beaches and

- 29:00 Tokyo Rose came on the air and we used to listen to that a bit because it was fun stuff played good music too and she broadcast a tirade of what was going to happen that night to the entire force in Labuan. Now Singapore was only X hundred miles across the bottom of the South China Sea with all the Japanese aircraft there and the warning wasn't taken lightly and the order went round the fleet to tell the engine room crews to prepare to make
- 29:30 the thickest smoke screen that they could possibly concoct. The smoke screens are awful they cause an immense amount of problem on ships. All the flakes come down into the clinker built life boats on board and whalers and they get wedged in every corner.

The flakes what do you mean flakes?

Flakes out of the funnel flakes of oil burnt unburnt oil that come out with the with the smoke just come down like an envelope and the

They just make the mixture richer do they so you get the smoke?

Yes thick black smoke. So we were all ready to do this

- 30:00 the some warships stood out to sea and we had a long hard night listening in on the radar in the hope that the Japanese didn't arrive and they didn't. I went back to Labuan later on that pilgrimage. The beaches there have changed a shade Martin the actual beaches where they went ashore are a little further inland now we've reclaimed operations but in a picturesque little park there in a garden
- 30:30 in the lawn setting there is a great rock with a commemorative plaque on it where the whole Japanese army surrendered to the 9th Division and it's all laid out in a lovely brass tablet there which is quite unique days upon us remember.

And after Labuan where did the Hawkesbury go then?

We went to Balikpapan with the third landing. Not with the invasion of course. We came in with supply convoy shortly after landing

- 31:00 and my memories of it were mainly the unbelievably grotesque twisted mess that was the original Royal Dutch Shell Refinery at Balikpapan a tank of massive pipes and twisted grotesque mess. Made a trip in there and later on when I went back there with the pilgrimage a local oil company bloke there took me up the hill and he was a guy very interesting. He was very interested in the history of the place
- 31:30 and with some colleagues they'd put little plaques on the side of the hill there and described individual little skirmishes and battles that had taken 11 Japanese died here five Australian died there and explained it all and on top of the hill were two big twin five inch Japanese navy guns deflected downwards to show defeat and with a plaque on it that they were the guns that defended Balikpapan when Japan had it. Very well
- 32:00 done. Full nice piece of history by a guy who had put some good effort into the history of the actual fighting ashore having in mind we didn't get ashore at those places of course we only saw it from the sea.

What sort of guns did the Hawkesbury have?

Four inch four inch guns. Mainly anti submarine frigates.

A couple at either end is that right?

Yeh with about 120 depth chargers to keep the submarines under the surface where they were

- 32:30 were we used to under the surface if they come to the surface some of this very big Japanese submarines had five inch guns and they were quite potent.

So after all the Borneo campaigns the winding up where do you go from there? Is that when you head back to Singapore?

Yes from Borneo we went back to Morotai and we were we went down to build this lighthouse in New Guinea with a

- 33:00 vessel called the Cape Lewin and we were headed for Melbourne for Sydney for a refit and we were coming through the heads when the Hiroshima bomb was exploded and then that gave us the orders to go to Singapore which was a probably the most coveted assignment an Australian warship's ever had it really was because the HMAS Perth guys were also in Changi. They'd been sunk in Chung Straits and were taken prisoner of war and some of them
- 33:30 worked up on the railway. Interesting thing there Martin that not many people know about. When our Captain went ashore in Singapore he went to the British Naval authorities and asked was any way we could take the HMAS Perth prisoners of war back to Australia on an Aussie warship there was only one of us. They said yes we're more than happy for you to do that but you've got to guarantee you can land them in Sydney and of course we couldn't do that we didn't know where we were going and as it
- 34:00 was we got to Darwin a couple of times and then got raced down to Timor then to the Dutch East Indies.

We would never have been able to physically land them in Sydney plus the fact we knew they'd be more than comfortable on the big transports behind us with the hospital equipment but they came on board and we talked to them and heard dreadful story of the sinking of the Perth in Chung Straits and yeh we keep in touch with them over the years but most of them came home on a big transport called the Holland Chifley but we did try in Singapore to

- 34:30 to have them come home on our own warship but knowing really that they would be more comfortable with the hospital facilities on a big transport.

Now did you go ashore at Singapore?

Oh yes. I had my 21st birthday there. It was my 21st birthday and the officer of the day said everyone ashore. Piece of history so I did I went ashore on my 21st birthday to Singapore. It was quite unique.

What did you do? What did you see?

Well the only tall building in Sydney in Singapore in those

- 35:00 days was the Cathay building and the what used to be the post office near the entrance to the Singapore River. We went to the Municipal Chambers and saw the surrender ceremony and all that sort of thing where all that took place and the big Padang. Orchard Road wasn't like it is now which is you know full of magnificent high rise buildings these days. We went into St Andrews Cathedral which is at the end of the big parade
- 35:30 ground on the foreshore and having in mind a lot of that further out's been reclaimed now. Those big hotels like the Orient and the Pan Pacific and those are all on reclaimed areas. That was the original fleet anchorage out there but in St Andrews Cathedral the beautiful stained glass windows had all been taken out and preserved for the duration of the war. The RAF blokes and the Changi boys told us how the Japanese had tried to erect some sort of
- 36:00 a memorial down on the façade of the place and how they'd destroyed it and you know their comings and goings. The Singapore was garrisoned by a lot of Indian troops and to be quite frank they'd taken the guns off them they'd given them pick handles. They didn't want too much retribution and the Japanese were all over the city of course but they were very much surrendered at that stage and we brought
- 36:30 a few souvenirs. The shops were starting to open up again a little bit but it was a pretty sad scene in general but the harbour was chock full of warships. Unbelievable the warships there.

What sort of currency do you how do you buy something?

Very interesting. We got paid in Malay dollars including a Malay one cent note. Now I've got a few upstairs a Malay one cent note with King George's head on it and we got paid in Malay dollars and everything was barter

- 37:00 process and we were given some money when we went ashore. Money was a strange thing on a warship. We got paid now and again. We didn't have a pay book or anything. I never knew from one weeks' end to another whether I had any money accumulated or not. We didn't have a pay book in the navy. Record books were kept ashore and we never ever saw them but occasionally the Supply Officer would go to shore where there was a bit of civilisation and he would come back with a great box full of money and they were usually American dollars overprinted with the words
- 37:30 Hawaii. Now Hawaii in those days wasn't the 51st state of the Union but they were American dollar notes and I've got quite a few of them upstairs overprinted with the word Hawaii and on board there'd be a pay parade and we'd take our cap off and the pay master would put some money on the cap for us and we'd inevitably spend it at the canteen and after a period of time there'd be enough money in the canteen and they'd pay us all again. It was like a little bank that went round and round
- 38:00 because it was no good going ashore. There was nowhere to spend it in most places. It was a strange operation but I missed it all of course once the enormous amount of Japanese invasion money that was around. I remember on a on the tour of the Dutch East Indies for the local surrender ceremonies and we had to announce General Blamey's proclamation of the end of the war and we had to formally reinstate civil administration. It was a very formal process and there was a pattern
- 38:30 to it all and government and Dutch officials and our own ex boots on board where all part of the scene. We put into a place called Gorontalo and the ship was lying about two miles off shore and I was at the little jetty with a radio small distance radio set keeping contact with the ship
- 39:00 and the troops that came ashore and the navy blokes on board all trundled into town and I was left on the end of the wharf with this little radio. You know the place was cordoned with Japanese. I wasn't too happy about this. I was beginning to think you know it's not a good situation to be in. Here am I alone with all these Japs around the place. Anyhow they went off up into the town and I wouldn't want to go into the details too much but they got into Japanese headquarters and had a good look at what was there. Few souvenirs here and there and when I was
- 39:30 manning my little radio the ship's cutter came in to take some of them back on board and a mate said to me here Max a few souvenirs for you. Hope you had a good time there on your own and it was money.

Now I thought it was invasion money and most of it was but when I got back on board about two hours later the Captain made an announcement to everybody on board there's a table down on the quarter deck. He said a lot of that money that came on board today was

40:00 genuine Japanese currency some of it was genuine Dutch money some of it was invasion money which I'm not interested in he said no questions will be asked but back on the table I want you to deposit the good currency. I think he said there was 80,000 something or other and they got about 115,000 back so we all owned up and gave back the best of the good stuff. We kept a wee bit for ourselves but that was our day in Gorontalo. But it

40:30 wasn't a good feeling sitting on the end of that little wharf on my own with a damn radio set with the place crawling with Japanese.

Tape 4

00:09 **We've just been talking about money and you were saying how on a ship money's not so important because you know there's not much to spend nothing to buy. I was just thinking though what about gambling? Was there much of that that went on?**

Oh yes. The inevitable card games with guys locked up on a warship you know some

00:30 of them played crib others gambled in a worthwhile sense and crown and anchor of course was very popular on board. Not to an over degree. It was a form of relaxation more than anything serious in terms of gambling but no-one on board had much money. We had enough but there was nowhere to go when the when you got to those island places with the convoy there really wasn't much ashore to go to they only had a canteen in some of those places the airforce base or the army base.

01:00 There were no townships in the main except the Dutch East Indies which was a real eye opener. But the invasions were usually at beaches well away from civilisation and as such there was a danger of going ashore I know in New Guinea on ML817 you went ashore probably more than we did on the Hawkesbury. We'd take the motor the ship's boat in and we'd do

01:30 some trading with the Japanese after with the with the navy after we found out what Japanese might be around the place if it was safe and we'd come back with some fresh fruit and some provisions hopefully a chicken or something like that and it was trade for cigarettes and you know odd items off the ship rather than rather than money. But remember New Guinea was awfully primitive in those days. There was the grass skirts there you know look at me Mum I'm in New Guinea with a couple of girls

02:00 in a grass skirt and you know all the ones with the rifle in their right hand but there was it was a trading scene. Bananas particularly were popular and coconuts and by gee when the ship went out again if you went into any sort of a storm blessed coconuts would be rolling from port side over to starboard side over the mess deck and bananas would be whoofing along hanging from the bulkheads but that was our way of getting some

02:30 really fresh fruit because early in that in those earlier days in New Guinea the supply line really hadn't been established properly and we were sort of operating independently sometimes with American torpedo boats. They had an interesting set up. They had a millionaires yacht called the Hilo at Buna and it was leased to the United States navy for a peppercorn rent of a dollar and that was the mother ship for their torpedo boats. Now we'd

03:00 liked working with the torpedo boats. They were fast and they were good but they were awfully noisy the Japanese could hear them coming and as we worked our way along the New Guinea coast line trying to find Japanese barges at night time infiltrating troops ashore we wanted silence and quiet to hear them but these blessed torpedo boats were terribly noisy. They were terribly hospitable. They used to invite us back on the Hilo of a night time to look at a picture show and it was wonderful just to look at the millionaires yacht.

03:30 **What about where there any fights on board? I mean were you ever?**

Can't remember any no. It wasn't like that. Mainly I think everybody I wouldn't say they were tired but everybody was working four hour watches that's four hours on and eight hours off which sounds wonderful but in the eight hours off you've got to abide by dawn and dusk action stations you've got laundry to do you've got certain jobs on board that you have to do

04:00 and as navy signalmen we were always kept busy with updates to the to the code books. Whenever we got to port of any consequence the senior ship there would give us the latest corrections to code books issued by the Admiral to the Orderly Commonwealth Naval Board and endlessly we spent hours on board just putting the new additions and alterations into the code book so that you know we needed them they had to be the latest and they had to be right and we did all those sort of things. You

04:30 tend to get very tired and the ship never stopped moving and your knees and your left ankles and your right ankles and your left knee and your right knee never stop moving from the time you got out of a

hammock in the morning. The decks were always moving and I think it tired you out so that you did tend to sleep wherever you could get a bit of sleep plus the fact that you were working such unbelievably stupid hours if you had midnight to 4 am next morning you'd have 4 am to 8 am then 8 am to midday

05:00 then midday to four then they broke it up on the dog watches four to six and six to eight but you wouldn't work the same cycle all the time and you couldn't really sleep on a warship during the day time to any extent because something was always going on. There was oxyacetylene plants going and all sorts of horrible things happening all through the ship to you know maintain the ships because they were expendable they rarely got back to dock yards. They did what repairs

05:30 they had to do at sea mainly and they were prepared to be expendable. The chances of coming back to Australia were usually in blocks you know you went away for five months and then you went away for another five months or you went away for four months it was never less than that and it was only when the ship got back that they could do a few worthwhile jobs but in between you had to rely on those engineers to keep those engines going top line and the water purification plant and the electrical plants and refrigeration plants and the

06:00 systems that work all the toilets on board it was all running maintenance at sea because you just there were no dock yards to go to.

Were the two boats that you were on mostly the ML817 and the Hawkesbury would you describe them as happy ships? Were they?

Oh wonderful yes yes. Yeh we had no trouble of any sort. The small the trouble with the patrol boat was that it was unprofessional. We had about five

06:30 permanent navy guys on board who were the backbone of it you know the gunners and the depth charge operators and things like that. The rest of us were volunteers who hopefully had done some training. No permanent cook. You had a volunteer cook and you know you can imagine what that's like on a small warship. I thought the frigate was like a block of flats when I got there gee we had four cooks an officers' cook and officers' stewards you know a bloomin' great galley that turned out really good meals we had wonderful meals in the navy. We really did

07:00 mainly because the American supply line was so good and we were lucky enough to join the navy during that change over as I mentioned to Annie earlier from the Royal Navy to the United States Navy. Now all that signalling we learned at Flinders Navy Depot had to suddenly be switched to the American way of doing things which is entirely different Martin. Their flags were different their meanings were different their procedures were different their fleet control was different and even the way American signalmen made semaphores

07:30 was different to the strict straight laced way we had been taught ala the British navy and we had to adapt ourselves to that. There was no-one around to teach us we learnt it the hard way and we were damned good at it quite frankly. I look back on it with amazement. The Americans were good but a little bit sloppy compared to the way the British did it and the British would make their angles perfect. The American's were a little bit slap happy but you got used to it and it worked like a charm

08:00 but all that training down at HMAS Cerberus in signals really had to be supplanted by a whole new spectrum which took a dramatic turn I might add. When we got raced to Singapore to bring home the 8th Division prisoners from Changi the Captain said to us listen you guys we're going to join a British Eastern Fleet in Singapore and we will be the only Australian warship there so he said you have all been working American signals

08:30 for the last you know tours of operations we've had in the Hawkesbury. We're now back to the Royal Navy's way of doing things and we've got to be good. We'll be the only Colonial ship there and you know smarten yourselves up it's got to be good. So we studied like hell on the trip to Singapore to acquaint ourselves once again with the Royal Navy's way of doing things and he told us quite you know forget all the Americanisations that you're used to at training. Find your books and study up on the British Navy's way of doing things and we want the

09:00 protocol to be good we want the procedures on board to be good the you know the Admirals are going to be there and we're the sole representative of the Royal Australian Navy. He had time to talk to us on the run to Singapore he laid down chapter and verse on what he expected of the ship's company and when we went ashore you know we were representatives of Australia do this diddla. It wasn't easy to suddenly switch back to the Royal Navy's way of doing things. I admired the blokes on board the way they did that. It really was quite amazing.

