Australians at War Film Archive

Maxwell Shean (Max) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:39 **Tell me a little bit about growing up in Perth.**

I was born in Perth, well South Perth, in 1918, and it was a good place to grow up, because there was quite a lot of bush around. It wasn't all developed as it is now and we were on the bank of the Swan River,

01:00 Perth water and that was a wonderful place for kids to play – it was all shallow and I spent a lot of time sailing model boats and so on. And in 1924, I started school in Forest Street Primary School, and I think that was as enjoyable as any primary school can be, and I was lucky to be born into a good family. I had an older sister already and a younger sister came along five years after I was born.

01:30 And my parents were good parents: they were kind, and we had a lot of fun – we used to go camping a lot and my father had been a sailor in his spare time and so it wasn't long until he got a boat and that's where I got a taste for being afloat. And after finishing at South Perth Primary School, I moved on to Perth Technical College, or Junior Technical College, which meant I had to travel by ferry. And going across

02:00 Perth water by ferry is quite a way of life too because the ferry has its own community, and you get to know friends who travel the same ferry every morning and every afternoon. And we used to walk across to North Perth where Junior Technical School was, that's where we learned some trade subjects as well as commercial subjects and after two years of that, I went to Perth Technical College, which was on the riverfront in Perth,

02:30 and there I did what was called a leaving exam and matriculation for University and I started University at WA. That was a bit unexpected for me, because I didn't think I was a good student and I wasn't either, but after a couple of years at Perth Technical College I found that I had to make up my mind what sort of career I was going to follow.

What sort of subjects did you do at Perth Technical College?

That was the point.

03:00 I'd done the usual subjects which were Mathematics, Two Mathematics, Geography and English, no History, Geology I did, Chemistry and so on and that was good. The principal, Ray Davis, who was a very good educator, knew that I should do better than what I did, and he rang my father and said, "Why don't you send your boy to university?" So when I got home that night my Dad told me and I said, "I'm not a student at university standard."

03:30 He said, "Well, Mr Davis thinks you are," and I said, "Well, how can we afford that?" and he said, "Don't worry. If you want to go there we'll keep you fed." Because this was just after the Depression and money was very, very tight.

How did the Depression affect your life? Did you notice any difference with the Depression?

No, we didn't. Being kids, parents took all the responsibility. We got three meals a day, and we always had shoes, and life just had

04:00 to go on because we didn't realise how hard it was for them. We didn't have a motor car in those days and everything was self help and does without, but it wasn't hard – it was all part of the fun. I remember once, I used to go to the local village at Mends Street on Saturday for the groceries, and one week among the groceries was a bottle of kerosene which we used for cooking sometimes and when I got back my mother said,

04:30 "Did you take an empty bottle?" and I said, "No I didn't," and she said, "Well, that would cost an extra halfpenny. You know, I walk from one end of town to the other to save a halfpenny!" So you can imagine how I felt; I felt absolutely dreadful, but still it was all part of the fun, part of growing up and I think having lived through a depression has given me a sense of economy that has never left me and now I'd

rather do without, because it was part of the game. So it was a good

05:00 childhood we knew really what goes on in some households I realised we were very lucky indeed and to be sent to university when I was sure I couldn't afford it, my family couldn't afford – it was a great act of generosity and cooperation on the part of my father and mother and having got there I started engineering; it was the only thing I could think of so that was a very good part of my life. But also I had got a job through

05:30 the same Ray Davis. He knew that finance was pretty tight in our household, and he said, "The Institute of Agriculture at the university wanted a laboratory assistant, and they're paying thirty shillings a week and that was pretty good money for an unqualified person – would you like it? So I said, "Yes, I'd like that." So I worked down there most times and I got time off to do studies for matriculation and I had a very good boss, he was a chap called John Conaghey, he was an

06:00 agricultural graduate, and he gave me an enormous amount of help with my studies and has been my friend for life; he's still my friend – he finished up working for the CSIRO, but I haven't seen him for a few years cause he's on the other side of Australia. But it was a good life, a very good life.

What sort of work did your father do?

He was, at the end of his career, he was under-secretary for law, always in the Supreme Court, and when I first started to take notice he was clerk

06:30 in charge of one of the offices there and then went into crown law, it's a subtle difference – I didn't quite understand it and I still don't, but he was well thought of in the Supreme Court and now every time I walk past the Supreme Court, I think of him. And how proud he would be to work in that fine building and of course I got to know all his colleagues in there and that was good. I was really proud of him and he was proud of me too I don't know quite why. I was his only son I suppose.

07:00 **What attracted you to the water in the first place?**

Well it would have been my father, and in fact living on the edge of the river, but he was always dabbling in boats, if he didn't have one he was always working on somebody else's. And that got me – I think – into the Perth Flying Squadron which is on the esplanade foreshore in Perth, and we'd go out in somebody else's power boat and that was quite good. And then it must have been when

07:30 I was sixteen, that's about 1933, 1934 it would have been, he bought a derelict yacht. It was on the beach down at Bicton, and we worked on that and we overhauled it and launched that and while we did that he made it 16 feet longer, it was 18 feet originally but finished up 34 feet long and we did a bit of running around the river in that, and then one of the ferry companies was Swan River Ferries and

08:00 they had quite a lot boats all called Val something. You know, there was Valhalla and Valdarner and one called Valmeeder, and Valmeeder was being sold as surplus to requirements, so Dad bought that and we worked on that and changed it from a ferry into a pleasure boat; we went to Rottnest quite a bit on that, but the highlight of all that was he had a dinghy built by Tommy Ran who was a boat builder at the foot of Spring Street, or Mills Street I think it is and he built a 10 foot

08:30 sailing dinghy. And once he put that on our power boat Valdarner, I went sailing every chance I got. I rigged it, and when we went to Rottnest I'd sail all around Rottnest in this boat and that was wonderful experience for me and I think that's why later on, when I joined the forces, I joined the navy.

Why did you decide to join the navy as in, as part of the war effort?

Yes well this was a very

09:00 significant time for me and for the world really, it was 1939 when the war broke out. I was in second year at university: I was doing a Bachelor of Engineering, which is a five year course and I was approaching the end of second year when we declared war on Germany. My feeling then was I'm only a young student, it doesn't really affect me – everybody thought the war was going to be over in a couple of weeks

09:30 and so we just carried on and anyway, engineering students along with others were 'manpowered' – we were not supposed to join the forces. We were supposed to carry on with our studies and on graduation, that was the time to make a decision so I just carried on with my studies and got into third year in 1940, and then as the event, as you probably know about, as the evacuation of Dunkirk, the British Expeditionary Force were in France, and

10:00 with the French they were pushed back by the Germans until they had to evacuate across the Channel and retreat. And that was a very bad time because we had a feeling on the other side of the earth that we were doing pretty well in the war – well that shows you that we weren't doing well at all, and the Germans were having it their own way and so the talk around the university engineering school was – we're now third year – should we join up? The official advice was still finish

10:30 your course, and then join up if you want to, but the way things were going – and that was two years away we thought, "Well, in two years we could have lost the war, so we'd better do something about…" And so we spoke to a few people who could give advice including our teachers and our lecturers advice, and finally the navy advertised for gentlemen with yachting experience I think it was, to study anti-

submarine warfare and be commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy voluntary reserve.

11:00 So I had a good friend at university, a chap called Peter Taylor, and he was a sailor like I was in small boats and we both had a growing affinity for the Royal Australian Navy so as soon as we saw this we put in applications and the process went on and we were interviewed and examined and so on and the greatest of good fortune – we were both accepted.

What sort of questions did they ask?

11:30 Oh, some of them were sort of psychological or logic questions I suppose, I can't remember exactly but I do remember one series of questions, it went something like – there'd the been the Battle Of The River Plate where the Australian, the Royal Navy and the Canadian Navy, not Canadian, New Zealand Navy, had beat Grafspee in terms of they'd surrendered or settled us off and one of the questions was:

12:00 "Was the Grafspee sunk at sea or did she scuttle herself? Now if she was sunk at sea, draw a line to represent a ship with two funnels and one mast, and if she scuttled herself draw a different sort of a ship." That sort of question – it was just to see how your thought process went I suppose. And I was young then and had a clearer brain than I've got now and we seemed to pass that one and

12:30 there were a few general knowledge ones and so on. Another one was: 'What seafaring ancestors do you have?' So I was stumped there, because we had not a great army or navy or air force tradition so I said well my grandfather was in the horse trade and he sailed from Madagascar to Fremantle with horses in square rigged ships and that seemed to hit the mark – that scored me a score. So when I got home that night I said to my father I told the story about

13:00 Granddad and his hose trading and Dad said, "Well, you're very nearly right. The horses came from Madagascar but grandfather never left Australia." But it didn't matter – I was on the navy, but I realise now that I could have done much better, because my father had three sisters and in 1914, the one who married the eldest sister Grace, his name was Alexander Clarke,

13:30 he joined the army in the medical core and he was in Gallipoli and his job was to get wounded soldiers across from the landing to the Isle of Lemnos and see that they were properly cared for in a hospital and he first of all was mentioned in dispatches, and then he was awarded the Military Cross, and so that would have been a good point but I didn't think of that at the time. In fact,

14:00 he seemed to be a black sheep in our family, was Uncle Alex, but I think he was pretty good so that helped.

So can you tell me the kind of training you went through after you were accepted into the navy?

Yes, well for the first two weeks we were in Fremantle being kitted out, we were given material for a uniform and the tailors were working on that and for that couple of weeks they gave us marching up and down Marine Terrace in Fremantle, and that was fairly useful.

14:30 Then as soon as we got out uniforms, we boarded the Kalgoorlie Express and went to Kalgoorlie and then got the transcontinental train across the Nullarbor. Of course, it's the Indian Pacific now, and then changed trains again at Adelaide and arrived eventually at Melbourne, and went down by the metropolitan railway to Flinders Naval Depot on the Mornington Peninsula. There we learned more marching

15:00 and square bashing as they called it, that was manoeuvres on the parade ground. Then the basics of navy administration: how you manage a ship, formulate the watches and so on. We had a lot of technical training like torpedo skills, gunnery which was a pretty big part of the navy then, and we practised on guns on the parade ground at Flinders Naval Depot, using wooden projectiles and wooden charges.

15:30 But it was all good training. We had training in tactics too, the drill hall was marked out in squares to represent ocean and there were wooden battle fleets – ours and theirs, and our class of twelve was divided in halves, and half were the enemy and half were the allies and we fought battles on the parade ground. Now, this sounds very simple but it was very good because every two minutes the fleet

16:00 would have moved on two minutes and we had to think our tactics – you could observe what's hits you – had or didn't have, and so on, and it really made you think and I found that very good and I still today with marvellous simulators and computers I still think fighting with wooden ships on a marked out parade ground is good for thinking and we had that training. I tell you what was really very good, there was a month of that, and then we were moved on to HMAS Rushcutter

16:30 on Rushcutters Bay in Sydney Harbour, and that's where the anti-submarine training started. And the first thing we learnt was the secret ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Commission or sub detector] device – it's now called sonar. And it was very secret – we weren't allowed to take any notes – we had to remember everything. And including the circuits for an ASDIC set, and it was quite complicated but for my friend Peter Taylor and I,

17:00 we'd been at University learning engineering – we had a bit of a jump start on a lot of the others. We were pretty familiar with some electronics and so on. We had a month of that and that was quite intensive and then we had a month at sea in HMAS Kybra, which had been one of the state shipping

service ships in Western Australia and she was now a navy training vessel, and there we learned navigation and boat work because she had two boats; a navy whaler and a ship's life boat,

17:30 and our job every day before breakfast was to launch these, row them around Sydney Harbour, and then hoist them again and that was quite good training.

With the ASDIC part of your training did you have to sign any sort of secrecy agreement?

I can't remember now whether we signed anything, but I do remember being told it was secret and you didn't talk about it. You got that at every turn. We probably did sign something but because this was a lot of years ago and I've signed a lot of things since then – I can't remember

18:00 what they all are. But there was no doubt at all about what our position was and we had to keep our, as they say in the navy; 'you keep your mouth shut, your bowels open, and never volunteer'. And that's what we tried to do. After a month in Kybra we came back to Rushcutter and were given another month of technical training and that was very advanced.

18:30 I was always a fairly earnest student – not a very clever one but I worked hard but Peter Taylor was a great personality and university social life sometimes got the better of Peter, and he didn't always get 100% at every examination, but when he got into the navy my word he worked. I never saw a man work so hard because the penalty was – if we didn't pass out of Rushcutter we went back to civilian street – we were out of the navy and that would have been terrible. Now

19:00 of course, we were pretty keen on making our contribution to the progress of the war, but Peter also had a fear of university exams and in third year there's only a two-term year, and we were mobilised into the navy just after the exams and that was terrible for Peter: he was hoping to be mobilised and off to the Atlantic before exams came along but it didn't happen. Anyway we were cleared our way through university and anyway it didn't matter,

19:30 we didn't realise that five years later we'd be coming back to University and have to carry on but it was all right for both of us.

So how exciting was this part of your life?

It was very exciting. Once again the simulator was the high point of this, apart from the general background of having left Western Australia for the first time in my life, and now being in Melbourne and Sydney – you know the really big cities where things were really happening. That was exciting but near the end of our anti-submarine training

20:00 we all went through sort of attack training – our class was twelve – we were all given jobs – one would be captain, one would be first lieutenant, one would be the anti-submarine operator and two would be the tactic table managers and so on. And they had a room set up with all this like a wheel and a compass and so on, it didn't have any depth charges but you pretended you had them and then in the next room was a table with an electronic and mechanical thing

20:30 which could represent a ship steaming through the ocean and a submarine making progress through the ocean and so on, and the ship crew in one room would be told you are doing a certain course at a certain speed, and the ASDIC has got a contact on a submarine at a certain bearing and a certain range and the people on the attack table would set this up and from there on everything happened automatically. The captain would give the

21:00 Alteration, of course, and the anti-submarine detecting officer would report what the submarine was doing and so on and the captain or the AS [Anti-Submarine] operator would con the ship to go ahead of the submarine so they could drop the depth charges on it, and of course the table would be keeping track of all this and having made the attack, then they said, "Right – exercise over – come through to the room." So you'd go through to the room and the people there had been following in red and blue pencil the track of the ship and the

21:30 track of the submarine, and you could see exactly what you did: either you got the submarine or you missed it by half a mile and that was most exciting, but unfortunately, because there were twelve of us, and each attack took about maybe half an hour – we only got one shot each on this table. We could have done it for a week because we knew the next time it would be against a real submarine in the Atlantic so it was most exciting and you had to make the very best of every chance you got and I loved it, and also

22:00 I don't think I mentioned on the record that the battle of the Atlantic was the biggest sea war there has ever been, the Royal Navy had everything that floated out there chasing submarines and of all these ships: one fifth were manned by graduates from Rushcutter. Now that's a big contribution for Australia to make on the other side of the world, and when I go to reunions and you get all the people who were manning ships around the Atlantic and they're bald or white haired, and you think,

22:30 "I was with these people and between us we beat the submarine and I feel so proud." When I was in a submarine later on, it was more important in a way but I still feel that being a Rushcutter graduate and serving in the battle of the Atlantic was something more worthwhile.

How do you feel about your comrades that you met at Rushcutter?

All the way through the navy, the people you're working with become your best friends. Unfortunately I haven't seen a lot of them.

23:00 We all survived – all twelve survived the war. There were four from Western Australia, and Peter Taylor and I were close friends until he died quite a few years ago – he had some very exciting and very trying times in the battle of the Atlantic and I think it finally killed him, because I got to know him and his family very well and he had a nervous breakdown sometime later,

23:30 and his wife, or his widow who I knew very well, wrote to me and said that she planned applying for a war widow's pension, and could I help, so I made a statutory declaration describing our training and my experience and Peter's experience, because I worked with him again after the war at university and I said I've no doubt that he was highly stressed, and I knew that he was a nervous case after the war and I'm sure that would have contributed to his early

24:00 demise and she got a pension so that was good.

So tell me what the next step was after you'd finished your training?

At the end of the training which was 1941 and it was April – we were all given two weeks leave and I came across by train and we had a gang of young people who used to go around together and have picnics and things, and they all knew I was getting leave so they arranged for

24:30 Dad to take his launch over to Careening Bay and Garden Island, and we had a picnic shore there for Easter, and then I was back to the mainland and on the train for Melbourne and then I went to Port Melbourne and joined a ship for the UK – seven of our twelve class elected to go to Britain. We were told that we could wait for a ship in Australia which may be some time, or we could go to Britain and get a ship straight away so...

What were the other choices apart from going to the UK?

25:00 They were the two choices – you could wait for a ship in Australia or you could go to Britain and be put where we were sent, so seven of us elected for that and we went to Britain in a ship carrying 10,000 tons of chilled lamb and us. We were the only passengers and that was quite good. The Pacific was pretty peaceful – we went through

25:30 Panama Canal, and once we got to the Atlantic we were in U-Boat [Unterseeboot – German submarine] territory and we were on anti-aircraft watch – two guns up on the bridge and we stood there and watched them continuously all the way across the Atlantic and that was quite exciting too. We were not in convoy and our ship was pretty fast: it was thirteen knots and they proceeded independently and we didn't see a submarine. And we didn't see anything until we got north of Ireland.

26:00 Right near Shetland it was, I think it was either north of Shetland, or north of Albany, and we ran into a fleet of British trawlers and I'd never seen so many ships – there were thousands of them so probably hundreds of them and then we came down the Irish Sea and stood off Liverpool. There was a long strip: dredged channel into Liverpool and it was foggy, and we were told we had to

26:30 wait because there was a blitz in progress – well actually the blitz had already taken place some time before, but we had to wait for the fog to clear and that was our first sight of England and it was wretched. Liverpool had been blitzed. There were barrage balloons everywhere – sunken ships right and left, and the city had been knocked about and because as kids you read fairy stories about Britain and it's all very romantic,

27:00 but when we got there I hated it and I started to feel homesick. But I know now that Liverpool is a most important place and without Liverpool and its docks and so on, I don't think we would have won the Battle of the Atlantic, because convoys were coming and going all the time and you can imagine the River Mersey, which is a shallow system of pools at low tide – because we dredged – and ships coming in had got to enter a lock or a dock before the tide goes down, otherwise they'd be sitting on the

27:30 bottom. And somehow Liverpool had managed to accept and discharge all these ships that were feeding Britain with everything she needed, and of course as soon as we got in they started unloading the lamb and they unloaded us and sent us down to the south of England.

Can you describe the living conditions on the ship?

Living conditions were wonderful. Cargo ships carrying few passengers are very good ships to travel on – or were of course – this was a long time ago

28:00 and we lived with officers and had their meals and so on and the meals were good and we kept watch before getting into the Atlantic – when we were on anti-aircraft watch, the engineering students among us went down to the engine room and kept watch down there and that was good – very interesting too and we saw things happen. Engines would break down and everybody rolling up their sleeves and getting this engine going again and you were imagining that there were U-Boats everywhere which

28:30 there weren't, but there were quite a few of them.

Was that stressful to know that you were in a real life situation where you could actually be sunk?

Yes there's no doubt about that – no doubt whatsoever. But I get asked quite a lot about the gaining of courage – and I never had any – I was always timid, but it's easy to volunteer at a distance, like joining the war in Australia when the nearest war was in Europe

29:00 wasn't, didn't take courage – it just takes a decision. You think it's probably never going to happen and when you get on a ship going into the Atlantic you've got seven colleagues around you and they're not frightened so I'm not frightened. You'd sort of think about something else. You did think about going to be sunk, you'd think about getting there or think about getting a submarine so

29:30 it was a funny, funny thing –it doesn't make sense. The other is, when I was in my first anti-submarine ship HMS Bluebell and we were defending the convoy against submarines – while you were on watch you are responsible – it's your job to keep the ship afloat, so of course you keep your eyes peeled, and you keep your sense of survival all the time, and you never take your eyes off the horizon but once you're relieved at the end of four hours – maybe at midnight –

30:00 you hand over to the man that comes up. You say, "There's the convoy and we're on this course and speed and we're told by Admiralty there are six U-Boats hunting the convoy, so we can expect attack tonight." You'd leave him with the worries and you'd go below and you'd think, "Right – he's in charge now I'm not – I'm going to sleep," so you'd get in your bunk and you'd go to sleep, not a care in the world. It's not logic but it works. You're kidding yourself

30:30 and it works very well.

How disappointed were you when you saw Liverpool?

I was at the peak of homesickness and I was feeling very unhappy. Fortunately I had a girlfriend in Australia at this stage, a girl called Elsie. She was a very nice girl, and it wasn't a very deep romance: we had no commitment to each other, but she had an aunt in Sussex and so I wrote to this aunt, and said,

31:00 "I'm now in England, and could I come down and see you?" and she said "Yes," so I went down by train, and she had two daughters, and she's a lovely person and I loved this village in Sussex, this place called Burwash and that was my retreat. Whenever I had leave I used to go and stay there and that was in a way what got me settled into life in England. I stopped being homesick after a while, and enjoyed that very much. That was good.

So what was an average day for you like?

31:30 On holidays in Burwash, I'd walk down the village and go hop-picking, and do things like that, but in my ship as soon as I got off of my first leave in England, I was appointed to HMS Bluebell in Liverpool, so I had to go back to Liverpool. I joined the ship, and everybody was a stranger and they didn't have, I thought they had a slight disregard for Australians: they didn't seem very pleased to have me. They had had a Canadian,

32:00 a chap called Moxley and they liked him, and when I joined, Moxley left, and that was a score against me because I'd displaced poor old Mox, but once we got to sea it soon settled down. I was on watch to start with the first lieutenant, and we had two on watch because I had to learn about watch keeping and after a couple of combos, I had a watch on my own and that's the big high point. You go on the bridge and you're in charge of the ship. And you just hope you can do it right.

32:30 **Can you describe watch keeping duties?**

On convoy escort your job is to protect the convoy, and there would probably be six escort vessels like Bluebell; maybe one sloop or one destroyer and five corvettes. Corvettes are slower than destroyers and they haven't got as much armament, and they are manned by reserves not Royal Navy people and your job is to – particularly at night – is to

33:00 keep station and the ships are put around the convoy – the senior officers' is ahead, and then there's port and starboard at the front of the convoy, port and starboard at the back of the convoy and then one right at stern. And we were junior ship right at stern, and you can't do much there because ships wee churning up the water, and that wasn't good for detecting submarines, but you've got to keep a good check and make sure all the ships are on station. Some of them can't make the speed of the convoy and they lag behind,

33:30 means you've got to go along side them and call out to them; "Please regain station. There are six U-Boats hunting the convoy – you're likely to be sunk!" Because if you do – if you get behind the screen – U-Boats picked them off easily so you've got to keep the ship on a safe station, keep all the lookouts awake, looking out, do whatever navigating there is to be done, see any signals that come in, wake the captain up if you think the signals are important enough.

34:00 Any signals run the convoy on, most signals come from admiralty by radio, some get sent by flashing light from the senior officer ahead – he might tell us to change station, or the convoy might have altered course and you'd call the captain if anything like that happens. Generally, keep vigilant and try and see a U-Boat before it gets into the convoy but that's very hard because they had a smaller silhouette and we've got a big silhouette and we can't do that.

How do you know you're being hunted by...?

34:30 That's a long story – can I have a break a minute?

We were just going to discuss how you know you're being hunted...

Yes, well that's one of the most important strategical matters in the Battle of the Atlantic. At that time Donitz, the U-Boats chief, was getting his U-Boats into wharf packs.

35:00 They would string out in a line across the Atlantic and the first one to spot a convoy would signal headquarters in Germany, who would then signal all the U-Boats in the area – give them the positions of the convoy and they would hone in on the convoy. Now to do this, they had to make signals to each other – our strategy was never break radio silence and we didn't either, so you gave no indication that you were coming. In fact,

35:30 we didn't always transmit of ASDIC, cause they could hear it at a greater distance than we could detect them, but it wasn't all one way. Ships were fitted with 'huff duff' [HFDF] as it's called, high frequency direction finding – it's four inclined antennas just forward of the bridge, and with that they could listen to enemy transmissions and get a direction on them.

36:00 And as soon as any U-Boat called Donitz and said, "Well, we are homing in on a convoy," all the ships of the convoy would pick this up and there were quite a few land stations that had HFDF up as well, and they would signal admiralty with the time and the frequency of the German signal – they couldn't read it of course, in those days and admiralty would plot all these directions and through all this plotting

36:30 you could pinpoint every submarine. Now, this was a very big factor in the Battle of the Atlantic and I've read several books on it. One called Very Special Intelligence by a Patrick Beazley and he was one of the real boffins in the headquarters, I think it was Bletchley Park in Britain. They were trying to break the German Enigma Code, which they did later on then – until they did that they only had these directions and one of the clever

37:00 intelligent people there formed a policy of plotting every U-Boat, every day and whether he knew where it was or whether he suspected that's where it was, that's what he did. And this became very successful, and they got better and better at it so before very long we'd be getting a signal from admiralty saying, "Your convoy has been detected," and then next day; "There are Three U-Boats tracking your convoy," and perhaps the following day; "There are nine U-Boats shadowing your convoy – expect

37:30 attack tonight," and we'd get an attack that night and it really was very good. Except attacks aren't very good, and of course everybody is searching like mad, but the U-Boats have got it mostly their own way. They're a very small target, they would follow the convoy at a distance of the horizon all day going full speed – 17 knots, get ahead of the convoy which was doing 7 knots, and then at night close in, sight the escorts, come in between

38:00 the escorts and get in between the columns of ships and just bang at short range. Whichever way you fired a torpedo you'd hit a ship, because there was about 30 or 60 ships in one convoy, and the first we'd know is that we'd hear an explosion – you'd see a shower of flame go up and then the signal, the senior officer would signal the ship like maybe saying – ship number five, three – that's the column and the position in the column – has been torpedoed,

38:30 pick up survivors. So we'd break off, go around the stern of the convoy, because the ship would stop and as soon as we saw the fire come up the back of the convoy we'd go along side and try to pick up the sailors from the water, which wasn't always terribly successful, because when a ship is torpedoed, the oil fuel spills out into the ocean and if the sailors jump off the side, they'd jump into a pool of oil which may be burning, and so by the time we got to them half of them would be dead. But we'd pick up

39:00 what we could. Corvettes are very good for this, because they are very low down and the sailors were wearing life jackets with a little red light on the shoulder, and you'd see all these red light dancing around and Sherwood, HMS Bluebell's captain, was a very good seaman. He'd bring the ship up alongside these people without cutting any of them up with the propeller, and we weren't allowed to leave the ship so we'd put a scramble net over the side, that's a rope net, and we'd climb down and grab these people

39:30 and pull them up on board, or get a boat hook and hook them up over the side and some could swim and they'd swim to the ship. Others couldn't, and we weren't allowed to leave the ship so we'd reach all we could with the boat hook, and the captain would call down from the bridge saying, "We've been stopped for too long, we've got to go or we'll be torpedoed next, so you'd have to go and leave these poor chaps floating on the ocean and that wasn't very good." So it was very depressing.

40:00 Nevertheless, as time went on we got a bit better at it and we got more escorts, we had better weapons and better detection and so on, and the story of the Battle of the Atlantic would take weeks to tell. It's a very gratifying story when you get near the end of it, but people keep giving me books to read about it and I don't want to read them, because it takes you back

40:30 to the early days when we weren't winning the war, we were losing the war. The Germans were sinking ships faster than the British shipyards could process them, but little by little it got over that. In fact, I've accessed a lot of information that is available now, and one of the best is a plot of the U-Boats sunk

month by month, and at the beginning of the

41:00 war about twenty ships sunk for every U-Boat, but little by little by the various inventions and a greater number of escorts and better convoys and so on, the kill rate by U-Boats came down. It took till May 1943 when we broke even for the first time – for every ship, one U-Boat, and by that time the convoy system was so efficient that

41:30 Donitz told his U-Boats not to attack a British convoy because they'd lose out. Of course he did other things then, the war went on for six years and I wasn't in all of that – I was only in it for 14 months, but it was a very depressing time. But I don't think we ever felt that we were going to be sunk. Several escort vessels were sunk, and in fact corvettes were very

42:00 quick to sink: they'd go down in about fifteen seconds and the only people to survive were the ones on the bridge. The ship would sink with everyone else down.

Tape 2

00:31 **You can say where we were – what we were talking about – about the competition…**

Talking about that? Because of course there's a lot of competition between captains. we were talking about signalling and making clever signals. and you were saying that they were inclined to quote the Bible because in those days people used to read the Bible. I don't know whether they do now and if one captain could out quote another that was a feather in his cap but I read a book called Make a Signal

01:00 by Jack Broome, and he's got one cartoon in it of two corvettes in a fairly rough sea and they're both rolling hard over each way and one captain signals the other: "I've just seen down your funnel – your boiler fires are burning brightly." And there's a lot like that, I can't remember many of them. You've got to really read Broome's book – it's well worth reading – but

01:30 signalling I find quite exciting. The signalmen are very good at it but even we officers of the watch try and keep up and whenever the signal comes, you can read it as well as he can, and we would try and read every signal, regardless of the signalmen but signalmen are a very clever breed, they're very proud of their calling and they're very good at it too.

