

Australians at War Film Archive

Evan Morris (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/783>

Tape 1

00:08 **Tell me about growing up in Perth?**

I thought you'd ask me this. Growing up in Perth was, I think, a very pleasant place to grow up in. Do you want to know where I was born and that sort of thing?

Sure.

00:30 I can tell you virtually up to the square yard. A house in what was called Labouchere Road, and still is called Labouchere Road, at the junction of Mill Point Road, which in the old days was called Suburban Road and Labouchere Road; my father and mother had built a house. They had it ready before they were married in 1914.

01:00 Anyway he then went off to the war and in 1917, on the 11th April 1917, he was quite severely wounded and captured at the Battle of Bullecourt, at the first Battle of Bullecourt; not fatally injured, obviously, because I am here now. He became

01:30 a prisoner of war which was, I won't say unusual, but there weren't an awful lot of Australian prisoners of war in Germany. And I think it was a particularly difficult period because he was commissioned, a big difference between being an ordinary private was in the treatment that they got. So he spent the rest of his war in, I think it was either Friedberg or Karlsburg, in a university, which had been

02:00 taken over as headquarters, a place to put them. And he returned to Australia in 1919 I think it was, and rejoined my mother, and as a result of that, and coincidentally, three years to the very day that he was taken prisoner, I was born, 11th April 1920.

02:30 Whether that has anything to do with my nickname I don't know, but the popular story is that he referred to me as Kaiser Bill, as fathers often do when they get silly, like they become a bit silly with babies and he referred to me as Kaiser Bill, and believe it or not that name has stuck with me for the last 80 years. Anyway getting back to it, I was born in this house in

03:00 South Perth, within 18 months it was sold because my sister came along and the house was too small. We moved to another place nearby but I think my father had rather itchy feet, or not so much itchy feet as not particularly

03:30 happy with his occupation. I think he was rather spoilt in his prisoner of war camp because he was mixing with some quite well known figures, in fact, one of the prisoners there was a cousin of the late Queen Mother, he was a Bowes-Lyons, another one of them was Leif Robinson who shot down the first Zeppelin over London. So poor old Dad

04:00 coming back to Perth and working for an estate agent, as a clerk of an estate agent I think, it rather unsettled him so he decided to take us all off to the country.

Was he actually in the army or the navy?

Army, he was a lieutenant when he went away and I think his captaincy came through while he was in the prisoner of war camp. Anyway he carted us off to the country; first of

04:30 all to an awful place called Darkan, most appropriately named, I think, Darkan, and then from Darkan to Bruce Rock, as a stock and land station agent. That didn't work out obviously because of poor seasons and we returned to Perth in 1926, and that's when we came back to South Perth.

What didn't you like about Darkan?

05:00 It was virtually a siding, well when I say I didn't like it, I probably wasn't old enough to have an opinion but from reports it wasn't the most exciting place in the world to live.

So you are back in South Perth now?

Yes, we came back to South Perth, and it was the year of the great flood, 1926.

05:30 I can remember going down to Mends Street and seeing kids after school sailing boats up from Mill Point almost as far as Mends Street. The ferry, heavens know how the people got aboard the ferry because the tide was so high I think they almost had to build a staging

06:00 on the Mends Street jetty in order for people to get on the ferry because the water lapped right across the road, what is now the Esplanade and a very salubrious part of South Perth was completely under water. Those things don't happen these days of course because of Mundaring Weir; the level has been raised, maybe we just had freak weather.

06:30 But South Perth was a very pleasant place to live.

What sort of things did you do on the weekends?

Kids amused themselves by just mucking around.

07:00 You could go down to the recreation ground and kick a football around. Go out bird nesting, but then you wouldn't like that very much these days I don't think.

What's bird nesting?

Well you find a nest and take the eggs out and bring them home and put a hole in either end and blow. Kids used to collect, like they collect stamps, they used to collect birds eggs.

07:30 As I got a bit older, my main attraction in summer time particularly, was swimming. Como jetty these days is virtually, almost deserted. But I can recall back in the '20s that jetty being so crowded.

08:00 If you had a hot Sunday that jetty would be so crowded, virtually you ran a risk of being pushed over the side. It thronged with people. There would be yachts tied up at the end, fellas would hire yachts and great spots to go across to Como. There were dance halls for sure. The tramways used to run trams in tandem, two large bogey trams

08:30 hooked up so that they just had the one driver and two conductors. In fact I have got photos of them, in a book here I have got a photo of the tandem trams, and they could carry, from my recollection, 64 in each trams seated and about at least 64 standing;

09:00 so close on 250 people could be brought along en masse. And they would originate in places like Victoria Park and the City and made their way around. Vic [Victoria] Park ones of course didn't have to go across the Causeway, but the ones from Perth did and they would come along

09:30 too, pass the zoo and along Labouchere Road, past Royal Perth golf links disgorging all their passengers, as I say, on a hot Sunday.

Did you go to the zoo?

Not very often, I suppose possibly because it was there,

10:00 having been once or twice there was probably no attraction. Apart from little boys who sometimes got in at night time, as mentioned in that book of Hungerford's and I think he stole a little cockerel and poked it down his jumper. Colonel Swift knew he had it there but let him get away with it.

10:30 It was a very pleasant place.

Como just sounds so much more colourful back in those days? Because it's a bit of a dead spot now isn't it?

It is really, the whole area has been taken over with units, which of course that's only happened probably in the last 30 or 40 years. Como was a particularly pleasant place.

So what did you think of school?

Contrary to the usual reaction, I rather liked school, without wishing to sound conceited I was a reasonably good scholar, and for that reason, in fact, I don't consider myself particularly competitive, but I was at school.

11:30 Particularly as one got up to the more senior classes, one of the attractions back in those days was the teachers. I don't know whether it happens in state schools today. Probably this business of

12:00 they have a rigid objection to having an elite society as it were. They cut out Perth Modern School. Everybody has to be the same these days but back when I was at school they conducted examinations, or tests as we call them, every Friday and one of the attractions of

12:30 getting top of the class was the fact that, the person likely to get the top of the class was a young lady; I think I can mention her name, Judy Philp, and Judy was attractive and if you were second top of the class you sat next to her for a week - get it! Funnily enough I ran in to her in the navy years later

13:00 but I was usually either sitting next to her or close up to her most of the time in my fifth and sixth standard. Anyway getting back to schooling, yes, I quite enjoyed it, and when a scholarship was offered by Wesley College for sons of returned soldiers I happened to jag one,

13:30 which was just as well because it was 1932 and they were the Depression years where my old man had been quite, well the family had been quite, hit quite badly really financially.

How did that happen?

Well after my father's somewhat unsuccessful sojourn

14:00 in Bruce Rock he came down to Perth and got a job at Lioness Motors who were the big Ford Dealers in Hay Street, because he knew one of the Lionesses. I don't know exactly but I think he only had at that stage a clerical position with them. Anyway as luck would have it around about that time the Ford Company brought out

14:30 a range of agricultural equipment like light road graders and tractors and road rollers and things all powered by Ford engines and the management asked whether anybody in the staff had any experience in the agricultural fields and of course the old man put his hand up, and he had

15:00 quite a bonanza as far as he was concerned because the various country shires and things were just itching to get hold of road graders and things which had been in short supply. And the old man made quite a lot of money, commission wise, I mean it sounds crazy today but I can remember my mother telling me how one week he made as much as forty pounds. Well when you consider that the basic

15:30 wage those days was about three pound 10 a week or something, that was big dough. But unfortunately it didn't last because in 1929 along came the big crash and eventually he was just put off because there were no sales and he went through an awful period between about 1930 and 1932.

16:00 Funds were in very short supply so it was just as well I jagged this scholarship because I would have never would have made it otherwise. The scholarship was for 3 years and at the end of 3 years I managed to get myself

16:30 a job with an insurance company as an office boy. That was normal procedure in those days, you either got a job with an insurance company or a bank or a shipping company. Unfortunately

17:00 my father went to a lodge meeting where the headmaster of Wesley in those days was a man called Rossiter, Dr Rossiter, who said "Evan is a good student, we'd like to have him on to do leaving, we'll make perhaps some arrangement as far as fees are concerned." That was the very day

17:30 that I had got the job in town and of course the job took priority which I rather regret really, because well it's one of my regrets that I didn't, was not able to do those 2 years, which these days they have different names for these standards,

18:00 but in those days you either left after you did Junior, and I got a very good Junior actually, I got 9 subjects. As I say, in retrospect it would have been much better had I been able to do my leaving in which case I probably would have done something more worthwhile in life, finally.

18:30 **So how old are you at this point?**

When started work I was still 15 and I turned 16 in the April of 36 and I think I

19:00 did reasonably well there; it was just a slow progression from being office boy, to renewal clerk and one thing and another, and by 1939 I had become the acting chief clerk.

What sort of job duties do you have as this chief clerk?

19:30 You are responsible, the company I worked for had a head office in Melbourne and each month the books were balanced, the agent's ledger and the private ledger, to the penny. And all prepared and sent across to Melbourne and I'm rather proud of the fact that

20:00 at 19 or 20 years of age I was doing this and making sure that it did balance to the penny. It was quite involved you can imagine and everything was done, the ledgers and everything were all done by hand and there were journal entries, and going back, thinking back 60-odd years, it's hard to recall exactly what one did

20:30 but it was quite onerous and quite a responsible job.

Did you enjoy it?

I did, I like figures and in fact I will get onto that later but, yes I did, anything to do with figures and arithmetic, still do actually.

21:00 **So, what makes you decide that you are going to go into the services, what was going on in Perth at that time to alert you that there could be problems abroad?**

Well, by then, it was very obvious that there were problems abroad because I can quite clearly remember

- 21:30 listening to the broadcast, the declaration of war by England, and Menzies telling the people of Australia that as England were at war, we were automatically at war. I remember it quite clearly, and lads that I knew had been caps in the navy reserve were being called up
- 22:00 ; but I didn't do anything about it right away. I didn't go racing up to join the colours or anything like that. What really triggered me into action was when I got called up by the army. It wasn't conscription as far as overseas service was concerned, but the army had the power to call you up for
- 22:30 what they rather rudely refer to as 'Chocko', and the moment that happened, then I thought no way was I going to be in the army. I suppose that was a result of my father's stories of the western front and what he had gone through and at times he used to tell me and about and
- 23:00 people I knew around the place who's had fathers with arms and legs missing and that sort of thing. I thought why am I going to be in the army? And I'd always had this passion for ships. Going back to my days at Wesley, some times of a Wednesday afternoon we had a period where we would be asked to get up and address the class on a subject
- 23:30 of our choosing, say for 20 minutes, and my particular forte as I say was shipping and ships and I remember holding forth for 20 minutes on the Blue Ribbands of the Atlantic and nominating all the ships. I remember Rossiter being amazed that Morris, at 15 years of age, could remember all the names of these ships, but it just comes automatically. When you are interested in a subject it just comes to you automatically.

24:00 **What's a Blue Ribband?**

Well, there is great rivalry on the Atlantic run between Southampton and New York, between the nations, particularly the Germans and the British, and strangely enough it was something that particularly the Cunard line, which eventually held it, they had never boasted that they were

- 24:30 holders of the blue ribbon, they just said that we happen to have the fastest crossing and that's just part of our policy sort of thing. It was sort of an unofficial thing but the general public relished it of course, and it started way back at the turn of the century when the Germans were starting to throw their weight around a bit and vie with the British
- 25:00 for world recognition. They started building these big ships, and up to that stage I suppose Britain had been the sort of, certainly in the mercantile power of the world, and they were being challenged by the Germans, and then in, I think—forgetting the actual vessels that they produced—
- 25:30 round about I think it was 1908 the British revolutionised the whole thing by introducing turbine-driven ships, as opposed to the old 'up and downers', and their famous ship was the Mauritania, and the Mauritania held that so-called Blue Ribband from about 1908 to 1929,
- 26:00 over 20 years, nothing could touch it, and then the Germans came along with two beautiful ships, the Bremen and the Europa and they took it off the Brits and then the Italians got in on the act and they started building fast ships. Then in about 1930 Great Britain produced the Queen Mary
- 26:30 and that fixed it for all time. It was only, the Queen Mary held it for so long that people sort of lost interest. The Yanks eventually built the United States which took it off us, but by then it was a bit like the America's Cup, people have lost interest in it now.

So you had this big interest in ships?

- 27:00 I loved ships, and I knew that if I did anything it would be the navy, so around about, having been called up by the army I decided that I would join the navy, to avoid being called up by the army as it were. I don't think my old man was ever was very enthusiastic, being a military man of course, I suppose
- 27:30 he would have liked his son to have gone into the army, but I thought no, no way.

So what did you do in order to join the navy?

Just went down to Cliff Street, Fremantle, signed the dotted line.

Can you tell me what it was like that day? How many people, where were you? Was there tension in the air, was there excitement?

Not really.

- 28:00 It was just another day but going back perhaps before we joined the navy, perhaps I could mention, and also getting back to the shipping business, how one day in town I ran into one of my old school mates who said to me after an ordinary conversation about this and that, "Incidentally," he said, "the Queen Mary is coming
- 28:30 in tomorrow." And of course movement of shipping was hush, hush, it was supposed to be, and I said,

"How do you know this?" "A friend of mine's father works at a provedoring company and they have been told this," and of course at that stage there had been a couple of big convoys taking troops to the Middle East, and I had taken time off work to go down and have a look at them, sitting out in Gage Road. Anyway we lived in Cottesloe at this

- 29:00 stage, house is still there on the corner of Gerard Street, near the crossing, and I thought to myself I wonder whether this bloke's pulling my leg and so I set the alarm for about 5 o'clock and I hop footed up Gerard Street to where the rugby club is, up the top there, that reserve, and I looked out and I thought, "Oh no, I think he's pulling my leg,"
- 29:30 and then all of a sudden I noticed just north of Rottnest a thing like a block of flats sitting on the horizon and I thought, "My God, he's right you know," so I stood there till this thing gets bigger and bigger, swung around with three great big funnels, it was the Queen Mary all right, anchored in Gage Road. So getting back to the navy, the day I joined up wasn't particularly exciting. We just got kitted up;
- 30:00 but I do recall getting dressed in my uniform, taking myself back to Hay Street in Perth to be seen. And fortunately I ran into a friend of mine who was already in and we felt very pleased with ourselves.

What was the uniform like?

The issued

- 30:30 uniform was pretty rough, wasn't bad, but later on we used to get our own, called 'tiddlies', made by naval tailors in Melbourne. The issued job was pass but at first we weren't aware of what indicated whether
- 31:00 you were a rookie, or whether you were an old salt. At that stage you were quite ignorant. In fact, I think I went up to Perth minus the black ribbon. In later years I would have been ashamed to have been seen dead in it but I was at this stage quite ignorant of the fact that there were certain little things about the uniform which indicated
- 31:30 just how senior you were. I remember next morning waking up, having to get back to the depot and it was July, so it was mid winter, and I thought to myself, "My God, what have I done!." But one hardens after a while.

So what was the training like?

There wasn't much training at Fremantle. There was

- 32:00 only a recruiting spot. The depot in Cliff Street was actually named Cerberus Five, it wasn't Leeuwin. The name of Leeuwin was changed later on. I don't know whether it was, they transferred from Cliff Street to Preston Point where the big barracks are now,
- 32:30 which have subsequently been taken over by the army by the way. I think the name was changed to Leeuwin before they actually transferred to there but when I joined in 1940 it was Cerberus Five and really it was only a recruiting depot, very little training there. They'd take you out on The Esplanade near Cicerello's and do a little bit of a rifle drill but they gave you
- 33:00 fairly menial jobs, like sentry around the buildings with a rifle on your shoulder and that sort of thing. One rather aspired to become allocated for sentry duty because it gave you time off. You did your 24 hours then you had 24 hours leave which wasn't
- 33:30 available to the ordinary run of the mill. I was quite pleased when I got myself appointed sentry to the naval control building which is the old Elder Smith building on the corner of Cliff Street, right down the bottom. That didn't last long; I got into trouble.
- 34:00 It was very lonely, as you can imagine, pacing up and down there. They ran it entirely as they do aboard ship with the watches, there is the morning watch which is 8 till 12, there is the afternoon from 12 till 4, then there is the first dog watch which is from 4 to 6, and the last dog watch
- 34:30 from 6 till 8, then you've got 8 till 12 and so it goes on. Anyway this particular evening I was walking up and down and a girl came along on a pushbike, there were a few 'street Arabs' I suppose you'd call them really. They were naughty girls I think.
- 35:00 She started talking to me and she said, "Are you hungry?" and I said, "Yeah, I'm always hungry." She said, "Give us some money and I will go and buy you a pie," a pie or a pasty. So I gave her some money and she brought the pie back, so I parked my rifle against the building and I hopped up on the window sill
- 35:30 and I was munching at this pie and talking to this girl. Well, it just so happened that the officer of the evening in the building, his messenger, a little bloke called Morrissey I think it was, and I think he was lost in the Sydney, but he used to sleep under the counter in this building and if the officer of the evening
- 36:00 wanted anything done he would call out to Morrissey, but he had taken it upon himself to shoot through as they called it. So the officer came out looking for Morrissey, couldn't find him, so he came out to the

footpath. "Ho, ho, ho, what have we got here?" So the next thing down comes an armed guard and they march me back to the depot

36:30 and I was up before the officer of the day the next morning and I got myself a week's stoppage to leave. So I thought, "Well, this is a fine way to start a naval career." Anyway they couldn't have held it against me because as soon as my stoppage was up I was appointed to the North Moll and even today on your way to Rottnest if you look out

37:00 half way along the moll before you get to where they have cut a hole through these dunes. There's a building with a smokestack where there is a whole lot of rubbish but next to that is another squat building. That was the engine house of the big boom chain that they pulled across the harbour, anti submarine, and that was being built at the time, and I had to guard it at night time. Well, that was quite

37:30 a soft number. You'd sit out there but I nearly got into trouble there too. The chances of the officer of the day or the night doing rounds and check on you was pretty scarce out there because it meant coming across in a boat and all that sort of thing. So you didn't run the risk so much of being caught out.

38:00 But this particular day, or morning, it must have just been getting light, and I looked down the harbour and there was HMAS Perth, the one subsequently lost in the Sunda Strait. She was 'flashing up' as they say. Black smoke was pouring out of the funnels and you know when that's happening, she's about to leave harbour. So I thought to myself, "Well, I'd had better be on my toes here because when she comes past I have to stand there with my weapon on shoulder,"

38:30 but I thought, "In the meantime I will just sit on this box." And the sun was just coming up and getting warm. "I'll just sit here for a few minutes," which I did. And it seemed only a matter of minutes and I looked up and down the harbour and I looked up looked down the harbour and she'd gone. So I got up looked across the mole and there she was hull down on the horizon.

39:00 That was the day she left to go to the Middle East. She didn't come back, and had she just been going out on one of her patrols, I'm quite sure that there would have been a report put in that the north mole sentry was fast asleep on a box in the sunlight.

Saved by the Middle East?

Saved by the Middle East, yes.

39:30 **So how long were you doing this duty on the mole?**

It couldn't have been long because I joined in mid July, I joined a couple of weeks after Italy came into the war. Italy came into the war I think on June 10th 1940. I joined on the 16th July.

40:00 And I was off to Flinders by November so all this took place in a matter of 3 months.

So how did they get you to Flinders?

In those days early in the war there were no such things as troop trains, we just went second class passengers on the Kalgoorlie express and then across the desert on the transcontinental. That was rather interesting. When we got to

40:30 Port Augusta, and of course bearing in mind unlike today where by the time thousands of kids are 16 or 17 years of age they have been to England, they've been to America, they've been every bloody where. But in those days half your reason for joining the services was to be able to get away somewhere. That was the attraction I would say, not for your patriotism. But the group

41:00 of us that went across on that train, I doubt whether any of us had been out of the state in our lives, so it was quite a thrill. When we got to Port Augusta there had been a wash away, sudden floods they get over there. The rain that comes down off the Flinders Ranges had cut the track between Port Augusta and Pirie. So we were stranded in Port Augusta. We were there that night

41:30 anyway and they put on a dance for us in the local hall and the next day they cranked up the funniest little train I have ever seen. Port Augusta is one of those peculiar places that had three sets of gauges. There's the 4' 8"—that came across from Kalgoorlie—

42:00 there was the South Australia 3' 6"...

