Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Walker - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Okay. If we can just start talking about the early years. We'll begin at the beginning, as they say.**

Yeah, righto. Well, actually I was born around Bendigo. Ninety years ago last year.

01:00 I was born above a business premises in View Street, right opposite the present art gallery, where my father had a business. My grandfather walked up here in 1852, during the gold rush. So we're an old established family. All my four grandparents came here from Scotland. And I was born, though, right in the centre of the city. So Rosny Park and all the centre of the city were my playground.

01:30 It was not a very exciting boyhood, I suppose, although it was a good one. I went to Camp Hill School, and on to elementary high. I didn't particularly like school. I suppose it would be more correct to say I didn't like the teacher. She was, I don't think I was a badly behaved child, but some of the teachers were a bit sadistic in those days. But anyhow, I went there.

02:00 My father died, I suppose, when I was about twelve, and of course, there was no social service in those days. It was very hard for my mother. I had an elder brother and sister who were older than myself. So when I turned fourteen, I went to Melbourne, and I got a job with a firm, with Smith's Weekly. It was a well-known newspaper at that time. And I had to board in Melbourne. I got a pound a week, which was two dollars.

02:30 So I didn't know for many years what it was to have money in my pocket. I got to know Melbourne well, because I went to everything that was free. I went to every gallery and museum, and anything else that was possible. And I walked, literally, miles and miles up and rather than get on a tram, because of the fare. Still, I moved a weight off my mother's back by doing that, because of that. I was able to support myself. And it's hard to believe.

03:00 One thing that I never forgave that firm for. When the Depression hit, about 1939 – they were a Sydney firm actually, but they published all over Australia. And I remember they had to economise and I always remember that the Managing Editor, who was on thirty pounds a week, which was an enormous wage in those days, when the average man got about three pounds. He came down from thirty pounds a week, to twenty five,

03:30 and they actually cut me down from twenty five shillings to twenty two and six. They saved twenty five cents, on the boy, and I never forgave them. I always thought that was a shocking thing to do. But it was very hard. But I had my first association with the services at that time. At that time there was a compulsory training system in operation in Australia.

04:00 **We're talking the twenties now, are we?**

Yes, yeah. This was 1929. 1929, I was still boarding in Melbourne. I moved into East Melbourne so as to save the tram and train fares, so I could walk to work, and they had compulsory training system. You had to give up a Saturday afternoon, and a couple of nights a month, and that sort of thing, in the early stages,

04:30 until you got into the full Citizens' Forces [Citizens' Military Force] where you had to do annual camps and so on. I had to start training in June of the year that you became 17, so at sixteen and a half, I had to start training. I should have trained with the army, but by this time, the sea being in my blood a bit from my, the Walker side of the family, I got this idea I'd rather do naval training,

05:00 and I open applied to go in the naval reserve, so I started training about June 1929, at the Naval Reserve Drill Room in Port Melbourne. And I rather liked this, because it was the only chance I ever really had in Melbourne to mix with boys of my own age. And I enjoyed that very much.

05:30 And then the governments, of course, whenever they had to economise, they always economised on the defence forces, and a Labor Government under, I forget who it was, Scullin [James Scullin, Labor Prime

Minister of Australia] I suppose it would be, got in, and they abolished compulsory training. Well, it was a strange thing, of course. A lot of people were delighted to get released

06:00 but it was amazing how many still wanted to carry on, although it was compulsory and there were certainly enough carried on to continue voluntary militia and so on. So I carried on with the naval reserve and I had a lot of fun there. In fact, I used to go there nearly every night of the week, and every Saturday afternoon for recreation, and we went boat sailing on the bay. And I took part in different competitions out in the show ground.

06:30 I was in the field guns crew one year, competing against Williamstown depot. I was a guardsman in competition, and everything you could take part in, in connection with the naval training, I did. The navy proper at this time had become, it got down to a very, very low ebb, due to the Depression. There were very few ships in commission, and they demobilised as many men as they could possible get rid of.

07:00 But it got to the stage, of course, where they had to provide for some future manpower. The word went around, early 1932, that they were going to recruit in a small way, and my mother by this time had come to Melbourne, and I was living with her at Middle Park, actually, and my sister came down too.

07:30 So we had a small family living together in Melbourne, and we discussed whether I could afford to go in the navy because it meant a considerable reduction in my pay by that time. But anyway, to cut a long story short, I joined up. They recruited very lightly. They took, I suppose, about ten or twelve from Melbourne and the same number from Sydney,

08:00 and when we got down to depot, they mixed the classes. They weren't all Sydney and Melbourne classes. They mixed you up into classes of about a dozen, and you started your training there. It was a very intensive training, and when I look back on it I realise how thoroughly we were trained, because I can remember word for word a lot of the stuff that I was taught as an ordinary seaman.

08:30 And just as an aside, one thing that I often think is sad. I was reading the official history about the navy in the war, and it covered those years, before it started on the war, and it said that due to the situation of wanting so few men, they could afford to pick recruits of higher physical and educational standards.

09:00 Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but that's what the official history said, and I thought in that case, it's very sad to think that of those hand-picked youths that joined up with me, the best part of half of them died in the war. And it makes you think what a loss to the country breeding stock, to put it plainly, the war was. But that was in the future. We all got on well together, and it was a very intensive training, and because there was so few of us, they could use the best of instructors

09:30 and work the life out of us. But you did, after you kitted up and you had a few lectures, that sort of thing, the first two months you didn't move off the parade ground. You went up and down, up and down, up and down the asphalt but, of course, you did a permanent forced style. You didn't do just right turn, left turn. You went right through the full ceremonial procedures. Funeral following procedures, drill for lining the streets, and guards and sentries, and everything you could possibly do. The first three weeks

10:00 you just did pure squad drill. And then you got a rifle and bayonet and the next five weeks you did drill with the rifle. And somehow, looking back, I always think that, years later, when they recruited thousands of men in the navy, got big I think those first couple of months, marked the permanent man for the rest of his time.

10:30 I could more or less pick them out on board ship. Although they were dressed the same as I could pick out the 'permas' [permanents], they used to call them in the navy. The army called them regular. We called them perma, permanent man.

How could you tell?

I don't know how I could tell, but I suppose it was just the way they presented themselves, really. I remember years and years and years later, when I was a petty officer in the Warramunga, a chap came up and said, "There's six," what the army called, "Reinforcements."

11:00 A draft of six arrived and I was delighted to think I was getting six more men. And I went down and I spoke to them, and told them it was a good ship and I hoped they'd keep it that way, and so on. And somehow or other, I don't know, they were all dressed up and I looked at one chap and I said, "Are you permanent?" and he said, "Yes". And I looked at another one and I said, "Are you permanent?" and he said, "Yes," and I was dead right. Whether it was the way they stood up and presented themselves,

11:30 or the way they wore a uniform, but there was no explaining it. But I put it back to the initial training. We did, after two months there, we did a month in the gunnery school, where you drilled at every type of gun and learnt to strip the mechanisms down and that sort of thing. Did machine gun, Lewis gun [light machine gun], you did courses at the rifle range. You did bayonet fighting.

12:00 I did everything possible. The gunnery school was the place that everybody dreaded. That was the place that set the standard for discipline anywhere in the navy, was the gunnery school. And as a matter of fact, it rather appealed to me. I liked it very much. Now we did a month in torpedo school, where you did partly torpedoes and partly electrical. Doing lens laws, Ohm's laws and photos law and all that sort of stuff, and connecting things up

12:30 in series and parallel. One thing that was very, very thrilling for the lads about that, that the torpedo branch generally did most of the demolition work, so we were trained in setting up gun cotton charges and so on, and we had to go out the back paddock behind the depot and blow holes in the ground and so on. And this, of course, was very appealing. Then we did…

13:00 What I'm telling you is what marked the difference between the chap who was called up during the war. We had to give him a quick course, so that he had a good basic knowledge and send him to sea. But time was nothing in the permanent times. You had to be well trained, and so we did an awful lot of stuff that we wouldn't have taught men during the war. And that was typical, demolition, using gun cotton and so on.

Gun cotton, what's that?

Mmmm?

Gun cotton?

Gun cotton, yes. It's an explosive used for,

13:30 well, if you wanted to blow down the pylon of a bridge, or something like that. As a matter of fact, during the war I was on a destroyer that landed a landing party of 'Blue Jackets' [navy seamen] on the coast of France with cases and cases and cases of gun cotton. So they obviously were going to have some fun. Provided they didn't get overrun by the Germans, but that's getting ahead. We did three weeks in the signals school, and in the signals school I joined up as a seaman mind you. This is the training a seaman got.

14:00 You had to learn every flag in the naval code, every flag and every pennant. The idea being, that if you were away in a boat, if you saw flags and you were on a ship, you could tell whether they were calling you or not. You had a boat signal book, and they would run up a hoist of numbers, and you could look up in the signal book and see what they were sending to you.

14:30 It might be, "Proceed in shore and bring off a postman," or something like that. And we also had to learn semaphore. We didn't send that at a signalman speed, of course. They signalled about the speed of light, the signalmen. But we had to be able to send a signal off, and you were standing on Man O'War steps, or something, and you wanted to speak to the ship, you had to be able to signal that you were sending a semaphore message. That was a handy thing to do. And actually speaking, I could still do that if I wanted to.

15:00 The big thing then was two month seamanship. You were issued with a seamanship manual when you joined, and you did that from cover to cover. Rigging sheer legs, and derricks, and letting anchors go, and mooring to two anchors. All the rules of the road, and the lights at sea, and the rules for preventing collisions. Sailing canvas. You name it, and of course, at that stage we didn't just do bends and hitches with rope,

15:30 we were still doing all the ornamental rope work. Fancy knots and fancy splices and so on. And when you got to sea, all the ships in those days were ornamented with that type of stuff. So it was really a tremendous training. I also did a couple of weeks' school. The idea of that was so that you could pass what they called Educational Test Part 1. It was necessary to do that before you could be made a leading seaman at a later stage.