I think where we left on our last tape was we were talking about the duties of the watchmen…

02:00 **Yes – the officer of the watch. Yes I think keeping vigilance is the main duty, keeping the ship afloat, trying to see a submarine before he sees you is your aim. But it doesn't always work. Keeping station on a convoy is tricky because the convoy is doing 7 knots, and we're generally doing 10 or 12 so we've got to zigzag all the time; zigzag out, zigzag back, keeping always level with your ship. You may be keeping level with the front ship in your column,**

02:30 **in the right hand column. They're all blacked out – nobody shows any lights and so you're on your binoculars all the time, in fact I souvenired my binoculars at the end of the war. They're down there – I'll show you later. 7 x 50s, we used to say, they magnify seven times and the field lenses is fifty in diameter, so it gets plenty of light in. So at night you've got them on your eyes all the time, and you can see the ships in the convoy,**

03:00 **just dark blobs, so when you're approaching the convoy on the inner zig, you've got to be very careful you don't run into him. So you're very close – you'd alter the course about and you'd zig out and when you're zigging out you've got to zig back again, before you'd lose sight of him, otherwise you get lost. So that's very tricky, and in our first convoy, because we were a junior ship, and this is the way the game was played, there's six ships and the captains all look up their names in the navy list**

03:30 **and look up to see who was senior ship, and he goes in front and then rest go right and left back down the convoy in order of seniority or juniority and we, Bluebell, were 'tail-end Charlie'; we were at the very back, which was a very tricky position to be in, because the ships were maybe in six columns and some of them could keep up with the declared speed of 7 or 7 and a half knots, but some say they can but they can't. Particularly**

04:00 **the coal fired ones, because their grates get covered with clinker, and they've got to get a slice and break the clinkers through and while they're doing that, the boiler is losing a head of steam and the ship goes slower and she starts to drop back. And when you're zigging across the stern like this, and if one ship can't keep up, she's just back and you're coming across picking out each column as you pass the stern ship and suddenly there's a ship over there on the wrong side and if you're not very careful you'll run into him.**

04:30 **So that's very tricky – you've got to keep your eyes skinned all the time. So as time goes on and your captain gains in seniority – so you move up the head of the convoy until you get starboard front, which is where we finished up. And that's, until you become a senior officer, you go straight to the very front but that's your position and I liked being starboard front; it**

was good. You feel as though you're more important than those further back. This is the competition thing you were talking about. It's always on but it's part of the fun,

05:00 **and you've got to enjoy what you're doing because it goes on for a very long time.**

How often would there be collisions during the night?

We never had one on our convoys. There were quite a few collisions, but no, we didn't have one. They were all pretty good seamen and of course the survivors survive, and the bad watch-keepers don't survive. Of course, you mustn't collide because that's sinking your own ship. No, all the ships we lost were torpedoes – we had one bombing loss but

05:30 the rest were torpedoes.

Can you please describe for us the Bluebell?

When I first met her, she was in Clarence dock in Liverpool alongside a power station. The power station is not there now, it's been knocked down, but there was Bluebell and she looked pretty good to me. If I was a career navy man she'd look like a very small ship but she was my first ship and

06:00 you take to your first ship as something you just love. You just can't get over it. So when I joined there was no sentry on the gangway, I just walked aboard and dropped my case on the deck and there was a sailor on duty so I said, "My name's Shean, I've come from Australia to join Bluebell," and he said, "I'll take you down to the board room." So he took me down to board room and there was the first lieutenant and

06:30 I said, "My name's Shean and I've been sent to join Bluebell." "Oh, we weren't expecting you." I said, "Well they told me at the Royal Liver Building in Liverpool, where the navy had its headquarters, that you've got a Canadian called Moxley, and I'm replacing him." "Oh Mox! Is he going? Oh what a shame, he's a lovely chap, Mox!" Of course, I'm feeling smaller and smaller; the unwanted Australian – anyway we got over that and

07:00 he said, "Well I'll take you around the ship." So he took me up on deck and we went far along the deck and he said, "Well this is the winch and there's the anchors and this is the gun and so on," and we went right back to the ship and showed me all the bits and pieces on the main deck which is where the guns are, we had one four point seven inch gun – it was a survivor from the Great War. Of course at the beginning of World War 11, Britain had to use all the equipment she had, and so corvettes'd

07:30 got these archaic guns. It wasn't a bad gun, we never hit anything with it but it made a loud bang. And then further after the main deck, was a four quadruple point five inch gun – four guns one above the other. It was only half an inch – on the bridge there were .303s – that's 0.3 of an inch – useless. Unless you're firing at a dirigible or a balloon, you couldn't hit it and if you did…

08:00 Firing a bit of lead at an airplane doesn't do any good at all, unless you can hit a vital part, but hitting the fabric it would just go straight through it doesn't matter at all. But later on, we got better guns – this was back in 1941. Took us to the depth charges which were state of the art, the destroyer depth charges were no better than Bluebell depth charges: we were up there with it as far as the depth charges were concerned. That's what we had then, and then he took me down to the engine room and we had

08:30 a single engine up and down which are the reciprocating engines; no turbines. Because reciprocating engines could be built in factories, but they couldn't build turbines, so that's what we all had. And our speed, 16 knots, and the U-Boat's speed – the type 7C which is an ordinary U-Boat – they could do seventeen knots – not one knot more but that didn't seem to matter much – we got by all right. And then met the rest of

09:00 the officers, of course, and they gave me a bit of a description of what my duties would be, and because Moxley was still aboard, I didn't have a bunk and I happened to join on the first anniversary of her commissioning, so there was a board room party that night and so they'd invited all the Wrens [WRNS – Women's Royal Naval Service] from the Liver Building, which was the headquarters in Liverpool to the party, and it was quite a good party except

09:30 I was feeling homesick, and I was just waiting for the last Wren to go home so I could have a bed, because I had to sleep in the boardroom on the couch, but we got past that. One of the Wrens invited me home for dinner the next night, which was quite nice. I only saw her once – that was that day: I wasn't really looking for romance – I was so homesick – anyway, I had my girl back in Australia. So I was only on the ship for a couple of days before we put to sea and that suited me. I wanted to get this war over

10:00 and done with so I could get back home. I was tired of Britain and Liverpool: filthy old place. But after a while I settled down and made friends and get used to what you're doing and didn't really want to go home so badly. We were put on the Liverpool to Gibraltar run – we did it twelve times; six times each way and that was good. We'd take about 10 days to get there, and then have about two or three days in port, and then off again. We had a lot of sea time in those days.

10:30 **Who were you in a convoy with?**

In a convoy with? Well our leading superior officer was Black Swan – she was a sloop, and there were all kinds of other corvettes like Myosotis and Lavington, and I can't remember all the names now – and Daffodil – all flowers, and there was six of those, five of those

11:00 and one sloop. The ships were mostly British ships, although there were certain neutral ships, but if they were neutral the U-Boats could fire at them without warning. But they didn't warn anybody anyway, they fired first and warned afterwards. So our convoys were fairly small, about thirty ships. Some of the big convoys going to America got up to about a hundred ships but that happened as the war went on –

11:30 the convoys got bigger as they got more escorts and so on and so we were fairly small convoys. All the same a convoy is a pretty big bit of ocean because the lines about half a mile apart and the ships are about half a mile apart, so you've got about six lines, what's that? Five, two and half miles. That's how big it is – that's a lot of ocean. And during by day, we were out on the horizon so we could just see the convoy because that's where the U-Boats were.

12:00 So we put them further out again and we hoped they'd miss the convoy and every now and then the convoy would alter course to try to shake to shake the U-Boats off and if you were at the end of your zig way out there you might miss the signal and once, when I was on watch I did miss a signal, and we got lost. We lost our convoy so I had to call the captain, and he came up and he had a guess – it's that way – so we went that way and we found it again, so that was all right. Because you're looking for something pretty big. Excuse me I'm going to have another break.

12:30 I think, convoy work is very interesting. I get asked to give talks pretty frequently and I say, well what you want to know about? I spent about half my time convoying ships which is a very responsible job. The ships are carrying food and things for people in Britain and clothes and so on, and I liken them to

13:00 looking after a flock of sheep, they are carrying the goods, they are carrying a valuable fleece so that's a good thing. I said, "The escorts are like the shepherds or the sheep dogs and they try to protect their flock. Try to protect their ships and so on, whereas way out in the woods are the villains, the wolves, they're the U-Boats. They're trying to sink the ships, they're the villains." I said, "What do you want to hear about? You want to hear about the people doing something good?" "No," they said "I want to hear

13:30 about submarines." So I think that the convoy story is the most fascinating because we started off at the losing end and we were just losing, losing, losing but by development of one thing after another we gradually got ahead, and we finished up winning. And I think the study of that battle against the odds is a far better story than drowning submarines where you're winning all the time. But

14:00 I'll tell you about this one event that Bluebell had with a submarine that might sort of help to see how the favours lie. It was, we were taking a convoy to Gibraltar and at the end of the convoy, most of which are bound for Gibraltar, there was one or two bound for Lisbon in Spain or for Portugal, maybe it's in Portugal.

14:30 Anyway when we got to the latitude of Lisbon, it was in this case, the senior officer said, "We're detaching the ships for Lisbon, Bluebell and Carnation escort them." So we tacked off the convoy and escorted these ships into Lisbon and then of course the convoy goes on so once we had delivered them to Lisbon we had to hot foot it back to join the convoy again.

15:00 And in this case the Bluebell was on her own and we were chasing after the convoy at twelve miles zigzagging all the time hoping to put off the aim of the U-Boats and this went on until about 11 o'clock at night when – we had radar by this time, they had just been fitted. And it was called RDF [Radio Direction Finding], a code name so the Germans wouldn't know

15:30 because they were developing it too. The RDF operator who was on the bridge in a little cubicle of his own reported a contact. I don't know whether you know much about radar, but the modern radar, you've got a big thing like a television screen but it's round and a sweep line going around and every contact he gets paints a dot on the screen. We called it a planned position indicator but we didn't have one of those, we just had a straight line

16:00 across a thing like a small television screen and you'd make a signal and it runs across and you get a bit of mush – that's the waves and things – and if you got a contact, it was a big peak coming up like that and on again and that's what we had. Well, he had a contact so they didn't know what it was, so he called the captain and it wasn't the convoy, he had the convoy off the starboard

16:30 but this was something else and it wasn't an escort either, because the escorts got close in at night. So the captain came out, he got to full speed and altered a course towards and just sounded the alarm. I was in my bunk, so I hopped out of my bunk and put my sea boots and oilskin, and up to the bridge, and my job was on the ASDIC: there would be an operator there, but I'd stand alongside him. In those days, the ASDIC was on a little penthouse on the bridge

17:00 and the watch keeper was outside on the front but you could call him, you could talk to him. And he's got a wheel which trains an oscillator down below the keel, and that sends out signals and receives them back and alongside it is a recorder, and if you get a contact, you switch on the recorder and that records every echo it gets back. So off we went at full speed, and it was the first time I'd done full speed in Bluebell and you could feel the ship bouncing, because the reciprocating engines down below with four cylinders, so there'd be

17:30 four shafts going up and down and basically the whole ship bounced and it got quite exciting. And of course you hear people report as they come, point lookout relieved and then point anti-aircraft gunner relieved and these signals were all coming through and it was really quite exciting – you hear the whole ship manning from just normal watch keeping stations, to action stations. And we were belting along at 16 knots now,

18:00 which was real fast for us. You can't see anything – it was black as the inside of a cow outside and you'd hear the radar reporting; the range is now five thousand yards, it's now four thousand five hundred yards, and then four thousand yards and then the captain said, "I can see him! It's a U-Boat. I can see you watch…" And we don't get contact for two thousand yards so we're waiting until we

18:30 Contact, and of course the four gun is mounted, is manned now, so the captain calls out at the guns crew; "Load star shell. Maximum elevation. Fire!" What you want to do is send out a shell ahead of the U-Boat, which explodes and comes down with a flare on the parachute and that illuminates the U-Boat so next one you can fire at the U-Boat. So what they do is load a star shell, fire it and then load a direct action shot right behind it and wait

19:00 for the star shell explodes. Well the star shell didn't go off. So the captain said, "Fire second star shell!" Well we were just off Cape St. Vincent and we could see the lighthouse of Cape St. Vincent and we were going towards Cape St. Vincent so they pulled the trigger of the gun and off went this shell and I thought the next thing the Cape St. Vincent lighthouse is going to go out, well anyway they missed Cape St. Vincent – anyway it was 30 miles away beyond our range, and they put in another star shell and that didn't go off either. I did say this was a Great War gun and we were now in the Second

19:30 World War, so it was a bit disappointing. Anyway by this time we had contact with the U-Boat, we'd picked up a contact and what happens on the recorder it's got a wet paper with an iodine solution on it and when you get an echo coming back, it makes a dot on the record so by the time you've got a few dots you've now got a trace and there's a bit of Trevor mechanics there where you line up a little ruler thing, and you twirl a couple of knobs

20:00 and it gives you his range and his bearing, of course these days, it'd be a computer telling you this but this is pre-computer age when everything was mechanical. So by this time, I reported to the captain, "We've got contact ranges at two thousand yards," or whatever was, probably less than that and he said, "Right. ASDIC take over," and so now I conned the ship, I've got the trace there, I line up this bit of Perspex

20:30 and we find out from listening to the echo whether the submarine is approaching us or going away. You know by listening to the tone of the echo, when you make a transmission that's your tone, when you get a tone back – if it's a higher in pitch you know he's coming towards to. It's doppler. You may have learned this in school. I had, and was a full bottle on doppler, so we found that he was traversing at right angles to us.

21:00 Going left because we could see on the compass the line keep going further and further left so I had to throw off to get ahead of him so I altered course to port and next thing, we heard a torpedo running, two torpedoes running, and so I called the bridge and said, "Torpedo running to port." We altered course to go towards the torpedo, because we should go on a reciprocal course, and then he saw them and was able to dodge the torpedoes and about three minutes later, we had torpedoes running to starboard. So he took

21:30 altered course again and missed that lot of torpedoes so then he said, "Asdic, take over again," so then I lay off to intercept the submarine and warned the depth charge team we would drop a pattern of five depth charges which was the standard practice, you drop a small pattern to keep the submarine down, then you turned around and dropped a bigger pattern of ten depth charges so I told them to stand by for a pattern. There's a certain alphabetical code for patterns and I was watching

22:00 the line and coming and when the line of dots tees up with this plastic ruler you'd say; Fire one. And on that two throwers threw depth charges over the side and one drops from the stern, from the rails and that makes the ship shudder a bit and then fire two – they'd drop another one from the rails of stern and then fire three and they'd drop a third. And you're just sort of holding your breath, waiting for the depth charges to go off, and when they do the ship just about jumps out of the water because they're not very far astern.

22:30 So we carried on, and then the fellow on the operating – he loses contact – and then when the depth charges noise had died down, he brings astern and he gets contact again, so we ran out about half a mile, turned around, slowed down to a slower speed to give us more time and then picked up the echo again, which we did, and he's now drawing the other way and come in slow. And I told them aft

23:00 to set to ten depth charges this time, and set to a deeper depth, like 200 feet because he'd be going deep and we came up again. The disadvantage with the depth charges was you'd have to run over the target before you let them go, because they go from the stern of the ship. So then: "Fire one!" – and then they sent four throwers to each side and then "Fire two!" "Fire three!" and then there's ten depth charges and this time, because we're going slow, they're closer to us and the ship did jump this time and something went wrong

23:30 inside the recorder and something got red-hot – it was some of the electronics getting short circuited so I went to the recorder, took off my handkerchief, grabbed the thing – whatever it was – and pulled it out and the lights went out on the… and the automatic transmission went out. Well that didn't matter, we had a torch so we shone the torch on the recorder and the operator had a torch on the compass, so he was pinging by hand this time

24:00 and we lost contact, and we searched for about twenty minutes and got no contact. At this stage the captain made a signal to Black Swan saying, "Two attacks on U-Boat – lost contact fault in the ASDIC." So we got a signal back saying, "The fault on the ASDIC has probably crashed your distinguished service order – rejoin the convoy," so we were in disfavour. That's what's known as a 'bottle' in the navy –

24:30 a reprimand – and actually the fault in the recorder didn't make any difference. We kept on pinging and we lost him, because we reckon we'd sunk him so that was that. So we rejoined the convoy and there was no further action, we got to Gibraltar without losing any ships and the policy as always, convoy first, U-Boats second. Get the convoy through, if you've got time sink a U-Boat as well. So we'd achieved our objective.

25:00 So when we got to Gibraltar a few ships hooted because they'd got the signal- they knew we'd attacked a U-Boat – and anything like an attack whether you sink or not was good news, so that was all I knew about it until after the war, about 1ten years after the war, I was reading the history of the war at sea by, what his name? I'll think of it tomorrow, Admiralty publication in five volumes, and I looked up the index and it said that Bluebell sinks U-208.

25:30 And I thought that must be after I left so I whizzed over this book and looked it up and it was our attack. They said we'd sunk U208 so for a long time, I wrote and told the captain and he didn't know, he did now but he knew before he died, so then when I wrote my book, I went to him and went to the U-Boat archive and got a copy of the logs. But before doing, that I wrote to Admiralty

26:00 and said, "I conducted this attack can you tell me more about it. What was the U-Boat's type?" Because it was running away from us until he dived and when we fired our star-shell at least, he dived so they wrote back and said, "We've done further research into this, and we find the U-208 was sunk but it was attacked by two destroyers a few days earlier and it has been accorded to them not Bluebell." So

26:30 when I went over myself I got the U-Boat war diaries and went through them, and I spent weeks going through them, and I came to the conclusion that we had sunk it because one U-Boat which we didn't sink had fired two torpedoes, but no word of the other two torpedoes and there were only 4 U-Boats in the area and the other one unaccounted for was U-208, so I came to the conclusion that indeed we had sunk U-208 so I sent across

27:00 a book to the fellow in charge of the archives, and weeks later he sent me back a letter condemning every point I'd made. I was wrong on everything. Well, statistically, if you're only guessing you're entitled to be right some of the time so I came to the conclusion that we had sunk U-208, but as they had to allocate it to two destroyers manned by the Royal Navy, or one corvette manned by reserves, they gave it to the Royal Navy. So I'm pretty sure now we did sink U-208.

27:30 But that was what an attack was like. But in my research I found that on that day, we were first of all seen by U-43, commanded by a captain called Luke, and he was an ace sinker and he fired three torpedoes at us, he'd seen us zigzagging down from Lisbon to join in the convoy and he fired three torpedoes and missed and then two other submarines fired two torpedoes each so that day we had seven torpedoes fired at us

28:00 and none of them hit obviously, because here I am.

How many sinkings do you have to make before you're considered an ace?

I think if you could prove one sinking that is, that is if oil or a body comes up and you can recover the body and they can take it home and examine it, and say, "Yes, he's a German," then yes they'd give you a kill, but everybody was very conservative. They wanted to make quite sure

28:30 that if you created a kill, it's proven before you get any recognition of it. It is a hard job and maybe the two destroyers; Hesperus and Harvester they were, and I knew one of the crew, I knew the engineer on Hesperus so I didn't really care if we sunk it or he did, between us we sang it. When I read that I thought "Well,

29:00 they didn't get proof of their kill, they didn't get any bodies coming up or anything like that with oil or anything and we didn't get any proof so it's our word against theirs." And Roskill was the historian who wrote the book who said we'd killed it and I think he came to the same conclusion that I did, and that later on the admiralty boffins got into it, and said this is going to be a Royal Navy occasion, so they got it. But anyway it didn't matter, we got our convoy to Gibraltar with no losses and that was what we were trying to do.

29:30 **What happened after you've done your 12 convoys?**

By this time, a couple of notable events had occurred, I got a letter from Elsie in Perth, said she's now

joined the Army Medical Service and she was training at Black Boy Hill, and she'd met a soldier and his name was Roy.

30:00 While we were still good friends, our romance was over, so I got the sack. But that was all right because it was two years after I joined the navy and I thought this war is going on, I don't want anybody waiting for me, so in my letters to her, I'd sort of just eased off a bit, they weren't as romantic as the previous letters. So I was expecting to be told off and that's what I got so that was okay.

30:30 So I wrote her a letter and I said, "I hope this Roy as worthy of you," as if to say if I wasn't he might not be. I thought afterwards that was a pretty rude thing to say. Anyway that was one, the other thing was we went for a re-fit, they were always refitting ships, giving them more elements and so on and I had been to Scotland so I wrote to Australia House in London, who had a very good billeting service, and said, could you recommend a place I could go and stay in Scotland?

31:00 And they wrote back and said yes, go to Aberfeldy in Perthshire – there you'll be a guest of the British Legion – which was like the RSL [Returned and Services League] – for a week, and it'll be free and they'll find you a bed and something to eat. And so off I went, and they told me my host would be a Mr Bill Bennett, who ran the local news agency called McLaren's I think it was, so I got to

31:30 Aberfeldy which is on a branch line in Perthshire and on the station was Bill Bennett, he was an Englishman, Cockney, in fact. So he took me to his house. Aberfeldy was a very small place, about the size of Pinjarra, so he said to me, "You settle yourself down, and I'll be home after work." So I did. Next day, I went for a walk through Aberfeldy and called in at McLaren's, it's only one street in it and so I came in there

32:00 and Jess-Anne my hostess was there and she said, "Come in Max, meet Mary Golding – she was serving in the counter – Mary Golding has got a friend in the navy, go and get John Sheriff's picture," so off she went to get his picture and he was a sub lieutenant in the Royal Navy you see, this is Max Shean from Australia, he's got a girlfriend in Perth so there you are you see, you can keep your distance. So during the week I was walking to the village and I saw there was a

32:30 concert on in the town hall on Saturday, a concert put on by the council for music for the encouragement of hearts. I thought if you want a respectable event that's it. So I thought to hell with John Sheriff and Elsie back in Perth, I'm going to see a concert so I said to her there's a concert on in the town hall on Saturday. She said, "I know." I said, "Would like to go to it?" and she said, "No thanks." So I thought, "That's it Sheeny, you're going walkies, son."

33:00 I spent the rest of the week, I went to the concert and it was very good and so that was the end of that and that was July 1942. So we went on plying the seas for a bit, and I went to another refit and during this refit, we'd get the Royal Admiralty publications; it had confidential admiralty fleet orders and it was a must read: we'd get it from admiralty every couple of weeks. So I read this one and in it they said Admiralty are calling for volunteers for a special and hazardous service.

33:30 Applicants must be below the age of 24, unmarried, good swimmers and of strong and enduring physique, so we thought – "Oh, that's for somebody else," so we put it away but a couple of weeks later we got a signal from everybody during commanding officer's attention to this confidential admiralty fleet order. So we had a new captain by this time, Walker who had been first lieutenant, so he took me to his cabin and he said, "Shean have you read this?"

34:00 I said, "Yes Sir, I've read that," he said, "I am going to volunteer," so of course, you know what it's like having the finger pointed at you, so I was thinking I'd been in Bluebell for nearly two years, I'm going to get a shift soon, as for hazardous operation, I reckoned it was pretty hazardous what we were doing so I said, "All right, put my name down, please sir." So he put my name down and I went for an interview and he went for interview and they said to him, "No. You're too valuable as a captain of the corvette,

34:30 but Shean; yes he'll do." So I found myself in submarines. So that was fine, we started, were sent to Scotland and we started being lectured on how to run a submarine.

Before we go on can I just….?

So we got on with our training

35:00 and we hadn't been there very long when it came to February 1943, and what arrived at our base in the island of Bute was a Valentine's card from Mary Golding in Aberfeldy, so I thought, "That's a bit of a turnaround! You know last time July; no, this February; I'm interested." So I wrote her a letter saying "Thank you for the card, it's very nice.

35:30 Do you want to see me by any chance?" And she wrote back and said, "Yes please." So next time I got leave which was a month or two later, I went up to Aberfeldy and we started to get friendly. So that went on, I went once or twice on leave to Aberfeldy and that was the beginning of my second romance. I was absolved from the first one by being given the sack, and well, that's the girl up there.

36:00 That's my romantic life: two dates, one marriage. Not a bad score.

How long have you been married?

1944 we were married so forty-four – that's fifty-six, fifty-nine years. We've got two daughters and they run the family now.

You were talking about your special orders – that you've been accepted for this unusual…

36:30 **Yes I've been accepted… Well the first notice was I got a signal saying, "Shean accepted. Will be mobilized in November," and I forget what month that was, about August I think. Anyway, September came, and I packed my bags and went to Liverpool and then I was off to Russia. So I had to walk around saying goodbye to my now**

37:00 **very good friends in Bluebell, and got the train from Liverpool down to London, and then down to Portsmouth. And I found myself in the submarine base in Portsmouth. That's the first we knew we were in submarines. In my interview I was told it was terribly secret – I couldn't be told what it was but it was very small and it was navigated with a periscope. Excuse me….**

37:30 **I had just said goodbye to Bluebell. I just want to say a word about this, I'd been on it fourteen months and I'd mentioned that when I joined I hated everything, Bluebell and the war and everything else because I was homesick. Well when I left, it was the saddest day of my life. I'd got to know everybody and down she went, down the Mersey which was always pretty much fog bound**

38:00 **or smog bound and I suddenly felt terribly lonely. I was starting at the beginning again, didn't know anybody, had to join another part of the Royal Navy I didn't really understand and it was a sad day. But anyway…**

Was there any special social event that was created on the Bluebell for …?

No. I just walked around, shook hands, got off. It was happening all the time: people were joining and leaving.

38:30 No, I was nobody in particular. I got a very nice comment from, in the navy you get a thing called a 'flimsy' when you change ship or the captain changes. Flimsy is a very thin bit of paper like a docket book and it's got, "I've known Lieutenant, or Sub Lieutenant Shean from this date to that date. He has served as a watch keeping officer to my satisfaction." Sometimes in the merchant services, they say,

39:00 "He is strictly server." But everybody knows that's not true so they don't write it in the navy – they're honest. I've still got it, flimsy from both Sherwood, when he left and Walker when I left. Walker was still, he was still captain when I left. So I'm glad to have that, I regard those as some of the best testimonials. When I joined the ship,

39:30 I was the first Australian Sherwood had ever sailed with, and he regarded me with acute suspicion as well the British might, they exported a lot of convicts and what do they get back? Anyway, I was good friends with them both. No, there was no send off apart from shaking hands, and I finished up in Portsmouth. Got down there and I found I was in a training class of twelve.

40:00 Twelve seems to be the magic number. And we all got together and said that the first thing we were going to learn was how to escape from a sunken submarine. Now that's not a very good introduction, is it? By this time we had a pretty strong clue that it was a submarine, but it was still absolute secrecy. They said, "Don't tell your mother, your father or your sisters or your wife or anybody what you're doing. It's absolutely secret." They wouldn't say what was –

40:30 we didn't have anything to say anyway. So we went through the escape training procedure for a submarine, and that was quite interesting. First of all, you put on an aqualung and jump into a heated pool which was very nice, and swim around, and then you let the oxygen out, this is oxygen you breathe, and then you sink down, you swim around and then go up the top again. And the next thing you do is get out of the tank, walk down below, ground level, and they opened a steel door on the side, and there was a steel chamber.

41:00 And you go in there; about three trainees and a trainer and a petty officer, and then they shut the door and say, "What we're going to do now – we're in a submarine – we're going to lower a canvas track down, and then somebody's got to go in it and open the hatch and you'll find that we're underwater – we're at the bottom of a tank." So when they slammed the door shut, a couple of chaps started shouting.

41:30 They said, "No. No. No. Let me out." So three of the twelve got out, didn't go any further but the rest of then just sort of hung on. I've got a bit of a theory about this: I say courage is an acquired thing, nobody's got any I reckon. But there are times when you can bluff it out. The first one to shout – he gets out. The rest are jammed in, and you think well, am I going to say, "Let me out?"

42:00 No, I haven't got enough courage to do that. I'll stay here and hope that it's all right.

Tape 3

00:32 **So we were talking about the escaping from submarine training…**

Yes. We were all pretty nervous and some hopped out before the escape really takes place, but out of the whole twelve we all went through it. But for me, when you get in this chamber and they shut the door, it is rather unnerving, because it's steel – and noises all echo around – and you know you're underwater and you've

01:00 never done it before, but the instructor has and you think, "Oh well, if he can do it…" And he's responsible anyway. So they drop down this canvas tube – it's open at the bottom – and the instructor says, "Well I'll do it this time, I'll open the hatch." So he then opens a valve, and water comes in and it comes from the bottom and when it gets to the bottom of the trunk, then it just stays there outside the trunk and inside the trunk it just goes up.