09:30 **You talked how at night you know you couldn't use your normal sorts of signal. How did you communicate at night if you can't?**

There wasn't any.

There wasn't any?

That's not quite correct. At the at the very worst in bad where the particularly the ships in the convoys having in mind they're all in lines and there are maybe five or six lines with ships all one behind the are burnt a slow burnt they burnt a low

10:00 intensity blue light on their stern just enough that the ship astern to be able to see that it was there and that was there were no light or lamps or lights of any sort. You could not communicate at night time. It just wasn't done. The only time I can ever remember the Captain placing radio silence and I wouldn't remember where we were somewhere at sea it was reasonably safe waters I had a man onboard who was

10:30 quite ill and we didn't have a doctor on board we had a good sick bay a hospital and a good sick bay artificer and the captain said you can write shorthand he said I'm going to break radio silence very shortly and very quickly and he said for the absolute minimum time I want to call the navy signal station at Canberra and get instructions on how we handle this man. He said I want to make it quick I don't want to be on the air very long

11:00 write it as accurately as you can and get it right because you know this guy's not going too well and we need some help so I went down to the radio room and they established a link with the naval transmitting station at Belconnen in Canberra and they gave us a rather short message on things that they suggest would be helpful and I rattled them out and typed them so there couldn't be any inaccuracy and gave them to the officer of the watch and he gave them to the sick bay

11:30 to try and help this chap. It's the only time I can remember radio silence being broken with the Captain's permission. The radio operators oh we used to my best mates were down in the radio room which was down a couple of decks below the bridge on the very wet nights when the storms were howling and the wind was raging and rain was pelting down we used to slightly open the voice hatch on the compass platform and let a little bit of rain trickle down the voice type then would come out

12:00 on the desk at the boys down there in the radio and say you lucky so and so's down there in all your comfort this is what's going on up here. Shut that voice pipe we're getting wet down here but that's the way it was. They didn't transmit they couldn't transmit but they listened into the Admiralty British Admiralty London they listened to Belconnen radio station in Canberra which was the Australian Fleet transmitting station Manus Island and Leyte Gulf fleet operational headquarters

12:30 and a lot of time we listened in to Pearl Harbour radio which was the sort of masterpiece of the Pacific scene tuned in to all those frequencies and there wasn't much went on we didn't know about. A lot of it was in code but as I think I was mentioning to Annie the stuff that came from the British in naval code the first two groupings gave the secret of uncoding the remainder of it the first two groups of

13:00 of letters and that would be fed into a coding machine which looked like a very complicated typewriter down in the radio room and that decoded the signal for us hopefully most times amid a lot of abuse.

Yes. And did you have to learn codes as well as the signals?

Yeh it was surprising what we knew as visual signals about the codes. We had access to the Royal Navy's code books which were those fascinating thick books with lead covers

13:30 oh very august looking they were.

Lead covers?

Lead covers so that if anything happened and the ship got torpedoed or

Throw them overboard?

We could put them in this big steel box with the holes and put the lot over the side and the officer of the watch would record the latitude and longitude where the code books were dispatched in deep six. It didn't happen fortunately but it was surprising it was surprising how much the navy taught us about their secret codes and we were only visual signalmen

14:00 not the radio boys probably knew a lot more.

You talked about points when you were discharged from the navy you didn't have many points. What does that mean?

The discharge system after the war was based on years of service in the armed services. The guys who went in 1939

14:30 went to the North African campaigns and so forth they amassed a lot more points than those of us who turned 18 and went in early in 1942 and the points really governed the priority in which you could be discharged from the services but the authorities were open minded enough to listen to individual cases particularly family set ups where a guy was wanted back to help run a family business

15:00 or rejoin his father in the enterprise things like that.

OK. I wonder if you can give us a good visual description of the patrol boat? It's scenes you know of?

It was unusual. When they decided to build them the Australian ship yards were churning out Corvettes at a great rate which did a fantastic

- 15:30 job the Corvettes and they were building a limited number of destroyers and the ship yards were overworked and couldn't handle any more. Remember we didn't have too many ship yards so the Australian authorities decided to try and handle this submarine menace off the east coast they needed anything to drop depth chargers with some degree of naval efficiency and the British had built these Fairmile patrol boats developed in the Fairmile company in England and they were made
- 16:00 for these dashes across the English Channel to France and places occupied Holland and they decided to go to firms like Halversons and then they built the Greenpoint Naval Ship yard in Sydney and one yard in Queensland and they shipped out from England the components for the first couple of Fairmiles and the rest were built in Australia. They
- 16:30 were quite amazing. They were about 140 feet long. They could tour in about 21, 22 knots if pushed hard. They had not a bad anti submarine set on board.

What do you mean by an anti submarine set?

An ASDIC it sent down a transmission that hit a piece of quartz and radioed out around the ship and an echo came back from it and a good detector could detect from the echo whether it was metallic or a whale

- 17:00 in principal and that was called as ASDIC anti submarine detection equipment and

What sort of range did that have?

Oh not as good as needed no we were pretty limited to I couldn't quote you a figure I wasn't an ASDIC operator but I wouldn't like to but then they could trigger the depth chargers back on stern and dropping them from 50 down to about 400 feet and all the in between measurements you could make life pretty

- 17:30 uncomfortable for a submarine. Chasing Japanese barge traffic in New Guinea I always felt uncomfortable about because we didn't have enough hardware on board. We had well it wasn't much better than a Bofors 40 mm gun up forehead and a heap of oerlikon 20 mm guns which were basically anti aircraft guns and the authorities in Australia didn't have the slightest idea for equipping the ships properly for what they were designed to do.
- 18:00 When if I could divert from when Hawkesbury commissioned and went north to the Philippines eventually where the kamikazes were raging and the destroyers and cruisers particularly were mixed up in that lot we were short of anti aircraft equipment. Now some poor dear old clerk back in Melbourne had all the papers about HMAS Hawkesbury which didn't look like anything he had in him. Our Gunnery Officer went ashore and you couldn't do it
- 18:30 in peace time today. He took the motor cutter ashore with a crate of whiskey and you went out to the big Japanese base big American base made friends with the Yank out there and he said I need some 40 mm anti hell man we've got plenty of them here how many do you want oh he said I'll have four to start with come with me and he went out and he got four huge anti air 40mm anti aircraft but they're on wheels with rubber tyres so they got 'em down to the wharf
- 19:00 and with the help of some more whiskey we got 'em onto a barge a barge came out to the ship lying out about two miles out in Leyte Gulf and they got 'em hoisted inboard. This is true this is exactly it should be recorded unofficially. They got 'em onboard and they decided where they'd put these four extra anti aircraft guns to shoot down Japanese aircraft which were pretty busy up there in those days so they threw the four wheels and the under carriage for each one over the side in
- 19:30 the deep water got rid of them they cluttered up the ship and they welded the anti aircraft guns onto the ammunition turrets that fed the shells from down in the bow of the ship up into the gun itself. Put them on the top of the anti aircraft shelter and it was great except that the engineer said look I've done some figures on all this and we're a bit top heavy you know which is not good if we run into one of those Philippine cyclones he said my figures don't add up the way they're meant to so they
- 20:00 had a good look at it so they cut off the crows nest on the ship you know you wouldn't do this in peace time they cut the crows nest off and threw it over the side that wasn't good enough so they cut the port and the starboard wings off the bridge. On the compass platform there were rooms on either side then they went out right to the very ship's side and you could walk out there and gaze right down the port side wander over and go gaze right down on the starboard. They cut them both off threw them over the side and with these extra guns
- 20:30 and with chain and silhouette crows nest missing the ship looked entirely different. Some poor old bloke back in navy base headquarters back in Melbourne thought he had silhouettes on what his frigates looked like. They the other frigates did the same thing. We went to sea with four extra good 40 mm anti aircraft guns but you had to find guys on board to fire them you know good crews for them and you had to get ammunition supplies for them and that took guys from and there's only 160 of us that took
- 21:00 guys from somewhere else on board so it was an adjustment on board but that's the way it worked but getting back to the patrol boat in New Guinea it took a different turn altogether. The Captain went ashore one day with the engineer and they went to an army workshop and he came back with a truck and a great big contraption they manhandled it on board. It was a muffler to fit over the funnel. These patrol boats burned high octane aviation gasoline

21:30 fortunately in self sealing tanks originally they wouldn't explode if a shell got into them or a bullet got in them?

130 octane or something?

Yeh the good stuff that the air airforce boys had plenty of and they fiddled around for a day and they fitted this muffler over the over the funnel and we were very quiet weren't we so the Captain's rubbing his hands in glee and we took up the coast looking for Japanese barge traffic as we always were and there was an inlet I don't know whether you'd call it

22:00 a river but it was as sizeable mouth an inlet and we decided that this was where there something that needed to be investigated so we poked our nose in there and we were 130 feet long which was you know a reasonable length for anything along the New Guinea coast close to the edge and we got about three quarters of the way up it jungle on either side and we blew the muffler off the funnel and the noise echoed around the mountains and it was unbelievably awful. We didn't have enough room to turn the

22:30 Fairmile around in we came back stern first for about three miles slowly stern first which is not easy and thinking that all hell would break loose from the jungle on either side of us and that was the last we ever saw of the funnel. It was never tried again but it wasn't a good feeling. Wasn't a good night.

And on the patrol boats there were about 20 of you?

About 20 of us yes gunners and ASDIC operators one signalman one radio operator an awesome responsibility

23:00 for a young bloke. You're the only signalman on board. No matter what time of the day or night when something was sighted you know you were the only bloke who'd talk to it or identify it or communicate to it.

You haven't you can't do a change in watch either I s'pose can you because if you're the only signalman?

No you spent most of your time on the bridge. There was nowhere else to be. When you weren't asleep you were up on the on the bridge just keeping an eye on things.

Where did you sleep on the patrol boat?

We had bunks on board that would you believe? Very nice bunks too.

23:30 yeh it was quite nicely fitted out.

Whereas on the Hawkesbury you were sleeping in hammocks?

Yeh they were good. I liked hammocks in the rough. I never objected to hammocks yeh they were quite good but that's the only way you could stow 160 blokes on a frigate.

Cause they take up less space do they?

Yeh they're also great in rough weather and they stow away into a corner and leave all areas clear. Remember that we ate slept and lived in the

24:00 same horrible quarters you know they there was it was a bit claustrophobic the starboard side of the bow the actual bow of the ship was an anchor locker with some big great anchors and some cable in it and behind that was a paint locker where all the paint was kept and the bows of those frigates were reinforced. They were made for the north Atlantic U boats and they had heavy ramming prows on the bow so that if you had to ram

24:30 a submarine you could do more than a normal ship could because you had a reinforced bow. Next there was a big bulk head which was a steel wall right across with an entrance to it and on the left hand side it was the radio operators and the signalmen and the coders and there was a thumping great contraption in the centre of it that served one of the gunners up above us and on the other side were the radar operators but behind us there was

25:00 another steel bulk head which could be locked and behind that was a hatchway that went up to the forehead part of the upper deck and when that was locked down at night time so that cascading sea waters from the bows wouldn't plough down there. It was a pretty horrible claustrophobic feeling really. I wouldn't like to do it now but you're young and silly in those days but it wasn't good. Then you had to scamper right along a great passage way down through the bow of the ship

25:30 to the mid sections and then right down either side of the engine room to the after part of the ship and then down on the quarter deck there was a pretty big quarter deck on those with about 120 depth chargers on deck or down underneath it and there were wheel chocks down underneath it and lathes and all sorts of equipment to repair things and then the two big engines that propelled the ship and then two thumping great boilers that generated the steam to propel it

26:00 and down further there was there were huge tanks to hold the water for the ship and we made about 40 tonnes of fresh water a day for our own consumption but it was quite wonderful. We always had a

shower on board. It might occasionally happen to be a salt water shower but you know when you think what the poor army blokes put up with we could at least get a shower and not bad facilities. The galley the cook

26:30 house the galley was on one of the upper decks and I don't know how they ever worked in there and the ship was bouncing bucking all over the place and these poor cooks were cooking things with these amazing contraptions they'd invented to stop soup slopping over the top of the great big containers and all the things they made but we had wonderful meals by the standards of the day backed up by the ability of our own organisation to get the supplies we wanted from the Americans. It was good stuff.

27:00 **What were your officers like?**

27:30 They were specialists in their own I always admired the way the navy did it. In the period when we had a reserve a naval reserve captain his first Lieutenant in other words his top right hand man was a permanent navy man. Ours was an amazing one. He'd won the DSC [Distinguished Service Cross] on a British destroyer on Mermansk the convoys and you know what that involved getting convoys through to Mermansk in the middle of the war. The engineers

28:00 office were specialists in their own right. The end submarine officer that was his world he knew all about that. The gunnery officer had come off the Hobart a cruiser was a gunnery man at the fingertip just loved guns and everything about them which were great when they were pointing four and a half to forty five degree to port to starboard when they came around to 90 degrees they just about blasted everything that was on the bridge as they went off and if you were down below all the corking came off the deck heads and lockers sprung open

28:30 and hair oil all spilt on the stuff steel decks and talcum powder went everywhere it was dreadful. But there was a Supply Officer who looked after the ship's papers and supplies and payroll and all those sorts of things. There was there was an Officer for everything. A couple of watch keeping officers and a mid shipman and a navy midshipman learning the ropes and the backbone of the ship helping them were the chief petty officers

29:00 who were the old experienced hands who'd been through it all salt of the earth rough as could be some of them but great blokes to have when there's trouble and under them were the petty officers who were pretty good but maybe not quite up to their chief petty officers' standards and then the leading hands who were the best of individual groups who their job and the seamanship guys I always admired because we were specialists up on the bridge. No-one ever worried no-one could read signals so they left us alone.