Tape 2

00:31 This funny little train, because in addition to the naval contingent there were ordinary civilian passengers, had to get through to Adelaide some how or other. So the way they did it was to get this little train with two funny little engines

01:00 and we went through Quorn, through the Flinders Ranges down to Terowie, and this little train, and

some of the curves were so acute that the engine would be here while you'd be here, and the cinders being poured out of chimneys of these two little engines sounded like hail on the roof, you dared not put your head out of the window

01:30 you'd get smuts in your eyes, but it was quite fascinating because when we got to Quorn for instance, I think it was Quorn or one of the other little stations, the CWA [Country Women's Association] had these big trestles out on the platform. They had risen to the occasion, they were wonderful really, wonderful women to do those sorts of things. I mention this because years later, that Pichi Richi Pass railway is now a tourist attraction.

02:00 When you get to Port Augusta you can—a bit like our Hotham Valley—these enthusiasts have resurrected this line and it's now a tourist attraction in South Australia. Anyway we got ourselves to Terowie and from Terowie we could pick up the 5' 3" gauge and then onto Adelaide, over to Flinders.

02:30 We arrived in Melbourne, on one of Melbourne's few beautiful days, a bit like yesterday was here and I thought, "What's all this nonsense about Melbourne raining and four seasons in one day etcetera, etcetera." The train that we got into at Spencer Street went straight through Flinders along its way down to Westernport Bay.

03:00 We got the usual greeting, "You'll be sorry" and so forth from all the other sailors. When the new draft arrives they all start chanting and carrying on.

Yeah, what did they say?

"You'll be sorry," oh yes, it's just part of some sort of tradition. Next day it was pouring with rain. The Flinders

03:30 Indoctrination, I suppose you'd call it. And training was, I suppose, quite innocuous; PT in the morning, you'd go through the various gunnery schools, a bit of parade ground work. Once again I quite enjoyed it; I can't say that I found it

04:00 at all irksome. In fact when they used to line up on a Friday afternoon, virtually just about everybody, and they'll be hundreds and hundreds of sailors there, drawn up in their various classes and there'd be the man right out in the middle who'd say, "Parade," then the boom, boom, boom on the beautiful bands; they play those Sousa marches.

04:30 I found it great.

How did you feel about being away from home?

Homesick, I was terribly homesick for a long time, I have to admit. But it was just one of those things. Actually navy do things in peculiar ways and later on we will get onto something which was

05:00 just typical of them. Having taken us over to Melbourne in November, they brought us back for Christmas and that was my first experience of... I was homesick and it was made even worse when we got up to Melbourne

05:30 with the intention of being put on a train that night and the rail transport officer in Melbourne made the announcement that there were two names not on the list and could not be accommodated. One was ordinary seaman Morris and I've forgotten who the other one was. You can imagine my feelings.

06:00 So I thought, "I want to do something about this," and I went to... we had the day off and the train was leaving that evening, so I took myself along to the head office of the insurance company that I worked for and the assistant manager who was a very kindly man, who was very enthusiastic

06:30 about his young clerks and things from the various branches who had joined up and done the right thing. And I told him what had happened and he said, "We'll soon bloody well fix this." He got in touch with the Commissioner of Railways, so when I saw him later on he said, "You'll find out it's all right." When I got back there,

07:00 my God, did that RTO [Rail Transport Officer] give me a dressing down. I don't whether the navy is like today but it was a case of, "How dare you, how dare you go behind my back, I've a bloody good mind, I can't see any reason why you should be on that train and the other fellow isn't. Give me one good reason." "Well, for the simple reason that I got off my bum and did something about it

07:30 and I'm carrying the can back," that's one good reason. And that shut him up because the both of us got on. I think it was a storm in a teacup but he just hated the fact that an ordinary seaman had the initiative to do something about it and go behind his back. Oh, he was an awful little cootie; he'd been a railway clerk and I thought to myself, "One of these days

08:00 when I get a commission, I'm going to have a go at this bloke" and years later when I came through there as a sub-lieutenant, he had two rings, he'd been promoted, so I still couldn't do anything about it. Same bloke, he was still there. Anyway, we were getting back to Flinders and the period waiting around when the training was finished was boring,

- 08:30 particularly as winter was setting in and Flinders, as anybody will tell you, it's one of the most miserable parts of Victoria down there, in winter. It's low lying and wet and cold and I was at that stage pretty depressed hanging around the depot and they were giving you jobs to do like polishing the brass around the chapel and that sort of thing. And then to add to our discomfort or woes,
- 09:00 the class in front of us came running out of the block just after lunch one day, "We're on draft, we're on draft" and we said, "Where are you going to?" and they said, "The Sydney," and we said, "Oh you lucky buggers." The Sydney had come back from the Med [Mediterranean Sea] and was the glamour ship of the Australian navy and that sort of thing. They were all dead within four months, so just shows you how lucky you can be, it was just
- 09:30 the luck of the draw, yeah they all would have gone. Anyway shortly after that it was announced that a group of us were on draft at last and we were going to go to Liverpool in England, to join a ship called the Aurora. Now the Aurora had been the old Esperance Bay--
- 10:00 remember the 'Bay' boats. They had been built for the Commonwealth Government after the First World War with the assistance of the British Government. They had been subsidised by the British Government on the understanding that they had certain things built into them that could accommodate guns, in other words they could be turned into armed merchant cruisers if a war came along.
- 10:30 Well, the war didn't come along for a long, long time. They were built in 1922, I think it was. And by the time war did come one of them had been sold to the New Zealand shipping company and renamed Aurora but she was still requisitioned as an armed merchant cruiser and her home port was Liverpool. And can you imagine anybody with half a brain between their ears getting
- 11:00 excited about the thought of going to Liverpool which was getting bombed nightly, and it would be a dreadful place to be in the best of times, let alone war time, but I was thrilled to bits and eventually we...

How did you get over there, like what sort of conditions?

I'm glad we've come to that; that was my first experience of a troop train, which was devoted entirely to troops

- 11:30 which left Sydney and it went all that night, took a hell a lot of time, and all the next day to get to Sydney and back in the 40's. The train could be diverted right down and end up
- 12:00 at Pyrmont docks just behind where Darling Harbour is now. I think some of the old railway lines can still be seen there but in those days a train could be diverted down from Central [station] somehow. But they got us down. And we just disembarked down from the train at about 9 o'clock at night and into a ferry; we just got off the train, across a wharf and into a ferry, taken out...
- 12:30 I remember passing under the Sydney Harbour Bridge and hearing the traffic coming across and taken out to this transport in the middle of the harbour. And do you know what it was, the Queen Mary. So I thought, "Once again, I've hit the jackpot."

Three great funnels and the ship you want to be on.

Yes, that's right.

- 13:00 We left next day, I don't know about wartime security and so forth but all the ferries were around, mums and dads with big placards, 'Goodbye Bert' and 'Good Luck'. And away we went and we went down to Jervis Bay.
- 13:30 And the idea apparently was... in wartime...an awful lot I found out afterwards by reading and checking up on records and things. You are kept completely in the dark as an ordinary private or ordinary seaman, you just go with the flow and you find out afterwards why things happened and so forth.
- 14:00 I don't know why we went down to Jervis Bay and anchored overnight. Now I've found out. No, no, I've made a terrible mistake, it was the Queen Elizabeth, it wasn't the Queen Mary, it was the Queen Elizabeth, which was even better. The reason we went down to Jervis Bay was the fact that the Queen Mary was hanging around somewhere but they couldn't bring two
- 14:30 monsters into Sydney simultaneously because, well, the risk of sabotage; and that's why we waited for the Mary to pick up her lot and then we proceeded outside next and there was the Queen Mary and the Aquitania which had come across from New Zealand, the whole three of us. So we came around
- 15:00 I imagine we went south of Tasmania, I don't know whether we went through the Bass Strait. We came around to Fremantle, and we anchored off Fremantle for about 5 days, and we weren't allowed on shore, which was a bit of a bummer. Pretty sour about that. Accommodation as far as we were concerned was pretty ghastly.
- 15:30 She hadn't really been converted extensively for troop carrying at that stage; later on at the end of the war she carted as many as 15,000 Yanks home in one go. Goodness knows how, 'hot-bunking' or something. We were given a nasty little compartment right down the stern over the propellers so that as she rose up and a great big screw—whoom,

- 16:00 whooom, whooom—but we didn't stay down there long. Once we left Fremantle and a day or so out and got into the tropics, we just took all our gear up on the upper deck. We used to sleep up there at night time, it was beautiful. We would watch this monstrous great funnel and we would watch it against the stars as she rolled slightly at night time.
- 16:30 I got quite a good job on board really, waiting on the tables. Once a meal was over and you cleared up and done a little bit of work in the galley, you had time off for the rest of the day. And we weren't far out of Fremantle when they announced that the cinema and the swimming pool would be open for those people who were in the position to take
- 17:00 advantage of it, not on duty. What had happened with the Queen Elizabeth was that she was still being built when the war started, so they hurriedly finished it, the essentials and then they shot her across, it's quite a famous story, to America
- 17:30 and then from there she preceded to Australia and then in Australia, in Sydney, they fitted her out with a certain amount of accommodation. But what had been completed were the swimming pool, a very, very nice chapel and a very, very nice cinema. And this particular day I thought I'd take myself off to the pictures, the first day that they opened; at
- 18:00 2 o'clock every afternoon I went into this beautiful little cinema, it was full of all these soldiers, and before the show started this padre comes onto the stage with his old back to front collar. "Well men, I hope you realise that this is a great privilege, you are sitting in seats designed for millionaires." And a voice from an Australian at the back fired up
- 18:30 "Well we're the bastards now!" Oh dear, it was so funny, poor old padre, he retreated rapidly. What a stupid thing to say, the soldiers were probably going to get their heads blown off and sitting in seats that were designed for millionaires. They deserved it I reckon. Anyway first stop was a place called
- 19:00 Trincomalee, which is on the north eastern corner of what was called Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, and that's where the Tamil Tigers are so active these days; but Trincomalee was quite a nice, big, very protected harbour. You could hold half the British Navy in there. From Trincomalee we proceeded then
- 19:30 non stop, up the Red Sea to Port Tewfik, which is this end of the Suez Canal.

Did you actually get any shore leave in Ceylon?

No, no. Certain people may have done, but we certainly didn't. Up the Red Sea. We'd been, up to that stage, we'd been accompanied by one of the Australian Kent

- 20:00 class cruisers. I think it was the Australia and when we got to the start of the Red Sea, she disappeared and had been taken over by a little Pommy anti-aircraft cruiser called the Carlisle or the Coventry, either one or the other. Then when we got up to almost to Tewfik, we had to wait
- 20:30 because the commodore of the convoy had transferred his flag to the Queen Mary, so she was first in. Once again, approaching the war zone, they certainly didn't want three transporters there simultaneously, so we hung back 50 miles or so down the coast. And that was interesting because the sea was a greeny colour.
- 21:00 The sharks, there were hundreds of them; you could see them chucking things overboard, bits of meat and things, and the things would lazily come up and disappear. And amongst them were kids diving for pennies. Sharks didn't worry them and the kids didn't worry the sharks apparently, amazing. Anyway we eventually got up to Tewfik; we got unloaded and
- 21:30 took by train then to Cairo. Well, those Egyptian trains were an eye opener. The hawkers on the platform selling you all sorts of things French. They had a patter, they had obviously picked up a bit of English around the place. "Hello Mr McKenzie, I'd like to do business with you."
- 22:00 They'd be selling French lemonade made in Canada and all sorts of things. And then there were the ones touting for a bit of business, "You like a nice sheila, you like a nice girl, you like my sister, she very nice, very clean, I know, I use her myself." They were dreadful people. Most of them had one eye that was
- 22:30 clouded over, there were some shockers amongst them. Anyway we arrived in Cairo, had a night there, I believe there was an air raid, but I'd had a few drinks and I'd slept through it. Next day on the train again and up to Alexandria. When we arrived in Alexandria, just as it was
- 23:00 getting dusk and an air raid was on, and we were stopped in the marshalling yard outside the station. I've heard subsequently that the engine driver and fireman just beat it, they just left us there, probably why we were there so long. Right alongside us was a Pommy anti-aircraft battery and when they opened up I thought it was bombs dropping, so naive,
- 23:30 and so green, and I was scared stiff, I thought, "Oh God, this is the real thing mate, they're not mucking around." Anyway we were there for hours and hours and eventually we crawled into the station, it must have been close on midnight. And then we were taken out to this appalling Royal Navy transit camp. It was after midnight when we got there and the officer, who was a very nice bloke, he was quite

sympathetic

- 24:00 but he said he can't do much about the accommodation. He said, "Go out there and find yourself a tent that's not occupied" and he gave us a few blankets and we just crashed off for the night. And I had fleas running across me all night, they were sand fleas. Well, I was in that camp for a week or so; that was funny.
- 24:30 They let us go each evening, afternoon we'd take ourselves into Alex [Alexandria] and take ourselves down the beach at night time, walking along at night time. One of the funniest things there was a peanut vendor. This camp was very reminiscent of Scarborough
- 25:00 really. It was very close to the beach. It was just a post and wire fence with all these tents in it. And around the perimeter were various hawkers, and the one that appealed to me was the peanut vendor. He had one of these big English prams with the big high wheels and it was loaded with peanuts, not shelled, but in their shells. And he himself had one of those
- 25:30 old fashioned straw hats, like sailors used to wear years ago, and across the front was HMAS Peanut, and for a megaphone he had one of those that had obviously come off one of those old fashioned gramophones that you used to wind up, with a big horn. And he had this out of the corner of his mouth and you'd be lying back in your tent, drowsy sort of afternoon, and you could hear this fella around the perimeter saying,
- 26:00 "Peanuts, peanuts, very good for the stomachs, very clean, very hygiene, up your fat arse." Obviously the sailors or the soldiers had told him this is what you said. It was so funny, he was doing it in all seriousness, every few minutes, with a great big raspberry. It's amazing.
- 26:30 You had to have a sense of humour really. Anyway finally came the big day. Oh, I had forgot to mention that en route to the Middle East, my draft onto Aurora had been cancelled, and I learnt subsequently that she had been an armed merchant cruiser
- 27:00 but they had decided that armed merchant cruisers were too vulnerable. The Jervis Bay had been sunk in that action, the Rawalpindi had been sunk. If the Germans found them, they were sitting ducks. They were merchant ships with guns stuck on them. Anyway they decided that they were becoming too expendable and they turned her into a troop transport and she ended up bringing POWs [prisoners of war] home to
- 27:30 Australia at the end of the war. She survived. My draft had been cancelled and I was put in what was called the destroyer pool in Alexandria and that's where I got transferred, or drafted to HMAS Nizam.

How did you feel about getting drafted onto a destroyer?

That's what I wanted, that was the big thrill. And that really is one reason why I

- 28:00 volunteered for this little interview because I don't think the N class destroyers—I happen to be the secretary of the local branch here—I don't think that they get the recognition that they deserve. And this was brought home to me about 12 months ago when the Rats of Tobruk Association who had refurbished their big memorial in Kings Park got in touch with me.
- 28:30 They were put onto me by somebody else, to find out whether their plaque they had produced..., they have got a column up there, and each column is devoted to the particular, the airforce have got one, the navy have got one and various units have got their own. He wanted to know whether the wording was right. And I looked down at it and down at it and I said "God, it's so wrong."
- 29:00 It struck me then that whilst the so-called scrap iron flotilla got—I don't take anything from them, they did a wonderful job—there was more to the Tobruk ferry service and so forth than the scrap iron flotilla, namely Napier and Nizam. Nizam did 14 trips and the last one we did in moonlight which wasn't all that pleasant. Normally it was done in dark.
- 29:30 I just thought the general public probably don't know as much about the N class destroyers as they should do. One of the reasons probably is that they were only ever on loan to us. They were manned by Australians but they were only ever on loan and consequently they came under the jurisdiction of the Royal Navy and even though the
- 30:00 Japanese came into the war later on and the rest of the Australian Navy was more or less restricted to the Pacific war, the N class carried on with the Royal Navy. As such of course probably didn't get the publicity back here in Australia that I think that they deserve.
- 30:30 That's why I am sticking my neck out now. Because they did, particularly Nizam did a, even long after I left her, she did a wonderful job. Lucky ship, very lucky. Getting back to Nizam. I joined Nizam, I remember it like it was yesterday. She wasn't at
- 31:00 mooring, she was alongside a depot ship, getting a little bit of work done and she looked a bit untidy at the time because whenever works being done, there is welding and pipes and goodness knows what lying around. The first lieutenant had a flaming red beard, stalking up and down the upper deck.

- Seemed to be in a constant state of irritation I think. I think the fact that we had interrupted his routine
- 31:30 by arriving was sufficient. "Right get those men below decks. Get them into some working gear and get them working." This was our welcome. As soon as we settled in, and I will say that the rest of the crew who were permanent only, nearly 100 per cent permanent service with
- 32:00 a few RN [Royal Navy] ratings in certain areas, where we were short of that particular rate. I wouldn't say that they were particularly friendly because we were the first bunch of what the navy referred to as 'Rockies', in other words reservists and these guys were full time navy, but its amazing how soon the feeling disappeared.
- 32:30 By the time the war was over the ship was probably 100 per cent reservists. It was just those silly jealousies that crop up in the services. We just got into the routine with the rest of them. At this stage Nizam and her sister ship Napier had come around. They were commissioned and worked up
- 33:00 in England and they arrived in the Mediterranean in time for the evacuation of Crete, so they certainly got, this is before me, I wasn't there, and I don't claim to have been there, but they arrived in time for the evacuation of Crete, which was a pretty ghastly business. They lost a lot of ships and got the hell belted out of them getting the soldiers out of Crete. Anyway she got away with that without being
- 33:30 hurt. Near miss by a considerable amount of times. No sooner was Crete over than she was pulled into the Syrian campaign and the Syrian campaign was a bit of a side issue.
- 34:00 Syria was still under French control, Vichy French control, and that was always a very difficult situation, because the Vichy French who had made a separate peace with Germany weren't particularly pro British either
- 34:30 and there was a possibility that Syria was going to be, the Vichy French were going to allow the Germans to get themselves established in Syria. Concurrently our people in the Middle East said, "Oh no you don't," and that's when the Australian Army, together with the British Army invaded Syria and the Nizam took part in the naval support of that operation. And that had just been
- 35:00 completed when we joined her, and in fact she had done two Tobruk trips when I joined her I think, so I was there for number three.

Before you tell me about number three, when you said it was made difficult for the reservists, was there anything in particular they did to make it difficult for you when you came on board?

- 35:30 Just being not particularly helpful; for instance, if you wanted to swing your hammock, there were certain areas set aside for the swinging of hammocks. There was a particular type of rail that goes across with a little ring in it with a little kink in it where you put yours in. Bloke would say, "Can't put that there mate, that's mine!" that sort of attitude.
- 36:00 You always find someone amongst them that is a bit of a mate. And there was a Western Australian leading seaman who rather befriended us. No, maybe I was being possibly ultra-sensitive, and just picked at it; you could feel it occasionally. On the other hand there were fellows there, and we soon settled into the
- 36:30 routine, in fact I was just telling someone the other day, I don't I'd been on the ship all that long before I palled up with a little fellow we'd refer to as 'Peter the Greek'. I don't know what his name was but he had a little black Van Dyke beard. He was rather 'Greeky' looking. His forte was making scones, I think it was, he used to make scones or some sort of cakes or something. I was a pretty good swimmer
- 37:00 and that's when I got introduced to water polo actually. We'd get a large plate with these cakes on and we'd do side stroke across the harbour to the swimming baths because there was quite attractive Greek girls used to frequent these places. So we used to take these cakes across there to smarten our, or to sweeten the alley a bit.

Very ingenious of you. When you

- 37:30 **were on the Nizam what sort of duties were you carrying out? Where you were stationed?**

My station was the transmitting station, which was one I didn't like very much because when action stations were sounded there was a water tight door between you and the upper deck It had a certain number of dogs on it, you know, levers that come over against a wedge.