01:30 And then he'd go up and he'd open the hatch. And then, you're breathing the air but you're underwater so you change over to oxygen with a little valve on the thing, and first of all what you do, you take a few gulps of oxygen, breath out, get rid of it and then you're on oxygen. So you don't want to mix it. So then on oxygen you then duck down under the trunk

02:00 and then you swim out, and having done it with the breathing set, next time you do it without the breathing set. You've still got it on for buoyancy but you don't breath from it – you blow it up to give you buoyancy, but you hold your breath and get under the trunk and go out and on the way up you've got to breath out and that's the hard part – having your face underwater, opening your mouth and breathing out takes a lot of doing. So I didn't find that

02:30 very good, but I must say, these days they've got a much better idea. Down at Stirling, you get in a very lightweight wetsuit with a hood that comes over like a plastic bucket in a way, and you see through it. It's not watertight – water can come in but you've got enough air there to breathe in and out – you couldn't do that for more than about five minutes, I suppose, but that's long enough to get to the surface. So now you are breathing, so the pressure can't build up in your lungs and burst your lungs, and you haven't got to hold your breath

03:00 and that's a very good thing. I don't know why some clever person didn't think of that in 1940. All inventions don't take a lot of brain power – any fool could think of that. Another thing was to grab a bucket and put that over your head and they're aren't enough buckets around, of course, but nobody thought of a suit like this. It's a very good idea. Anyway, we went through that few days with –

Were there any accidents… Sorry to interrupt – were there any accidents during that training?

No. No accidents except when you

03:30 first put on this DSEA apparatus it's called, Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus, you jump into the water and swim around, and the instructor goes around looking for bubbles coming out of ears. If anyone's got perforated eardrums, back to surface – no submarines for you. But no, apart from the three that opted out, everybody finished up in the team. Well, having finished all that lot we were then called into an office and the door was shut and

04:00 the window sealed and the instructor was a Lieutenant Halsfett, now a very famous submarine captain and he said, "Now, this is the most secret thing in your life and I'm going to tell you something you must not tell to anybody. This is what you've been trained for to do this', he said, "You know about Bismarck, everybody knows about Bismarck – she was German's number one battleship.

04:30 There were two of them; Bismarck and Tirpitz. They were the most powerful ships in the world at that time. You know that Bismarck was sunk in a surface action, having sunk battleship Hood. We were very pleased that she was now sunk, but Tirpitz is still at large and the Germans keep her in a fjord in the north of Norway. We've tried bombing it from the air, we've

05:00 tried various sorts of new weapons, and we've developed a new one and that's what you're here for. We divided a submarine which will displace 30 tons, it's 50 feet long and the idea of the submarine is that it will be towed up to where Tirpitz is, that's a thousand miles north, by an ocean going submarine. It's armed with two explosive charges, one strap port and one starboard, and it's your job to train the crew of the

05:30 submarine. You will be towed up, you will then proceed independently, and go into where the Tirpitz is moored, now she 80 miles from the sea in the fjords of Norway – she's in Alten Fjord or Kaa Fjord, which is the smallest fjords, and you will penetrate the anti-submarine defences which are nets and so on, and get underneath the battleship and release these two charges under the battleship set with a time delay

06:00 of anything from two to six hours. All being well, you will then make your retreat and you will wander over to the submarine that towed you up, will tow you back. Nothing like this has ever been done before: six submarines are being built by Vickers Armstrong, and they're due for delivery at the end of 1942. And in March 1943 will be the attack on Tirpitz.

06:30 You realise how important it is to keep this secret. Because if the Germans get any idea that something like this is going to happen then they can shift Tirpitz or up their defences, put on more patrols and

you've got no chance. You've only got a chance of success, and life after success, if the Germans don't know about it. So, now off you go now and do your training and don't say a word to anybody. So you

07:00 can imagine how we all felt. I felt no, not for Shean, this is not my scene at all. But I didn't have enough courage to say, "Sorry, I won't be in it." I thought, "Well, I'll be put up with it. There's eleven others here and hopefully I won't be noticed." So off we went and they said you're going to go to the island of Bute in the Clyde, and you're training will start so off we went. And I was very worried until we got off the train

07:30 in London and then it was an all night passage up to Scotland. There were a dozen of us – in the compartment next door was about a dozen Wrens going to the same base, so we thought, "To hell with the submarines – we're going to the Wrens compartment." And we had a hell of a flying time on the way to Scotland. But we got up there and you can go to Glasgow, and take the train to Green's Bay on the Clyde…

Can I just interrupt?

08:00 **What did you get up to with the Wrens on that train?**

Just harmless fun.

Can you explain?

With the Wrens. Joking and chaffing, and what any group of young people get up to on a long train journey. Of course they were a lot of the Wrens we were going to be working with, so we didn't want to blur our cooking book too soon. They were, I don't remember any of them particularly,

08:30 **individually. But the one chap in our group – he was six foot five tall – getting him into a submarine which was five foot ten in diameter, there weren't any seats left, so the Wrens put him along their laps and this chap was stretching from one side to the other being nursed by half a dozen Wrens, so he enjoyed that.**

Any drinking onboard?

No. No drinking – we didn't have any drinks. No catering at all.

09:00 Well, you could get out at the station and buy a cup of British rail coffee which wasn't that good. It was just good fun and when we got to Wemyss Bay, we went over on the car ferry to the island of Bute and there was a truck driven by Wrens to take us to the base about three miles away, and then our training started. It was a hotel taken over by Admiralty and relieved of

09:30 all its comforts like carpets and curtains and things – it was pretty stark. I think there was hot water for a shower for a start, because it was pretty damn cold up there. It was a hydropathic hotel – they prided themselves on having good mineral water, but it was still damn cold. And we started being lectured about submarines and that was very interesting because a submarine is a very interesting vessel and if you think it's appropriate, I can describe what these things were like. I have got a model there – do you want the model?

10:00 **I'd appreciate your personal description, thanks Max.**

Ok. Well, they were 52 feet long and 5 foot 10 in diameter. I hope you don't mind me talking in imperial because that's what it was in those days, there wasn't the system 'internationale' that we have now. Of course, there was a system, but it wasn't British and they don't like things that are French. There's principally a pressure hull, which every

10:30 submarine has, and that's the strong part, and that was the dimensions of the pressure hull. That's a quarter inch steel in our case and in the case of the submarines that are now down at Stirling, they're about two inches thick or 50 millimetres thick again, so that's 6 millimetres. Of course they're very small. Everything about them is small and light. The main part as far as we were concerned were the three buoyancy tanks,

11:00 because without buoyancy tanks submarines won't float or the ideal is something that will just float like a fish, doesn't come up, doesn't go down, it just stays put at whatever depth the fish likes. To come up, which fish don't do, submarines have got three tanks, and when you dive they're full of seawater and when you want to come up to the surface, you blow the seawater out with compressed air and up she comes because she's buoyant you know they're like water wings. You have a compressor to recharge the

11:30 air cylinders. The air cylinders are like any oxygen cylinder, or acetylene cylinder you see in factories and things, or in hospitals for oxygen. So these cylinders were in the keel and we had a compressor, a three stage compressor that could blow these up to 3000 pounds per square inch which was pretty high pressure. They had a diesel engine for propulsion at surface at 6 knots and that at a range of 1000 miles and batteries and an electric motor. The batteries

12:00 could keep the motor going for about twenty odd hours which would give us about 80 miles distance. Yes, probably a bit less than that, 80 miles at the most economical speed would probably take longer than 20 hours. Which wasn't bad, but you had to be sure of being able to surface once a day to charge

the batteries and that's always at night so you can't be seen. Which makes it a little bit tricky if you're operating at high latitudes because

12:30 when you get up to the Arctic Circle, if you go up there in summer it never gets dark and that doesn't give you any time to charge your batteries because if you surface in any enemy harbour during the day the enemy harbour won't be very cooperative, so we had to have enough daylight and enough dark to do both things. To navigate by day, and to charge batteries by night. And so it had to be at the equinox, so either in March or September. Well, we were to do this in

13:00 March, it was 1943. A lot of other things in a submarine besides this; when you're moving you've got to be able to steer of course, that's just a rudder, and usually we had an automatic pilot but that didn't work terribly well so they got rid of that to make room for something else. There are hydroplanes to keep you at the right depth – that's horizontal rudders – and again they were manual – no automatics there. And they were pretty straight forward, they only had one set of hydroplanes and they were aft.

13:30 The ocean going submarines at that time had forward and after planes, but these submarines were very simple and anything that wasn't essential they didn't have. So we only had after hydroplanes which did work quite well. They were meant to go deep, you had to lift the stern of the submarine to point down and then you'd power down until you got to the depth you wanted, and then you'd level out, and then adjust the trim. Now the other thing about a submarine:

14:00 it's got to be an exact weight, and of course you could build them at an exact weight but you've got to be able to adjust for crew coming aboard and fuel being used and so on. So we had three other tanks; they were called trimming tanks, there's one right forward and one right aft and they were half full of water so if something was too heavy by the bow, you'd pump some water aft. So that was pretty straight forward, and the other one was a tank forward, called the compensating tank, and that was to compensate for the bodily mass or weight and if the submarine was

14:30 altogether too heavy, you'd pump some water overboard. So with that you've got all the means of keeping a submarine under control. All you've got to do then is to learn how to use them, which is a bit tricky. It's like learning to drive a car or ride a bike for the first time – you do it wrong quite a lot of times and then… so there were a lot of sort of accidents but they took good care to make sure we were never operating in water that was too deep. Submarines were designed to dive to 300 feet, if you

15:00 were further than 300 feet then they would collapse like a bang, lie an implosion which takes a millisecond so you didn't last too long if you were too deep. If you got too shallow – well training in Scotland it didn't matter – you could break surface but you'd lose a point for doing that. Alongside Tirpitz, it wasn't a good thing to do, because the Germans would see you and bang bang you'd be gone. The Germans were very good at defence, they're excellent gunners, so you couldn't afford to surface anywhere within sight of Tirpitz

15:30 or you'd be a gone coon. So these were all things we had to learn.

During that training you said there were some accidents and some interesting incidents. Can you tell us about those?

Oh yes the best accident was in X3. They'd built two of these submarines – two prototypes; X3 and X4.

16:00 They weren't operational submarines, they were for us to learn on while Vickers Armstrong are building the six operational boats. Well, when you're on engine of course you've got to get air into the submarine, and we had a pipe called an induction pipe. You'd wind a handle and this pipe would hinge up, and there were two valves in it – there's always two valves between the inside and the outside, so if one valve leaks the other didn't. So you'd raise this pipe and start up your engine,

16:30 and air would come down this pipe and feed the engine and of course you'd breathe the same air and go through the engine and exhaust into the ocean – there are two valves there too – so when you were on the surface on engine these valves were open. When you dive, a big submarine sounds a klaxon but we didn't, we did it verbally, whoever was on the casing would yell down this pipe that the air's coming down: "Dive! Dive! Dive!" It's not so much that you hear the words but you hear something going: "Uh! Uh! Uh!" –

17:00 so you dive anyway, and the rule is you've got to get down as quickly as possible. Don't mind the man up the top – that's his business – you've got to drive the submarine: that's your business. So immediately the bloke down below shuts the two valves of the induction pipe and the chap back half stops the engine and the crew, it was three in those days, shuts those two valves, the exhaust valves and you hope that the hatch would open and the captain who opens the hatch on deck comes into a water tight chamber, shuts that hatch, opens the lower

17:30 hatch and comes into the control room. Until he arrives, you think, "Oh well, that's one captain we've saved." X3 was out with a training crew of two and an instructor of one and he called down, "Dive! Dive! Dive!" and down they went and the fellow underneath the induction truck had trouble with the valve – the valve jammed – and he only had one valve and so the submarine dived and the water came down the induction truck and she filled up and went and sat down on the bottom. It was 100 feet deep, and so the trainee had to….

18:00 Of course the water only comes in so far until it compresses the air in the submarine, so he had to get his DSEA sets to these two trainees and on himself, and one trainee lost the plot, he went berserk. So the skipper opened the hatches which you could do, because the submarines already full of water, got the conscious man breathing on the set, shoved him up the hatch and then he got the other one who wasn't breathing, inflated his device, shoved him up the hatch and then he got up the hatch himself and he was very pleased to

18:30 see when he got to the top there were two people floating as well as himself. So those chaps went ashore they were okay, but they left the service – they went back to surface ships. There was always a crash, a sub smash organisation and as soon as they knew the score – single word out: 'sub smash' – the first ship to arrive was a diving ship. She anchored over the submarine which had a float – they knew where she was – and sent

19:00 divers down, and then a boom defence vessel, the vessels that lower these nets into any salvage jobs came and anchored with the bows of the submarine, sent down a grab, the divers were down there, hitched onto the submarine and pulled her up. She was up within a couple of hours, of course she was full of water and she had to be emptied out and overhauled and so on, and that submarine was returned to service and we went on training in it, but I

19:30 was out at Browns Gyro Compass Works at a course at that time, and the compass from X3 was sent down because it wasn't all the best, having been immersed for a couple of days. And the compass people who made it were absolutely disgusted with the navy, fancy what they're doing to our compasses! And of course we couldn't tell them what had happened, because it was all secret but the navy were absolutely rock bottom as far as they were concerned. They got it going again, they overhauled it and we were all trained in overhauling compasses.

20:00 So that was quite an interesting one. That was the only sinking with crew onboard, another sank at a buoy with no crew onboard ,so they just got the bar vessel again, pulled her up and emptied her out and overhauled it and she went all right. Now we normally have lunch at about this time – can we have lunch?

So Max, we were talking about the mini subs that sunk

20:30 **during your training?**

I think we were talking about accidents, and things going wrong yes – well I told you about X3 going down and being recovered and put into commission again, and they had a certain amount of troubles with engines; one broke a crank shaft and because the submarines were busy training, they couldn't spare her to go back to the works and get fixed up, so what they had to do was the engine room artificers [engineering technician] had to work at night

21:00 down in the engine room, taking the engine to pieces and then by day she'd go out training on the motor and come back at dusk, and they'd recharge the batteries from a drifter – another vessel – and the artificers would go down and get on with this engine and they went weeks on this job getting every part out until they put a new crank shaft in, and fitting it all together again and getting it going again, because the urgency was great because they had to get rid of the Tirpitz. But they got the job done and that was

21:30 really an enormous feat. This doesn't appear in the overall story, but all the same, it's really a high point in the progress of the endeavour altogether, that we kept going no matter what happened – we kept going with the training to be ready on time but even then we weren't ready on time. It was to be March 1943 that equinox, that'd be the spring equinox – we weren't ready, so it was put back

22:00 til September, and the training still went on at pace. All the time the training had been going in anticipation of the operational boats arriving from Barrow Inverness and Vickers Armstrong Ship Builders. A selection was made for the operational crews, because there was I suppose about twice as many people as the essential requirements and what was required was there were three operational crew,

22:30 and three in the towing crew for six boats, six six's are thirty six – we must have had over sixty people in the training program, and eventually they had to make a selection and it was like picking your team for the grand finals, you know, and everybody, although they were all scared stiff, hoped to go to Guernsey. And there were I think three Royal Navy lieutenants, and one Royal Australian Navy lieutenant

23:00 and there was one Royal Navy seagoing reservists – and anybody that's seagoing means that that's their normal occupation and they just joined the navy – so of course these people had priority and that left one vacancy for a reservist and of Ken Hudspeth got that – he was the one from Tasmania who died about two years ago and we all thought that was a very good selection, because Ken was

23:30 a fairly serious man – he'd been an educationalist, headmaster and part of the Tasmanian administration of education, and he was a very good fellow, very serious but very capable. One of the Royal Navy lieutenants, a chap called Meek, who was probably the most senior of all, when they postponed the whole operation, he said, "Not for me," he said, "I've spent near six months working up with this flotilla and

24:00 you're not ready, so I'm going back to working with real submarines." So he went back to take

command of an ocean going submarine so that meant there was a vacancy then, but at the same time we'd started net cutting. Now as a precaution or a protection of any harbour there's a submarine, anti-submarine net fished across, there was one at Fremantle, and that was called a boomed defence and the Germans had it north of Norway, and so although

24:30 we hoped that when we arrived the gate would be open because of course the gates led in to the enemies' boom ships and in the case that the gate wasn't open, we had to be able to cut through the net and so our diving was not just for escape, it was for net-cutting, and so these small submarines had a special facility – it's like an air-lock in a spaceship – this was a water lock in a submarine and under the main hatch there was a steel chamber with two doors, one going forward and one going aft,

25:00 all pressure tight and what was intended was that one of the crew of three, we were all trained for diving, one of the crew would dress up in a diving suit and get out while the submarine was nosed into the net going dead slow and not moving of course, held by the net. And there he would take out a hydraulic operated cutter, and go forward and cut a hole in the net and we would go through and

25:30 as soon as the training for handling a submarine was well advanced, they started net cutting and there was a net laid in the lock where we were training and the crews that were selected one by one would try to get through this net. Well they managed to get outside the craft all right, but then things started to go wrong. And so a lot of them drowned. When you drowned the whole net cutting program was stopped and I was sent for,

26:00 because when the crews were selected I was an ex-senior and seniority in the navy counts – an ex-senior gets the next job very often – so I was told to take command of Meek's submarine, which was X5 – the numbers were five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten – and to concentrate on net cutting until we had it all worked out – we could cut through a net without killing anybody. So this suited me very well because I'd

26:30 done a bit of diving pre-war, I'd made my own diving helmet and while it was very crude it did get me used to diving and all the equipment in the navy is top quality, so going from my tin derby diving helmet to a navy suit was really quite good – it was a step forward. And our suits were very lightweight, flexible material, not quite a heavy rudder – much lighter than the commercial diving suit and very similar in breathing

27:00 apparatus to the one we'd already used. It was a longer endurance – you'd last about an hour and a half on the oxygen we had so when I was given this job I got the first lieutenant of X5 – he was the fellow I mentioned – Henty, Henty Creer – the cameraman – and I said to him, "Now, Henty, you've had a go at this – what's your story?" Well it seemed that he was in the very first submarine ever tried, and people

27:30 driving it were hesitant, the chap that gave us our instruction – a very competent submarine commander, commanding officer and Willy Meek, and Henty, Henty Creer, and Henty was going to do the diving. So they put Henty into his diving suit and he went and dived into the net and they were going to do it in style. Before they got to the net they put Henty into this compartment, shut the doors, pumped it up full of water so he was sitting inside a compartment full of water, and as I said when they

28:00 hit on the door with a hammer, it was the sign for him to get out, so they made a pass at the net and they missed the net – I don't know how they did that because they were big enough but they went round in a circle and they missed the net a second time and this time they thought poor old Henty had spent enough time underwater in a compartment so they knocked in the door and as far as Henty was concerned that was the sign to get out and cut the net so he opened the top hatch, got out and he thought that the current was quite strong but never mind – he shut the hatch and he went forward

28:30 to cut through the net but when he got forward there wasn't any net and suddenly there was a crash as the submarine hit the rock. They'd run ashore so they came to the surface and Henty by this time was pretty well fatigued, so they called it off. He had another shot, and this time he did get out and they were in the net and he cut the net but the submarine didn't go through it, it stuck in the hole he'd cut so he got down underneath the submarine, hung on to the submarine and pushed the submarine

29:00 with his feet, he hung on to the net and he did that unwisely and passed out, because if you work too hard breathing oxygen you do, you lose consciousness. So they always had an attendant diver when cutting a net, so the attendant brought Henty to the surface and got him breathing again and the next one was a chap called Lock tried it, his round. So next thing Shean found himself in charge of this operation.

29:30 So I spoke to the others that had had a shot and I got a few ideas about what they were doing wrong. There was one advantage at having done a study of engineering – you do learn about the forces of nature. You learn a bit about physiology and you learn a lot about chemistry and so on, and breathing oxygen is very largely a chemistry exercise because the reason we don't breathe oxygen – we breathe nitrogen and oxygen

30:00 - is because oxygen is too concentrated for us or vice versa – we evolved to breathe 20 – 25% oxygen and 80% nitrogen – so you mustn't work too hard or you breathe to hard and this upsets the physiology and also if a submarine is stuck in a hole there must be a reason for this and I reckon that they were either off course or they were not in correct trim, so I spoke to the

30:30 Helmsman, and he said, no – he wasn't off course, he was on course, because when he went to strike the net he noticed the ships head on the gyro and he keeps it there – you can still steer the submarine,

even though you're not going anywhere, so it seemed to me that it must have been that they weren't in correct trim. If you're going through the water without a net and you're too heavy the submarine will go down and you'll see it on the depth gauge, but if you've got your nose stuck in a net, it can't go down the nets holding you, so I decided that the diver would have to have a good look at the net

31:00 and see if the submarine was resting down, or resting up or sideways or whatever, and we'd devise a system of hand signals that the captain would be watching the diver through the periscope all the time. If he could see that the submarine was bearing down on the net – he'd make a signal like a pop out so that was our scheme so I wrote all this down on a short list for divers to try and then we went next day to try it and Henty said – you know centre stage, front, – "I'll do the

31:30 first dive." So I said, "Okay, you'll do the first dive." Didn't worry me who did it, so long as it was done, so we got into the net and Henty was dressed, got into the compartment, pumped up and there are dual controls on this compartment and the diver has got his two valves to open for the water inlet and the air exit and then one on the pump and you pump away until the water

32:00 came up over his face and up to the top vent and then you suddenly feel a bang on the ears when the water gets to the vent instead of the air and goes clunk. And then you shut all the valves and stop the pump. Well, Henty got to this stage and I was watching on the valves and as soon as the valves started to move I'd do it for him, to save him having to work, and then he got the compartment full, and he shut a valve and then he opened it a bit and I thought, "That's wrong. You shouldn't do that." So I shut him off, pumped him down,

32:30 opened the door and got him out, and he'd lost the plot. He'd lost consciousness so we pulled, what you had to do was you had to get into the suit through an umbilical, big umbilicus, so we took a clip off that and you've got to fold it back over his head, get his head out of the head piece and then he could breathe air. But you breathe air before that, open the visor and get the air going in, and then get him out of it and he started to come to in the control room so he said

33:00 "There's something wrong with the set." It was always the set, it's never the diver. So we said, "Okay." We backed out of the net and came up to the surface and the attendant boat which was a whaler came alongside, and they said, "What's the bother?" and we said, "Well, Henty says his set's no good." So I said, "We'll have another go and I'll do the diving and Henty can company the craft." We had another set onboard, so down we went and got into the net and I went through the procedure and going through the W&Ds

33:30 you called it which means 'wet and dry' which means you can fill it up or you could empty it. When you get in, you shut the two pressure tight doors – forward to the battery and aft to the control room – big heavy doors cause they got to stand pressure, and they've still got that thick and they swing around on a davit which takes the weight and you get them into place and you push a lever and then tongs come out and you lock it in. When you get those two shut – that's your first

34:00 butterfly – you think, "I'm locked into this chamber." Now you know as well, you've done it loads of time, because we had a simulator there – we could do it without a submarine but then you opened the valves and start the pump and the waters coming up and until it gets to here its not bad – once it gets over your face that's the second failure you have of butterflies. Now you're locked in a sealed chamber and underwater, and then it gets up and it covers the

34:30 light and suddenly it all goes dark, everything's dark and so now you're underwater and the pump running inside your head and you think, "Locked into a steel chamber and you're underwater," and that's when you feel really non-confident. You feel like, you know pushing a button and getting out, but you think, "Well, I've got to go on, I'm so far and I'm breathing – that's a good sign," so you shut off the valves and then open a little valve in the top hatch to equalise with the pressure outside. Lock the clip off the top hatch

35:00 and push. And nothing happened, it didn't go. Because it takes a long time for the water outside to come around to the seal and get inside. Otherwise you're trying to evacuate the chamber, which of course you can't do but eventually just keep pushing and the hatch opens and then its beautiful – daylight comes in and you're still underwater, but it's much better than where you were before. So that went okay, then I went forward and I found that yes indeed, the submarine was resting down on the wires –

35:30 these nets are diagonal wires about one metre mesh, a submarine wouldn't go through any hole and we worked out that we needed to cut two wires each side to make a three metre diamond, and the submarine should go through that. So as I saw it was heavy, I walked aft to the periscope and made the hands up sign to Henty inside and, next thing I heard the trim pump running – you hear everything going inside your head under water – and I looked over to the side and

36:00 you see this stream of water coming out from the side of the submarine, because there was always rust in it ,so as soon as the pumps stopped, I went forward and this time she was resting nicely in the diamond, so I got to work with the cutter. You've got to get to the other side of the net first, because the submarines got to go through in, and if you stay in the first side of the net, it'll go through and strangle you as it goes because you're on the backside with the cutter. So the cutter's hydraulic, it's got a long hose and very strong. So I got to the right side, cut the wires,

36:30 and she started to go through very nicely, so I went back along the casing, crawling up the pressure hose, opened the hatch, shoved the cutter down, shut the hatch and watched the net as it went back past the submarine and I could see the attendant over there – he was waving at me and I could see the boat up top – you could see the shape of the boat and we got right through, so next thing I had to do was get down the hatch quick, because as soon as they get through the net, if there's anything wrong with the trim, the submarine will go down

37:00 or it will go up, and they've got to be quick about it – increasing speed in the motor and pumping in or out and if they increased speed on the motor and you're still outside, you're likely to get swept off so I hopped forward, opened the hatch, got in and that's the next difficult thing – is shutting the hatch. Opening it is difficult, except that you're inside and you're pushing down with your feet not your hands but when you're getting in you've got no weight – you're floating – and you're trying to get this hatch down and you've got nothing to pull against – they should really have a rail so you can grab that and the hatch and pull down but just keep a steady pressure

37:30 On, and then the hand on the lever and push it, and once the lever goes round you have a look up and make sure it is shut, because if you've got any tape on your suit stuck into the hatch that's disaster because if you open a valve inside, the submarine will float up through that, but you're very deep and then go down and hit the bottom and then you're in trouble. So you've got to make sure that the hatch is shut and it clips on and then you open the valve – just gingerly – make sure

38:00 that everything is all right, and then open the other valve and start the pump and pump down. And so I did all that and shut off the valves, opened the hatch and they said in the control room that it took twelve minutes, so it seemed like a lifetime to me but it worked. And so that was fine, so we called it day and as I went through the net, I could see the attendant diver hanging on his lifeline with his thumbs up like that. You know, it's happened! First time!

38:30 So we went ashore and I phoned the base which was down the loch about ten miles, and you've got to be careful on the telephone not to use anything that would give it away cause telephones are always likely to be bugged so the captain wasn't there so I said to his secretary, "Can you tell Captain Banks – first trial okay. We'll continue." So we went on then, but I rather suspect what Henty did was to get onto one of

39:00 the senior people on the telephone and give him his version of what happened, that is – when I was conning the submarine it failed, but when he was conning it, it succeeded. So that was, I didn't realise this till a long time later, but having done it once we did it a few more times and then we got all the other divers up to give them a run through, and then did a few other tests that were additional to the agenda and then went back

39:30 and that all took about six weeks, and I was rather hoping that having made a success of that I would remain in command of X5, because I had a better understanding of the submarine that I think anybody due to university lectures on mechanics and electrics and everything else – we'd covered all of the science side of it – it was only a matter of getting the application to a submarine which was really a scientific experiment – every scientific principle at work and you understand that

40:00 you're a long way to becoming a submariner. So I got a terrible surprise when I was given the message to hand over the command of X5 to Henty Creer, and I would take over X3 which was now a superseded training craft because the whole other six were there and I thought, "Well, that's disappointing," and the other thing about Henty is that having come in from the film industry, he served the Royal Navy for a while as a sailor and then he applied to become an officer, he became an officer and was sent to our flotilla straight away.

40:30 Now the rule was when you came in as a sub lieutenant: you did two and a half years at sea, got a watch keeping certificate and then you were eligible for promotion as a lieutenant, if suitable. Well I'd just been promoted to lieutenant, Henty came in, must've chatted up the commander of the flotilla, and went on to accelerated promotion and he became at lieutenant within a few weeks after that and I think it – now I'm quite sure it was Henty and his powers of eloquence. Whatever happened, he'd always convince the people, the decision makers

41:00 that if it was good, it was due to him. If it was bad it was due to somebody else. And anyway, Henty became captain of X5.