29:30 The officers couldn't read signals. We had a specialist little scene that way and yeh it was rather good world to work in. We were left alone from that point of view whereas on the on the Fairmile on the navy patrol boat I remember being down at Jervis Bay early in the piece and the one of the ships officers said we've got to provide a bloke for navy shore patrol he said you'd better put some white gaiters on and a belt

30:00 and a bayonet look the part and you can be the shore patrol for the afternoon so I it's the only time in my life I every felt I was navy shore patrol but I think the guys ashore were pretty safe but that didn't happen on the big ships on the bigger ships but we weren't regimented like they were on the destroyers on the cruisers particularly. My pal that I joined the navy with he was on the Australia and there was 900 people probably more at some stages and I think the incredible

30:30 navy discipline did its necessary best to administer a ship of 10,000 tonnes with 900 blokes on board. We weren't regimented like that on board the.... we I'm not saying we had it free and easy we didn't we were heavily discipline we'd been trained in discipline we were going by guys who knew what discipline meant on a warship. I can't ever remember seeing a fight on board. We were too busy surviving ourselves from day to day and making the best of each day

31:00 a lot of which weren't easy because when the ship was in awful weather it was an unbelievable lifestyle for 24 hours to you know exist on board a bouncing bucking warship. The convoys were fairly slow. They built these wonderful American Liberty ships they could build them in a month which you've probably read about. Wonderful ships. They could make convoy speed of about 11 knots. Wonderful ships great convoy ships too. Their signal

31:30 halyards and their masts were clear you could read you could read their signals very clearly which was an interesting point for a naval signalman because as I was explaining to Annie while the convoy steams a steady course the escorts grid's going in and out on a zigzag. Now that's great except that you're half way through a signal coming to you from another warship or the Commodore of the convoy and the ship's swings and the funnel haze is unbelievably awful but especially after the ship's been

32:00 at sea for a long time this great funnel haze you can't read the signal through it. You've got to hastily dash to the other side of the bridge where you've got a clear view so you miss a few dots and dashes and hope that you can make up the in between. Not easy. Trained navy signalmen could see when the ship was swinging and they'd just slow down a little bit and then pick it up again when they know the ship had come back on his little zig of the zigzag all those little things entered into another problem for a navy signalman was

32:30 that when there was a following wind coming from the stern the funnel used to pick up a lot of gunk

that came out of came out of the funnel little bits of black sooty oil that would get in your eyes and our eyes always had to be open as signalmen and we frequently had to race down to the sick bay and down there they had little sticks like matches with bits of cotton wool on the end they could roll them under the eyelids and get the black gunk out

- 33:00 and you could see again but if you copped one of those bits of funnel gunk at the wrong moment in the midst of an important signal it was very serious.

Were you ever disciplined for missing signals?

Only at a shore base. While I was waiting for Hawkesbury to commission I was at Balmoral Navy Depot. Now I'd been away for a year in New Guinea and when I came back I was shovelled into the signal office there and there were women in the navy.

- 33:30 There were no women in the navy when I left and I found myself in charge of a watch of about four signalmen and a couple of girls and it was all working pretty merrily and a very busy signal office and I had to make a signal to a ship concerning some guy called Grey. I spelled his wrongly Gray instead of Grey and the wrong bloke came ashore. I didn't have his service number with it

- 34:00 and I copped fourteen days cancellation of leave for that but only did four because the Hawkesbury commissioned on the fourth day and we all went over to Mort stock and commissioned the new warship and I never saw the end of that lot.

That was good fortune.

We had discipline on board. There we left guys behind in ports here and there who didn't get back on board on time and left a couple behind in Singapore when we went there

- 34:30 that didn't quite make it back on board. It was a very serious during the war if you lost a ship because the chance of catching it up again were terrible. We had a guy that had appendicitis in convoys out to sea off the Philippines and we'd make a signal to an American destroyer most of which carried a full doctor and we'd come close to them and you know hopefully amid safe circumstances and fire a line across and then fire a cable across and the two ships

- 35:00 would steam not side by side but with you know a reasonable amount of distance between them and across this cable was slung a beaches buoy with the guy latched into it and he was lashed across and transferred over to the other ship and he was operated on and there and they'd send you a signal that the operation had been successful but you didn't always finish up ashore at the same time to get him back again. You didn't always sometimes bits of the convoy would peel off and go somewhere else and he might be on this ship that escorted them.

- 35:30 I've known blokes to chase a ship around for six weeks to try and catch up with their own ship again. Funny stuff funny.

What about discipline on board. Was there any corporal yeah any corporal punishment?

Yes the either the Captain or the Executive Officer the First Lieutenant on occasions where there'd be a common sense would outdo us as per the requirements to them the key

- 36:00 points of the navy's admiralty instructions on all the dire things that can happen to do if you don't do this and you don't do that. They had to be had to read it out once every six months I think it was. Of course they're all dated back to the old days of Nelson you know and the horrendous penalties keel hauling and heaven knows what. It was quite stupid when you look back on it but I s'pose it kept us all in line.

And did that ever happen any

- 36:30 **any instances where people were?**

Oh we had a few did. A theft on a warship is terrible if you know you think there's one guy and you know he wasn't thieving against the ship's company he managed to get some beer out of the ward room supplies. We didn't carry a lot on board but our ships were wet in other words they did carry liquor. The Americans were completely dry. No way you would ever get a drink on any American warship

- 37:00 and this guy you know guys got that way some of them were won't say rough diamond but they were experienced blokes but we had one guy who got into the ship's liquor supplies and made a bit of a mess of himself and paid a heavy penalty for it but that's just distinct from anybody thieving on board. We never had any lock didn't have a lock on the locker or anything like that.

When you say heavy penalty I mean what do you mean?

- 37:30 Well you couldn't put him ashore because there was nowhere to put him ashore. He was I think they got loss of pay and they got cancellation of leave when they eventually got somewhere those sort of disciplines and extra work on board extra watches to keep. Things that could be handled on board the ship at sea rather than anything later on where it was too hard to administer. I had the Executive Officer of the ship here the other day. He's a doctor and he said no we had a pretty happy lot he said one or two lads

- 38:00 caused me a bit of strife here and there but we had a very happy ship's company. It's a good thing to be able to say. There were ships that didn't. There were some ships that I won't name that had problems. Instances where hand grenades were thrown into motor cutters by disgruntled guys who didn't like officers, guys who couldn't handle the discipline and the rigours of life at sea under those circumstances and did odd ball things and caused havoc on some
- 38:30 ships. The Australian Navy's also had an odd mutiny or two. I never ever saw any of them but I've heard about them. Not publicised by the navy which traditionally is a solid service. Human incidents they come to light for sure. Sickness was the biggest thing. If anybody took ill could you get the guy some help when you're hundreds of miles from anywhere.

Tape 5

- 00:20 **So Max we had a good day on Friday talking about lots of things. There's a few more places we want to take you today. I want to ask you**

- 00:30 **first to talk about the day to day work on the patrol boat especially perhaps some of the night work if I can be specific?**

It was an interesting assignment really because to a large extent it operated independently. Remember that things were pretty chaotic in New Guinea in that period of time and as the first of the OAM patrol vessels to get there to Port Moresby

- 01:00 its initial work was on anti submarine patrols outside Port Moresby Harbour having in mind that Moresby was being raided by the enemy aircraft nearly every night interspersed with trips from Port Moresby to Milne Bay escorting Liberty ships so that was straight convoy work usually with American patrol cutters and occasionally an American destroyer escort but then once we got to Milne Bay it was really on with a vengeance there. The big Japanese

- 01:30 base was across the way at Rabaul partly beleaguered and eventually beleaguered the Japanese were surrounded there and couldn't go anywhere under the rather ingenious plan that General MacArthur worked out and we found ourselves going out of Milne Bay every night on surveillance work and then convoy work up as far as Eroro Bay and then chasing Japanese barge traffic along the New Guinea coast at night

- 02:00 time from Bougainville and points across in that area they tried to infiltrate their troops back and forth to certain outposts that they had along the New Guinea coast and their barges were pretty busy of a night time. American patrol boats were operating out of Eroro Bay and we became involved with them on some of their assignments but basically it was it was a mixture of coastal surveillance

- 02:30 work chasing enemy barge traffic patrol work on our own looking for what might be going on along the coast particularly at night time and straight out convoy work.

Now the barge traffic can you describe these barges and what the Japanese had on them?

Yeh they were wonderful really when we sank them and sank them close into the shore we were eventually able to go for a swim in them but they were they were quite formidable things not terribly well armed very seaworthy

- 03:00 and reasonably well armed and they were particularly around Eroro Bay and Buna Gona Sanananda the beaches were strewn with these Japanese barges which the big American forces had really blown apart in large numbers and the beach right along there was strewn was absolutely strewn with enemy barges but they were very sturdy vessels capable of bringing troops across from probably as far as Rabaul but certainly from

- 03:30 Bougainville and those parts.

And presumably supplies as well?

And supplies as well which was the big problem. The Japanese were starting to run very short of food at most places that we were able to get some knowledge of. They were living off supplies that they could get ashore from the natives just as we did in virtually in many places too but as the war progressed passed Buna Gona Sanandanda past Morobe

- 04:00 towards Lae that area was pretty well cut off and by-passed and the war then took off in a forthright state as MacArthur really began his island hopping campaign up through Morotai and onward to the Philippines.

So when you're out on patrol at night just describe the sorts of scenes the sights?

It wasn't a good feeling at night time really. To begin with it was blacked out entirely. The ship was entirely

- 04:30 blacked out. Our ships weren't as silent as steam frigates or corvettes were. Our engines made a degree of noise. They were quite powerful and made a noise but we were ever listening for the hum of Japanese barge traffic too having in mind that radar was very much in its infancy in those days and not terribly good on those small vessels particularly. I think
- 05:00 the big cruisers like the Australia were fitted with the first really good radar sets and progressively then the proper units of the fleet were fitted with them but in those early days in New Guinea it was pretty much a hit or miss process so the night times were quite creepy quite frankly. A small ship not terribly well gunned not very well equipped with life saving equipment if anything went wrong. In
- 05:30 fine waters that weren't very well chartered the New Guinea coastline in those days was very poorly chartered. The charts that the skippers had the captains had to manoeuvre the ships through some of the very treacherous reefs up there were quite an eye opener to study really particularly the further you got up towards Eroro Bay and points around there. A lot of American Liberty ships were constantly being wrecked on the reefs. At one stage an Australian corvette was
- 06:00 stationed there continually to help haul them off the reef as they tried to get through the name of the I can't remember the name of the terrible reef that they had to get around to get on past Milne Bay to Eroro Bay quite treacherous.

So how do you what's the first sign you have that you've seen a barge? Is it the sound is it the sight? How do you identify them?

Well even though it's blacked out at night there's an amazing

- 06:30 degree of moonlight things silhouetted against the skyline and strangely enough if you don't look directly at it in the darkness of the light you get a bit better vision of it. If you look slightly to the left or slightly to the right you can get the image of what's on the horizon to a better degree than trying to stare straight at it. We had binoculars of a sort night binoculars and so forth but nothing of course what the boys have got these days but you would get some sort of
- 07:00 feeling of a presence that shouldn't be there and then there was a question of identification which either did or didn't happen and there were those sad occasions when friendly ships shot at each other because the silhouettes on some of those patrol vessels at night in darkness looked remarkable like the conning tower of a submarine.

Did that ever happen on your boat?

No it didn't but it did happen to others I knew of

- 07:30 yeh very sad but one of things that happened during the war. No I was never involved in situations like that fortunately. It would be very sad.

So what's the first thing that happens when you when you've spotted something? Lead us through the process?

Well the ship's company always were at action stations the gun crews were closed up and the anti submarine boys were manning the depth charge racks and ready to drop them at specific depths if it if it was necessary to use depth chargers

- 08:00 but the Oerlikon guns and the Bofors gun and the bigger gun up in the bow of the Fairmile having in mind that they weren't large guns because they were only patrol vessels.

What what's the biggest gun that you had on the boat?

A two pounder and a and 20 mm anti aircraft Oerlikon guns. Lots of smaller sub machine guns and gas operated Vickers and various horrible pieces of paraphernalia that

- 08:30 we were taught to fire at in various conditions of hardship but once you saw these things you really it was a very personal sort of a war. It wasn't like two large warships standing off and having a blotch at each other. It was it was a very localised small you know them and you type of operation in these strange waters along the New Guinea coast line.

- 09:00 **And were you ever hit by one of these barges?**

No we weren't no. These ships had a pretty good turn of speed. They could make about 21 knots but they made a bit of a noise doing it. They could churn turn out 21 knots maybe a bit more pushed hard. They were 12 cylinder Hall Scott engines powered by aviation gasoline and you could warm them up fairly well very quickly but you couldn't stay at sea many days

- 09:30 at full pitch so we had to nurse the speed where we could and stay at sea as long as we could but to get out of trouble they were quite fast. Not as fast as the American patrol boats. They had three huge engines in them and they could really scud along at enormous rates but they made an unbelievable noise doing it.

And when you were seeing a barge you're the signalman. Do you have to try and raise a

- 10:00 **signal?**

No there were no signals when something was sighted that was pretty obvious what it was. They the gun crews took over from then on. As signalman all you could do was man the machine gun they gave you yes.

And was the idea purely to sink the barge?

Yes and what was on it.

10:30 **When the crew you know the Japanese crew were there any times when you had to rescue them pick them up or were they generally just dealt with?**

Well let's just say it was dark at night and you couldn't see too much.

In those situations is there ever any debate amongst the crew as to what you should do or does everyone have pretty much the same idea?

No it was clear cut. It was clear cut. Them or us.