16:00 So to save you having to organise that for yourself once you got to sea, they made sure you'd passed that before you went out of depot. So anyway, oh, we had some interesting times, I always think. I don't know why these things come to mind, but one of the most awful experiences I had was just before we left depot. It reminded me of when I was little and in church with my very strict Presbyterian parents,

16:30 and my brother would tell me something funny out the side of his mouth, and I was nearly injuring myself to avoid laughing, and it came to mind, just before we left depot, the governor-general came down to the depot, for some purpose or other, and they had to provide a guard of a hundred men, and of course, my class was in it. And to the old ABs [Able Seaman] this was, you know,

17:00 two bob a dozen, like it was to me in later years, but to us this was a tremendously awe-inspiring experience, to be in a guard of honour. And I don't know why this has stuck in my mind, but we were lined up and, because the bravest men in the navy, I always found, were the men in the rear rank of a guard, and they could make all sorts of witticisms while you were standing looking very solemn in the front rank. Anyway, the governor-general arrived and we gave the royal salute and everything,

17:30 and we came to the order for the inspection, and of course, to us this was very awe inspiring. We were standing with the heels together, and knees back and eyes looking up slightly above their own level, and all of that sort of thing, and along comes the Officer of the Guard, and the governor-general. But ahead of them, and he should have been behind them, was the sheepish looking fellow.

18:00 He must have been some sort of civil secretary, or something, and instead of being behind them, he was walking about a pace in front. And he had a dove grey vest and a swallow-tailed coat, and spats, and with all things, a rolled up umbrella, at a naval depot. He walked past looking at us with an inane grin on his face. And just as I was thinking, "What a queer looking fellow." The fellow behind me said, "Keep your eye on it while I get a stick."

18:30 It nearly paralysed me. And of course by this time, the governor-general's one pace away from me. And I never forgot that in my life. "Keep your eye on him while I get a stick." And I nearly injured myself, you know, trying to keep a straight face as they walked past, because… But isn't it amazing? You see death and destruction in later years, but a thing like that really makes far more impression on you. You never forget it. I love that expression. But anyway, I went off to various ships.

19:00 In those days, unlike during the war where a lot went to iron sweepers and corvettes, they were a bit more strict with us. You never went to a destroyer or a small ship. Your first draft was always to a cruiser because they were big ships, and they ran training classes and kept training you, and the standard of discipline though was much higher of course, than on the small ships where everybody mixed together. And they were run on very strict lines.

19:30 Seeing this is of an historical nature, it's interesting to recall the state of the navy at the time. You know, when I joined the Royal Australian Navy it was one twenty-one years old. It had been officially recognised in 1911. And the result was a large proportion of the ship's company were British. We were all British. And we were proud of it. But I mean, they came from Britain.

20:00 They were RN [Royal Navy] or they were ex RN who had been in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] and stayed on. All the senior officers were Royal Navy. And a fair percentage of the other officers, because it wasn't until about the year I joined that the first two RAN College officers reached commander's rank. And so all commanders and above were all Royal Navy, on loan out here,

20:30 and a lot of the lieutenants were, because our own junior officers used to go and spend two or three years in the Royal Navy for experience, and these others came out on exchange. So we had a mixture of RAN trained officers and RN. And you would probably be interested to know that the ratings far preferred the RN officers to the RAN officers. First thing you'll say is "Why?"

21:00 I don't known why, but I'm firmly convinced that that Royal Australian Naval College brainwashed, I suppose is the expression, these lads. They went in between twelve and thirteen years of age. They were trained to be naval officers and nothing else. I think it gave them a very narrow outlook on life, to take them at that age. And

21:30 I've discussed this, since I came out of the service, with officers, and I'll say this for them, they've agreed with me too. But when they came to sea as cadet midshipmen, it wasn't long before they sent them off then to do about two years in the Royal Navy for experience, on big ships and so on, and so that they could qualify and come back here as full-blown midshipmen

22:00 and go later as sub-lieutenant. And I think that the basic idea of the RAN College was that these boys had to be taught that they were aristocrats, they were naval officers, and they had to be able to compete when they got to the Royal Navy. And strangely enough, the Royal Navy officers, to my experience, weren't like that. But I thing this was the idea. I mentioned to one captain, not at the time, but after the war, and he said, "You're quite right." He said, "You know, when we went on leave over there,

22:30 we had to go and stay at Lord and Lady Somebody's place and go and watch the hunting and the shooting, going off to the hunt and all that sort of thing." But there's good and bad in everybody, but I would be quite confident in saying that if you asked the sailors, and there was some pretty rough characters in the navy in my day, but if you asked them if they preferred the RN or the RAN officers, almost all would say "Oh, give us the RN blokes any time," you know,

23:00 because we found they weren't like that. They were much more approachable than our own. But that's an historical observation and it would be interesting if there were many permanent blokes alive to ask them if they agree with me on that point.

Don, you said earlier that the sea was in your blood.

Yes.

Can you explain why that was?

Oh, yes. The Walker's all came from Kintyre in Scotland,

23:30 basically at Campbellton. The all finished up at a place called Campbellton. It was a fishing and seafaring port down on the Mull of Kintyre. And they had been seamen there for a long time, and my grandfather was, Donald, he was at sea from a very early age, and in fact, he had a go at the navy.

24:00 Some years ago, I'd heard the story, passed down to me word of mouth, and I decided to check them, and I got the record from the Public Records Offices in London. And sure enough, he had. He served in HMS [His Majesty's Ship] Speedy, which was an armed cutter, I found out, and then he went to what we'd call a light cruiser. A fifth rate I think, called HMS Brilliant. And he saw a man flogged and that sort of thing and he thought, "That's no good to him," and he deserted.

24:30 And I was amazed, afterwards, to read that he deserted in the Cove of Cork in the south of Ireland. He would get back to Scotland easy because he would only need to get down to the docks or something and say, if chaps didn't know him, say "I'm Neil Walker's son. Can you ferry me home?" Or something,

because but he would have had no trouble. But he didn't get landed at Campbellton. He walked for miles over the hills and everything and he arrived in the early hours of the morning at Campbellton.

25:00 But his father was a very distinguished seaman too. And he apparently said, "Well, if you don't like the life, there's no good going on." I don't know what the terms of his engagements were at the time, but I have no record of him being chased up. He just went back. They were all pretty distinguished. I mean, his brother, John Walker, was decorated by the French government. For a thing that was very unusual. There was a French ship went up at the entrance to,

25:30 or outside Campbellton Harbour, in enormous gales, and the weather was that bad that the lifeboat's crew wouldn't go out, which in a seafaring port, would be a fair indication of what the weather was like. And so anyhow, John Walker jumped up in the boat, because a crowd had gathered, and he said, "If I can get a crew, I'll take her out." And he got his crew, and he went out and did the job on this boat, and he,

26:00 I've seen the medal as a matter of fact. I've got pictures of it, too. He was decorated by the French government for that. He lost himself at sea after it. But they were brought up in that atmosphere. They generally started as fisherman and then they became skippers of schooners, and they traded across to Ireland and those places, and so that's where I got this, I got this call of the sea from, I suppose.

26:30 It gave me tremendous pleasure in later years to go to Campbellton and to get to know all the other side of the family. But they were all seafaring men, and when it came to the gold rush – we're going back a bit aren't we? He walked up to Bendigo and, it was typical of the standard that those Scottish working-class people were brought up to, you know. He said afterwards that, a party off the ship that he came out with –

27:00 he worked his way out as a seaman – and a party of them set off for Bendigo. And he told my father, he was dead before my time, but he told my father that one of his outstanding memories of his early days was that, on the Sunday, they were in the Black Forest, and they didn't march that day because that was the Sabbath, the Lord's day. And he said, as the sun went down these chaps all stood up,

27:30 and sung the 100th psalm. It's amazing, isn't it? Only working chaps, but that was how they'd been brought up in Scotland, you know. And so, anyway, we digressed a bit. But if you're interested and you go down the street near the fountain there, you'll see the great big city family hotel, there at Charing Cross. Well, that's the site of his first big claim, where he pulled enough gold out there to go straight home and marry his girl. And he brought her out here

28:00 and lived in tents and everything. My first uncle was born in a tent. And they roughed it. But they were people of character. There's no doubt about that. He brought out, when he went home to get married, he brought out his younger brother, Neil. Now this Neil had been on his father's ship at about nine years of age. This is a great indication of the positive obsession the Scots had with education. After they'd been digging here for a while, and the mining started to get more established,

28:30 Neil got a bit fed up with swinging a pick, I suppose, he opened what they called a puddling machine. And then steam came in and he qualified as a steam engine driver at the mines. And from there he started to take on the mines themselves, and to finish up with, he opened an office in the main street, and he became a legal manager for the mining companies. He was auditor for the borough of Eaglehawk. He was

29:00 financial secretary for Manchester Unity Oddfellows Lodge. All those sort of things. He was a fellow that had been brought up as a seaman, you know. But they had this pension. They were all very, very literate. But we're getting back to my family history, rather than the navy. That's your fault. You started me off on that.

That's all right. I know I did.

But that's where the seafaring background came from. And, where did I get up to? I'd gone to sea, had I? I went to the Canberra.

29:30 **Just to get this clear. The dates. When had you joined?**

I joined in May 1932. I'd had about three years in the Navy Reserve. Saturday afternoon sailor, you know, before that.

That was in the twenties.

I was rapt in that. And I did a week's continuous training at the naval depot at Westernport. And I did a week's continuous training on board Canberra. Because in those days, I took my annual leave to do that.

30:00 But yes, at May '32 I joined the service, and then I trained all that year at the depot, and in January '33 it would be, I went to Canberra. She was the flagship at the time. There were only three or four ships in seagoing commission. A lot in reserve. And oh, she was quite a good ship.

30:30 But all very strict, you know. Everything was run per the book. But still, you continued to get trained there. But I really felt in those days, you were an extremely well trained seaman before you left the depot. Really, all you needed to do was see the real thing and drop into it. You knew, if you were told to do something, you knew what they were talking about. Only a couple of cruisers on her.

