Australians at War Film Archive

Richard Roberts - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 22nd September 2003

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:36 **So Dick can you tell us a little bit about where you actually grew up in Melbourne?**

I was born in Kew in St Georges Hospital, and I grew up basically in Kew, went to school in Kew and then subsequently went to school in Hawthorn.

01:00 **How big is Kew?**

Kew is a big suburb, it's equivalent I suppose to Claremont in Western Australia.

Sure. What sort of things did you get up to at the weekend that you can remember?

On the weekends I used to play a lot of sport. I was always very keen on sport right from the jump and used to run, do a bit of running, cross-country running

01:30 and also played tennis. Also did a bit of cricket but mainly rowing. Rowing I had to quite a bit of time for. That's as a school boy; I didn't follow it up very much after I left. I also played football, Australian Rules football, of course.

Got quite a few sports in there?

Yes, I've always been a sort of generalist

02:00 as far as anything in my life is concerned. I like to have a broad sort of picture of everything if I can, even in my subsequent career; I've always looked at things from across the board, rather than just from a narrow view.

How much of a benefit was your height, with sport?

I think it has always been. I have a photo actually of me

02:30 winning the Under 7 seventy-five or fifty yards sprint and I was much taller than the other ones that competed in it. That was a great advantage, not so much later on, but as a small child, well relatively small, I was much bigger than my peers.

What sort of subjects did you enjoy when you were in school?

I enjoyed again a broad range, but

03:00 I enjoyed the study of history a lot. But also mathematics and physics and chemistry, so I did a broad sort of range, as again human biology. Early one I sort of went for either the arts or medicine, cause I was interested in medicine by my general practitioner who was very keen.

03:30 **Can we just have a bit of a pause there for a moment? Ready? So with your interest in history does this mean that you're a bit of an avid reader?**

Oh yes, I was an avid reader and that helped a lot in my subsequent life in the services, because there's

a lot of time when you're just sitting on your backside, and just waiting for things to happen. There was a lot of boredom associated with

04:00 war service. That's what I found, I don't know what everybody found, what to do with their spare time, but I was fortunate in that I was able to read and was interested in reading, and after I left school I established contact with a couple of sources of reading that helped a lot in filling in the time between actions of various sorts and shapes and sizes.

04:30 **Quite a few kids in your family, five children?**

Three of us, no, three of us.

Oh three of you?

Three—an older brother and a younger brother. My older brother was, he spent the war in the Merchant Navy. He was in the Merchant Navy, initially running

05:00 from Australia up to the islands, up to Nauru actually. He was in a British phosphate commission ship. He was a wireless operator on board.

So you weren't the only one that ended up in the services?

No, not the only one that ended up in the services. My younger brother, he was a bit young so he didn't have any war service.

And how were finances? I mean you grew up during the Depression with quite

05:30 **a few kids?**

Grew up during the Depression. Our finances were stable really, because my father was an engineer in the then Country Roads Board in Victoria. That's where I grew up and he had a steady job, although I can remember at one stage that he was studying Russian because at that time, the Soviet Union,

06:00 it was advertising for engineers to go to the Soviet Union to help them in rebuilding their country. That was in the 1930s, so he studied Russian. He never actually went but I think he did apply to go because the jobs were pretty good and they were well paid.

That's pretty unusual.

It is, yes, it is unusual, but of course they were a very undeveloped country and they wanted to push ahead and develop their engineering.

06:30 **Can you remember any sort of bartering system that went on as part of the Depression, you know I'll give you one of these and you can take one of those?**

Oh yes, yes, yes. The things that I can remember particularly about the Depression, because we lived in a fairly affluent area—Kew is a fairly affluent area—and so we didn't come across the very hard sort of times that people, even the working-class areas had, where they just couldn't get a job and couldn't get any income,

07:00 but we used to have a lot of people hawking stuff from door to door, and I can remember particularly the rabbits. Rabbits were the sort of thing that people went out into the country, well the working people went out in the country and trapped their rabbits, and shot their rabbits and then bought them in, and sold them from door to door, fairly cheaply. They were a cheap source of meat. We used to like rabbit and I can always remember the rabbiters coming from door-to-door, and the other thing I can remember

07:30 was my father employed a carpenter around the place and he did quite a bit of carpentry work. That's the main things that I can remember as far as the Depression was concerned.

How attracted to the water were you?

Well not particularly. The main reason that I wanted to join the Navy, it's sort of almost

08:00 a romantic sort of attraction. I had read a bit of Joseph Conrad and Joseph Conrad talks about the water. But the main reason I wanted to join there was because you could get into the service quickly, whereas the army, at the stage that I wanted to join they had a delay factor, because there were so many people going in they didn't have enough training positions so that took

08:30 a lot longer than the navy, where you could join fairly quickly. You could also join at the age of seventeen. In the army you had to wait until you were eighteen, and the same with the air force, you couldn't join until you were eighteen, so that was one of the main reasons that I wanted to join the navy.

What was the big hurry for you joining?

Well it was the patriotic urge at school. You were sort of whipped into almost a frenzy

09:00 of patriotism, and it was also adventure, the question of getting, once you'd made up your mind of joining the services you wanted to get in, from the point of view of patriotism and also at that time I

developed an idealistic approach thing where I felt I wanted to do good in the world.

09:30 And at that age you do, when you're seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, in your adolescence you sort of developed a feeling that you wanted to do something useful in life. You wanted to also help those people who were also underprivileged. There was also the factor at that time that our patriotism had developed into almost

10:00 an atmosphere of hate towards the enemy, hatred towards Japanese particularly because of the atrocities that they had carried out and also the Germans. There was a definite racial sort of bias in our approach to life at that stage.

How much of this attitude was filtering through in the newspapers?

Oh I think it was a general thing, a general sort of attitude,

10:30 the anti-German, anti-Japanese sort of atmosphere that sort of developed. And of course early in the war there was the Soviet atmosphere, because at one stage, early on in the war, the Soviet Union, the Russians, had signed a peace treaty with Germany, which was our

11:00 enemy at the time, and that sort of confused things quite a lot.

Not a lot of people were as aware as yourself; were you reading a paper everyday?

I wasn't reading the paper everyday, but I was politically understanding, even at school, because I was influenced there by our chaplain at school, which was a private school, Scotch College, and he was very

11:30 interested in the political and economic ramifications of the war, and he used to have quite long discussions with us and I got to know him fairly well, personally. We used to talk quite a bit about politics, about religion, about the general sort of state of affairs in the world and that was an interesting sort of a thing and I became interested in it and it's one of my

12:00 motivations to go to war, was sort of part of this joining in this political struggle and the economic struggle at the time.

What was your chaplain's ideology in relation to his flock joining?

Oh he was in, he was, what? Joining the services? He was in favour of it. He

12:30 recognised the dangers of fascism, the dangers of the Japanese's approach to world affairs and he could quite understand their approach. He wasn't in the services himself, but he supported the war effort, there's no question of that. There was no question of doubting the war effort at the time. Nobody doubted what we were doing,

13:00 not that I could fathom at any rate.

Would he talk to you about his religious and political attitudes as part of his service or would it be more of a one to one kind of—?

Oh both, both, both. Actually post-war there was some sort of reaction to his approach to things, but there we are, he was a left-winger and I'd

13:30 developed some sort of affinity towards that. Because my mother was also somewhat of a 'leftie'. A leftie in that she was a pacifist. Her father was an Englishman and he was very much a pacifist, between the wars at any rate. I never knew him but I know she was influenced very heavily by him.

So your mother thought there shouldn't

14:00 **be a war?**

Oh well, she had mixed feelings, because of her father, she had this pacifist sort of feeling, and she could see that there was real danger as far as fascism was concerned. She was very much an anti-fascist and very much anti the Japanese approach to life. On the one hand

14:30 she was married to my father who was a colonel in the army. He was actually on General MacArthur's [Douglas MacArthur, United States General] staff as an intelligence agent, so you know she was very close to my father and she shared most of his views, not all of them, but most of them. And I was bought up in this atmosphere. It just wasn't school influence,

15:00 but it was home influence as well.

So how did you go about joining up?

How did I go about it? I went into the recruiting office, the Naval Recruiting Office, which was heavily advertised at the time and said, 'I want to join up'.

Did you go alone or with some mates?

I went alone.

And what was the process they put you through after you walked through the door?

Oh well they interviewed you. They looked at just what you were doing,

15:30 at my past life and they asked me what my motivations were. They examined me from head to toe to see that I was fit and well. Didn't take any blood tests or anything like that. Blood tests weren't on at that stage. All they did was a physical examination, and said I was fit enough to go in, and they called me up in due time.

How long was it before they did that?

16:00 Oh a couple of months, actually a couple of months, or was it? I'm not absolutely sure about that. Yes, I think it was a couple of months, but in the meantime, after I left school I got a job as an ice carter. I used to drive an ice cart and horse around, carrying ice to deliver it from the ice-works in the city to various pubs

16:30 around the city.

Sounds like a fairly unusual sort of a job.

Oh yes, but during the war people did have unusual sorts of jobs. When you were on school holidays we used to go and do harvesting of flax. I don't now whether you know the harvesting of flax, which was grown extensively at the time.

Sorry, what's flax good for?

Flax is used in the building of houses,

17:00 and it's also used as a source of animal feed. It's like corn, barley and things like that.

So would this be a voluntary kind of thing that you would do or would you be paid?

Yeah, that would be voluntary, yes that was voluntary. It was part of the Land Army which the women were involved in, and which anyone who had any spare time and was

17:30 was able to volunteer did and so school kids—you know the senior school kids would, of which I was one of them—we used to go and do that sort of thing in the school holidays. At the time, during the war, there was people sort of put their hands to everything they could do, assisted as far as the war effort was concerned.

18:00 Patriotism ran very high.

How much social pressure was there to be part of the Land Army?

Considerable I would say, considerable social pressure from your peers as much as anything, and also from the newspapers, from everywhere. It wasn't like say the Vietnam War where there were people questioning what we were doing and why we were there and

18:30 what were we doing. The community was sort of split as far as the war was concerned. In the 1939 to '45 war, that's the Second World War, there were very few people, very few, who were opposed to the war as such. They all supported it. There were a few pacifists,

19:00 and I could understand those sort of people who were sort of opposed to it, who said that 'War did no good ever', but we could never see the logic of that when people were invading your country, when people threatened to invade your country. And the Japanese definitely threatened to invade our country and they actually bombed our country, and they invaded our country with

19:30 midget submarines and such like.

Did it come as a bit of a shock that they were so close and active?

Almost inevitable because you sort of, when the Japanese entered the war, they advanced so swiftly and you wondered 'when are we going to be involved?' because they came south from Japan, initially into the Philippines and then into Singapore then into Borneo, then into Indonesia,

20:00 and then they bombed Darwin and they bombed Broome and they bombed Port Headland. They sent midget submarines into Sydney Harbour, and torpedoed a couple of boom ships and ferries, so it was pretty close. Then there was the Battle of the Coral Sea, which was just off the Queensland coast, which made people think,

20:30 'Who's next? And we're in the firing line.' So, it was pretty sort of threatening I suppose. Quite exciting from a teenager's point of view.

Sure. So you've managed to join up and now you've been told to come along and do some training, so where do you go to for training?

Oh we went to Flinders Naval Depot for training, which was

21:00 down on Western Port Bay, part of HMAS Cerberus, that's what they called us, and we had a period there. I'm not sure actually how long it was, eight weeks, eight to ten weeks; I'm not sure actually how long it was.

Can you remember some of the things that they

21:30 **put you through?**

Oh well, it was marching up and down, showing you how to use a gun, checking on how you could swim. If you couldn't swim they taught you to swim, just the general sort of discipline of an armed force, that's what they did and subsequent to that I went to Sydney and did a course in gunnery,

22:00 anti-aircraft gunnery, and that's where I went as far as that was concerned. At that stage they were just bringing in radar, which was a new thing and I enrolled for that and did a course in radar as well, in Sydney.

Just before we get into that, taking a bit of a step back to Flinders, what were the conditions like there?

Well the

22:30 conditions? We at the time accepted it as part of the conditions. We were all in a dormitory, a big dormitory, and we slept in hammocks. We didn't have any bunks. We always slept in hammocks. The food was very basic and there was no sort of privacy in the place and that was accepted as part of the life in the services.

23:00 **How many blokes were together in the one room?**

Oh about twenty, twenty or it may have been forty. Yeah there were forty; there were two lots of twenty, that's right. In our sort of draft, that they called up there were forty people and I can remember marching in and there were about forty of us. We marched in and we went by train from Melbourne down to Flinders Naval Depot.

23:30 **That's not too far, is it?**

No, not very far at all.

What were the conditions like on the train?

Oh well it was a bit like cattle trucks, but that was accepted.

It was only a short journey anyway.

Yes, only a short one, except for the ones that came and joined our draft that came over from Western Australia, they came by train and they went from Perth to Melbourne by train.

24:00 Had to change trains a couple of times, but they were basically in sort of cattle truck types of things conditions where they slept on the floor and occasionally in hammocks as well.

Even though you weren't too far away from home, did you get homesick?

At that stage, no. Actually my mother, my father at that stage had moved to Brisbane on General MacArthur's staff, and my mother

24:30 went up there and stayed. She helped him, she helped in one of the offices. She wasn't in the army, but she was one of the civilians who assisted in the army.

Kind of unusual to have your parents move away from you.

Yeah, oh well I was in boarding school too. I was sent to boarding school in my last, in my last couple of years at school I was in boarding school.

Do you have any recollection of the

25:00 **kinds of things that your father would do as part of General MacArthur's staff?**

No, he was in the intelligence section, and as such was pretty hush-hush, very hush-hush.

But that must have been pretty impressive for a teenage boy like you?

I suppose it was. I didn't really recognise it at the time because you accepted it as part of life.

Can you remember any specifics about the type of training you did at Flinders?

25:30 **I mean obviously there's a bit of square bashing going on, but was there anything that was say a written sort of a presentation course of—?**

No, not that I can recall.

Any sort of water activities as far as—?

Well you were taken out, you were taken out in boats and you had to row in boats.

26:00 The standard sort of boat was what was known as a whaler, was a certain size, certain specifications and there was a crew of about eight and you were part of that crew so there was quite a lot of water activities as far as that was concerned. And you also went on board some of the smaller ships that they had down there for training purposes.

What sort of things would you do on these small ships?

Oh navigation, learning how to be a look-out because there was

26:30 certain sort of skills in detection of ships, aeroplanes. There was the air look-out as distinct from the land look-out, as distinct from the sea look-out and there was special sort of tips in acquiring efficiency in these areas as we were concerned.

27:00 Because at this stage radar was only just coming in really. Hadn't been well-established, and so the emphasis on the use of the eyes, the use of the telescope, the use of binoculars was pretty high.

Can you remember any handy helpful tips for being a good look-out?

Oh yeah, there was, you

27:30 always used not just straight visions but using the corner of your eye, because the corner of the eye was much more sensitive as far as detecting movement was concerned and very important in air detection to see aeroplanes. It was important to look not just ahead but

28:00 from the corner of your eye.

I haven't heard that one before. That's quite interesting.

Yes, it is.

Can you think of any other tips like that?