- 38:00 I used to often think, "I wonder how quickly I could get those off, if necessary." Yes, transmitting station.

And that means what?

This great big clock that we sat around with dials and things was nothing more than what you would call a computer today. That's what it was; it was a computer, that's where the name came from. It used to compute

- 38:30 or compute. The stuff would be fed down from the range finder and it would be bearing, the range, the

distance the target was in , its bearing, its speed, the course of the

- 39:00 target, whether it was going away from you or towards you or estimated speed, estimated direction. All of this was fed in so when the man fired the trigger, corrections were made for atmospheric conditions, the roll of the ship and everything else so that theoretically those projectiles should be able to hit that target.
- 39:30 You had what they called a director and he sat right up high above the bridge, and the range finder sat along side him. And they were the guys that supplied this information which in turn was transmitted out to the guns. They had pointers which they followed and when on target
- 40:00 and everything was ready, the man with the director actually had the trigger which he'd go like that, which fired the guns. They could be fired by local control as happened with the Sydney - which got blown up--but, yes, it was actually pretty sophisticated stuff for 1940.
- 40:30 It was giro controlled so that even if though the man pulled the trigger it would be delayed until such time as when the ship was on an even keel because if she was keeled like that they would go over, whereas if she was this way. All of that was taken into consideration before you fired a salvo. But later I got out of that lot and I got into the torpedo party, which was more my kettle of fish.
- 41:00 **With the transmitting station, is that like below deck, below the bridge area?**
- Yes, I believe that in things like cruisers, it can be almost down below water level, but we were actually at deck level.
- 41:30 More or less main deck level. It's not below, but it's well down below the bridge of course, the bridge was up two or three levels.
- Because this technology was very, very high tech as you say for 1940, was there any secrecy attached to it?**
- 42:00 The only secrecy that I can recall was the fact that...

Tape 3

- 00:42 **I just wanted to ask you how long you were in the navy transit camp in Alexandria?**
- I don't think it would have been much more than 10 days. I remember it quite vividly because
- 01:00 I'm a person who doesn't complain very much about food. You have people who go into restaurants and want their steak taken back because it isn't done well enough. Or people who always complain. I'm fairly easily pleased or won't make a fuss, but there was the most revolting food that I have ever tasted in my life. It was bloody awful.
- 01:30 The only redeeming feature was that being over 18 years of age I was entitled to—I was not UA, underage, I was a G, Grog—I was entitled to Grog and the Royal Navy was still issuing their daily 'tot'. I fronted up for mine, well the thing was it made you so bloody hungry that you would eat shit, and that was just about what we were.
- 02:00 It also made you very sleepy, so of an afternoon you'd crash off and get into trouble for still being in your bunk when you should be fallen in.
- What was your daily tot there?**
- I don't know what the big measurement is, but that was watered down mind you, what they called 'neaters'. 'Neaters' is
- 02:30 one of these expressions that come from the Royal Navy. Certain watch keepers who happened to be on duty while the issue was on would have it set aside, certain stokers and people like that. They would be able to accumulate this neat rum of course. That was known as 'neaters'. In the Royal Navy it was almost a bargaining thing. I've known blokes who've been along side a Royal Navy ship to come aboard
- 03:00 and ask if you are likely to , would you possibly do his watch for him, and offer you 'sippers'. In other words offer you a sip of his rum. Apparently that went on all the time in the Royal Navy. We cynical Australians used to maintain that that was the only thing that kept the Royal Navy going.
- What was your first impression of Alexandria?**
- Oh, very interesting, very interesting.
- 03:30 From sea it looked spectacular, the buildings on the skyline. When you got in close you realised that half of them you were only looking at the façade. The backs of them hadn't been finished. Even more deteriorating a little from the overall effect, was the fact that there were thousands of bamboo poles

sticking up. But the actual place itself was quite fascinating, because there is a very strong French influence there. All the streets

04:00 are doubly named. The Sister Street was the Rue de Soeurs, and then there was Mohamed Ali Square. I found it fascinating actually, the city. Smelly.

I've heard that the night life was quite interesting.

Yes, yes. We used to go into honky tonks.

04:30 Little places with a black curtain. You had to know your way around, as some of the older hands showed me some of the more attractive. The Gordon Cabaret for instance. It was quite, so different to Australia because living in a city like this, you'd go in and sit down at a table and immediately you'd

05:00 be joined immediately by, I suppose, for the want of a better word, a hostess. And the idea was that she would inveigle you into buying drinks. Her drink was obviously something

05:30 that cost very little and kept her sober. Probably lolly water I think we used to call it. We'd have a beer, and this would go on as long as the money, until the money ran out actually. They were available, if you suggest that perhaps you'd go home with them, general speaking there was no objection to doing so.

06:00 In the main they weren't bad looking sort of girls. A bit of old boilers in a way, and because of what they ate their breath was always like a carbine lamp.

Did many of the fellas take them up on their hospitality?

Oh, I'm sure they did. They was all night in,

06:30 short time and that sort of thing. It was quite normal.

What was some of the other entertainment like?

Well, I know what you're getting at. There were so called shows of ladies performing certain acts with donkeys. I heard a lot about this but I never actually witnessed it. I did hear one bloke telling me that

07:00 when he objected to the fact that the, it was a bit of a fraud, that that wasn't a donkey, the bloke immediately turned around, 'If man was like a donkey!'. I think one of the saddest stories I heard and one of the most frightening stories I heard was a

07:30 very great friend of mine who was in the Med before me in the old Vampire. In fact he was there before the Italians came into the war so they had a pretty free run for a while there, between 1939 and the mid '40. He went to Athens, or Piraeus, decided to go ashore with his mate. He decided not to bother to go up Athens; he'd stay.

08:00 Piraeus and Athens are like Fremantle and Perth. They went into this tavern and there were a couple of girls there that caught their eye, and one thing led to another. And the upshot was that they took these two girls upstairs, and then an argument developed between my mate and his friend as to who, because one was quite attractive and the other one was ugly. So, Bill said, "Reckon I will have the pretty one, because I did all

08:30 the work." "No, blow it, we'll toss for it." So they tossed for it. Bill lost the toss and got the ugly one. And this is a true story. They were in bed with these girls, around about midnight, and there was a tremendous bang and crash down below and it was like the Greek equivalent of what we called the vice squad that operated in Perth here during the war

09:00 to look after young girls, underage drinkers and girls that were around the town. These girls realised who it was and leapt out of bed, dragging on their gear, and hopped out the window. These people came up, and couldn't do anything with the sailors because they had no jurisdiction over them and the girls shot through, so they just lay there for the rest of the night. About a week later

09:30 Bills friend fronted up to the sick bay with you know what. So bad in fact that he had to be invalided back to Australia. So my friend said, "There but by the grace of God go I." It'll happen.

Was VD [venereal disease] pretty common amongst the troops?

Yeah. Ships invariably had certain sections

10:00 set aside. It was always known as 60 mess, or pox tank, generally speaking. And sometimes sailors would have a bit of fun ashore when they'd run into some girl and she'd say where's so and so. Oh he's in 60 mess. They were probably just teasing her. They'd address letters

10:30 on board to 60 mess, and of course there was no such thing really.

So I gather that these sex shows and the girls were pretty popular in Alexandria?

Oh yeah. And the brothels. The brothels were in Sister Street. In fact they were actually controlled.

- 11:00 When you came out—it wasn't compulsory, they were set up in these various places—and you'd tell them who the girl was that you'd been with by number or something like that, then they'd give you a bit of medicine stuff to treat yourself with if you
- 11:30 felt that way. But none of it was, I don't think they were, naturally they weren't very happy about the sailors, well the services, they weren't confined to sailors. But I think it was a fairly sensible precaution to take because you don't want half your troops out of action with venereal disease, do you.

I've heard that a lot of the local

- 12:00 **women were quite attractive, I suppose these women must have been quite a temptation?**

Oh yes, they were, in fact I can remember one girl I had seen in the brothel walking down the street subsequently, just like you'd see somebody here in Hay Street that had been in that occupation.

- 12:30 **How unruly were the streets in Alexandria?**

I don't think that they were really unruly at all. The servicemen really treated the beggars and the people, and merchants and things

- 13:00 rather shockingly really. I'm not particularly proud of the way Aussie, the things that we did at the time. We thought. I'm not being 'goody goody two shoes', but I don't think I did anything all that bad. We had blokes

- 13:30 get a board a gharry, that was a form of transport—there were old taxis, which were funny old Fiat tourers and things, real old things that we haven't seen in Australia for 20-odd years—but the main form of transport was the gharry or Victoria. It's a four wheel

- 14:00 coach type thing, mainly one or two horse, mainly one horse and the driver with his old tar bush. I have known sailors to, when they start haggling about price, grab a poly bottle

- 14:30 and stick it in his ribs and he'd get going. Of course he thinks it's a gun. Things like that they used to do. Also another thing, somehow get one of the sailors to distract his attention and as you are approaching the destination, you'd drop off one by one, those sort of things.

- 15:00 We were pretty disrespectful the way we treated them, "Speak English you so and so," that sort of attitude all the time. They were also very amusing, as I was saying earlier on, they'd pick up these certain expressions and things from the service men. That's why you'd get all the funny expressions like, "Hello Mr McKenzie," everybody was Mr McKenzie, "I want to do business with

- 15:30 you." In fact my Dad tells me exactly the same thing happened in the First World War because he was in Egypt at one stage, and that's how I was able to carry on a bit of correspondence with my Dad. To beat the sensor I would say that some of the fellas around here wear dresses that make them look like girls. And when you accuse them of being girls, they pull their skirts up to prove that they aren't girls. Well, Dad tells me that is exactly what the soldiers used to do

- 16:00 in 1916 or 1915 when he was there. There are sailors 25 years later doing the same thing. Times don't change really, in fact I think he tells me that the soldiers used to

- 16:30 train the news vendors that used to walk around the army camps in those days, and he heard one, one morning, this fella coming around saying "Egyptian Timees, Egyptian Timees," "General Birdwood is a bastard, General Birdwood is a bastard," so he doesn't know what he's saying and some cheeky soldier has told him

- 17:00 that this is the right thing. Much the same thing happened, as I say, exactly 25 years later.

What was the security like in the streets?

I don't know of any security really. There were shore patrols that used to go around, they would come off the individual ships, just keeping their eye on drunken sailors.

- 17:30 The military would have their red caps, but I don't think there was much security that came from the Egyptian authorities. I can recall on one occasion being with a fellow and we were surrounded by a crowd of hawkers, and this fellow was silly enough to pull his jumper up because we had trousers that had pockets in the top.

- 18:00 He was silly enough to pull his jumper up and his wallet was sticking out and of course the next minute it had gone. Anyway we grabbed somebody, an Egyptian policeman appeared, and he grabbed hold of this fellow and amongst a lot of gear that he had with him, there were a lot of pornographic pictures, postcards.

- 18:30 Filthy postcards they used to sell. God, they were old fashioned, I've never seen anything like it. I remember this policeman beating this, I suppose he was no more than a kid, about the head and so forth, before he carted him off. We never got the wallet back. They were too quick. It would be passed around from one

19:00 to the other in a flash. They were famous pickpockets, so you had to be very, very careful.

What about military operations and the secrecy surrounding those? Were there spies in the streets of Alexandria?

We liked to think that there were.

19:30 I remember when we were at that transit camp. We would go down the beach of an evening and there'd be couples strolling around and a high proportion of them would be Italian and the word got around that you had to be careful what you said there because Italy,

20:00 of course, was the enemy. But that was only hearsay. I didn't come across any. I think there was more fifth column activity in South Africa later on, when we were down there.

I've heard the saying that loose lips sink ships?

Yes, oh, yes.

I've heard of a

20:30 **brothel that was blown up in Alexandria by the Germans in an air raid. Possibly some unfortunate pillow talk.**

Well I think I did hear on more than one occasion that there were more sailors killed in the brothels in Alexandria than they ever did aboard the ships, in the harbour.

What kind of deaths did they meet?

What kind of deaths did they meet in the brothels?

Oh, when a bomb was dropped on them.

21:00 When a brothel got hit by a bomb there were more sailors killed there than there were in active service.

What was your first impression of the Nizam?

Well, as I mentioned earlier. First of all, while we were waiting to

21:30 be picked up to be taken out by boat to the Nizam, I got into conversation with an RN rating who was there, waiting there at the same time, and I happened to say to him, and I pointed to a couple of destroyers that were moored not far away from it,

22:00 I said, "Are they captured Italian?" I think that what gave me the impression that they could be captured was that when we were coming up for Tewfik, we had that night in Cairo. The army barracks where they put us down for the night, was chock-a-block full of Italian trucks. There was Lancias and Fiats and goodness knows what, and I said, "Where did they come from?" and they said, "Oh they captured all them up the desert,

22:30 in the very early stages of the war." But I saw these beautiful sleek looking things in the harbour and knowing that the Italians had a flair for pretty ships. This bloke said, "No mate." He said, "What ship are you going to?" I said "Nizam." He said, "Well, she's a sister ship to those," and I thought, "Oh, wow." They were beautiful looking things, there's no doubt about it; I've got some photos in there that'll probably bear me out.

23:00 They were modern, and I was always very proud of her, very proud of her.

What could you boast about the N class destroyer, the Nizam?

What was she like to travel on and what sort of speeds did she travel at, and how did she manoeuvre, anything like that?

23:30 **Well, it never ceased to thrill me to be standing on the right down aft on the quarterdeck where the depth charges and things are stacked up, and when you are cruising along at something like 32 knots, which is well over 35 mile per hour and you have two**

24:00 **great big propellers underneath you doing about 350 revs a minute. The noise underneath is like thunder and there is a great wash astern of you, and if you were to stop suddenly it would virtually fall on board. If you walk up forward you've got a bow wave that comes almost level with the deck, and that never ceased to thrill me.**

24:30 **And on a fine day on our way to Tobruk it's like being on the western coast of Australia, you've just got this dull grey bluey outline of the coast and there we are cruising along at about 30 miles per hour. If you've got a sister ship with you every now and again you'd see a slight puff of smoke. And no smoke comes out of the funnels normally, the ignition, or the combustion is so perfect, air and fuel,**

25:00 **that its smokeless, just a haze, and every now and again you would see a very little puff of**

smoke come over the funnel and you know that the stoker over on that ship had just changed sprayers. And of course every so often, if they get out of kilter a bit, a bit of smoke would come out. And if that happens and the senior officer looks across

25:30 **that sheep will get a blast, "Stop making smoke."**

Can you maybe talk me through the a tour of the ship? Maybe some of the areas that you frequented and enjoyed visiting.

If you approach the ship from the water

26:00 you've got a gangway that comes down to the water level. If you are alongside of course you've got a brow that just, a gangway, where you'd just walk a board and as you do so of course, the sailor looks to the quarterdeck and salutes automatically as a mark of respect to Nelson. That's where Nelson fell apparently. If you turn

26:30 and go down aft you'll find she has a rack with a heap of depth charges which are, in those days, cylindrical, like a barrel, made of steel; a pistol sits inside which gets set to the depth that they require them to be detonated at. They can be

27:00 activated locally or a man on the bridge can pull a lever which looks like a brake lever on an old fashioned car. And that will trip the apparatus on which each mine sits so that you can drop them off singularly. Coming further forward you've got what the Yanks referred to as 'Y guns'; we called

27:30 them depth charge throwers. A depth charge sits on a little support and the base of this thing fits in—its what the army would call a mortar—and a small explosive charge fires and

28:00 throws that thing so that you can set patterns of depth charges. If you think there is a sub down there, you can drop them one, two, three, then one, two, then a couple more. There are various patterns that you can set to. Coming forward in Nizam you would have a 4 inch high angle gun.

28:30 The next section holds the torpedo tubes. There is five of those which normally face fore and aft but of course they swung around at right angles to be fired out of the ship either side. Then the galley, which was fairly small for a ship of that size.

29:00 But he doesn't have to do much more than cook what you take up to him, he doesn't have to have long hot tables and things. You do your own preparation of your food in the mess deck itself and then take it along and he cooks them and then you pick it up.

How many of those mess decks were there?

Probably about one, two,

29:30 there'd be about a dozen I suppose. The seamen have their own messes, the torpedo men have a separate mess, stokers have a separate mess and the communication department broken up into certain sections.

How did all the different sections interact on the ship?

30:00 Well, funnily enough, we kept to ourselves. You could be on a ship for two years, she's 300 feet long, 350 feet long, and over 200 people, close on 250, and you probably wouldn't know the names of half of them. Strangely enough that you could live so close together and that if you are in separate messes you don't really know them.

30:30 No, it's an amazing thing really.

Who was in your section?

When I first went aboard I was in a mess with general ordinary seamen, and able seamen, and later on when I transferred to what they called the torpedo party, they changed my mess and I was in...

31:00 we were still able seamen but our rating was that we specialised in torpedoes. The torpedo party was broken up into two sections, there was the electrical section, and what they called the whitehead. Goodness knows why but a bloke called Whitehead had a lot to do with the invention of torpedoes way back in splash.

31:30 The whitehead party looked after the torpedoes and made sure that they were ready for action, in good running order, and looked after depth charges. The electrical party looked after all the electrical side of things on the ship. Mess deck lighting, giros, anything that had any electrical component was looked after by that particular group.

32:00 When you were getting ready. For some reason or other the ship's log, which was lowered down through the bottom of the ship with a little impeller on the end, which gave you your speed and distance, was always extracted, I don't know why, maybe

32:30 we wouldn't be going into water that shallow. One of my duties always was to lower this thing. The last

thing that was done by the navigator's yeoman, who looked after charts and things, would come along and say, "Righto Bill, you had better get that log lowered soon, down you go." It's a case of just

33:00 undoing a certain wheel or something at the side, and take the tension off and slide it down. A bit like a submarine's periscope in reverse, same sort of thing, the way that it would slide up beautifully, this thing used to slide down beautifully.

So what about the operations that you were carrying out there aboard the Nizam? I think you were about to describe some of those earlier.

33:30 Well, I remember, as I mentioned earlier, very, very naïve, very green, absolute newcomers as it were. And of course the seeker after knowledge, you just had to ask questions and things. I looked across and I saw this little Pommy destroyer and I was amazed at the way it was handled. The way this fellow came along

34:00 to the mooring and was able to scoot around and pick it up so beautifully, and I said, "What's happening?" and he said, "He's getting ready, he's loaded up, he's on his way to Tobruk." That's when he said, "It'll probably be our turn tomorrow." And sure enough, we moved in alongside a wharf

34:30 and along came all this stuff to be loaded on board There were provisions and Red Cross comforts; boxes of cigs [cigarettes], and the main thing of course was ammunition, boxes and boxes and boxes of ammunition. We were loaded up quite heavily on the upper deck and I said, "What's the deal?" He said,

35:00 "You'll find out." And sure enough next morning when we were loaded up and we went back to our mooring and then very early, 7'ish or half past six or so, all hands to prepare for leaving harbour, which would mean that you would fall in. If you were at a mooring, only the fo'c'sle party; if you were along side, well, of course you would need people

35:30 forward, aft and in the middle to let go of all the ropes and things. If you were on a mooring, the fo'c'sle party, and you'd proceed to sea. Sometimes, I don't think we ever went... We only ever did one trip on our own, all the other trips we would be in company with another destroyer. Then of course

36:00 as there were only two Australian destroyers there, when I was there, we only ever went once with our sister ship, all the rest were RN destroyers. And the drill was that you would proceed all day along the coast at about 22 knots.

36:30 They work it out at that speed the distance that you would cover would be covered by our aircraft, giving us fighter protection. By the time it was dark, we had reached the limit of their cover that could be provided. So as soon as it got dark

37:00 we were then whip her up to 28 knots and we would arrive off Tobruk at about 11, 11.30 at night. Sneak quietly into the harbour, and then depending on what was available, generally alongside a barge. On one occasion it was a jetty, but mainly it was alongside a barge and then you would start. And I remember I've never seen

37:30 sailors get gear off a ship so quick. Slinging these boxes. Thank goodness they didn't have delicate fuses, slinging these damn boxes of ammunition, "Get them off, get them off, get them off." Then we would take on probably walking wounded, some in stretchers and some maybe not wounded

38:00 depending on who was allocated to us. Then you'd get the hell out of it and you would probably get out after midnight and you would scream along at about 32 knots. And by the time daylight came, theoretically, you were back under our umbrella air cover, theoretically. Didn't always work that way.