31:00 Finance was very, very tight at that time. The Depression was in full swing. And if you went cruise, you travelled about seven or eight knots to conserve oil so that you could have some high speed exercises from time to time. And I did a trip over to New Zealand in her. We had a great time there. Australia and Canberra, we both went to New Zealand, and oh, we had boat pulling competitions against the New Zealanders,

31:30 and all that sort of thing. I studied like billyo in there, and I'll tell you one thing that pushed me ahead. I didn't realise it, of course, but from an advancement point of view, I had joined the navy at the right time. It couldn't have got any lower in strength and eventually the European situation was going to make anybody with two eyes in their head realise we had to start to build up the forces.

32:00 And so, although I didn't know it, I'd joined the navy at a good time. And also, these courses that I told you about, that we did at training depot, you could get seniority for your results in those, because when you went to sea, you did fourteen months as an ordinary seaman before you got made AB. And I tell you, when you got made AB, you'd made it. That was one of the most satisfying promotions you got in you life in the navy.

32:30 You were no longer at the bottom of the barrel. But you could get a month for gunnery and a month for torpedo and half a month for something else, and so on. But any way, according to the high marks you got. But as it happened, I was the only one in class that got the full five months, and so I never looked back from this. So after I did nine months at sea, I got made AB,

33:00 and I immediately started to push like billyo to get into the leading seaman's class, which I eventually did. So really, I was an AB passed for leading seaman, when some of my class mates were still getting made AB, you know. And of course, although we didn't know it, the navy was about to expand to billyo. Not that they pushed you,

33:30 you still had to keep your nose clean, as they called it in the navy. And I tell you what, you got run in for the drop of a hat in those days. If you lost a tin of metal polish over the side, you got run in. As though that would push up the national debt.

What sort of action would they take against you? How would they discipline you?

Oh, they'd scale the punishment in those days. If it was some very, very petty thing that any civilised person wouldn't even have noticed,

34:00 you'd get two days number 16, which was two hours extra work in the evening, something like that. But apart from that you got a thing called 10A, you'd get seven days 10A. That might be for being a little bit insolent. Not too insolent, because they were pretty hard on that. But if you got a bit cheeky, or you forgot to do some job, you might get seven days number 11,

34:30 and that was a pest of a thing. You got up half an hour before anybody else, and started to wash down decks and all that sort of thing. And then you fell in at half past twelve instead of one o'clock after dinner. And then in the evening you did two hours' work during the dog watch if nobody else was off. It was a thoroughgoing pest. And then, of course, for anything like insolence, well then, of course, you could get sent to the detention barracks or somewhere.

35:00 If you got sent to that detention barracks in Garden Island, you came back about two stone lighter. It was a thing that would never be permitted now, you know. You could get celled, and I think cells was a sadistic punishment, really. I don't want to sound anti-discipline. It was my job to impose discipline for a lot of my time in the navy, and I hope I did it in a way for which I was respected.

35:30 But a chap that, you know, broke leave when the ship was under sailing orders or something like that, or was guilty of insolence, he could get seven days in the cells – first three on low diet, which was bread and water. The hardest thing I ever thought about cells, not that I ever did it, but I saw others do, was the fact that you served the time in a white duck suit, which are pretty awful to sleep in in cold weather, without a blanket or anything.

36:00 Slept on hard boards, and you got a wooden block for a pillow. And you picked a pound of oakum every day, which was a pound of rope that had to be teased up like wool. They used it in corking decks. It was a very old traditional punishment, I suppose, going back hundreds of years, picking oakum. But one of the worst things, I thought, was that you had a bright light on all night. A bloke lying there without any blankets, in a cell block, with a bright light on,

36:30 that was really torture. And very often you got first three days on low diet. Bread and water. And to tell you the truth you didn't have to, this is disjointed of course, it's all over the place. But you didn't have to do anything very, very terrible to get this sort of punishment. I knew one bloke, old Elmo, got seven days in the cells, first three on low diet,

37:00 for sunbaking against orders. You know, the commander had said people weren't to sunbake and he did, and he got caught. He only got seven days cells for that. Well, I think if that sort of thing happened now you'd have ombudsmen and you'd have members of parliament and everything. But we just took it as part of naval life, you know. But anyway, getting back to business.

37:30 Talking about, no, before we get back, I'll tell you how petty some of the officers were, and don't think I

was an insubordinate man. I carried a lot of authority myself, and I think I got on all right with the officers, but they always struck me as petty. Now, I'll give you an example. A pal of mine, John Mullen, he was serving in Sydney and they went to Hobart. And he wasn't a boy under training or anything; he was a petty officer.

38:00 And he had friends in Hobart, so he stayed overnight with them and they drove him down to the ship in the morning. Leave expired at 7.30 am. So he stood talking to him on the jetty, and he said, "Just on time. I'd better go back." And he was walking up the gangway and the bell struck, and he got run in when he got to the top. Off cap and charged with being adrift over leave. The man was halfway up the gangway!

38:30 So I mean, it wouldn't stand up in any other court of law. They would have said, "Well, if he wasn't on ship, was he ashore. He wasn't ashore, he was on the ship." So I think it reflected a terribly petty outlook on life. What the devil did it matter whether the bloke was halfway up the gangway or was on board? It was only a matter of eight feet or something. But you had to be on your guard against this sort of thing all the time, you know. But it was hard training.

39:00 But mind you a lot of youth would be a hundred percent improved by having that sort of training. But the present day serviceman, I mean, that would be like, comparing the present day service – and I've been to some of the depots in connection with another thing I'm connected with – it'd be like staying at the Hotel Windsor now compared to camping out in a tent. The difference was so great.

39:30 But mark you, we've got to be honest, we were well disciplined before we joined the navy in those days. You were well disciplined at home. You were more than well disciplined by school teachers if you got the wretches I had. And you know, most people had been to church and Sunday school on Sunday afternoons, and all that sort of thing. So you were really more fitted to take on a severe disciplined life than the young person of today would be,

40:00 without detriment to them. That's, I think that's a reasonable assumption.

Can you tell me a bit about that. Your parents, your teachers . . . .

Tape 2

00:30 **So Don, before we get on to more of your training. You went from ordinary seaman to able bodied seaman. I want to talk about that. Just tell us a little bit more if you can about your parents and school. You know, you said that there was a lot of strict discipline. I just want to get a sense of what that was like.**

Yes. To go back to schooldays. Yes. My father was a lovely man. He was a very strong temperance man.

01:00 And we had quite a happy life. My mother was a very, very fine woman. My father was mad on the fire brigade. He was from his early youth. And he was an officer in the Bendigo Fire Brigade, and I think that's why he set up business almost opposite the fire station, so he'd be handy there. And it was always his proud boast.

01:30 I don't know why he should have boasted about it, but I was born when the fire bell was ringing. Years later, when my mother was about ninety, she said to me, "I never forgave your father for racing off to a fire," she said, "when you were being born." She said, "I could have died you know." But not on your life. He had to go off and answer the fire bells, you know. And did a tremendous amount of work. All of which was voluntary in those days.

02:00 And I was fire brigade mad myself. From the time I was a tiny child we lived opposite it, and I inherited his love for the fire brigade. But I will say this, that it prevented him from doing a lot of things that would have raised a lot of money. He was a fully qualified man with figures, and he was offered opportunities to go to Melbourne with big firms,

02:30 but he would never go because he didn't want to leave the fire brigade which, as I say, was a volunteer job he didn't get paid for. And my mother suffered by that. We never had much money. He was a very respected man. He was secretary of the fire brigades association. He was on the fire brigade's board as a matter of fact. He used to go to Melbourne once a month for that. But not anything that brought in much money.

03:00 But nevertheless we had a very happy time. But the Camp Hill School, of course, was only a short walk from us and we all went to Camp Hill School. But for some reason, I never liked school. I was never game to wag it or anything like that, but I feel the teachers were very, very hard in those days. I suppose, there's a lot to be said on their side –

03:30 they could handle a class of about forty whereas teachers nowadays, of course, are complaining if they've got twenty it's too many. But they had classes of about forty. But they inflicted very severe discipline. I think it was the idea of keeping order. But then they had a lot of good ideas, that school teachers in later years gave away because it was interfering with children's rights, or it was too

militaristic.

04:00 When we, at Camp Hill, when we fell in, we fell in, in exactly the same place each day on the ground, and then the headmaster would come out and call the school to attention, and if he wanted to give you some notes about something, announce it. But then he, you know, he called attention, right and left turn, and you marched about twice around the school ground,

04:30 and then you peeled off and you went up to your classes, and stood alongside your desk. The teacher came in and she said, "Step in," and "Class, sit." Of course, nowadays, they think, "Oh, that's militaristic." I know from my service days, that they had us under the thumb from the time the bell rang. And it's, to me, is one of those principles you learn, that you can be a good bloke and let discipline slide, but you can never get it back.

05:00 Once you let people know, "Oh, he's easy, this character," it's too late to try and tighten up. Well, I suppose that worked on that principle, that if you didn't do anything right, well, "Come out the front and you get the strap," you know. But when I look back on it, and I think it was a frightful punishment. You get a great big strong man ripping that strap into your hands, and after all,

05:30 what are you, a kid eight or nine years of age – he wasn't very heroic. If it was so necessary, why was it against the law to give it to girls? It was only the boys that got it. So that doesn't stand up, really, to examination from a legal point of view. But they kept you in a state of fear, there's no doubt about it. But I'll give them this end, they could maintain a class.

06:00 But don't worry. Some of them would lay it into you for getting sums wrong, and that sort of thing, which was against the law. But of course, they always denied it. Later in years, I used to read Hansard with parliamentary reports, and you'd see where people in some town had complained about the school teacher, and that he gave the kid half a dozen for getting sums wrong, and the minister's reply was always the same, "No, no. No child ever gets the strap for not being able to do work. It's only for discipline purposes." Well, that was 'poppycock' and 'balderdash' [untrue],

06:30 I can tell you that. But, I didn't go much on this. But I was a timid boy I suppose, and I possibly was unduly scared of them. I don't know. But at least I never tried to wag it or anything. I wasn't game to, no. I know people say, "Oh, wasn't it lovely at school? The best days of your life," you know. Well, if they're my age I always think that distance lends enchantment to the view.