Well to move your eyes, not to keep on the one spot all the time, to keep moving, that was the only sort of thing that I can remember.

Did you make any mates while you were in this training?

28:30 Oh no, they were pretty superficial, pretty superficial. It was only a very short one and you moved around a lot. I was not isolated or anything. We were all good mates, but it was very much just a fleeting acquaintance and then you split up and you went your various ways.

So you were obviously heading off towards Sydney, was that right?

Yeah, I was intent on getting some sea time,

29:00 actually going to sea, and the quickest way was to get some training in specific areas and that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to do some gunnery, and so I went up there and radar as well, so that's why I went to Sydney and was based in Sydney for a while.

Did that field actually interest you or was that all about getting onto—?

Yeah, it interested me and also I wanted to get to sea. I joined the navy

29:30 to go to sea and I wanted to get there quickly.

So what did they do in order to train you up?

Oh well they introduced us to the various anti-aircraft guns, to the various guns which were used on board ships and they took you over and taught you how to take them to bits and put them together again, how to fire them, how to load them.

30:00 **Would you actually get time out on a ship or—?**

Not so much time out on a ship, no. You get time out on land where they had the guns and where they trained you in their use.

And how intense was this part of the course?

Oh it was fairly intense, you worked fairly hard. And of course while I was up there as well doing this training they got me,

30:30 I was drafted to the boom ship in Sydney. The boom ship was just a light, a ferry really, which had a winch on board which opened and closed the boom, which protected Sydney Harbour. This was after the torpedoing escapade of the Japanese submarines that came in, the

31:00 midget submarines who came into Sydney Harbour and torpedoed a couple of boats.

How big is the boom on the boom ship?

Oh it's quite a wide boom. The boom itself goes, it's a fence really that goes across the harbour, right across the harbour entrance and there's about a, and the boom itself

31:30 is the one that opens and shuts and allows the ships in and out. In between the ships going in and out you close the boom, and so the function of the boom ship, which I was on, was to open and shut this gate, mechanically of course, open and shut this boom across the channel, and the channel was about a hundred foot wide

32:00 I suppose. And we used to be signalled as to when we should open it and close it and we used to talk to the ships by wireless contact.

Did you enjoy it or did you find it a bit dull?

It was dull, but it was better than doing nothing. We used to work twenty-four hours on and twenty-four hours

32:30 off, so that would mean the twenty-four hours off we would have shore leave so we would be able to go ashore and see Sydney, visit friends and stay with people. When we were on board ship we were working four hours on, four hours off. That's when you had the twenty-four hours on. So in the four hours on you'd be pretty solidly engaged in doing the

33:00 job that you were supposed to. In the four hours off you'd sleep as much or as little as you could.

What did you think of Sydney?

Oh I enjoyed it. Although there were periods where I felt a bit homesick, I must say, in Sydney. It was a humming sort of city. Lots of people coming and going, lots of servicemen, because it was

33:30 the centre for all the services that were engaged in the war, both American and Australian.

What did you think of some of the other services?

Oh well there was always rivalry between us, always rivalry between the Australians and the Americans because the American's conditions were so much better than what ours were. Because they had better sleeping conditions,

34:00 better quarters, better uniforms, better boots, everything was of a higher standard than we had. But that's always been and there was some rivalry between us and of course they were better paid as well. It was known that the girls enjoyed the American's because they had more money to spend, better

34:30 places to take them too, more romantic and this was not very conducive to good relations between the Yanks [Americans] and the Australians, servicemen particularly.

Did you witness any stoushes [fights]?

Oh yes, there used to be occasional stoushes, no doubt about that. I wasn't involved in them myself, but I witnessed them certainly.

Can you describe what sort of a uniform you were wearing at the time?

35:00 Standard naval uniform. I was a seaman and as such you had your bell-bottom trousers which were creased in a certain way, which were ironed in a certain way, that's the trousers. And then we

35:30 had a jacket with a scarf and a scarf and collar, a particular sort of collar and you were identified by the collar that you wore and also the badges that you had.

Any particular way to wear the uniform?

Oh yes, as casual as you could get away with and of course you had

36:00 your sailor's cap and you wore that on the back of your head if you could. Certainly you couldn't on official occasions, you had to wear it in a very pukka sort of way, but and you got away with as much scruff as you could. You wanted to be as scruffy as possible. This was frowned on very much by the officers and authorities concerned.

It's an interesting

36:30 **part of human nature though, isn't it?**

Yeah. As a teenager, late teenager, you're whole idea was to be as scruffy as possible, that's normal and natural I think.

Some things certainly haven't changed.

No.

So how long were you on the boom ship?

I would say three months.

And how did you actively pursue getting on your own ship?

37:00 Well I applied to the authorities in Balmoral. Balmoral Naval Base that was where we were stationed and I put in a request to the commander to see him to apply for the,

37:30 what was it called? Apply for sea time, I wanted to go to sea and he asked me, I had to front up before him and stand in front of him and he was behind the table and 'Why do you want to go to sea?' I said 'I joined the navy to go to sea, I'd like to go to sea.' And he said, 'Righto, I'll see what I can do for you.' And he did and that's when I was drafted to the [HMAS] Hobart.

38:00 **Well that must have been an exciting time when you actually found out you were drafted onto a ship?**

Yeah, it was. It was what I wanted to do and I wanted to go to sea.

What were your first impressions of the Hobart?

It had a tradition, the Hobart, it was part of the fleet which was engaged in the Coral Sea Battle. I wasn't involved myself and it was torpedoed or fished, as they

38:30 used to say. It was fished and it had quite extensive damage and it limped back into Sydney Harbour and was there and repaired and I went on board at just the finish of the repairing job. I was part of the commissioning crew, which re-commissioned the Hobart, preparing it going back into service up

39:00 in the Pacific.

Well that's pretty exciting to be on a—?

Yeah, it was and we had an inspiring skipper. There was a crew of about twelve hundred, which is quite a big crew and the skipper was a Captain Dowling, if I remember. He was quite an inspiring sort of fellow and he inspired us to be keen on getting out and getting stuck into things.

39:30 **I mean twelve-hundred people on one ship is a lot of people.**

It is.

Did you feel it was a cramped living environment?

Oh yes it was a cramped living environment, but that was accepted. On where I was, there was a sort of group of a dozen of us who had a table and that was our sort of the part of the fore top deck,

40:00 part of the fore top deck and there were twelve of us there and we had twelve lockers and I used to actually sleep, when we were in port I used to sleep on top of the lockers because there was very little room to sling a hammock and I used to sleep on top of the lockers. That's how cramped it was. Used to spread a bit of canvas out there, no mattress or anything, just slept on top of the—but that was alright. It didn't sort of worry me very much.

40:30 **Sounds pretty uncomfortable to me.**

Yeah, it was compared to conditions today.

How about the food, what was that like?

Very basic.

What sort of things when you say very basic?

Oh well, a lot of corn beef, potatoes, dehydrated food, prunes and custard I can remember. We used to get a lot of them, prunes and custard, dried

41:00 milk, very basic sort of, tinned bully beef.

What sort of duties did you have on board the Hobart?

Oh well apart from general duties, I was a seaman, I wasn't an officer, I was a seaman and the first thing you did when you got up was to do some physical exercise, physical education

41:30 type things and then we'd scrub the decks. Scrub the decks and we had various jobs that we used to rotate to be done. We used to clean out the toilets or clean the heads, as they used to call them. At one stage I was captain of the heads, I was in charge of the cleaning of the toilets, which was a privileged sort of position and we'd be cleaning up down below.

Tape 2

00:31 Well it's heading for a base attached to the Pacific fleet in the Philippines, a base in Subic Bay which is north of Manila, not very far from

01:00 Manila and that was the base of operations for the south-eastern Pacific, not far from Singapore, not far from Borneo, not far from New Guinea, not far from New Britain, places like that.

Do you

01:30 **head across the Great Australian Bight or do you go up the coast of Queensland?**

Go up the coast of Queensland, actually I think we called at Brisbane on the way up, went straight from Brisbane up to the Philippines.

What sort of things were you doing on the Hobart to pass the time?

Oh well, the training, getting to know the ship, the training aspect of it, training

02:00 and what to do when action stations are called, what to do as far as maintenance was concerned. My particular job was part of a six-inch gun crew, familiarising myself and my mates with each other, with the operations of the gun, with the operations

02:30 as far as command was concerned, what the various command situations were.

How many of you in gunnery?

How many of us? Well we were six-inch guns, dual six-inch gun crew, and in the various sort of areas in the gun crew and my particular area was right

03:00 up the front and there were three of us involved in a very small sort of cabin which was pretty cramped, but there were three of us involved there. And we used to take the full blast of the guns as they went off.

Any safety concerns?

No, no, nobody had safety concerns. Of course, there was the general sort of safety concern, what would happen if

03:30 we got bombed or if we got hit by a ship or you know, there were all those sorts of concerns, but they weren't very uppermost in our minds. At that age nothing can happen to you.

Oh that's right, you're invincible, you're only seventeen.

Yeah.

Oh I'm just wondering if they've given you any earplugs or other protection of that description?

Oh we had earplugs, yeah we had earplugs.

04:00 I had to have earplugs particularly because I can remember just sitting as I am now and guns were out there and as they went off you'd get a full blast. We didn't have earphones; we had little bits of cotton wool which we used to put in our ears. But there was very little worry about occupational hazards at that stage.

So after you've gone through Brisbane you're still heading

04:30 **up through the Coral Sea?**

Yeah, up through the Coral Sea, past New Britain, Rabual. I don't think we called at Rabual on the way up. I subsequently went to Rabual but that was after we'd been down on leave, after we'd been up in Subic Bay for some time.

05:00 **So where is your first port of call as far as south-east Asia is concerned?**

As far as?

Is it south-east Asia that you're in?

Yeah, Subic Bay, that was up near Leyte Gulf, in the main island of the Philippines.

So what are your first impressions of this very new sort of an area?

05:30 Our impressions weren't very illuminating at that particular stage because we were anchored outside, or in the harbour and that's where we stayed. We weren't allowed off the ship because there was still Japanese forces active in the Philippines at that stage. We just had a perimeter of land

06:00 at that stage, where we had our base and the crew weren't allowed off the ship. So we were confined to the ship while we were in harbour. So most of our life for the next twelve months really was basically on the ship. We got occasionally shore leave in a couple of places.

Can you remember anything about some of the shore leave that you got?

06:30 We did get, after we'd been there about three months we got some shore leave. We steamed out and went into harbour in Manila, and that's where we, it must have been about six months later, that we had some shore leave in Manila and we saw what had gone on there and the destruction that had been wreaked by the Japanese and also the Americans when they retook it.

Can you describe what you saw in Manila?

07:00 Well a lot of destruction, most of the buildings were destroyed, a lot of the working people, the normal population of the city were bombed out or burned out with incendiaries, and so the living quarters were very ramshackle.

07:30 **Would you say there was some serious poverty going on there with the locals?**

Oh yeah, there was serious poverty and a lot of starvation. And we of course, we were fairly privileged because we had access to chocolates and cigarettes and to various confectionery and to food. Food was no real problem to us.

08:00 And so we used to take a bit of food ashore and give it to the population.

How much begging?

A lot of beggars, a lot of begging. A lot of begging and a lot of bartering went on between what we had had, which was frowned on by the authorities because we had to survive, and they had to provide us with what was necessary to survive on board ship, but a lot of that went off.

08:30 We'd buy it up and barter it off ashore.

What sort of things would you like to buy, barter?

Oh, well anything that went, like gramophone records were particularly, watches, those sorts of things that you now get when you went to Bali. Those sorts of things

09:00 were what we wanted to take home to our families when we got home, to take home to our girlfriends.

Was it seriously cheap was it?

Oh yes, it was pretty cheap. We'd also go to some nightclubs there, massage parlours,

09:30 things like that.

I'm sure there would have been a healthy brothel industry.

Oh yes there was a healthy brothel industry, not that I wasn't at that stage—well I was interested but it was, I was very wary of that sort of activity. My upbringing had made it obligatory for me to very wary.

Was there any sort of discussion

10:00 **in the navy about VD [venereal disease]?**

Oh yes there was and everybody had ready access to condoms. Condoms, they were given away free from the sickbay, because they realised the problems with venereal disease, which was pretty rife in that area at the time, particularly gonorrhoea and syphilis.

10:30 **Was it reasonably common?**

Yes, it was. I'm sure that the health personnel and medical personnel were very active in a) the prevention of, and b) the treatment, as far as venereal disease was concerned.

What would happen if you got a case of the clap [slang term for sexually transmitted disease]?

A case of the clap? Well you went to the sickbay and at that stage they were giving

11:00 sulphur drugs for that, that's M and B which greatly assisted in the management of gonorrhoea particularly, and also syphilis at that stage. Penicillin had only just come in and of course, penicillin was very effective but we didn't have access to it at that stage.

11:30 They had it at the main hospitals in Australia and also the hospital ships had access to penicillin, but our particular ship wouldn't have had access to it at that particular stage.

Would there be any particular punishment for getting a case of VD?

Well you weren't allowed on shore leave, that was about it.

12:00 And you definitely had to have the treatment which at that stage wasn't very good. I mean once penicillin came in it was easy because one good shot of penicillin and you were cured. But no particular punishment that I knew of.

Anything else strike you about Manila?

Oh the poverty,

12:30 the poverty and the destruction, wanton destruction, really sort of turned me off war early, the futility of it, the futility of war. And that's in the board, I didn't think it was futile to re-take the place or to liberate the place but deep down I thought 'What's humanity doing to itself?' Belting itself around like this,

13:00 causing misery, causing destruction.

How much of that destruction were the Americans responsible for?

The Australians, the Americans, the Japanese, everyone was responsible for it. We used to try and knock each other about as much as we possibly could. Life was fairly cheap.

What were your impressions of the Americans?

13:30 I think I've described it already.

Is it getting worse, or is it pretty much the same?

Oh it was the same, person to person we got on very well with the Americans, but in the board you sort of felt, well you know, they were looking on themselves as rulers of the place,

14:00 rulers of the world and that's become more and more evident as time goes by. At that stage they looked after themselves very well. They looked after their troops very well. For instance if a city was invaded one of the first things that went ashore after the initial landing was a Coca-Cola factory, and I can remember that occurring in various places in the Pacific.

14:30 **A Coca-Cola factory, that's very funny.**

A Coca-Cola factory and the organisation of a clean and efficient brothel system.

Oh really? They'd actually go through the place and—?

Yeah, they'd make sure, the medical people and the health people would go ashore and make sure

15:00 the brothels were clean and well looked after and the girls were well treated if they developed any of the venereal diseases.

Oh that's a positive thing.

Oh yes, yes.

So where do you head to after Manila?

Oh well we're involved in various invasions

15:30 at that particular time. Our role, our main role was bombardment of shore positions from out at sea. We'd used our heavy guns to bombard.

How many other ships were involved?

Oh well there was ourselves and there was a couple of—we were a cruiser. There was another one or two cruisers

16:00 involved, some the same size, some bigger. We were part of the American fleet really, attached to the American fleet, so a lot of destroyers were concerned. Cruisers, destroyers, and the Australian destroyers, the [HMAS] Warramunga, and the [HMAS] Arunta and they were involved in bombardment just the same

16:30 as we were.