38:30 But I used to like that, exciting. The only problem was though that we were what they called 'two watches' and so that you, it was a case of four on, four off, four on, four off, the whole time. If you were unlucky enough to have the 8 till 12 at night you'd be on

39:00 watch, you'd get to Tobruk, you'd help unload, it would be half past one or 2 o'clock before you'd got out, so then you'd have exactly two hours to get your head down; at 4 o'clock to be called again. So sometimes you'd be pretty weary by the time you'd got back home.

What was the urgency in Tobruk?

Well the

39:30 urgency of it is that Tobruk was besieged, it was surrounded by the enemy and the only way that they could survive was to get supplies in by sea. The danger was, of course, was that the Jerries were doing everything possible to stop us

40:00 and there would be invariably air attacks on the way. The other thing of course was I think it irritated Mr Churchill that the Australian Government said that it was about time that the Australian troops that were in Tobruk, and had been

40:30 since April, it was about time that they were relieved because the Australian public was getting a bit tired of this. And Mr Churchill, as I say, wasn't particularly happy because he had other more pressing

things to be done. It wasn't popular, but part of the deal was not only to bring out wounded but to slowly replace the Australian garrison in

41:00 there, with fresh troops, British troops, and Polish troops.

Tape 4

- 00:31 This was a rather amusing incident that took place on one of our Tobruk trips. We went in, and it was always fairly disorganised. They probably didn't know which barge we were going to tie up to and of course everything is pitch dark and everybody is in a hell of a hurry because the Jerries were a wake up to what was happening and invariably there would
- 01:00 be aircraft sculling around so it was always a pretty nervy sort of operation. Anyway this particular night, obviously some group thought that they were going to be picked up, they weren't, but we picked up another lot and as we were down leaving the harbour, this Aussie voice bellowed out, "That's right, you Pommy bastards, piss off and leave us as usual." So we were there probably two
- 01:30 nights later and I happened to go down to the mess deck after we were just about ready to cast off and there were a whole roof of Aussie soldiers in the mess decks but I could hear this bloke saying, "Yeah, the other night," he said "we were left behind, this bloody Pommy so and so, and he left us there." I said to him "Yeah, that was us."
- 02:00 It's actually recorded in the book.

What was the morale like amongst those Australian troops?

They were wonderful really, yeah they were good, they were. And believe it or not, they were scared stiff on the way back. Every time we altered course they'd say, "Oh, are we dodging submarines!" and I used to think to myself that they had been there dodging shells, shot, shells since last April.

- 02:30 And they were frightened of the water. And if we went ashore I suppose, we'd be just as scared stiff. It's just a different environment. Actually we did have one very unfortunate incident coming back. We had a nasty sea and it was on the quarter, and when a ship like a destroyer, which is
- 03:00 a long narrow guttered thing, you get a combination of the particular speed you are doing and the waves, you get up a nasty roll and the upper deck is not the most pleasant of places to be, but these guys were obviously were seasick. They all had army greatcoats and boots and everything on and they were all huddled around the funnel, which is warm.
- 03:30 And we did a couple of rolls, and all of a sudden we did a real beauty. And she buried her shoulder in and of course this wall of water, when you are doing about 22 knots, this wall of water comes past; it just shot the hole bloody lot overboard. Of course there was a cry immediately of, "Men overboard!" and we pulled up, against rules and regulations. But that's what I loved about our skipper, he
- 04:00 said, "To hell with it, we've got to get these blokes." So we stopped immediately and I don't think we, we didn't lower any boats, but I know one of our signalman, a big, typical bronzed Aussie, he actually dived off the wing of the bridge straight into the water and we got them all back on board. To this day, I don't know whether we did.
- 04:30 According to the book we did, but I have a feeling we might have lost a couple. One bloke particularly, he got swept, he got his leg caught in the guard rail and I think so badly pulled out of his knee here that I think it had to be amputated in the sick bay before we got back into harbour. But at the time I thought how sad
- 05:00 for blokes who had been so brave for so long, what an awful way to go, on your way to virtual safety, or certainly a spell and to be swept over the side like that. It can happen.

When you were speaking earlier about these calls to Tobruk, it just seems remarkable that you could actually visit the harbour there when the whole place is under siege.

- 05:30 The German perimeter was some way out, it was not in close, it was quite some way out. I think the most hazardous things were all the wrecks and the rubbish that were in the harbour. One night we went in and we were allocated an old merchant ship which was on the beach. I think she was called the San Georgio or, something like that.
- 06:00 And we were allocated this merchant ship to go alongside and it was very difficult because the water was shelved very rapidly. It was quite deep and then it shallowed where her nose was stuck on the beach. And we had this wind, quite strong wind blowing us off and our skipper
- 06:30 who was a bit tentative when it came to boat handling—he was a wonderful guy at dodging bombs when they were being dropped from aircraft. I believe he was fantastic during the Crete evacuation. He was a wee bit tentative I think sometimes when handling the ship. And we had about three attempts to get

along side and each time we would get blown away too far for the heaving lines to get across.

07:00 So on about the third or fourth attempt it was a case of "Oh damn it, we have to get cracking in there," and in he went a wee bit too fast, a bit too close and then crack, there is about 20 feet of steel bar, overhanging of the bow, just peeling back like brown paper. It didn't affect our sea keeping quality

07:30 fortunately. And fortunately the sea going home was fairly calm. Of course the sunlight was streaming through this great gash along the side. The troops referred to it as the, what did they call it, something garden, spring garden or something? But it was fixed up very shortly after we got home. It was just a case, the beauty of those

08:00 ships built of welded plates is that you just take it back to the last one, to the clean one, take it all out and then just build it all back in again. They were riveted, not welded, they're riveted and the plates are riveted so that when you get damage like that, it's just a case of replacing

08:30 the individual plates, and paint it up, as good as new, you'd never have known it had happened. But once again I can show you a very good photo of that if you're interested.

Yeah, we will have to take a look later. How many of these runs to Tobruk did you do, Bill?

I did 12. The ship had done two before so it was 14 in all.

09:00 The last one was the diciest one of the lot and that was the 8th Army was just about to break through and the Tobruk garrison was just about to break out and join forces, after being isolated for something like 8 months and they sent out

09:30 an urgent request for small arms ammunition. They must have been running a bit short, so who gets the job, Nizam. We always reckoned that Nizam got the jobs because our skipper was, his seniority wasn't high enough. The navy goes by seniority and we felt that he was the junior boy around the place and he copped all the

10:00 jobs. Anyway, normally speaking those runs were done in the dark period, when the moon disappears for a fortnight or so, but on this occasion that couldn't be. This was urgent and couldn't be a consideration and we had to do the trip in broad moonlight.

10:30 Everybody was in a bit of a shiver, as the darkness naturally gives you protection against aircraft, but with a full moon it doesn't. And do you know not a damn thing happened, not a thing. That's war I suppose, sometimes when you think its going to happen it doesn't and when you least expect it, it does.

What was morale like on that voyage?

Oh, good, but we were all a bit

11:00 jumpy.

How did the men express their nerves, or repress their nerves?

By smoking heavily. Of course we did more than... the Tobruk thing, really whilst it features highly amongst our activity, there were a lot of other things that happened in the same period. I think particularly probably the month of November was

11:30 for me anyway, probably, and looking back on it, one of the most oppressing times because of the losses that took place. On the 19th of November the buzz went round the ship that the Sydney was missing, presumed lost with all hands.

12:00 On the 25th of November we went to sea with screening three battleships, cruisers, and goodness knows what because intelligence had come through that an Italian fleet had put to sea and was about to do something, so Admiral Cunningham decided to send the

12:30 three battleships to sea. And as it transpired, I don't know whether the intelligence was incorrect, nothing eventuated, so we were on our way home, a beautiful smooth afternoon, like today, and the battleships were one behind the other and all of a sudden somebody on the bridge

13:00 said, "What's happening to the Barham, what's that bit that's flown off her?" And they looked, and to our horror, this 31,000 ton battleship started to slowly cant over like this, and she got to about this stage about 45 degrees, and all of a sudden there was a gigantic explosion.

13:30 Whoosh! Nothing left. So who was detailed to pick up the survivors; Nizam and another little Pommy destroyer? Out of a crew of 1200 the two of us picked up something like 350. The other 850

14:00 killed instantly, or drowned very shortly afterward.

Logistically how did you rescue those men from the water?

Put boats out. I was in the TS [Torpedo Section]. I didn't take part in any of the operation on the upper deck. The first thing I became aware of, was when a naked fellow flew past the door, naked, absolutely

naked, not a stitch

- 14:30 on him, but covered in oil fuel and said, "G'day mate," as he went past, probably in terrible shock. We only got, of that 350 we only got about half of them, so we must have had 150, or a 125 or so, 175 is it, half of 350. We got as many as we could. But I believe there was some shocking scenes. One bloke tells me he pulled what
- 15:00 he thought was a bloke but that was all there was, from there up. See once again I wasn't in it, once again I was lucky, I wasn't in there. So that was the 25th of November. About 2 nights later our beaut HMAS Parramatta, was torpedoed off Tobruk and out of the ships company of about 150 there were 19 survivors.
- 15:30 The famous Ark Royal had been sunk at the other end of the Mediterranean. That was November. In December we were detailed off together with a lot of other ships to take the famous transport called the Breconshire, on a run to Malta.
- 16:00 Malta was also besieged, but in a different way, she was besieged. Malta is only within, on a clear day you can see Sicily from Malta, and that's where the German aerodrome, the German and Italian aerodromes were on Sicily. And they
- 16:30 pasted the hell out of Malta. And it was necessary for the Royal Navy to keep them supplied with, the garrison that was there, the anti aircraft, and the Royal Airforce and everything else, to keep them supplied and the population, with food. So every now and again it was absolutely essential to try and get a ship through to Malta. And it was our job to get this Breconshire through to Malta, which we did.
- 17:00 The group came out from Malta, to meet us a day or so out and around about 4 o'clock that afternoon, a message came through to us in TS that an enemy fleet had been sighted some distance from us and to stand by for possible surface action.
- 17:30 Anyway the Breconshire was hustled away, the Italian fleet was up here somewhere, hustled away with their own escort towards Malta and we lined up to look a bit aggressive to try and deter this Italian fleet which was quite impressive apparently. And I've read since that it's the one and only time
- 18:00 that an Australian destroyer had been fired on by an enemy battleship, when one of the Italian battleship's big, 15 inch projectiles whistled overhead like a MTT bus going home. Fortunately the Italians decided not to pursue whatever they had in mind, and withdrew, and that's when we smoked an awful lot of cigarettes.
- 18:30 In those few hours they were making up their minds what was going to happen. I mention this because when we got back, and that operation took place mid December, and I think we set off about the 15th, and it was the 19th of December when we finally got back to
- 19:00 Alexandria, and we got back at 3 o'clock in the morning, and immediately tied up beside an oiler with the object of refuelling, and I'd decided to get my head down. I got my hammock mattress in the TS and I was fast asleep and all of a sudden there was most
- 19:30 tremendous explosion which I leapt out and ran outside, thinking that we'd been torpedoed. I was fast asleep, I was dreaming, I thought we were still at sea. And what had happened was that when we came through the boom at 3 o'clock in the morning, three Italian frogmen followed us through.
- 20:00 They had designed what they called 'chariots', and a chariot was like a torpedo with a plough chair type seat on it, and a little control and they wore like scuba gear, underwater apparatus and they steered these things, they rode them like chariots, like the word says, and their object was to do something about
- 20:30 the three. They didn't know that the one battleship I had been telling you about, the Barham had been sunk, well it may not have been confirmed. They thought we still had three battleships in Alex. This time we only had two of course. And what they did was to ride under the battleship and at the front of the torpedo.
- 21:00 What they did was to put a magnetic clamp on one side with a wire strop going over to the other side and then the head of the chariot, was like the head of a torpedo with a charge into it, they hooked it up onto this wire and then the rest of it probably sank. They swam to the buoy
- 21:30 in front and they did that to the two battleships. And what I heard was one of the battleships going up. They had put this charge underneath it and both battleships had holes blown into the bottom of them that you could have driven a bus through, but fortunately the depth of water under them
- 22:00 was only a matter of 10 feet or so, so they just sat down on the bottom. Before it happened the sentry on one of the battleships, I don't know which one it was, had his attention drawn to the fact that there was some strange men sitting on the big mooring buoy in front of them singing songs. And it was these mad Italians
- 22:30 who had plonked these limpet mines under the ships. Of course they were immediately taken on board, and questioned, and at first they said they knew nothing, you know, "I know nothing," so who ever was

interrogating them said, "Right, take these men down, and put them down into the lowest part of the ship that you can find," so very shortly afterwards, apparently

- 23:00 there was a big hammering on the door and they said, "You've got 5 minutes, we've stuck a mine under you," and that's exactly what happened. So, there was one spare on account of the, in fact, the battleship that had been sunk a couple of weeks earlier.
- 23:30 There was a spare one, so they stuck it on the oiler that we were alongside. So we got out of that very smartly. There was a sequel to this because that group that we thought were going to interfere with us when we had got near Malta, as soon as they had got that Breconshire into Malta harbour they went off chasing this Italian
- 24:00 fleet to see what they were up to. They ran into a minefield and they lost a destroyer, and a cruiser and two other cruisers were disabled, or quite badly damaged. That was happening almost at the same time as the
- 24:30 battleships were getting blown up in Alexandria harbour. So in one fell swoop the whole balance of power in the Mediterranean had changed overnight. We were without one of battleships that had been blown up, the other two were sitting on their bums in the harbour on the bottom, and Force K, which operated out of Malta so successfully, no longer existed. And that is how
- 25:00 in the intervening period of the next few months Rommel got his supplies built up in the desert, that's when he came through in '42; he nearly got through to Egypt. People don't realise that. It was a very close run thing.

From what I've heard there were a lot of circumstances which could have tipped

- 25:30 **outcomes in either way?**

Oh, absolutely yeah.

Just let me see if I understand with those two battleships that were blown up in Alexandria, they had detected the Italians and put them in the holds before the explosives went off?

They had their suspicions as to what was likely to happen, that's why they put them down below because they'd know that they'd soon squeal if

- 26:00 they knew if they'd be... they suspected that's what they were up to. But they were very brave men. I have to hand it to them, they were very enterprising and very brave men, give it to them really.

A little crazy too?

Oh yeah, one of them rose to be an Admiral in the Italian Navy and the son of one of them was the Italian consulate

- 26:30 in Perth at one stage. Just a little bit of useless information.

We like that. So once, with minutes to spare they had detected there were bombs about to explode. What precautions were taken then to protect crew?

Oh, I don't know. Not having been on board them, I can only surmise that they probably got them on the upper deck

- 27:00 as much as possible because I don't think there were too many casualties. But later on we went along side, they had one of them, I think it was the Valiant. The Queen Elizabeth, not that Queen Elizabeth, the battleship Queen Elizabeth. The Valiant and the Barham, well the Barham was the one that blew up. Valiant was put in the dry dock, and for some reason we had to go along side that dry dock and

- 27:30 I must have got out of the ship and had a look because I've never seen such a huge hole in another ship. Very effective, but of course they got them. Within six months they were repaired and they lived to fight another day.

So because of the depth of the harbour they were easily salvaged?

That saved them, that saved them, yeah absolute.

Are there any other encounters that you should share with us while you were doing those runs

- 28:00 **to Tobruk?**

No, we did a couple of bombardments of the coast, Bardia I think it was. A lot of our operations were working with the Royal Navy, we were just one ship and they had lots of

- 28:30 vessels there. A lot of our activity was in conjunction with, even the Tobruk ferry service, we can't claim that to be an Australian thing by any means. We were just one of the ships that happened to be in it. And Napier, but Napier only did a couple, four I think she did. We did 14.

You mentioned earlier the scrap metal flotilla got a lot of recognition which you guys possibly

didn't. What were the main differences in your

29:00 **operations and why do you think you might not have gotten that recognition?**

Well possibly because the scrap iron flotilla were... had gone over. Well, to start with, I think a lot of it has to do with publicity and the press getting hold of

29:30 certain aspects of it, and in their case they were in it right from the very start. The moment war was declared Menzies made the Australian Navy available to the Royal Navy and those old destroyers were

30:00 First World War vintage, they were 1917 models, and when that famous Lord Haw Haw, the propagandist Joyce, or whatever his name was. He had a wonderful capacity for making statements which later on sort of backfired. For instance that's where the Rats of Tobruk come

30:30 from, because he said that they were trapped like rats in a trap. Well, the First World War when the Kaiser referred to the British army as 'a contemptible little army', and of course the old 'Contemptibles' is a famous name now, so Lord Haw Haw was responsible for that. And when he heard that the Australian Navy had made available these five ancient old destroyers, he referred to them as 'a

31:00 load of scrap iron', and of course the press got hold of that and they, given their due, they did a wonderful job. One of them was sunk, that was the Water Hen, but the rest of them survived, and the only reason they were taken out of the Med was that they were worn out, they'd had it, but they did a wonderful job. And of course in that period the scrap iron flotilla got a lot of

31:30 press coverage. Later on when we had more or less replaced them because in the meantime the war, as far as Australia was concerned, had changed focus, and it was Pacific. We were in Alexandria on December the 7th, when the news came through, and the bulk of us in the nest egg didn't know where

32:00 the hell Pearl Harbor was. And we couldn't have cared less really. "Where the bloody hell is Pearl Harbor?" We didn't realise it was such a gigantic thing that sort of heralded the start of the Pacific war, America versus Japan. There was a funny incident that arose out of that because I remember next morning going ashore and on the wharf at Alex there were a number of

32:30 small canteen type places and they were staffed or run by wives of British naval officers. They were still very much, I don't think the gloves had come off really at that stage, as far as they were concerned. Naval officers' wives were travelling out to helping their husbands and so forth, in places like Alexandria. So a couple of us went up to this canteen for some reason

33:00 or another. A very English lady behind the counter said to me, "Australians, I see." She knows the HMAS tally [identification label]. I said "Yes, that's right," she said, "You're the people that call a basin a bison." I said, "Yes, that's right," and we've got some of your countrymen on board who we can't understand what they are saying. Anyway that little repartee was over. I said, "Oh, by the way, have you heard the latest buzz?" She said "No, no,

33:30 what's that?" "The Japanese have sunk the Prince of Wales and the Repulse." And this woman looked at me and she said, "What utter nonsense, what utter nonsense."

There wasn't a very good rapport between you, was there?

Well, at the time I thought, "That was a bit arrogant."

34:00 The thought about the Prince of Wales was, "How could those awful little yellow men could possibly sink our beautiful ships?" I think there was an attitude. To give Churchill his due, but I don't think he ever realised or ever took into consideration how strong the Japs were. I mean sending out those two ships thinking that he was going to frighten them.

34:30 The silly man. The Japanese had the third biggest navy in the world when they started and they were bloody good, they were good.

Before we move to the Pacific, while we're still in the Med, did you fraternise much with the American Navy or any of the American soldiers when you were ashore?

Well, there were none in the Med at that stage. The first time we came in contact with the Americans was

35:00 when we arrived in Colombo in '42 and we ran into (them). What came into Colombo was USS Boise, which subsequently made quite a name for itself in the Pacific war. Rather funny actually, at that stage they were very naïve,

35:30 very. They went bug eyed when we used to tell them about some things in the Med.

Where would you share those kinds of tales?