Tape 4

00:36 I was talking about the first trial net cut, and how I got sideways promotion having succeeded and the eloquent man got the job. Well I went back then into the pool of reserve people just hoping that somebody would pull out, so I could pull in and go on this operation. And the date was now set for the

01:00 22nd of September, and we were to leave the Clyde on the 11th, in two of six ocean going submarines and have a thousand miles, which is about ten days and then we'd change crews and we had a passage crew in the towing submarine, and all the time everybody was looking disgustingly healthy, and Shean didn't have a job and a lot of exciting things were happening, like everybody would send up experts of all kinds of things,

01:30 including escape experts. Now escaping from German prison camp was one of the arts of war in those days and we were all, anybody going over Germany would be briefed and if you're taken prisoner, your duty is to escape. You may not get back to Britain, but every time someone gets out of prison camp they get a marshal, a division of German soldiers to find you again, and that keeps them away from the front. So we were schooled in this, and I attended all these briefing lectures just in case

02:00 I got a guernsey on the job, and we had a group photograph to take a picture of all the crews and Henty Creer got very huffy about all that. You'd think being a cameraman he'd just lap it up but he did for a start – he formed up with his crew – standing like that I showed you the picture – like Napoleon – but then they wanted another picture, and Henty Creer went and locked himself in his cabin. He said, "It's showing lack of confidence

02:30 in this whole operation. They think we're not going to come back again – that's why they want the picture now – well, nobodies going to get my picture." So he went, unlike a cameraman I thought, he went and hid: so that didn't matter. We got on with everything, had a party or two and at the, oh yes – after my pioneering of the net cutting and succeeding, I made a report and I said, as a sort of appendix to my report –

03:00 proficiency in diving is paramount in this – if you don't keep up your diving practice, you lose touch, you're not as good as a diver. I really think that three in the crew – one of whom is a diver part-time, was not good enough. I think we should have a fourth man to concentrate on diving and it would work very well if he were responsible for diving and ventilation in the submarine, because that was pretty important because

03:30 everybody was always busy looking after his part of the ship, and that was accepted and they had to get six divers in a hurry. Now Admiralty were also running a team of charioteers, or human torpedo men, and they did quite a few attacks on German shipping. They tried to get Tirpitz but failed, so six of them were called to volunteer – well volunteers were called and they got six, and they set them up. Now this was only a week or so before we were set to sail for Tirpitz, and these six people came in with human torpedo training,

04:00 but most of them were in training and we'd all been training for a long time by this – nearly a year – and a conflict arose spontaneously that these people, they were experts as human torpedo men, but being told what to do by these submariners – and they didn't like that. And they wanted to do things their own way and at the same time the submarine crew had been training for a year

04:30 and these blokes were coming in wanting to run the submarine their own way and there's a difference between handling 30 tons and handling 1 ton, which they'd been doing by pushing it around by hand and it got to a stalemate where one side wouldn't talk to the other and they picked on Shean again. Fell was the captain of our depot ship, HMS Bonaventure where all this was happening at the late stage – she was our seagoing depot – and he said, "Shean, see what you can do with this bunch of charioteers will you?" So I went and met them and it was a

05:00 situation where tempers were running high, and everybody was so sensitive and they'd bite each other no trouble at all, so I met them in the staff office where all these top secret discussions went on, and I could see that everybody was on edge and I said, "My suggestion is we all get into the wardroom and have a drink and do nothing today and tomorrow after we've settled down, we'll talk through the difficulties," and one chap – a chap called Hindmarsh – I remember he was an Englishman – he said, "I think we should settle it here

05:30 and now." And I said, "All right. If that's what you all think we'll do it here and now, but we're going to work at it. You know we get a bit, you get a bit," so I went through the early training we'd had and the mistakes we'd made and the crashes at the bottom and the depth gauges shut off and so on, and I said, "There's a lot to learn in running a submarine." I said, "There's a lot to learn on your side too but you are doing it, but we are driving the submarine, so you've got to do your part in driving the submarine,

06:00 you're just a member of a crew of four until its your turn to get outside and do some cutting." I said, "Then you're the expert, but until then you're just one of the crew like the rest of us and you've got to learn the dos and donts about running a submarine." After that we had a good old chat and they accepted this, and we got on with it, but a couple of days later one of them pulled out and he happened to be the diver in X9 and at the same time the engine room artificers in X9 pulled out.

06:30 He was just scared, and so my friend Coles, who rang me this morning, he was the engine room artificer I spent a lot of time with, he lives in Newbury in England, and at that time way back in 1943, he was an ex engine artificer, so he and I had a pier-head jump as its called. When you're joining a submarine just as it's casting off from the wharf,

07:00 to go to war you run down the pier and jump off and you get there with absolutely no briefing or handover at all, so I found myself diver and Ginger Coles found himself engine room artificer in X9. Now the day I was given temporary command of X5 to solve this net cutting problem, two other officers were appointed as supernumerary. I think I may have told you this earlier on when you weren't recording.

07:30 One was Terry Lloyd, a South African who was very temperamental – very short fuse, good chap but easily aroused – he was the first to step aboard. The next was an Irishman, Edward Kieran – he was a nice chap – a bit laid back and slightly unconventional, like a lot of Irish, his logic was totally different from everyone else's logic, but he was

08:00 a nice chap. Well he was about to step aboard when Terry Lloyd said to him, "Now listen, Kieran, there's only space for one madman aboard a submarine and that's me – now you keep off." So Paddy said, "Okay Terry," so he turned around, went back to the depot saw the staff officer and was appointed to X9 as passage commanding officer. Well, so here we were together Ginger Coles, muggins and Paddy Kieran

08:30 all on the submarine except Paddy was to man it during the long tow north with his crew and we were taking passage in the submarine, the ship towing which was called Serapis until we got within a few hours of the entry into the fjords, and then we'd change over. Well, we didn't get that far – there was communication between the towing submarine and the X craft by three cables laid up in the towing rope itself

09:00 one in each strand and telephones plugged in at each end. Well, this had a reputation of lasting twenty-four hours, and our tow was ten days, so it wasn't long before the communications broke down and from there on it was all done by routine – the towing submarine would slow down every six hours and the small submarine would come to the surface – because you couldn't tow at the surface at full speed, cause they'd go down anyway – so she'd come up, run the engine to ventilate the submarine, and the first surface at night

09:30 she would stay on the surface and charge the batteries and air as well, then when she was ready, she would go down, the submarine, to pick up speed and then go again. Well, we'd just entered the Arctic Ocean pretty well north and it was morning, 9 o'clock, due for X9 to surface and we slowed down and surface – nothing happened to surface – she was gone. So we stopped – had a look aft and the tow was broken. So they started to heave the tow in and although the sea wasn't

10:00 Rough, there was a big swell and Serapis was just pitching, as they do down like that and the stern goes down and the prow comes up, and so on, and this rope – it was a big rope like about that diameter and 600 feet long – had started to snake up and then drop back, and as it got fairly close to the end it wrapped itself around the port propeller so they juggled and heaved and pushed and couldn't get it off so the captain said, "Right Shean, you're the diver;

10:30 over the side and clear it." Well my diving suit was in X9 and she was sunk, so – it was the Arctic – it's not terribly warm, so all I could do was get into a pair of overalls and put on one of these escape sets and get in the water and I said, "This is not going to be heavy enough because these suits are buoyant – they're meant to bring you up from the submarine," so they went down the engine room and got a few odd castings and put them round my waist and over the side I went and I don't need to say – it was cold.

11:00 And I couldn't get down – I was too light – so I tried to swim down and the submarine would thrash its stern down and of course that blows everything up, so I couldn't get down but I could see – it was very clear. In fact I could see right, right down – it was fairly deep, 3000 fathoms – you can't see the seabed at that depth – and I was so cold and I was very frightened and I looked down and I could see the rope coming out from the submarine and wrapped around the screw and going down to

11:30 the infinite depths so I watched for a while, and every time the stern came down this lot slackened off and then it would tighten again, so I came up to the surface and I called out to the crew on deck, "Heave in now," and they heaved in and it would come in a bit then she'd do another pitch and then, "Heave again now," and after a few of those up it came and I thought, "Jolly good. I'm pleased about that," so I climbed up the hydroplanes and got back on deck, and by this time the engines were running and we were on our way back to

12:00 repeat or traverse the course we'd come, in case X9 had come to the surface and was following on trying to catch us up. So by the time I got up to the conning tower, you had to climb up the side of the conning tower and you'd go down the main lid and with the engines running – of course there's an absolute typhoon of wind going down, and going down you had to keep your elbows in, cause you're in a tube going down a ladder like that and gosh I was cold, because this draft of air going down the

12:30 side and I was numb and I thought, "I won't be able to move my legs very soon." Anyway, got down below and got out of my overalls, and the captain came down and gave me a whisky, and that was pretty good and we were already on our way back so we sat down at the boardroom table to try and work out what had happened and the engineer came along and he said, "I've checked the fuel and according to the fuel consumption we lost the tow soon after we dived six hours before." So we had a long way

13:00 to go back so we all went up – this was daytime of course – and we kept a watch on the periscope standings. You can, it's pretty high and you can see pretty well – looking for a small submarine in a big ocean – it's not easy – so we re-traced the whole distance till we got to a point where we last saw him – didn't find him – never been found so I think what happened – Paddy was a pretty good chap but he wasn't quite as up

13:30 with the technicalities as he could have been, because I did the very first tow up at Lynch and within the first fifteen minutes of diving, she went out of control and the function of speed…. A ship has got a

hold speed and below the hold speed which is not very much, about 6 knots or 8 knots with these submarines, they go out of control, they make a big bow wave and a big

14:00 stern wave, and they fall down the hole in the middle. And it's very hard to control and I found in this towing trial – it was in X6 – and the crew, my crew couldn't handle it and I said, "Move aft," and of course, when something's going down at an angle like that, everything slides forward and it gets down to the depth of the tow line and then it picks up and she shoots up again, breaks surface like a whale, and thrashes back again and down you go again, so I found the only way to stop it was when you got near the bottom,

14:30 put the planes to a dive, keep her diving, don't let her come up, hold her down there and hope you don't hit the rock on the bottom cause that will sink it. And then gradually ease it, just little by little, until you've got control, and you probably still bow down but still coming up because of the buoyancy, and so after a while, I got the hang of this and started to change the trim. Put more weight forward, more weight in to hold the submarine at that depth the hydroplanes

15:00 the mid ships and the while level. So that's how it works, and it was Paddy's job to teach his crew this, but I don't really see Paddy doing it so I think this is probably what happened: I think she went unstable, broke her tow, kept going down and crushed. With that they'd be dead in an instant, so that was a very sad time. We'd lost our boat. We didn't know that they were dead –we know now – but the rule then was that if you lost your submarine – carry on and

15:30 patrol outside Alton fjord for Tirpitz to come out, and if Tirpitz or any other capital ship came out we would attack. Nothing less because we mustn't give away the fact that there was a fleet of six submarines going for Tirpitz, so we made out station on time and as far as we know four other submarines had. Now I didn't mention that in the intake a year earlier were five Australians.

16:00 There was the Australian lieutenant RAN, his name was Brian McFarlane from Victoria and his friend – became friends, Jack Marsden from Victoria. There was, myself from Western Australia, there was Ken Hudsworth from Hobart and Henty Creer – he'd come across from Canada – he was Australian born and very proud of the fact he was five generations Australian. So it was in X8

16:30 with McFarlane and Marsden that the operation – the towing crew – had trouble with the side charges bolted on the side – the explosive charges started to leak, so they changed crews and McFarlane couldn't control her any better, so they decided to drop their charges so they let them go set to safe. Well, 15 minutes later they exploded, and damaged the small submarine and they were about a mile away, so they were taken aboard the towing submarine and it was all over for them. But they hadn't lost any men.

17:00 The next one to have trouble was Ken Hudsworth in X10 – he got there – the crews changed over – they started their run up to Tirpitz which was eighty miles – it took a full day to get there – and his submarine developed a few defects and he was adding it all up, and at one stage his periscope hoist caught fire, and a fire on a submarine is intolerable cause there's no ventilation – you just breathe the smoke and so he thought – as far as he knew

17:30 there were five other submarines still going, although there weren't – there were only three – but the security was such that we couldn't read other submarines signals – everybody had his own recoding cables and we could only report major items. Well, Admiralty had been told that X8 and X9 were lost, and now Hudsworth thought that rather than give the show away, he'd withdraw so he did. And he was taken in tow but he had to scuttle his submarine on the way back because the weather got too

18:00 Strong, so the other three were still going. What we know definitely is that X5 and, sorry X6 and X7 made their attacks – they did attack Tirpitz. X6 reckoned he had no chance of getting out alive, so he scuttled alongside and was taken prisoner. No lives lost. X7 was trying to get out when he got stuck in the nets around Tirpitz, and he was still there when his own charges went off – well they blew him out of the net

18:30 but also blew a few holes in his submarine so his submarine started to take in water so he went full speed for the other side of the fjord and came up to the surface but when he got to the surface he jumped out and shot the hatch and the Germans started to fire on him, so he made a swim to a floating target and got aboard that. Meantime his submarine went to the bottom of the fjord which was sixty metres deep and pretty dark down there and very cold, and she was leaking so bad there was no chance of rescuing the submarine

19:00 so they made preparations for getting out and only one made it. The diver made it – the other two drowned and the diver – a chap called Rob Aitken –he's still alive. So that was two attacks and the third one not known and they were taken prisoner aboard Tirpitz and were standing on the upper deck when they saw X5 surface 700 metres on Tirpitz's starboard bow. And of course the Germans are good at gunnery and they straight away opened at the secondary armament and after the

19:30 first round you couldn't see X5 any more. Now nothing more is known about X5. There are two surveys of Alton, Kaa Fjord looking for her, they've used side scan sonar and magnetic anomaly and they found a lot of things – there's a lot of wrecks in the bottom there and old nets and things but they haven't found X5. Henty Creer's family, when they learnt about this,

20:00 said to Admiralty, “As you’ve given VC [Victoria Cross] to the two captains that did the attack – Henty attacked therefore he should get a VC.” Well, awarding a VC is a pretty responsible job and you’ve got to be pretty sure of your grounds: well nothing is certain about Henty. My own opinion is that I’d been with Henty when he lost consciousness four times due to he seemed if he was under stress he would lose the plot and I think he

20:30 lost the plot there, and what’s more, I believe he never should have been given command of X5. He was the least experienced and the least senior of the people available, and I just don’t think he had the resilience or whatever it’s called, to make a stand up and go through it in times of severe stress and the stress of attacking Tirpitz would be maximum – I’m pretty sure of that – and I think that’s what happened to him. I’ve spoken to some of

21:00 the chaps who were on the surveys looking for him, and one of them was an army major, and he asked for – Henty was writing a book, he was writing his autobiography and his sister carried on with this and she wrote a third of the book and Henty’s bit was a third of the book and they got a friend of mine from New South Wales, who was a newspaper journalist and in the navy,

21:30 and he wrote a bit. It was whatever evidence they could get. Of course it was written with success in mind. The theme of the book was Henty did attack Tirpitz. Firstly, I think Henty did not attack Tirpitz. And little by little evidence comes to hand. I mentioned a chap called Hindmarsh who was the one that persevered with learning the submariner side of the thing when we had this conflict between torpedo men and submariners,

22:00 and he wrote his memoirs, and he was with McFarlane so he didn’t see much of the Tirpitz operation because he was a passenger like I ,was in the towing submarine, but in his memoirs he said that the diver of Henty Creer’s boat spoke to another diver from another boat – I forget who it was – but we’d often thought about taking Tirpitz – instead of

22:30 putting a mine on the seabed – would it not be better to attach it to the bilge keels so it’s right against the ship. This was well discussed: the thing was 2 tons each. We didn’t have details of Tirpitz bilge keels and we decided that it was impractical, because the way these things are attached, they’ve got a sort of a step at the bottom by the keel and two rigging screws at the top for and aft and what you had to do was first of all set the clock to run

23:00 and say detonate in four hours time or whatever, and then enable the flooding valve to flood the buoyancy chambers in the charge and then release. A big wheel would turn and release the top. Now the charges were all ready and you’re supposed to be sitting on the seabed underneath the target, and it will peel off and these two claws will come out and drop off, and if they don’t drop off of course, it’s not good news because you’re attached to a thing going

23:30 tick, tick, tick, tick with two tons each side so we decided, “No, this isn’t going to work. We’ve never tried it,” and we never did try it. The other one was go right aft and come up underneath the propeller shafts, put the diver out to shackle the charges onto the propeller shafts with wire and things and then get back in. Well, Tirpitz – the propeller shafts are not in line, there’s one high and two low, or the other way around. I think they’re like that. Now trying to bring a submarine up,

24:00 she wouldn’t stretch across the port and starboard one, it would be one and the midship one, trying to bring a submarine up like that wouldn’t work – you’ve got to have some buoyancy to keep her there or she’s going to slide back. They won’t do a thing you want them to do, they’ll do what nature tells them to do so we all discussed this and we all discounted it and we never tried it. Well, before the operation Henty spoke to his diver and said, “I’m going to attach my charges to the propeller shafts,” and the diver thought, “Crumbs. I’ve got to do it. I’ve

24:30 been told to do it.” So he spoke to another diver, which Henty told him not to do, and the other diver said, “Well, you’re really in a difficult situation,” he said, “If you’re ordered to do it so you’ve got to have a go but it won’t work but you’ve got to have a go.” So Henty was attacking with that in mind. Frankly, I don’t think he tried because if he’d tried he would have been seen under Tirpitz’s stern and he wouldn’t have lasted two minutes. I think things went wrong aboard X5,

25:00 maybe he lost his plot or lost his physician or where he was seen was fairly near shallow water – he might have run aground. If you run aground in a submarine they come straight up, they bounce up and bang – he’d be down again sunk and I think the reason she hasn’t been found was that afterwards the Germans plastered that area with depth charges so they probably countermined his charges. If they went off alongside the submarine there wouldn’t be anything left bigger than that – it’d be blown to bits.

25:30 Absolute bits because 4 tons of explosives is quiet a lot. So that’s the story of Henty. When I wrote my book, I sent the draft to Ken Hudsmith, and he came back about this. He said, “Look, Henty’s dead – why not leave it alone?” and I said, “That’s okay from that point of view, but his family are giving Admiralty a lot of embarrassment, arguing that Henty did attack Tirpitz and he should have a VC and I think

26:00 it’s as well for someone to record something like the truth, because of all the skippers, he was the one least likely to succeed. I don’t doubt his courage…Although that’s not detracting from his courage and his general ability – he was a very courageous man and dedicated to the cause and he was very intelligent and very personable. He could talk to anybody with ease. I’m not like that,

26:30 I like, I'm happy talking to people about my own station but… I met the King once and I was dumbfounded, I couldn't even say, "Shean," so that's all I had to say. We had dinner with him. But that's Henty – he was a good fellow, but he should not have been given that job. And one of the divers in one of the survey parties – an army major he read the book, Henty's book and his conclusion was the same as mine: that

27:00 anybody who writes his autobiography at that age is bound to be conceited, and Henty's conceit leaps at you from his photographs and it does too. You see he's so smug and so, "I'm it," but he was a good chap – I liked him. But I would like to have had command of X5 – I think it might have been a different story. So that was the Tirpitz run…

Before we continue – what was your personal disappointment following the operations…?

27:30 We were all depressed. Very depressed. I would like to have been there. If I had been there and been killed well, that would have been the final solution there. If I had been there and had succeeded it would have been the peak of my life, particularly if I had got home as well, those that succeeded were locked up and they had a few years to wait in Germany but yeah, one's alive now.

28:00 The others have died of natural causes. But I was very depressed, and by this time I had known Mary fairly well and when we got back we were sent to London for debriefing and given two weeks leave.

Can I interrupt? How personally frustrated were you?

Well, it's hard to say. We've all had disappointments in life and after disappointment you feel depressed, you're unhappy.

28:30 You wish it hadn't happened but it did happen, so basically you've got to go on living because the next time – it'll be better next time. So I was still in the depression stage when I was given leave and went up to Aberfeldy which was probably a foolish thing to do to: go and see your girlfriend when you're feeling a bit upset and we went out to dinner one night and had a few whiskies and on the way back I said, "How would you like to live in Australia after the war?" and she said, "Yes – I'd like that." So that was it:

29:00 I was engaged. I think that I was really wanting somebody to talk to because I was really so depressed. So we came back to flotilla, it wasn't till the next year, and got on with a few other things, and another six boats were building and I was given command this time, first off, no mucking around. And that was X22 and Digger McFarlane, they called him digger because he seemed to be a typical Australian,

29:30 not like me, they weren't too sure whether I was Australian or not and he commissioned X24 and having commissioned these boats they were built at inland factory towns and delivered by rail. It as quite a story delivering these things – it was quite good fun. The company that built ours, their name was Markham, they made a beautiful job of the submarine and they gave us a hamper aboard the train. They had a special train – a locomotive – a tender and then a flat wagon and then one of these bogey wagons with the submarine on it,

30:00 then another flat wagon and then the guard's van and we were in the guard's van with this hamper with everything in it – you had a party all the way – really terrific, we ended up in the engine cabin, we weren't driving it but we had a lot of fun. When we got to Scotland – we travelled all night and then we got to Scotland and come alongside a floating crane and it just picks the submarine up and drops it in the water and that's the launch and off you go. Well, when we got back to the base, Admiralty were now worried that because Tirpitz

30:30 was crippled, the Germans might retaliate and attack the home fleet in Scarpa, which was a pretty big harbour and so McFarlane was told to do it – tow from the Clyde up to Scarpa and to enter. There were three entrances all defended, enter them one by one without being detected, and make a dummy attack on a battleship of the home fleet and then surface. Well, X24 wasn't very well built and a lot of things kept going wrong

31:00 and so he got all ready to tow off with Serapis, the one that towed us to Tirpitz and they had to cancel it because X24 had broken down. And they started again and this time they had tow trouble the tow got round the propeller or something so they had to stop that and they got ready to go again and X24 broke down again so the Captain McArthur sort of said, "Right Shean and McFarlane change boats," so I took over his scrappy old X24 and he got my beautiful X22,

31:30 so off they went no trouble this time. X22 was beautifully built and nothing ever went wrong, and we looked after her well too – we only had her for a couple of weeks. So off they went and I don't know if you know the geography up there, but going north from Scotland there's Pentland Firth an absolute tidal raceway, and then there's the Orkney group which is Scarpa, and then a bit more ocean and then there's the Shetlands way up top. Well, they had to go into Pentland Firth: and Pentland Firth when the tide's running is a devil of a place.

32:00 And very hard to keep ship on an even keel and there was a gale blowing too and I don't think Serapis should have gone in under those conditions, but she did and the X22 was towing behind, telephone wasn't working of course, it always broke down, and the officer of the watch in Serapis was washed over the side, so she rounded up to pick him up and as soon as you do that, of course, X22 would lose way and you can't control a submarine unless she's moving, cause you're going to get your hydroplanes

32:30 to rotor, rudders to work, unless you've got a lot of time to adjust the trim perfectly – all you could do was surface, and well he surfaced and Serapis collided with her, and down she went and she's still there. So that was the end of her, so now its three Australians gone out of the five and the other two survived until Hudsworth died the other day. So anyway, I was still down patching

33:00 up X24 and we were working night and day on this boat and my ERA [Engine Room Artificer] Coles was very good – he'd been a tool maker and they had some tremendous jobs to do. They were built in three sections and bolted together and the workshop where they were making the third section they got a bow in the flange – you know they were heated and then bent and when they brought the two bits together they weren't like that, they were like that – open at the ends so they filled them with putty which wouldn't do in a submarine. You go down to 300 feet – putty

33:30 won't last two seconds. So we realised that X24 was leaking on the main flange so we had to put it up on the slip and pull it apart and Coles and company had to file these two things flat. They were two inches wide and five foot ten in height – that's a lot of filing but they did it and we worked and worked and got it right just in time for X22 to be damaged and sunk and so the captain said, "Right Shean, you're next. Off you go and do this job." So we were up

34:00 and got it done and that was quite good because the Duke of York battleship was in Scarpa and first day, there were three entrances and the first entrance we went through dived and then that went okay, surfaced inside and we saw that Anson battleship was in, so we called up our – we always had an escort and so we called him up on the lamp and said, "Please pass

34:30 close to stern of Anson," and we were already – and the drill is with ships – when one Navy ship passes another the junior ship, the one with the junior captain sounds off to the senior one: you blow a bosun's call and still everyone on deck salutes until they respond and then you sound carry on and you stop saluting and you get on with the job. So we were approaching Anson at the stern and we could see somebody on the quarter deck and everyone was going, "Look at that. Look at that."

35:00 Nobody knew about these submarines and then another chap on the quarter deck and in no time there were about a hundred officers all on the quarter deck and we thought, "That's what we want," so we went to stern and then we sounded off, and I saluted and we got a hundred salutes in return- it was good business so that was fine. Next day we did another entrance and this time Duke of York was in – she was the flagship – and admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, Royal Navy and now we didn't say anything to the escort this day because it was blowing hard and raining – it was a terrible day but without any prompting from us she

35:30 went further astern the Duke of York and we could see the same thing happening with all the officers coming on the quarter deck and my jimmy was Joe Brookes and – he's the chap that does the cartoons and things – he's a wonderful bloke – so I said, "Joe come up and have a look at the Duke of York," and just as we were passing the bridge he picked up the lamp and flashed away and he said, "What a big bastard!" and I said, "Joe, you were saying that to Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser from Lieutenant Max Shean,"

36:00 and I said, "It doesn't matter to me, you're Royal Navy – this is your career. This is the last day for you in the navy." 'Oh," he said, 'I suppose it was too. Oh I'm sorry about that." But he said, "I couldn't resist – she is a big bastard isn't she?." There's something about it – whether you see a battleship on your side you get so enthused with confidence at the power of this mighty vessel you just can't help yourself. You feel like throwing your hat in the air. We're going to win! Anyway,

36:30 the following day Bruce Fraser asked to come aboard Bonaventure, our depot ship – he wanted to inspect the submarine so we were all lined up and my submarine was out on deck and so he came along inspecting all the troops lined up and he said, "Oh Shean, were you on deck passing the, crossing the flag yesterday?" and I said, "Yes Sir." "Must've been a bit wet." Now 'wet' in the navy means 'dumb', 'stupid' and if you call a bloke 'wet', it means stupid. So I said

37:00 'Yes Sir, it was a bit." Anyway he got back to his ship and then came the signal, "Join me for dinner tomorrow night," so Brookes and I went over and had dinner with him and that was really good. That's what I like about the navy – you do something stupid and you get a kick in the shins and then you get a free dinner. Well that was the commissioning of X24 and the next job having done the test at Scarpa – another funny thing about that

37:30 there was a post mortem after this. Everybody was gathered in the commander in chief's office in Scarpa including the men in charge of the nets and the men in charge of the loop detectors and the men in charge of hydrophones and they all said their bit to the admiral 'Well the nets would work all right of course we opened the gate for X24 to go through because we knew she was coming and we didn't want to cut a hole in our net for the enemy to come through." So that was okay,

38:00 and everybody else said everything went fine, and then after we broke up they all came to me in turn and said, "Look, if you were going through Germany, do this and do that and you'd get through and we couldn't possibly find you," so it was interesting to hear two points of view whether they were talking to the boss or talking to the monkey which was me. But then we got back and they said, "Right next thing we want to do is go to Bergen and sink a dock, a floating dock." Bergen's a pretty good harbour in Norway, really busy,

38:30 and the Germans were using it for their U-Boats and they had a big dock there which was a parent to six small docks and the small docks didn't have any machinery – they couldn't pump themselves out. You know how the docks work – they're floating high and when a ship comes along they flood down, but they still keep a bit afloat until the ship runs into the dock and then they pump out and the whole lot comes up and with a big ship, they then get out their paint brushes and give it a quick coat of paint, and launch her again. With the U-Boats, they would bring a small dock in to the big dock

39:00 flood that down and let the U-Boat come into the small dock. Then they'd pump out the big dock – up she'd come up they'd drown out the little dock and then they'd launch it again. Now the big docks available once more and they could do six U-Boats at a time that way. Well, everybody wanted a hole in the big dock – wanted to stay there all the time. So we were sent across to do this and that was interesting because it was my first time in enemy waters and

39:30 nobody had ever been to Bergen. Nobody had ever been and done a job and come home again, so all eyes were on us. Well, it went well except that Bergen's a very busy harbour and it's a very complicated with all the docks and things and everything's jammed in close together and we were given a chart that showed that the only possible vessel in that position on that line of bearing was the dock. Nothing else. Just a few metres away was a coaling wharf at right angles – nothing like the same thing.

40:00 And there's a net in front of the dock. So we couldn't go straight for the dock we had to go round in a zigzag to get to it and it was too close to use a periscope so we had to have our last look half a mile out and then come in going for the coal ships at the long dock at a depth. When we it the bottom turn around and then run along and only one thing that we'd go under that would look like a dock and that was the dock. So we did

40:30 That, and of course my heart was in my mouth all the time because there were patrols building everywhere and you had to be careful not to get rammed because if you got rammed – that's failure – that's the end of you. So I wasn't too sure, so I came out took another look, and went in again and laid our charges and went back and we were nearly caught by a patrol coming back but we weren't caught so we got out all right and made our rendezvous with Sceptre this time. Commanded by Ian McIntosh,

41:00 you've already seen his picture.