Are you seeing very many Japanese aircraft?

Not very many, but occasionally you'd see one. We were very lucky that we were never actually hit by one of them. You could see them from afar bombarding other ships, but not ours.

Did you hear anything about the kamikaze?

17:00 Oh yes, we used to hear about the Kamikaze because that occurred up particularly in the north of the Philippines and in Okinawa, which was not very far from where we were. Okinawa is not very far and the Kamikaze were involved in those particular areas. We weren't involved ourselves, it was a bit further north, as far as we were concerned.

I'm sure hearing about it for the first time must have been quite alarming.

Didn't worry us much, part of life, part of life.

Well it would worry me, it would worry me.

Oh well the sort of atmosphere that you lived in and worked, it was sort of looked on as part of life and you get stuck into it.

And what sort of duties did you have on the ship at this time?

18:00 At action stations I was a member of the six-inch gun crew and then as a part-time there was two sort of, there was action stations and then there was standby stations. In action stations all the crew was involved and standby stations they were involved on a roster sort of system, and

18:30 on the standby situation I was on an anti-aircraft gun, which was a lot smaller, the Bofors gun [40mm anti-aircraft gun], which was a smaller one, which was specifically developed for firing on aircraft. And that's what I was on in the standby situation.

What sort of a range would this gun have?

It would only have a range of about four hundred yards. Six-inch guns would have a range of

19:00 about a couple of miles.

How often were you at action stations during this time?

Numerous occasions, numerous occasions, mostly false alarms, but you had to be on your toes all the time. But of course when you were bombarding you were at action stations for some time.

19:30 And the initial bombardment we were on the city in the Philippines called Cebu, C-E-B-U, which is now still well developed. It's on Cebu Island and it's probably the second city in the Philippines beside Manila.

20:00 And we were involved in the invasion of that and the bombardment and invasion of Cebu. It was the first thing we were involved in and subsequently we were involved in the invasion of Borneo, the original invasion, the first invasion took place in the island of Tarakan, which is just off the north east coast of

20:30 Borneo, initially Tarakan and then subsequently and then we'd go back after that. After that we'd go back from Tarakan back to the Philippines and then we went to Brunei and was involved in the bombardment of Brunei. Brunei of course, was a very oil rich

21:00 part of Borneo and was very much part of the Japanese source of supply of oil, and so was a prime target for invasion and re-taking of that particular area. As with the other places we were involved with —that was Balikpapan, which is on the east coast of Borneo,

21:30 which is again was a big oil-producing port. We were involved in that as well, so there was three places in Borneo which we were involved in.

Can you tell me how big some of these invasions are? Like particularly with Tarakan, because I mean this is all at an intense time and an intense area, all around Borneo, with the Japanese?

Yeah, I'd say there was

22:00 probably a hundred-thousand troops involved in each of those areas. I couldn't be certain of the exact number.

It was quite a lot of troops.

Oh yes, oh yes, it was a big operation, mainly American, but we were part of the American fleet, the American invasion troops.

When did you first hook up with the rest of the convoys, because obviously you've got to collaborate together in order to—?

Yeah, we'd hook up

22:30 early, we set out from Subic Bay you see, and we'd all go out together and so we'd there'd be about a hundred ships involved.

That would have been quite exciting.

Oh yeah, quite exciting. Cause spread out over a big ocean a hundred ships doesn't look very great. Of course there was aircraft-carriers involved

23:00 as well, so you'd have aircraft as well.

Are you seeing a lot of aircraft action, at all?

Not a great deal, not a great deal.

How much information about whatever you're involved with like Cebu and Tarakan is actually filtering through to the crew?

Not very much, not very much. The

23:30 strategies and the plans and whatnot were worked out on an officer sort of level and the ordinary seaman point of view, from the seaman's point of view, from the stoker's point of view and they just did what they were told, not much information filtered through. We were told where we were going and what our aim was

24:00 before we set out so we knew what we were going into, but as for actual detail of strategies and planning, we really didn't have much to go on.

How much information about the rest of the war, you know like what was going on with—?

Oh well we had the radios, you see we had BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] Radio

24:30 and BBC broadcasts, American broadcasts. You knew what the state of the war was, what was going on, on the Russian front and what was going on in France and places like this, you got the up to date sort of information as far as those were concerned.

What about propaganda? Are you hearing any of that?

Oh lots of that, propaganda in war was very important, particularly in areas that you

25:00 were invading, see? Particularly there because you'd go into a place and the minds had been poisoned by the people who had been occupying them, the Japanese or the Germans.

The mines had been poisoned?

The minds of the population had been, the minds.

Oh minds, sorry.

25:30 They had been fed propaganda which was directly opposite to the propaganda that we used to feed, but by the end of the war it was very important.

Well when you're actually getting into various areas with the natives, was there any sort of information that you were told about the natives? How important was it to get on with them?

Oh well whenever we went ashore we were told

26:00 to get on with them, we were advised to get on with them, advised to be friendly, advised not to be aggressive. Some of the crew did tend to be aggressive, did tend to harbour resentment against the populations that they went into.

Was that perhaps because they interacted in too much of a positive way with the Japanese?

Yes, and you had

26:30 always sort of suspected, you had the suspicion that these people could have well been Japanese spies, could well have sent them information that was detrimental to what you were doing, could well have sent information as far as the ships were concerned,

27:00 as far as the movement of the ships were concerned. If you gave it away, so you were asked not to give any information of that sort of nature to anyone that asked unless you really trusted them. But censorship was pretty high. When you wrote letters home they were censored by the officers.

27:30 **How often would you get mail?**

Well it was intermittent but you'd get mail about once a month. It used to be flown in you see, the aircraft made a lot of difference to communication as far as that was concerned.

Did you get any care packages from home?

Very intermittent, very intermittent.

What sort of things would you get in a care package?

Oh something to eat,

28:00 a fruitcake, socks, underpants, things like that, hankies.

Oh you came from good breeding, didn't you?

Well you didn't have tissues at that stage, there were no tissues, everybody had a hanky.

What did you think of some of the local population in Borneo?

28:30 Didn't get ashore much there, no, I couldn't recall any sort of particular incidents as far as Borneo was concerned. As I say we used to go there, bombard, support the troops as they went ashore and then scuttle back to the Philippines,

29:00 so we didn't, I didn't actually go ashore in Tarakan. Went to shore at Balikpapan but didn't go ashore at Brunei, went down to Morotai which was part of the Indonesian archipelago at that stage, which was a main base, Morotai. It was a main base as air force,

29:30 army and navy was concerned. We called in there on our way down to New Guinea where we were involved in the bombardment and invasion of Wewak in New Guinea.

Does anything strike you about that New Guinea conflict?

Nothing in particular, no, nothing in particular.

30:00 At that stage there was no air defence at all, as far as the Japanese were concerned and there was nothing much, no sea defence either so it was a pretty tame sort of operation as far as the navy was concerned. As far as the army was concerned once they got ashore they copped it, but we didn't cop it much at all, no.

Sounds like it was

30:30 **pretty relentless, you were moving around, you were bombarding, you were moving around.**

Yeah, that's right, that's right. It was all part of warfare.

What did you do to pass the time in between bombardments?

What did we do? I did a lot of reading. We used to play various sorts of games on board ship.

Like?

31:00 Like tombola which was basically like, what's the name of the game that they play where they pick out numbers?

Bingo?

Bingo, yeah, bingo. We used to play a lot of bingo. It was called tombola in the navy and we used to play some card games. 'Hukkas' was a special sort of card game,

31:30 can't remember the details of it, but that's what we used to play a lot of and there was a sort of gambling game.

Much gambling going on, on the ship?

Oh quite a bit, quite a bit, yeah. The other thing that used to sort of occupy my hive of activity, I used to run a laundry, a private sort of laundry on our deck. I used to go down

32:00 and wash blokes uniforms and iron them, so I used to do washing and ironing of uniforms and became quite adept at that, and that was a way of earning a bit of extra money and a way of occupying my time.

How much extra dosh [money] would you get for that?

Oh quite a bit. I can't remember the details of it, but we weren't very well paid, of course, so we used to

32:30 save up a lot so we could spend when we went ashore.

That's quite enterprising of you.

Oh well I was interested in remaining active, interested in broadening my activities, be they intellectual, be they physical and there wasn't any sort of sport as such that you could play.

33:00 There was no tennis, no football, nothing like that, so I used to try, in between the spells of working and reading, I became a 'dohbi' man. A dohbi man is D-O-H-B-I, a dobhi man is the one who does the washing.

How many of the dohbi men were there?

33:30 Oh well there was the main sort of laundry on the ship, which used to do a lot of this sort of stuff, but on each deck you'd have one or two people who'd invested in an iron. I'd bought an iron and used to iron these blokes things for them, because a lot of people didn't have a clue about ironing. I just taught myself how to do it.

34:00 **Well you would have had a continual process with the laundry, like twelve-hundred blokes on board a ship?**

Oh yeah, but I wouldn't be doing the twelve hundred. I'd only be doing our deck which was about twenty-four of them, but it used to keep me busy.

What sort of things were you saving up for when you got onto shore leave?

Well buying of stuff, buying of books, buying of things like gramophone records,

watches, things like that. Also when I went ashore, as far as possible, I used to try and get around a bit so I'd employ taxis or rickshaws to show me around, to show me places.

What sort of places did you get into a taxi and get shown around?

Things like temples, destruction of places which had occurred,

looking at buildings that had been gutted, looking and hunting around amongst ruins to find anything which was of souvenir value.

Did you find anything which was of souvenir value?

Oh yeah, particularly later on when we went to shore in Japan, but that was later on.

What sort of souveniring was going on?

What is a good souvenir?

Oh well—little bowls, fans, gramophone records, cause you couldn't get gramophone records for love or money in Australia, you know, with extreme difficulty, watches. They were the sort of thing, knick-knacks.

Were there any gramophones on board the ship?

Yeah, there was, not gramophones as such, there was a PA [Public Address] system which used to play some music occasionally, but not very much. There wasn't much entertainment as far as that was concerned. On board the ship the electronic equipment was virtually, well it wasn't in existence and of course there was no TV, at all anywhere. We used to get,

these wee broadcasts of news bulletins occasionally over the PA system, so we knew what was going on.

Would there be any opportunity—

Shortwave—

Sorry, carry on.

Shortwave of course was a big thing then and shortwave from Australia and shortwave from Britain, shortwave from America. That was always on so every day

you'd get a news bulletin of some sort or another and you'd hear what was going on everywhere else.

Was there any opportunity to see newsreels of any description?

Yeah, there was. That reminds me now, they did have a film show which was shown periodically, I think once or twice a week, on board ship and you could go along to that,

where they'd show newsreels, where they'd show perhaps a film, so that was part of the entertainment that used to occur on board ship.

Did you listen to Tokyo Rose [Radio Tokyo radio propaganda host] at any point?

No, I can't remember.

That's ok.

Perhaps we did, perhaps we did, but I forget.

That's ok. Some fellows just remember it quite clearly because they'd get really angry about it or they'd kill themselves laughing about it, it's just always worth asking the question. So how long were you in this region, in the Pacific altogether?

About twelve months.

Do you feel it went really quickly or slowly?

At times it went quickly, at times it went slowly.

There were long periods of boredom.

What did you miss most about Australia?

Oh home and home cooking. Had a girlfriend, who I used to miss.

Who was your girlfriend at the time?

She was a girl who was at university in Melbourne. Used to

occasionally write to her. It wasn't a big sort of deal, that was part of growing up, part of adolescence.

Something to miss?

Mmh.

Well how did your parents feel about you being in the Pacific, when it was such a hotbed of activity?

My father sort of accepted it because he'd been, he was involved in the

39:30 First World War and also the Second World War, so that was life for him. My mother, of course, was apprehensive. She was unhappy with me being involved, unhappy on the one hand, but proud of me on the other. A general sort of reaction of mothers.

What was your father doing in World War I? The same sort of thing?

He was an engineer

40:00 in the First World War, involved in France and later the invasion of Russia which occurred just after the First World War, about 1920, so he was pretty much involved as far as the army was concerned.

Did he ever speak to you about any of the action he saw in World War I?

40:30 Oh he did occasionally. Most people don't like talking about it after. For instance my wife accuses me of not talking much about it and my daughters say, when this interview sort of came up and I said 'What can I talk about?' and I sort of said a couple of things and they said 'Well you've never talked to us at all about it.' And I never did and my father was much the same.

41:00 I think most servicemen are much the same.

Well you're certainly not alone.

No, it's a general sort of reaction. You want to forget it, and when you're coming up for discharge you think 'Gosh I want to put this aside and get on with my life, forget that.'

Being such an avid reader, were you keeping a diary at all?

Never, oh occasionally

41:30 I'd make a few notes. I'd sort of say to myself 'I must keep a diary', but I never did, never any meaningful diary.

At what point did you actually head to Japan?

Well that was—

Part of the peacekeeping?

Part of the peacekeeping. When peace broke out, that was August the 15th, 1945.

Tape 3

00:32 **Dick would you mind telling me some of your observations of Subic Bay?**

Subic Bay was a base for the American Pacific fleet, to which the [HMAS] Hobart was attached and the base is north of Manila.

01:00 It is surrounded by mountains and it was potentially a dangerous place to go ashore to because there was known Japanese troops.

Dick if you can just tell me what you observed of Subic Bay, what you saw and experienced there.

01:30 Well we went ashore there and we saw the local population which was pretty poverty- stricken. We saw the American base which was a big base, a lot of army personnel there and navy personnel because parts of the American fleet were also anchored alongside us in Subic Bay. We didn't actually

02:00 go alongside a wharf, but we were anchored in the middle of Subic Bay and as such we hardly ever went ashore and whatever trips we did do ashore were very short lived.

What were your reasons for going ashore?

Just to stretch our legs because there was nothing much doing there apart from the American base. You could go to the American base and have a taste of their canteen arrangements, which were a

02:30 lot better than ours, but that was about all.

What about the mess?

The mess? Oh they had a mess there but we didn't have access to that, no.

So no drinking at the American base?

No, no drinking. Of course we had some drinking on board ship. We used to be issued, I think, with a couple of cans of beer once a week, or something like that, but not much,

03:00 nothing of any note.

What reasons would you have for going ashore? Apart from stretching your legs, any others?

No. We wouldn't have any, apart from some members of the crew having responsibilities there in creating liaison with the Americans and working out what was going to happen and where we were going and how we were going to do it.

Sorry. Were the opportunities to go ashore and stretch your legs very limited?

Yeah, they were.

03:30 And I hardly went ashore, a) because of availability and b) because I wasn't particularly interested. I'd seen it once and it didn't fairly interest me to go ashore.

What did you see in the community of local people?

Oh the community were at that stage pretty wary, because they'd had three changes of scenery as

04:00 far as the occupation forces were concerned. Firstly they were occupied by the Americans, before the Philippines actually fell to the Japanese, and then it was the Japanese while they occupied the area and then again the Americans and the Australians were occupying it, so the population was pretty wary of any of the occupations..

04:30 Kept pretty much to themselves apart from the selling and the bartering that went on in the streets.

What kind of settlement did they have there?

Very primitive, that's the local population.

Was it a very large settlement?