Oh, ashore, in the boozers and things like that. One of the funny stories was: they used to refer to their destroyers as 'tin cans'. "So Aussie,"

- 36:00 what did they say, "tin can. Well the way you tell what speed our tin cans can do, two stacks, 20 knots, 3 stacks, 30 knots, four stacks, 40 knots." What about you?" And one of our battlos said, "Well," he said, "they put one funnel on her and she goes 36, they're frightened to put any more on."
- 36:30 **How did Colombo compare with Alexandria?**
- At that stage very peaceful. We felt very relieved to be there, but as events turned out, it was short lived. Oh, it was quite pleasant, getting ashore at Colombo.
- What was leave like on shore in Colombo?**
- We did all right. In fact we spent a couple
- 37:00 of weeks in dry dock in Colombo so we got around a bit there.
- What kind of entertainment did you seek out in Colombo?**
- I think we behaved ourselves in Colombo, I don't think they were offering the flesh pots of Alexandria exactly. But I suppose you could have found it if you go looking for it. But I don't recall. They were nice
- 37:30 in Bombay. The brothels in Bombay were quite posh actually. Grant Road, very posh. The officers used to go in the front door and the black lads in the back door. So they say.
- I just want to return to the Med. At any time during those runs that you were doing to Tobruk,**
- 38:00 **was there any feeling that you were overworked?**
- I'm glad you've brought this up because it's something that did happen. Yeah, there was a feeling that we were getting more than our fair share and we put this down to the fact that Lieutenant Commander Clark, who possibly
- 38:30 wasn't as senior as some of the others. So much so that we had a sit down strike. When I say 'we' had a sit down strike, it was just a case of..., I think that was possibly because we'd been, among other things I think we'd been doing, that December was pretty busy. That's when all that business took place with the Italian
- 39:00 frogmen and so forth. And then we were sent to sea on Christmas Eve to what appeared to be quite an unnecessary patrolling outside, etcetera, etcetera. And the sit down strike just consisted of one of, a big bruiser, one of the sailors just standing by the door saying, "Right anybody who wants to get past me, have a go." Well, you just didn't have a go, did you?
- Are we**
- 39:30 **talking mutiny?**
- Not really, it's just a protest, a form of protest. They eventually cleared lower deck as they called it, which means everybody on the upper deck, everybody fall in, nobody is excused. The first lieutenant wants to know, "What is all this about?" There is a spokesman who says that, well, we reckon we have been
- 40:00 this, that and the other. Anyway it all blew over. I think at one stage there was some talk of an RN patrol, armed guard coming over if there was going to be any really
- 40:30 serious stuff. And the word must have got around because I remember when we tied up alongside the lower dock where the Valiant was sitting, some Pommy sailor bellowed out, "You fucking Australians, that's all you're good for is sitting on your arses and drinking beer." So somebody picked up a baring out spar, he stuck his head out of a porthole, so the baring out spar, he
- 41:00 threw it. He pulled his head in damn smart, I tell you.

Tape 5

- 00:34 **So, can you tell us about that?**
- Well, when the news came through that we were about to leave the Med, I think everybody heaved a sigh of relief. We weren't too sure what we were up to, but we were leaving the Med. There was a Dutch destroyer in the harbour at the time, I think it was the little Isaacs Sweers and they
- 01:00 sent a message across, "Goodbye, good luck and have a dinkum bonza time." A Dutch signal, which we thought was rather amusing. So we proceeded through the canal and down the Red Sea to Aden, fuelled at Aden, went on
- 01:30 a bit further and picked up HMS Indomitable an aircraft carrier. We didn't know what it was all about but we soon found out. We took her back to Aden where she took on a bit more fuel, then up the coast

again to Port Sudan which is on the western side of the Red Sea.

02:00 And there we embarked 50 Hurricane fighters, not we, but the carrier. They still had the dust of the western desert on them and the pilots had never been on an aircraft carrier in their lives before. And the idea was to shuttle them out to Malaya as soon as possible because the Japs were coming down there post-haste. And they needed something to try and stop them. So having loaded the 50 we

02:30 proceeded back down out and across the Indian ocean and we called into Ado Atoll, which is part of the Maldive group, the most southern part of the Maldive group. Oiled off an oil tanker and proceeded across to just off the coast of Sumatra, and flew these fellows off. And these pilots as I say had never flown off a carrier before. So if they got off,

03:00 woe betide them if they had to come back, but they didn't. The whole 50 got away, and we learnt subsequently that they lasted a few days; the Japs just shot them off the ground, too little, too late.

What nationality were these pilots?

British, RAF [Royal Air Force]. We went up to Colombo.

03:30 I omitted to mention that before we left the Med we were joined by the Nestor, so it was the Nestor, Napier and Nizam. The three of us left in company and the three of us accompanied the Indomitable across the Indian Ocean. We went up to Colombo but Nestor and Napier went back for another load.

04:00 We went into dry dock; they went back to Port Sudan, as I say, and brought out another 50. By then things were looking so grim in Malaya that the admiral who was stationed himself in Ceylon at this stage; Sir Geoffrey Leighton, I was just swotting up a minute ago, he purloined these aircraft and said, "Look, it's a lost

04:30 cause. These aircraft are going to suffer the same fate as the last lot. We want them here please." It was a very, very providential act on his part because I will tell you later on, they came in very handy.

Where actually is the Japanese Fleet at this stage, if you are in Colombo?

Singapore, mainly.

And what have you actually found out about Singapore by this stage.

05:00 **The news was coming through and it was getting grimmer by the day. There were vessels coming into Colombo loaded up with expats [expatriates] on their way home, on the old Empress Liners and things coming in and that's where we first ran into the American USS Boise, as I told you about earlier. We mucked around after**

05:30 **we came out of dry dock; we seemed be hanging around waiting. We were sent out on little jobs, out into the Bay of Bengal, little sweeps and things on our own. Eventually we arrived back in, we came back to Trincomalee which is the naval base and realised Britain, for the second time, was endeavouring to build up another eastern fleet to combat this Japanese menace.**

06:00 **The Warsprite, a modernised battleship that had been getting repaired in America, was diverted to Trincomalee plus the four old R class, the 'wobbly R's' as they called them. They were so old they would have been in the battle of Jutland in 1916, so had Warsprite for that matter but she had been modernised.**

06:30 **The Indomitable, the carrier, another carrier the Formidable and a multi collection of cruisers and things to make up this new eastern fleet.**

It must have been pretty impressive to actually see this build up?

It was, on paper.

07:00 We thought when we left the Med, that we were in for a bit of respite but little did we realise that we were really moving towards something probably more dangerous than what we had been in previously.

So when did you actually realise that you were getting out of the frying pan and into the fire?

I don't think

07:30 at the time any of us appreciated it. The sailors get told nothing really you see, and once again a lot of what I now know I was not aware of at the time. But its something that I have studied a bit, because once again it's something that the general public, particularly in Australia, didn't realise, nor did the people of Britain for that matter, just how near to

08:00 disaster we really came on that occasion, because Somerville, who was a fighting admiral, had built up quite a reputation operating out of Gibraltar. This news, or intelligence, apparently arrived that the Japanese were planning an air raid, a carrier born air raid on Ceylon, or on Colombo, as they had done on Darwin only a

- 08:30 matter of weeks previously, so he got this motley collection, including Nizam, in a position just south south east of Colombo in a direct line with Singapore and we patrolled up and down, up and down for about 5 days and then apparently he decided that
- 09:00 this Japanese story was a bit of a false alarm. Fuel was running low, fresh water was running out on the old battleships, so he retreated back to Ado Atoll, which is a comparatively safe distance from Colombo.
- 09:30 We no sooner arrived there than a report came through that a large Japanese force, no, an alarmingly large Japanese force had been sighted by aircraft in a position exactly where we had been patrolling those days previously, and it consisted of at least 5 battleships, 4 fleet carriers,
- 10:00 goodness knows how many cruisers and destroyers. It was enormous. Plus another fleet which had taken themselves up north into the Bay of Bengal. So at that stage, I don't know whether Somerville realised how powerful it was but he selected what was called Force A, the fast force, which consisted of the carriers, himself,
- 10:30 a couple of carriers and a few destroyers and away he went like a bloodhound after the prey.

How could you have missed something so big in the first place?

Because they weren't there when we were there. They arrived after we left, we were just a week too early. They arrived after we left.

So essentially the intelligence was right but the timing was wrong?

- 11:00 Well, what happened was after we had retreated, due to shortage of oil and so forth, he despatched two of the heavy Kent class cruisers back to Ceylon to carry on with some repairs that were being done to them, but when he heard that
- 11:30 this Japanese menace was about to arrive, he signalled to them to come back, come back quick smart, and rendezvous at a certain point. At 2 o'clock, we left at midnight, at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon a garbled report came through from the Dorsetshire, I think it was, that there were enemy aircraft about, and after
- 12:00 that silence. And I can remember quite clearly to this day over the public address system, the first lieutenant who would have made the announcement, to say that, "There has been no contact with the Dorsetshire or Cornwall since 2 pm and it is assumed that they have been lost due to enemy action."
- 12:30 Two great cruisers, the size of the Canberra and Australia. What had happened was that the Japs found them and they just annihilated them, knocked them both out in 20 minutes, the air apparently was just a cloud of aircraft. And it was then that Cunningham decided that he'd better scuttle back to Ado Atoll and he'd separated his fleet
- 13:00 which was very dangerous.

How close were you to where the cloud of aircraft action happened?

Too damn close, actually that book that I was reading a moment ago has got a little passage in there which sums it all up, but I'll mention that in a second. When he got back, he still wasn't

- 13:30 as well informed as the man ashore was, and the man ashore was not in the position to give him a direct order, so what he did, very wisely, he wirelessly through to Admiralty in London and said, "I'm terribly concerned as to the safety of Cunningham and his fleet, the fleet that is out there will absolutely cut him to pieces." He knew full well that Somerville,
- 14:00 did I say Cunningham? Somerville, would be listening in. And it was a very shrewd way of getting the message across, and when Somerville got that message, discretion was the better part of valour, they did a strategic withdrawal. He was not the sort of man that running away would come easy to but he had no option really
- 14:30 because had that fleet found us, with their superiority in numbers and their far more efficient aircraft they would have cut that fleet to pieces and as it says in that book, had Churchill suffered the loss of a second eastern fleet, on top of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, it's doubtful whether he would have survived as Prime Minister.
- 15:00 It all hinged on the toss of a heavenly coin, and it's a fact that those aircraft failed to find us. It's a period where once again history has never played it up very much; I don't suppose you ever do play up incidents which are not in your favour. And as they coined in
- 15:30 that book, "Our losses out there were never redeemed by the Royal Navy." They were redeemed for us by the Yanks at Pearl Harbor and Midway six months later. Not Pearl Harbor, Coral Sea and Midway six months later, or not six months later, no, no, two months later probably.

What was your reaction when you found out about the fall of Singapore?

- 16:00 Depressing, depressing. But you can't do much about it; you just go about your job. Being on the ship is

just like going to work, it's a job, you're doing a job, you can have your private thoughts about things but you don't sort of dwell on them too much or you would send yourself silly.

- 16:30 As soon as the decision was made to pull out, the old slow wobbles were sent over to Mombasa, and I think partly for propaganda purposes the Warsprite and the carriers and Nizam, the three. At this stage
- 17:00 I think we were joined by Northern, I think by then we had four. We all went to Bombay and I think that was just a flag waving exercise, showing the flag, just show the Indians the Japs hadn't kicked us out of here, but they had really.

When you also heard about the Darwin attack, was that an enormous shock, that it was happening on Australian soil?

- 17:30 Once again you seemed to take those things in your stride. Because those sorts of things were happening where we were, the fact that it happened in Australia didn't have the same, like I mentioned about Pearl Harbor, we just thought, "Oh yeah." It was only after the war we went to see some of the films that were made we realised what a horrendous thing it was. It was only talking to
- 18:00 the lads that were in Darwin that I realised what a nasty day that was, February the 19th.

So you are on a flag waving exercise in Bombay?

In Bombay. Once again we went in for some repairs and they put us ashore in Bombay; we lived under canvas for a couple of weeks. We used to be taken down by truck in the mornings

- 18:30 to work on the ship. Mad Indian drivers, we were more scared than being on the ship, by being taken down on a truck with a mad Indian driver at the wheel.

What were the living conditions like in 'under canvas' as you say?

Very pleasant, very pleasant. Its like being parked on the, there's a place called the Japanese Gymkhana they called it for some reason or another, and it was like being camped on the

- 19:00 showgrounds. And they had quite good food, nice curries and rice and things.

Is this the first time you're getting hold of any curry?

I've always been a bit partial to curry, so it was good. In the dock also there at that time were a couple of casualties from the Mediterranean. Nubian, was

- 19:30 one of the tribal class destroyers, she'd had her stern blown off in the Med. She was there getting a new stern fitted, and also a cruiser of some sort.

So what sort of duties were you doing on your ship when you were coming back to work every day, as part of repairs?

Well as a seaman torpedo man at this stage,

- 20:00 one stock in trade of our equipment for a seaman torpedo man was a nicely made little canvas bag with a rope handle on it and in there you kept your wooden pliers for pulling fuses out and various other bits and pieces and your overalls were always nice and clean and the beauty of being in that position was that
- 20:30 if the gunners mate or one of the duty POs [Petty Officers] said, "What are you doing, Morris?" "I'm just on my way to have a look at electric motor number so and so, in such and such mess." You could never get caught. You were always going somewhere. You always made sure that you had a comb in your top pocket so your hair was nicely brushed.

- 21:00 **So what were you actually doing, were you doing anything during this time when you were supposed to be fixing?**

You filled the day in. There was a laid down program of things to be looked at but you could do it at a somewhat leisurely pace, and as I say whereas the

- 21:30 fella who was supposed to be out on the deck chipping paintwork, or something like that, he couldn't be wandering around the mess deck looking at the newspaper or something like that. But we used to get away with murder, being slightly more specialist than they are.

And so how much leave did you get in Bombay?

- 22:00 We worked the normal. From memory, and because it was so hot I think we used to knock off just after midday, so most of the afternoons you'd take yourself back to where you were living and then into town. But later on they did organise for us to go up to
- 22:30 what was it called, Deolali. Do you ever remember a television show called "It Ain't Half Hot Mum"? That was Deolali, or supposed to be Deolali, it was a camp up from Bombay in the Poona area and we went up there for 3 or 4 days, just for a break away from the ship. I don't know that we did anything.

We decided to go tiger shooting one day.

23:00 I've got a photo there with us all with pith helmets on. We never saw a tiger but we managed to get ourselves on an artillery range, by mistake. Those things were whistling overhead. Stupid things one does.

That's extremely comical. Did you really think that you were going to find a tiger?

I think we were rather kidding ourselves.

23:30 But the bloke in charge of us, who organised the operation, I think he had a marvellous imagination.

And what was this little retreat like, what sort of facilities did they have?

Pretty rough. A bit like outback Australia. The willy-willies used to go through of an afternoon, just about taking the latrines off their hinges. They were only temporary sort of structures,

24:00 which were likely to be taken away while you were in there.

So if it was so primitive what was the attraction to go there?

Well, we didn't know. An announcement just gets made, if anybody's interested, this trip is available, it costs nothing, it's just another diversion from what you are doing.

What did you think of the local Indian people?

24:30 Much the same as when you go there today. It's terrible poverty, people living in doorways. We used to go out at night time, rather cruel I suppose. There'd be fellows in a made up sort of bed, just on the footpath.

25:00 and these semi drunken sailors would give them a shake, "Wakey, wakey, wakey you've got the middle watch mate." Those sorts of silly things. They were just like anywhere else; they were different stratas of society, but an awful lot of begging and it's still going on. Pat and I went on the Oriana a few years back and called into Bombay. The gateway

25:30 of India hasn't changed since I was there in 1942. The begging, you can't get rid of them, they hang onto you like flies. You can't be too tender about them. I know this is diverting slightly from what we are talking out. When we were there in '96

26:00 I think it was, there was a fellow strapping a beautiful looking little girl, strapping her onto a cross on the ground. I wondered at first what the heck he was doing. There was this little girl, binding her arms. There was this piece of timber was laid out with a cross on it, just like JC [Jesus Christ], and they had this child being lashed to this cross, and he hoisted it up into the air, on the end of this pole, so that she could put her little hand through the

26:30 window on the bus. Beautiful little kid she was and this dreadful father, I suppose. But that's the way they live. And I made the mistake, it just about brought tears to my eyes. I chucked a couple of coins out, oh, the silliest thing I could have done. It's a bit like when you're down the beach and the seagulls descend.

Pretty big culture shock though in the '40s, if you've come from Australia.

But we got used to it.

27:00 Having been in Alexandria, we'd been hardened to the begging that goes on, it's part of the scene there. Hand out like baksheesh the whole time.

So how long did it take to get your vessel refitted?

I don't know exactly how long we were there. Probably

27:30 3 weeks at the very most.

And where are you going onto from now?

Back to Mombasa, or to Mombasa for the first time actually. And we arrived there with a dose of flu that we'd picked up from somewhere, and put in quarantine. But we hadn't been there more than a few days

28:00 when the word got around, "We're going back to the Med." We said, "Oh, no, please God, not the Med again." "Yes." But I mentioned earlier, by this stage the four of us had finally got together. The Nestor had joined us before we left the Med, so that meant Napier, Nizam, Nestor and the Norman joined us in Trincomalee

28:30 prior to that Japanese threat, so the four of us were on our way back to the Mediterranean for a convoy.

You didn't find that surprising that considering there was so much Japanese fleet action in the area that you were in, that you were taken to Mombasa?

We operated out of Mombasa because it was too

29:00 dangerous operating closer to Singapore.

Oh.

We had more or less handed over control of that part of the Indian Ocean to the Japanese. We didn't contest that for the time being anyway because they were too strong for us. So we had to virtually cede that to them for the period. But as far as going back

29:30 to the Med was concerned, you have to realise they were always scratching. The navy was never big enough. It was never planned that England would be fighting the Japanese as well as the Germans at the same time. The planners never took that into consideration I don't think. That's why

30:00 Singapore fell. Britain had their hands full in Europe. They just couldn't spare the ships and things for this theatre, and that's why I thank God for the Americans.

So when were you first in contact with the Americans, is this in Mombasa?

30:30 No. We saw them, as far as my Nizam time was concerned, that was the one and only time, when I was in Colombo. Boise had been in a skirmish with some Dutch ships and things quite early in the piece and she was damaged and she was on her way home.

31:00 I did see another American ship, the Marblehead. They made a film about the Marblehead but she was also badly damaged. They were the only two Americans that we saw.

So you arrive in Mombasa and what are your orders in this situation?

That we are proceeding to Aden and we are going back to the Mediterranean.

31:30 From time to time they would propagate the news around the ship so they didn't leave you guessing all the time because that was always gives rise to buzzes and disjointed, garbled messages and things, so its better really to let the

32:00 troops know from time to time.

But essentially you are getting the news on where you are going next by Chinese Whisper?

Virtually. In fact to give you some idea of how we knew that we were going back to the Med but we didn't what the score was until we got there. To give you some idea of the way a buzz can get elaborated upon and changed, we tied up along side

32:30 a British destroyer called the Inconstant, HMS Inconstant. Well somebody made the observation that Inconstant, at the outbreak of war, was being built in Britain for the Turkish Navy, but when the war broke out

33:00 they carried on building her but they had no intention of handing her over to the Turks and they called her Inconstant. Well, that message got around the ship so garbled that in the end, it was that we were going to Turkey, we were going to Constantinople in Turkey.

33:30 **That's quite funny. So you are heading towards the Med. So is this going towards Malta?**

Well, when we got there, we realised that we were going to partake,

34:00 be involved, in a convoy to Malta. The situation had got desperate in Malta, so much so that they were prepared to try and get through, starting simultaneously from Gibraltar and from Alexandria. Our convoy was called 'Vigorous' and the one from the Mediterranean

34:30 was called 'Harpoon'. And it was the case of who could get there. Well 'Harpoon' got there but suffered terrible losses. We nearly got there but there was the possibility of

35:00 being interrupted, or challenged, by Italian surface units and eventually it was decided in view of the fuel situation, etcetera, that we would turn back to Alex. But in doing so we lost, I've forgotten the amount of merchant ships we lost,

35:30 3 destroyers and a cruiser and of course one of the destroyers we lost was HMAS Nestor.

So can you describe how that actually came about?

Yes, we were withdrawing and it was probably the last desperate throw on the part of the enemy to damage us,

36:00 or damage the convoy, even though we were retreating and about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the Nestor was straddled with a stick of bombs and so close that I think it was actually damaged. You have to bear in mind that destroyers are very delicate things.