07:00 I couldn't see anything nice about it. I thought it was rotten. The only time, I always regretted having a birthday in December, because it was too close to Christmas, and you know, there was only once I was ever pleased with being, having a birthday in December, was when I turned fourteen and I left. And one of the satisfactions I got, was a great big schoolmaster,

07:30 I won't mention his name – he's got descendants, I suppose, the same as I have – but I couldn't stand this fellow. He was a wicked man with a strap. And this was high up in the elementary grade, and he taught me two years of algebra. And when I left I hadn't the faintest idea of what he was even talking about. So as an ex-instructor myself, I'd say he was a rotten teacher. But I always got satisfaction when it came round December and he walked up and down amongst the aisles and said,

08:00 "What are you going to do?" and they said, "I'm going on to tech [technical] school, Mr so and so," you know. And, "What are you going to do?" "Oh, I'm going on to the high school and so on." And he said, "What are you going to do?" and so on. And he said, "What are you doing, Walker?" and I said, "I'm leaving school." "You can't leave school," he said, "When do you turn fourteen?" And with satisfaction I said to him, "Yesterday, sir." That was one of the satisfactions I got from school. To be able to say something to him that he had no reply for.

08:30 Mark you, had I gone on to high school, I don't know if my mother could have afforded to keep me in high school, anyway. But that's, you know, sort of hypothetical situation. But my sister was in Melbourne for something or other and she met a chap that we knew, and he said there was a job going at Smith's Weekly, and so I packed my bag and hammock as I would have said in the navy,

09:00 and I raced down to Melbourne, and I started work on the 25th April, 1927. I started with Smith's Weekly, and I was with them for five years. But I struck a bad time really. The things were pretty bad in those days, and it got worse as it got towards the Depression, and particularly the last couple of years, about 1929 onwards. Wages were poor

09:30 and I worked there, sometimes, as a boy of fourteen, I worked there till twenty past ten at night. No overtime, or anything. It was next to slavery, you know. But they wouldn't have thought that you were hard treated by. Because in those days, they always had the old saying, "Yeah, but you've got a job." And when you think that thirty percent of the work force was out of work in the Depression, and that didn't mean husbands and wives, one of them was out.

10:00 The man was the breadwinner of the house. There was very little work for women, except in offices and so on, and if a man was out, he would come home in tears and tell his wife that he'd got notice that Friday night with his wages. He wasn't required back. They were really terrible days. People were out of work, and of course, eventually their clothes got that shabby they couldn't apply for a job in what they were used to, you know.

10:30 This is a matter of history that most people now have forgotten. Sidney Myer, for instance gave a lot of money to help to pay men to build the Yarra Boulevard [Yarra River]. And chaps that were, they didn't dash it out to everybody. I mean, you had to be a married man with children or something like that, and you got the preference of a job. And they got a small pay. And you know,

11:00 chaps that had been used to executive positions and that sort of thing, were wheeling barrows, or wielding crow bars, but they were able to bring something home to the wife and that was the main thing. And I always think that, even if a chap took the most humble of work, when he came home with a pay envelope, he'd got it by the dignity of his own labour, you know. It was something to look back on, that. A lot of work was done like that during the Depression,

11:30 to create work. Public jobs and so on. But I can tell you this, that I used to look at it in years to come. Up in Russell Street, at the back of what used to be the Royal Melbourne Hospital then, there was a long brick wall that was the laundry. And the wall was always warm. I can tell you, for years afterwards that wall was greasy,

12:00 black colour right along, and that was from unemployed men standing against that wall to keep warm. Really, they were bad times, those. So although I worked very hard for a youngster, and didn't have the money to go to anything much, and I used to get embarrassed going to work because my hair was a bit long, or my boots were a bit out of repair. I just had to count how many pay days it would be before I could get that done.

12:30 At least I had a job. There was no social services. There was no doles, or anything like that. But, like all hardship, I think it built character. People came through that, and they could look the world in the face and say, "Well, we survived it and we paid our own way, and we didn't cost anybody else anything." I suppose they were horrible times to look back on, but they were good times in that regard,

13:00 because you'd say, "Well, I survived that." And that was the general attitude. But, getting back to your question, I still preferred doing that than living under the discipline of some of those school teachers. But maybe the disciplinary training that they gave me helped when I joined the navy, but it comes back to the thing that I said to you before, that although the discipline was very strict in the navy,

13:30 people that joined it were probably more disciplined than young people going in it now would be. Some of the things that I see now appall me, where a ship gets ordered overseas and blokes decide they don't want to go, and the paper saying, "What are you doing about these blokes that won't go?" And three weeks before it's time, the navy saying, "Oh, we're deciding what action." Huh. Decide what action. They'd have decided that in five minutes, and he'd have been in the cooler, quick smart.

14:00 So things were, I suppose it's a different world. You've got to go along with it. But anyway we got up to the fact where I was serving in the Canberra, didn't we, when I got made AB on there? Which was marvellous.

What did that entail? The difference between ordinary and able bodied seaman.

Oh, an ordinary seaman was where you started, unless you were under eighteen when you were ordinary seaman 2nd class.

14:30 But you were an ordinary seaman until you'd had quite a bit of seafaring experience. And then you got to able seaman. It meant that you were an experienced seaman. You know, that you'd learnt the trade at sea as well as on shore. And apart from the increase in pay, it gave you status. You know, the navy, even in the lower echelons, like everything in life, it had its own standards.

15:00 When you went to sea as an ordinary seaman, if an AB had his favourite place on the mess stool, you didn't sit there. He mighty soon let you know that you sit up the other end. And he was only an AB, possibly with fifteen years in the navy and never get a day's promotion, but he made sure you didn't sit in his favourite seat, and that's why you didn't give any cheek to an AB or he'd give you a backhander quick smart.

15:30 So, when you got up to that class yourself, you probably, to excuse some of the more mundane jobs, "Oh, no, he's an AB, you know." And it was a feeling of great satisfaction. And it was a feeling of a few bob a day more, too, which was important. I had a good training in the Canberra and I liked it all right. Then I put in for, see,

16:00 after you'd been to sea you used to go back to the depot at times. All the schools were at Westernport – gunnery school, signal school, torpedo school and cooking school, music school . Everything was down there. So you used to put if for 'recommend to qualify' for such and such a thing, and if they thought you were suitable, well finally you got sent back to form a class at depot. And I put in to qualify seaman gunner,

16:30 which was the first gunnery qualification that you got in those days, and sure enough, eventually I got sent down to depot to qualify seaman gunner. It was a three months course. And I always thought, in later years I used to take seaman gunners course myself when I was a gunnery instructor, and I always thought it was a lovely course. You really got a very good grounding,

17:00 more advanced than you got when you were an ordinary seaman in your training. And also, of course,

you'd had experience at sea, and seen guns firing and so on. You learnt, they let you back on the parade, first of all, the gunnery school, to smarten you up, and give you plenty of bayonet fighting and section leading and all that. If I think of it, talking about bayonet fighting and section leading, I'll mention a very important point later, if I remember.

17:30 But oh, you did a bit of fire control. That was the direction of gun fire, pyrotechnics, the assembling and firing of rockets and flares and so on, pretty advanced stuff, with machine gun, and Lewis gun, and all that sort of thing. And eventually you did exams in all these things and you would qualify seaman gunner and you got a gun and a star to put on your arm.

18:00 And so when you went back to sea you had a slightly more advanced job, perhaps on the guns. It was a good course. Now, I'll tell you something interesting about that. Seaman gunner was the first specialist rating that they ever brought in the navy, back in the days of sail.

18:30 As the cannons started to get a little bit more complicated, and they got locks to fire them with and everything, they developed the idea that they should train men in these, and teach them a bit more, and they took HMS Excellent, an old battle ship, and they converted it into a gunnery school. And they put classes through

19:00 and they stipulated to the fleet at sea that they didn't want any ' WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s' as we called them, any 'fowls' sent in to get rid of them. They wanted good men sent in, recommended men, and they got these men sent in from sea. And they formed classes and they gave them plenty of training with the rifle and the cutlass. And the drill at the guns – the proper way to do drill –

19:30 the idea being, I suppose, that when they went back to sea they would instruct the rest of the gun crews the proper way to do things. And I have read books written by men many, many years ago, who went through the ranks of the navy, and they've all said the time they did at Whale Island, or at HMS Excellent, was the best time they had in the navy. I suppose they felt they were somebody at last. They were being treated, and it didn't take long to occur to the navy that it was foolish to lose these men.

20:00 See, at that time the ships went round and the captains recruited chaps at port. You know, talked them into joining the navy and so on, but there was no security as far as your job's concerned. You could join a ship and twelve months later she paid off, and they'd put you on the wharf at Portsmouth, or somewhere, and said, "Well, you're out of work." And as far back as Lord Nelson's [Viscount Horatio Nelson, British admiral] day, he said, "If they'd only…" When they got had the press gangs [kidnapping men for forced navy service] going, Lord Nelson himself said,

20:30 "If they'd only double the sailor's pay and have them sign on for a number of years, they wouldn't need the press gang." And he was right. So they decided these seaman gunners could sign on, and do five years and five years until they got up to twenty-two years, and they could be pensioned off. And this system proved so satisfactory that they extended it to the whole service,

21:00 and put in permanent service where men could do twenty-two years in the navy. And they had no more trouble recruiting. But the interesting thing I was going to tell you, when these men finished this three month course at HMS Excellent, they got threepence a day extra, that's about roughly three cents, but in those days that probably bought a loaf of bread and two pints of beer, or something. Well when I finished by course as seaman gunner, in 1934,

21:30 I got threepence a day extra, the same as they did back about 1860 when it was brought in. So pay didn't go up with a meteoric rise, I can assure you of that. But we're digressing all over the place, aren't we?