No, not a very large settlement at all. The largest settlement, of course, was in Manila which was south and which was about fifty kilometres south of

05:00 Subic Bay.

How often would you get leave in Manila?

Only very intermittently. As I say our home was the ship itself and we stayed on there basically all the time. We didn't get ashore to do any travelling around at all as far as Manila or any other area was concerned.

But you did have leave in Manila?

05:30 I can remember we had one day's leave in Manila which we were able to get around a bit. I went for a ride in a rickshaw just to have a look around the place. There were no taxis at that stage because fuel and machinery was very limited in the area.

How would you travel to Manila from Subic Bay?

Well

06:00 the ship went around to anchor in the harbour at Manila and we'd go ashore in one of the speedboats that the ship had on board.

What was the harbour like at Manila?

It was, I think I've got some photos of it actually. There was a lot of sunken ships in the harbour, because they were virtually the same ships that the Japanese

06:30 had sunk when they invaded, and then there was the subsequent invasion by the Americans and they'd sunk a lot of Japanese ships, so there was a lot of shipwrecks in the bay which you could see and they created a navigational hazard as well.

What could you see of them?

Oh the upturned hulks, the damage that had been done to superstructure

07:00 by bombing, that was about all. I can show you some pictures that I've got out there but that's really basically what you could see.

What did you think of the scene when you first set upon it?

Manila itself, it was really knocked about. I was quite shocked about the amount of destruction that had been

07:30 done to buildings, the amount of destruction that had been done to homes and to people and it really sort of started me thinking on the futility of war, from a personal point of view.

What kind of interaction did you have with the local people?

Not very much in Manila. Didn't go into their homes, only met them

08:00 on the street and they were very guarded as far as giving any information about their life or anything like that.

What kinds of attempts did you have to reach them personally?

I didn't much attempt because I didn't have much time, not like if I'd go there now I'd have a lot more opportunity to go into their homes and observe what their

08:30 problems were, to observe what their health problems were, but I didn't have that opportunity when I was in Manila, no.

How did you communicate with them?

Oh I was able to communicate alright, they were just human beings, just like you or I. They weren't any different to anybody else.

Was there a language barrier?

Oh of course there was a language barrier, yes. Of course being Australian I could speak Australian only and no other language

09:00 and they could speak their Portuguese language and perhaps some Spanish because there was an occupation by Spain for quite some time. And I suppose there was a bit of English, a spattering of English, because the Americans had been in the Philippines for quite some period of time before the war.

09:30 **When you were on leave did you have many or any encounters with the Americans from the fleet?**

Yes, you did. They weren't hostile encounters, you just met them and talked to them but we tended to keep to ourselves, each of the units tended to keep to ourselves, so there wasn't much interaction.

Why was that Dick?

Oh that was just a fact

10:00 of life, because of the limited time there was no opportunity to form any relationships with any of the other people involved.

Were there any hostile encounters with American sailors in the fleet?

No, not at that stage. It was only back in Australia that you had any hostile encounters because

10:30 they cut across your interests and we cut across theirs.

Were any of the fellows on the Hobart receiving 'Dear John' [letter informing that a relationship is over] letters?

Not that I knew of, not that I knew of, no.

When was it that you found out about the Americans fraternising with the Aussie ladies at home?

Initially I was in Sydney, based in Sydney and that's when I learnt quite a lot about it then.

11:00 **So you'd sized them up quite early on?**

Yeah.

What did you think of the command of the American fleet that you were with?

I didn't think much about that, what I thought basically about was the command of our ship and I thought our ship was commanded well. The skipper and the officers got on well with

11:30 the seamen and stokers and the people who were sort of non-officer groups of people, be they stokers, be they seamen, be they look-outs, whatever, we all got on, we all seemed to get on quite well. It was recognised that you had to obey discipline and there were certain disciplinary rules that you stuck to and

12:00 at no stage did I encounter any animosity apart from just trivial small things, at no stage was there anything approaching any mutinous sort of thoughts, mutiny.

How was morale?

Morale was pretty good.

12:30 I couldn't fault the morale. Of course it was an atmosphere where everyone accepted that you had to put your best foot forward and that anybody who didn't was out, they weren't part of the scenery.

13:00 **Were you a pretty disciplined crew?**

Yeah we were.

Were there a few of those that were perhaps a little undisciplined or unsavoury on board?

Inevitably there were a few but they weren't a major part of our life and there was nothing that I can recall of any marked departure from

13:30 the general sort of atmosphere.

So there were no real incidents?

No, no, no real incidents that I can recall.

What were some of your relationships with crew and officers on board like? Who were they with? What were the most significant relationships you had on board?

The most significant relationships were with my fellow crew members who

14:00 I got on with really well, the people who you actually lived with day in and day out. Had a couple of spats with them but nothing of any great note. My other relationship of course was with the laundry because I was part of the dohbi crew, the members of the crews who used to wash people's clothes for them, I was part of

14:30 that too, so I got on well with them. And that was all the relationships. I had a sort of very distant relationship with the captain of the Hobart too, he was Captain Dowling, because I had met him before I got on board ship and was probably part of the reason I got on board originally. I had met him socially on my leave in Sydney,

15:00 and he'd asked me at that time what I wanted to do, what I was doing, what I wanted to do and I told him what I was doing and I told him I felt it was a bit boring and I'd put in for sea time, I'd applied for sea time, and he said, 'We'll see what we can do'. And I think he probably engineered me into getting a

15:30 sea draft, a draft to sea on the Hobart, so that's probably how I got on. So I did have some sort of a relationship with him, not much.

What was the social occasion where you met the captain of the Hobart?

Well I used to go on leave in Sydney to some old family friends who lived in the North Shore of Sydney, in a suburb called Turramurra, which was very much an outer suburb at that stage,

16:00 very nice. And I'd gone to an afternoon tea party there and was actually helping them and he came along and he was a member, a guest of theirs, he was an old friend of theirs so that's how I got to know him. I didn't get to really know him very well, I just met him there and he engineered me to get on board the Hobart.

Sounds like a fairly unique encounter though.

Oh yes it was unique, it was unique and it was

16:30 a relationship which we never let interfere with our normal disciplinary relationship aboard ship, as a member of the ship's company. No-one else knew about it, but it was cordial. I used to say, 'Good morning sir', and he used to say, 'Good morning Able Seaman Roberts', and that was the sort of thing,

17:00 but with a twinkle in our eyes on both occasions.

So it remained fairly quiet by your own initiative.

Oh yeah, yeah.

Why was that?

Oh well that was part of discipline and also I sort of felt a little embarrassed that I had used influence to get on board ship, so I never let

17:30 anybody know about that at all. But we both knew it of course.

I imagine word might have travelled pretty quickly on board if you'd let the cat out of the bag.

For sure.

What was the sort of buzz you'd hear on board the ship?

Oh lots of things, about what when on when people went ashore, what people's experiences

18:00 with brothels was, for instance. There was a bit of homosexuality went on aboard ship and you'd hear about that. There was a lot of encounters from a homosexual point of view, well not a lot, but it was well-known that there were some members of the ship's company crew who were homosexual and some

18:30 people used those homosexual encounters for their own gratification. There was, as far as the homosexuals were concerned, there was no hostility towards them because it was recognised that this sort of thing went on aboard a ship or within a company when

19:00 a considerable number of men were sort of locked away together for a considerable period of time. I was never tempted myself to enter into any homosexual relationship. I was firmly a heterosexual sort of inclined person, but there were some people who were homosexual and some people who were bisexual who would seek sexual gratification

19:30 from either a male or a female and that's so of quite a considerable part of the population, that's accepted, that was accepted in the Navy.

How prolific were these kind of engagements on board?

Well they were pretty quiet. They were not the sort of thing that people broadcast but I knew of

20:00 at least two within our group of twenty-four who were engaged in this sort of activity.

Were guys sort of sprung in the act during an intimate encounter?

No, not that I knew of, they were very discreet about it.

20:30 **I've lost my next question now. What was the kind of buzz that would go about the ship with regards to homosexuality?**

Oh the buzz was quite open, they knew it went on and quite open about it. They knew who the active homosexuals were who sort of sought after

21:00 this sort of activity from a physical point of view. It was known one of the cooks, he was known as the sort of main person as far as gratification was concerned.

So the cook had a reputation, did he?

Oh yeah, yeah, a reputation, everybody knew it but he wasn't the only

21:30 one, but he had the main. That's the only one that I can recall but there were obviously other people as well.

In an informal sense, what kind of buzz would have gone about the ship in regards to homosexuality? I think so far what you've explained to me has been explained quite formally.

An informal sense?

Yeah, what was the informal buzz, how would you have spoken about it? How old were you at the time? Seventeen?

Eighteen.

22:00 **Eighteen. It would have been quite crude kind of language used at that time, wouldn't it?**

Oh yes it was crude, want to have a suck-off, or want to have a fuck or go and see, I've forgotten what his name was, go and see the cook.

With a bit of a laugh or—?

Oh yeah, with a bit of a laugh, but blokes used to go up. We knew when they went to see him, but

22:30 actually catching him in the act, no, there was never any business about that. There was another fellow who was in the paint shop, they had a paint shop there and he was also involved in homosexual activities, but well it was just part of life, it was a part of life that was just accepted. It wasn't a shocking sort of thing or things you talked about under your breath or anything like that.

23:00 I'm sure this went on throughout all the forces when people, well men were locked away from any sexual activity of any sort that this sort of thing went on.

Given the fact that you were working to a roster what opportunity would the crew have to have an intimate encounter?

Oh well you had four hours on,

23:30 four hours off and this sort of varied and there was always opportunity to create these encounters There was no problem about that.

What would you do in your spare time when you were rostered off?

I'd read, I would do my

24:00 ironing and washing of clothes and of course you used to have to do your own sewing on of buttons and things like that, your own sort of housewife duties, and I'd talk a lot, seek out people to talk with and discuss books with, watch films on the local

24:30 theatre that they had set up there. So there was always something to do, although there was quite a lot of time when I got a bit sick of reading and used to listen to a bit of music, but it was at times pretty boring.

Did you have an interest in your own

25:00 **art or drawing or painting?**

I was no good. I was interested in art, I'd always been interested in art, but unfortunately I didn't have the physical ability of drawing or painting which I would have liked to have had. I did try it initially when I was at school, and I didn't do very well at all at it, but I've always been interested. My family has always been

25:30 interested in art and that's why I've always been interested in appreciating it and reading about it and also collecting it.

Can you maybe tell me about the extent and interest of your family's interest in art?

Well my grandfather was an artist, a famous artist, Tom Roberts, who was, well he was born in Australia —no, he was born

26:00 in England and came to Australia and helped establish the Heidelberg School of Art which was in the late nineteenth century with such people as Arthur Streeton and Condor and they established this school of art,

26:30 the Heidelberg School, originally Box Hill. They painted in Box Hill in Victoria and then subsequently in Heidelberg they established, and then he was involved with a big painting for the opening of Federal Parliament at the turn of the nineteenth century in Canberra and spent a lot of time painting that big picture,

27:00 which was a huge picture and then he went to England. Actually my grandfather, he served in the First World War as a medical officer—not a medical officer, a field medical attendant, I think he was. He wasn't a doctor, he was a field medical attendant.

Whereabouts did he serve?

He served in France.

27:30 It's in the First World War, as my father did, he served in France as well. But of course there was not much, there was only twenty-one years separating the First World War and the Second World War. We tend to forget that.

What was your relationship with your grandfather?

I didn't know him very well because he died when I was five years of age, so I didn't know him very well.

28:00 All that I can remember about him was that he was a warm sort of person, but the children at the table were to be seen but not heard, not to speak unless you were spoken too, and that was the sort of going discipline which young people had to observe when I was a kid, at five years of age.

28:30 Apart from that I didn't have any real recollection of him.

Do you have any recollection of his work or him working?

Oh yes I have recollection of his work because we used to go and stay up in his house and subsequently to him dying, my father inherited the house.

29:00 I could well remember the circumstances in which he painted.

Can you go into some detail for us? Maybe paint the scene for us?

His house in the later part of his career, which was in the 1920s and early 1930s, that house was in Kallista, which is in the Dandenongs of Victoria

29:30 and he had a studio there and he used to paint there and I can remember actually seeing him paint,

paint scenes from the surrounding countryside. It's very picturesque countryside around Kallista, the Dandenong's, Olinda, Monbulk, all those sorts of areas. He used to paint a lot of scenes from around there and he was also a very good portrait painter and this portrait here of

30:00 my mother he painted that, and that one of my father he painted that one as well. -

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

31:20 **You said you actually watched him work, can you tell me?**

I can't remember that, I can't remember that, as I say I was only five when he died so

31:30 I can just recall where it was.

With the two of you, perhaps on an excursion together?

No, I can't even remember that. We probably did but I can't remember, no.

I don't think there are any more questions I can ask you about your grandfather then, if you don't have any further recollection.

My father attempted to follow in his footsteps but he didn't have the skill or

32:00 the imagination that he had, so he went into engineering, but I think he initially wanted to do some art work but he didn't have the necessary skill that my grandfather had.

Tom Roberts is an incredible relative to have, what does, I don't know, I don't mean to embarrass you, but how does your family regard your grandfather? For instance, his creativity

32:30 **hasn't been seen in your father, or yourself.**

How do we regard—?

Yeah, that creativity, if your father and yourself hadn't seen the same creativity.

Well we've only got, he only had one child and that was my father and my father didn't have the facility, my eldest brother had a little

33:00 interest and ability as far as art was concerned, but his daughter, so that's one of my nieces, she had the skill and drive which helped her to become an artist and she's an established sort of artist now, not in a very big way but sufficient

33:30 to make a bit of a living out of it, to make a living out of painting pictures and that.

It's a wonderful talent to have.

Oh it is, but I haven't got it.

Where do your personal talents lie?

Well of course this comes to the end of the war and post-war when peace broke out but before that happened, and you can deal with

34:00 later.

Okay. Shall we return to Subic Bay?

Subic Bay, yes.

We don't have to follow a linear course, but it does help.

From Subic Bay, it's from Subic Bay that we ventured out to Borneo and to New Guinea and various islands of the Philippines.

During those operations when you'd be travelling in convoy,

34:30 **did you receive any air attacks?**

We did receive one air attack, yeah, but that didn't come to anything much at all. They didn't get close enough to us because they were buzzed off by other aircraft, by friendly aircraft.

So how did you feel travelling in convoy, such a large convoy with the fleet?

Well it was part of life, you just did it, you were safe, we felt we were safe.

35:00 Because anything could have happened, we knew that, but at that age it doesn't happen to me, it happens to somebody else.

Do you think that your young age was an advantage?

Yeah, I think so, yeah. At the age you're optimistic about things, optimistic about life.

How did each of the operations vary? You mentioned earlier quite a number

35:30 **of bombardments and landings, were they all pretty routine?**

Yeah, pretty routine, you knew what you had to do and you knew what was going to happen, what could happen, but as I say it was pretty routine while it was on, it was pretty noisy and your meals were pretty scrappy. Your normal sort of routines

36:00 were put out but it wasn't what you'd call terribly traumatic. You didn't have any personal sort of person-to-person fighting, person-to-person hostility anywhere, because you were off shore and you were bombarding.