Tape 5

00:00 **So you'd just made a rendezvous…?**

Yes we'd just made rendezvous with McIntosh in Sceptre and that was a big risk for him too. He drops us one night, he's waiting out there and next night, as soon as the end of nautical twilight, he surfaces and he doesn't know what's waiting for him. We might have been captured and interrogated with a bit of persuasion and told, them that Sceptre was out there waiting for us and they could send out their defences

01:00 and shoot him down. So it was a great risk for him. And he was very good and well we made the rendezvous. We'd make it with infrared cause the Germans knew about infrared, but not everybody was using it and to beat a submarine in the middle of the dark night of the Norwegian coast is largely hit and miss – mostly miss. But he had his position, we had our position,

01:30 so as we leave we've got to be quite sure we know where we are and then proceed to our search position and then search in the right direction and we have an infrared receiver which is like any little gubbance, and look through that, and he had a infrared transmitter which is like a big camera and it sends out a light that looks green in the received. Well we forged along this recovery course and sooner or later we picked up the green light and so we just come alongside, we had a signal and

02:00 we flashed 'MAC' in Morse and that was our identification. And so we came close alongside and he said we'll spend an hour on this course and so off we went him and us side by side at our top speed which was about six and a half knots and just to get away form the Norwegian coast and then if all's well and nothing had been seen then he'd stop, we'd stop and pass the tow and change crews and then we were off again, off home. When I got aboard I told him what had happened and he made

02:30 a signal saying, "Operation completed. ETA [estimated time of arrival] at…" wherever we were going at a certain time. And we got a reply from Admiralty saying, "Well done, especially as the man concerned doesn't know what hit him." And I thought that was okay, but McIntosh said, "That's a bit oblique – something's wrong." So we got home and the dock was floating and a ship alongside the dock was sunk – a ship called

03:00 Berenfeld. She was a German ammunition ship and not only was she blown up and broken in half but a masonry wharf alongside was blown into the harbour and then the aircraft gunner was blown into the harbour, so there was no doubt about it being a success except it wasn't the right target and I was very distressed over that. It was awful and I asked to go back again and have another go. Well, they said it wasn't that easy, but thinking over it since, I think I could have

03:30 just got two charges off and shoved off on my own and got across and got back on the land because it wasn't nearly as far as Tirpitz was, they could have done it. Anyway, they thought about it and Westacott the New Zealander, I was told to give him my submarine, and he would go next time. He argued that he was a New Zealand Navy professional and his career depended on this and he had to have success,

04:00 and they believed him and so off he went and we had to put up with the same back. But I got married in the meantime and that was all right. His went all right – he got the dock because there wasn't anything else to get. I'd sunk the decoy but he did what I think is a foolish thing – submarines generally 'ditch gash' after dark – that is, dump rubbish – and you've got to make sure it's not going to float. These days you put it into a calico bag which is weighted and put it over the side and it sinks to the bottom, because if the enemy

04:30 finds rubbish floating around it's a clue that somebody is there. Well, he was off the coast of Bergen, still on tow I think, it was a bit rough and he sent one of his crew up on deck to ditch gash. Well, we didn't ditch any rubbish until we'd done the job because you saw a submarine, you eat the food, all your left with is the container well if you kept the container you could still keep it so just keep the container on the submarine until the

05:00 jobs done, no need to send anybody on deck. Well he sent one of crew on deck and it wasn't at full buoyancy and the submarine went down, and he just washed off so they lost him so that wasn't very good and I was married by this time, and I remember I was on leave and I rang the depot and spoke to a rent officer and I said, "How's Percy Westacott?" "He's all right, but not Perdy." He was one of his crew, the chap got

05:30 washed off. I thought then, "Well, if I'd sunk the dock the first time that wouldn't have happened." Life's full of things like that so you had to carry on but it was getting, the war was advancing by this time and the landing at Normandy had taken place and very soon the Germans lost all of their Atlantic ports, so there was nothing else for us to do. And Admiralty had foreseen this, and they had ordered

06:00 six war submarines designed for an operation in the Pacific and I was given command of XE4. The E was for Eusted, which was the British view of the Far East. And so we had a lot of trials to do. Every batch of new designs has got to go through first of class trials to make sure they'll do all the things they're supposed to do so we got busy doing that and that went quite well, XE4 was a

06:30 good boat, and then we loaded aboard – Bonaventure – and then February 1945, she left for the far East and that was a fairly sad moment, as I was married the previous June, and here I was with my new bride, saying goodbye to her in Glasgow which was not the most attractive of cities, it wasn't then, out to do battle with the Japanese who nobody liked. We didn't like the Germans but we didn't like the Japanese

07:00 a whole lot more. And I remember saying goodbye to Mary on the station in Glasgow, and I had to go down to the ship in Bute and we were having a bit of a final hug at the end of the platform by the carriage, and Admiral came aboard and said, "Is this the train for Inverness, Sir? Or the sub lieutenant?" and I said, "Yes Sir, this is it," so in he went and when the train shoved off Mary was in the same

07:30 compartment as he was, and she was looking very sad, so he gave her a pat and said, "Don't worry – it'll soon be over," which was nice of him. And then we steamed out across the Atlantic through Panama again and into the Pacific and went to Oahu, which is Pearl Harbour, and stopped for a few days and the crew were let ashore and the Americans opened one of their rest centres for us:

08:00 threw everybody else out because of the secrecy and we had it and it was very kind of them. And also, they had a canteen there with all kinds of goodies because everything in Britain was scarce by this time, you couldn't buy anything hardly but there they had all kinds of things – we didn't know when to stop diving. So that was good fun and then we arrived in Brisbane, and bad news, the captain went ashore, went down to Melbourne to find out what we had to do. Nothing. We don't want you.

08:30 This was the Yank attitude. They were going to fight this war, it was their war, nothing to do with the British and they were going to win it, so we could go home. Well, that didn't go down too well but we hung around and the captain was quite a good chap – Fell – he was a good business man and a good contact man and he heard some mention of cable cutting so he said, "What's this cable cutting?" so one of the senior Yanks said, "We've got to cut the submarine telegraph cables between Singapore and Tokyo and this is high priority, top secret,

09:00 we've got it done yesterday. Can you do it?" He said, "Yes, we can do that." He didn't know whether we could or not, but he was eager for business so he flew back to Brisbane, came aboard and called a conference of the commanding officers – six of us – and he said, "We've got a job." He told us how the situation was: he said, "The Yank's don't want us but there's something that they do want – they want these cables cut. I brought back with me an engineer form Cable and Wireless Ltd who owned the cables, you blokes have got to work out how to do it. I've told them we're going to do it."

09:30 So that gave us something to think about and we shoved off straight away for Whitsunday Islands, which is now a very popular tourist centre – then there was nobody there – it was vacant and on the way we had a good chap, talk to this chap from Cable and Wireless, and he had a lot of books there on cable working and he said, "Well, the normal thing," he said, "we're doing this all the time, repairing cables

but," he said, "peacetime, not in wartime.

10:00 These cables can be got near Singapore or near Saigon or near Hong Kong or near Tokyo." He said, "I would suggest Singapore," sorry, not Singapore, "Saigon and Hong Kong." There were two cables to cut because there's a sort of parallel path. And he told us how cable ships did it with a big heavy grapnel and its

10:30 about four thousand horse power to pull it, and they could pull that anywhere on the ocean no matter how deep they could pull the cable to the surface and work on it. Cutting it's easy, they've got to repair it, they've got to get both ends if its broken and then join it together again." So our job was fairly easy except that we haven't got four thousand horsepower, we've got thirty, and we can't be pulling heavy grapnel, we've only pull a light one. So he had a book on grapnels, I had a good look at that and here again my engineering experience was useful.

11:00 I realised you had to have the most efficient grapnel you could one that would dig and slice without dragging. Any drag and we'd stop and there was one called a flat fish grapnel which was about a thirty inch diamond of steel with a towing hole at one corner, like a crescent moon stuck to the middle of it so coming up each side and you drag that in a chain, on a rope so it manages it,

11:30 you could push it over the side and whichever way it lands, topside or bottom side, it would still dig in just the same. All the rest of the five captains all picked the reef anchor type, that's the type you make if you're going fishing and you want to hang onto the reef. Just a bit of tube with four bits of steel through it, you'd bend them out four ways. I thought that wasn't much good because the thing would land with two prongs digging in, so two have got to dig in, with mine the only ones got to dig in

12:00 so it could dig deeper and also mine was very strong, made of 38 plate and was very narrow, so it wouldn't drag too hard, so we made ours and they laid a cable in Sid Harbour in Whitsunday Island and we went across that and we picked it up every time. Of course something you've just laid still on the surface, that's no trouble. Then we went to Hervey Bay where there was one of Cable and Wireless Ltd cables, an old one, not used and it had

12:30 been there for umpteen years so they said we could try catching that but don't cut it. We couldn't see why we couldn't cut it cause it wasn't in use, so we went across and we found it, and we circled around and found it again and we found it every time then we cut it and that went well. We had to alter the cutters to make it bigger. I've got the cable there, I can show you – it's about that in diameter, whereas the submarine nets were that diameter – easy you could make a big end off with the cutter. But the other boats were still persevering with their reef anchors

13:00 and I showed you the picture of the chap that drowned trying to find out why it wasn't working but there wasn't any time for tears and we had to answer so off we went and they took X5 up to Pacific Bay in the Philippines, unloaded him to rendezvous with his submarine and go away and try and cut it in Hong Kong and then the ship came back to Brunei Bay, Labuan I think it is, in Borneo and the

13:30 Americans came up again and they said, "We also want two cruisers sunk. They're in Johor Strait off Singapore," and so that was agreed and I was told to go to Saigon, and a chap called Fraser and one called Smart were detailed off the cruisers in Johor Strait. We thought the cruisers were more fun than cables but it turned out the other way around. And Fyffe was the admiral

14:00 in charge of submarines in the Pacific. Now while we were operating in Britain we were pretty small deal compared with the British submarine service, but the commanding officer of the submarines did visit us once, as we were sailing for Tirpitz he came up for the day, and waved us goodbye and went back to London. When we were about to go and do this cable cutting, Fyffe came aboard with his whole staff crew, he had dozens of people, all yanks and we thought, "Crumbs, Yanks are operating all over the Pacific,

14:30 he can't spend this time on us, we're only doing small jobs." Well, apparently it wasn't the case. Anyway off we went and our job went well – no trouble at all, there were one or two minor difficulties. We were towed by a submarine called Spearhead this time – Captain Youngman, he was a reserve, a Royal Navy volunteer reserve – he was a good chap too. And he towed us over, this time the telephone did

15:00 work all the way, and we towed over toward Saigon. Locating the cable was a bit of a trick because its fairly featureless this bit of the coast and the only thing we were sure we recognised was the Cape St Jacques lighthouse. The light wouldn't be working of course because the enemy are very unsporting. They put their lights out so as not to help their enemies. So off we went and

15:30 we changed crews as at the date of tow. Youngman called on the phone and he said, "We're pretty close to the coast of French Indo-China which is now Saigon, no its Vietnam, if you want to look at the lighthouse tower you can see it, so if you, we'll stay dived but if you come to the surface don't take too long but have a look." So we surfaced and went on deck and had a look and it's quite an eerie situation: you're in the middle of the ocean,

16:00 no engine running, no motor running and you're moving along through the water, sea snakes swimming past and so on and presently up ahead a periscope would come up, take a look around and then go down again. We didn't stay long, we went down below and that night after nautical twilight he called on the phone and said, "We'll surface now, we're on the surface." So we surfaced and he said, "Any time you like now slip." So we slipped and he slipped his end and he said, "Good luck," and all that and then

we went. Couldn't see the tower now

16:30 because it was dark so we went toward the shore and there were junks everywhere, bloody things, getting in the road and we didn't want to be seen by one – we weren't frightened of them, but if they saw us they'd probably report us to the Japanese, because they were probably all on the make, so every time we saw a junk, we had to deviate which we didn't want to do because we were on dead reckoning of a given position, to a position you want to make. Anyway the wind was coming up, it was at lee-shore and it was getting quite rough and I was searching because I had binoculars and kept

17:00 getting full of spray and I couldn't see so I had to go below. I called out, "Slow ahead!" and we come down slow on the engines and opened the hatch and ducked down, dried the binoculars and put them on your neck and then open the hatch, jump up, sit in the casing, shut the hatch and then stand up. And one time I did this, and just as I sat on the casing and shut the hatch a wave broke on the submarine, and I found myself swimming in the South China Sea and the submarine going 'chug, chug, chug', so I swum like mad and just grabbed the rudder as it went past and pulled myself along keeping your legs straight out cause

17:30 the propeller was going round like that, and I didn't want to lose my legs and we had a jumping wire from the rudder pin right forward to the periscope standards, so I grabbed hold of that and pulled myself up. And of course my binoculars were wet so I had to go down below and I thought, "That was a bit lucky being washed over the side and catching your own submarine." If I hadn't it would have been all over for me. I might have swum ashore, been taken prisoner by the Japanese and beheaded and that was standard practice.

18:00 **What was the reaction from your crew?**

The crew of course knew nothing for a while, until they hadn't heard anything from me for a while, and then they made enquiries to find that I wasn't there. Now then they'd be in a bit of dilemma. It's no good looking for me cause it's dark, they probably would have come and had a look but they wouldn't have found me and so they would have probably carried on independently. I think they'd have made it, there were enough there to do it – we had an extra man that time, we had two divers;

18:30 one was Ken Briggs, an Australian, lives near Brisbane, a good chap – he's still alive. He's an excellent fellow – very tough and he did the dive all right – he cut the first cable. Anyway, I'm jumping ahead a bit, we stayed on the surface till we got fed up with these damn junks, then we stemmed the grapnel and dived and just sat on the bottom where we were. We knew where we were then, we could see the lighthouse

19:00 tower and stayed down till sunrise. It's no good coming up at dawn, because you can't see through the periscope, the periscope is very small and you had to have good daylight, so at sunrise we came to the surface, and there were still junks everywhere and we could see the lighthouse tower and with that and the soundings, we had an echo sounder, we got to position to start the first trawl and at sea we could, at shore we could see the new

19:30 (UNCLEAR) range of mountains which was a useful backup, but not a terribly good thing to focus on. We made for the rock that I mentioned – there was a rock at the other side of the cable from where we were and the chart showed a wreck of a ship on it, which should be visible, but maybe not because they showed what was visible and nobody tells them when they're not visible any more. So off we went, and we didn't catch anything and when the time had expired that we should have crossed the cable – and we should have

20:00 come to the surface – when we hit the rock. So we knew where we were and we'd already made the plan that our first trawl was in thirty feet and at thirty foot the diver can operate for an unlimited time so we thought that would be the best thing – the most convenient. Well we crossed the cable without hitting it, on the other hand we knew we were unlikely to get it because the Mekong river is like the Mississippi, it brings down tons of dirt every year and dumps it on top of the cable, so the cable would be buried we thought and the

20:30 Cable and Wireless man said, "Yeah that's right it will be. You're only hope is to take the next trawl further out to sea where its deeper," and he said at a hundred feet you should get it but of course our divers can't dive at a hundred feet – they wouldn't last two minutes. So we went out to ten feet more depth – at forty feet and did another trawl – nothing. We came to periscope depth to convene on the lighthouse tower and we'd crossed the cable and we turned around

21:00 and did a third run, this time in fifty feet and I said, "Well, if we can get it at this depth, you divers will have to be very careful. We've got twelve minutes – that's your endurance and if you're not back in twelve minutes we'll surface and let you in. Now we don't want to do that because the enemy is all around so you jolly well be back cable or no cable in twelve minutes," and they were both very intelligent people, but sometimes people get carried away – you know, they get halfway through the job and time's up and they carry on, and that wouldn't do.

21:30 You could leave the job half done, come back, have a rest and then go out and then do it and we said they had to bring a bit back because no-one would believe us if we said we cut the cable unless we brought a bit of cable back to show them. So off we went and about the time we expected to cross the cable the submarine stopped. So we went full ahead on the motor and she held for a while then she

broke free so we did a circle and we went round again and slowed down and were stopped again so we thought well, that could be the cable – better have a look.

22:00 So Briggs got out and he came back in about five minutes and he said, “No, it’s a rock, not a cable,” so he stayed in his diving suit and we went one and a few minutes later was stopped again and we went full ahead and this time it didn’t let go – it hung on cause we thought, “Good thing if we got the cable to pull it out of the mud – get it up on the surface again so the diver can see what he’s doing,” so out went Ken Briggs again and this time we heard him take the cutter so we thought, “This is it,” and you could hear the

22:30 cutter working, because it works on high pressure water, so we carry air cylinders of 3000 pound per square inch, but the cutter doesn’t work on air it works on water so the air goes into a cylinder full of water and the water goes to the cutter and you can hear when he pulls the trigger you can hear the water sort of rushing through the chokes in the cylinder because you’ve got to put a barrier to stop the water going too fast or else the cutter goes slam and breaks itself.

23:00 So we heard Ken working away, and presently we’ve seen through the periscope, he’s came up and opened the hatch and he’s got the cable in his hand: so we thought, “That’s good – the job’s done,” that was his job so the second cable – his being the one to Singapore – the second one went to Hong Kong and we thought “Well, we’ll carry on the same line of sounding – still fifty feet and it’s Adam Burgess’s turn next time.” So we went along and we brought up on something and we went ahead again and held on so out

23:30 went Adam Burgess, and we heard the cutter working, and then he came back with the cutter in one hand and no cable in the other, so he came down the hatch and pumped down and he said, “It’s a very old cable – its coming apart and I couldn’t get all the strands, because the cable’s got copper in the middle and then a ring of steel around the outside, and it’s really very strong.” So he said, “Time was running out so I thought I’d

24:00 come back for a rest and then go out again.” So that was okay – so we sat him in the wet and dry compartment, talking away, he said there’s a whelk on the cable, a huge whelk is one of these spiral shells about this big and this is Adam – he’s always interested in nature and what’s going on around him. The fact that he’s fifty feet down in enemy waters and about to lose his life didn’t overshadow the matter that there was this huge whelk there. He’d liked to have brought the whelk home I think.

24:30 Anyway, when he’d had half an hours rest he went out with the second cutter – we carried two – and this time he came back with a bunch of wires in his hand so that was it. So the job was done. We’d trawled two cables and we’d cut two cables, and so we got him out of his suit and by this time it was afternoon and being in the South China Sea, it was a bit warm and stuffy in the sub and we had tried several times in Scotland

25:00 with this six foot pipe, and we raised that, and start the engine and the periscope dips. Now this is not advised – it’s bad submarine practice. It wasn’t until the Germans invented the snorkel that it became respectable, but while the British were using it – oh no, you don’t do that, its not submarine practice. Admiralty was very concerned with it, but we’d done and we thought, “Well, we’d like a bit of fresh air,” so we shoved up the snorkel and off we went running off shore

25:30 out to deeper water. One tricky thing about the snorkel is you have to keep a very accurate periscope depth, because if you go too deep, the snorkel comes underwater and down comes the ocean and the fellow sitting forward says, “Shut the valve.” Well that’s all right – it stops the ocean coming in, but the engines still running using up the air, and the ears go pop and you say to the person, “Get her up! Get her up! We won’t be able to breathe soon!” So we had to get her up, and as soon as the snorkel broke the surface you opened the valve: and of course by this time the pressure in the submarine has lowered

26:00 and down comes a gale of air, and the whole submarine fills with mist and it evaporates as soon as it gets in, but after a while the engine burns it up too, and off you go, and after a while you think the air’s fresh enough and your ears, after a few false alarms when the helmsman thinks we’re going deep, so he shuts the valve anyway and then he opens it again and your ears are going pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! And this is a bit nauseating, and then finally we got far enough out and

26:30 had nice fresh air, so we stopped the engine and sat on the bottom, and had a bit of a rest and it was a few hours of daylight to go and then after nautical twilight, we came to the surface and made our rendezvous which wasn’t any trouble. There was a second mission – if we saw any ships entering the river – the Saigon River – we could attack them, but Spearhead had kept a watch all day, and he said they’d been no shipping in there, so he said, “Let’s go home.”

27:00 I said, “It suits me,” so off we went. Now when we got back, because all along we were told that the reason for wanting these cables cut was that the reoccupation of Singapore was to take place, and while the cables were there, the Japs in Singapore could talk to their friends in Tokyo by cable and that couldn’t be intercepted – it can be now but not then – so they wanted it cut to make them send everything by radio and so that’s what we were told, so

27:30 we went back and Fraser came back from Johor Strait, and Smart had got one cruiser but not the other, so they said, “Right Fraser and Shean, you go back and get the second cruiser.” Well, that wouldn’t be such a picnic because they’d just been in and blown up one ship, and a month later we were going to go back to blow up the other one. Now surprise is a big safety and there was no surprise. So we were okay

– we were going to go back again, but at this time a depression sets in until you've had a holiday

28:00 or something, so we had to put up with depression and we got ready to go. We were about to go, in fact, a couple of days before, a notice came on the board, see we'd cut the cables on the 31st of July, 6th [August] an atomic bomb had dropped, and on the 9th, another one had dropped, and we thought, "Crumbs. I hope they're going to give in." We hadn't heard of atomic bombs, but we imagined what they'd be because we'd studied it in nuclear physics at university. Anyway, on the 14th,

28:30 the rumour went around that the Japanese had surrendered, so the submarine – Spearhead running alongside – fired up all the star-shells they had and the senior officer in Borneo sent us a signal saying "Cease pyrotechnic display – the war is not over yet," well the next day it was over so that was fine, and only a few years ago, Adam Burgess had a friend who was researching the USA and he turned up some documents that showed that the cable cutting was really required, because the bomb was ready

29:00 and the American president had been petitioned by all the scientists on the Manhattan Project not to use the bomb, because they thought it would destroy civilisation eventually so he had to make a decision. If the Japanese were going to surrender – and he'd sent them the surrender terms – he wouldn't use the bomb, but if they weren't then he'd use the bomb. Well, we know the answer, they used it and the war was over and if it hadn't been for that, I think I'd be sitting at the bottom of the Johor Strait

29:30 with my crew and a bloody cruiser. These two cruisers had already been torpedoed once, but the Yanks wanted to make sure.

What was it like working with the American Navy compared to the British navy?

It was okay. You had to adjust – we were always keen on radio silence – we never said anything. Can you imagine the Yanks not saying anything? They were jabbering the whole time on the radio, but mind, the war was nearly won by then anyway, and the Japanese didn't have much of a navy.

30:00 All the same we thought that was not too good. When we got to Borneo, they came aboard our ship for a meal occasionally. Now our provider was pretty good; we had good meat and good vegetables and so on – the only thing they liked was the horseradish sauce. That was the Yanks – they liked these frills but they were okay. We got on fine with them. We had quite a few, we went aboard one of their ships in the Clyde, and they were about to pay off and hand over to the Royal Navy, and they had all the surplus stores

30:30 so they said, "Would you like these?" and we said, "Oh, do we ever!" So we had blankets, and tinned fruit, and butter, and all kinds of things that in Britain was rationed so no, they were very kind. Mind, they didn't want it, they were handing the ship over and the Royal Navy didn't want it, so it was probably a barney between the stores officers. So we got on quite well with them. We didn't like their attitude: that they were going to finish the war and didn't want the Allies to have anything to do with it, because also we heard on the radio on the

31:00 way across the Pacific that the British fleet had been allocated to the American command to give them fighting experience well, damn it we'd been fighting the war for about five years, and they'd only been in it a dogwatch. But never mind, they certainly made a difference.

You said that you'd studied some nuclear physics when you were at University. Had you ever contemplated a nuclear bomb being created?

Contemplated..?

31:30 **A nuclear bomb. Or nuclear physics being used…?**

When I was in university? No I wasn't really a nuclear physicist. I just knew that it would be possible to split the atom or whatever. But the Yanks were working on it for a long time after that, and they solved the Manhattan Project: had the bomb ready in 1945 and I left university in 1940. Now that's five years of intense research. Now, what would an undergraduate in engineering have to contribute? No we just knew it was possible. But we hadn't

32:00 really thought it was happening. We thought occasionally that maybe – we thought that Norway were making heavy water, which is one of the research tools, but we didn't know much about water molecule. But some oxygen molecules are heavier than others, a very small percentage, and most oxygen molecules exist in water combined with hydrogen and the water in your battery in your motorcar will

32:30 eventually have a high proportion of heavy water, heavy water molecules, and of course for some time they were collecting batteries to take off the water, but to make a moderator for a nuclear device whether it's a bomb or a boiler or anything else, you've got to get a moderator that doesn't destroy the uranium. And heavy water was a

33:00 good moderator, and the first thing you require in research is uranium and then heavy water, and the way it's made is either by centrifuge, which is a thing that goes round – it's got to be a special machine that goes round very fast and it's pretty expensive – or electrolyse the water – just put electric current into the water – DC [direct current] – and the light molecules come up first, because what bubbles out of your car battery

33:30 is hydrogen on one plate, and oxygen on another, and you catch the oxygen. And you find that in an old battery – most of it is heavy oxygen and it makes heavy water. And we knew all this was going on, but we didn't really know that the atomic bomb was about to be delivered. And it was very lucky, because the cruiser that delivered the atomic bomb was later sunk by a Japanese submarine. If she'd been sunk before it was delivered, then

34:00 the bomb wouldn't have gone off on the 6th of May [actually August], a few days later. You know it took a lot of making, and I think if they'd wasted the first two, it'd take a long time to make another two.

I think the Japanese submarine would have got a surprise. What were your views of atomic bombs and the atomic explosion?

My view is that is saved my life. Now that's a fairly convincing argument in favour. But I thought a lot about it since and I've listened to a lot of debate, and

34:30 finishing the war early was definitely an economy for the Allies and for Japan. While they killed 100,000 people or something at Hiroshima and a lot more at Nagasaki, if the Japanese hadn't have surrendered then we'd have had to invade Japan: it would have been a blood bath. It would have been shocking. There would have been millions of Japanese killed and probably a million Yanks and British and Australians and others,

35:00 so I do support it. What to do about it now is another thing – it strikes me as something quaint that the Yanks are telling North Korea not to make an atomic bomb and they have got an arsenal: the lot of them. I only have to think about my war – I wasn't thinking about posterity, because there might not have been one for me. No we were absolutely in favour. I was – that was the 15th of August – the

35:30 official Japanese surrender, I'm not sure when I got home but we hotfooted it for Sydney, and the ship was no longer required. Dumped your submarines, they all put in Woolloomooloo Wharf, and cut up for scrap – they were only six months old or a bit more than that, and the captain said to me, "I've got to go to Melbourne tomorrow. You come with me, I've got to get rid of all my officers and turn the ship over to become a cargo ship." So I went to Melbourne

36:00 with the captain, and saw the navy people there, and I have a letter from university which I'd written to them saying, "The war looks like finishing soon, what are my chances of being re-admitted?" and they wrote back and said, "Your chances are quite good. Especially if you can get back before the beginning of term." Well this was already August, and the third term was pretty close, so we got back to Melbourne and showed them my letter, and the captain put in a word for me and they said, "Well, we'll work on it and give you two weeks leave,

36:30 and by the end of two weeks, you should know if you're in the navy or if you're a student." So I flew home, that was a Friday, flew home in a Dakota, the Royal Australian Air force flew us home and I wasn't the only one from our ship – there were a lot of other people going home too. We just sat along bag seats along each side of the aircraft and we landed at Cook and the crew got off, and brought a big urn of coffee aboard for us and I thought that was really nice of them for our way home and got to –

37:00 I was able to ring my family and say I was coming – got to Perth Airport, and the one fellow who failed our very first exams in Rushcutter was on duty at Perth Airport as flight controller, and he sent me a cable, a signal on halfway across the Nullarbor, and one of the crew came back and said, "Is there a Shean here?" and I said, "Yes." "Message for you." It was a welcome home from this chap, and when we landed, he was there with the aircraft, because they just got out

37:30 on the tarmac in those days and walked ashore and of course all my family and my sister in her WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Navy Service]uniform and so on and that was Friday. Monday I went to university to see how I stood, and Blagy, the dean at the faculty site said, "There's a lecture on structures going on now. Join it." And he said, "The course has changed. When you left, you'd done three of five years. Now it's a four year course, but they're all more concentrated

38:00 so we're not too sure whether you're in third year or fourth year, but go down and see how you get on." So I went down and sat in on this lecture and I was going to do electrical, so the head of the electrical department sent for me, and he said, "You're back at university now?" and I said, "I'm not sure, till I hear from the navy, but I might be." He said, "Right, I'm writing a book for a laboratory manual. Can you help me do that in the fourth term?" I said, "Yes. All right."

38:30 I thought, "He's my boss now." So I got stuck into that and within the two weeks I got my discharge, so I was navy on Friday, student Monday – there was no break, and that was good. I gave a talk to a school a few weeks ago, a primary school and each kid had a question and one kid, he rather stumped me, he said, "Did I ever watch a close friend dying?" I said, "No, I never did." I didn't say in a submarine you all

39:00 live, or you all die, and I didn't watch anybody dying except these merchant men we tried to rescue. But what was the other thing I was going to say?

You were at school and these kids all had a question?

Yes. School kids. I forget what it was now but they all had very good questions. As a matter of fact, the teacher who asked me to talk to them, I'd said to her, "A bit tricky knowing what to talk to primary school children about

39:30 when for the last six years you've been trying to kill people." You don't want to go on about that in a primary school class. So I said, "It helps to get questions as you go along cause you know what the children are wondering." So she told the kids all to have a question, and so I was only about five minutes into my talk, when one kid put up his hand and had a question so from then on it was hands, hands, hands, hands. I spent the rest of the session answering questions but it was good.

40:00 They were all good questions. I still can't remember the one I was going to use as an example.

Max, how did you spend the weekend with your family when you first returned?