11:00 **Now other areas in the Pacific where you worked up in the Philippines too when were you up in the Philippines?**

Fairly early in the piece having in mind that the big ships the cruisers and the battle squadron opened up the Philippines campaign but the moment they did there was need for an enormous number of support convoys

11:30 to replenish their ammunition supply line their fuel supply line all the stores and the foodstuffs for the guys on the battle fleets so the convoy runs to the Philippines followed very quickly after the battle fleet went up there and did the job that put General MacArthur ashore at Leyte Gulf and I was in there pretty early in the piece with the convoys. Some of ships of course were doing other work. Some of the frigates indeed the Gascoyne they were with General MacArthur's

12:00 front line strike forces doing surveillance work off places right up as far as Lingayen Gulf eventually to place marker buoys and to survey the scene where the actual troops were to go ashore and they had some pretty hazardous operations up there including encounters with the kamikaze aircraft which was another spectrum of what the frigates were doing apart from bringing in the huge supplies that were needed to keep the battle fleet where it was

12:30 having in mind that they expended enormous quantities of ammunition fuel and to keep all those thousands of guys aboard those ships day after day needed whole convoys of supplies.

And at Palawan what was the scene that you saw?

Palawan was unusual. It was the western most island of the Philippines group at the bottom of the South China Sea. The capital of Palawan was a place

13:00 called Puerto Princesa. The Americans had gone in there with I think a pretty much purely American force and they were they'd captured the township and we raced across there with a supply convoy of oil tankers big oil tankers fleet tankers fast fleet tankers very big by the standards of the day. When we got to Puerto Princesa we could sit up on the bridge with our telescopes and watch the big guns

13:30 of the army in their gun battles with the Japanese in the hills up behind the township. We were able to get ashore in Palawan in Puerto Princesa which is a little bit unusual. The town area was blasted and knocked around terribly rubble all over the place and the lovely churches and so forth were all knocked around with records galore strewn around the township but some Americans said come and we'll show you something we want you to remember want you to see and want you to record.

14:00 150 Americans had been captured by the Japanese at some stage. I'm not sure that they weren't off Corregidor originally and the Japanese had sighted a force heading past Palawan but believing they were coming in to capture Palawan. Actually they were headed for Mindoro the island next to the north and they'd herded 151 men into air raid pits alongside this huge corrugated building which had written on the top of it

14:30 prisoners of war and once they got them in there they sprayed petrol on them and set fire to the lot. Nine escaped couple of them got down to the water by some strange means and eventually were picked up but the Americans showed us where it all happened and described it all to us were anxious that somebody should know about it and it has been well documented in American books on Japan's war exactly what took place there but the Japanese had mistaken the planes

15:00 and the ships at sea as being an invasion force for Palawan whereas they tackled Mindoro to the north first then came back and worked over Palawan. Very sad sight.

How did you feel when you saw this sort of activity? Evidence of that sort of activity?

Well you're young and you tend to take these things in your stride and you listen to the description of it all and you get back on board and you get involved in the routine

15:30 of what's going on in the ship and you make notes and you know eventually it found its way into my

diary and eventually I researched it when I not all that many years ago I researched it with American archives to find out precisely what did go on and they have it all well documented there but at the time I suppose you're 18 19 years old you managed to ride with those sort of things without a without them upsetting you duly unduly. There was a particular incident

- 16:00 at Manus Island which was a huge fleet base from where the battle squadrons assembled to tackle the Philippines and we came into the convoy one afternoon and anchored in Manus Fleet Base very busy situation and two of us were working on a signal bridge and there was an unbelievably enormous explosion just across the way from us a dreadful explosion. Matter of fact my friend
- 16:30 Reg Daniels one of the other signalman who still lives in Brisbane to this day didn't know what it was but he grabbed a little camera on the wing of the bridge and he took a picture of this enormous mushroom of smoke heading skywards. We realised it was a dreadful explosion that there would be a the shock wave would hit us so instead of ringing the ship's alarm bells immediately we made what was hopefully a good decision not to ring the alarm bells until the shock wave did hit the ship
- 17:00 which it did and the moment it did of course everyone came hurtling out of the bows of the ship up onto the bridge and you know taking up their action stations believing that it was an air raid attack or something of that nature but what had happened was that a big American ammunition ship called the U.S.S. Mount Hood strangely enough named after a volcano in North America it had brought 3,800 tonnes of heavy ammunition out for the fleet
- 17:30 battle ships and cruisers ready for the Philippines campaign and it blew up. Now 271 guys on the ship died immediately. 17 of them had gone ashore with a Lieutenant Wallace who was their Communications Officer he was taking them ashore to the Manus Fleet Base to go to the dentist and do things like that in the fleet base. They looked back out there out into the harbour and they saw this mushroom of flame
- 18:00 heading skywards jumped in their boat to go back and what happened they found nothing existed of the U.S. Mount U.S.S. Mount Hood at all. It disintegrated entirely. I believe that in all there were 743 men killed declared missing or badly wounded when Mount Hood blew up and we were just a short distance away from it. It disintegrated with 296 on board
- 18:30 38 nearby vessels were extensively damaged 61 small craft servicing the ships around the fleet base were destroyed or damaged beyond repair and the amazing thing about it was that a massive 107,387 man hours were required to repair the ships that were damaged by explosion aboard the U.S.S. Mount Hood. There was a board of inquiry convened
- 19:00 at the time they couldn't determine what caused it. It reconvened back in America at a later date and the judgement virtually was that it was manhandling of the ammunition nothing to do with enemy aircraft nothing to do with American submarines. American crews who were adjacent to us have written to me over the years and probably trying to build up a case for some compensation advocating that an American midget submarine had slipped in and one the job. We deny
- 19:30 that completely. No submarine got into that harbour. No midget submarine got into the harbour. There was no air raid at the time. Our firm belief having virtually witnessed the whole thing was definitely that it was the manhandling of the cargo but that's what happened with those huge American ammunition ships. Strangely enough it was on its maiden voyage its one and only trip U.S.S. Mount Hood.

Those sorts of

- 20:00 **accidents of course do happen. They continue to happen. Were you involved in any similar circumstances at any time? Any bad accidents?**

Yes there was a I think I mentioned the one to you about the troop ship and the oil tanker that collided outside Manus Harbor one dark night how we raced out there with the final latitude and longitude instructions being bounced off a cloud bank to we rescued there were hundreds in the water

- 20:30 that night and we had a good percentage of them on board and there were domestics were sort of casualty clearing stations to try and help them but we were not far out of Manus fleet base and we could eventually race them in there and get them in to some proper professional help in the right way. There were other incidents of course. With all those ships and all those situations inevitably there were the odd accidents and collisions and explosions and bad accidents on board ships but we didn't have any on
- 21:00 the Hawkesbury that I can remember. We didn't lose any men through any accidents and things of that nature.

Now at the end of the war you were detailed to go to Singapore and you saw a lot of the POWs at Changi. Tell us about that experience.

- 21:30 Well they as I think I mentioned the bush telegraph worked pretty well and they were waiting for us when we dropped anchor and they aboard in large numbers. Quite unexpected we were expecting to go out to Changi and make contact with them but it didn't work that way at all. They somehow knew that an Australian warship was coming and with the relief liner from Australia and they met and greeted us and they were on board long before we ever expected to make contact with them but those guys were in

their originally rags

22:00 and tatters that they worked on the Burma Railway with they worked in and around Changi and we simply we I made hundreds and hundreds of notes of interviews and talks with individual ones and what had happened to them trying to piece the pattern of it all together because it was very complex. They'd obviously fought a magnificent campaign down the Malaya Peninsula before they were taken prisoner for which they should be given great credit and eventually when they were

22:30 captured so many of them were eventually send up to build that dreaded Thailand Burma Railway.

How much of this did you know before you got to Singapore? Did you know what you were going to

No we only knew the 8th Division had gone. We knew about the 9th in the Middle East we knew about the 6th division having lots of troubles in Greece before they were evacuated home. We knew the problem the Australian government had to get the 7th and the 9th divisions

23:00 back from North Africa and the Australian ships that were serving with the Royal Navy to get them back home to take up the fight against the Japanese and we were conscious of the need to try and persuade the British to allow our troops and our ships and we had a good number of ships over there with the British Royal Navy back home to try and take up the war against the Japanese because it wasn't just a case of bringing the troops back and shooting them up there to start the Japanese campaign in the Pacific.

23:30 They needed to be retrained. They were experts in the North African desert campaigns and they'd had experience in Greece and Crete some of it rather sad but they had to be taken to the Canungra Jungle Training School in Queensland and reconditioned in jungle fighting of which the Japanese were fairly expert by that stage so this all crossed our mind about the battle the Australian government had had to get the British government to allow the Australian troops

24:00 to be brought out of North Africa and our warships with them because one of our Captains on Hawkesbury had Lieutenant Commander Purvis he'd been a young Lieutenant on the HMAS Sydney when it sank the Bartolomeo [Bartolomeo Colleoni] in the engagement in the Mediterranean. He'd also had a lot of experience in the North Atlantic U boat war and these were guys that had told us you know

24:30 what things were like over there in those days. We had limited amount of knowledge being at sea you didn't know the detail of all that was going on but we did everything we could muster back here in Australia to fight the Japanese and the navy had copped it very badly the Canberra had been sunk the Sydney had been sunk the Perth had been sunk in Chunga Straits [?] we'd lost destroyers galore and our navy wasn't a large navy at the beginning of the war and we needed every ship we could muster. Eventually the British to their great credit

25:00 gave us five N class destroyers which were never given Australian names but were manned entirely by Australian crews and they gave us about the same number of Q class destroyers. Again they were they kept the British names but they were entirely manned by Australians and they did an enormous job picking up the cudgels with the war against the Japanese.

And the Shropshire as well was one?

Yes when the

25:30 Canberra was sunk the Americans built and were about to give us a new cruiser called Shropshire I'm sorry Canberra in acknowledgement of the loss of Canberra in the Solomon's Island battle Solo Island but the British had taken up a great collection and they gave us a beautiful 18 inch cruiser called HMAS Shropshire which too never changed its name. It came out served

26:00 always as HMAS Shropshire manned by Australians looked for all the world like HMAS Australia with three big funnels and it was returned to the British after the war.

So when you were when you were finally after the war going to going to Singapore you've known that the 8th div fought well but had prisoners of war for three and a half years. Did you know anything of the circumstances?

26:30 Very little. It had filtered through that there was a railway trying to be built and that the conditions were horrendous. We knew also that survivals from HMAS Perth had survived the actual sinking of the ship had been taken prisoner by the Japanese and were somewhere in Singapore or up on the Burma Railway that we were conscious of you know the navy element of that but even on the way to Singapore and with the Duntroon

27:00 knowledge of what we were going to find was very limited until we got there. Remember we were at sea 28 out of every 31 days during the war most of the time give or take a few periods here and there and our knowledge of what went on elsewhere was terribly limited. Now communications weren't like they are today. Even radio newscast bulletins were so heavily censored that the real

27:30 story in which you were getting was probably only part of the story and we didn't know anything about that Sandakan death march we didn't know the full story of what had gone on in Changi. We knew overtures had been made through the International Red Cross to try and better the conditions for the

Changi prisoners of war but over and above that the day to day life of existence on a warship sort of kept you occupied and your mind didn't trend to the bigger scenario as much as it

28:00 probably should have so when we got there it was one heck of an eye opener because these guys when they came on board were at you know the end of the line. We saw them as they really were when they got off the ship back in Sydney and Brisbane and Fremantle they'd on at the end of a month or so later they looked a wee bit better but we saw them as they really were and it was a tragic sight tragic sight.

28:30 **That must have made a strong impression about the Japanese to you as well?**

I don't say I hate the Japanese but I was always terribly conscious of the of the sheer awfulness of the Japanese officer class particularly when they were in a winning situation. They were arrogant they were brutal

29:00 and they looked every bit of both of those elements. I guess most of the guys on board the one thing that we all I won't say feared but were ever conscious of was being taken prisoner of war you know if we ran into something that was bigger than we were and got clobbered and you survived it where you would finish up but the Japanese were a damn poor lot to be honest. The servicemen were a pretty ill educated lot. A lot of them were the

29:30 worst of the worst types you can come across but the officer type that commanded them were sheer ruthless men. The Australians to this day don't know what would have happened to them had the Japanese hierarchy gained a foothold on the Australian mainland. They were absolutely awful brutal people. Now the young people of Japan today don't know that. They've been fed a line of propaganda and public relations that's really never done justice to telling the real truth of what

30:00 the Japanese really were like. They were they those military types were unbelievably awful people brutal people especially when they were in a winning commanding situation. You can say they were brave when they were about to be hanged and things like that. They did their part the way you know tradition tells us they did it but while they were winning and while they were in command of any situation they were awful people.

30:30 I wish the young people of Japan today knew the true history of what the Japanese during the war were really like. I'm not saying every one but that was our general feeling about the Japanese in general. They were they were dreadful collection of people that came south of that Japanese army awful. The navy types I'd like to think were a little bit better and I think they may have been but the Japanese Military an unbelievably awful collection.

31:00 **Did you get to go ashore in Singapore at that time?**

Oh yeah. Singapore was had just been recaptured and Admiral Mountbatten had arrived came out to Changi and he stood up on a big platform there and he addressed all the boys in a right and proper way and his wife was great at the meeting and greeting and she moved around an awful lot too but it was that wonderful interesting transition period

31:30 where the Japanese had ruled it and suddenly they were being ruled over and their hope of going anywhere was very low key. There were no ships to send them home no-one wanted to be worried about the damn Japanese they you know they were enemy let's get the Australian prisoners of war home first and the British and Indians and Australians don't really realise that an awful lot of prisoners of war from other nations were captured there as well

32:00 as the Australians. It was a very strange city to walk around in for about a week of the 12 days that we were there. Not uncomfortable but there were hordes of Japanese all over the place and they weren't all being supervised.

Were you tempted to undertake some of your own vengeance at any point?

No but we

32:30 asked the prisoners of war about this. It's an interesting question. Remember they sat on the ship every day and another group at night time and we quizzed them and queried them and you know about the brutality and pay back. They weren't real they were I would say up to the time of surrender immensely interested in payback but once the bomb had been dropped and peace was declared and there was suddenly a thought of going home. I'm not saying

33:00 it dropped out of their minds but it was never high on their priority. When day came for them to identify the ringleaders who had caused a lot of the brutality they did that in right and proper style. Pointed to men that they and described what they believed they had done and that was taken into account by the War Crimes Tribunals but in a general sense the guys who for three and a half years had built up a hatred against particular Japanese

33:30 would get them when it all ended hopefully one day changed their priorities and were not after them to the extent that you think that they would be. I don't doubt a few caught up with them and we heard a few cases here and there where such things happened but their main purpose then was to get back home to see the family.