That's fine.

I qualified seaman gunner, and I was gunnery mad, as a matter of fact, gunnery mad. And that was my first step into the gunnery.

What was it about the guns?

Mmmm?

What was it that appealed to you?

I don't know. I just loved the idea of mucking around with guns, and the idea of gunfire

22:00 and all that sort of thing, I loved it. And also I liked the disciplinary side of gunnery. The gunnery man was the man that stood up straight, and you know, turned right and clicked his heels. And it was the very epitome of discipline and excellence, to be connected to the gunnery school.

22:30 And I didn't go back to Canberra, then. When I did my three month course there and I was qualified seaman gunner, I was an ABSG [Able Seaman, Seaman Gunner] as they called it, I got a draft to Australia. I remember, I had to pick her up, another chap and I had to pick her up in Devonport in Tasmania And we went over on the old 'Oona' [Taroona], a little passenger ship. When we got to Devonport, there was a big heavy swell running,

23:00 and the Australia was anchored out, and she sent us a signal to say that she wasn't running boats, but

was going to try again at five o'clock that afternoon. So I went up the street and went into the Malvern Star shop and used my influence by telling the bloke I knew the manager of the branch in Melbourne, and asked him if he could lend us a couple of bikes. And so, anyway, me and this bloke we rode up to a place called Latrobe;

23:30 it was about twelve miles. And this Ron Porteous was the chap who was with me, and we had a lovely time, went for a drive through the bush and that sort of thing, and came back and the shops were shut, but we went round the back and put the bikes safely in his yard, and went down. Eventually came the boats, and we went out and joined it. My action station there was seaman gunner of ex-magazine.

24:00 I was what they called the main topman. And she was a lovely ship the Australia, and she had a good crew, and I'll tell you why. They had been hand picking, not openly, but you could see that they'd been handpicking people they'd sent to [His Majesty's Australian Ship] Australia for some time, because what was going to happen, HMS Sussex was coming out and bringing the Duke of Gloucester out, for the centenary. This must have been 1935.

24:30 Yes, Melbourne centenary. And when she came out she was going to stay here for two years, the ship, and Australia was going to take him home for two years on exchange with the Royal Navy. They used to do this, not like now: when there's a rumpus when they send them away for eight weeks. They were away for two years.

25:00 And I think for this reason they'd sort of been hand-picking the crew. Oh, I was delighted when I went there. I knew quite a few chaps that I'd served in the Canberra with and so on, and I thought they were a lovely ship's company, and I was very happy there. We went across from Devonport, right across the [Great Australian] Bight to Perth, Fremantle, and then we went up to Shark Bay for three weeks to clean the ship up. And when they said, "Clean the ship up," in those days, I tell you what, they didn't mean give it a wipe with a wet cloth.

25:30 They used to, they used to get going with chipping hammers and they would chip that ship right back to the steel. Funnel, everything, right back to the steel, and then they would red lead it, and then they'd give it a coat of flat paint, and then they'd give it a beautiful coat of enamel, and you even all had to paint in the same direction and everything, and oh, worked like billyo. But it was a fascinating time. It was beautiful hot weather, and we were banging away there and having the time of our lives.

26:00 That Shark Bay was alive with sharks, whales and everything. It was fascinating. Every time you looked out there was whales splashing. Whether they go there to make love or what they do, I don't know, but it must have been the time of the year when they all migrate up from the south, or something. And it was fascinating. And these great things would come up and blow along the side of the ship and so on, and really, it was a great time, and tons of fish there.

26:30 I remember one time the chief and petty officers took a cutter and went sailing and they took a sea net ashore, and they came back and the cutter was just loaded up, all the flooring of the boat was covered up with beautiful big snapper, so much so that they asked for volunteers to come and help scale fish, and they put off that night's meal and served fish to everybody, you know.

27:00 Those sort of interludes were quite good. Anyway we came down to Perth, or to Fremantle, looking absolutely spruced up of course, and shining, because we always had to look good if we were going to meet up with anybody from the RN. We had to be at least as good as them, and of course we never carried marines in the Royal Australian Navy, the seamen were the military branch.

27:30 So when it came to providing a guard of honour on the quarterdeck and that sort of thing, and you had marines on the ship opposite, who were amazing people, you know, we drilled and drilled and drilled to make sure that our Blue Jacket guard was as good as theirs. That was the situation. Well, we came across the bay with her, across the Bight, went into Adelaide, and of course everywhere, the towns were all in fete for the visit of the duke, this sort of thing, you know, and celebrations everywhere.

28:00 We came into Melbourne and the navy, on that occasion, put on what I would consider would probably be the best outdoor tattoo, if you'd call it, that has ever been put on in Australia. This would be arguable, I suppose, but I've seen some of the tattoos. But the navy's contribution to the celebrations, the Melbourne centenary celebrations,

28:30 they put on a thing at the Melbourne showgrounds, called the Naval Pageant. It was done at night, and it was only played to one side of the ground, as though you were in a theatre. And they brought people out from England to help organise it. It was run on the lines of the annual thing they have in London – the Royal Tournament. It was run on the lines of the Royal Tournament,

29:00 but they had sailors training. They had eighty fellows dancing the hornpipe for one thing. And they had a guard that had been specially trained in Australia, and they put on a display of ceremonial drill, and I tell you what, the Guards [Royal Guard] couldn't have showed them a thing. And they had guns mounted there, and they exchanged naval battles, and oh, it was the most magnificent pageant, so much so that on the last night the police were stationed on the way,

29:30 they were turning traffic back to Melbourne. It was a houseful and you couldn't get in it. But I missed out. I was lucky to be able to go and see that, because otherwise I would have been taking part in it. But I got a telegram, oh, to my complete horror! I was looking forward to two years away with the Australia,

30:00 and I got leave, and I got a telegram during leave to say that, “As you are qualified for advancement, you will not now be proceeding to the United Kingdom in HMAS Australia,” and so I could take another week’s leave and call that my annual leave. Well, I could have broken down and cried, I was that disappointed. But somebody had woke up that I was passed for leading seaman, and I suppose they didn’t want any promotions coming on,

30:30 any more than they could avoid, if you were going away for two years, you know. But I was most disappointed. Buy anyway, I made up for it afterwards. So I went back to Sydney and rejoined her.

Rejoined which ship?

Australia. But then I got a draft to Penguin, which was the depot ship in Sydney, for HMAS Brisbane.

31:00 And this was the horror part of the story, this. They had decided to acquire some more cruisers, you see, and, in other words, to cut it short, they bought HMAS Sydney. She was still under construction, and she was going to be HMAS Amphion [formerly HMS]. The Australian government bought her in the dockyard at Newcastle, and so we had to send a ship’s company

31:30 over to bring her back. So what they did, they commissioned HMAS Brisbane to transport the ship’s company home for Sydney. Brisbane was the same class as the Sydney, that sank the Emden in the First [World] War. It had been swinging around – a coal-burning ship – it had been swinging around the buoy in Sydney for seven years. You can imagine the decrepit condition it was in. So I went to Penguin,

32:00 but we used to have to go and work on the Brisbane to clean it up, and did it take some cleaning up. And I have no hesitation in saying that they had the worst combination of executive officers on there of any ship I ever served in. The commander and the first lieutenant, and the chief PE [Project Engineer], they called the chief buffer, they couldn’t have picked worse,

32:30 which was pretty awful when you think it was going to be such a rotten trip. We had to coal-ship, for instance.

Sorry. Coal ship, did you say?

Yes. Plugging in or filling up with oil, like we did in the other ships. We had to take nine hundred tons of coal on board, as soon as you come in, you know. But anyway, we’ll get to that. We scraped and scraped and scraped the deck with hand scrapers, they were old teak decks, but of course they’d gone black lying out in the weather,

33:00 and we brought her right up to the standard of the modern war ship. We never worked so hard in our lives and we were driven, driven like cattle we were. A most unhappy ship, in my book. It could have been quite a comical experience, taking her home, but it wasn’t. And I tell you what, we polished her right up till she was back to the old brass work, and the gleaming decks and everything else,

33:30 and eventually, of course, it was time to commission her, and I actually joined HMAS Brisbane. I had been on the depot ship, same as everybody else, working on her, well, then they commissioned her we joined her, and we went and lived on board her. The conditions were pretty poor after you’d been used to the big county class cruisers, like Canberra; their living conditions were very good. But anyway,

34:00 eventually, we got the thing going. A big lighter came and coaled us at Sydney, we didn’t have to. But we had to coal her everywhere else. And eventually sailed for England, carrying the crew that were going to be the crew of Sydney, and we picked up recruits at Melbourne, from the naval depot. And we had a very, very rough trip across the Bight. But after that we got into colder,

34:30 ah, warmer weather. We went to Fremantle and up to Singapore, and from there to Colombo and then through the [Suez] Canal into the Mediterranean and home that way.

Don, can I ask how, did you have sea legs from day one? You said it was in your blood. Did you ever experience seasickness?

Oh, yes. I used to get sick from time to time. In fact, I got sick a lot to tell you the truth.

35:00 I found I got sicker on the big ships with their slow, heaving motion than I did on destroyers, which I spent some years in later on, under most appalling conditions. But whether you spent so much time trying to stand up straight and didn’t have time to be sick, I don’t know. But everybody, or some people were never sick,

35:30 but most people got sick if the conditions were bad enough. But the thing was, you couldn’t stop work. There was no question of, “Oh, he’s sick, he can’t do the job.” So consequently, you got over it. Now, my experience of seasickness was if you did a long trip, in very heavy seas, it took about three days,

36:00 and after that you didn’t care whether she stood on end or what. But that was my experience, about three days, it finally passed off and your equilibrium or whatever it was, was balanced. But getting back to Brisbane. Coaling was a thing you’d never see now, of course, but it was done as what we called an evolution. It was always done with full speed. And my heart bled for the people that must have served during the First War, when they were all coal burners.