I can't remember now. It's a long time ago you know: 1945. They had a weekender down at Safety Bay and we probably went down there for the weekend, because they had a little boat down there and I used to go in the boat. And we went down there several times,

40:30 that's right, I went down there probably for that weekend we came back and then university vacation, so I had a vacation from drawing plans for my professor, so Mary and I went down there for a sort of honeymoon. But the second day we were there, a jeep came down from Stirling to say that the Duke of York was in, and Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser wants to see you and your wife so we took off

41:00 and went back and we had dinner aboard the Duke of York and that was good. And then we went down and finished our honeymoon, but after that – ten days I was into study and that was pretty intense. I was working on this book – getting it ready for publication in the new year – and then starting what turned out to be my final year in 1946, and I was working very hard because I had no qualification, no money, a wife, no job and so

41:30 I had to qualify. That's right! The question was from one of the kids – "Were you delighted whether the war finished?" and I said, "Well, not really because the situation for me totally changed. I was glad the fighting was over, but now I was unemployed, and I had to get back to university and I had a wife coming out from England, so I had a fresh lot of worries. All the same it was a jolly good thing."

Tape 6

00:32 **We were just talking about when America entered the war can you tell us what happened?**

Yes – I can. It was soon after we reckoned we sunk U208, and we were approaching Gibraltar and we got the news that America were in the war, and of course that we'd lost our two ships up in Bakers Strait, as far as our convoys were concerned, we carried on convoy to

01:00 Gibraltar and back, and gradually the U-Boats found that it was easier to sink American ships by plying the east coast of America, than to sink the ships that we were escorting on the east side of the Atlantic, so they left us alone and went over to attack these ships on the American coast, and while I don't wish the Americans any harm, it was a great relief for us to be able to go up and down without losing any ships.

01:30 I think the Germans were very quick to catch on, and I think the Americans were very tardy, because the ships were still sailing with their navigation lights on, and the cities had their lights, and so the U-Boat had targets ready made and illuminated, and they didn't have a convoy system working and they didn't do all that many anti-submarine ships, because they take a while to build, but that was a happy period for us taking a very limited view, but a very happy time for the Germans.

02:00 But the Americans might have been slow at the start but they weren't slow at the finish – they built up their anti-submarine techniques and facilities enormously, and when I think about the Battle of the Atlantic, I was very proud even to have taken a very small part in it. I used to ask myself in Bluebell – where are we getting? We don't seem to be doing anything better, not advancing – are we ever going to win this

02:30 war or aren't we? And at the time it looked as though we weren't, but I realise now I was being pessimistic and this applies a good deal through life: when things are tough you might think you're not winning, but don't give up because you're probably achieving more than you think. And so I listed all the factors that went into helping to win the Battle of the Atlantic, and there are about twenty odd of them and some are highly technical like development of radar,

03:00 and the cracking of the Enigma, and the developing of the ultra, which is a philosophy of communicating and ourselves: we were learning I came in as a university student, and I went out as a fairly experienced lieutenant and all these things add up, but I think air cover is one of the principal things. We had quite a bit of air cover from coastal command

03:30 like in the British air force, there's was fighting command and bomber command and coastal command looked after the convoys. And they had some remarkable aircraft, including the Catalinas, some of which are based here, and they had very long range, and of long duration, and when we were plugging away from Gibraltar back towards Liverpool, as soon as you saw a Catalina, we thought, "Right, we're nearly home." Because they may not have been great U-Boat killers, but the big advantage is that for

these wolf packs to work,

04:00 the U-Boats, one had to contact the convoy and then radio signals to get his mates alongside him and build up a big flock of U-Boats, and by day they had to keep out of sight, so they were way out on the perimeter of the convoy and they had plenty of speed, so they could easily get up ahead at night to attack, but if a Catalina came around, they weren't to know they weren't going to be attacked, so they'd dive. From 17 knots they'd go down to about 4 knots and the convoy was doing 7.

04:30 So as long as the Catalina kept going around and kept the U-Boats down, they'd lose the convoy and that was a very big step forward. And then of course, the air force developed this lay light, and I think rockets to fire at submarines and a special radar which they used in the Bay of Biscay, and when submarines were coming from – say – ports on the coast of France out toward the mid-Atlantic, the aircraft would be flying around, they'd pick up a U-Boat

05:00 on a ten centimetre radar, and then dive to attack and at the last moment switch on the floodlight and there'd go the rockets. And they were knocking U-Boats off one after another like this. And so Donitz started to sail the U-Boats in convoy with each other, so they could put up a bit of fire power to knock the aircraft down, but that wasn't really a winner – probably saved a few U-Boats – didn't save them all. But there are all kinds of things and as convoy after convoy was attacked and the slower ships got picked off,

05:30 then these liberty ships came on into service and they were bigger and faster. They were – originally the British idea was to send a convoy on an escape course, because if they found a lot of U-Boats to starboard they built a course to port to try to evade the U-Boats. Later on in the war, when the convoys got bigger and the ships got faster they said, "To hell with the U-Boats – we'll go great circle," which is the shortest distance,

06:00 full speed with a massive escort and just power our way through, and bash our way through, and that worked too. But on the other hand, the U-Boats at the end of the war were coming out in better designs and faster and so on, and if the war had gone on, I think it might have gone the other way a bit. But fortunately for us the U-Boats sort of collapsed at the end, and the end of the war came very quickly and there was no atomic bomb there – it was just bedlam, not only

06:30 at sea but also in the air.

How did other members of the navy view submariners? What was their reaction to you – other navy men?

I think they tolerated us. We all smelt of diesel fuel, and they're a hard lot to get on with – there's some larrikins among them. Oh yes, we were tolerated with some kindness. I don't think

07:00 I had very much to do with service officers after I joined the submarines. It's a bit of a closed club in a way, submarines are happy enough among themselves and they do smell – they smell of diesel fuel. We had very bad ventilation you know, week after week, but well we still get girlfriends, I've still got mine. She could stand the smell. I don't think it's any….there were conflicts in areas but I don't think

07:30 there was anything serious. Also there was inter-service conflict here and there, but I reckon any service member is my friend. We had to be wary of the air force, they would use us for bombing practice because they didn't always recognise a submarine as being friend or foe and there are stories of submariners saying, "ETA back at base a certain time and date – Royal Air Force permitting,"

08:00 cause they did bomb us now and then.

How do you communicate when you're underwater to other submarines?

There's an underwater signal called a phosindin, which makes a dickens of a noise. You wouldn't use it if you thought the enemy was around. We communicated without telephone breakdown with underwater signals – that's a little bomb that goes off and you could send one, two or three of those. One means, "Are you okay?" and I think three means: "Surface forthwith."

08:30 It's fairly basic but modern submarines can communicate. They've got very clever things with radio – they can stick an antenna up and then also they compress signals. They compose a signal – put it into a machine and it squashes it down to about a micro-second and put the thing up and then 'blip' and it's gone. That's to stop the enemy reading it. Now I don't know whether the enemy does read it, but that's just the way it's going. Now my technique is all superseded now.

09:00 The only thing is that occasionally I get a request from Stirling to go down there and talk to some submariner officers under training, and I said to the captain down there last time: "What can I possibly tell these people that's of any use to them?" I said, "My technique is 1945 vintage and these are present day. They're so far ahead," and he said, "It's not the technique – it's the attitude." He said,

09:30 "You survivors have got a fairly good attitude to what's its all about and what you're supposed to be doing, and that's what we want to inculcate into these people, that they're to do their very best all the time," and I suppose there's something in that. The people I served among were fairly dedicated, but I believe the U-Boat people were starting to flag towards the end of the war – there were a few desertions, not many, considering

10:00 the terrible hiding they were getting, so attitude is pretty important, and that's not modern technique, that's been going on ever since men evolved I think.

How did you think submariners today from submariners of your time?

I think they're far more clever today. The techniques are advanced so much that I think a submariner's course in my day was a lot shorter than it is now. They've got more things to do, more

10:30 gadgets to work with and so on. I've got no doubt that they are a very high standard – you've got to support your own, don't you? And what surprised me, is that having joined these very small submarines, that we were accepted at all by the main submarine fleets – they do – they count us as equal to themselves which is very kind of them really. And even the modern submariners still pay us some respects and that's a compliment.

11:00 **In the middle of a conflict how important is it to be quiet?**

If you're attacking a target in a harbour in particular, or in a fairly quite ocean you have to be very careful not to make noises. Because the submarine listening devices are so clever that they hear a noise and analyse it and they can tell you a lot about it. In fact ,you see plenty of this on television, like Hunt for Red October and so on, you can

11:30 always hear what the enemy are saying to each other. I don't really think it's that clever, but it is a lot more advanced now than it was in our day. We had no listening devices. When we were approaching the target in Bergen in Norway, we could hear, we could see a German E-boat – that's like an anti-submarine vessel – and very soon we could hear his sonar going – pinging you could hear it on the hull. You shouldn't

12:00 be able to, because its supposed to be super-sonic, above the hearing range, but I must have had good hearing in those days, or maybe he had chains coming through the water or something, but we could hear them. Of course, you could hear propellers running and I didn't say but that's one of the troubles with junks – they haven't got any propellers – so you can't hear them and you might be thinking you're coming to periscope depth and you come up and get the fright of your life, because there's a junk just there sailing for you, and of course if they ran into your periscope you're almost out of the game because you're then blind. There are a lot of changes, I don't really know a lot about

12:30 present day submarines. I go down to a party every now and then and drink too much beer and don't learn anything except that the same old jokes are still going around.

Do you get cabin fever when you're in a submarine for a long period of time?

You mean claustrophobia? Yes – if you're subject to it you do, but I wasn't very subject to it – I think you can be if you let yourself be, but you try to control your emotions.

13:00 Another thing is that in corvettes or submarines, some people say, "I could never do that – I couldn't stand that," but in most of life you're in search of comfort, but in wartime you're in search of survival – you don't mind putting up with a bit of discomfort if you live, because if you live you can always get comfortable later. So I think it's a matter of changing your goals. And now I sail my yacht, which makes me far more seasick

13:30 than every other submarine added together ever did, but I don't know why I do it. It's something that sort of gets into you I suppose, you must do it so there you've given away comfort. You like to, especially going to Wynnewood, you like to get there and you don't mind getting a bit cold and a bit seasick and a bit shivery as long as you get there.

How difficult was seasickness for submariners?

It's very difficult. In a surface ship you can go and hang over the lee-rail but in a

14:00 submarine, you can't hang outside because everything's inside and in a small submarines there was a bilge – that's a place where there's just the pressure hull – nothing built over it, there's tanks everywhere else. As you came out of the wet and dry compartment coming out of the control room there was a shirt section of the bilge. Any water in the submarine would drain down to there and you could pump it overboard. And my action station, or diving station, was at the chart table which was near there.

14:30 For some exercises we had a radio with a handset – well the handset cord was too short for me to reach the bilge and vomit in the bilge and talk to my senior officer at the same time so I had to get a long cord put on. But that's fairly gross isn't it? But you put up with it because you still survive.

During the time that you're on the submarine and you know that you're going to be away for quite some time what do you eat?

15:00 That's a pretty popular question, and it's very hard to answer, because I can't think now how we did it. Pork and beans is the favourite. In fact, we had a bit of a joke with the…John Britnell was our passage commanding officer. He was also stores officer for the submarine, and before any operation or exercise he had to store up. Now, you get Mr Heinz Beans, and they've got a lot of paper labels on, well by the

time they get into a submarine for a

15:30 few days at 100% humidity – all the labels fall off so you grab a tin and you think, “What is this? Is it fruit salad or beans?” and so John Britnell used to go through with a roll of adhesive tape and he’d stick it on the end of the tin and anything with – you’ve heard of Ginger Coles – he liked baked beans – “Ginger’s favourite,” was baked beans. And we had bread. They baked special bread for us in the depot ship which was supposed

16:00 to not go mouldy as quickly as ordinary bread but it still went mouldy, and we’d sort of peel the bread and eat what was in the middle. You don’t eat an awful lot, but we weren’t often at sea for a long time. The people at tow were, you’d really have to ask them. Poor old John Britnell, he’s gone upstairs – you can’t ask him any more. But chocolates we carried, and biscuits. Tinned fruit and fruit juice – they were very popular.

16:30 But you’re not really big eaters – I’m sure you lose a lot of weight in a submarine. So perhaps we should advertise them for the purpose.

Where do you sleep – can you describe the sleeping situation?

Yes – very quickly I can describe that. In the control room, when you first go into a submarine you might say, “Where do the people live?” because its all equipment; pipes and valves and motors and grey boxes full of electronics and things,

17:00 there was one bunk in these submarines and that was on port side just – I usually come in through the front door down the hatch, and through the W&D and then there’s a short chart table about this big on the port side, and then the bunk. And the head was fairly clear, it was under the chart table as long as you didn’t sit up in a hurry, cause you’d hit the chart table with your forehead. But where you feet went were the start of the pumps and pipes and there are lots of pumps and pipes in a submarine, so you had to tread your feet among them.

17:30 The favoured description for this was a ‘snakes’ wedding’ with all these pipes going in and out like. So that was where the senior officer slept – I slept there. On top of the batteries forward, there are boards and while the atmosphere is not very good because when you’re charging you get acid fumes and hydrogen and oxygen coming up. Although they are ventilated, and the ventilation goes through a catalyst that burns the hydrogen and oxygen quietly, not explosively. Any crew with spare time could

18:00 stretch out on top of the batteries and sleep. That’s not bad as long as it’s fairly – because they’re flat boards and the submarines rolling – you’d roll onto the batteries one side or the other but you can sleep there. We did get a bit of sleep when we could. In fact, when we went into Bergen, we were a long time awake, because the day before you slip you were awake most of the time, and by the time you slip you’re awake all the time and we were given Benzedrine tablets and

18:30 advised to take them if we needed to, just before making the attack. And they’re supposed to keep you drowsy for quite a few hours, well I took a Benzedrine tablet, I think about 9 o’clock in the morning as we were entering the last approach to Bergen, which was a very bust channel through a mine field and you’ve got to stick to the channel like every other ship, so you’re in among a lot of other ships and they can see where they’re going and we can’t – we had to navigate on their propeller noise. We went in and did the attack and then came out and

19:00 as soon as we were outside this minefield again, we drew lots to see who was going to get an hour’s sleep and lucky player, I drew first sleep. So I turned in and I slept straight away and when I got back to the depot ship I told the doctor this and he said, “You shouldn’t have been able to after taking that Benzedrine tablet,” but I did, I had about forty-five minutes sleep and it was the best sleep of my life – it was wonderful and, in fact, the first lieutenant woke me up and he was on watch and he said, “We should be seeing a certain buoy marking the channel

19:30 and I can’t see it,” so I got up, took a look in the periscope and there it was there. I don’t know what the secret was – maybe by having some sleep I was able to see better. So that was another happy moment. A good sleep and a good awakening.

How dangerous are mines for submarines?

They’re lethal. If we hit in a submarine it would be the end. The best a submarine could hope for was to sit on the bottom if it wasn’t too deep, because a mine is a very

20:00 destructive weapon. I think there were more ships sunk by mines than any other weapon in World War II, I think. The idea of that was the perhaps we could go over them, perhaps we could go under them. Mostly we knew where the swept channels were – especially in Norway. Norwegian intelligence is very good and there’s a lot of fishermen that used to tow with us in Norway and Scotland quite a bit, and they’d bring us the latest information. In fact, our briefing for attacking in Bergen was excellent.

20:30 The fishermen were able to tell us where the minefields were, where the swept channels were and if we had to go ashore, who to go and see. But don’t write their names down and don’t ever tell anybody their names, so I don’t know who they are now. We knew then. See, there was quite a population of friends to us. Not the case if you were attacking in Germany, but we never did and not the case if you were attacking a Japanese port, so

21:00 it wasn't all bad. There were a few comforting thoughts.

What sort of information was filtering through to you guys about German POWs [Prisoners of War] and Japanese POWs?

We knew a lot about German POWs, because people escaped. Gradually, we got a feeling for the Japanese POW camps. It wasn't as good a communication as with Germans, but we knew

21:30 that things weren't well. We know jolly well if we got ashore we would have lost our heads straight away – no arguing the point. So we didn't go ashore and tried to stay afloat. We did know, certainly by the end of the war that POWs were very badly treated. It was part of the incentive for maximum effort. We thought, "Well, we won't grumble about being in a wet, cold submarine – what about the POWs?"

22:00 **Is there any particular situation that motivated you to keep on pushing forwards to win the war?**

Just that I was in the navy, and that's what I joined for so we did it. I never – the only time I had a worry was when the Japanese came in, we worried about Australia. See we'd volunteered to fight where the war was in Europe and suddenly it was out near Australia and we wanted to go home so we were told to stay put and do as you're told.

22:30 From Australia and Britain, so we thought, "Okay. We'll do that."

What was your reaction when you heard about the invasion of Singapore?

Well, we were very worried of course when the Japanese came in, because we weren't expecting that. We weren't as well up with the politics as the intelligence people were, and it was dreadful. Especially when soon after that we lost our two big ships, Repulse

23:00 and Renown. That was shocking, we were all very worried and disheartened about that. We had to agree the thing to do was to carry on with the job in hand, and we knew that the decision was to beat the Germans first and then the Japanese, so of course when we set sail for the Pacific, we thought, "Now, the reals war's on," and we were told, "You're not wanted." Anyway, we were wanted and we made our mark.

23:30 **Was there anything that you would do on a submarine to lighten the atmosphere, like humour?**

Well, I'm not too sure that I'm too good at that sort of thing but things were being done. You've heard of the Daily Mirror I suppose? The British newspaper? They published a series of so-called newspapers called Good Morning, and these were made up in month batches because the length of a patrol in the Atlantic

24:00 was about a month, so a submarine would go on patrol with a bunch of Good Mornings and so on the first day at sea, number one would be issued. Now of course there was no up to the minute news, but it contained topical things like interviews with submariner's families and the current comic strips – there were quite a few famous comic strips – the one about Jane, do you know the one about Jane? Well, she was a very attractive English young lady

24:30 who was always getting into compromising situations. She never did anything wrong – anything that her grandmother would be ashamed of – but she got pretty close to it at times, and funnily Jane, she came like – newspaper – now first thing I read in the morning are the comic strips, and they're not all that funny. But there was one lot called Jake and Jake was an explorer and his ambition in life was to

25:00 discover a pre-historic monster and be made a fellow of the archaeological society, or something like that. Well, another thing we used to do, when we were approaching the target, we operational crew had nothing to do except wait in the big submarine in absolute comfort and we used to play – have you ever played 'Hang the man'? Yeah well, we played 'Hang the man' – and it got to the stage where you couldn't hang anyone because we got so good at it,

25:30 until one day the skipper of out boat, called Terry Martin – a rather mean chap, I didn't like him very much – was playing Joe Brookes, who was a lovely fellow, and Joe hung him on 'Zeke FAS' and the captain didn't get that one. Then there was a long fight for the rest of the patrol as to whether that was a legitimate word. But yeah, there are things that go on like playing games and

26:00 so on. In surface ships, ludo was a favourite game and so was housie housie.

What's that?

There's another word for it isn't there? Housie housie – ummm – what was the other word? – the modern word for it? Well, you get a card and they start calling numbers, and you put a marker on every number on your card, and when you get a line you call out, "Line!" and when you get a whole

26:30 house you call out, "House!" and if you're legitimate you got it. There's another name for it, a better name, more popular…

Bingo?

Bingo – that's it. Bingo. You've got it. Yeah that's it, we played that. But there might have been other entertainment, like television is available now – probably for videos – I doubt whether they get a live signal. I know

27:00 these modern submarines have got so many masts with different things, that they've got almost everything coming down from the outside world. But yeah, they are getting better, the combination is now better too: each member of the crew's got a locker – not a very big one – and everybody's got a bunk. There was a lot of hot-bunking in British submarines in the war. Like we didn't have bunks enough for all the crew – only the number that are off watch, so if you were going on watch, you'd get out of the bunk and the man you were relieving

27:30 would come down, hence 'hot-bunk' – you got into a hot bunk. When we were being transported – being towed, the operational crew in the big submarine, I slung a hammock and the only place of course are the passage ways, and the crew were always going from forward to aft and back again and they all bump under the hammock as they go. So it wasn't a very good sleep and the other thing is that, particularly in the Arctic, you turn in, perhaps you'd been on watch during the dark, you come down to

28:00 the periscope standard – it is freezing. It's so cold you almost cry until you get to sleep, because you're fingers are frozen, and as they thaw out they are very, very painful. Anyway, I'd get into my bunk and the engines would be running, and I was always in the passage between the control room and the engine room and all the air was rushing past out of the engines and then sometimes before dawn, she'd dive and of course the engines would stop and the rush of air would stop and

28:30 I still had about four or five blankets on and I woke up absolutely boiling with perspiration so these were the slight disadvantages, but still I liked it and of course the day changes, you generally have dinner when you surface, and the cook gets to work and as soon as a meal is ready because you've got plenty of ventilation then, you have your main meal of the day, and it might be about midnight by that time. And so you're

29:00 already out of shore schedule anyway, and I think you have breakfast when you dive – anyway, you get used to it. It was okay – I rather liked it. Especially the S-class submarines, I thought they were mighty, they were very big and we were well treated by the submariners, they regarded us as real submariners.

You mentioned that you had a cartoonist onboard?

Joe Brookes is the cartoonist. I've got his book of cartoons here – I don't know whether you'd

29:30 like to see those.

Maybe later. What kinds of cartoons did he draw?

His were all topical. He'd – if anybody did something stupid during the day he'd draw a cartoon and put it on the board room noticeboard and these became a very useful tool in teaching us to do the right thing, because nobody wants to be laughed at. And the air force had something similar – they had a training manual called TM –

30:00 which means training manual – and they invented a character called Pilot Officer Prune. Pilot Officer Prune made every mistake there was to be made, and so he was the person always depicted as making that mistake, so Joe Brookes would take his lead from Pilot Officer Prune and I souvenired one of these TMs because we used to get them, although they were meant for the air force but they applied in principal to

30:30 us. And when they started the museum out at Boor Creek, I gave them my copy for the library, but they always had a theme and the theme for this one was, "Low flying – don't do it." Don't do it just for fun, hedgehop, and frighten all the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and everything round the place, and so they made this cartoon. It was a medieval scene of the Duke or something in his castle with his footman or something coming up to him saying, "Sire,

31:00 there is a damsel without," and the Sire says, "Without what?" "Without food and without raiment." "Well give the poor girl something to eat and show her in." So the next photo is, "Without what?" said Prune, and then Prune's been hedgehopping out of the village and left his tail plane sticking on the church spire and he's got no tail on his aircraft. So that was a serious thing about don't hedgehop. So that was a very good thing.

31:30 Yeah, that was Joe's cartoons, and they're really very good, but they are all so topical that you've really got to explain to a non-submariner the point that he's getting at and then read the cartoon.

When you found out the Bluebell was hit and sunk, where were you and how did you find out?

Middle East bound.

32:00 In fact, I thought we were on our way, but I came across recently that she was sunk just before we left the Clyde. So we got the news fairly promptly. Because I'd been out of Bluebell since 1941 and that was 1945, so it was nearly four years. All the same, it didn't astonish me too much then, since then I've thought a lot about it and that's why I've called my yacht Bluebell. I've had a lot to do with it. In fact,

32:30 most ships have a badge, and they give it to various cities they meet, they visit and so on and I thought,

"Well, as I've got a yacht called Bluebell, I'll make a badge," so I asked my friend Ginger Coles if he could get me a piece of oak: six inches square to carve it in. I thought it should be oak. Well, he's got a brother in law who's a joiner, and he had a job in the local church, and so he sawed a six inch square out of a pew somewhere. So I carved this, and I've got it aboard my yacht and

33:00 I made a cast from it out of one of these pretty fancy plastics, and cast off of it in fibreglass, and made one for every survivor to have served in Bluebell, and sent them over to England and that was a very popular move. Once you've made the original, the cast is fairly easy, you just mix up fibreglass and put it in and you do it in a vacuum chamber , put it in there, and that takes all the air out of it, otherwise

33:30 you get air bubbles in it, and they come out in the finished product, so you have to go through and chisel all the little blobs that were air bubbles. But that was fairly popular, and I used to wait for people to go to England and ask them to take a couple, and post them in England to cut down on the freight.

That's a lovely thought.

There's a Flower Class corvette association, and one lady I met said,

34:00 "I've just been to England and staying with my cousin who served in corvettes, and he came home from the association wearing a Bluebell, because they were in season when they met in May." So I wrote to him, I didn't remember him although I had met him – he'd been a trainee aboard Bluebell so we started going to these conferences, we went to quite a few. They're just a reunion really and you get some people I did know, and some I didn't know but you became very good friends.

34:30 And because you'd served in the same ship, there was a very strong bond and there were about two hundred odd corvettes, and they meet in a big hall in Leamington Spa, and at the end of each row of seats they've got the ships names and they have a roll call, and the chairman calls the ships in alphabetical order and they all stand up, and only two ships had more attendants than Bluebell. And we thought we've got to beat these people – we've got to get a few more recruits, so that becomes a bit of a game too,

35:00 because there was only one true survivor. The others had served like I had, and then gone to something else because the practice is to change crews about every two years. I suppose that's probably a good thing.

Did you know any of the crew who died?

Yes I was reminded of several of them. There was the stores officer, called Don Curtain and a stoker called Eric, I forget his other name at the moment,

35:30 and there was another fellow, Cavanagh, Paul Cavanagh, I had met him. Some of these people had taken ill just before the last convoy, that's how they survived: they were off-loaded to go to hospital. Some of them feel that they shouldn't really be alive, but I told them to forget about that – you take what comes in war.

Can you tell me about the decision you made to go into the submariner field of

36:00 **work and how that actually saved your life even though it was more dangerous?**

Well it did, I was saying that if I'd stayed in Bluebell, my chances of survival would have been one in ninety, which is about 1.1% ,but as it was six Australians served in our flotillas at different times and three of them survived so my chances of survival went from 1.1% up to 50%, now that's an enormous improvement isn't it? You couldn't turn an offer like that down.

36:30 So I really saved my life by joining submarines, although it could have turned out the other way. I might have been one of the three that went down.

Can you tell me if there are any safety procedures or pieces of equipment that you use in a submarine?

Well there's the DSEA [Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus] – the escape apparatus – you'd use that. But I suppose the best thing is not to sink. To work the submarine properly,

37:00 because I don't think any submarine ever sank of its own accord. It's the crew did the wrong thing by them or we did silly things like being towed along too fast. But it's mainly a matter of practice, and more Australians, a bigger percentage of Australians were lost than of British, but I think that's because Australians were all volunteers – they went from Australia to fight the war and that's what they did. And so if anything was going they were in it. Every Australian took part

37:30 in an operation, not every Briton did. Not that is was their fault: it was just that the Australians were just that much more keen. I didn't miss any operation, I was very lucky to survive.

Can you tell me what your uniform is in a submarine of that time?

Well, there's the normal, traditional navy uniform, which hasn't really changed, and then the battle dress came in for the army, you know the battle dress that Montgomery always wore? And we adopted that, we got them

38:00 made in a blue serge, and they were very good, because you haven't got a jacket around flapping in the way. So that's what we wore when we were in uniform – otherwise we wore a boiler suit or just any old clothes you happened to have, but any old clothes were usually old uniform clothes, because you had to have coupons to get civilian clothes, but I liked the battle dress. It was very comfortable, workable uniform. I don't like the other uniform – it's too artificial – I feel a

38:30 bit strange in it. This is like battle dress – that's why we wear it.

So when you're actually on a mission in the submarine you're in any clothes you please?

Yeah, we were in working clothes. You've got to be careful if you're attacking in an enemy harbour to take a cap, because if you're caught as a prisoner of war, if you're not in uniform you can be shot but if you're in uniform you're entitled under the Geneva Convention to be made prisoner of war.

39:00 Well, if you're wearing a cap, that's accepted as uniform. So I always did have a cap, and also, it stops you from knocking your head on the valves and things sometimes. The cap gets pretty black of course: then in Europe it's always a blue cap and in Australia it's always white. In Europe they wear blue in winter and white in summer, but they have so little summer it's usually all blue. So it means it doesn't get as dirty as a white one does out here.

39:30 **When you were on Bluebell, what was the thing you feared the most?**

Seasickness. Homesickness. I didn't like being in a convoy that was being attacked. Being amongst ships being blown up – it's so dreadful blowing up a ship. The funny thing is sailors normally in peace time will do anything to save another sailor or another ship. In wartime

40:00 it reverses. In fact, if you pick up, we never did, but if you pick up a German sailor, you treat him well. Particularly a submariner because he's a submariner, I'm a submariner. And he's like one of your own ilk and this is the Nazis, you pick up a Nazi – they are so repulsive, you couldn't love one even if you were married to one I wouldn't think. No, we didn't like Nazis, in fact it was the Nazis we were fighting, not the

40:30 Germans. The Germans I get on quite well with. There's one in our yacht club; Werner Schlaw, he was too young to serve in the German forces, and he sailed to Albany with me in my yacht and I had to keep reminding myself that he's your friend, he's not the enemy, because propaganda's going all the time and although you think, "This doesn't affect me, I'm too intelligent for that," it does affect you.