You also went to Ambon?

- 34:00 Yes Ambon was this was after the war of course peace had been declared it was during that extensive surveillance on the Dutch East Indies. A magnificently beautiful place Ambon frustrating for us in many ways though. The Japanese had surrendered and there were loads of them there and you went ashore and you wondered were you were safe because there were Japanese everywhere outnumbering us but the AIF boys had done a great job. They'd taken over Japanese headquarters
- 34:30 which incidentally were in a very picturesque part of the of the of the tropical setting there but on the end of the little wharf where we were lying out in the anchor at anchor there was a pile of rifles and bayonets and a few swords that a kangaroo couldn't jump over and cause we all wanted to see what we could take home to our friends and the AIF mounted a guard
- 35:00 on it so that we couldn't but in a round about sort of way we managed to acquire a few. Some were raffled on board. Others were taken on board and no-one ever asked us about them later but those were my memories of Ambon the enormous stack of rifles and bayonets on the end of the wharf and the Japanese in truck loads and walking around everywhere saluting every Australian they saw irrespective of rank but it was it was over and the
- 35:30 Australians that were there were being repatriated home. The Japanese were there for a long time because there were no ships to take the Jap we'd sunk the entire Japanese merchant fleet. There were no Japanese ships and all the allied ships that were available were wanted to either keep supplies running for the troops scattered all over the vastness of the areas that the Japanese had occupied to keep up the supply line or to bring troops back home to Australia and back to America and England.

And did you see the Australian POWs on

- 36:00 **Ambon as well? Were they gone or?**

Yes I did but I can't remember much of them to be honest. We no doubt chatted to them but I just read my notes the other day and I can't give you a great deal of depth on that. I haven't a vivid memory of that like I have on Singapore.

You said Ambon was a particularly beautiful place. Did other places that you went to did you actually have the time you're seeing this after the war when perhaps you've got a bit more time to relax but during the war

- 36:30 **where there moments where you were able to stop and reflect on the?**

Yes during that surveillance of the Dutch East Indies which took about two months there were places in the Gulf of Tomini like Gorontalo and Manado Pari and of Macassar which was a good sized town they were they were quite fascinating beautiful places. If you could go there on a yacht in peace time you'd reckon you were in paradise. The waters were smooth

- 37:00 and calm the scenery was magnificent the towns and the way of life under normal circumstances would have been idyllic. The Japanese had ruined it for many of them but they were still being rounded up and the job of reading out to every one of those places we went to a proclamation by General Blamey that the war had ended and that civil administration was henceforth being restored took some getting over and had to be read in Chinese
- 37:30 it had to be read in Dutch it had to be read in the local languages of the various areas that we went to through the Dutch Indies. Quite a laborious process in about 14 key places at least but money couldn't buy that trip. It was unbelievably fascinating.

Have you been back to any of those places?

Yes I went back with that Department of Veteran Affairs Australia Remembers Project went to Jakarta which you couldn't get into during the war

- 38:00 of course went back to Tarakan and I think I mentioned that to either you or Annie the other day Balikpapan Labuan and along the top of north Borneo which is largely now eastern Malaysia. They've recovered magnificently. There are beautiful holiday resorts there now with five star hotels and the European people the Austrians the Swiss the Germans they certainly know about those places and they come out there in large numbers.
- 38:30 Australians don't seem to go there terribly much but they are top line resorts in eastern Malaysia and right down to Buna of course where the sultan reigns supreme but in that trip there was some interesting assignments. We were asked to take the Raja Poso back to Poso and here we made rendezvous with a ship that brought him from somewhere or other. He came on board and we took him into Poso and we saw all the rituals and ceremonies
- 39:00 when he stepped ashore from the motor cutter and he was welcomed by his own people and about three days later we took the Sultan of Ternate back to his island kingdom and the first thing we saw when we got close was his beautiful luxurious motor launch sunk alongside the little wharf that used to serve his palace but we took him ashore and laid on as much navy ceremony as we
- 39:30 could and he threw a wonderful dance for the ship's company that night in the in the palace with the

Sultan of Ternate with a wonderful string orchestra beautiful music and the Captain said look I want to do this properly I want a good pyrotechnic display tonight to wind up the dance. He said all those rockets and star shells you can fire the star shells out of the main guns the star shells off the signal bridge so we put some homework into this and we got

40:00 out all the rocketry stuff that we had on board. Rocketry as distinct from what's on board the ships today of course. They were mainly emergency flares and the pyrotechnics that we kept for you know ships sinking and all that sort of thing and they weren't precision made. They were really scary stuff to use I know all the hair off our eyebrows off our arms all got singed and but we put on a really good night and the boys in the in the A & B guns they

40:30 fired the star shells which made an immense spectacle of the whole thing and I think the Captain was quite pleased.

Tape 6

00:17 **We're talking about the end of the war and the very places that the very ports you were around at that time. You saw a number of surrender ceremonies**

00:30 **too where the Japanese did surrender. Tell us about some of those?**

I guess the big thing was to know if the Japanese knew that the war was over. You know we certainly did but they were spread through an immense area of the South Pacific through the vastness of the Dutch East Indies and they had Japanese outposts all over the place and we took as I think may have mentioned earlier about 40 AIF blokes on board well armed

01:00 Dutch interpreters who could speak all the languages and some experts and we set off to find out what the Japanese did know through these parts. Other ships did too we weren't the sole ship doing it either I hastily add that but we were amazed at what supplies the Japanese had. They were an amazing bunch. You'd put into one place and there'd be an amazing supply of barbed wire and down the coast you'd put in somewhere else and you'd find all the wire

01:30 cutters were down there. Their pattern their organisation seemed to be complete chaotic but we had to round them up find out what they knew find out from the navy what ones had gone into the hills or whether all those that were around the foreshore area were the total Japanese involved. A lot of them had taken to the hills and some of them were not found till years and years afterwards particularly in the Philippines. Some of them lived in the hills for many years which is another story in itself

02:00 so we went from place to place. We'd approach a place and make a loud hailer message from the ship's loud hailer system in Japanese to them to come out onto the beach and expose themselves which they often did and quite frankly were a few times where we fired a few shells from the 4 inch guns over the top mainly with blank rounds

02:30 to frighten them to let them see if they didn't there were to be dire consequences. They weren't armour piercing shells or anything like that but they made a lot of noise and they usually got a desired result out of them then we'd put a motor cutter ashore with an armed party on board and well armed and line them up and count them and find out who was the head and who could speak English take us into Japanese headquarters show us what you've got we want to see your records then we'd want to see the local town man who would be normally

03:00 the equivalent of the Mayor or the head village man talk to him about he had been viewing the treatment of the local people and start from that point and sort it all out. Now it was a complex thing that we did about 14 times that I know of. There are probably others that I didn't count but some of them in rather worthwhile places. The Japanese in the main collaborated. We brought a few back on board for further interrogation

03:30 and got additional information out of them. We mainly wanted to know about mine fields and things like that. We also wanted to know precisely what ammunition they had and what explosive materials they had where their stores were kept or where their stores may have been hidden. We wanted a count of how many we knew of and how many that we might not be aware of and whether they would descend on the local population after we steamed out of harbour. The best we could do was to take the best of their stores

04:00 that we reckoned were available to us and dump them in deep water. We would organise every work boat we could find Japanese working parties and took them out into deep water and just threw them over this wonderful radio equipment and stores and you know items galore that they had just dumped in deep water which was at least rendering them useless particularly guns and ammunition so when we left town the local natives wouldn't have

04:30 them pointing guns at them and threatening boom stone and fire once we once we'd steamed out of port and that basically was all that we could do. We reported back to headquarters what we'd done.

But you'd leave the troops on the island the Japanese?

No we took the troops back on board. Left the Japanese there yes because there were no ships to take them. We'd found a few Japanese freighters here and there dreadful old things and we got the Captains Commanders on board. In some cases we told them to follow us

05:00 in other cases we told them to go to ports and do certain things and meet certain situations and take supplies from A that we'd been to B that needed some more foodstuff and told them that was their orders and that they were to do and we were reporting it. If they didn't do it would be dire consequences but we couldn't do much after we left but we didn't tell them much but we used what Japanese ships we came across to resupply areas that were desperately

05:30 short of food. I guess including a few of the Japanese outposts which were pretty desperate too.

Were there any circumstances where there was some hostility from the Japanese? Any shots fired?

No I don't know how to put this too delicately but it's meant in good faith. The delicacy of those at some of the Japanese surrender ceremonies and the declaration of the independence

06:00 back to civil administration when rabble rousers suddenly turned up in the crowd with a flag we had never seen before. It was a white and red flag we now know as the flag of Indonesia. Now this was unrecognised in those days and we didn't appreciate it and we didn't like the way they did it and I'm very careful in saying this but we took some of the ship's company well armed got hold of these

06:30 problem guys with their new found flag for which they wanted a new found force and we took them aside and fed them fire and brimstone at them and took the flag off them and we did that several times. That was the first time we'd ever sighted the white and red flag that became the flag of Indonesia having in mind though they wanted the Dutch out. The Dutch East Indies were to be reverted to the to the Dutch and ultimately of course

07:00 was given to Indonesia.

So you were handing over back over to Dutch?

Yes yes we were.

authorities and raising the Dutch flag?

We were raising the Dutch flag yeh. The Dutch flag in some places there was a predominant Chinese element we raised the Chinese flag alongside it but it was basically the Dutch and the proclamation issued by General Blamey on behalf of the allied commanders was that the Dutch East Indies was being reinstated

07:30 as it was for quite a number of years until eventually various governments decided to surrender the whole lot back to New Republic of Indonesia.

Were you aware at the time that you know some people did regard the Japanese as liberators to begin with from the Dutch?

None of the people we met were no. The

08:00 hierarchy of the towns that we spoke to welcomed the end of the war and the end of the Japanese. We had no question of that problem at all.

But there were independents?

There were insurgent groups that we didn't know where they came from in those days and what their message was. They wanted to break away a movement from the Dutch. They did not want the Dutch to be instated there cause in some places as you know the Dutch were immensely unpopular

08:30 and we weren't interested in any cause. That was a thing for governments to sort out. Our job was to reinstate civil administration according to the proclamation which was very carefully worded lead by a top government official who came with us and given the full authority of the backing of government and the allied commanders who'd won the war and we were not interested in their bleat to try and establish something other than the Dutch regime

09:00 which of course was changed over subsequently a number of years later on but we I can't say that I ever came across a group that wasn't sorry to see the Japanese go.

What sort of protocols were there with the Japanese surrendering?

Very strict ones. There were preliminary meetings some of them brought on board some of the commanders were brought on board and told what the format would be and it was to be

09:30 militarily ceremonial and where we could it was quite impressively done so. I may have mentioned the other day there were a lot of wonderful old Portuguese ports right through those Dutch East Indies going back to the early centuries with parade grounds out the front and we got a few locals to cut hack

down the coconut trees and erect them vertically and we put signal halyards on them and hoisted the flags and made it look impressive but the

10:00 the Major I think he was on board for General Blamey's outfit read the proclamation and he was backed by the leader of the town civic group as it used to be before the Japanese arrived standing alongside him. Our Captain with his number one uniform on to make it look impressive a navy guard of ceremonial guard off our ship

10:30 you know with the full works. The 40 AIF troops we had on board in ceremonial gear and the Japanese were marched around the corner out of the jungle with their leader in front came up to a table handed over his sword which was never returned to him of course and he was obliged to sign an instrument of surrender and there were the appropriate speeches made and it was a we got that ceremony down to a pretty fine art 14 times. It really was a top line little

11:00 ceremony. Somewhere in the archives in the Australian War Memorial is film of that. I've got some of upstairs in black and white on video of some of those surrender ceremonies where the where we held them. I've got some classic examples of it. The war film cameraman who came with us for that trip and recorded it. Very colourful would have been in colour but it's in black and white.

And

11:30 **when you left as you said you couldn't take the Japanese with you? Were they just left to their own devices or do you think that they were then put under some sort of house arrest?**

No they were left to their own devices. The locals couldn't control them but then again they had nothing to control. Their weaponry was taken off them and dumped in deep water. Any of the extremely bad types we couldn't take them as we didn't want them on a warship because we were going to another place we'd probably collect more and more.

12:00 Wasn't our job to collect them. Was our job to hand them over there was a lot of good guys in those local villages that could make their presence felt very nicely if they had to and they were glad to see the Japanese go but they looked after them until eventually some method was found to finally extricate them and send them back home to Japan. But that took a long time in many instances. There were no ships. The British weren't going to loan their ships to take the Japanese home. We had none. The entire Japanese

12:30 merchant service had been sent to the bottom. There was just no way of getting them home so they stayed there for a long time many of them.

Did you get to converse with any Japanese?

Oh yes often. We had them on board. We had prisoners of war on board at various stages. Our knowledge our Japanese was hopeless their knowledge of England was you know mainly by sign language but we

13:00 we kept them in the paint lock at night time right up in the fo'c'sle under guard but in the day to keep them busy they chipped the upper deck for us. I've got pictures upstairs I can show you groups of Japanese up in the fo'c'sle chipping away you know the paintwork in the upper deck and then they'd paint it for us and paint the funnel do all those sort of things and we'd eventually get to a port somewhere and put them ashore in the hands of the army and authorities. But many times we had Japanese on board. On

13:30 the way to Singapore we had to intercept a Japanese freighter and brought the commanding officer of the freighter on board to question him. He claimed we thought we had a bigwig. He claimed he was in charge of a lot but it was only four ships that he was really in charge of but he had an unbelievable cargo of good stuff on board the ship we intercepted. We couldn't sink him the war was over. We pointed guns at him and frightened the ship's company no end

14:00 but what we did do we took his mine field charts off him and we radioed Canberra Belconnen Radio Station back in Canberra the detail that we were able to interpret off the charts of where the Japanese mines were Surabaya Batavia those sort of places but we didn't give the charts back to him. We told him we had to go back to Surabaya and report to the authorities there. He jumped up and down and was most upset that he couldn't get into Surabaya

14:30 without his mine field charts which was of course exactly what we wanted to have happen but we couldn't sink him but I often wonder whether he ever made it or not but the information on those charts was wonderfully valuable to the Dutch authorities eventually so we ran into those sort of guys here and there.