36:30 You thought a bit about the people who were receiving your bombardment. You hoped it would be the Japanese who would be receiving the bombardment and that the local population were escaping but there you are, it was fairly impersonal the encounter that you had, very impersonal really.

How disrupted was your routine by bombardment and landing?

37:00 Oh it was part of the routine of life really, part of the routine. Long periods of inactivity followed by fairly short periods of intense activity and that, the short periods of activity was the bombardment procedures.

How would you prepare yourself mentally for that transition?

Didn't, just happened,

37:30 but some people would be, no doubt, concerned and worried about such a thing, but it never worried me at all, I must say, and it never worried me about thinking 'what will my reaction be?' It was just part of life and that's it, part of the excitement really. You used to get quite excited about it, that you were going to do something, but no great

38:00 fear, or anything like that, no.

What would have been some of the fears or concerns that you mentioned crew members did experience?

Well some would be nervous, some would say they wished it was over, some would say they don't want to experience that again, you know, those sorts of chance remarks, but it

38:30 was part of life and I never met anybody who sort of ran away from it, showed any lack of fortitude when it came to going into action. Not that I can recall.

How did your role change from your obligations or responsibilities during

39:00 **the convoy to those during a bombardment and landing?**

Well in the convoy you were on a routine which was relaxed in which you were four hours on, four hours off, sort of thing, where your readiness

39:30 was only limited whereas in the attack bombardment situation everybody was at action stations, whereas the other was a sort of routine station thing where you just took part in the normal running of the ship.

We are near the end of the tape

40:00 **but I'll ask you my next question.**

Has the tape ended?

It's nearly ended but I'll ask you my next question anyway. Can you maybe go into explaining to me your daily routine during the ordinary running of the ship?

My daily routine would be to take part in watches where I would be

40:30 drafted to a watching brief, an aircraft watching brief up on the bridge of the ship. That would be my main activity when we were just cruising along, would be as a watch keeper, in which

41:00 I'd be watching for four hours, with the help of binoculars and my normal sort of vision and the help of other members of the crew who were also watch keeping and we would then have four hours off. So it would be four hours on, four hours off, sort of thing, keeping a watch for aircraft, keeping a watch for ships,

41:30 keeping a watch for any suspicious fishing boats and things like that.

Did you enjoy being on watch?

Yeah, it was something to do.

Were you in any company at all?

Yes, you had other people around you. You had officers around you, you had other watch keepers around you, so you weren't sort of on your own.

We're at the end of the tape there.

Tape 4

00:32 **What was the atmosphere like in the crew when you were on watch, the crew around you?**

It was just like any other job, routine sort of stuff, no particular sort of difference to any other job really, you just did your job and got on with it. It was a

01:00 friendly sort of atmosphere, there would be a bit of chiacking going on but nothing particular, cause in that particular job as a look-out I was up on the bridge where there were quite a lot of officers involved so you had to be careful about what you said, because there was quite a divide between the officers and the rest of the crew, as far as discipline was concerned

01:30 and as far as the general sort of behaviour, there was that gulf between them.

What about amongst the officers themselves, what did you observe between them?

Oh the same, their sort of relationship with each other was about the same as the relationship with the crew, much the same. It was friendly sort of but disciplined, friendly, disciplined,

02:00 somewhat distant sort of atmosphere because the crew was divided basically into the officer class and the crew class. There was a sort of divide because the officers had special privileges, they had their own mess; they had ready access to alcohol,

02:30 ready access to better food, their food was better. There was no question they did lead a better life and they still do it, and they excused this divide because they had greater responsibility, they had greater

03:00 tension than the crew members. That was sort of accepted, that was part of life, part of the hierarchy although it is becoming much less now than it used to be but it's the same in any discipline really. You have these hierarchical structures in the public service, for instance, in which I served for some years post-war. You had this

03:30 hierarchy where there were certain levels where you had certain dress, you had a different dress, you had a different inter-personal relationship. Between each hierarchy there was a certain distance which was observed, but that does happen.

Were there any privileges to being on

04:00 **watch and being in the company of the officers?**

No, no, no discipline, no privileges, that was just a part of life really.

It does sound like a fairly privileged role though compared to some of the other duties on board.

Oh well I was involved in the other duties on board but that was the main duty that I remembered. But I used to be involved in cleaning of the toilets, in washing of the decks,

04:30 in painting of the ship's side, which we had to do periodically when we were in port. We used to have to go down and paint the ship's side and paint the various bits and pieces around, so you were involved in lots of other things but the main thing, those things I described to you when you were on watch that was in the periods of activity when you were actually sailing at sea.

05:00 **What were some of the other areas that you would frequent in your role?**

The other areas? Well they'd be areas like the paint shop where'd you go to get the paint. There were areas where you actually had to maintain the upkeep of the area in which you worked,

05:30 such as on a particular gun. You'd be involved in the painting of the guns and the greasing of the guns, the general upkeep of the area in which you worked. You'd be responsible for that as well as being involved in action stations when you were actually

06:00 involved in a bombardment, you be concerned with the upkeep of the area as well, so there were various other responsibilities that you had.

If I heard you correctly earlier you mentioned that you used to take messages around the ship; did that give you access to a large area of the ship?

Oh yes, you had ready access to most parts of the ship, as far as seamen were

06:30 concerned, but there were certain areas you didn't have access to. You didn't have access to the stokers, the people who actually ran the machinery bits of the ship, the driving force of the ship, that looked after the engines, the propellers, everything else, and they were usually below decks.

07:00 They were down in the deep dungeons if you like, of the ship, so you didn't have access to that. That was for stokers only, not for seamen and then in the same way the stokers didn't have much access to the areas the seamen looked after. You didn't have access to the officers' quarters unless you were involved in the cleaning up and cleaning of the quarters, but I was never involved in that.

07:30 Or in their mess deck or anything like that, you see.

What was it like having that segregation between the crew?

Oh it was alright, it was accepted. You didn't interfere with each other. There were some people who had ready access; some of the officers had ready access to all parts

08:00 of the ship. The padres, the ministers of religion, who were sort of part of the ship's company and there were some. In our particular ship there was an Anglican minister, there was a Uniting Church minister and there was a Catholic padre.

08:30 They were all, I think there were three of them, they varied a bit, whether they were Catholic, or whether they were Baptist or Methodist or Anglican but they had all had ready access to all parts of the ship and if you wanted to consult one of them, you could.

So what was daily life like on board the ship?

09:00 A bit humdrum, boring, but you had your definite tasks and you just went about them. And when you were at anchor at base it was really humdrum and you looked forward actually going out in action or going ashore

09:30 or going on leave. Particularly you looked forward to sailing south and going home on leave. If the ship needed some repairs done, if it had to go into dock or anything like that, you looked to that happening.

How many occasions were there where you returned for repairs?

It could happen about every six months,

10:00 every six perhaps, sooner actually, depended on where you were and what you were doing and what needed to be done as far as the ship's repairs were concerned.

Where were the repairs done?

Our base was in Sydney and that's where they had the dry docking facilities, where they had the support facilities for the fleet as a whole.

10:30 **How long do you recall returning for repairs and leave?**

Oh you'd probably come home for two or three weeks during which time you'd go off, parts of the ship's company would go off for a week, maybe for a couple of weeks and you'd be able to go home and relax.

Do you remember taking leave, any memorable incidents?

Oh I had a girlfriend who was

11:00 very important in my life at the time and I used to look forward to going home and seeing her and spending time with her and the same with spending time at home as well.

What was it like, or what did it mean to you to be able to return and visit your family?

Oh it meant a lot. We were a normal sort of loving family, and we all got on well together. We didn't have any big barneys [fights] or

11:30 problems which kept us apart, which made us not want to see each other. We all looked forward to seeing each other. We were very lucky in that respect.

How were you greeted by your parents?

Oh, very well. They looked forward to seeing me and I looked forward to seeing them

12:00 whenever I could. Leave was an intermittent sort of affair. Occasionally when I was based in Sydney we used to get weekend leave and I used to travel down from Sydney to Melbourne by train and I can remember going down, twenty-four hours travelling down there, no, twelve hours travelling down there, twelve

12:30 hours there and then twelve hours travelling back. You'd do that just for the twelve hours to be at home.

What was morale like on board when you'd eventually depart?

Well it was alright. It was a bit sad from the point of view of leaving home,

13:00 from leaving your loved ones but you soon settled into your routine. You realised it was inevitable.

Was breaking routine difficult when you were on leave?

No, not really. It was very good, not difficult at all.

Wasn't something you missed?

No.

Just returning to some of your duties on board,

13:30 **when you were working in the laundry what was the daily workings and operations of the laundry?**

Oh the laundry of course was staffed. There were a couple of fellows who did nothing else but do laundry, probably more than that, I can't quite recall, but they had big washing machines. Very big washing machines, not like the small washing machines we've got now

14:00 here and they used to wash all the blankets and particularly the officers' tablecloths and serviettes and all of those sorts of things, washing uniforms particularly, because all the uniforms we had were washable. They would do a lot of that as well and they'd be doing the ironing and they'd have the special

14:30 laundry type ironing boards and that's what went on as far as the laundry was concerned. But they were full-time on that, they did nothing else.

Whereabouts was the laundry based on the ship? Was there only one laundry?

There was one laundry, yeah. It was based towards the back of the ship, down aft and it was on the upper deck so they could hang out the washing

15:00 on lines, if need be.

If need be, in what instance?

Oh well, if they had the necessary sunshine. If we were in port they could, otherwise they'd have to use the dryer when we were at sea.

How was all the laundry collected?

Oh I can't remember that, no idea.

There must have been a fairly

15:30 **efficient system.**

Oh yeah there would have been. I can't quite remember that, no.

How did taking leave home in Australia compare with some of the leave that

16:00 **you took in Asia, south-east Asia?**

Oh Australia thank you. You always looked forward to going home, seeing those people that you knew, seeing those people that you loved. There was no question that Australia was the place that you looked forward to as far as leave was concerned.

With the various landings and bombardments that you completed,

16:30 **how did they compare or contrast from one another? You mentioned the landing at Borneo and the bombardment at Tarakan, Brunei, Balikpapan, Morotai, that's quite a lot of operations to just gloss over?**

Yeah, well I can't remember any great differences between them, there must have been, I suppose, but

17:00 as far as I was concerned and as far as the rest of the ship's company was concerned, there was a certain job to be done and you did it and that was it. It was we didn't have any particular encounters

that were different from one bombardment to another. We were never attacked by the Japanese from

17:30 onshore; we were attacked once by air, but that was all. So it was basically part of the routine of life, part of the routine that went on as far as bombardment was concerned.

You mentioned you moved down to New Guinea and you were involved in an operation at Wewak?

Yeah, we were actually on the north-

18:00 west coast of New Guinea, but basically more north than west and it was originally run by the Dutch who had coconut palms and things like that. We went ashore there and it was a bit knocked about by the time we got there,

18:30 cause it had been bombarded and invaded and was all knocked about.

What was your involvement at Wewak?

Again bombardment, bombardment from half a mile off shore.

Who were you supporting with the bombardment?

Supporting Australian crews who were going ashore

19:00 to invade the area with Americans as well—Australians and Americans were involved in the capture of Wewak. There may have been a Dutch ship involved as well, but not very much. The Dutch weren't looked on very favourably.

Why was that?

Because we felt that

19:30 they didn't have the guts or determination that the other ones had. That was almost a tradition that we didn't think much of them as a fighting force, as compared with the Australians, as compared with the Americans.

How did their actions give you cause to believe that?

It was hearsay, it wasn't

20:00 their actions so much, it was hearsay. It was just part of the general picture.

And what took place when you landed at Wewak?

Nothing much, we just went ashore and had a look and that was all. Saw it had been knocked about, seen that it had been bombarded, weren't attacked, weren't approached by the locals at all because they'd all fled to the hills and that was it, there was nothing

20:30 going on there immediately after the bombardment. That's when we went and then we went back on board ship and we sailed back to Subic Bay.

What were you expecting to see when you went ashore?

Just what we saw really, just what we saw, because we'd heard that we weren't to expect anything startling

21:00 when we went ashore.

Why had you gone ashore then?

Oh interest, interest to have a look.

Did you want to assess the damage?

I suppose some of the officers may have wanted to do that and to report back but as far as I was concerned and as far as the rest of the ship's company was concerned, no we didn't have any particular.

21:30 **What other events led up to the end of the war while you were serving in this area, around New Guinea, and the Philippines and Borneo?**

Oh of course the atomic bombs, they were dropped a couple of weeks before the end of the war. At the time of the dropping of the atomic bombs we were

22:00 anchored at Subic Bay, so there were no particular actions going on when heard the news of the dropping of the atomic bomb. There was, towards the north of us, towards Okinawa,

22:30 there was sort of Kamikaze attacks going on. We heard of these but we didn't actually experience them at all. And it was around this time that they dropped the first atomic bomb in Hiroshima.

What was the buzz about Kamikazes?

Oh the buzz was that here were these madmen who were crashing their planes into ships

23:00 and you couldn't stop them. They tried to stop them, of course. Anti-aircraft fire to a certain extent stopped them, but they couldn't stop them from plunging straight into the ships.

How unthinkable were these Kamikazes to you?

23:30 Well we had a sort of general feeling which was that the Japanese were sort of sub-human, that they were, what shall I say, very cruel as a population, that they were

24:00 uncivilized as a population, very hard, very cruel generally. This was a general feeling that we all had about them that was quite incorrect really because people are people everywhere and they'd been influenced

24:30 by fanatics, by Nazis, by totalitarian regime. But the general sort of propaganda was that they were sub-human people and as sub-human people we could expect them to do things like committing suicide

25:00 like they were, cause that's what it was. It was a suicide mission.

Where were you when you heard news of the atomic blast in Japan?

In Subic Bay we were anchored, at anchor. The general sort of feeling was the Japanese can't hold out much longer if they're going to drop too many of these, it looks as if the end of the war is coming and we

25:30 were very happy about that, very happy.

And what were you doing at the time when you heard the news?

I can't remember exactly what I was doing, just carrying out routine.

Had you ever heard of atomic weaponry before?

Never, never, no.

So it was a new—?

It was a new thing and of course, it was explained pretty

26:00 minutely when it first came out. The correspondents, the newspaper correspondents, the radio correspondents, the BBC correspondents really got on it and hammered us on it so we were fairly quick in learning what the effects would be. Although we didn't really know what the long term effects would be.

26:30 **Was that before or after the blast that you received all this information?**

Oh after, after the first blast at Hiroshima and about ten days later there was the one in Nagasaki. So there were only two blasts.

When were you moved to Japan?

On the signing, not on the signing,

27:00 on the surrender of the Japanese. The Japanese surrendered officially on August the 15th I think, it was something like that. The first atomic bomb was on August 1st and then a week or ten days later there was the bombing of Nagasaki, and soon after that there was the declaration of surrender by the Japanese.

27:30 **Where were you when Japan surrendered?**

We were in Subic Bay again, at anchor, you see, it was during a period of inactivity really as far as we were concerned.

And how did you respond to that news?

We got a couple of cans of beer each as a ration which pleased us very much and we were all very happy because we knew we were all going to go home. We weren't quite sure how

28:00 soon we'd be going home, we weren't quite sure where we were going at that stage. We didn't know we were going to go up to Tokyo Bay to witness the surrender.