41:00 And there's a saying you hear often: "The only good German is a dead one," which isn't true obviously. But you've got this in-built, hammered in attitude that the enemy is evil and we are good. Well, when this chap was sailing to Albany with me, I had to keep reminding myself because he had this sort of guttural way of speaking, he sounded like a German, and one night I was on watch, officially, but things are

41:30 going along smoothly, and it's self steering, I might go and lie down in my bunk for five minutes and then go up and have a look around. Well, I was having one of my horizontal five minutes, when Werner jumped out of his bunk, rushed up to the cockpit and I could hear him going click, click, click on the self-steering, which means he's altering course so I went up and said, "What's wrong Werner?" "Oh, you're there, I thought you'd fallen overboard," because he hadn't heard anything for a while, he went up and there was nobody in the cockpit, so I thought well he is my friend.

42:00 But not so with the – I've read quite a few books.

Tape 7

00:33 **Can you explain to me about the human torpedoes?**

Yes, these are X craft as they called the small submarines, it was one special weapon they got up to attack Tirpitz and the other was a human torpedo. Now the X craft weighs 30 tons and had a crew of three, four or five inside it, although a diver could get out, the human torpedoes were about one ton and they were

01:00 a slow speed torpedo-like vessel with a warhead, but it was manned by two frogmen type people sitting on top of it with a bit of a water shield in front of them, to stop them being washed off. And they were a short range weapon. They were towed originally by fishing craft, they were towed once they got near the target they put them over the side and towed. The danger there was that during the tow in rough weather they could break and drift.

01:30 But the people who manned them were trained in diving for long periods. They had very long range oxygen bottles on their backs, and they were very good divers indeed. They trained for hours at a time whereas our divers were trained just to get out, cut a net, and then get back in again. The Italians were very good with their human torpedoes, and they had explosive motor boats as well, both depended on having good swimmers, or good divers.

02:00 I don't think the human torpedoes had as much success as they deserved, but they did have quite a bit just the same as we had quite a bit, a few, as much successes.

So they weren't humans fired out of a torpedo shoot?

No. They weren't meant as kamikaze or one-way only. Sometimes they were designed to go in and attach their charges to the ships bottom with magnets, and then

02:30 go ashore and then come back, for example, from Norway to Sweden, and some of them did that and they were quite good, but the Italians were very good at that.

And the gyro compass?

Yes, we had a Browns gyro compass. Most compasses were made by Sperry, and there's quite a lot of differences between them – they both work on the same principal that the earth is rotating, and if you get something else rotating on the earth,

03:00 it will try and line itself up with the earth's rotation and this principal you can use in finding out where north is, because the earth obviously rotates about a north south axis. This gyro compass that we had was a very fine instrument I think, very small and we all went to the Browns' works in Slough on the Thames to be instructed on using the compass.

03:30 When we got our own submarine, we took a lot of interest in this compass, and if you treat them kindly, they will work very well and you can find certain tricks about lining them up. If you start a compass from stand-still, it takes a few minutes to get up to speed, and then it takes about three hours to find out where north is. It runs and it's on a shaft of course, and if its happens to start up with the shaft pointing north, it'll stay there, it won't move.

04:00 But if the shaft is pointing say east, well then it will rise the same as the sun does, and what the compass does automatically is pump some liquid from one end to the other to preset it. If you push one end of the gyro shaft down, it won't go down, it'll go the other way. It'll go in such a way as to align itself with the earth's rotation.

04:30 So if you start up a gyro and then watch, there's a little spirit level on it, watch very carefully, as soon as one end starts to rise you can push it, preset it, say ten degrees and then watch again and if it still rises you can do that until you pass centre point and it falls. Then you know you've passed the north point. Now if you're not in a hurry, then you leave it and it'll soon settle down, and it's only five degrees off anyway but if you like to carry on

05:00 you can get it spot on within a short time. And that's very useful, because in a small submarine for example, if they hit bottom, it sometimes starts the gyro on a bit of a wander and it might do a circle and it's good to be able to adjust it quickly, so you can get on with what you want to do. Well, we did this course down at Browns, and later in the war they made some development in the gyro, it was in the follow up mechanism. You've got to design a compass

05:30 so that it's got no friction at all, if you can, and therefore you have the master gyro wheel, and somehow you've got to transmit what it says to other compasses around the ship somewhere – follow up all slaves or repeaters. And what this had was the wheel, the gyro wheel had a lot of little holes in it that would blow air out, and they had a scoop on the support, and the scoop

06:00 aimed this air in a little air paddle, and when the gyro got a paddle one way, it would rotate that way by a driving motor, and when it went past north, it would go back the other way, so the follow up ring was always going like that all the time. And some gyros on a ship, you find they're doing that they're kicking, the kick backs on, it depends how finely you adjust them. The first compasses were the mechanical amplifier,

06:30 and then later on they made an electronic amplifier, because the boffins that invented the thyratron valve – the thyratron valve is a valve like all radios used to have once, full of gas, otherwise they are full of vacuum – full of nothing. And where the thyratron has the advantage that with a grid, that's a control, you can make it fire, so it'll carry quite a big current one way or the other, and that was put in instead of this paddle wheel thing,

07:00 and so we were all sat down at Browns to learn about this new thing. Well, by this time, we'd been in submarines for quite a few years, and we were fairly used to electronics, and practically everything really, so it took us about half an hour to learn about this new device, and the rest of the day we had nothing to do. So they had a classroom there, and in the classroom was a big box of bits, all the gyro bits, so we said to our tutor, "Do you mind if we play around with these bits?" and he said, "No. Go for your life," he said, "I've told

07:30 you all I've got to tell you." So we built a compass out of these bits. There were enough bits there to build the whole thing, and so then: "Can we have a power source?" So yes, he gave us a power source of the voltage we wanted, and we set this gyro going, and we filled the oil systems to do this depressing business, and we got the thing up and running and by the time at the end of the day, the gyro was running and on course. It was pointing north, and we thought,

08:00 "Well, that was fairly useful out of a box of bits to build a serviceable gyro," and that's the way it got.

They were only small submarines, they were very simple, and pretty soon you learnt all about everything. And I think that added a lot to survival in the end.

Did the mini submarines evolve technically throughout the war? While you were operating them?

Yes they did. One evolution in ours

08:30 was the weapon was changed from a side cargo, which went onto the seabed to limpets which were carried in a side cargo case with no explosives in it. And there were six limpets each side that did have explosives in them. And they fitted the submarines with three antennas we called them, they were like inverted table legs – you could wind them up. And two forward and one aft, and then the idea was to come to a ship, come up underneath it, stop – don't go ahead

09:00 or stern, just pump water out of the submarine till it came up, wind up these antennas until it would bounce of the ship and then come to rest. If there wasn't too much tide – if there was a lot of tide, they'd scoot along and fall off the end and that wasn't good. Then having done that, the diver would get out and open the hatch on the limpet stowage, take out a limpet, scratch off the barnacles, stick the magnets on the limpet against the ship's hull and then move onto the next one and he could place twelve of those.

09:30 And with twelve limpets, you could sink a number of ships, so that was used at the end of the war.

Was that procedure conducted successfully throughout the war?

Yeah, well, we were pretty late in getting them, and yes it was. The Italians that sunk the battleship at Alexandria – that was limpets. So they thought of it and we followed their pioneer.

How would you complete that procedure without detection?

Well, you do it quietly. As long as you don't break surface, they don't know you're there. You're breathing oxygen, so

10:00 you're not venting any nitrogen, which you would if you were breathing air so you've just got to be quiet and not tell them you're coming, and then if you're lucky and you get the limpets on and then duck off before – Fraser, who attacked the cruiser Ta Gei in Johor Strait, his diver got out, placed his limpets and he had to get rid of the casings for them. And so he came back into the submarine and they wouldn't release, so he had to go out again with a crowbar and

10:30 lever them off, and he got rid of them. He was pretty well exhausted by the time he had, and he would have been at extreme risk, because he's got twelve limpets all ticking away on the ship. If he took too long, they'd blow up and they'd blow him up too, so he got a VC for that. Very unhappy subsequent to that – he was Irish, and of course Irish have got their complications on the political scene and because he was serving for the Royal Navy,

11:00 a lot of people back home didn't want him to get a VC, and so he come in for a lot of criticism and I think in the end it killed him. So that was an awful shame, for a chap having done such a splendid job at great risk, and been decorated to end his life because of that. Great shame. Very nice fellow, Mickey McGuinness, everybody liked him. I'm glad I wasn't born Irish –

11:30 you'd have had this problem that we haven't got. But if you were born Aboriginal, I suppose you might have.

What other measures did you have to take to avoid detection while you were on operation?

Keeping quiet was the main one and keeping unseen was the main one. Our periscope was a very small one – it was only about that thick the top part of it – and if the water's nice and calm in the harbour or

12:00 wherever the target was, and if you were under control with your submarine, you could go along steadily at ten feet and raise the periscope, and just show that much of it, but even so, you had to take quick looks. Probably one quick all around look, then drop it, then do it again and have a look at your target and then drop it and then have another look and maybe get a fix on where you are and then drop it and then keep it down. And if you going to stay without using the periscope, tell whoever's on the hydroplanes say

12:30 fifteen feet, so as you got a bit more scope. If you're at ten feet, you haven't got too much scope. You go down to eleven and the periscope goes under, come up to nine feet and you're likely to see the nig part of the periscope, and there's a bit of a conflict between the fellow keeping depth and the navigator. Now he can raise a periscope up to ten feet, no higher, but he can't bring it down lower, and if the submarine stays at ten feet, he raises it and he can go on looking through it and that's fine.

13:00 But sometimes it's difficult keeping a 30 ton submarine at a particular depth – it might creep up to nine. Well, what the navigator should do, is push the button and bring the periscope down, or someone will say, "Damn it! Keep ten feet!" you see, whereas it's a jolly sight easier for him to make an adjustment so that used to cause a little bit of competition – never very serious. Not to use it is also a good thing – I think if I had the good fortune to command X5, and I had attacked

13:30 Tirpitz – I think I would have come out blind, don't use the periscope any more. Around Tirpitz was an anti-torpedo net, and you could do a lot by dead reckoning. That is, you're under a battleship – you should know which end is the prow and which end is the stern, and if your gyro's working you'd know anyway, because you'd know her line of bearing, set the course to regain the position where you came in, which was the gate near the shore, and you stay deep and aim for the

14:00 net slightly because you're going to get something – I'd rather hit a net than hit rocks. So you go on keeping your watch all the time – probably go down to about twenty feet, and with any luck you'd see the net coming and then alter course to run parallel to the net until you see the shore coming and then stop. Alter course and get round the end of the net. Now I've thought of this I suppose a million times since the war. You could do a lot by keeping quiet, sitting at the bottom if you want to and think and say,

14:30 "I'm not going to use a periscope. I'm going to do this without looking – do it on dead reckoning." And you've got a diver who hopefully is on good order – he's not too tired – put him, keep the plot, he's got a chart there. Give him all the information he wants – if you stop say stop now and he'd write in his log book 'stop' and time and when you start getting the revolutions, he'll put 'time revolutions' and then you can put on the chart your progress – you can work out how much you're going and

15:00 you get pretty good results that way, because revolutions of the propeller shaft of a submarine are a pretty good indication of distance run, because you've got no wind to worry about because you're not up in the wind at all. If there's current, you've got to allow for that but there wasn't too much current up where Tirpitz was: it was at the head of the fjord. So you could probably get away, and anyway you allow off – so you know you're going to be a bit out of position, so probably better to be off to port than to starboard or something like that,

15:30 so you deliberately aim off to port and we did quite a lot of running on dead reckoning, and it came out quite well, you get confidence in it. You've got to be meticulous about noting everything and about calculating it and about putting it on the chart. There's all kinds of instruments for converting time and speed and distance to save you calculating, but it's a pretty straight forward calculation, and you try and pick on a number of revolutions that gives you a whole number of knots like two knots or three knots – it makes it a whole lot easier again,

16:00 because we're not all great mental arithmeticians are we?

Did you operate the mini submarines in open waters?

They're not terribly big. Yes, we were in the open sea quite a bit, because we always left our towing submarine and rejoined it in the open sea and luckily every time I did it, it wasn't terribly rough. It was about moderate weather, and you had to be careful about

16:30 not colliding with your towing submarine when you see him, but oh yes, you can do it all right and we did some quite good exercises around the Hebrides and a lot of the time, you're sailing between islands which is pretty calm – but between the inner Hebrides and the outer Hebrides, it does get quite rough. And we had a spectacular run one winter: we were going around and the islands were all covered in snow and it wasn't a big swell – it was a long sort of oily swell, and I was on deck and

17:00 you wear sea boots and waterproof clothing, and the submarine would be going along at full speed, she'd go over one swell and then under the next and the water would come over the deck about knee height and you'd be going along with nothing around, you know you're standing on something and there's the induction pipe with the engine on it and that's all you could see – just your pipe and so you hang on like mad for the next swell, and then the submarine comes out again. It was really quite exciting,

17:30 and keeping watch on a big submarine was exciting too, because they've got saddle tanks because the submarine is circular, and the saddle tanks are like crescents on the side and the sea breaks on them. If it's a fairly calm time and you hit a wave, start to break forward – it's like the surf breaks along the beach, and the waves break along this tank and it really is quite a pleasant feeling, and keeping watch in the Arctic is all right – apart from the cold – and the aurora borealis

18:00 comes up every now and then. Out of nothing, quite silently the whole sky lights up and it's like a silk scarf being waved in the sky, and you tremble at the knees because it's like day and you wish they'd switch off those damn things and then it stops and it's all to do with something coming from the sun, and entering the stratosphere, and it causes these electrons to light up and that's exciting as long as the enemy isn't watching too.

18:30 I rather like watch keeping in a submarine if the weather's not too cold and wet – you don't want it wet. The Germans gave the Norwegians a submarine after the war, and the Norwegians didn't want it for too long, and they gave it back and the Germans have got a submariner's association, and they got hold of it and they pulled it out of the water at a place called

19:00 Laboe I think it is, near Kiel, and it's now a submarine museum, and my friends have been aboard the submarine and they got a very nice guide book in German, and so they gave me this and I gave it to my German friend who went to Albany with me, and he translated it and it was very interesting because this submarine had been operating in the Bering Sea, that's north of Russia for about three years and never sunk anything and he's

19:30 put it down to the strength of the British escort ships, well that made me think of Bluebell and made me feel very proud having been in Bluebell. And also, he described what it's like in rough weather, and it's absolutely horrific in the U-Boats. The conning tower where you come out of the tube and you stand on the deck with a bit of railing around would get full of water in the Arctic, which is jolly cold and the water would run down the conning tower and splash around the control room, and everything would be sodden with blue

20:00 Water, and that must have been terrible. And also a few of the bits I've seen on television of German U-Boats on patrol – you can see in the Atlantic, how uncomfortable it was, you know the water would be over the whole submarine there was just a bit of the conning tower showing. Still they deserved it, didn't they? Compared to what they were doing to us.

20:30 **How difficult would it be to maintain depth in open waters?**

It's very difficult. In a big swell, even though you're down at periscope depth, the submarine is still subject to the motion of the ocean. Now as a very rough rule of thumb, you've got to be as deep as the swell is long to get out of it. Now some of those swells are very long and you can't always go down that deep because of the submarine design, but the Germans

21:00 were very good at – their submarines were very efficient. Donitz had served in submarines in the Great War and when he became chief of submarines in the Second World War, he built up an enormous fleet on the same design, and they built – I think – seven hundred of one design – that's the type seven – we sunk one of those I reckon. And no navy has ever built that many of one design so they – if Donitz had had his way and hadn't had Hitler

21:30 for a boss, I think he would have won the war with his submarines, but Hitler, fortunately for us was a bit of an idiot, and some of his chiefs of staff who were correct and good and very expert at their job couldn't get their ideas over to Hitler – he knew best he reckoned, so very often he was playing for us.

What conflict was there between them?

I don't know in detail, but I know there was a good deal of ill feeling at times. Hitler was

22:00 such a villain and such an evil man, that they didn't dare get on the wrong side of him. In the end Rommel who was a marvellous soldier in North Africa knew that the Germans weren't going to win, and if he said anything like that to Hitler, Hitler knew that he was planning against him so Hitler had him poisoned. Now that's a shocking thing to do, because he was probably the bravest and the most expert German soldier and his own boss killed him. Terrible.

22:30 I'm glad I wasn't a German. It'd be terrible to be an honest, peace-loving German, and be conscripted into this sort of thing, so they really had a lot to put up with. Also, I think Donitz had a little bit to do with the plot to bomb Hitler. Pity they hadn't succeeded. They didn't and he killed a lot of his good men that way. So in some ways Hitler helped us beat him.

23:00 **What influence did he have on the war at sea that advantaged you guys?**

Well he… Donitz would have to discuss all his strategies with Hitler, and Hitler would agree with some and not agree with others. And I think he stopped him doing a few things that would have helped him. The building program was one big thing – Donitz always wanted more German resources put into building submarines and Hitler didn't always agree with him. Of course Hitler had to

23:30 divide his resources among the armed services – couldn't give everything to the navy, but if he had I think he'd have won the war because they were more likely to win the war at sea than on land. Same might have applied to air force, I don't know, I've read The Battle of Britain a few times, and the last book I read seemed to be a very good analysis, and it said that the Germans were not going to succeed in invading

24:00 Britain, even from the beginning, although if you read about the losses over Britain in the Battle for Britain, it seemed the Germans had the upper hand at times. But when you analyse it from a strategical point of view, the Germans had to beat the Royal Air Force with enough planes in hand to cover the invasion, and they said they had to achieve a kill ratio of five to one – five Brits for every German plane – well they never got anywhere near that, thanks to the splendid

24:30 performance of the Royal Air Force. So it's very interesting to read about the strategic situation long after the war. We people who were in it, you only see what's going on in your own horizon – you've got to come back home afterwards to find out what you're in, and that's why writing a book is a very good thing, because you've got to read about more than you saw, in order to write about what you saw. Because you've

25:00 got a bit more background, and I'm not a great historian – my memory is not good enough – but I do read a book occasionally and not all, I don't like reading about the Battle of the Atlantic, because at the beginning we were definitely losing and I don't like reading about ships being sunk – it makes me feel depressed again. I've been through it once: I don't need to go through it you know, after it's all over so I don't read those sorts of books. But that film you talked about, Das Boot, it's quite a good film. It's a bit overdone like

25:30 most films: you've got to play larger than life in a film, I think, and in that one, the Germans are running up and down the boat and shouting out and so on. Well, our crews didn't behave like that, and I don't believe the Germans ever did either, because they were just as expert as the British or Australian crews. But the British made a film in an operational submarine with a submarine crew and it might have been a good training film but as

26:00 Entertainment, it didn't succeed – didn't lay it on enough. The crews just did what they normally did – it's not spectacular unless you're a submariner. If you're a submariner taking passenger in someone else's submarine, to just stand back and watch when they say, "Dive! Dive! Dive!" – it really is inspiring. All these different people doing different things on their own, especially the fellow at the valve panel:

26:30 it's all operated by hydraulics and when you hear, "Dive! Dive! Dive!" you go click, click, click, click, click and get all these vales and you think, "Gosh I hope he's doing the right ones." And then the orders come down from the bridge, and they're very short and they're quick, and they're relayed to the boat and that's good too. I read an article by a fellow who'd served in submarines, and he went and saw the one that's on display in the museum in Gosport in England, and

27:00 as he was going through the submarine, the guide was telling him about it and he doesn't let on that he's an expert submariner, but he takes over from the guide in his own mind and all the things that are happening and he does it very well but he doesn't say anything, and at the end of the tour, the guide was beginning to catch on that this chap was no ordinary visitor, so as they were going down the gangway the guide said, "Were you in boats, Sir?" He said, "Me?

27:30 Goodness no," and going down the gangplank his wife said to him, "You're not going to get to heaven," but the way he describes all the actions is really quite inspiring because it really is that way – it's a very good team in any submarine – they've got to be or they don't survive.

Can you explain to me how that communication

28:00 **is conducted through the ranks from the bridge?**

Well it comes first of all down a voice pipe. Voice pipes are very popular in the navy, because they can't go wrong – they're just a bit of copper tube and the captain will call down something, and the coxswain who's at the bottom end, and he hears it, and he relays it, and somebody else will relay it further back and some go direct to the motor room where they're controlling the motor when they dive, because if they dive then the captain will be on the bridge ,

28:30 but they still get – sometimes they're on the motor on the surface and so on and so its relayed most of the time. They do have telephone, but mostly it goes by voice pipe, because telephones have a habit of breaking down. In ours – they're so short, that if one gets a message, you've just got to say it and everybody hears it, but with the engine running, you don't hear too much but they developed signs after a while – developed their own signs like

29:00 'duh' means 'reduce speed' and then probably call out, "6-5 revolutions – get that?" – you lip read a bit, and then you get it wrong and then you get it right the second time it's told. But the communications are really quite good. The telephone in the tug was the only big problem, that didn't work. We did have a telephone we could run from the upper deck down below and we were coming through Crinan Canal once, coming down from the Hebrides on the west coast of Scotland,

29:30 if you're going into the Clyde – you can go right down by the Mull of Kintyre or there's a canal running through the top of the Mull of Kintyre and you can take a short cut through that – and we were small enough to go through that – and we'd been on an all night exercise in the Hebrides, and we were coming through the canal. And in the canal, you've got to be very careful on steering because they're not very wide, and coming to a bend you steer, you're down the middle of the reach and at the bend you turn slightly toward the outer bend,

30:00 and then as you get there a wave builds up between the bow and the bank, and the submarine just goes around the bend on its own as if it's in a track. And when you get to the next straight ridge, you get in the middle again, and when we were coming through, and Ginger Coles was in the wheel, and we were coming down a reach – that's a straight section – and the submarine's going gradually to one side, so I said, "Port five," and got no response. "Port ten," no response.

30:30 "Stop. Stop!" by this time we were going into the bank and a tree was hanging over the bank and the tree swung back along the bank and pushed me right back to the stern. Well luckily she ran aground before I fell off the submarine, so I had to burrow through all these leaves. Of course the engines had stopped by this time, and I opened the hatch and looked down and there was Ginger Coles and he had his telephones on and the telephone jack had fallen out and he didn't know this until he felt the bump. I accused him of being asleep, he said, "No," he wasn't asleep – telephone jack had come out.

31:00 So that's the bother with telephones but with the voice pipe that sort of thing doesn't happen but I've got a sort of an anecdote in the book there that in Bluebell, we had a voice pipe coming from the bridge down to the captain's cabin, and then down again to the ward room and the captain had the habit of taking a snooze after lunch. And we were coming down the coast of Spain, and it was getting nice and warm, nothing much was happening – no U-Boats around – the fellow

31:30 on the bridge was a bit bored with nothing to do, so he got a jug of water and the voice pipes got a flap

on it with a whistle in it and if you want to attract attention, you take the whistle out and you blow in it and the whistle at the other end blows. Well, he forgot that the captain was on the same thing so he blew down to awake the ward room and when he heard the flap open and somebody said, “Yes,” he poured the jug down, and he got the captain didn’t he? The captain

32:00 had a flexible pipe that you put to the ear, so he got it full in the ear. Well that took a bit of laughing off. That sort of thing did happen occasionally.

How was he disciplined?

Yes. And there was another time when we’d been at action stations during the night, and there was no attack, so we fell out of action stations and the captain said to the officer of the watch, “Fall out action stations,” and he was on the fore-bridge

32:30 and there’s – in the middle there’s the ASDIC operator, and at the aft end of the bridge, there’s the radar. The fellow on the ASDIC, one chap we had, a chap called McDonald, he knew everything was going on, and he heard the captain call out, “Fall out action stations,” and so he didn’t wait for the officer of the watch, he just called out, “Radar!” Well, the captain answered

33:00 because he didn’t hear the word ‘Radar’ so he said, “You can put away your brass rags, finish your knitting and push off.” And the captain said, “What’s that?” and by that time the radar had answered, and that solved the situation. So you’d get a lot of laughs over pretty simple things. It’s the same everywhere you are – topical jokes that crop up, aren’t they? I’m sure in your game there are plenty?

33:30 **In jokes?**

Of course, in a ship there’s no control over language, so he probably had a stronger word than that. But they realised the traps in a multi-purpose voice pipe.

We were talking about the cartoonist who crewed with you earlier – did you appear in any of his work?

Yeah. In a couple of them. I was in one, we were being told to open up for diving.

34:00 I admitted to opening the depth gauge, and in our submarines we had three brass scuttles; one above, one starboard and one port, and I opened the main vents and we were going down all right, but the depth gauge wasn’t showing anything, so I kept her going down and in fact I think somebody noticed and said, “(UNCLEAR) depth gauge,” so we opened it – no harm done, but the way Joe has done it we’ve got down to an unsafe depth and the glass in the scuttler’s broken and the sea is coming in.

34:30 Well, that didn’t happen, but that’s the treatment I got. That’s the advantage of being a cartoonist, you can exaggerate everything you like.

Were you targeted any more than others?

No. I got it for being an Australian because they reckon we can’t speak English. And I was back after the submarine and manoeuvres were going on, and we had a dog clutch between the engine which is forward and the motor which is in the middle

35:00 and then one between the motor and the propeller. The thing about these dog clutches – if you wanted to clutch in the engine, you’ve got to stop the motor, pull the clutch in and then start the engine, because a dog clutch is not like a motor car disc clutch where you can clutch in on the run, and it makes a hell of a noise when you get these dogs going past each other, and on this occasion they clutched in with the motor running and I’m back aft and I said, “By crikey.”

35:30 And then because it got me saying, “Oi by crikey,” or something Australian but that wasn’t so much my fault – it was just being Australian.

You mentioned also a funny man – one of your crew members who used to make you laugh often?

Oh this is Adam Burgess. Yes – I can’t remember too many of his jokes down below, but what I do remember is we were going on our navigation exercise around

36:00 Whitsunday Island, and Adam Burgess came up, this was by day, we were on the surface and there’s a very rocky mountain on Whitsunday Island, and Adam Burgess came up on deck and looked across to port. He said, “There’s Jasper Eliot!” and I had a look across, and there was a rock-face just like one of our submariners in the depot ship, and his name was Jasper Eliot. Well that was pretty quick of old Adam, but he had a lot of jokes but I can’t

36:30 remember them all now. But he was doing an exercise out at Bute, and in Bute we were at Kames Bay, and then there’s a very busy waterway, and then there’s a loch going north in the mainland and we used to exercise in the loch going north, and so you had to cross this fairly busy waterway and this was just before the invasion in June 1944, and all the commanders were out there exercising – there were

37:00 ships going up and down all the time, landing ships and landing craft and so on and Adam was out with a new crew exercising in XE4, and I was in our depot, which was a hotel and I was going up the stairs looking out the window, and I saw a landing craft go past, pretty big thing, and then I saw XE4 surface

right to stern of it, and I thought, “Crumbs! That doesn’t look too good,” and then I saw Adam come up on the casing – it was about a mile away –

37:30 and he started flashing on a mores lamp to the hotel where I was and he had a signal tower up top so I read the signal and it was, “Have been run down by landing craft and bent periscope,” and I thought, “Oh dear, that’s not good. I’d better go and tell Banks.” He was the captain and was up on deck four. Well, he was standing on the next flight of stairs reading the same signal. So I said, “Did you read Burgess’s signal Sir?” “Burgess was it?! Tell him I’m damned annoyed, will you?”

38:00 I said, “Yes I’ll tell him that,” and that was all he said. So I had to wait for Adam to come in and tell him that the captain was damned annoyed, but they put in a new periscope and it was all right. So I didn’t want to say too much, because he was a good chap and we all get caught out at times, but I imagine what was happening was that his new crew were causing him a bit of delay and things, and he had to concentrate on his crew and not his navigation for a while, but that happens – people ask you questions and while you’re answering them, you’re not questioning where you’re going and

38:30 he was in the wrong place. But it didn’t do any real harm – it just bent it and it was probably sent back to the works and straightened and changed the lenses, I suppose, but all these works like engine works and periscope works and gyro compass works reckoned we were a bunch of cowboys I think. One mistake or accident that happened pretty frequently early on, is that there was this line of machinery; engine, motor and propeller and

39:00 if you want to go astern you de-clutch the engine and go stern on the motor and next time you want to go ahead on the engine, you say ‘stop. Ready ahead. End engine clutch,” but sometimes they didn’t change the motor over, and they started the engine going astern and that’s terrible, because you open the two valve and it sucks

39:30 the water in, and starts to compress it and you can’t compress water, and in one revolution the engine was wrecked absolutely – con rods sticking through the crack case sides and then the engine was finished for life and that happened a couple of times. So then Admiralty woke up, and they put an interlock so you couldn’t put the engine clutch in with the motor stern switch closed, and it didn’t happen after that. But all the same, we took good care that we didn’t depend on the interlock and gave deliberate orders,

40:00 you know, “Motor ready ahead,” and then, “End engine clutch,” in that order. When that happened the first time I was on the submarine, on deck, and it was on X9 with this Terry Martin as captain, and it was at a bit of a panic of manoeuvring, and I quite see how it happened. He’d been going astern and quickly went ahead without the perimetry orders

40:30 and ruined that engine. Well that submarine was taken holus-bolus back to Barrow Inverness by train, and the stern taken off, and Vickers Armstrong fitted a new engine. They had plenty of engines – they were a London bus engine – a Gardener 4LK, and they pretty soon had it fixed, but they probably sent the wreck down to Gardener’s Works and they would be shocked with dismay I think seeing it – they’re a beautiful works – I went down there and it was ideal:

41:00 no dirt on the floor you know, every part made to precision, and put in the engine without any checking and you’d be sure everything was right, and when they got this wreck of an engine in, it would be against their religion, and we felt pretty humbled at it too. We thought we weren’t terribly good operators doing that.