36:30 Every time they came in the first thing, these coal ships, it was a foul job, and we used to take on about nine hundred tons. And at Fremantle, the lighter came alongside, and nobody was excused coaling. Everybody worked, with the exception of the band. The band used to play. God knows why. For some reason the band was excused. But everybody else, no matter what they were, they coaled ship,

37:00 and I can understand this. In wartime it would be essential when you came in. Get the thing coaled. You might have to go out the same day. You might be halfway through an action or something. And it was a fairly hazardous thing. These hundreds of tons of coal coming on. It came on in bags. And everybody had set jobs. There were ones down in the lighter shovelling the bags, then the bags were hooked on to slings, and they were put on cranes, and then they were tipped out on deck and they went down chutes.

37:30 But of course, the whole ship was covered with coal dust. It was vile, and it used to come down through round chutes, through the mess decks, and the seams of those were even open, and you would see this coal dust coming out like steam and settling on everything. It was hard work, but I won't say people didn't enjoy it. It was a bit of fun, swinging this shovel. And you were always trying to beat records. You know, they'd say, you know, twenty years ago HMS so and so did this in seven hours or something.

38:00 Well, your aim would be to try and do it in six and a half hours or something. And of course, when it was done, out came the hoses. And you had to hose down the funnels and the bridges and everything, and hose down the upper deck and then go down the mess decks, and scrub the mess decks and try and clean them up. A thing that would intrigue you, was that before you started coaling, you rubbed butter into your eyes. All round your eyes

38:30 you rubbed butter. Because otherwise, you looked like a film star. We couldn't get the black. You were black from head to foot of course. And there was no bathrooms or showers in those ships. Now what they called a bathroom was just a tiled space with a row of washbasins, and you threw buckets of water over yourself. But you always greased your eyes up, because that was the hardest. Well, you could scrub your arms but you couldn't scrub your eyeballs, or your eyelids,

39:00 so you always put butter on, otherwise you would go ashore looking like those film stars done up for a take, you know. And these are funny things to look back on, aren't they? But they're things that are history. You know, it wouldn't occur to anybody now because nobody has to coal ship. But we did this. Some places, if you were lucky in those days, you would get natives to do it. There was no cruelty about this. Some places like Singapore and Colombo, the poorer class of natives, that was their living, coaling ships,

39:30 because all the ships in the world were using coal, you know. And they had some methods which were very fascinating. Some they came up with every bloke carrying a basket on their shoulder. Hundreds of them in line, like ants, you know, and tipping them off. And in Singapore, two Chinamen or people of Chinese extraction mainly, they carried a pole with a basket between it,

40:00 and they shuffled up a long plank. And when they got on deck they had a very deft way of one bloke letting the pole go and the basket fell over and it tipped the coal down the hold. It was quite fascinating to watch. Anyway, it was a pretty rotten trip all round, I must say. The engine room couldn't produce enough fresh water for a big ship's company like that,

40:30 with the result there was padlocks on all the water taps, and they were only opened for certain time, at meal times and that for you to get water out. And what should happen, but we got to Aden. In anticipation of what I'm going to tell you, I might tell you that in those days, the navy still kept a good eye on slavery, because, I suppose it still goes on, but it certainly did in places like the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

41:00 These potentates used to get slaves in Africa and bring them across for whatever reason they wanted them. I don't know. And the Royal Navy kept two sloops in the Red Sea, a terrible place to be stationed, you know. They'd be stationed there for about two years, I suppose. About the hottest part of the world. And they used to patrol the Red Sea to try and prevent this slave traffic.

41:30 And you might wonder what this had to do with us. It had a lot to do with us because we were coaling in Aden, about the most formidable place in the world, the barren rocks of Aden. And anyway, news came through then that there was a ship aground, needed assistance, and it was HMS Hastings. It was one of these, in a sandstorm it had sat right on top of an invisible reef out in the Red Sea. The reef was under…

Tape 3

00:30 It was where we were going over in Brisbane and we got the distress call from HMS Hastings. And this ship was aground, and they suspected that some of the crew had rabies from a cat bite or something, so they'd abandoned ship and been taken into Port Sudan or some such place, and we raced up to try and tow her off.

01:00 We had a very, very shocking time there. The heat was terrific and we worked like slaves, paying out cable and wire to tow her and all that sort of thing. It's a long story so I won't go into it, but it was terrifically hard work. We were there for days, but we still couldn't shift her. Eventually we were

ordered to go on and I think they were sending salvage ships out.

01:30 So we went through the Canal, and I had one interesting experience between there and reaching England. Only interesting in this regard, that I'd never seen it done before. They had this fetish, of course, with cleanliness, and after all the work we'd done towing and everything, the ship got a bit chatty, so we worked like billyo getting it cleaned up, because when we were due to arrive in England, to get into Portsmouth we had to pass through

02:00 the lines of one hundred and fifty warships that were drawn up for the royal inspection by King George V. It was the king's jubilee, and they had this big jubilee review. And I think it was a hundred and fifty seven warships, from battleships down to destroyers, and all polished to the nines. Peacetime style, you know. And we were due to arrive, and to go into Portsmouth we had to pass through the lines of these, and we must have looked like Drake's Golden Hind, you know,

02:30 going through with this old ship we had. So of course, they decreed it had to be absolutely spotless, and I got a job that I hadn't seen done before. We actually painted the mast and the upper yards at sea. It was always done at anchor or in dock, and AB Jack Burton from Hobart and I got sent up to paint the yards. They were about a hundred and fifty feet up.

03:00 Climbing out onto the yards, they used to have a saying, you know, "One hand for the ship, and one for yourself when you're up there." It's pretty hard when you've got a paint brush in one hand and a paint pot in the other. So we had to climb out on the end of the yard, and then back like a crayfish toward the mast. But we did that, and so eventually, of course, to cut a long story short, we called at Gib [Gibraltar] and we coaled there,

03:30 and then we went into England. And we got leave as soon as we arrived there. And I had the great satisfaction of going up to Scotland, and meeting a lot of the kinfolk that still lived there. And I was very impressed with everything in Britain. Actually, as far as leave was concerned, we were extremely well off financially,

04:00 because we were on Australian pay, which as inadequate as it might have seemed to us out here, it was far, far superior to the pay British servicemen got. But, on the other hand, we got all their concessions. If you went on leave, you got about a third train fare, and every big town you went to had a Soldiers' & Sailors' Institute, or something, where you could get a bed for about a shilling a night or something, so we lived like fighting cocks while we were over there.

04:30 But it was just a matter of routine. Then the Sydney came down. We sent a party up to steam her down, and the Sydney came from Newcastle, where it had been built, and it was not dockyard built, by the HM [His Majesty's] Dockyards. It was built by Swan Hunter and Wickham Richardson, and they turned it over in immaculate condition to us. They even had women came in and scrubbed the mess tables and everything before they turned it over to us.

05:00 And we really loved that ship. I suppose because we'd came off this rotten coal-burning thing, it seemed a palace to us. But there's something about commissioning a brand new ship. It's your own ship and you're the first ship's company and everything relies on you. And soon after I arrived in England, I got made, to my utter amazement and everyone else's a think, a leading seaman, because I'd only picked up my first good conduct badge, which was three year's service

05:30 on the way over. And I wouldn't argue this, but it was possibly the most rapid advancement to leading seaman in the RAN's history to that time. During the war, of course, with the recruiting and casualties, people could beat that. But as soon as I had three years, I got made a leading seaman.

06:00 And that was a considerable increase in pay, too. That was a welcome acquisition. Anyway we had leave there, and we commissioned the Sydney, and of course, trials took place. Speed trials, gun trials, every other sort of thing. And then we went down to Portland on the [English] Channel, to do some of our exercises, and I remember of all the things that I'd never done before,

06:30 I was given six hands and told to assemble an old aeroplane, because they were going to fire it off the catapult before they fired the real one off. But this was they way in the navy in those days. They didn't ask could you do a thing. It wouldn't have surprised me if they told you to go and tune a piano. You would never have said, "I don't know how to." You'd have mucked around somehow and found somebody that could. There used to be a saying in the navy, you know, if they asked you to tune a piano, for instance,

07:00 and you'd said, "Well, I don't know how to," they'd say, "What! Who passed you out for AB?" You were supposed to be able to do anything. So I had this party ashore, with this old biplane there in pieces, and we had to get all the wires and tighten them up, and then get a chap to hoist it out on a crane onto a lighter. And they took it out on the ship, and they fired that off the catapult, which most of us had never seen a catapult before, but they fired that off,

07:30 and strangely enough it flew about two or three hundred feet before it crashed. But then, they had a great big baulk of wood, about the shape of the fuselage of our seaplanes, and they fired that off. Modern people will laugh at this, but I tell you what, when we fired it off, it went about two hundred feet, and it lobbed fair on a stack of seabirds that were sitting there watching.

08:00 And we old sailors reckoned that ship was doomed, you know. It was bad luck to kill seabirds. And strangely enough, history will prove we weren't far wrong either. But here's an interesting thing too, and it contrasts somewhat perhaps with modern outlook. We eventually sailed from Melbourne and Sydney, Australia in other words. We were due to arrive in Melbourne on the 18th December, 1935,

08:30 and we'd been away since May, and Sydney, a couple of days later. So everybody packed their lockers. Everybody's space we had with toys for children, and presents for wives and sisters. Oh, we were going to a tremendous homecoming. We only steamed out a couple of days, in the Bay of Biscay, and on the day before we arrived at Gibraltar

09:00 they cleared lower deck in the evening and the commander got up and told us he had news for us. He said, "Due to the international situation, the ship has been lent to the Royal Navy, and tomorrow when we arrive in Gibraltar, we'll be joining the Second Cruiser Squadron." Well, you know, it was such a shock that the whole ship's company roared with laughter. You'd be surprised. The situation seemed so ridiculous. Here was us, heading home for Christmas,

09:30 and we'd been away nearly all the year, and they told us that we were staying in the Mediterranean. As I say, the reaction was for everybody to laugh. Well, we got to Gib, and what had happened, a lot of people now won't know this, but Italy, for no reason other than to try and convince the Italians that they were as good as the ancient Romans, invaded Abyssinia, or Ethiopia they call it mainly now.