15:00 **We've got some questions just about some sort of generic questions about the war which we're asking most people just to get you know a variety of responses. Beginning with the sort of banal question but what did you pack when you went away first went away overseas in your dunnage?**

15:30 The navy did it very well. They first sent us a list of what we couldn't pack. I've got it upstairs to this day. There's a list of what you can take but above all what you can't take and it was very little. Down at

HMAS Cerberus in training it wasn't that serious but on a warship there's not much room. You've got a locker and that's got to contain your whole world. Our main goods uniforms we really didn't take to sea because we were never going to go

- 16:00 anywhere where we'd ever wear a full navy uniform. I don't think I took my uniform to sea very much. Certainly not on a navy patrol vessel. I did on HMAS Hawkesbury but then again we had you know two or three ceremonial blue uniforms but all we took were essentials. My sister gave me her box brownie camera and that's all it was in those days and somebody sent me a
- 16:30 a cake to the ship in a tin and I kept that box brownie camera in the tin sealed to keep the tropical fungus out of it and it took wonderful little pictures right up to the end of the war and the rest of it was what the navy issued you with. There was very little that you took that was your own apart from a wristlet watch with a protective thing over it so it wouldn't get damaged you know a flap across the top of it a watch
- 17:00 no personal gear of any sort because the only things that you wore were your navy issue blue jeans or khaki shorts in the tropics. I often wonder how we ever came out of the war the way we did. The ships in the tropics and I know we crossed the equator 38 times so we spent a lot of time in the tropics and working you worked a four hour watch on the bridge on the wings of the bridge and the signal platforms
- 17:30 in a pair of shorts and never with any sunglasses. Now the ocean up in the tropics it's like a sheet of glass and the sun just glares off it. It's frightening to see it happen and what it must have done to our eyes has often worried me. What it must have done to our skin but doctors checked me out afterwards I've been checked regularly ever since but I've had no trouble with skin problems
- 18:00 as a result of it but we should have had a lot because we only wore a pair of shorts and the navy gave us because the decks were steel and they got terribly hot during the day and very cold at night they gave us what you would call thongs today but they were made of rope. They were rope woven in the form of your foot and you wore those on each foot just to stop blistering your feet on the steel decks because they were very hot particularly
- 18:30 around the funnel after the ship had been steaming hard for a long time. The companion by the ladder way that went past the funnel up to the flag deck and from the flag deck up to the wheel of the bridge and compass platform oh boy that used to get very hot. If you had a following breeze all the funnel heat and the funnel haze wafted straight over the bridge and the compass platform and it was very hot but I

The captain would have worn a bit more than shorts and?

No mainly shorts

- 19:00 mainly shorts yeh which thinking back on it was quite stupid. If we'd have if we'd have been torpedoed or we'd been you know in dire trouble we should have had more on than we had more than what we should have because the nights in the tugger would have been very cold and in the sea but no our lockers only had navy slacks which originally were Royal Australian Navy and later on American and the t-shirts and things that we wore were on American style towards the end.
- 19:30 We had our navy cap to identify ourselves battered as it was and they only had HMAS on it of course in those days. His Majesty's Australian Ship. There was never any identification of a ship. When you went ashore and went back to Sydney you were told don't talk about your ship don't talk about where you've been don't identify yourself. We don't want people to know what convoys are coming and going what escorts might be with them. It was you know quite secret.
- 20:00 **You said you crossed the equator 38 times. Crossing the line can be a bit of an occasion in the navy. Can you tell us about the first time you crossed the line?**
- Never was. Never ever was an occasion. We never ever stopped to have a little ceremony or anything. I know what you mean and the wonderful King Neptune ceremonies that that have been held. To us crossing the line was part of the days' business and even from the I never crossed the line on the navy patrol vessel
- 20:30 we didn't get as far as the equator. We got bombed at Lae and towed home beforehand but on HMAS Hawkesbury we crossed it many times but 38 times I can tell you precisely but even the first crossing we never ever celebrated in any way you know we just knew we'd crossed the equator that day. There was no interest

There were more important things to worry about?

Yes there was no interest in it having in mind too that a lot of our ship's company had served in the North African campaign. They'd been on the Tobruk ferry one

- 21:00 on destroyers trying to relieve the garrison Tobruk. They'd been up and down the Mediterranean and they'd crossed the equator a few times to get there obviously and to them it wasn't such a big event to the rest of them it really didn't occur to us but we knew where we were. The ship's progress was sometimes made known to the ship's company. I remember one particular thing talking about situations like that. We took a convoy to the

- 21:30 Marshall Islands which is on the edge of the Central Pacific and we steamed we delivered the convoy. The American 81st Construction Core it was a troop convoy and from there we were told to steam to Australia quickly we were needed for a special assignment so the Captain wound up the ship and we set course and we refuelled at Russell Island in the Solomon's about to cross the Coral Sea and the Captain felt that with a little amount of luck we might be able to make
- 22:00 Brisbane in time for some of the crew to have Christmas at home. Not many but maybe those from the southern states at least. Now those frigates were made for 6,000 mile convoy runs. They could stay at sea a long time but they weren't made for high destroyer type speeds so every watch that went down in the engine room tried to squeeze a little bit more out of the two big engines. The watches in the two big boiler rooms tried to squeeze a bit more steam out of the system
- 22:30 and we were making a little over 20 knots and which gave us 500 miles each 24 hours which is pretty good running on a ship. We were doing 500 miles a day and we eventually reached Brisbane and the Captain said those of you from New South Wales and Victoria can go on leave so we jumped over to South Brisbane Railway Station and caught a troop train south. Now that meant coming down through Sydney and changing
- 23:00 trains Albury and changing trains Melbourne and changing trains because I wanted to get to Bendigo and of the ten days I spent three days coming I had four days in Bendigo home with the family and I spent three more days on the troop train getting back to the ship in Brisbane and the reason why we travelled we travelled six days to get four days at home because remember in those days and I don't know the scene today the line from Brisbane to south was a single line from
- 23:30 Brisbane to Sydney and troop trains sat on the sidings and waited for northbound train loads of Americans and troops going north and guns and heaven knows what and yeh we will eternally thank the ladies of the Country Womans' Authority [Country Women's' Association] and the auxiliary groups that gave us a few sausages and some potato at some of these stops as the troops trains came in but it was a long haul in a troop train but when we got back to the ship in Brisbane the reason why we were
- 24:00 brought back to Australia was that the then Minister for the Navy the Honourable Norman Mackin wanted to do a tour of some Australian northern outposts with his departmental head a Mr Nankervis and they came on board with their staff and took over part of the officer's quarters and we took them to Townsville and we took them to Cairns and Thursday Island and he wanted to go into Darwin so we did this smart run around to Darwin and he had a good look at Darwin and
- 24:30 had a little ceremony on board and we left him there and went back and joined the war.

When you've been at sea for a you know a good long time and you get into Brisbane does it take you a bit of time to get your land legs back again and?

No not really you know when you're about a day out of Brisbane or a day out of Sydney particularly I we never ever got further south than Sydney and I think we only got back to Sydney three times

- 25:00 we got to Brisbane once the terms away were about six months five months. You could brush up your number one uniform and you know you had 24 hours to get it decent and make it look respectable again which you probably hadn't worn for five months and when you got to Sydney it was great to get into a town but it was a mixed feeling and I probably shouldn't say this but
- 25:30 you came from the war zone where everything was blackout and grim and darkness and horror and dreadful circumstances and misery and you came ashore in Sydney and there's people going to the races and people playing football and dance bands playing all over the place and you know you made you feel what the hell is it all about you come back home it's full of merriment and I'm not suggesting for a minute that they weren't as worried about the war as anybody else but
- 26:00 it was a shattering experience to come off a warship from the war zone suddenly in Sydney and go ashore you know people their big worry in life is who's going to win the third at the Randwick races next Saturday and football was still being played and there were dances galore around Sydney which I don't doubt there should have been too to keep up the morale but it was a little bit shattering to come out of the blackout at sea and the war at sea suddenly to be
- 26:30 dumped into that and then when you rejoined the ship to leave all that behind and go to sea and know that you probably won't enjoy that again for another three or four five months.

When you're on the troop train on your way down to Bendigo how do you do you just watch the landscape go by? What do you do to amuse yourself?

The first the guys who were smart used to aim for the luggage racks. Do you remember the old red carriages

- 27:00 of the early railway trains? They all had big luggage racks. You could sleep in a luggage rack rather well with your kitbag to put your head on. So they were the first coveted things the kitbags to get into the up in the luggage rack and you could swap around a bit but oh you looked at the scenery some played cards most blokes slept they were tired and worn out but there but it had its McHale's Navy touches. We pulled into Albury on a troop train a

- 27:30 genuine troop train from Sydney. Now if you know Albury number one platform it's very long because the railway gauges change there and everything had to be switched across and across the platform from us is the glamorous blue Spirit of Progress Victoria's number one glamour train in those days and a few of our guys looked at each other the Hobart had been torpedoed somewhere in and a few of her blokes on board and they were in a hurry to get home
- 28:00 and there was a lot of whistle blowing and ceremony and the Spirit of Progress was about to take off and as if you blew a whistle about 30 of our blokes dived out of the carriage raced across the Spirit of Progress and cluttered up all the corridors in companion ways and toilets and anywhere you could sit. Now the Spirit was you know getting up a head of steam to head to Melbourne at a good rate of knots and no-one could stop us.
- 28:30 The I can't put this on record I don't think but the conductors came along and let's say we got onside with the conductor and he decided he wouldn't report us and furthermore he would arrange for the train to slow down a little bit at North Melbourne Railway Station and it didn't normally stop there but as it slowed down we piled off on the Melbourne platform and that was our one and only ride ever on the Spirit of Progress but on board the train there were dear old souls sitting up in the
- 29:00 first class luxury in their padded compartments on board the Spirit of Progress grizzling us about all these uncouth sailors and a couple of the boys winked at each other and put on a wonderful turn about. Poor old Joe you know when the Hobart got hit if only he could have been with us tonight he would have enjoyed this trip and they ended up in fine style. She was in tears towards the end of it. Anyway we got away with it but that was that was my one and only ever ride on the Spirit of Progress.

And then of course you had to

- 29:30 **get a train out to Bendigo?**

Yeh we had to catch a country and that took four hours and they didn't run every day. Joyce's father died while I was in the navy and amid great difficulty she got a telegram to me and amid further difficulty I managed to raise the telephone on HMAS Hawkesbury lying at Williamstown and speak to the Officer of the Watch and I said sir I've got a problem. I'd like to go to a funeral for a whole host of reasons in Bendigo. He listened to my case and said yes well go

- 30:00 by all means so the ship's in dockyards hands and he was very sensible about it and I wanted to go to Joyce's Dad's funeral. We weren't then engaged even but there were no trains to Bendigo that day. They only ran Monday Wednesday and Friday and there were no trains on the day I wanted to go so I caught a tram out to Essendon as far as the tram system went and I stood on the side of the road and all the cars passed me by thought you know sailor no we won't give him a lift no
- 30:30 I couldn't get a lift. I had just me and a kitbag small kitbag and a bloke came along with a great big vegetable truck laden with vegetables and with canvas over the top and he said look I've got no room in the cabin for you but if you'd like to jump up on the load you'll be right. I'm going to Bendigo so I got up on the top of the load amongst the carrots and cabbages and tomatoes and heaven knows what and it rained and I had my number one uniform on to go to Joyce's father's funeral and I wasn't in very good shape when we got to Bendigo and it took a long time and the
- 31:00 strangely enough it pulled up at the vegetable shop alongside the drapery emporium that Joyce's father had Matthews Brothers Drapery Emporium and this bloke put the screws on me to help him unload the veggie truck and I said look I'd gladly do it but I'm trying to get to a funeral at the cemetery so I said Tom Matthews you know next door to you. Oh well he'd let me off the hook then so my Dad picked me up and he raced home and he ironed my uniform dry for me and I got to the funeral but the
- 31:30 troop trains were amazing even on the Bendigo run it took four and a half hours to get to Bendigo because the trains were that long they had to pull into every station twice. The first five or six carriages would unload the train would go on a little bit and then the end four or five carriages would unload or load at the key stops on the way to Bendigo. Took a long time to get to Bendigo two big A class steam locomotives to haul it up over the Dividing Range it was quite a job to get
- 32:00 to Bendigo.

And you only had about three days generally?

Oh yes I rarely got back there during the war very rarely. The ship didn't come back to Sydney very much. Brisbane once or twice but we didn't see home very much. I never sent my father a telegram during the war. Telegrams only conveyed bad news of course the government regrets and we made up our minds on board that we would never send our

- 32:30 parents a telegram saying we were coming home and find enough money and it wasn't cheap in those days to ring Bendigo from Brisbane or Sydney. It would cost you half a day's pay to do it but it was better than sending a telegram.

So you'd just ring to say I'll be home in a few days?

Yeah can't talk long Dad I'm running out of money.

On another thing when you're at when you're at sea you didn't have too much of this I think

but

33:00 **if someone dies in the ship's crew whether or not from a bomb or sickness or illness what happens?**

The best example I can give you of that is I wrote a quite wonderful story for a pal I joined the navy with. He served on the cruiser HMAS Australia and they were kamikaze attacked six times and 82 guys were killed overall. I said write

33:30 the story that can never be written of course is what happened to the guys after the kamikaze's crashed into the steelworks of the cruiser and the bodies and bits of aircraft strewn all over the upper deck oh he said it was an enormous mess he said the obvious pieces were gathered up and identified. Mainly we knew what their action station was in the ship and what part of the ship they were working in which gave us a

34:00 lead to who they probably would be and eventually when they didn't report you know in the daily muster we knew who precisely had gone but he said we the ship's company sewed them up in canvas and we had the traditional burials at sea and that's the way it was done. As it I've been in convoys many times when guys on other ships have died and they've had the signal went out to all ships to lower their

34:30 engines for half an hour there's a burial service being conducted. A ship didn't stop and the convoys didn't stop but it was a burial at sea on that basis. The Americans did it the same way.