36:30 They are like racehorses. When they are in top form, in good repair they are very effective things at fighting units, but they are very susceptible to damage. You don't have to actually hit them,

- 37:00 near enough is good enough. In fact we were put out of action, coming in from Tobruk, exactly the same way. What happened in our case, is that you get immediate flashback from the boiler which is just as likely to kill the stokers on watch. But the moment that happens automatic shutdowns take place. The ship stops
- 37:30 it takes a bit of getting going again. In the case of the Nestor it was fatal. The flashback in the boiler room killed 4 stokers, damaged the plates and watered poured in. I think the ship's surgeon, in the darkness and up to his waist wading around, managed to find the bodies under the water and drag them up.
- Can you explain in a bit more detail what a flashback is, I'm not quite clear on that?**
- 38:00 Have you ever had any experience with the old wood stove? You try and get it going and you pour kerosene over it, and then foolishly you flick a match then and 'whoosh'. Well you imagine the ship's boiler,
- 38:30 these jets of oil being sprayed in against brickwork which is absolutely white hot. If you suddenly cut the supply of the fuel, that heat in there immediately rushes out at you, terribly dangerous.
- Got yah.**
- Flashback, you'd get a flashback with
- 39:00 the old blow lamp sometimes. Or the old primer stove and you put a match to it and 'whoosh'. So in the case of the Nestor, she, the damage—a lot of destroyers could get quite badly damaged and
- 39:30 could make it to port generally with the help of other ships. In the case of the Nestor, they tried desperately to get her under way. She obviously must have been holed because photos you see of her, she is sitting very low in the water and they tried to take her in tow but because she had no way of steering; her everything
- 40:00 was out of action, she started to yaw all over the place and the towrope would break and they'd have another go. And because of the possibility of enemy aircraft and German and Italian E-Boats [Enemy Boats] in the area they decided to take the crew off and sink her, which they did. Took the crew off and stood by; chucked a couple of depth charges at her
- 40:30 and finished her off. But that's what happened in that convoy. And that's probably, when we got back into Alex; it was middle June or late June of '42, and in addition to losing one of our sister ships,
- 41:00 word came through that Tobruk had fallen again. The South Africans had caved in and that's when, I must say, it was one of the lowest periods in my navy career. I thought, "Well all that running backwards and forwards we did last year, all for nothing." We were back to square one. But fortunately
- 41:30 we didn't have long to sit about and fret, because no sooner had we got back, word came through that we were going back to Mombasa. We thought, "Oh thank God for that." And when we got through the canal, who should be waiting there, needing an escort, was the Queen Mary. The idea was to escort the Queen Mary down the Red Sea
- 42:00 until the moon went down.

Tape 6

- 00:31 The instructions were that we were to escort the Queen Mary until the moon went down. I think the Queen Mary escorted us. We were battling along, must have been doing about 32 knots. Everything on board was shaking, the door frames, we had a slight woof in one of the propeller shafts and at high speed even the door frames would go along.
- 01:00 And we were battling against it. And this great big monster was getting further and further and further; we were supposed to be escorting. By the time the moon went down she was so far ahead of us we couldn't see it. He said, "Bugger it, let her go, she can look after herself."
- So you just aborted the escort?**
- We just cruised on slowly, not much point. Just wasting fuel at high speed.
- 01:30 **So where did you meet up?**
- We went back to Mombasa. If I remember rightly one of the cruisers that had been damaged in that convoy 'Vigorous', she was proceeding along very slowly, like someone that's a bit lame.
- 02:00 I think she was worried that the temporary repairs weren't going to hold and we got in front of her and dropped a bit of oil over the side, to smooth things off a bit for her. That's all I remember about that

trip.

So how much longer were you serving on board the Nizam?

I still had a year to go at that stage. As soon as we got back to Mombasa we got involved in the Madagascan operation.

- 02:30 Because of that strategic withdrawal that we made to get away from the Japs, the Brits realised that the Japanese were prepared to exploit that superiority that they had,
- 03:00 that it left the trade routes up the east coast of Africa, which were vital at that stage. They were feeding the Middle East with arms and ammunition. Also the stuff that was going to the aid of Russia through that railway that went through Persia. If the Japs were strong enough they might get themselves established in Madagascar which would really create
- 03:30 some terrible problems, so they decided to beat them to it. And once again, it was like the Syrian business. It was a Vichy held island and when they asked the Vichy authorities there to cooperate they refused, so they had to rattle the sabre a bit, send some commandos ashore and they got themselves a foothold there at the
- 04:00 top of Madagascar, that was all going on while we were in Bombay in dry dock. After we came back from the Med, we were engaged in landings on various other parts of the island. And eventually they chucked their hand in. Then Madagascar came into British control, for the rest of the war anyway. We then decided..., our ship was then told to
- 04:30 escort one of the aircraft carriers to Durban. We were looking forward very much to visiting Durban. And for the next few weeks we were involved in just cleaning up the remnants of what was left of the Madagascan thing. We captured one little vessel and put a prize crew on board that took them down to
- 05:00 Durban. The other one we couldn't do that, so we sunk her. We used it as target practice. Went on board and killed the livestock; pigs and things, and used her as target practice. In fact I've got photos of it there. We had to throw a couple of depth charges at her before we got her.
- 05:30 Then we took ourselves around to Simonstad, which is the naval base of Cape Town. A bit like Stirling is in relation to Fremantle or Perth; it's in the bay south of Cape Town. We arrived there with the intention of going into dock and having a good boiler clean and a few repairs and things carried out.
- 06:00 Unfortunately, like everything else, fate stepped in and virtually the very day we arrived there to do our boiler clean, the German Admiral Dönitz decided that he would institute a submarine campaign around the Cape of Good Hope. And instead of us going into dry dock we got
- 06:30 up steam and proceeded to sea, and for the next few weeks we were racing around the place picking up survivors, left, right and centre. It was quite an intensive campaign. He realised that there was quite a lot of shipping going around the Cape of Good Hope and of course the pickings around there were pretty good because there was very few of us. They reinforced us later on, but when they first arrived
- 07:00 there was only us and another destroyer I think. There may have been two others. But we did get one of them, when I say we, one of our chummy ships got one of the subs and it happened to be a brand new 'milch cow' as they call them—a big submarine designed to carry enough fuel to feed the other subs if they ran short.
- 07:30 It was brand new and one of our other chummy ships got it about 11 o'clock one night. I was on the bridge on our ship at the time and I heard gun fire, I saw a searchlight exposed and some gunfire, 'Bang, bang'. That's about all there was to it. But they got her; that was confirmed after the war. She was a casualty.
- 08:00 I can recall shortly after being on the bridge, just at dawn and all of a sudden he hit the lookout on the shoulder and said, "Can't you see that?" And the kid was sitting there with his glasses, half asleep. Dear old 'Clarky' without his glasses, can see this sub on the surface, so we raced over.
- 08:30 Naturally the sub saw us too and crashed dived. These guys were inclined to be a bit..., they liked to claim the kudos for themselves because the other destroyer signalled across to us, "What's the hurry?" He wasn't going to tell the others he'd seen
- 09:00 this sub. He was going to get him for himself. We started what you call a 'box search' where you go around pinging with ASDIC [sonar device developed by the Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] to try and find it and we'd been trying to do this for a comparatively short while when we were told to discontinue and proceed to such and such a point and escort in a merchant ship that had picked up the entire compliment of the Orcades. The original Orcades
- 09:30 was a P&O [Peninsular and Oriental] liner of some 24,000 tons and she'd been torpedoed the night before, probably by this bugger we saw on the surface actually. She sank very slowly and this Polish merchant ship picked up the whole lot. Imagine this small merchant ship with all these thousands of passengers off this troop ship. The authorities decided that we would be better employed

- 10:00 protecting this merchant ship than looking for this sub, which I suppose was fairly right. We went into dry dock finally, when the submarine campaign finally petered out. In that period we picked up a lot of survivors. One group in particular were, God they were lucky. It was just on dusk and we
- 10:30 have what they call dawn action stations and dusk action stations; the dawn you stand to until it gets light enough to see, with the other, it's the other way around, until it gets too dark, when you retire from the stand to. And we were just about to give it away when one of our bridge lookouts happened to spot what he thought was something and sure enough it
- 11:00 was one of those raft type things that you see on ships. Drums with slats on them. And there were 3 or 4 lacerated, poor, skinny little Greek seamen. They were on their last legs, but we got them in time, which was great really. They had
- 11:30 mates in Cape Town. There was quite a big Greek community, like there is in Adelaide I think. Cape Town has a big Greek community. A lot of them have got restaurants and things, and any sailor in the vicinity with HMAS Nizam on his cap would immediately be hauled in and given a free feed. The word gets around.

So did you get a feed?

No, I was too well fed elsewhere.

12:00 What happened during this part of your service?

Another fellow and I put our names down, they had organisations like they do everywhere, particularly in Melbourne and Sydney,

- 12:30 where civilians would offer hospitality to servicemen, and we put our names down with this family and we had 10 days with them. A very nice home, they were quite well to do people, and that was rather nice, just living like you used to at home, in a family. That had a rather pleasant
- 13:00 sequel because about at least 40 years later, if not more, I wrote to a newspaper in South Africa to try and locate this family and it's amazing the number of responses I got. We send Christmas cards to them to this day. There were two daughters and a son.
- 13:30 The two daughters, they are middle aged women now. They were schoolgirls when we were there. One lives in England and one lives still in Natal, up from Durban. The son unfortunately is dead. They were thrilled to bits to hear from me. It was rather good after a lapse of time like that.
- 14:00 After that we tootled off back to Mombasa, nothing much happened. Things were quietening down a bit at that stage. The Japs were starting to get thrashed a bit by the Yanks out in the Pacific, and of course the menace in the Indian ocean was receding quite rapidly, so much so that we escorted one of the aircraft carriers across to the Bay of Bengal and did a sweep around
- 14:30 just to show that we were still alive. Time was starting to run out for me anyway, and back to the Cape, I think there was a bit of resurgence of the submarine campaign down there for a while. Then it was decided to send the Nizam home to Australia. So we left Durban, called into Port
- 15:00 Louis, Mauritius. But before we did that, there was no rest for the wicked. A merchant ship had been torpedoed, we had been despatched to find these survivors; we picked them up about 2 o'clock in the morning, which was a tremendous piece of navigation I thought on the part of the group on the bridge. We were bringing home with us the skipper of one of the other N class
- 15:30 ships, who's a noted navigator, and between the lot of them, between wind and tide and so forth, they reckoned the ship was torpedoed in such and such position, the lifeboats would probably be here and about 3 o'clock in the morning they just quietly turned the searchlight on, exposed the beam as they say, just flashed it
- 16:00 around the horizon once. And less than half a mile away they got an answering flash from the hand held torch. The boat was over there, which I thought was pretty good. Later on after Port Louis, we called into Diego Garcia, which is these days quite a big base. I think the Yanks have got it now;
- 16:30 in fact, yes, I don't know what operations they conduct from there. Still it's quite a strategic little island out in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and then home, but we couldn't quite make Fremantle. Fuel was running low so they decided to make it Geraldton instead. So wartime Geraldton wasn't exactly the most exciting of places but it was rather nice to be home and come down on the 'old rattler'.

17:00 Tell us about the journey on the 'old rattler'?

You were so keyed up, it's a giggle. At every station we stopped at there would be booze and so forth. We would be into it. We were just so excited to be home, it was tremendous.

What was it like stopping at those pubs on the way home?

They were just refreshment rooms, on railway stations, they weren't all that exciting.

17:30 **Any locals there to greet you?**

In Geraldton, no. I suppose of the West Australians who disembarked there, none of us lived in Geraldton so we were virtually strangers. I think they were quite interested to see a modern destroyer coming into their port. And then we were picked up when we got

18:00 down to Perth and taken across to HMAS Leeuwin which in the meantime had established this rather delightful set up on Preston Point. Of course it was typical of depots. We were all laughing and joking, and out comes the petty officer who had been there four years previously, or three years previously, "Stand to attention, you're in a depot now"

18:30 which is always the way. They always fight the war far more vigorously ashore than they ever did afloat. So we got given leave and that's where I decided to do something about a bit of advancement. As luck would have it I went down there for some reason or another

19:00 while I was on this leave, and the officer of the day was a man that I'd known in Perth before the war, as a teller in one of the banks. He recognised me and I recognised him and so we started walking up and down the hall. So I said to him, "What's the

19:30 action around here?" "What's happening?" He said, "What do you mean?" so I said, "Well, not to put too fine a point on it, when I left here the last time I remember you, you were shuffling bank notes behind the counter and now you're sporting two stripes." He said, "Well, I thought you might have done something like that by now," and I said, "No mate, when you get sent overseas you've got no hope,

20:00 you're too valuable, they don't want little boys with aspirations in that direction, limiting our crew, they are not very sympathetic to those sort of requests." He said, "Would you be interested if I could organise something?" I said, "Certainly." I said, "I don't want to be a deck scrub all my life." So he said, "Leave it with me."

20:30 Without much further ado, I found myself drafted to a corvette based in Fremantle, the object being if I behaved myself and kept my nose clean, the skipper might give me a recommendation to go before a selection board in Flinders, which he duly did.

21:00 It was a pretty boring sort of posting really. Not that I am any hero, but having spent a couple of years on a fighting destroyer, to find yourself on a corvette aimlessly wandering up and down Gage Roads on the anti submarine patrol was a bit boring but quite comfortable. It allowed one to renew acquaintances with some ladies that

21:30 were still around; that the Yanks hadn't snaffled up or the Dutch or somebody. Anyway I suppose in that period, the only interesting things that happened were the fact it was HMAS Dubbo, they were, as you know, named after Australian towns. HMAS Dubbo. And our one claim to fame was that we were despatched

22:00 to a point somewhere off Cape Leeuwin to pick up what appeared to be a derelict barge, and in this barge was brand new unmarked Duck (DUKW), like the Yanks used, a truck that had a propeller, that could be floated off. It had a propeller where the differential is. You could

22:30 go ashore and carry on up the beach, clutch it out of the propeller and into the ordinary gearbox. The Yanks used them extensively in their beach landings. How it got there, goodness knows, it was just floating around the ocean. So we towed it back to Freo [Fremantle], and that how Western Australia got its first Duck. The other thing was a sudden hurried departure from

23:00 Fremantle in March of '44. We're getting into '44 now. I came home in August '43, and by the time I had had leave, I guess we were into September, early October, so that was '43.

23:30 In March '44 there was a flap on in Perth that oldies would still remember. A Japanese naval force had been sighted by RAF reconnaissance and then lost, they couldn't find them again, and like a lot of reconnaissance reports, probably highly exaggerated as to its strength, but everybody got into a bloody panic about it. They thought it's on its way to

24:00 Fremantle. So they sent a whole lot of fighter planes across to the eastern states. They alerted this that and the other. All the merchant ships anchored in Fremantle harbour were dragged out and anchored in Gage Roads and the American submarine depot ship, which had been alongside for months, cast off and hotfooted it down to Albany. And so did we. It all blew over in a couple of days, we all came back

24:30 again. But that was about the drama on the HMAS Dubbo.

What was life like in Freo then?

It was good, we were back to normal. I could go home. My father was back in the forces, but I had a mother and my brothers and sisters. I was home as much as 2 or 3 times a week, any time I was off there was always a bed there. The only drama was that

25:00 I had to be back in Fremantle by 7.30 am and living in Dalkeith, near the old men's home, I had to walk from there along Vincent Street to the highway, and there was one metro bus that left Perth at 6.30. I

remember the driver, a big fat bloke, it was the same bloke every morning. A beaut bloke, he never ever let a serviceman down, that bus must have had elastic sides, the number of people he used to cram into it.

- 25:30 On one occasion it was so full, that I stood on the back bumper and held onto the pram hooks; they used to have pram hooks on them those days. And I hung on to them until we got to Leighton and a few Yanks that had got on board got off, because they had a depot or something and you could get in the back door and have a seat.

Sorry, what happened at Leighton?

The Yanks had

- 26:00 some sort of annex or depot or something. Quite a few of them were stationed there and they used to get off the bus at Leighton, which meant that from Leighton into Fremantle I used to have a seat.

So you mean down on Leighton beach?

No, no, on the highway part, somewhere where the flower mill is, in that area, or that church or grog shop. In there somewhere there was an annex. The Yanks had annexes all over the place.

- 26:30 They had one just under the subway, when we used to have a subway at the end of Hay Street. Where the Arrow Wool making place factory used to be. That was a great big, pre war it had been a second hand parts place, well the Yanks took that over. They took over the OBH [Ocean Beach Hotel], they took over Steve's hotel,

- 27:00 practically took the place over when they were here.

So there was no shortage of American servicemen at the time?

No, unfortunately.

What was life like here when the place was overrun with Yank sailors?

Oh, it never worried me all that much, the blokes used to complain about it. The only thing was taxi drivers were sods. The only way that an Aussie sailor could possibly get a taxi was when you were in your number sixes, which is the white uniforms, and they'd stop

- 27:30 thinking that you were Yank, and before they had a chance to take off you had the door open and you were inside. Because they had to charge you the tariff fare instead of charging you five pound or something. The Yanks would give them five pound to drive them to Fremantle. Well five-pound in those days was a week's wages for me.

What was the difference in the Yanks wages and your wages?

I don't know, but it was considerable, that's why they got all the women. They had the money

- 28:00 to buy the booze and buy the flowers.

Can you tell me a bit more about the Yanks and maybe what life was like on the streets in Freo and in the bars of Freo?

Well, there was a certain antipathy as you can imagine, and it was based on the fact that they were so much better paid. There used to be all sorts of jibes

- 28:30 like "They are overpaid, oversexed and over here!" And all sorts of things they used to say about them. And it was even more pronounced I think in England where the English sailors were paid far less than we were. So the disparity over there would have been even greater. But I guess to certain extent

- 29:00 when there were no Yanks around and when we were in ports where there were only English sailors and Australian sailors, they hated us for the same reason. Because an ordinary seaman, an Australian ordinary seaman, probably got as much as an English able seaman. They were some of the disparages that were a bit unfair really. For instance the Australian serviceman in Perth was not...

- 29:30 by law, he could be picked up by the police, the military police if he was seen actually carrying bottles of beer, publicly. And yet you would see some great Negro staggering down the street with half a dozen, and perfectly free to do so. It was little things like that, we were a bit foolish really, because it led to

- 30:00 a certain amount of discord between the troops. And I believe there were some quite nasty cases when troop ships would call in. The New Zealand Maoris had a great hate on them. The fact that the Americans could treat their Negroes

- 30:30 poorly, whereas a New Zealand Maori wasn't going to take any bloody nonsense like that from white men. And that led to brawls and some rather unpleasant incidents but I never really had any personal sort of..., I could never see the point in getting involved in those sorts of things. You'd get your bloody face disfigured for life.

- 31:00 The same thing applied where our shipboard life was concerned. There were so many blokes who would

go adrift just for the sake of, "Oh, I'm not going to go back." I could never see the sense in that. Why stay ashore, overstay ashore for a few minutes only to find yourself doing seven days stoppage of leave. No, no.

31:30 I'm afraid I'm too rational for that sort of thing.

What pub did you drink in, in Fremantle?

The HM mainly. I don't know whether it's still there, His Majesty's. Dubbo was tied up at what was known as H shed in those days, which is where the International, big terminal is. You just went over that overhead bridge and you were practically in the pub door

32:00 on the other side. One of the famous pubs in Perth was the basement bar of The Palace. That was a meeting place for all the services. All the guys that had been around Perth, pre war days. If there was any mate of yours that was home on leave, that's where you'd find him. A great place. And there was a lass behind the bar there, well I say a lass, a middle-aged woman,

32:30 Scottie I think her name was. I can remember when the news came through to say one of her boys that would have previously worked at Elder Smiths across the road, had joined the air force and had been shot down in England. She'd be in tears, just like a mother. That was good, yeah it was good.

33:00 Where would you go if you were looking for some female companionship?

I didn't need to because it was my home town and I had my own contacts.

A few old girlfriends to visit?

Yeah, a couple I gave away because I just felt

33:30 that they were, to use a common expression, 'yanked from pillar to post'. Actually when I finally got married, I married a girl 8 years younger than myself for that reason, that I didn't want somebody who had been out with every Yank in Perth.