10:00 And to tell the truth, they did some terrible things there, but it's not for me to go into. But they took Abyssinia and the United Nations, it was called the League of Nations in those days, they decided to impose oil sanctions on Italy and isolate it. So Britain mobilised this huge fleet, and the main strength of the Italians was in fast cruisers,

10:30 so they brought cruisers from everywhere. The Exeter came from South America and somebody else came from Chin, and we had the two Australian cruisers there. And they had a huge fleet there, but as so often happens, Britain was the only one took the field. France had decided that they would drop out of the picture, so the whole situation altered overnight. But we were there for a long, long time,

11:00 and the first of our misfortunes happened. German measles, or rubella, broke out on the ship, and a lot of the ship's company got it. The ship was in quarantine for seven weeks. They shifted it out to a detached knoll that had no connection with the shore, and I had a great stroke of luck here. When the big fleets were in harbour,

11:30 each ship was ordered to contribute a certain number of men. A battleship, it might be sergeant of marines and eight marines and so on. Right down to a cruiser had to land a leading seaman and two hands to live ashore for standing patrol. That was the police patrol on the streets. Of course, everybody disappeared out of sight, but I had a fair idea who'd get it. And sure enough it was me.

12:00 It should have been a very senior leading seaman, but I copped it and we went ashore and we lived in an old wooden hulk – Cormorant – it was the sort of depot ship of Gibraltar. And so I had to back my bag and go off there with these two blokes and report to the RN. And it was almost with satisfaction, I thought it was God looking after his own, because measles broke out in a day or so, and for seven weeks we could watch them running up and down the knoll,

12:30 doubling for exercise, and all that sort of thing. And oh, the patrol job was the most luxurious job. We would patrol for a few hours at night. Some days all we had to do was clean the canteen at the football ground, very simple jobs, and nobody interfered with you at all. You could walk ashore as much as you like. All you had to do was be there when you were wanted. And I got to love Gibraltar very much, and I got to know all the shopkeepers and people.

13:00 You'd get a brawl or two. I got called into one, one night, and it looked like a brawl in one of those John Wayne wild west movies. There were sailors and solders and people fighting right, left and centre. In fact, my main impression of it was as I ran up the floor of the cabaret, was the crushing of glass under my feet. But upside down and everything. And you were supposed to get in,

13:30 and of course, we weren't armed. All we had, apart from a belt and gaiters, was a little canvas wrist with a crown on it, around my wrist, but of course, we were dealing with permanent troops. And you could get into the middle of a melee and throw people right, left and centre, if you were either military police or naval patrol – nobody would dare lay a hand on you. So that lent an interest. I'd never seen that sort of thing before.

14:00 But not much of that happened. The troops were all very, very well disciplined. You used to have to be, because those days you cracked at a fellow for not having his cap on straight. And told him to put his cap on straight in the street, and all that sort of thing. It was a luxurious life, as far as I was concerned. But anyway, I think I had about seven or eight weeks of that, but then I got called back because the rubella had died down.

14:30 And the captain, who was an Irishman, Captain Fitzgerald, RN of course, he was a fearsome man, but he understood Australians well, and they thought he was great. He picked out a couple of ports where rubella was quarantineable, and of all things, after seven weeks in quarantine, I suppose six hundred of the fittest men in Australia, we went round and we spent Christmas at Lisbon in Portugal

15:00 and stayed there for the best part, and then we came down and we went to Cadiz in Spain, and we spent New Year there. And then of all places, we went across to Casablanca in French Morocco. And, boy oh boy, did we have a good time. We'll skip that part of it, and keep to the Siegfried side of it. But oh, cripes, I suppose you'd say it was an orgy, but it was a marvellous experience.

15:30 And of course, we used to arrange day trips, and in Spain I went up to Seville; a beautiful city. Which I suppose was like going from Melbourne to Bendigo, or something like that. At these places we used to arrange these trips and it was all very, very educational and…

Well, tell us about Casablanca in the forties.

Oh, I don't know that I should tell you.

Yeah, come on.

16:00 All you would do is pitch your seats under those old time sailors, and I tell you, there were some tough hombres in those days in the service. They're cooped up for six weeks and doing physical exercises, and as we used to say in the navy, "Get the soapy water off their chests." Then they go and send them to a place like Casablanca, in Morocco. And of course, we had never seen the sexual side of life catered for like the French did.

16:30 I mean, they really made something almost classy of it. The places you went to there, it was like going to a first-class hotel or something. Sufficient to say, I think everybody had a good time while they were there. And we came back fairly refreshed in body and mind. Well, there wasn't much of that, I can tell you. We exercised. As far as we were concerned; we were on the brink of a war. People in Australia don't know this.

17:00 And we exercised, and exercised and exercised; we were continually at sea, doing high speed manoeuvres, and shoots and everything else. And I suppose, looking back, although it came to nothing, it was a tremendous practice for the real war that was to follow in a few years. We developed things like oiling at sea, ships steaming alongside each other and providing each other with oil,

17:30 and all that type of thing. We did an assault on Gibraltar itself a couple of times. We had to land, Sydney. We tried to land troops, sailors on the knoll there, secretly at night, and we pretty near got away with it, till one of the umpires saw us. But on another occasion, we went round to the opposite side of the rock. About the only part that had a beach,

18:00 near a little village called Catlin Bay. And the captain had an idea for there, for sending a landing party, and we disguised one of the cutters as a fishing boat, with nets hanging over the side, and everything and we had an armed platoon in it, and we landed up on the beach at Catlin Bay, and we were going to attack the oil tanks there. We went through people's houses –

18:30 they let us go through; they could see something was going on. They knew we weren't fishermen, of course. And we went along the back road, and finished up we got into the oil depot, and were sitting on top of the oil tanks when the umpire came to see what was going on. They had to admit that we'd taken the oil tanks. Well, all that sort of thing was pretty good fun. And I think about this time I was made Corporal of the Gangway.

19:00 In port I stationed on the gangway to watch people coming aboard and going ashore. All that sort of thing. And giving them, taking their cards when they went off and handing them back when they came back, and so on, and in this regard, talking of Corporal of the Gangway, now quite recently there have been some incidents in the navy, with fellows being drunk at sea and having parties on board,

19:30 and I was very interested in this. Somebody asked, what do they call him now, the Chief of the Navy or something, "Why don't they stop this drinking at sea?" and he said, to my amazement, I saw him on TV [television], he said, "You can't stop this drinking at sea. It's always been allowed. It's one of the old traditions we inherited from the Royal Navy." He might be an admiral, but he's wrong. Because I can tell you,

20:00 when you mention Corporal of the Gangway, the RAN ships were dry from the time the RAN was formed. Not down the officer's end, but up our end they were. I was corporal one night at one of these ports, and a great gang of revellers came aboard about ten o'clock at night, and one of them, in his overcoat, he had a bottle of beer in the overcoat pocket, and you could see the neck sticking out. And I spotted it, and I wasn't going to do anything, but the Officer of the Watch, who was watching them arrive,

20:30 he spotted it, and he moved over, and Hutchie could see what was going to happen, so he took it out of his pocket and he just dropped it over the side between the ship's side and the wharf. Seven days in the cells, first three on bread and water. So there was no good the admiral telling me they were always allowed to drink at sea. Nobody could drink at sea in the rank and file, and you couldn't even bring it. If a man, when I was Corporal of the Gangway, if a man came back and the Officer of the Watch considered he was actually drunk,

21:00 he wasn't even allowed to go down and sling his hammock. He went up forward and slept in the cells, with the doors open. No offence about it. But he wasn't even allowed to go down and sleep with the rest. So they can't teach an old dog new tricks where I'm concerned, about drinking at sea, and I think

that was the proper thing too. Getting back, we were there quite some months, and then we got shifted down to Alexandria.

21:30 Malta had been the big naval base always for the British navy, but it was too close to Italy from the point of view of war threat and so on, so they moved the base to Alexandria, and they had a huge fleet at Alexandria. Huge fleet there. And it was a most unlikable place. Malta was rather good fun, you know. The Malts were all used to the navy, and we used to have a lot of fun.

22:00 But I think it hit Malta so hard financially that they used to detach ships from time to time to go back and go into dock, and spend some time at Malta. In other words, to spend some money in Malta. But we were in this detestable Alexandria, and for some reason, going right back to at least the First War, Australians and Egyptians as a whole,

22:30 were not meant to match up on cordial terms. And we thought it was a detestable place, and it was aggravated by the fact that we couldn't get all-night leave because of the war situation. Every time the League of Nations sat, all the leave was stopped and the ships raised steam and the minesweepers went out and swept the entrances to the harbour, and everything. And then the news would come through, "No, there's no decision,"

23:00 and we'd relax again, you know. But I did get the opportunity to take a weekend up to Cairo, and visit the sphinx and all that sort of thing, which was relaxation. But by this time, after a good many months of this, we'd been away a long time, by this time, over, well over a year, our people started to get a bit fed up.

23:30 We were hoping that they'd either get stuck into the Italians and have a war, or send us home. One or the other.

Why were you at Alexandria? Why were you moved on to Alexandria?

Oh, I joined a different cruiser squadron. The 1st Cruiser Squadron was down at Alexandria, and the 2nd Cruiser Squadron was based up at Gib. I suppose It had something to do with deployment of forces, I don't know. We started to get the 'jack' [become bored and restless], and Fitzgerald the captain,

24:00 he was very aggressive, where admirals were concerned. He wasn't afraid of gold braid himself. And he kept going over to the flat ship. I suppose he was thinking to himself, "How long am I going to be able to control all these Australians?" And he kept going over and asking that we be given the opportunity to go and do something a bit more interesting. He tried to get us to the Holy Land, to Palestine, and I was looking forward to that,

24:30 it would have been good, but blow me down, at that time there's trouble in Palestine. And so it was not a good time for more British troops to be showing up there. And then to our great delight, he got permission, I suppose through the British and the Turkish governments, to go to Gallipoli. And ooh, this absolutely raised our spirits.