Were there any other celebrations in Subic Bay?

Oh letting off of fireworks and shooting of rifles and things like that, general sort of mayhem.

28:30 **Was it mayhem?**

Oh you know, hurrah, hurrah, and loudspeakers turned up in full volume.

And what was the crew doing around the ship?

Just the normal sort of activities, just the normal activities, because it was very pleasing, it was sort of relaxing. I can remember how relaxed we all felt once we learnt about it.

29:00 It almost inevitably led to lessening of tension—personal tension, and inter-personal tension, tension—as a result of that threat being taken away, the constant sort of threat that you had that you were going to get bombed or you were going to get bombardment. That tension was

29:30 sort of lifted.

So what was the voyage like up to Japan?

It was very quiet and very relaxed. Lots of messages going backwards and forwards to people back home, where they could get the attention of the radio operator.

How would you go about doing that?

Oh you'd, I can't

30:00 remember the exact details but obviously those who knew the radio operator would be able to get those messages back. I don't remember myself having sent any messages myself.

Did you go about your normal duties in the daily running of the ship?

The daily running of the ship, yeah, the routine sailing duties—four on,

30:30 eight off, or four on, four off, depending on what your job was.

And how about the officers? How had they changed or hadn't they changed?

They were about the same, but there was a relaxed atmosphere, there was no doubt about that.

How much had the officers relaxed their attitude?

Oh I can't recall that but I know there was a general relaxed atmosphere.

31:00 **And whereabouts did you arrive in Japan?**

Tokyo Bay. We didn't go ashore at all for a start until the actual surrender was signed and we went up there, not far from the battleship, where the signing took place. That was the [SS] Missouri and General MacArthur and Tojo and those sort of people, they all signed the

31:30 surrender.

What were you doing that day?

We were just lolling about on deck, enjoying the sunshine and we were watching the bypass of planes because there was about a thousand planes that flew over Tokyo Bay on the day of the surrender, so we were watching out for them and we were having a look through the glasses at all

32:00 the various ships that were there, because there were a lot of ships, a lot, a lot of ships there. They'd come to Tokyo Bay for the surrender just like we had.

What were some of the various ships there?

Oh there were the Australian ships, there was the [HMAS] Shropshire, there was the [HMAS] Warramunga and the [HMAS] Arunta. The Shropshire was a big cruiser, the Warramunga and the Arunta

32:30 were destroyers and there were various other corvettes and whatnots which I can't remember who they were, can't recall, but I do know those ships were there.

What else did you see arriving in Tokyo Bay?

Where else?

What else did you see there? Were there any sunken ships?

Oh yes, there was quite a lot of damage that you could see and that was what we were interested in having a look at. There were quite a lot of sunken ships in Tokyo Bay,

33:00 including battleships and cruisers and other ships.

How did sunken ships interest you?

Oh well just to see them, to see them turned upside down, to see them with all their deck sort of blasted to bits.

33:30 How are we going?

Good. Can we keep going? So what kind of role did you play in Japan after the signing of the peace declaration?

Well our main role was just to be there. We carried on normal sorts of ship's routines, in a relaxed sort of way,

34:00 and after the signing had taken place, about a week after, we sailed down to Yokohama and when we were there—now I'm not absolutely certain of the, yeah—we went to Yokohama and went ashore at Yokohama, had a look around

34:30 and then came back and then we sailed back to Tokyo Bay because—no, I'm not certain about that. But we went ashore in Tokyo, we went ashore in Yokohama, we went ashore in Hiroshima—Hiroshima, whatever you call it,—so they were basically the three places we went to. When we went,

35:00 I'm getting, it's all sort of mixed up with the occupation forces when we came down to Sydney after the signing. It may have been almost straight away now that I come to think of it. I think we probably came down from Tokyo Bay from the surrender; we went down to, back to Sydney,

35:30 calling at Brisbane on the way, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart. We went to all those places and took part in celebrations in those places.

What did you see when you went ashore at Hiroshima?

Devastation, devastation, it was flat, it was very flattened. There were a few buildings standing but of course

36:30 there was firstly the force of the atomic bomb itself, the devastation that that had occurred, but following that there were fires raging everywhere which burned down whatever was left standing as far as wooden structures were concerned. The only structures that were left standing were big

37:00 apartment buildings which were made of concrete, and there weren't very many of them, so the place was virtually all flattened. But I must say that we also saw the flattening that had occurred in Tokyo and that had been involved in ceaseless bombarding by aircraft with the you know,

37:30 the normal sort of bombs and normal sort of incendiaries and that had been really flattened as well, so the destruction in Tokyo had been just as much, if not more than in Hiroshima, because it's a much bigger place, Tokyo.

What was your purpose—to have gone ashore and visited those spots?

To have a look, to have a look, you see we didn't

38:00 have any particular task to carry out, but it was more or less a sightseeing tour of both, and Yokohama as well. Yokohama was a main ship-building, ship-repair complex near Quee Bay which was again a

38:30 centre for repair and construction of ships. So our main task as far as me personally was concerned was to go ashore and have a look. We went ashore as spectators, more or less as tourists, and we did have more time there, in Yokohama. If we had more time we

39:00 could go ashore and visit places and visit people in their homes.

What impression did that devastation have upon you?

Again it impressed on me the futility of war. It was very much of the thought that

39:30 'why are we belting into one another like this?' I asked myself that question and I've been asking myself that question ever since. But homo-sapiens as such are very destructive creatures. The further we go the more adept we become at destroying ourselves and

40:00 destroying the environment and I'm becoming very much a pessimist as far as the future of mankind is concerned.

Did you return to the Hobart as satisfied or unsatisfied tourists?

We returned as satisfied tourists in that we saw what was going on, it was very educational

40:30 as far as we were concerned, or particularly as far as I was concerned.

When did you begin to question or reflect upon the futility of war?

Oh that was in Manila; that was during the war and also hearing the stories that other people told me about their experiences during the war and realising the atrocities the Japanese carried out,

41:00 that we carried out atrocities of our own, and I've experienced that first-hand myself, in some of the things that went on as far as our bombardment was concerned.

What do you think would define some of those actions as atrocities?

Oh well I can remember sailing down towards Tarakan and

41:30 there was a little fishing boat, which was a native fishing boat, which was about a mile off and the skipper said, “Let’s wipe them out”, which they did, wipe them out and there was no evidence that I could gather

42:00 or—I did ask around.

Tape 5

00:32 **How did you get to find out that you were going to go to Japan?**

Oh the next day, the next day or two, I’m not sure, one or two days after peace came, a signal came to the ship to say that we

01:00 were to go up to Tokyo Bay to be present at the signing of the peace, along with a hundred other ships from all around the area. They all went up there to be present at the signing of the peace treaty in Tokyo Bay. I think partly

01:30 as a celebration but also partly that somebody didn’t do the dirty on us.

That would have been an exciting thing to be part of.

Yes it was, it was. Are you going?

What sort of things did you do when you got ashore?

Well it was mainly sightseeing to see what

02:00 sort of damage had been done. In Tokyo, of course, there was mass devastation there because they’d had a lot of bombing raids there, and also to visit the shrines that had been damaged.

02:30 Also to have a look at the Emperor’s palace which had been spared because they didn’t bomb the Emperor’s palace, which was by the river, so we just had a look at that. It was mainly a sightseeing tour. Also bought some, I can remember particularly buying some gramophone records which were very hard to get at that time

03:00 and they were, I think they were Beethoven’s First Piano Concerto, which I’d been wanting to have for a long time, so I was very pleased to get that and a nice shiny album and all very pleased, very clean and new looking, only to find when I got them home that they were worn out, so I’d been done for a dinner there.

03:30 **Oh dear.**

And the other thing was I wanted to buy myself a watch because the watch I had was worn out, and I remember that particularly because I put the watch up against one ear and it was ticking loudly and I put it up against the other ear and I couldn’t hear a thing and I thought ‘there’s something going on here, I must be going deaf.’

04:00 So the next day I went to the ship’s company medical centre and had someone look in my ears and there was a bit of cotton wool which had been pushed down during the bombardment at some stage and had completely blocked the ear, so I just had that hooked out and I was okay and could hear properly. So that was the cause of my deafness.

04:30 **Emergency over.**

Yes, that’s right.

How do you think the Japanese received you as an occupying force?

Well I did go into, with another fellow, we went into a Japanese home. We met someone, when we were out looking at the stalls we met someone, a young lady, in the thirties I suppose,

05:00 who had a husband who was in the war somewhere in the Okinawa and she sort of defended us and agreed with us what a crazy thing war was, so we got a sort of a friendship with her and we went into her home. We were very well-received there

05:30 and generally when we mixed quite a lot with people in shops and shops on the street, and at that time we also went into a couple of other homes, we found much to our surprise that they weren’t ogres and they weren’t sort of, there was nothing mysterious about it,

06:00 they were just ordinary people like we were and that was quite surprising, quite enjoyable that that was so. When we went ashore we spent a couple of days up in a holiday resort up in the mountains. That was

the only real time we had away

06:30 from the ship. Had a couple of days away, went to place called Niko, which was up in the mountains and it was summer time. There was no snow. That was an enjoyable one too. That was enjoyable because we went into several people's homes there and met them and that was again eye opening.

Why was it eye opening?

07:00 Oh from the point of view of realizing that the Japanese had had enough of war, that they hated it and they wanted to settle down and get working and get back to peacetime activities. They'd had enough of war, they'd had enough of a totaleristic regime or that's what we gathered and I think that's what was shown in it.

07:30 **Must have been a bit of a culture shock to have come from Australia and then the kinds of things that you would see in Japan.**

It was, it was, yes, it was different, definitely different. It was the first time I had ever been overseas and it was interesting to me—the people and to experience with them, meeting a different culture. We also went to a couple of

08:00 armament factories while we were there too just to see, which were knocked about, very knocked about, completely gutted by the time we saw them, but that was in Tokyo as well. And then we went down to Yokohama, after a while we went down to Yokohama. These experiences are all mixed up with when we were in the occupation forces, half-way through we had been down to

08:30 Australia and come back again. So we met a lot of army fellows from Australia. They were in the occupation forces too. The other thing that I remembered vividly, or it's coming vividly, was that we met or a ship passed us soon after the surrender,

09:00 very soon after the surrender a ship passed us with a huge number of prisoners-of-war, Australian prisoners-of-war who were lined up on the deck opposite us and we realized the deprivations they had suffered because they were very thin, very malnourished, very under-nourished. They were happy and smiling but they obviously

09:30 had been ill treated. That was the other thing I remember about the surrender.

Do you have any idea where those POWs [Prisoners of War] were coming from?

Oh they'd been working in coal mines in Japan. There were quite a number of Australian POWs from Indonesia I know, who we knew then had been transported, and from Singapore up to work in the coal mines in Japan.

10:00 **At what point did you start to become aware of some of the atrocities of the Japanese?**

Well we'd heard about them before. When we were in Subic Bay we heard a bit about them because there had been broadcasts from Japan and from Singapore

10:30 and these had been re-broadcast by the BBC so we knew about them then and we knew there had been atrocities. We didn't actually come across anything like that when we were in Japan. By the time we went ashore in Japan, all the POWs had been evacuated on hospital ships and

11:00 general ships as well. They'd been evacuated back to Australia.

With some of the atrocities that happened with the Japanese, when you were mixing amongst the normal everyday people, were they aware of it?

No, they knew that everybody in Japan had been under great pressures, malnourished pressures. They hadn't been getting

11:30 their usual amount of food. They knew that the POWs would have suffered but no, we didn't come across anybody who had been actually involved, or who would admit to being involved in the maltreatment of POWs, no.

But would the average Japanese person admit that perhaps that could have been possible?

Well we don't know that, we don't know that. But I certainly didn't admit

12:00 to anything like that, no.

Do you think Australia should get an apology from the Japanese government because of the atrocities?

I think it has had an apology, hasn't it?

I know that Keating [Paul Keating, Prime Minister of Australia] attempted to get one.

Yes, that was right. Do I think they should apologise? Yes, I do, I suppose so, yeah.

12:30 **Can you tell me how did you see the Japanese women being treated by the Japanese men?**

Well they were obviously subservient to the men. The men were the ones that were all sitting down outside the houses while the women were inside working, that was obvious. And it was obvious that the position of women

13:00 was not, certainly not on an equitable basis, an equal basis. But still that wasn't very unusual for us, because women in Australia were certainly not equal at that time of the war. They were much

13:30 more than they had been but the days of feminisation and the days of people such as Germaine Greer hadn't arrived.

Indeed.

So it wasn't very surprising to see this, the condition of women as against men in Japan.

When you were there for the signing,

14:00 **did you notice traditional costumes on the (unclear)?**

Yeah, there were, there were traditional costumes, very much so amongst the women, very much so.

Cause that must have been quite exotic?

Oh some of it was, some of it was ordinary and drab. They hadn't had access to the clothing they'd had in the past or certainly were to have

14:30 in the future.

Did you notice any change in what the women were walking around in between when you were there for the signing and when you went back with the occupational force?

Not really, no.

So it still kept quite traditional?

Yeah.

What were your impressions of the local people that you met in Japan?

15:00 Very friendly. They, not many of them, spoke English, very few of them. Very few of us spoke Japanese so it was mainly a question of sign language, but it's amazing what you can get past, get by on as far as interpersonal relationships with sign language.

What did you think of some of the food?

Didn't have much of it.

15:30 They were very short of food and they didn't have any cafes or restaurants open for us to use. We were discouraged from eating out because of their situation.

Who was discouraging you?

Occasionally we'd give them chocolates and things like that but there was very little in the way of food which came our way.

16:00 **Even like rice supplies, were they low as well?**

Yeah.

Did any of the Japanese that you were bumping into have any understanding of what had happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Yes, yes, because we went ashore at Hiroshima and we actually walked around Hiroshima.

16:30 We had no idea then of the danger of radiation, but.

Do you kind or regret your decision to walk around?

No, no, no, not at all. I haven't had any side-effects of the radiation, I don't think. I came home and married and got a family.

When you were walking around Hiroshima

17:00 **did you see any of the locals, like injured or begging?**

No, it was almost completely bereft of any inhabitants at all in Hiroshima in the parts we saw anyway. We went to the centre, we didn't really go to the suburbs of Hiroshima.

17:30 I think if we had we would have seen some evidence but we didn't explore that at all. We only had, I

think one day in Hiroshima. We were based in Yokohama which is not so very far from Hiroshima. We caught a train from, a steam train from Yokohama to Hiroshima, and spent the day there, so it wasn't as if we had a long time there.

18:00 **Were some of the Japanese that you were connecting with during your time there as an occupational force, fearful as to what you might do to them?**

Not that I could detect, no, although they kept to themselves very much. They didn't come forward,

18:30 we had to do the initial approach to them and I would think they would have some fear. It would be natural for them to be, to have some fear in that situation where we were the victors and they were the vanquished.

Cause I'm also thinking, cause we've met some veterans who have very strong opinions about the Japanese and the fact that they really dislike them intensely, did you see any of that

19:00 **with some of your comrades?**

Oh yes there was. There is still a lot left over that dislike the Japanese and I can understand those who'd been POWs, those who'd suffered physically having a resentment against them because of what they'd been through. But I myself and my fellow

19:30 comrades on board ship had not suffered directly physically from the Japanese, so there wasn't that enmity but I could well imagine it could occur.