34:00 I was going to tell you about getting this recommend that gave rise to one of those most frustrating episodes. I thought it was all going to be so easy, and actually getting the recommend from the skipper was no trouble really. I just behaved myself and he wasn't a bad sort of bloke. They didn't have to be your skipper; it was your divisional officer. And in the case of the corvette it was the first lieutenant.

34:30 I thought the period was about six months, and sure enough when six months came up the coxswain told me I was on draft and I thought, "Ah, it's come!" I said, "Is it to Flinders?" He said, "No, no, strangely it's not, it's to a ship called the Ararat." She was another corvette so

35:00 by coincidence, the following day a rating came on board wearing HMAS Ararat cap tally, so I collared him and it appears that he was a West Aussie on leave while she was being refitted. I asked him where she was. He said, "In Williamstown, Victoria, and she's just finishing a refit. I'm going back shortly." So

35:30 in 24 hours I was told to report to Leeuwin to go on draft. So I went up and I thought it was strange but I was given a rail warrant ticket to Sydney. So I said to the petty officer who was dishing these things out "Excuse me, chief"; I used to refer to them as 'chief',

36:00 particularly if you wanted to suck on to them a bit. "Chief, I've got a ticket to Sydney; I believe she's in Williamstown." And in typical fashion I was told, "I would go where I was f'n well told!" I said, "All right, okay, I'll go to Sydney." So away I went on a troop train, and I have to say of all the seven trips I did across the Nullarbor I never got a dog box or a cattle truck.

36:30 I always managed to get a compartment, which is one good plus. Duly arrived in Sydney and I was carted out to HMAS Penguin on Middle Head, Balmoral. And I ran into some of my old Nizam mates. They had come ashore there and in various positions, postman and various other things. And I must have been there for at least 10 days. And one day I heard my

37:00 name being piped over the public address system, "Report to the police office." So I went around to the police office and they had WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] by this time, WRANS had been introduced to the Australian Navy. "Oh here's this Able Seaman Morris you've been looking for." Well, I was cheeky enough to say, "Well you couldn't have been looking very hard because I've been here for 10 days." They said, "You were supposed to go to the Ararat. I said, "Yes, I know that, that's what I told them in Leeuwin."

37:30 "Well what are you doing here?" and I said, "Well, you tell me what I'm doing here." "Right get your bag and hammock," and this was Friday afternoon about 3 o'clock, "Get your bag and hammock," which was the old expression, which was exactly that. You lashed up your hammock and slung it over your shoulders and your kitbag, and they put me on the back of this 4 by 4 truck, you know the little trucks the army and navy had. And this maniacal driver took me in from Balmoral into Sydney Central.

38:00 At 5 o'clock traffic in Sydney, even at wartime, it was pretty thick. This homicidal maniac that was driving it, and I was sitting on the back of it. Onto the Sydney express at 6 o'clock, change at Albury, into the Spirit of Progress. And I arrive in Melbourne mid morning, a Saturday morning, hang around

for a while, and a truck takes me down to Port Melbourne, HMAS Lonsdale. By then its after

- 38:30 midday, the depot is deserted. The officer of the watch is walking up and down. "What are you here for lad?" and I said, "I've come to join the Ararat." He said, "Where have you come from?" I said, "Originally Fremantle and then Sydney," and I remember to this day he said, "Did those stupid bastards send you here?" I said, "Yes."
- 39:00 He said, "She left here four days ago." "Have you got some relations in Melbourne?" I said, "Yes, I've got some relations here." "Good, well buzz off and come back on Monday morning," which I did. On Monday evening I was back on the Spirit of Progress, back to Sydney. When I got to Sydney Central I saw the rail transport officer.
- 39:30 I said, "Please sir, don't send me out to Penguin." He said, "Leave it with me lad," and he put me on the Brisbane train then. Because Ararat had left with the intention of bypassing Sydney and going straight to Brisbane. So I got to Brisbane only to be told that Ararat had been and gone. She had arrived, or left the day before. So they put me on the watch bill
- 40:00 again. I spent one night there, and next morning I heard my name being piped and they said Ararat has come back, she has suffered a slight boiler problem and she's down at Hamilton Wharf. So down I went on the back of a truck and I finally joined the Ararat. Well the Ararat took us
- 40:30 to New Guinea, Milne Bay, Langemak, Madang, Finschhafen, all those wartime places. I was in it for 6 weeks, no 2 months, oh we did all sorts of things. We went across to Umboi Island, New Ireland, a bit of convoy work and this that and the other. And one day the coxswain whistled me up and said,
- 41:00 "Hey, you're on draft," I said, "Where to?" He said, "Flinders." He said, "You never should have come to this ship, you know." This is the way the navy works in wartime.

What did you say, "You don't say"?

He said, "This actual draft note was issued before the one that brought you here," so what happened God only knows.

Tape 7

- 00:32 We used to practice for our pig merchants on board, ASDIC operators, and it was probably good practice for the Americans taking evasive action, and then when we got that, there is a way of signalling on the key and we'd
- 01:00 indicate when we could drop the charges and then the Yanks would send up a little smoke float and sometimes it would be close and other times it would be miles out. Used to take place at the north end of Rottnest; that was our diversion really. We went out and got a Catalina one day. This Catalina ran out of fuel.
- 01:30 Pretty poor navigation, how he managed to get himself marooned. In a position almost out of sight of land, north, north west of Rottnest and we set out to take the crew off and do whatever was possible. And we got out there and we tried to float a line across to it. But being lighter,
- 02:00 the wind and tide was pulling it away faster than it was drifting down and we could never get it. We could never get this floating line with a little barrel on the end, fast enough and they played around for ages. And eventually we went around the other side of it, hoping for it to just come down on us and that's exactly what it did. And this damn great tail came up, and came down on the quarterdeck.
- 02:30 And there was duralium around that ship for months and months. Later we used to make models and things, great big chunks of it. We'd damaged this thing. Skipper reckoned he was still going to tow it back into Fremantle. The Yanks ashore signalled, "Take off crew and destroy the aircraft," and our bloke being a stubborn sort of man
- 03:00 sent a signal saying that the captain of the aircraft felt that the aircraft was still salvageable and he was capable of towing it. He got a very terse reply back to say, "He is the captain of an aircraft, not a naval captain. Please comply with my previous request." We took them off eventually, they inflated a little rubber
- 03:30 dinghy and paddled across to us. On board were a couple of Aussie soldiers who had thumbled a lift down to Perth. Shortly afterwards the weather was starting to deteriorate. You could see a norwester was coming in and the cloud was coming over and it was starting to get a little unpleasant and out came a little American ship, the Chantacrier or something from Fremantle
- 04:00 and we proceeded on our way home, and shortly afterwards we hear, "boom, boom, boom, boom," they despatched her to the deep. A beautiful brand new, well not brand new, a beautiful big Catalina flying boat, just written off like that.

Were you aware of any Japanese scares like out near Rottneest because I

04:30 **know they were pointing their guns all around the place, you know ready to pick off the Japanese? What was going on out there really?**

I think as far as Japanese activity around the West Australian coast is concerned, there are stories that people up round Dandaragan and Moore River maintain, that they would come in at night time. They used to hear the sound of heavy diesels and like

05:00 you do when you go down to Fremantle, those little Taiwanese fishing, little white fishing boats you walk past. Their diesels are always thumping away. And it's quite feasible that in fact there has been a book written about the Japanese submarine activity around the Australian coast, and West Australia gets quite a few mentions but, stories about Japanese spies and lights at night time, a lot of those I think are sheer imagination.

05:30 **So as far as Japanese fleet scares go, it was just a bit of furphy [rumour]?**

That flap that I mentioned in March of '44. I read about it only recently somewhere. It wasn't anywhere as big as it was originally reported and all it did was go out on a bit of foray

06:00 **into the Indian Ocean to pick off any merchant ships that they might come across. As far as mounting an invasion of Western Australia and an attack on Fremantle, no way. At that stage, by '44, they were getting belted up in the Pacific too much to worry about a little diversion like that.**

06:30 **That was the invasion of the Philippines, you know MacArthur going back to the Philippines and the Leyte Gulf and Lingayen Gulf and all those tremendous battles that were being fought there. They wouldn't have had..., they wouldn't have bothered so late in the piece. Back in the early stages when they were cock-a-hoop and carrying all**

07:00 **before them maybe they might of thought, had their eyes on Australia, but I don't think Australia was ever in their original plans.**

When you were heading around the Pacific and going to places such as Milne Bay, what were you actually doing out there, as far as your mission was concerned?

We were available for any old job that was going.

07:30 It mainly concerned escorting work. Anti submarine escorts for relevantly slow moving merchant ships, liberty ships and the like. Taking a ship from A to B, to give it a bit of protection. Nothing very spectacular.

So nothing really stood out from that time?

Not really. I wondered why they sent me there. It was a mistake in the first place. I should have really gone; I was going to get onto that actually.

08:00 When they finally told me that I was to go to Flinders, they gave me the option of coming down to Australia. We were in Manus in the Admiralty Islands. They gave me the option of taking passage in HMAS Swan which was a sloop that was there, or there was an American ship, the Calamares which was an old

08:30 White Star liner, flying an American flag. It transpires that she was virtually a ship equipped for carrying walking wounded, in other words guys with skin solar exposure problems, skin cancers and that sort of thing.

09:00 And I could take passage on her if I so desired. I thought, "Ooh that will do me, an American ship." If I go down on the Swan they are going to make me work. I'll be doing some damn thing. But I didn't realise that USS Calamares had 15,000 cases of chilled turkeys in the hold for Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day was fast approaching, and typical

09:30 of the Yanks, no expense is spared when it comes to the troops. They were going to make sure that everybody on New Guinea had a bit of roast turkey on Thanksgiving Day. So from the Admiralty Islands we went across to Biak or Hollandia, or one of the furthest Schouten Islands, which is the furthest point north we had got at that stage. And then we came down and we called into every little 'piss pot' settlement all the way down.

10:00 It took 26 days to get to Brisbane.

That's hilarious, you are on a turkey run?

A turkey run, yeah, not a turkey shoot. By the time I got to Flinders I walked through the main gates and they didn't know who the hell I was or where I'd come from. I could have been adrift for months.

So what did you end up doing at Flinders OT [Operational Training]?

Well they put us into

- 10:30 a whole group of other blokes and there was some beaut blokes amongst them. The OT course I went on, there were 20 of us finally. 10 of us were old sea dogs that had had 3 or 4 years in the navy on the lower deck; the other 10 were dear little boys from Melbourne Grammar and Geelong Grammar and all those sorts of places. But it was beaut getting amongst blokes
- 11:00 that had been overseas. Some of them had been on Russian convoys, a beaut bunch. And they just wanted to sit in the class room and be told, "Right, just report into there each day and get your trigonometry up to date" because that's what you had to be. And you think, "Trigonometry, cor yeah, I'm 24. The last time I did trigonometry I was 15."
- 11:30 Anyway it was a good period; it blew a lot of cobwebs away. You started thinking about angles and algebra. And then we went before the selection board, and who should be on the panel but my old skipper MJ Clark. And the questions he said, "Nizam. Were you with me Morris in the Eastern
- 12:00 Fleet?" I said, "Yes, sir." I was dying to say, "I was in the Med with you, too," but I thought, "No, No, No," because he would then have said, "I suppose you participated in that sit-down strike, did you Morris?" Because a long time earlier we had an English radar mechanic fella on board and he had applied
- 12:30 to be sent back to the UK to do an officer's course, and one of the questions, this got around, somebody told me that one of the questions he got asked, one of the things he was told was that he couldn't be recommended because he had taken part in the sit down strike. And he was able to say, "On the contrary sir, I was in my radar cabinet and I didn't even know it had taken place." But I couldn't put that one over Clarky. I had to bite my
- 13:00 tongue because I hadn't come all this way and all these years to be knocked back on a technicality. Anyway I apparently passed muster and we did this 16-week course and came out as temporary acting sub lieutenant, on probation.

And what does that really mean?

Well you just have one

- 13:30 thin wavy stripe around your arm. And you wear a nice white shirt and a black tie, and you have a nice peaked cap. Well, what it had meant in fact was from becoming a reasonable senior able seaman; I become a very, very junior officer. A dogsbody in other words.

So was this actually a good move or a bad move?

Oh, it was a good move. A good move finally I think, you keep quiet about it

- 14:00 as far as a lot of the old sailors are concerned. They don't want to know about it and I doubt whether my mates in the N class destroyer association even know that I was a 'pig' as they say. So I just kept quiet about it. But I just felt that you don't stay in something without trying to better yourself somehow. You want to leave your mark somewhere. I feel the same way
- 14:30 towards my association with the yacht club. Even here I am on the management committee of this place. I like to feel that you do some damn thing.

With the rise in rank at the time, did you actually get treated any differently?

Oh yes, when I was sent up to Sydney I travelled first class and had a cup of tea brought in, in the morning by the

- 15:00 bloke on the train. Oh yes, the treatment is very, very different. We did a few courses. I did an anti-submarine course at Rushcutter.

And what did that involve?

They have a simulator, just like the aircraft industry has a simulator for pilots, you know you

- 15:30 sit there and you've got the same table they have got on board a ship and you can carry out attacks and then the instructor can tell you afterwards how close, whether you made a balls of it or whether the depth charges were somewhere near the target. It was good fun. Then you go over to the aircraft recognition course and, what else did we do?
- 16:00 We went out to Maroubra one day and there was a big Chev [Chevrolet] 5-ton truck towing a Beaufort gun and I thought he was a very skilful driver, doubly clutching and changing down. Little man about 5 feet tall driving this damn truck. Anyway we got down there and fired a few shots at that. And then I got a posting.
- 16:30 And I thought I really should have a guilty conscience at this stage but I thought, "No bugger it, I feel that I did my little bit overseas so from now on I'm not going to seek any great glory." I got posted to Jervis Bay which was a really cushy number. I was the additional officer on a Fairmile.
- 17:00 Do you know what a Fairmile is? Do you remember the original islander that ran to Rottnest, the

original islander? She was a converted Fairmile. They were a wooden motor launch 112 feet long, two-V12 petrol motors in them, 25 knots. Used for all sorts of things. They used a fair few of them up in New Guinea on close in shore work

17:30 and tried to chase Japanese subs that were trying to evacuate their troops. As far as Jervis Bay was concerned, the Royal Navy had arrived by this stage. They had adopted, taken on what became subsequently HMAS Albatross, it's a depot near Nowra NSW just in from NSW, what became the Royal Navy

18:00 Fleet Air Arm base and our job was to patrol up and down while these guys exercised out at sea. In the event of crashes we were to pick up, if there were survivors. Whilst the time I was there we didn't pick up any survivors; it was just a really cushy job.

So what would an average day entail?

18:30 Leaving at 8 o'clock in the morning. Proceeding up and down, up and down, up and down and up and down until about 4 o'clock in the afternoon then coming in. One of the pleasures of Jervis Bay was the fact that it was a bit like Rottnest. It was still open to the public even though there was a naval jetty.

19:00 It had been a naval establishment. Jervis Bay was the old Officers Training School when the navy was first formed in 1913, or whenever it was. Jervis Bay was when all those people like Collins and DeShano and all those types; they all started off down there. And then during the Depression I think they closed it down and transferred it to Flinders. But the buildings

19:30 remained there and they were rented out as hotels and guesthouses. Like Rottnest, it was very popular place for young girls taking their annual holidays. A bit like Rottnest where the tenancy generally changes on a Wednesday or a Saturday; it may still do, it used to in the old days.

20:00 Some of the tenancies of the bungalows and things changed there on those days. Well, the tenancies changed there as far as guesthouse come hotel type thing was concerned, on Friday. And we had an ally with the girl on the reception desk and we had a phone on the wharf and we'd get a ring to say, "The draft has arrived, and there is a couple of very promising looking blondes so you had better high up here as best you can." So up we go.

20:30 But that, of course, couldn't last forever.

Sounds like more than a cushy job, it sounds like heaven.

And I was sent up to stand by another Fairmile, which was on the Brisbane River. Incidentally while I was down at Jervis Bay both VE and VJ Day occurred.

Well tell me what you were doing and what happened on both those occasions"

21:00 Well VE Day I was up in Sydney. I'd bummed a ride on an aeroplane for the first time in my life, up to Sydney and I did virtually nothing. I could hear all this yahooing and carrying on and just lying in my bed thinking, "What a bloody fool I am, I should be back on the ship." So when VJ [Victory over Japan] day came along, there were signs that it was about to happen,

21:30 I made damn sure I wasn't going to be anywhere else but there. We had a wonderful day, God we did, tremendous.

Lots of partying and drinking and girls?

The head steward from the pub, he was a funny man. He came down all dressed up, forgotten what his rig was. It really was a fantastic time. Then I got sent up to Brisbane to stand by another one of things, which never did leave.

22:00 It never did get off the stocks. To my horror the naval officer in charge in Brisbane decided that sub lieutenant Morris was wasting their time, and his own time probably, and he brought me in to make me the Rail Transport Officer's offsider. And in the old days

22:30 the train from Sydney didn't go right through into town. It stopped at Indooroopilly. That's where the broad gauge, 4' 8½" stopped, and that was the terminus and they used to go down. They had a WRAN driver and I used to go down and welcome, well not welcome but, not exactly welcome but be there when these troop trains came up from Sydney,

23:00 and get all of these sleepy, lazy sailors out of their bunks and lined up and put up with their cheek. Didn't appeal to me very much. But I had one incident there which was rather amusing. I was sent down to make sure that this group of officers who had come from the British Navy, the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm types.

23:30 They weren't sort of salt horses; they were fliers rather than seamen. And the troop train had a..., they were old carriages, New South Wales carriages, and they had converted them by putting bunks along, longways, not across, but longways. And the bottom bunk, two people could lie side by side

24:00 and then there was another single bunk and another single bunk. And these guys went aboard and they

saw this accommodation, and they came back and said to me, "We're not going to travel on this train," and I said, "What is your objection?" They said, "It is laid down in KR&AI," that is King's Rules and Admiralty Instructions, that it is illegal for two serving personnel to sleep in the same bunk.