You would have had a lot of close mates with the crews you served with. How important was that?

35:00 Terribly important the camaraderie on a warship with a crew of up to about 200 was basic to everything everybody depended on the other bloke to do his job properly or there could be chaos. You know if you wanted a depth charger set for 150 feet you wanted to be confident that that depth charger would explode at 150 feet and training came into it immensely. The navy discipline the navy way of doing things I've always admired

35:30 and I admire the navy. I've always admired the navy. You know they got a heap of guys like us that knew nothing and within five months taught us the necessary rudimentary basics of it all and it worked. You got to remember that the guys were four hours on and eight hours off and there was lots of things they had to do when they came off watch so there was no time to

36:00 do much but look after their own personal gear and their situations write a few letters home heaven know when they'd get there but it was all very friendly and nice. There wasn't much room for night time there was pretty quiet because guys wanted to sleep to go on the middle watch. There was not a lot of noise there was music played through the interior of the ship until about nine o'clock at night just nice pleasant music mostly of the Captain's choice or the officers who liked you know Glenn Miller or whatever it was

36:30 but over and above that the routine of it all kept you reasonably occupied doing things that your mind didn't really wander onto anything else no.

What were your officers like your Captain and so forth?

A very good bunch really.

Tape 7

00:16 **Max you mentioned one of HMAS Hawkesbury's Captains earlier. Were there any others that you'd like to mention?**

Yes there were Annie. In retrospect it's rather interesting looking back on the three Captains I served under.

00:30 On the patrol vessel it was a war time reserve Lieutenant Commander a war time only navy man. When HMAS Hawkesbury commissioned our Lieutenant Commander Captain with about nine officers was a merchant marine highly skilled officer who was on the permanent navy reserve and then later on Hawkesbury was taken over by career permanent navy Lieutenant Commander.

01:00 It was interesting looking at the approach the different approaches of each of them and in retrospect it was a fascinating study really. The last the permanent navy Captain had served in the Mediterranean as I mentioned I think earlier to Andrew and to Martin and he'd been through the Mediterranean war in the HMAS Sydney and he brought all the skills of a career navy permanent service man to the job of being Captain. Wonderful navigator

01:30 a wonderful administrator the ship ran well as indeed it did with the earlier merchant service Captain who'd been used to handling men in tight difficult circumstances and just analysing the three of them has often fascinated me in retrospect.

I remember you mentioned that the Hawkesbury was a happy ship but that there weren't ships that weren't happy and you referred to an incident involving Cutter

02:00 **and grenades. Could you tell me a bit more about that what happened there?**

Oh I think the boys off the ship should tell you that story Annie. I don't think I'll go into that one. There were one or two instances where there inevitable I think there were 31,000 men and women in the war time Australian navy and there were 305 commissioned vessels some of them awfully tiny mind you but the navy had 350 305 vessels 31,000 people so inevitable there would be some dramatic

02:30 personnel situations and there were on one or two ships. I was never unfortunate enough to be on a ship that had any problem on board at all. We were too busy looking after ourselves and our own situations to be perfectly honest and it's a strange thing about the navy now none of us had ideas of staying on in the navy. It was a war time situation that we volunteered for. Because the ship was brand new it was built by the government it was sort of our ship

03:00 and that's the way we approached it. In all the years after the war we still regarded it as our ship. Even though later crews took the ship to sea and were tied up in the Montebello atomic explosion tests off the north west of Western Australia and all those sort of things with later crews on after we left the navy but we hold reunions and we all look back on navy with wonderful affection really and there's not a reason in the world why we should really because it was simply a

03:30 job that we volunteered for and we were not permanent navy people but there's something about the service that really grabs hold of you and we've all been terribly loyal to the navy ever since. I've written 400 navy stories and I didn't have to write one of them but I felt as a journalist there were some stories that needed to be written others I loved writing. A lot of guys asked me they've come across Dad's diary could you know give him a little bit of limelight and write a story or two and one thing lead to another and

04:00 what was meant to be a peace time hobby after a life time with a dynamic international oil company developed into a little bit busier than I meant it to be.

And were there some stories that you haven't written?

Yes there are one or two that have been written that I haven't written that I don't think I'll ever write.

And why is that Max why?

One of them I mentioned to Martin. I often quizzed my friend that I joined the navy with from Bendigo the same day and we were both

04:30 signalman. What happened I brought HMAS Australia during the kamikaze attacks. We lost a colleague from the Bendigo High School there. He was killed in one of the kamikaze attacks and my friend Warwick said look I was on the on the signal on the flag deck I saw where the kamikaze landed I knew Lindsay Herdman was at that action station there and I knew there was no hope for him. He said I went and saw his parents when I eventually got back to Bendigo

05:00 and told them the story as softly as I could of what happened but I wrote Warwick's story of what happened where the six kamikazes crashed into the Australia and I've written it many times cause I had a few pals on the Australia and they've given me their individual versions of it apart from the navy's own official version but I've never followed it up with what precisely went on after cleaning up all the wreckage and what had to be done after 81 guys lost their life.

05:30 **And do they refer to the navy as the silent service?**

Oh indeed they do. The dear old navy when it gets itself into trouble a la the Voyager collision and so forth they can bury their head in the sand very quickly. I shouldn't say that but yes it's the silent service for many reasons. They keep things within ranks fairly well as best they can but of course today's media you can't hush anything up. It's poked and probed and

06:00 eventually floated to the surface as you well know.

As all scum does?

Yes.

You mentioned the difference between Captains on the Hawkesbury. Would you care to comment on your view of the different navies that were involved the US and the Royal Navy and the Australian Navy?

They were vastly different. The Americans were they seemed to do it in a free and easy manner not always to the detriment of circumstances at the time.

06:30 The British were straight laced and strictly by the book although at the same time war's were never won by people who didn't stretch the regulations a little bit and did something unusual and innovative flare and style and panache but our navy and our training was instilled into us on the basis of the British Royal Navy right from the days when the Australian station was manned by ships of the British Navy

07:00 until our navy was formed in well the Australian Navy was formed in nineteen hundred and one the Royal Australian Navy became such in nineteen hundred and eleven and all our training you know that was only less than oh about 30 years after the formation of the Royal Australian Navy that we found ourselves at sea in a war with it and it's not all it's not a very old service but traditionally it was all backgrounded on the way the British did things and that went back to the days of the wooden walls of England

07:30 you know the great wooden ships of Nelson's era.

And you found yourself becoming part of the US navy essentially during that and how did you find the?

Magnificent. Fortunately they made us welcome. They made us welcome we had to prove ourselves which we did. Once they accepted us as efficient and they could count on us and we would do our job properly and we would be an adequate member of the escort

08:00 screen around a convoy or anything like that they were wonderfully generous people. They accepted us as part and parcel of the United States Navy and that's the way we lived for those years on HMAS Hawkesbury working with 78th Task Force I think it was of the US Pacific fleet. A wonderful experience for a young bloke really. I loved being at sea with lots of ships. I loved convoy work immensely. I loved being at sea with five or six columns of

08:30 ships with a good escort screen strewn around them. There was always something doing. It was always interesting and when you got there what those ships unloaded was an immense stack of war supplies that must have done some good somewhere. We weren't big enough and strong enough and powerful enough to be in the assault force of the navy. That was up the cruisers with their big six and eight inch guns and the Americans with their huge battle ships and their heavy cruisers and so forth. That wasn't our role. I

09:00 was never lucky or unlucky enough to be on those sorts of ships and we didn't really have them in the Australian Navy except for the half a dozen cruisers that we had of which we lost three but as basically a convoy escort and anti submarine patrol ships I won't say enjoyed every minute of it but looking back on it for an 18 year old lad it was immensely fascinating.

And was there any resentment about the command structure?

No

09:30 I've often said to our Captains in the years since I would love to have gone ashore with you as a journalist to attend one of the convoy conferences where the convoy makeup disposition of the ships allocation of the escort screen around it destination and what might be encountered was all tabled for discussion. I said convoys fascinated me the makeup of the convoy and the steaming ability of convoys which of course is only as fast

10:00 as the slowest ship in the ranks and he said well I was one of a few Australians at most of the convoy conferences I went to but he said they accepted us laid down the law to us as readily as to the rest of them. The merchant service skippers were different category because the Americans built these Liberty ships. Wonderful ships they were about seven eight thousand tonnes they could make about 11 knots which was a good convoy speed and they

10:30 could turn them out at about the rate of one a month fabricated all over America and brought together in the Kiser ship yards. They were wonderful ships really and they won the war the Liberty ships and he said their main problem was to find enough experienced men to be master of them and he said at the convoy conference they usually you know had to be very heavily briefed on what their role was in the convoy and what to do if anything went wrong and

11:00 the emergency situations but no the American command most of the convoys I sailed in had a all of them had an American Convoy Commodores and the escorts screen of warships around them usually had an American destroyer or destroyer escort as the senior officer of the escort force and his word was law. We did what he told us and he was the senior officer in the command and it was unchallenged but it was usually very professional.

11:30 **You talked about on a completely different topic you talked earlier about when you were taking the prisoners of war home and you were sailing out of Singapore Harbour and you said that there were 52 miles of mines to navigate and I'd love to hear how you navigate through 52 miles of mines?**

It's only very it's done according to a

12:00 lot of war navy experience. When Singapore was opening up the British Navy sent a task force of mine sweepers in there to the northern approach to Singapore and the southern approach to Singapore and they felt their way with their equipment through 52 miles of mine fields from the south from the Australian end and they blasted oh they opened up a channel through the mine fields with

12:30 mine sweeper equipment and they put marker buoys along the channel that you were to steam. Now I noticed going into Singapore that several of the marker buoys were missing and listening to the Captain

and the officers on the bridge and they were noting heavily what ones were missing and reporting them to fleet control headquarters in Singapore that these marker buoys in the swept channel were missing and that all shipping should take care of them but you don't always trust what the mine sweepers have done.

13:00 they might have missed some and as I may have mentioned to you or Martin earlier the wires holding those mines were three and a half years old and mine steel wires in salt water tend to fray and the mines drift off into the shipping channel and that's what worried us but we had this anti submarine detection equipment on board and it sent out a ping and you could hear the ping go out and the echo come back on

13:30 either side of the ship where the mines were. We didn't have paravanes which were fitted to merchant ships and the Duntroon behind us lowered paravanes over the bows and they slipped down into the water and they cut the wires of any mines that might have drifted close to the ship.

So these extended out from the sides of the ship?

14:00 But on the bridge we could hear the ripple coming back from the ASDIC set of the mines on either side and we were watching Duntroon tucked in fairly tight to us astern making exactly the same speed as we were and we worked our way through the mine fields. The unfortunate part about it was that when we got into Singapore after we'd been there two days we were detailed off to be duty ship for the day and as duty ship we were obliged to give a navy protection escort to

14:30 three British freighters back out through the 52 miles of mine fields again so we went through them to get them out into open ocean then came back through the mine field again ourselves and we went through it four times in the end but it's not a good feeling particularly with old mines like that. Having in mind too that no ships had gone through from Darwin to Singapore during the war years except the Japanese with the exception of the Krait commando raid on

15:00 Singapore no ships had ever got through all that conglomeration of Japanese occupied islands Java Sumatra all the way up to Singapore with Borneo on the right. That was all heavily held by the Japanese and none of our ships went through there during the war years because it was enemy territory. A few of them had skirmishes with Japanese destroyers here and there and there were odd battles in the Dutch East Indies but basically in the sea lane between Australia and Singapore

15:30 they hadn't been used in a general sense until after the war.

Now I know that you and a mate had some experiences in Sydney when there was an air raid alert one night?

Oh yes we got to Sydney to take over the patrol boat at Alverson Ship Yard and we went to a dance at I think the one of the

16:00 popular dance halls in the heart of Sydney anyhow and the air raid sirens went so we raced across the road and we went down into one of the popular underground stations and it was a bit like London all the people were down there with their with their rugs and they were they were sitting down there waiting expecting to spend the night there because the Japanese float planes had been over Sydney on the night of May 31 when they detected the Chicago and

16:30 the Canberra lying in Sydney Harbour and brought the midget submarines in to attack them so Sydney by this time was well and truly accustomed to air raid alerts and didn't take them lightly but it was an odd experience for us to I didn't like being down in an underground station. I sooner be at sea on a warship so that played heavily on us that night. A chap called Tom South a warship called HMAS Wollongong and oh we spent a couple of hours down in the in the underground

17:00 tube station but pretty well deep down but not a good feeling I felt claustrophobic to be honest.

And when you got out of there next morning did you?

No we got out fairly early in the morning yes. They realised it was all clear and blew the all clear sign and most of the people went home and the station became a railway station again.

And I read in one of your articles about the sailors' friend?

The dolphins? They were amazing

17:30 I up where I was talking to Martin about in the Celebes where the water's mirror shiny and calm we used to sit on the fo'c'sle when the ship was making good speed and watch the flying fish scuttle across the surface of the water but every now and again to our great delight a pod of dolphins would take up station off the bow and without seemingly any effort at all you couldn't see their tail fins moving they would speed along

18:00 up and down up and down at exactly the same speed as the ship never wavered and it was an amazing sight in those clear waters to see how they did it and I'm still amazed at to this day that with practically no apparent effort from their tail fins they could maintain that speed always the same distance from the bow never in danger of being run down never in danger of sliding under the ship and being hit by the

propellers. It was just a fascinating sight. We loved seeing them around. But by the same token

18:30 I can always remember coming down the east coast of Australia I think with a convoy and I was worried as what I was looking at on the horizon and reported the bridge and it was a school of whales headed south. Now the way they operate you would swear it was you would swear they were ships and in the odd light that you can find yourself involved with at sea this school of whales

19:00 moving south worried us for a little while as to precisely what they were but they were whales headed south.

The other thing that I was intrigued by was the depth charge practise. Now I don't know a lot of about depth chargers Max so I'd be interested to hear about how a depth charge works and how your practise with them?

Oh it's a pretty horrendous thing and you can only use the real thing for practise really.