I'm just wondering if there was at all any mistreatment of the Japanese by Australian or American forces?

Oh well they certainly, there was

20:00 a certain element in the Australian forces and the American forces who would at the drop of a hat, would take it out or bash them up or abuse them, but there was no sort of organised punishment of Japanese for what had gone on before,

20:30 that I knew of, at any rate.

Did you see any mistreatment of the Japanese, just even on a small level?

No, not that I can recall. I may have but it's been put out of my mind.

When you say you were on a holiday at Niko, and it was a holiday resort, I'm just wondering what the holiday resort would look like considering the fact that all the resources from Japan had been quite systematically depleted.

21:00 **What does a—?**

Well it was like an oasis really, because it was up in the mountains. Hadn't had any bombings and life in the village where it was situated was carrying on as normal. They had quite a good rice crop, I can remember that and they weren't poverty stricken. It was a bit like, what would you say?

21:30 What Byron Bay was like, Byron Bay which never had any experience of war, what that would be like.

What sort of activities did you get up to while you were at the holiday resort?

Sightseeing, getting around about, we went into a Japanese home I can remember and had

22:00 something to eat there, some rice, a rice meal. We all paid for it, it was a paid sort of holiday. It wasn't one that was part of recreations or anything like that, more or less a private affair. They took us up there and we were driven up there by the ship's company,

22:30 and what had been organised by the ship's company and we were staying in a hotel, which was a Japanese hotel, which was run by Japanese and you took off your shoes when you went in and you sat down for your meal and it was a typical Japanese hotel. The food we got there was quite reasonable and it was interesting to experience that,

23:00 and their actual way of life

Cause there wouldn't have been anything at that time like it in Australia?

No, nothing like it at all.

What actually was the role as you saw it being part of the occupational force? I mean what were you actively doing within a day?

Actively doing within the day we were just living, going

23:30 ashore and wandering around and mixing with people. We'd certainly report any activity that looked a bit suspicious or anything like that but I never came across anything like that.

Were you or any of the forces actually assisting in rebuilding anything?

No, not that I knew of.

How fast was that happening? Were the Japanese really—?

24:00 Oh they were getting stuck into it, although their man force had been depleted and everybody had been plugged into the army and gone overseas, gone either to China or the Philippines or to Singapore or all of that Siam, as it was called then, Thailand. They invaded a vast amount of territory and their lines were very stretched.

24:30 So at that stage there wasn't much activity going on. They were all waiting for the forces to come back, the men to come back because theoretically they were all POWs, all the forces in all those islands and places outside Japan. So as POWs they had to wait until they could be shipped home.

How long were you

25:00 **part of the occupational forces?**

About six months.

Just your general opinion of the time you spent there—what did you enjoy the most or what sort of stood out?

It was interesting. It became a little repetitive and I sort of felt when I left 'I'd like to come back here in ten years time', which I didn't do it, I haven't been back there. Been tempted to go back but never had the opportunity

25:30 to. Came back home and became involved in other activities and went into university and did my medical course and during that time got married and had a family and it all gets very complicated.

Families and studies, yes, the big double whammy. So how were you feeling by the time you were on your way back to Australia? Were you missing home?

26:00 Oh yes missing home, itching to get out of the services and get stuck into something useful.

Why did you want to actually get out of the services?

Cause I found it was, by this time it had become non self-fulfilling and I'd had enough and that was shared by ninety-nine percent of the ship's company,

26:30 I'm sure.

How much of a percentage of the fellows that you were with on the Hobart with continued being at sea after their experiences?

Oh I'd say about five percent, ten percent maybe.

Well I mean that's interesting.

That's just an observation, it's not based on facts or figures.

But it's interesting to note that your opinion of it is that a lot of people just

27:00 **went home and fitted into a normal life that wasn't a part of the service anymore.**

That's right. I think we all realised when we joined up that we were going to go there and do a job and that was it. Not many were attracted to a lifelong stint. At that time you could enlist for eight years or fifteen years I think it was, and there were very few who did that.

27:30 **How do you think life in the navy has changed over the years?**

I'd say life has become much more comfortable, physically much more comfortable and I think the relationship within the hierarchy of naval personnel is a lot better now than it used to be, much closer, I would think that, but I'm not sure.

28:00 I was asked to join the naval reserve but I declined. I said, 'I won't do that, thank you'.

And what was your reasoning behind that?

I'd had enough and as with most ex-servicemen we felt that war was the war to end wars. The war was over, there wouldn't be another war, there couldn't be because of,

28:30 well the fact that the devastation and the fact of the atom bombs, the fact of Hiroshima, well I felt that anyway, that this was the end of the road, but I was wrong of course. But not completely wrong because it's a long time since we had a world war. There's been spats of wars, but not big ones. And of course a big one these days would be horrific.

Well there wouldn't be a lot of people left

29:00 **I don't think. Can you tell me a little bit about the sense of achievement that you got out of contributing to winning the war?**

Sense of achievement?

Just by how you're communicating?

Also got to (unclear)—when I went into the navy I'd come from an area, when I was at school I'd come

29:30 from an area where I was an officer in the Cadet Corps. I was a Lieutenant in the Cadet Corps, I was a prefect at school, I was a house captain, all of these responsible positions and when I joined the navy I said to myself 'now look, I know how this feels'. They wanted me to do an officer training school. They said you could join the navy and as soon as you went in you could

30:00 go into the officer training school. I said, "No, I don't want to do that. I want to go onto the lower deck." I wanted to meet the ordinary sailors, the ordinary people, the ordinary working people who'd joined up and that's what I did and I didn't regret that at all, and that was an experience that I got. I got to know people, the sort of people I'd never met before and

30:30 I wanted to experience that. While I was at sea, while we were in New Guinea actually I was called up by the commander who said I'd been recommended to go down to Melbourne and do an officers' training course, with a view to—this was before the war was

31:00 ended, well before the war was ended, and he said, "Will you leave the ship and go down?" and I said, "No, I don't want to." I'd rather stay where I was, which I didn't regret either. I could have gone down and done an officers training school but by that time probably the war would have been over anyway, but anyway that's neither here nor there. So that was an experience that I had

31:30 and which I never regretted, meeting all these different people and mingling with the mob.

Did you continue to see and contact them when you went back?

No, I didn't, I didn't really and I look at the pictures that I haven't looked at for years and I didn't, I don't think I've—when I left the navy

32:00 I went into a completely different way of life again and I didn't meet any of the fellows that I'd been with before. There weren't very many people from Melbourne actually who were on the Hobart. I didn't, I can't recall anybody who was from Melbourne on the Hobart and I never sought them out. There probably was but I never sought them out.

32:30 And in the group that I was in, a couple of dozen I was with, they were all from other states, Tasmania, from Queensland, from New South Wales, Western Australia and I hadn't known any of them, so I didn't form any sort of relationships with any of them. While I was in there I had some quite good friends, well you couldn't call them friends really, they were close acquaintances.

33:00 **What sort of reception did you get when you eventually did come back to Australia?**

Oh we got a good reception of course, we marched in various victory marches, in Brisbane, in Melbourne, in Sydney and in Hobart of course. Hobart being the home port, we had a nice victory march there and was entertained.

What happens as part of a victory march?

33:30 Oh well you'd march and then you'd end up with, usually they had a ship's company ball and you'd go along to the ball and have a ball of a time, jumping up and down, jitterbugging and generally getting boozed.

Where do the ladies come from?

Oh well the lady, I can always remember a lady who

34:00 I was attached to at the victory ball in Queensland, she came from the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association], and I took her back and left her at the YWCA and I went to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and had a sleep. That was a fleeting sort of relationship that we had. And in Hobart I

34:30 went to the ball and went home with a woman and her daughter, I went with the daughter and ended up with them both and went home to their place and had a cup of tea, a drink and then went back to the ship. Never any sort of lasting romances or hot sex or anything like that.

Oh yes,

35:00 **but the reputation for sailors was.**

Oh yes, that's right.

So you must have met Rae at some point?

Oh Rae's my second wife. My first wife, my first wife I met while I was doing my medical course.

So maybe you can tell us a little bit about making the decision to actually do something vastly different, which is the medical course.

Oh well it wasn't really

35:30 vastly different in that I'd sort of prepared myself for it before I went in the navy, with my last year at school. I sort of thought 'now I'd like to do either history in an arts course and teach history', because I was interested in history, or alternatively to do medicine so I did the necessary subjects to enter a medical school and in those days you had to have Latin, Intermediate Latin,

36:00 which has subsequently been done away with because it was ridiculous. That was to try and understand the word for, or the names of drugs and diseases which were in Latin and I'd also done chemistry and physics and biology, I'm not sure which, which prepared me for the medical course.

36:30 And when I was discharged, when I came down and was discharged from the navy in 1946, I had counselling services—they had a counselling service to counsel everybody if they wanted it when they went out and I had a counselling service and they said yeah, I was okay. They gave me certain psychological testing.

37:00 **That's interesting.**

Yeah, that was a free service that you could get and they said, "Yeah, you're okay, you can go and do your medical course" and I must say that the repatriation and rehabilitation of ex-servicemen was very good. I think it's always been very good actually and I've had a very good run as far as that's concerned.

37:30 I had this counselling service and they said, "Okay, it would be a good idea for you to go and do some catch-up courses in the subjects that you've done", which they paid for. They paid for the training, they paid for the books, that's the Government which did this. Then they gave me a job in the

38:00 repatriation department, as a temporary measure while I waited for the medical course to start, which didn't start until 1947.

That's a lot of care really going on.

Oh yeah, yeah, they were good. And during that time I was earning a bit of a wage. Didn't get paid much in the navy, didn't get discharged with a lot,

38:30 so you didn't come out with superannuation or anything like that, you were a bit short, but they did give you training, free training and they gave me that job in the repatriation department which was a fairly easy sort of a job.

Yeah, what was it?

Oh, a clerical thing. That was in Melbourne. It allowed me to shoot out every now and then to watch cricket during the week and things like that. It wasn't a very disciplined sort of place.

39:00 And it was staffed by ex-servicemen too, who all sort of joined in and all sort of helped each other to make it an easy life. And then I had to go to Mildura for the first year of medicine because the University of Melbourne was full, it was over full, because of returning ex-servicemen.

39:30 Lots of ex-servicemen wanted to do a course of one sort or another, so they sent all the first year medical courses, all the first year engineering, all the first year dentistry and some of the first year science, all of them had to go up to Mildura, where there was an old former RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base, which they converted into a first-year university house, where you

40:00 lived in and where you did your first year in medicine.

And how did you adjust to the new life in medical school?

It was okay because again we were all ex-servicemen, well most of us were ex-service, not all of us, but most of us were and we'd been used to living in an environment,

40:30 oh communal environment where you lived and worked, worked and lived and also before I went into the navy, I had a couple of years in boarding school myself so it wasn't any great sort of problem as far as I was concerned.

Almost like home?

Yeah, yeah. I'd go home on holidays but it wasn't a big deal. It was quite enjoyable.

41:00 I made a couple of good friends there too, while we were living in there because we continued on into medical school and I got to know them well, and one he came to my wedding and I went to his wedding and that sort of thing, so we did form lasting sort of relationships then.

So what you're saying is, you actually made more lasting relationships

41:30 **out of medical school?**

Yeah, well we were all striving towards the same sort of thing as well, we had this common interest, common ideas, common interests. Used to discuss politics and things like that as well.

What were some of the subjects that were coming up in politics considering the war was over?

Oh well there was the very much the building of a better life.

Tape 6

00:32 **Okay we were just talking about your medical training and the relationships that you formed there compared with the relationships that you formed while you were serving in the navy.**

Yes, well the relationships that I had there were, as I say, they were acquaintances and good acquaintances whereas when I started my medical course and when I went through my

01:00 medical course I formed more lasting relationships because I worked with them, I lived with them, I worked with them and we had common interests, that's the thing, more thinking along the same lines on the same level and so we made much better relationships then,

01:30 than I did in the navy. It was a six-year course, of course, so you had longer and we were doing the same things, we were tackling the same problems.

And what were the sorts of politics that you discussed? What was your interest in politics post-war?

Oh my interest was to the left.

02:00 It was a period when people were thinking or more people were thinking we must be thinking about reform, we must look into the areas of improvement of living, improvement of the lot of people as a whole, looking at the problems of equality, the equality of

02:30 opportunity, equality of distribution of benefits, equality and health, those sorts of issues and we did look into that a lot. And so it was my sort of thinking and a lot of the people around me was in the direction of the left,

03:00 initially Chifley, Ben Chifley, who was the Prime Minister of Australia soon after the war. He took over after John Curtin. John Curtin was the Prime Minister during the war. He died just before the end of the war and Chifley took over. So that was the sort of atmosphere.

How did the war influence you socially and politically?

03:30 It make me think a lot about issues which I hadn't thought about before, although I had been influenced while I was at my last couple of years of school, but it did sort of polarise my thinking a lot, as far as the issues of politics and economics were concerned.

Had it altered your perspectives much?

Not much. Once you form your opinions

04:00 and your attitudes in your adolescent years and your post-adolescent years I think that's when you're opinions sort of fairly firm, most people at any rate. I joined the Labor Party. I'm not in the Labor Party now, but I've always voted Labor and I always will vote Labor whatever happens. I'm one of those people who are polarised one way and that's the way. I'm not a swinging voter.

04:30 And actually when you really look at it there are very few really swinging voters. Most people have much the same opinion about politics now that they had when they were young. I don't know about yourself but your political opinions are fairly fixed and you can't see them changing much, can you? And that's how I feel. That sort of carried forward in my attitude

05:00 towards medicine, in my attitude towards doctoring and things like that.

What inspired you to take up medicine?

What inspired me? Well going right back of course I can always remember I broke my arm once and I went to see the local GP [General Practitioner] and I can remember him vividly sort of setting my arm straight and having a talk to me and telling me I must go in and I must do medicine,

05:30 you must train to be a doctor, and I was very impressed by that. That was just one occasion many, many years ago and he sort of put me along that sort of field. Subsequently I was perhaps looking at history and economics as a course because I had become interested in that and I sort of thought of that and during the war when I was actually serving overseas,

06:00 the University of New England, which is the university in New South Wales, which is still a very influential university, but at that stage it was a fledgling university and it wrote to ex-servicemen, or contacted ex-servicemen one way or the other. I'm not quite sure how it contacted them, offering to set up correspondence courses and

06:30 to provide literature to anybody who was interested in doing it while they were in the forces and I wrote to them and asked them could I do a history course, which they said yes, sure, and so they wrote to me and gave me the necessary literature and text books to do a unit in history, which I did.

07:00 **What part of history were you studying?**

Oh I was studying British history actually because in those days you studied either British history or ancient history. Australian history hadn't even surfaced at that stage. We were still very much into the history of the British Empire.

In a broad context?

Yeah, yeah, in a broad context. Australia did

07:30 come into it, but it was in as part of the British Empire.

How did you value the Empire or serving the Empire?