- 24:30 Well I said, "Well, you don't exactly sleep, if you are fully clothed, you just lie there," and he wouldn't have a bar of it. And he was, either a lieutenant or he might have even been a two and a half, and I was a mere sub lieutenant. So I said, "God, what am I going to do about this lot." So I went into the little caboose and I rang up my boss in Brisbane and I told him what had happened, and he said, "Give him a direct order to board that train, and if he refuses
- 25:00 then it is up to him to make some other arrangements." "But," I said, "he's a two and a half, I think." And he said, "It doesn't matter, you are my representative and you are the Rail Transport Officer." So I just went back and said, "I am giving you a direct order to board that train." And he said, "Well, we refuse," so I said, "Okay, please yourself." I just
- 25:30 walked off and hopped into the van, got driven back to town and went home or to wherever I was staying at the time. Next morning I went in and I saw the boss and I said, "What happened about the fellows on the train yesterday?" And he laughed and said, "Ha, ha, I tell you what happened. I rang the CO of the ship, and the CO said to me,
- 26:00 "Tell those men that if they are not prepared to get on that train,"—or a train, in other words they had missed that one, I can't remember now—"they will come back to this ship and they will do another tour of duty." He said, "They came in here and they were prepared to sit on the end of the engine's cowcatcher. Anything to get out."
- 26:30 **Now from this position you headed up to Brisbane and this is where you met your first wife?**
- No, no. There is a little bit more to come. I went into see the OIC [Officer in Charge] in Brisbane and I was cheeky enough to say, "Look, sir, I joined the navy to serve on ships, not to be a railway porter." "You don't like it lad?"
- 27:00 "No, of course I don't." He said, "Right." Next thing I know I get sent down to Sydney to stand by a thing that was being built up the river, the Parramatta River or up the other river. Called a GPV, a general-purpose vessel. That's where I really did my last little stint, which I was reasonably proud of, because the skipper was a lieutenant and I was a sub lieutenant. He was a man
- 27:30 who had been overseas. He had no money, because he had overdrawn his allowance to such an extent, hoping that when he got to England his records would be bombed and they would never catch up, but they weren't, and they did catch up. Of course he was on 'north easters', that we called them, for months and months because he had to make up what he had overdrawn. So poor old Donald
- 28:00 had no money. What we did was to buy a whole lot of beer and a whole lot of gin and whisky through the naval set up there, where you could, on credit. And we were supposed to go and take this thing to New Guinea. We reckoned
- 28:30 that we would flog this whisky and this gin off to the Yanks and get tremendous money for it, which you could. And that would pay for it and the beer as well. So away we went, finally, the ship we did trials with and one thing and another, brought it down the river and mucked around in Sydney Harbour. I got abused by a ferry driver one day for trying to hold my course. He swung his door open,
- 29:00 you know those Sydney ferries, he bellowed out, "I'm trying to run a bloody service here, get out of my way." Anyway, we set off to go to Brisbane, first stop. It was a lovely afternoon with a nice up and down swell. That was when I realised that Mr Donald Cameron, the skipper, was a terrible
- 29:30 sailor. He was seasick as a dog. So I found myself on the bridge of this thing and we set off with a young man who was a wireless operator and a signalman combined. I think I put him on the wheel for a while, but he lasted about 20 minutes and he said, "Er, I'm going to be sick, sir," so
- 30:00 he lay down on a couch and somebody brought a bucket up and I got another bloke. Well, the combination of this bloke heaving into this bucket and the new bloke, he didn't last any more than about 20 minutes so I said, "Well,"—we had one three badge man on board; when I say a three badge man, it
- 30:30 indicates that he was in the permanent navy for at least 12 years, which means he's an old sea dog. So I said, "Go and get him." To my amazement he didn't last long. So in desperation, "For God's sake go and find somebody that can steer this ship without spewing all over the place." So they brought up ordinary seaman Dodson, I think his name was. His father
- 31:00 was a warder for the Claremont Hospital for the Insane, he tells me. And he was a bit heavy sort of youth. I said, "Can you steer this thing?" He said, "I think so." Well, Ordinary Seaman Dodson and sub lieutenant commanded that ship all that night, all next day, all the next night until 3 o'clock in the morning
- 31:30 when the lights of Coffs Harbour came into view. And I think at that stage somebody was strong enough down below to bring us up a couple of sandwiches, corned beef sandwiches. And I went down finally as we turned into towards Coffs Harbour. I thought, "Well I don't know this, I'm not the captain of the ship,

I'm not going to take the responsibility," so I went down below and

- 32:00 I woke Cameron who had slept the whole way through, in between being ill, all the way through. He came up on the bridge and then, he said, "Ring down for half ahead," we were full ahead at this stage. "Ring down for half ahead." Nothing happened. "Have another go," nothing happened, so down I go, down the
- 32:30 ladder along to the engine room, and down the ladder. There's the duty engine room officer. Spew bucket beside him, fast asleep. "Hey chief, wakey, wakey we're there." He wakes up with a start and does the necessary to take us into Coffs Harbour. I was very proud of myself on that occasion. I might only be a jumped up
- 33:00 able seaman that suddenly found himself with a commission, but my God, I don't get seasick. Anyway we proceeded in, in much calmer waters up around Moreton Island to Brisbane and then we found that our instructions to go to New Guinea had been cancelled and that we were to stay there pending further
- 33:30 instructions. Then the big problem arose. What the hell are we going to do with this grog? We've got no money. We were joined shortly afterwards by—I suppose telling these sorts of tales probably is very dangerous—we were joined by another of these
- 34:00 GPs and the skipper, and this problem cropped up. "What are we going to do about it?" I don't know whether he had a similar problem on his ship, but we certainly had this one. And he elected to go ashore and suss out the landscape as to how we would go and get rid of this stuff. He got dressed in civvies and called himself by another name, and hired a taxi driver and said,
- 34:30 "Do you know anywhere around Brisbane at black market prices." The driver says, "Is it hot?" We said, "No, it's not hot, it's quite legal, but we have to get rid of it." And we did, we was taken down the Valley, Fortitude Valley, which is the brothel area, and he flogged all this stuff off at highly inflated prices. And we had enough money to pay for our beer.

So how long are you actually in

35:00 Brisbane for?

A couple of months I suppose. We were tied up at the Colonial sugar factory, very similar to the one we had here, on the corner. Down here at Blackmore Reach area. They had a place at a wharf. All pervading smell of sugar all the time,

- 35:30 but it was very handy because they had nice ablution blocks and things ashore, which we didn't have on board. But we had a nice little clinker built dinghy, lifeboat, which I modified the mast and the sails. We used to sail it up and down the Brisbane River, it was good fun. Finally a note came through to say that I was eligible for discharge. So travelled by train to Sydney.
- 36:00 And was brought around to Fremantle on an aircraft carrier, and that was about it. And I was still single.

So what were you planning to do after you had been discharged from the navy?

Well that's another of my regrets of my life is the fact that I did not avail myself of the wonderful opportunities that were

- 36:30 offered by way of rehabilitation courses. I have friends who did medicine, and other friends who became a schoolteacher and then head of the immigration section of the Education Department here in Perth, all through rehab courses. My trouble, was, in a way was
- 37:00 making excuses, is that had I been younger and not been working before the war, and didn't have a job to go to, I would have been far more amenable to listening to it. But when I had the office in Perth, getting in touch with me and saying, "We're desperate, when are you coming in?"
- 37:30 We are offering you 8 pound a week, and I had been getting 12 and 6 a day. And I was free, unmarried, the world's my oyster now. When I say free, free as far as matrimony was concerned and free as a breeze as far as I could do. I didn't have anybody telling me what time of the day I was to report on board.
- 38:00 It was a wonderful feeling of freedom, absolutely wonderful and the fact that you were being offered a job. You didn't have to fight for it, it was very tempting, but I do rather wish that I had been strong enough to say, "No, I'd like to be an engineer or an architect," or something very worthwhile.

So how long were you actually in that job, when you returned back to it?

- 38:30 I was in that job until, only a couple of years. I went back as the Chief Clerk of this insurance office and then I did a stint outside as an Inspector they called it. An Inspector was a 'business getter'
- 39:00 which I didn't like very much. I felt that selling something nebulous like insurance, and it wasn't life insurance, it was foreign accident. Even so my heart wasn't really in it. I thought something more solid

I'd like to try my hand at. So I left, with their blessing, but I left and joined a company which was the forerunner

39:30 of the Nylex Plastic Corporation. They are in quite a big way these days. I quite enjoyed that, selling something that you could see. You could take samples and this that and the other. And then my father came along unexpectedly and he had started a small real estate firm and would I care to join him, on much the same wages as I was getting. I thought, "Yes, I'd

40:00 like to try my hand at real estate." And I did that for 2 years and thoroughly enjoyed it, but Dad wasn't happy, he wasn't happy with his partner and he sort of pulled out. There was a bit of a downturn in the finance world at

40:30 the time, a bit of a downturn in industry.

How long after the war is this?

This is '52. I was married in '47. We lost our first baby, so Jonathan, my son, came along in '52,

41:00 and there is a gap of 5 years from the time we were married until he came along. And with a new baby and a new house and one thing and another, I leapt back into the insurance again. It was offered to me and this time I did.

41:30 I went back to being back on the road for a while which for some reason or other, maybe I was more mature, didn't worry me as much, and then they got me inside as Assistant Manager. I intended to stay with them until such time as the real estate market improved a bit, but I didn't, I stayed with them for 13 years. Jonathan was born in

42:00 '52, and then Amanda in '55 and that's the only two children we have.

Tape 8

00:34 **I've been meaning to ask you this. This is just some definitions. Can you tell me what a 'mess mother' is, a 'sea daddy' and a 'Good Samaritan' is, in relation to sea terminology?**

A 'sea daddy' is a more senior rating who takes you

01:00 under his wing and keeps an eye on you and keeps you on the straight and narrow. I was a 'sea daddy' to a... He referred to me as his 'sea daddy', but it was the OTS [Officer Training School], this lad from Tasmania. He was one of the young fry that came in. That's a 'sea daddy' or a 'winger' they'd call it, because he is taken under his wing.

01:30 The 'Good Samaritan' and the 'mess mother', I haven't struck that, or the 'Good Samaritan'.

I just had some terminology here, I thought, might be interesting.

Got any more?

No, that was just a couple there.

There were quite a lot of expressions, which Pat quite often gets amused about because I come up with them. And she'd say,

02:00 "Oh God, there's no doubt about the navy." We do have some peculiar expressions and things which emanate mainly from the Royal Navy. The Australian navy really up until not so long ago, but really was just an offshoot of the Royal Navy. But for instance anything in the way of sauces and gravies are known as 'gippers'.

02:30 Tomato sauce is known as 'red lead'. Herrings in tomato sauce are known as 'goldfish'. A 'goffer' is known as a soft drink. A 'macca' is a very, very ordinary seaman. If you wanted to insult someone you'd called him a Macca OD [Ordinary Seaman].

03:00 And that stems from I think canteen in one of the cruisers and the youngsters used to buy macaroons. They were the favourites of the little boys on board who bought macaroons. So they called them 'maccas'. There were all sorts of funny names we had for things.

Would you have a similar language to the American Navy? Would they be able to understand your language?

03:30 They have, they probably would get the message. Some of our orders were quite different like the pipe used to come round, "Out pipes; hands carry on with your work." In American

04:00 Navy they'd say, "The smoking lamp is extinguished top sides." We would say, "Away motor boat crew or away motor boat." They would say, "Away gasoline jig." Just different, meaning the same thing.

In our travels we have actually come across quite a few 'sea dogs' who say that with

04:30 the Morse code and the lamps that its quite amusing the banter between the RN and the RAN, but when it comes to the American navy they just have absolutely no sense of humour. So have you ever experienced that?

Actually there has been a book written, and there was a quite a high ranking British Navy fella who wrote a book

05:00 on wonderful signals that did pass between ships and for instance I think when one of the well-known Admirals was knighted, not only once, but twice, he received a signal from one of his co-Admirals that said "What, twice a night at your age?" I think that's very clever.

05:30 And then there is another famous one where the signal..., it was a ship arriving in Hong Kong where they had Chinese ladies coming aboard to do the dhobi-ing. That's another expression that was used in the navy a lot, a dhobi wallah. That's a washer; the person that does the washing is a dhobi.

06:00 D.H.O.B.E.Y. I think it's spelt. Comes from a real Indian name. Dhobi Gat is Bombay, where all that washing gets done in public. But this signal said, when the ship was coming in, the signal came, "Stand by to embark woman."

06:30 And a few minutes later came a signal, "In addition to previous signal, insert the following. Between 'board'

07:00 and 'woman', insert 'washer'."

Fair enough.

'Insert washer', yes that's another funny one.

Something else I have been thinking of. You mentioned earlier that you had a captain, I'm sorry I'm not sure what the name of the captain is, but he was excellent at avoiding bombs.

07:30 **How can you actually be good at avoiding bombs as to not good at avoiding bombs? Is it a matter of luck or is there some sort of tactical thing that he was doing?**

Maybe it's a matter of holding your nerve or something like that. This became particularly evident during the Crete evacuation where the German Air Force was particularly strong and they were using these Stuka dive-bombers which are terrifying apparently.

08:00 To make them even more terrifying they used to attach a siren to the undercarriage so that they screamed as they come down. He would apparently just hold his glasses on the plane and then wait until he saw the bombs, where he'd think the bombs are going to go, and then he'd say, "Right, starboard, harder starboard," or, "Harder port," to the helmsman.

08:30 And it's knowing when you could make the mistake of going the wrong way and sail right into them. I think an awful lot of luck too, attached to it. He apparently had the ability to manoeuvre that ship so that the bombs dropped harmlessly either one side or the other. Whether by luck or good judgment I don't know but he otherwise was a very quiet

09:00 sort of man, lovely sort of fellow I thought.

Pretty neat trick? Just having a bit of a think about Anzac Day, everybody has their own opinions about Anzac Day; do you actually much?

Mm.

What is important to you about Anzac Day?

Well I would hate to see

09:30 it dispensed with. There is one thing about it, particularly with the addresses that take place down on the Esplanade. I do think that they should now concentrate a little more on the Second World War and the Vietnam War and rather forget the First World War. I know that's where it originated

10:00 but I think that they should lay off that a bit now. There's hardly one even alive, I think, in Australia today. I think that man in Tassie is the last one to go or something. I would just like to see a little more emphasis on the deeds of our blokes in the Second World War. But I like to see a little pomp and ceremony.

10:30 I'm not again, when I've been in London, I think that those wonderful things they have there like the Trooping Of The Colour and so forth, I mean there are a lot of left wingers and so forth that reckon that it is an anachronism and that it should be done away with. It's the greatest tourist attraction they've got. And long may it live. After all, its okay if you have a president, they spend as much money on a president.

11:00 **A lot of people talk a lot about mateship and I know a lot of relationships can be quite tight.**

How do you see mateship?

I think it's more pronounced in the army, because friends of mine who went away

11:30 stayed with the same group of blokes, over the whole period particularly those who went to the Middle East and who might have been at El Alamein or Tobruk or somewhere like that, maybe seeing some their mates killed or wounded. navy, I don't think quite the same applies because

12:00 you are never long enough with people before you get separated. You might have joined with a man; well I joined up with a couple of fellows back in 1940. I didn't lay eyes on them for the entire 5 years until after the war and then I ran into them down at the beach. "Where the hell did you get to?" "Well, I got sent to Darwin," or, "I did this." No, I don't think you build up quite the same affinity in the navy,

12:30 for that reason.

You also mentioned that you found the navy making some really silly decisions sometimes. Why do you think that is? I mean it seems to be disorganised, some of the things you experienced like going back for Christmas when you have just come from Perth.

I really don't know

13:00 how it could happen to me. Perhaps some of their systems were a bit old fashioned and unwieldy. But mine was not the only example. I have heard lots of stories like this of chasing around all over the place for a ship that's probably just down the river. All sorts of silly damn things.

Do you think that it is just basic disorganisation that was happening?

13:30 Yes.

How do you think the navy has changed since you were active in the navy?

Oh the navy is very, very different today. So much of it is; so much of today is contracted out, private enterprise and that applies to the catering, there is no longer cooks and stewards.

14:00 That's all done by outside contracts. Even the navy engineering establishment. That's all now ADI [Australian Defence Industries Ltd] or somebody else; no, it's all being outsourced, even the security. When I was in Melbourne I wanted to go down and have a look at Flinders Naval Depot

14:30 seeing that I hadn't been there since 1944, and about nearly 55 years. It happened to be just after September 11th and I got through to security and they wouldn't have a bar of me. "No you're not coming near this place." That's all private contract.

Just you mentioning September 11th has reminded

15:00 **me, I haven't asked you what you think of the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?**

Once again, at the time we just took it in our stride. I remember the insurance company boss that I'd started with back in 1936 was managing Sydney by the end of the war and

15:30 I remember Sammy saying, "No Morris, I don't like the look of it. I don't like the look of it at all. That sort of thing could get out of control." You're right, he was. Getting back to answering your question. I know that there are a lot of people who are still harping about what a dreadful thing it was but it brought that war to a

16:00 conclusion and I'm damn sure that had they'd not dropped that bomb, those Japanese would have fought to the death. They would have lost millions. Every person there would be prepared to sacrifice themselves. It would have been dreadful, I think, that's my personal opinion. And it might have been a dreadful thing to do to drop the bomb that they did, but my God it had the effect.

16:30 **Just getting back to some happier times, I've noticed on your shirt you have the yachting club mentioned there, so obviously you have not left the ocean, or ships and boats completely?**

It was as a result; I went back into the naval reserve after the war. In 1950 when they started the Nashos [National Service soldiers] they wanted instructors, so they were offering, they were very generous. I joined it

17:00 back in 1950 and I got back into the navy as an instructor and although I had left the navy as a sub lieutenant, they offered me another stripe. They backdated my seniority to about 1947 as a lieutenant, as a full lieutenant. Not that it made much difference because it was only a matter of only one night a week, so it wasn't a lot of money involved but it was just the standing to a certain extent.

17:30 It was there that I met another fellow, another instructor, who was a pretty keen yachtsman, although I had done a bit of sailing in the navy, in their cutters and whalers. I had done a little bit of sailing on the river here with a friend of mine. He had a cruiser that was very well known. He was a very good yachtsman. He

- 18:00 asked me if I'd like to join his crew, and I said, "Yes, I would." And that's how the fight started back in 1957. So much so that they made me a 'special member' not so long ago and named a boat after me. I stayed on, once again a bit like I was saying earlier, I never liked to be in an organisation and not do
- 18:30 something, and I was initiated into sailing with this fellow. He sacked me after a while because somebody came along that was younger and more agile than I was. So it was a bit like, I would make the comment, or the comparison;
- 19:00 a bit like a bloke introducing his girlfriend to his best mate. A very foolish thing to do. I introduced this mate of mine to the skipper and it wasn't long before my mate was in, and I was out. So I got a little bit 'cheesed off' with cruisers and prima donna skippers, so when somebody said to me one day,
- 19:30 "You use tools, can't you, to a certain extent." I said, "Yes, a bit of a hobby of mine." He said, "What about building a 'Flying 15'?" A Flying 15 is a design; there is a photo of it in there. It's an English design and was catching on here and this fellow was endeavouring to get the class going. He said, "I've got one started at home.
- 20:00 It's on the frame, the keel is on the frame and there's enough veneer and timber there to finish it. You can have the lot for 25 quid." So that's how I built a Flying 15. And I sailed those things, and I sold that one and bought a professionally built one, which was no bloody good anyway, but I sailed those things for 15 years.
- 20:30 Then my wife and I upped sticks and went to England and while I was away this thing disintegrated and when I came back I didn't have the money to buy them. They had gone up in price, like everything does these days. To give you some idea, I built that original Flying 15 for,
- 21:00 complete with trailer, for 345 pounds. That's by scrounging around and using a sail off another class of boat and a mast off something else. Today you can buy one professional built, in fibreglass, and mounted on its trailer, if you've got 20,000 dollars; just a difference.
- 21:30 **Are you still active in the yacht club?**
- Yeah. I'm the chief starter down there on a Saturday afternoon. That's how I got the boat named after me. Then we bought a powerboat, my wife and I bought a powerboat. And then tragically she died.
- Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, Bill.**
- 22:00 That was 1981, which was shattering. Anyway I got myself another partner, for the boat I'm talking about now, a bloke. We hung on to old Nyngan. Sounds like a dreadful name but as a West Australian you probably know that there is a dude ranch up near Paynesville called Nyngan;
- 22:30 well, he was the guy that bought this boat originally, well one of the owners of it, and he called it Nyngan. A bloke called, sometimes I forgot these names but it doesn't really matter much. We eventually re-engined it and played around with it. Had a lot of fun with it, and finally sold it in
- 23:00 1991. By that time I was re-married. Camille died in 1981, so I had about 4 years of freedom before I was snared again. Camille was
- 23:30 8 years younger than I am, or she was 8 years younger. This one is 14. I've been accused of being a cradle snatcher but Patty is 14 years younger.
- Well you must be doing something right Bill?**
- Yeah, well I've known Patty for... she used to come to parties at our place. I've known her for years and years. 40 years probably.
- So, just**
- 24:00 **thinking about all your wartime experience. A lot of people get quite philosophical about this final question. What do you think about war?**
- I think it's the most useless, stupidest. It never works, it never has done and yet for some unknown reason it seems humanity only
- 24:30 resorts to it. Some difference of opinion arises, and they end up killing one another. Even Churchill said, he was supposed to be a warmonger, which I don't hold with at all, he wasn't, he was trying to warn these stupid complacent people what was about to happen but, even he always says, "Jaw, jaw, jaw is better than war, war, war." No,
- 25:00 and as for these silly ladies, at one stage we had a group of ladies against rape and they were trying to make out that we glorified it on Anzac Day. That's nonsense, we don't do anything of the sort, it was just the companionship. Blokes get together on Anzac Day and they spin the same old yarns and they are not about death and glory and so forth. It's about what somebody got up to in
- 25:30 Cairo when they pinched something off a beggar or they did something like that. But as far as war itself is concerned, the older I get the more of a pacifist I have become. Has that answered your question?

It certainly does, Bill, thank you very much for talking to us today on the Archives.

Well I have thoroughly enjoyed it.

Good, it is supposed to be an enjoyable experience.

Well I just hope that I haven't waffled on too long.