Tape 8

00:32 You get an anxiety state which is continuous but…

What do you mean by saying you’ve got a constant anxiety state?

Well you’re worried. You know that it’s hazardous and things keep going wrong and you just wish the war would finish, but then other times you get involved in what you’re doing and your mind changes.

01:00 If I think about talking war as a whole – war is stupid and hateful, and doesn’t produce much benefit. On the other hand, when you get into something like a submarine, it’s so interesting that you get absorbed in getting the submarine going, and you stop worrying, so it’s a bit of a paradox in a way, but that’s the way life is and you might as well enjoy yourself doing something – the enemy’s going to kill you. Well it didn’t so…

01:30 **How did your time in the war change you as a person do you think?**

I think it made me more careful and more thorough. My Dad always had boats, and we used to get by with a minimum of work and then I joined the navy, which is a professional maritime organisation and you realise how thorough jobs can be. Whenever I went to sea with my Dad, I

02:00 was always worried that something would go wrong with the boat, but in the navy, particularly on a

surface ship, you get confidence in the ship, it's so well built and well managed and you find out what professionalism means in a maritime occupation, and I made quite a few decent mistakes myself like sinking the ship Barrenfields instead of the dock, but that makes you a bit more careful – before you do something think twice. Now I don't say I'm good at that – probably better than I was but

02:30 I don't know – of course you mature. One way I know I'd matured a bit – is that I used to write to a friend in South Perth quite regularly, and I started to write a letter on my first convoy from England to Gibraltar and it was not attacked and that letter is childish: I'm embarrassed to read it now. To see the stupid things I was talking about and the silly language, I suppose young people develop their own language in a way,

03:00 they invent words and mutilate real words and so on. On the way back we did get attacked and we lost a lot of ships and the style of my letter changed completely: there was nothing stupid or frivolous anywhere. And I don't say it stopped me from being stupid all the time, every time, but at least there was a change there. I'd seen an event of life that I hadn't seen before and that did make me a bit more serious I think.

03:30 But I think I was a fun loving person. I've always been like that – I've always enjoyed a good joke except when it's against me –

With your time on Gibraltar what sort of activities did you get up to on Gibraltar when you were part of the convoy?

We weren't in Gibraltar very long. I remember the very first free day we had in Gibraltar. All the officers except one who was left in duty walked around

04:00 the harbour to the rock, and there's a tunnel under the rock running through from the Bay of whatever it is to the Mediterranean. And we walked through this tunnel and had a swim, and it was my first swim in the Mediterranean and it was a pebbled beach and I remember the feeling of little waves breaking on the pebbles gives you a prickly sensation on the back of your neck, and the next day we walked up the rock and then walked to the very north end of it and that was very interesting. There's an

04:30 airstrip across the net between Gibraltar and Spain and some aircraft had overshot and you can see them – they're still there – just see their outline in the shallow water, and that was a bit of a experience. But we went shopping a bit, but we weren't there very long and then we were on another convoy back home. It was a quick turnaround. Convoys are always accumulating in the bay and

05:00 as soon as one was ready, off we went, so that was there. One time we did arrange to visit Spain so the time before we had to make an application and get a passport – that's what that photograph is I showed you – and next time down we collected our passport or visa or whatever it was and we went across to Spain to La Linea, didn't impress me very much. It was a dry and dusty looking place,

05:30 and there was a bull ring there which obviously is pretty popular but I don't think that bull fighting is a good idea and there was a bookshop there and the window being featured was Preen – The Sinking of the Royal Oak so they were obviously on the enemy's side and we got the feeling they were hostile compared to us, which they are, because they want Gibraltar back, it's still going on. But all the same it was an experience.

06:00 **Did you expect to survive the war considering you were in such a high risk …?**

I don't know: you just take each day as it comes. But I did offer Mary the option of marriage and I suppose I shouldn't have done that if I thought I was going to survive. But I remember rationalising that too. We decided there wouldn't be any children while the war was on, and I thought, "Well, if

06:30 I do drown. What's to hold her? She's free, she's married, she's a widow. She'd get a widow's pension from the Australian Government until she was married again, so she'd got two good options," so that's not too bad really. But she sort of gave me the head, she was the one that sent the valentine card, and I think people adapt to the war. You know early that you might not survive, you might not survive here with no war,

07:00 so I used to take pot luck – well it did work out all right for us.

Can you tell me about your graduation? When you came back to Australia you finally graduated from your university course – can you tell me what happened then in your life?

Well it happened before then actually. I was very lucky, in my last full year of study, which was 1946, I was doing electrical engineering and we had to design a transformer. Now I'd never

07:30 seen a transformer in the workshop. I'd seen them out on the poles, but I'd never seen one dismantled so I had a friend who had served in the navy and was already working in the electricity industry – it was called the Electricity and Gas Department of the City of Perth in those days. So I said, "We've got to design a transformer: do you think I could visit the transformer shop of the City of Perth when they've got a transformer out?" He said, "I'll arrange it." So he arranged it and my year

08:00 of students all trooped down there, and saw this transformer out of the middle of the floor on a tray because they're full of oil and drip oil everywhere. And there were a few of the employees around answering questions and one fairly well dressed chap, chap who had a tie on, and I asked him a lot of

questions and he seemed to know the answers, and that went quite well so I went back to university, and my friend got on to me and said that, “Mr Edmondson wants to see you.” I knew he was general manager, so I said, “All right. That’s very nice of him.”

08:30 He said, “He wants to offer you vacational employment.” Well, I made an appointment and called in on the general manager, and I said, “Ken Gibbon tells me you’re offering me vacational employment. That’s okay thank you, but I expect to finish at the end of this year.” “Oh well,” he said, “I’m offering you a job,” and I said, “Well, I haven’t passed exams yet,” and he said, “We’ll take that chance.” He said, “I’ll offer you a job as soon as you finish university. You report to me and I’ll get you started.” Now that was something – I was only halfway

09:00 through my final year, final exams still to come, and I had a job and that was a big boost so by the time graduation – which was the following March – we had our first daughter. She was born a week before graduation, so we had our first experience of having to find a baby sitter, and I went to the graduation and that went quite well. It wasn’t a roaring party of course, because we were new parents and I was staying with my parents then, so we

09:30 had to be very careful about crying during the night and so on, but that went quite well, but I often think, ‘Well, I was very fortunate indeed to have employment before being qualified.” In fact, he was a good friend to me throughout. He gave me promotion a few years later, that was

10:00 1946 in November I started. It was fifty-five I got my first promotion. Well, I had gone from an assistant engineer in the City of Perth department into the SEC [State Electricity Commission] which took it over. That was a legislation change and then I was a sort of dogsbody at East Perth Power Station and then I was sent to South Fremantle Power Station which was just building then, and helped with the commissioning, and then I carried out the acceptance test which is really a testing engineer’s job and after a while they made me efficiency engineer down there,

10:30 so that was a promotion but then I was instructed to go to East Perth Power Station one day a week, because they had appointed a power production engineer from the eastern states, and that was a very senior position – it was second management tier in the SEC. So I went up there and then I was told that the job would be advertised and I was to apply for it and I got it. So that was from the bottom of the rung to the second top in a few years and that was the last

11:00 promotion I got except that the job grew with the system, but I’ve got a feeling the Edmondson was an ex-soldier from the Great War, and I think he had a soft spot for ex-servicemen, because my next boss was a work serviceman and I didn’t get any more promotions, the non-servicemen got promotions after that. I know a bit of that went on, didn’t make much difference because I had a good job anyway. I really

11:30 had a good rehabilitation after the war, and also there was the commonwealth government rehabilitation training scheme where was all got a living allowance and got our university fees paid and a book allowance fee paid, and that was a great help because I had Mary with the baby and a few expenses – living at home didn’t cost much – but then I got

12:00 on the allocation list for a war service home, and so we had to get furniture, so I made furniture because we didn’t have much money so I made all this stuff, and the bedroom suite and everything ,and that was worthwhile doing. I had a lot of energy in those days – I’d get up at half past five in the morning and go down to the workshop and do an hour’s woodwork, and then I’d get on my motorbike which I had, go to work, come home, have dinner, go down the workshop again, at ten o’clock go to bed. I had plenty of energy in those

12:30 days – I could do all those things. Now I only do half that, and I don’t work half as fast, but all the same my rehabilitation was good – I can’t complain about it. Of course there were plenty of us – university was half full of soldiers coming back – and the university welcomed it, because the other students were five years younger, and they were the sort of muck around type, whereas we all had commitments and were fairly serious and they’re the sort of people that universities want.

13:00 People who study hard because they can’t afford not to pass, so altogether and also, because of that, you were very soon befriended by all the university administrators, I’ve got some good friends with the chancellor, and the vice-chancellor and so on and that’s a pretty nice feeling having come back from trying to kill Germans to be welcomed by the university staff. I was going to say a

13:30 word about Ian McFarlane. I told you that he was serving with Jack Marsden when they were rammed at Penland Firth and died, and that was in 1944 and when the war finished, I was in Melbourne and I’d been to the navy officer in Melbourne to see about my discharge. I said, Brian McFarlane, my colleague, had a father in the navy and he was a commander

14:00 and Brian was Royal Australian Navy, he was a professional sailor not like me just a reserve so when I was in Melbourne in the navy office, I said, “Is there a commander McFarlane here?” and they said, “Yes,” and I said, “I’d like to meet him.” So I was shown where his office was, and I went in and I said, “You wouldn’t know me – my name is Shean – I’ve been serving in X craft along with Brian.” and I said, “I’m very sorry about Brian’s accident and I thought maybe you might want

14:30 to know more about it.” And he said, “Yes I would.” So I told him the whole plot and what was going on, and I thought it was important to tell him the circumstances that his son died, and so he listened to all this and he said, “When are you going back to Perth?” and I said, “Tomorrow. I’m going back with the

RAAF." He said, "Would you care to come home and spend the night and talk to my wife?" and I said, "Yes I'll do that," and I thought, "Gee, this is going to be a thing

15:00 telling Brian's mother about it." Anyway, we went through that and she took it pretty well and I hated having to do it but I thought it was something that had to be done and then I went back next morning and I've often thought about that. I was going home to my Mum, but Brian wasn't going to be with his Mum. He was a good chap too, very nice chap. He married a French girl

15:30 and they had a fairly torrid courtship and honeymoon. When he came back from the honeymoon, he was going to Bonaventure, to our depot ship, and she was anchored just off our hotel and the chap rigged a bosun's chair over the side because he wouldn't be able to find the companionway – he was just back from his honeymoon, so they hoisted him up, so we all had a good laugh at Brian. But his married life didn't last long.

16:00 He was a very funny man. He was a great raconteur, and in the boardroom, he always had a story or two yarning and I liked him a great deal. He didn't deserve to go down due to an accident.

Why did you decide to write your book?

Because I was got at by so many people. I hadn't been home a week when my father said,

16:30 "I've got a friend in the Association of Accountants who have a monthly meeting or a weekly meeting and they'd like to hear about what you were up to." Because it got full publicity, as soon as we reached Sydney, secrecy was lifted and every paper ran stories about it. So I went along to this thing and gave a bit of a yarn and it wasn't long until I got another invitation and of course you get into the Rotary circuit. The first Rotary meeting you go to –

17:00 then you get a call every week after that from all the clubs in Western Australia, and then other groups like all ex-service groups wanted me and I joined Legacy and in fact, Legacy asked me for two talks before I joined, and people would say, "Have you written a book? You should write a book," and of course this goes on year after year and I suppose I was giving a talk about once a month. Once a month for fifty years is a lot of talks,

17:30 it's probably not quite that many but… So I said to my younger daughter, "I keep getting persuaded to write a book." She said, "You couldn't do it. Don't do it." I said, "That's fine. Thanks very much – I won't do it." So people still kept getting at me, so I said to Ruth in the end, "Look – they're still at me to write a book." She said, "You've got to get a word processor," as if to say, "You couldn't write a word, but a word processor could." So I started belting away on an electric typewriter, which I thought was good enough,

18:00 but for Christmas she took my draft which was finished, and got it put onto a word processor – she got a typist to put it in, so then of course I was locked in. So I used to go to her house some days and do a bit of typing, and then she decided to upgrade her word processor, and she sold me hers, so I've still got that. I realised she was quite right – I tell all my friends not to start on a word processor because editing is so easy

18:30 and the thing can spell, which I can't. So as long as you remember to tell it to spell you'll be free of mistakes, well most of the time, you've still got to make sure it's the right word it's spelling. So it took me about three years. I went to England on one of these reunions for the Corvette Association, and spent a week at the public record office and that was an experience.

19:00 I'd already written to them hoping that they would send me extracts of what I wanted, but I didn't realise it was such as enormous organisation. They just said, "You come over here and apply for a reader's card and okay you can do that." So I went down and I spent six days absolutely solid reading and that was like cramming for exams again, because I thought, "I've come a long way to do this – I'd better get everything I want." They've got a very good system, but they

19:30 said, "What do you want?" Well, I didn't know what I wanted, so they told me about the index system – there's a computer index and a card index – and I was frightened of computers, so I got onto the card, and you've got to think of a key word and I started off 'Bluebell'. I thought, "I'll do the convoys." So you go to the card index and they've got thousands of files so you pick out the first three you find with Bluebell and you go up to the counter and you ask

20:00 for these and they give you a little pager and a desk, and you've got to sit at this desk and listen to the pager and when it goes 'beep', you go to the counter and one of your files will be there. You're allowed three files at a time. There are a lot of rules – you're not allowed to use a pen, you're not allowed to talk and you can get photocopies that take two days, and otherwise you just make pencil notes. So I started on this thing and I read and read and read and anything where Bluebell was mentioned, I'd take notes. I don't know whether it was my convoy, or before

20:30 I'd joined her also, and after six days I thought I had a pretty good coverage of Bluebell, which turned out to be true. I had all the convoys documented there, and I started on the submarine bit, but they had very little that I could access on X-craft, I'd got a few things, so I thought, "My memory on X-craft is not too bad, and I'll apply for my patrol reports," which were available so I came back home.

21:00 And I'd already typed the first draft, because what really got me started was that I went to Legacy one day, which meets every week on a Tuesday, and they have a guest speaker and as I walked in and paid my money they said, "You're speaker today," and I said, "Thank you very much – what am I talking about?" and they said, "That's your worry, not ours, because the real speaker can't come." Well, I thought, "The book's a thing," so I got up and I said, "I've been asked to give a talk with five minutes' notice." I said, "I've been

21:30 prevailed upon to write a book. Several of you people have written books, so I'm going to tell you my thoughts so far, which will take five minutes, and then I expect you to tell me your guidance advice on how to do it." So that worked out very well. I said as much as I knew, and then people didn't get up, so I called them up – I knew who'd written books – and they gave me quite good advice, and one chap – a chap called John Bolt – he'd been an air force pilot – he'd written three

22:00 books and he said, "My advice to you is start writing now. Start your search now but don't let your writing wait for the research. Keep on writing, even if you've got to guess or leave blanks, and fill it in later – keep on writing and type it double spaced with four spaces between paragraphs and keep it to 80,000 words, and write as if you were talking to a friend sitting opposite you," and

22:30 he said a few other things, these are what I can remember. But luckily, next week, he wrote me a letter repeating what he'd said, and one or two other people gave advice too. So I did start writing right away, so by the time I'd finished the first draft by memory, I went to England and got these notes and luckily Mary stayed on with her Scottish folk, and I came home, and when I got home I tried to integrate my research notes to my memory notes and it

23:00 was impossible. I had everything back to front and the wrong time, and I had things out of sequence and I didn't know how I was going to do it, so I spread everything out on the floor – all the pages and would go around picking up one, cutting it in half and gluing it onto another one and so on. But I found that as John Bolt had said: "Allow for at least three proof readings of your own, and as many off other people as you can get and you'll find that each one of them becomes easier," and that's the way it was.

23:30 The first integrating of the research notes with memory writing took a long time and was most painful, but then I'd typed the corrections in, and then Ruth got it done on her computer, so I had it on floppy disk and then I was going – I'd do a lot more research and make a few notes, and then type those in and get another print out, which is easy because you have plenty of scrap paper, and

24:00 it got easier each time and then I went back and researched the… Well, in the book, when I wrote up the attack on this submarine, I wasn't happy with the word I got from Admiralty that we hadn't sunk it. So I decided to do my own research on that, so I went back again – this time to the place in Whitehall and got the German reports and came home with these, translating from a little dictionary all the way, and then I

24:30 made a composite diary: and I should have done this at the beginning. I should have made a blank diary for the whole of the war, say a line for every day, or something like that, so I made a diary for this attack. It was a two page diary with plenty of room, and I put in times from Bluebell's log and I put in times from the German log and the Germans were keeping one hour ahead of British time – I soon got that solved, and

25:00 the more I went, the more things jigsawed in, and it was marvellous. I'd find something in Bluebell's log and something at the same time in the U-Boat log, so that pinpointed those two together, and also I gave a synchronism of clocks, and then I came to the point that I mentioned earlier that I find of all the logs, only two torpedoes have been fired by U-67, but we heard four torpedoes running, so who fired

25:30 the other one? Well, two of the four submarines that I was researching had been sunk because obviously U-208 had been sunk, so we didn't have the full log – all we had was the German U-Boat command record of signals, and so I had those and I found that the only possibility was that U-208 had fired these other two torpedoes.

26:00 And also there were other notes there which gave a bit of a hint. The submarine we did have the record for said that something was following her – it must have been a British torpedo boat under Admiralty intelligence advice. Now that's a preposterous idea – we were off Cape St Vincent and the Admiralty won't be able to worry about a damn torpedo boat. Anyway, there wasn't a torpedo boat so I thought what had happened probably was that U-208 had been attacked

26:30 off Gibraltar by these two destroyers, and had some damage and was on her way home when she ran into our convoy and saw another U-Boat and tried to come alongside to pass a verbal message, because I think her radio was out of commission, but the U-Boat kept running away form her and she was faster. And so that accounted for how U-208 happened to see the convoy, or happened to see us and fired a couple of torpedoes as a parting shot. So I thought

27:00 I had a pretty good case, but Admiralty didn't agree, but never mind.

How was your book received?

It did well. Nobody's condemned it. A lot of people have commended it. I've had a lot of feedback which was very good. It was the first book I'd written. I printed a thousand, I decided to finance it myself –

self-publishing they call it, or vanity publishing and then I tried a couple

27:30 of publishers, but they weren't interested. One lot in England were a bit interested but they wanted too much money up front so they couldn't possibly lose on it, so I said, "No. I'll do it myself." So I got hold of an old printer in Northbridge to print it, and I was prepared to lay out $10,000 and if I lost, that well too bad, but if I somehow broke even well then that was good. I have broken even. I printed a thousand and they all went, so I printed another thousand

28:00 as a second edition, because the first thousand books bring you in a lot of corrections that people do read it and they say, "This word is spelt another way," and, "This Kitchener Rudder is a Kiption rudder," that's a special rudder on a navy boat, and as the quote for the manual of seamanship approved, and so you've got all this sort of thing coming in, so gradually I amended the first, I kept a working copy and every bit of advice I got I pencilled

28:30 In, and put an index in the back with corrections that had been made, and in 1992, I published the book and in 1994, I published a second thousand and I've got thirty of those left, and so now my ambition is to die on the day I sell my last book, because I don't want to have to print another thousand.

It's a pretty wonderful adventure to have written a book. But also you had a very big adventure sailing across to the UK?

29:00 Yes – that was quite good but I didn't write that in a book – the book is wartime only. I've mentioned it, in the very end of the book I mentioned it, because I thought, well my boat's called Bluebell after the corvette, which is lost on the people here, if it was in England every second boat is called Bluebell: well not every second, but a lot of boats are called Bluebell in Britain. When I went into one harbour

29:30 over there in Troon in Scotland, the manager said, "We've got two other Bluebells here already so we'll call you Bluebell Fremantle," but the book's been good of course, it's brought a lot more talks, and sometimes when Rotary are getting a bit willing I said to the talk organiser, "I've got a book for sale, if you care to mention this I'll take some along." So at some meetings,

30:00 the member of the Rotary thanks gives it a real good plug, and you can do very well there and at others they don't, and you don't sell any so a lot of the salesmanship – but I've generally – I think it's a good thing to have written a book, and I tell many of my shipmates they should write one, and I'll give them a bit of a hand. I was using the local libraries as research sources, as well as the Alexander Library and at Cottesloe down here,

30:30 there's a very girl who's librarian and she said, "My father was in the navy and he would like to hear you speak. We've got a friends of the library group. Would you care to give them a talk about writing a book?" so I said, "Yes. All right, I'll do that as you asked for it. You must think I can contribute." So I got together all my research papers, and one of the cartons the books came in, they filled that carton and it was about that big, so I went down to this group, quite nice people, and I

31:00 put down this carton and I said, "Now here are my research papers." Well, by the end of the talk they all decided they weren't going to write a book, if that's all the work there was in it – not for them. So perhaps it had a bad effect.

What actually made you decide to sail your own yacht over to the UK?

Well I'd bought a yacht in 1966, and it was a wooden boat – it's quite a nice boat – I turned sailing nephews and they

31:30 get it for me, and they regard me as their rich uncle and they said, "I think you should be into fibreglass, and Shorebricks have got a new design out and it looks a very good one," so I said, "Oh no. I'm happy with the boat I've got." So I went to Shorebricks and had a look and it was a good design – it was a thirty foot boat designed in America and I was over at Rottnest, and one of the Shorebricks was there and I was right over to him and I said, "I see you're building an SS34

32:00 as well as an SS30." That's four foot longer. I said, "What would the difference in cost be for the bare hull?" He said, "A thousand dollars," and I thought, "Well, you're getting more than a thousand dollars' worth of boat," so I asked him for a quote, and they gave me a quote and I accepted it. It was just a bare hull and deck, and I had it delivered home – I was living at Floreat then – and I was in the workshop making one of the parts for it, and the radio was going and it must have been about

32:30 1974 I suppose – seventy-nine was our sesquicentennial year – and there was a news item that as part of the 1979 celebrations there's going to be a yacht race from England to – Plymouth to Fremantle via Cape Town. So I'd just been to Britain, and been in a week sailing in the Hebrides with this Adam Burgess – the chap who could always make me laugh – and I thought it'd be wonderful

33:00 if I launch my boat and sail it to Scotland in the Hebrides, and getting over there would be a lot of fun, but coming back would be a bit of a bore. Then I heard this, and I thought, "That's be a thing – I could nominate for the race – I wouldn't be racing because I'm not a racing bloke, but you'd get over there and then come back with the race." And with these racers, there was all kinds of things like parties and things and briefings, so I'd have a lot of fun coming home. So I did that and I went to all the briefings here beforehand, and

33:30 met some of the other blokes, and they were all talking big: one chap was going to send his boat to him by cargo ship, and go skiing in Switzerland for a year and something else for a while and so on and I thought, “Crumbs. I’m not in that league – I’m very small beer in this race.” Anyway, the more we got going the more I thought I was being pretty thorough, with navy experience and with my planning, whereas some of these people were being very casual. And anyway

34:00 we had to estimate a starting date. And the rule was for our division, you had to declare your starting day of your own choice, in order to be in Fremantle on a given day at a given time, and if more than one bloke did it then the one with the shortest elapsed corrected time won. Because different boats have a different handicap, and that’s given as a time correction factor, because if you’re the fastest boat your factor is one – mine was about 0.7 or something, so

34:30 my number of days was multiplied by 0.7 and that was my corrected time. And we won the jolly thing and that was the biggest surprise of my life. Yeah, so I found that some of the other blokes were full of bluff and flannel. I got all the routing charts for the oceans and these are charts compile a wind row for every five degrees of latitude and longitude, so you’d go through systematically and work out what winds you could expect and work out your progress,

35:00 and the time for each square. So I did this and I had to get up at three o’clock in the morning, and I couldn’t sleep for excitement and work on this and I gave it to the chief chemist of SEC, and he was one of the crew and said, “Check these figures,” and so he checked them. A computer would do it much quicker, but I didn’t have a computer. Anyway, I first of all took a guess at the time, and I had to write and tell them so I told them I think the 4th of August was my starting date, and then

35:30 sailing outward bound, I also did the calculation and we got to Suez about six days earlier than my calculations, so when we got to Britain, we sailed up to the Clyde and I went ashore, and Adam was then director of his whisky firm, so I called on his office and I said, “Can you give me a place to sit and a proper calculator?” so he got me that so I went through all my calculations again and corrected my factor – it was a practical factor – and that gave

36:00 me a 14th of August starting date: later, which is better if you can make it. So that was my starting day – I started on the 14th, and we came to Fremantle with fifteen hours to spare, so that was a bit of a jag wasn’t it? And five yachts did it, and mine was the best corrected time so I got – we got fourteen trophies, and Mary stopped polishing them not very long ago. But it was worthwhile, and my Captain Fell, who was captain

36:30 of Bonaventure, I’ve kept in touch with him and also Banks, and I told them about this race and Banks said, “Right, you’ll dine with me,” in wherever it was, Scotland I think, because we were there at the same time and his wife, and Fell who was in New Zealand said, “I want a report on each stage. The outward bound stage and the two stages of the race,” so I did that and when I wrote in the final stage that we’d won, he sent a letter back saying,

37:00 “Splendid man.” That’s all he said. And I thought, “That wasn’t bad for your captain, who was usually used to giving you reprimands for doing the wrong thing.” So that was all extensions of the navy experience. When you join the navy you join a club that’ll last life long. And they’re both dead now, these captains, but they were jolly good friends.

37:30 **Tell us about all the associations you’ve been affiliated with?**

That’s the service associations. Right…

Just list them.

Well the first one I think was Legacy. You know what Legacy is? Yeah, well I’d built one house and then built a second house, and got the lawns planted and things, and by that time it was 1962, and I thought I had a bit

38:00 of spare time, so I contacted a chap I knew who was in Legacy, and next day I was in. And I’m still a member of Legacy. And I think probably the next one was the Submarine Old Comrades Association and after the Parmelia Race, they asked me to give them a talk, so I gave them a talk and before I went home they said, “What about joining the association?” and I said, “I’m in enough associations now. I can’t attend all the meetings,” and they

38:30 said, “You haven’t got to attend meetings. Just join – we’d like to have you.” So I joined that. Still a member of that, and they grumble when I don’t got to meetings. And the Flower Class corvette Association was the next one. I had a friend whose cousin sailed in Bluebell, and she put me in touch and he said, “There’s a meeting next year,” so we went to that and that was pretty good and then I became President of Legacy, and one of the

39:00 Legacies, who was a member of Highgate RSL, which is probably the principal club in WA said, “If you’re president of Legacy you’ve got to be a member of Highgate,” so I was in RSL. Now I think that’s all. Other associations came up and grabbed me from time to time, but Highgate RSL is good. Their meetings are well conducted, and they always have a speaker and they’re a lot better than I am, so that works out well. The Submariners

39:30 is really an English corner-pub meeting, everybody goes down there, drinks beer, talks nonsense and

goes home and comes back a month later and does the same thing, but they're nice chaps and Mary comes along too. She's joined the Wrens Association, so I go to some of their functions and she comes to some of mine so I'm almost a Wren. I think that's probably it.

You're also a custodian of the monument?

40:00 Yes I was warden for a year. That's a year office and yes they nominated me for that. That means you've got to go to every ceremony up there for a year, and for as long afterwards if the other man can't do it. I've been up twice for the existing warden, but that's quite okay. The thing is, I ride a pushbike and riding up Mount Eliza is quite a push, and I get pains in the heart and my doctor tells me I've got angina, and I should take tablets but I don't, because part of our

40:30 submarine training, we were told we had to be fit – we had to run every morning before breakfast – and the doctor said, "If you get a pain in the heart, breathe deeply. Deeply in, deeply out until it goes," he said, "Because the system is starving for oxygen and that's the way to do it," so I do that on my bike now. I breathe in and out.

Considering the fact that the archive that we're doing today is going to be around for as many years as Australia is – what would you like to pass on to people in the future about your experience of war?

41:00 Don't have one. Try to avoid it at all costs – having to go to war. But I suppose if you're got one and you've got to fight, well I suppose make the best of it. I believe in staying alive: you've got to look after yourself. Stay fit and healthy.

41:30 It might seem by ignoring the doctor's prescriptions. I'm not being very careful but I believe if you do the sensible thing, the common sense thing, you'll probably live longer, and I'm eighty-five now, so that's not a bad innings – touch wood and hope you carry on. But I think that apart from war being a hateful, wasteful and terrible thing, being in one

42:00 is not so bad – while you're alive.