I didn't value it very much. No, I was a bit cynical about it, but I valued the fight against fascisms and that sort of thing, that did influence my decision

08:00 about going to war and about fighting the war and when I came out I was still sort of fired with the ambition of making some contribution towards a better life for everybody in the world, not just in Australia but everywhere.

Is that partly behind your reason to become a doctor?

Yes, that was a lot

08:30 to do with my decision to do medicine and become a doctor.

What do you think of the current or recent debate in regard to republicanism?

What do I think? I think we should become a republic. I've never been a monarchist. I reckon they're a —well at times I thought they're

09:00 a mob of parasites, the monarchy. I still do to a certain extent. They do nothing. They never put their shoulder to the wheel. We just pay for them to be pretty and useless.

09:30 I'm not interested in pomp and circumstance. I've never been a person who delights in marching and whatnot, you know. For instance I was a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] when I was practising down in the country. I practiced medicine down the country for twelve years, down at Ravensthorpe, if you know where that is. It's down towards Esperance, it's a very isolated place, and

10:00 we had a little RSL group down there and I joined the RSL down there and actually I became president of the Ravensthorpe branch of the RSL. We enjoyed that, we enjoyed coming together once a month, but not for anything about Empire and power, we came together because we were all about the same age and we enjoyed each others company. And

10:30 we used to have a little march every Anzac Day when the Boy Scouts and the Cubs used to march and I used to quite enjoy that, but I've never actually taken part in activity, I've never had any activity in the RSL in the city, except, yeah there was an exception, I played in an RSL cricket team

11:00 when I was in Cottesloe. I used to play in the Cottesloe RSL cricket team. It was until the President of the RSL, who was very much a monarchist, very much for God, King and Country, saw on the TV that I was marching in an anti-Vietnam war march and had me blackballed from the RSL or tried to have me blackballed. I wasn't blackballed,

11:30 but I said after that, oh bugger them.

What does Anzac Day mean to you now?

Very little, very little. I've never been a person who likes going back for reunions and things. They have school reunions and they have RSL reunions and there's an HMAS Hobart Association

12:00 in Perth. Someone put them onto me and they contacted me and I said, "Oh I'll join, but I'll be a sleeping member." I don't quite know why I'm a sleeping member but I'm just a member of that. I've never taken part in any of the activities.

How large is that association in Perth?

Not very large I don't think, a few people.

Can you give me an indication of how many members?

12:30 About forty and those, see there were two HMAS Hobarts. There was the HMAS Hobart that I was on and that was scrapped about ten years after the war and they built another HMAS Hobart, which I think is a frigate or destroyer or something and I think that's been scrapped. I'm not absolutely certain

13:00 about that, but I think there's been a couple and anyone who's served on those ships can be a member of the HMAS Hobart Association.

What kind of activities does the Association hold for its members?

The main activity of ex-service organisations is centred around the preparation of the celebration of Anzac Day,

13:30 which consists usually of a march, a service and then a booze up. And I used to take part in a march and a bit of a booze up down in Ravensthorpe when I lived down there with the—I think there were about ten of us who were in the RSL down there and we used to have that and the community

14:00 used to come together but the community down at a place like Ravensthorpe was very close knit and they used to come together for lots of celebrations, whenever they could to keep together because they all lived in scattered sort of lives and they used to like to come together to keep contact with each other.

What do you think of the United States and American imperialism?

I think it's an imperialism which

14:30 is like other empires which is trying to be all pervasive and which will be all pervasive, has been all pervasive, is all pervasive but which will eventually die, just like the Roman Empire did, just like the British Empire did,

15:00 just like the Persian Empire did. The Persian, Iraq, Iran, all those under Alexander the Great, they were a great empire, but they are no longer so. The Egyptians were a civilization who were very strong at some stage. The Roman Empire was a very strong empire at some stage

15:30 and they contributed a lot to the development of culture and the development of civilization but they eventually were conquered and sank and I think the American empire has developed the same way and I think they're doomed.

What do you think awaits the civilization of the American Empire?

16:00 Well.

You can only speculate?

Yeah. I think the Chinese are a civilization which many centuries ago, before the birth of Christ, the Chinese empire was a huge one and

16:30 we talk about Australia being discovered by Captain James Cook, well it was discovered long before Captain James Cook by the Chinese who sailed round Australia and sailed around Tasmania, so I think the Chinese may well come again. They look as if they are. They're very hard workers. I don't know whether you've come across it but wherever

17:00 I've come across Chinese, and I know quite a few Chinese, because originally when the Chinese started coming over here post-war, there was quite a lot came out as students, who came out as immigrants to work in a lot of places and a lot of them have done very well indeed, because they work very hard. I've got to

17:30 know a Chinese doctor in Singapore very well and he's a very hard worker and a very able fellow and we've sponsored some Chinese people who came out here as refugees and were stranded and

18:00 we've sponsored them so they can stay, that's Rae and I have. We keep in contact with them and they work very hard indeed, and they're getting somewhere.

What do you think of the current climate of Australian politics?

I think it's very conservative and that includes the

18:30 Labor Party. That seems to be a very conservative sort of party at present, but I think that will change. I've sort of lived through the change from Labor to Conservative, back to Labor, back to Conservative and I get quite crazy, quite emotive about our

19:00 present Prime Minister [John Howard]. I reckon he's a little twerp. And every time I see him on the television I just about throw a book at the television and I think he's conservative and I think he's quite ruthless in his political ambition, but he uses issues

19:30 quite immorally in furthering his ambitions. I think his record as far as refugees is deplorable. I think his attitude towards people who are different is quite deplorable but I think he uses—but don't start me.

But I've always been a leftie,

so you can predict what I will think as far as politics and policies are concerned. I've never been active from a party point of view but that's just what I think. I had several people, several fellow medical students that I used to deal with at the university and also at the University of Melbourne

where I trained, there was a very strong university Labor club which had communists and socialists and Labor party people and they were all very strong, strong sort of people who subsequently became quite strong in the political field. People like Ian Turner, Stephen Murray-Smith, those sorts of people and I got to know them well and used to

discuss things with them. So I've always been interested from a political point of view.

Was your march against the Vietnam War a political stance?

A political stunt?

Stance.

Stance?

Yeah.

Yeah, we were very emotional at that time. I think the whole of the community was very emotional, one way or another about the Vietnam War.

And as it turned out, it turned out to be a disaster, it turned out to be a disaster for people, for common people. The use of military might against a little people, I think that sort of epitomised everything that's gone wrong or can go wrong, which in the end must go under.

And I think America has continued along that way. They lost the Vietnam War and I think they may well lose the war in the Middle East.

What are you views on the current conflict in Iraq?

Predictable, predictable. What do I think of Saddam Hussein? He's bad, I think he's wrong, absolutely but

I think that he will eventually go under, he would have eventually gone under, that would have been pretty quick if the politics of oil hadn't come into it. And if it had been approached in a more humanitarian way than it was. I mean the idea of putting

an embargo on the place where it's admitted there are millions of kids who have starved to death, that's absolutely horrific that sort of thing. Surely the world can do better than that. And of course, the war itself, it's bound to end up in disaster. I've just read a book called The Carpet Wars, which is a description

of the various places in the Middle East, like Iran, Iraq, Kashmir and Pakistan and all those, India and all the sort of tensions amongst them all and the way America has gone in there and said, 'I'll solve it' with the big brother sort of attitude.

It's admitted that America backed Saddam Hussein up to a certain point and as for that other fellow in Afghanistan America actively supported, what's his name again?

Osama Bin Laden?

Yeah, Osama Bin Laden. They actively supported him,

supplied him with arms and ammunition and planes and everything.

What would you say the United States agenda is?

The United States agenda is basically to provide a comfortable living for the people of the United States, I'd say. Even if that means knocking out people left, right and centre

to get there. Anyway that's not part of it.

What do you think of Bush [George Bush Jr, President of the United States]?

Well he's a clever speaker; he's got the gift of the gab.

Or a good spin-doctor?

Spin-doctor, yeah, I'm not for him.

I'd rather have Clinton [Bill Clinton, President of the United States] with all his problems. He's got some humanity in him.

You mentioned earlier—

That's got nothing to do with the war.

No, but we're still interested in your opinions. The comments you made earlier regarding equality and equitable distribution

26:00 **of wealth, do you think that we can foresee that on an international scale in the future?**

I think homo-sapiens have the ability to, I think we've got the means of communication, we got the means of production, everything's there, it's just a question of organising it and having enough people or political goodwill

26:30 to back that and to bring it about. The unfortunate thing is that human nature, and that includes me and you and everybody else, tends to get in the way of that happening. I think most of us think of the interests of those immediately around us

27:00 and our families, like Osama and Hussein, and all those people, they hurt the immediate family and the big thing is the immediate family they do alright. Everybody tends to think that way; they don't tend to think in the broad sense. And once we all develop the ability to think in the broad sense, to think in the community way, rather than just in the family way, or just in the Australian

27:30 way but in the global sort of way, have a global sense, where we deal with such things as Bangladesh and Uganda and with all the AIDS problems, and all those things and we think in a global sense rather than in just own little local sense, I think we'll go a long way towards—

28:30 **What was your reaction to September 11th 2001 [World Trade Centre terrorist attack]?**

My reaction was, oh well, that America had it coming to them. It was just one of those things, one of the incidents in man's inhumanity

29:00 towards man. I couldn't help in a secretive sort of way but admire the way that they did it. It was very, very smart and it was a real smack in the eye to the Americans, but terrorism is a bad thing, I agree with that absolutely.

29:30 But I hate the whole idea of terrorism, but I can understand it. And I think that the world is still pretty racial in its attitude towards people. The question of skin colour still comes into it, black versus white. In America they say it doesn't matter but it does.

30:00 We certainly see it in Australia in our treatment of Aborigines as compared with—

And refugees?

And refugees, anybody with a skin colour, the white Australia policy is still very much with us, if not officially but certainly in a more evasive sort of thing.

You just mentioned Dick that you secretly felt, or quietly felt that America perhaps had it coming to them. Do you think Australia has it coming to us?

30:30 I think our present Prime Minister hasn't done anything to lessen it.

Your generation and the generation before yours knows the reality of war, do you think the following generations are complacent when it comes to the standard of living and peace and freedom that we enjoy?

I don't think any less

31:00 or any more than what has been before. I think it's a political sort of gut feeling that people have and it's all bound up with politics and their reactions to issues. I recognised that when I went to school and

31:30 I recognise it now. Most people, the majority of us are innately conservative in that we don't want to change things, we want to keep things exactly as they are as far as our way of life and our way of living and economic situation is concerned, we want to keep

32:00 it that way. It's only a certain percentage who thinks otherwise, but anyway that's just a personal opinion.

And the tradition of Anzac, what do you think it will mean in the future?

I think it will die. I hope it does. I hope it does, but of course the RSL, the Returned

32:30 Servicemen's League that's struggling to keep its head above water because most of the original ones are dying out. It's a long time since they had a big war. Now they're trying to broaden it out to include the Vietnam War and of course the Gulf Wars will be a boost for their membership.

In what respect do you hope it will die out?

33:00 I hope that the celebration of war will die out because that's what it is really, it's a celebration of war, but there we are. Why did I do medicine? What have I done in medicine? I did medicine

33:30 because I wanted to be a general practitioner, because I wanted to help people on a person-to-person level and that's what I did. I graduated from Melbourne and I came over here, for a year actually, I came over to work in the hospital. I worked in Fremantle Hospital for a year. That was in 1953, 1953, and then I went to Midland and I worked in Midland for

34:00 twenty years as a general practitioner and then a paediatrician. And then after I'd been a paediatrician for about five years at Midland I became interested in preventative medicine and community medicine and I left there and went into the public health system

34:30 in Perth, into child health. That is, I don't know whether you've heard of the child health clinics, community and child health clinics, I went into that area and I became Director of Community and Child Health in WA [Western Australia] in about 1975.

35:00 I worked there for about four or five years. I got sick of the administration because it was a bureaucratic sort of job, it was just administration so I left there and went down to Ravensthorpe and worked as general practitioner for twelve years.

What do you think of current medical policy

35:30 **and the state of medicine in Australia?**

Well I look it from the point of view as the consumer, what's the health of the consumer? Healthwise I think we are very healthy population, looking at it again in the broad, we're a very healthy population. The health system that we have,

36:00 it has it's inequalities, it definitely has. It's got its inequalities in that those that can pay for it can get the best treatment. It's always been like that, I'm afraid. It's very difficult to get away from it. We have a public health system in as far as hospitals are concerned.

36:30 We have public hospitals where you get free treatment, but that treatment there is unfortunately is becoming overcrowded, inadequate and for instance if I get sick I don't go into a public hospital, I go into a private hospital and I get the best of treatment. And the treatment that I get is good and if you're covered by hospital benefits and you can afford it. Are you covered by hospital benefits?

37:00 **Yeah.**

You go into a private hospital and you get good treatment and I think that's good, but it's the ten percent who can't afford it, who, probably more than ten percent now, unfortunately it's growing, but the ten percent who can't afford it don't get good treatment. They go into an overcrowded sort of system and they don't get good treatment and they can't afford

37:30 to pay for better. But compared to other systems I think we do very well. We'll always, I think we'll always have inequality whatever sort of system we have. Whether we have a democracy or whether we have socialism, a socialist state, or whether we have a fascist state, we'll always have inequalities unfortunately. I don't think communism is the answer.

38:00 I think manipulation of our democracy is probably the way to go about it. And we do it, we bumble along, bumble along and we've got to have people who stir, we've got to have people who knock people like Howard, because only by knocking people like Howard and Ruddock will we get

38:30 changes. But I suppose we, to sum-up my sort of feeling is, democracy, yeah, yeah that's alright. I think it's probably the best way because we can still say what we like. I can still say that Howard's a prick and get away with it. But

39:00 we have to work at it all the time. We have to have people who say that and who get away with it. That's what I feel.

And without those people?

Without those people you can fall into a state like the Soviet Union did. Where you've still got your inequalities, even though it's philosophically they said 'to each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' it didn't work that way,

39:30 because human nature, human nature wouldn't let you. And I still think and you couldn't say what you thought, you couldn't say what you thought in the Soviet Union and you can't say what you think in America now. Although you can say what you think but you've got to be

40:00 powerful before you can say what you think. But if the media get hold of it, if the powerful forces against democracy get hold of it they can punish you. So anyway I feel that our democracy is going alright.

Are we still the 'Lucky Country'?

I reckon we are, we are.

40:30 We are almost too lucky, we are selfishly lucky, that's the problem, we're selfishly lucky. We want to hang onto that. We don't want the refugees to come in and we don't want the Yanks to come in, we don't anybody to come in. We don't want to change it.

But we'll take what suits us.

Yeah, we'll take what suits us.

41:00 We certainly don't want those Orientals to come in here; we don't want the Afghans to come in. It's a pity.

Do you think we can afford to welcome a lot more visitors or newcomers?

I feel we could. We'll have to if we're going to survive because a lot of people who are deprived

41:30 in this world, they're becoming forever closer, for instance Indonesia.

So if we don't welcome them we might have them on our doorstep.

Yep. I think so. But anyway. We're finished are we?

That's the end of the tape. Thanks very much Dick.

I've gone a bit different to what you usually do, haven't I?

No, no. TAPE ENDS