19:30 A depth chargers works best or they did in those days at about 12 knots. If you went too fast it did all sorts of horrible things to your equipment and if you went too slow you blew the stern off your own warship. Now when we got what they called a ping when the anti submarine detection boys and they were experts at noises they were probably musicians in private life but they had an ear for detecting strange noises from the earphones that came back from the from the

20:00 from the echo that went down through the bows of the ship to a piece of crystal and was radiated out in an arc around the ship and if it hit anything it came back with a certain answer which gave them a chance of detecting whether it was metal or not metal. These boys would alert the officer of the watch on the bridge or the Captain that something suspicious was lurking underneath us or around us or nearby us and we would close up to submarine action stations

20:30 and down on the stern the stern of those frigates was cut away. It was probably only about six feet above the water. Matter of fact it was very impressive just digressing the whole of church service at sea we held it down on the quarter deck where there was probably about 80 or 90 big depth chargers in racks and throwers and all sorts of equipment and paraphernalia a fairly good sized quarter deck and the crew stood around there and held a church service only about six feet above

21:00 the surface of the water with the twin wake of the ship's twin screws just the stern and with the ensign flying above it was a very impressive service a church service at sea on the quarter deck but during the anti submarine attacks and exercises the and the boys could do this in darkness without a light of any sort they were so well trained they could they could unleash the depth chargers they wanted to use

21:30 and they could drop them probably a pattern of about six 10 if they wanted to they would fire them off racks and they would go out about a hundred feet from either side of the ship up in the air and splash into the ocean. The rest would roll off racks that ran off the stern of the ship like a little railway line and they would fall into the ocean and they were set probably from 100, 150, 200, 250, 300 with variations in between at what

22:00 depth the anti submarine boys felt the lurking menace might be at and if you had enough variations you'd probably get one of them right and a submarine didn't have much of a chance against a good depth charge well aimed but even so it was horrendous when they exploded at 12 knots which is not very fast the ship wasn't very far away when they went off and if you had a pattern of them going off and some were reasonably close

22:30 to the surface it did all sorts of weird and wonderful things to what was inside the ship. Lockers burst open and hair oil spilled out and talcum powder and the corking on the upper deck and the asbestos that it was quite something when those depth chargers went off particularly if two or three or four exploded fairly quickly.

What sets them off is it the different pressure?

They've got a timer inside them

A timer?

which is like a little clock that had to be set at specific depth in a very specialised way. It all came into

23:00 good navy training. These boys were crash hot at it and they could reload them quickly and do it all over again very quickly and then if they ran out of all the depth chargers on the upper deck they could scream out down below and more would be hoisted up from the bows of the ship to replace those on the on the racks and on the throwers. That's what the ships were built for they were built for anti submarine protection.

What were the throwers like?

They were they were like a Y if you can imagine an upright with a Y

23:30 and it had four two on each side and they could throw them out with a charge in them and threw them out about a hundred feet each side of the ship far enough away from the ship for the ship itself to escape damage but it was a pretty hazardous process for any reason you had to come under 12 knots it

was not a nice feeling because you could lose your own propellers from your own depth chargers.

Does sound hazardous I mean I should imagine in a big sea?

24:00 Yes that's the awkward part about it because when those crashing seas were running the bow came up high out of the water and crashed down into the trough of the sea but the stern of the ship came up and if it if it was big enough sea the propellers sometimes came out of the water and raced madly which didn't help the shafts and the engine room too much and then crashed down into the sea and took a bite on into the sea again and settled it all down to do it all over again

24:30 but I never ever saw a depth charge I was lucky enough not to see depth charge attacks in horrendous seas. The ones I saw were mainly in reasonably calm waters which is good.

Did you ever encounter any weather that was so bad that you were concerned that you might not make it?

Yes I think I might have reiterated that to you or Martin earlier. On the up around the Philippines where

25:00 the typhoons rage that worried us immensely. The convoys put to sea irrespective of what the weather was like. The ships had to sail the supplies had to be taken and the ships had to reach their destination and we would get weather reports which were not what they are today of course and in the typhoon season up around the Philippines they were really massive blows they really were and to see 50 or 60 ships trying to keep in columns and away from each

25:30 other the escort screen around them sometimes abandoned the zigzag which they used to steam in and out and protect them and steered a steady course like the convoy ships but if you had to maintain the zigzag to go in close to the convoy then turn about as you turned about you came side on to the crashing seas and we I on many occasion I can remember thinking there's no way this ship can right itself again but you'd come around and do it all over again and 10 minutes later

26:00 and it was well not a good feeling to be on board.

Did you ever wish you'd joined the army or the airforce?

No not when I saw the army boys go ashore no in mud and slush and jungles and problems no never. The airforce boys we envied gee you lucky guys you'll be home tonight in a bunk somewhere but they were great to see overhead. We felt good when the airforce boys were overhead.

Something else that you mentioned

26:30 **about running out of water at one stage and how you had to make water?**

No we never we always made our own we made about 40 tons of fresh water a day.

How did you do that?

With distillation plants on board that the engine room crews administered. It was salt water distilled into fresh water. We made about 40 tons for drinking purposes and washing purposes and general livelihood on board for the cooks to cook things in fresh water and so forth.

27:00 The ships were built with distillation plants down in the bowels of the ship around the engine room area that could distil salt water into fresh water.

Was it good enough to drink?

Oh yes you could drink it yes yeh no problem.

So you never ran out of water on the ship?

Not really I can't remember us running out of water.

They're pretty self sufficient?

There was one occasion there were one or two there was one occasion when they didn't get their processes quite correct and most of the ship's

27:30 company had awful dysentery. Now that's a terrible thing on a warship at sea during the war and it was quite horrendous for about I don't know about 20 hours yeh and eventually we got it right.

What were your bathroom facilities like on the Hawkesbury?

Not bad not bad. No privacy to speak of just cubicles without doors if you can image that and unfortunately even in the you know good

28:00 conditions sometimes water would come in through the port holes and would slosh around that was salt water slosh around the bathroom facilities from side to side but only in the wash basin area never anywhere nasty but in the main the facilities were good. They were well built well equipped to handle all those sort of things.

And how long could they stay at sea?

We could do about 6,000 miles without putting into port. Probably three weeks

28:30 if you stretch it hard we could stay at sea three weeks. The destroyers were the ideal ships but they had turbines and turbines were the destroyers were too valuable really to do the all the convoy escorts. They were fleet operational battle ship cruiser protection enemy strike forces. I'm not saying they were wasted doing convoy work but the convoy work

29:00 and destroyers needing fuelling every few days because they gulped up fuel at a large rate because they were fast ships. The frigates built in Australia could only be 310 feet long. Ship yards didn't want to build ships longer than 310 yards because that length of ship could take what is known as reciprocating engines up and downers as they were called. Not fanciful engines not turbines they couldn't give you high speed

29:30 like the 35 knot destroyers but you could get 20 21 knots out of them if you had to which was rarely required for most convoys which was round about 12 14 at the most 18 to 18.5 knots and the beauty of the reciprocating engines was they didn't use a lot of fuel. They had enough but I think they took on about 600 tons of fuel and they could stay at sea about 6,000 miles and thoroughly protect a convoy

30:00 which was good. What we needed because as the war drifted back up towards Japan the convoy runs were getting longer and longer. The Corvettes had done an incredibly good job but the convoy runs were getting long for the Corvettes. They sometimes had to be refuelled at sea which is not an easy process so they needed something that had a little bit more sea endurance than the Corvettes and the frigates were the answer to that. Unfortunately we didn't have

30:30 them early enough in the war. If we could have had them earlier in the war they would have been immensely helpful but they developed they were developed out of the German U boat war in the Atlantic and by the time they were built out here we could have used them a little bit earlier than we got them.

Could the Hawkesbury be refuelled at sea?

Oh yes all warships can be refuelled at sea.

And how does that process work?

You steam close to a tanker or a cruiser or a big ship and you fire a light line across

31:00 with a gun you fire a light line across to the other ship you steam parallel at a reasonably safe distance and the light

And how far how far is that a reasonably safe distance?

Don't hold me to it but I suppose it would be about thirty yards and then the light line is hauled in and on the end of it is a slightly heavy line and on the end of that is a really heavy line and then the seamen on board each ship

31:30 cup it up to an amazing apparatus which carries fuel lines and on the heavy lines the fuel lines are attached and you maintain a rigid strict speed for each ship and maintain station absolutely correctly apart from each other and all the seas are rushing in between and you take on a couple of hundred tonnes of fuel and then the whole process is unwound. The big ships often refuel at sea you know even the battle ships and the cruisers. They were

32:00 often refuelling at sea and the destroyers. It's quite a process. They still do it today the same way.

Can you only do it when the seas are good?

Reasonable seas. In rough seas you wouldn't want to tackle it in the rough seas. You'd have to wait until they calm down a shade but it's an accepted navy procedure and practise. Well they worked it out over many years and it really works like a charm without spilling any oil into the sea too I might add.

It's pretty good isn't it?

32:30 **Max we're coming to the end of the time we have with you now and I'd just like to ask if there's anything that you'd like to add to go on the record for this archive?**

I guess the only thing that crosses my mind is that it was the end of an era for those of us in the navy in those days. We had one or two coal bearing ships in the navy. The Australian Navy's mine layer the Bungaree she was a coal ship believe it or not. She laid thousands of mines all over

33:00 the place. Fascinatingly enough she got sunk by a mine herself up in up in China I think in the Yangtze River under another name and years after war she hit a mine in the Yangtze River and sank which was a strange quirk of fate for a mine layer. We also saw the switch over if you could use that difficult term from our alliance and tradition with the British Royal Navy

33:30 to our friendship and operational expertise with the United States Navy a situation that was to change our navy forever because our ships from that time onwards were pretty much Americanised. Many of our good ships were built in American ship yards and the days of being strictly the Bulldog breed and the British backgrounded type of Australian navy really ended with the middle of World War II.

- 34:00 The we also saw the end of the era of the massive behemoths the great battle ships. We saw all the American huge battle ships we saw the British Pacific fleet battle ships come out our way and we saw some of the battle ships even that were raised off Pearl Harbour and patched up and from an American morale point of view trundled into the fleet bases up in the Philippines as virtually mobile batteries
- 34:30 so that that was the end of the battle ship era and of course the number one thing we saw was the emergence of the world of atomic warfare and the and the loss of every little kid that went down to see a warship loved to ogle at the big guns and the turrets and the massive guns pointing skyward. Today when you look at a warship you don't appreciate the weaponry on board it because they are missiles
- 35:00 and they're not spectacular to look at but they can do much more damage than our guns could ever do so that was another amazing change so the navy changed forever during World War II. We became pretty much an Americanised. Having in mind that the Australian Navy during the war was virtually a taskforce of the United States fleet not early in the war because the war was in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean the Japanese
- 35:30 hadn't entered the war till Pearl Harbour. In those days our ships were part and parcel of the British navy but from Pearl Harbour onwards we became very allied to the American way of doing things and all procedures and the way of life and the signalling procedure and the fleet manoeuvres and the navy's way of doing things was dictated by General MacArthur and the Admirals of the American Pacific fleet in a way that we never ever
- 36:00 questioned.

And what's your view of the long term impact of that alliance our alliance with the US?

I love to think we are friends and wonderful and always will be friends with the most powerful nation on earth. We developed a unique bond with the Americans. I don't know that America even had they certainly never had any territorial

- 36:30 ambitions over Australia but they needed a base to beat the Japanese from. The Philippines had been lost where else was there for the Americans to sort of group their forces in the Pacific and take off. General MacArthur landed her for the escape out of Corregidor he managed to become wonderful friends with the Australian Prime Minister and martialled what meagre forces we had in those days then set about the enormous task of trying to get a
- 37:00 percentage of the European war material diverted out of the Pacific. He did battle with all those in Washington to enable the Pacific fleet to be built up the American army to be built up and without a question of doubt the Americans did a job out this way that we should be eternally grateful for not in any gratuitous way but looking at it realistically we owe the Americans an enormous debt of gratitude for which they get precious little
- 37:30 thanks for saving Australia which served well for the Americans as a base to gather their forces to start the campaign backwards now. Having said that it was the Australians that really turned the Japanese back first in New Guinea at Milne Bay. The Americans did a wonderful job at Guadalcanal and those places but the Australians battled their way up through Milne Bay Eroro, Gona, Buna, Sanananda and with the help of
- 38:00 the American navy they took Lae and won that much of New Guinea. From then on it was a MacArthur island hopping campaign bypassing Bougainville bypassing Rabaul and the huge Japanese facilities in there and the big Japanese army which couldn't go anywhere or do anything it was beleaguered but from then on I greatly appreciated from what I saw of it the planning that the American chiefs put in winning the war
- 38:30 back to the Philippines and having won the Philippines they had to then go up as far as Lingayen Gulf and then had to take Okinawa and Iwo Jima to immense basically horrendous fights to take those parts as preparatory to invading the Japanese mainland which the bomb alleviated. MacArthur really didn't deviate at any stage. His mission was to go straight up to the Philippines and straight on to Japan.
- 39:00 Now we didn't have much in those days our navy was very small our army was lamentably small and half of it was in North Africa we had to bring it back retrain it send it up again and those boys in the 9th and 7th divisions they did an incredible job in the jungle campaigns and they fought their way up until MacArthur's forces were so overwhelming he martialled what he needed from the American sources he'd won his share of what was being diverted to Europe because the
- 39:30 Americans wanted to Churchill wanted to fix the European situation first then worry about the Pacific which was alright from their point of view but not so good for ours and he managed to get enough with the help of the great Admirals that commanded the American Pacific fleet to build up the American 3rd 5th and 7th fleets to be unbelievably potent forces and they took on the Japanese everywhere and the culmination
- 40:00 to it all was when the Japanese had two massive battle ships the biggest battle ships ever built in the world about 80,000 tonnes the Masachi and the Omato and they steamed out of Japan on a suicide mission. One had been sunk the other one left Japan with a full crew with only enough fuel to go south to do battle and the Americans sank it and once the Omato and Masachi were put to the bottom Japan was gone. They could no longer

40:30 raise the Japanese navy the way it used to be and the invasion of America was going to be an easier prospect and of course the bomb fixed it.

Well thanks very much for those comments Max and thanks very much for your contribution to the archive and Martin and I have really enjoyed spending this time with you.

Annie my thanks to you and my thanks to Martin I do appreciate it very much and thank you to the Department of Veterans' Affairs.