25:00 Really, nowadays young people can go overseas. But in those days, practically nobody had been to Gallipoli except the soldiers that fought there, and apart from that the Turks were wanting to remilitarise the Dardanelles, which had been deprived under peace treaty apparently, And they were pretty touchy about anyone going there. But anyway, somehow they managed to get permission for Australia and Sydney to go up the Dardanelles

25:30 and visit Gallipoli. This would be one of the things that I would consider I owe the navy for. It's harder for the present generation than it was for mine, to realise what a trip to Gallipoli meant. We were brought up on Gallipoli; it had happened almost in our time. In fact, we had men on the ships that were First War men,

26:00 and this is a very interesting thing. And Admiral Collins, in a book he wrote, 'As Luck Would Have It', I think, was the name of it – it was a good book – he mentioned this and I knew about it at the time. Admiral Horton, I think it was, was our boss. He was a First War submarine hero. And Horton came aboard and he walked around the ship's company

26:30 and through the mess decks, and he said he liked Australian soldiers because they stood up and talked to you. They weren't sort of frightened of you. And this is an amazing coincidence. He stopped the band master, Harry Blaskie, the band corporal, who had medals, and he said to him, "Would you like to go up to Gallipoli?" And he said, "Yes, Sir." And he said, "Why would you be interested?" He said, "I landed there in 1915."

27:00 And then he picked a young seaman, later on, walking around, and he said to this boy, "Would you like to go to Gallipoli?" And he said, "Yes, Sir." And he said, "Why would you like to go up there?" And he said, "My father's buried there." Now this is an amazing coincidence. It wasn't staged or anything. But it gave Horton the idea that these blokes would do anything to get up to Gallipoli. And we did. We went up. We didn't go to the landing site,

27:30 we went up the Dardanelles, which reminded me of a great bit stretch of water like the River Derwent at Hobart – beautiful stretch of water. And we steamed up there in flat calm, and we anchored off there at [UNCLEAR] which was opposite the Anzac side of the [UNCLEAR]. Everybody on the ship, whether they were under punishment or what, went. We stayed two full days, and half the ship's company went

one day, and a half the other.

28:00 Nobody forbidden, nobody excused. I was a bit lucky. I went the first day, and the Turks had managed to rake up a few trucks. And we got driven across. But after that, this fell through and the next day everybody had to march, walk across. But it was ordinary country like you'd strike around here, around Ravenswood or somewhere. And we went across to the sea side,

28:30 and then from there we walked right up a few beaches until we came to Anzac Cove. And everybody took their caps off and we looked at all these tombstones. And we took up a chap called Colonel Hughes, I think his name was. He was attached to the [Commonwealth] War Graves Commission, and he told us a bit about the layout and so on. Also rather funny, there were some Turkish militiamen

29:00 or gendarmerie I suppose – we classed them as policemen or soldiers. Gendarmerie – I suppose. They had rifles, and they were supposed to walk around with the parties because you weren't supposed to spread out on your own. Well, you can imagine, we landed about a thousand men in the countryside and a couple of coppers to look after them. To say the least, it's a big job. It just didn't work. They didn't take any notice of us. But we held a service on the beach at Anzac Cove,

29:30 and I really think it was probably much better set up than it is now. I've seen pictures now and there are sort of grandstands and areas for tourists and everything, but when we went ashore, we were the first Australian servicemen that had landed there since the landing. And everything was the same as they'd left it. There was tins and bully beef tins and stuff lying everywhere. And unexploded shells and everything else.

30:00 It was really an uplifting experience. After we'd had the service, we just took off to the hills, and we went all over the hills. It was a really marvellous experience. I'll tell you what the most striking thing was. We had grown up in a generation that knew returned soldiers as men, you know, mature men. Admittedly some of the might have only been thirty or something,

30:30 some were older. But to us lads, a returned soldier must have been very old to have been to a war. The same as people, youngsters, would think now. But when we looked at the headstones, and they were nineteen years and twenty years of age, that was the thing that really rocked us. The first time we realised that they were younger than us. And this was most impressive. We paid great tribute in our minds to the way these things were looked after.

31:00 Colonel Hughes told us they didn't have crosses or tombstones because they realised that peasantry living around there, to whom they wouldn't mean much, they would take those stones for hearths or doorsteps and things. So the gravestones were really posts with a little sort of disc-shaped top on it, and the engraving on it. They had the chap's name, and then they had an inscription which the relatives had apparently been allowed to put on.

31:30 And it was noticeable that none of them had any form of, shall we say, resentment or anything. The mottoes were all based on prayer and on pride. You know. It's very hard to say without breaking down. One of them, what was it? Just, 'Well done, Ted'. Things like that.

32:00 'King and Country' was a favourite one, and that was very moving to see things like just, 'My boy', and this moved us considerably. But anyway, it was a turning point to us in the main show. After that, we'd have fought anybody, you know. It was the most uplifting experience and we went back to Alexandria, almost thinking, "Right. Well, let them have a go at us," you know. Another thing that we did was went to Cyprus,

32:30 and this was more or less to, oh, I forgot the important part. Having got through the measles, when we got to Alexandria, what breaks out but mumps. And those that hadn't had measles got mumps. I was lucky. I didn't have either. I suppose because I'd had them both when I was a child. This drove the captain mad, I think, this business.

33:00 This was one of the strong things he used in trying to get some recreation. So when the mumps started to ease off he got permission to up to Rhodes, not Rhodes. Crete. No, Cyprus. And we took tents and everything up there, and we built a camp ashore and it was really like two or three weeks' recreation. A big batch went off and put tents up and we lived under canvas,

33:30 and hiked all over the island and so on. We didn't do military training. It was a recreation camp. Some of the chiefs and petty officers took the boats, and left the ships, and went sailing around the islands and disappeared for a few days. And we shifted around a bit too. We went to Limosole, a farming area. Larnaca. A couple of blokes and myself got a taxi and went over the mountains to Kyrenia which was the capital,

34:00 and it was sort of a recreational trip and that was good stuff. Anyway, the rest of it was all naval stuff. Fire, gunnery and gunnery manoeuvres and everything. Until the great day came when the loudspeakers said, "Do you hear there? We will be returning to Australia next Monday." And oooh, the roar went up all over the fleet. And a thing that not many people experience, we did then. That was the breaking up of that fleet.

34:30 It was a marvellous thing, because there were ships there that had come from the South American station, the China seas, out from Britain, from Australia, everywhere. Thousands and thousands of men,

you know. I suppose there would be sixty or eighty warships all told in Alexandria, from battleships right down to minesweepers. And of course, in those days, there was pomp and ceremony. All the cruisers and upwards all had a band.

35:00 As each ship went out of harbour the band on the quarterdeck was playing. All these other ships, we weren't full, and they were all crowded with men. We gave each ship three cheers as it went out. And the bands were playing appropriate tunes, you know. HMS Sussex was playing 'Sussex by the Sea' and we were singing the rude words to it. And I remember, our captain had a sense of humour,

35:30 and as HMS Exeter passed us, she was from South America, he had the band play 'South American Joe', which was in at that time. But his final stage, was when we left, and they were all cheering us, you know. The band was playing 'Waltzing Matilda'. Next thing, when we passed the admiral's flag ship, he had our band play 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf', the hit tune at that time. Because as a matter of fact he finished up in a bad odour

36:00 with the admiral there over his efforts to get things changed over there, and probably did his chance of promotion for a while. But it was a most memorable thing to see those thousands of men, all cheering each other's ships as they went out of harbour. And all delighted to get away, I might tell you. So we were away, I think, we left here in May. And I think we got back about August,

36:30 not that August. August the following year. But as I say, there was not song and dance made about it. We got no medals for that. We didn't get extra pay for that. That's what we were paid for. And people might find it hard to follow my reasoning that present day, that men get these enormous additional rates of pay to go to the Persian Gulf or something. Damn it all. That's what they should have joined up for,

37:00 what they expect when they join an army or a navy, I don't know. We've gone absolutely haywire on this. But we got no extra pay or anything like that. No question of that, and we didn't' expect it. We got the same pay when we were away on those things that you got when you were in the school at Flinders Naval Depot, because it was up to the navy where they wanted you. And I saw plenty of examples of this.

37:30 Anyway, to cut a long story short. We got back to Australia, very relieved to get back to our families again, and what did I do then? I was in the Sydney. I spent two or three years in the Sydney, I think. I liked the commander there. The commander is the man who you really come in contact with, rather than the captain. The commander is the executive officer who conducts all the work on the ship.

38:00 It was Commander Collins, who achieved great fame afterwards. And I liked Collins and he never forgot me as an old Sydney man, because I met him in later years when he came to inspect places as a rear admiral, or whatever it was, and he always would break away and he'd say, "Well, here's one old Sydney man I know," and he'd come over and shake hands with me. I put in then to go to depot again for gun leader's course,

38:30 so I went down there and I did another three months' course, and then I got two guns on my arm then. I went back and I was a gun leader on the Sydney. I left her, also, for about a two month course and I qualified as a diver. And qualified for that in Sydney. That was the old diving in the big brass helmet and the canvas suit. It was hard work as a matter of fact, that.

39:00 Each boot had eighteen pounds of lead on it, and you had half a hundredweight of lead on your chest, and half a hundredweight on your back.

Why did you want to be a diver?

I don't know. I suppose it just appealed to me to do something adventurous. There weren't many divers, but they used to qualify a few from time to time. Well, they were necessary in case something was lost overboard in harbour, or you thought you might have damaged the propellers and put the diver overboard to have a look, or underwater fittings got plugged up or something.

39:30 You started off in shallow water over at Clifton Springs in Sydney, and made it to deeper and muddier places. It was hard work, and you didn't see very much down below. Because as soon as you were at the bottom the mud came up like bushfire smoke. Other parts were quite nice. I found out later, from experience, off Portsea, and those places, and Port Phillip Bay, there was beautiful hard sand on the bottom;

40:00 you could see quite a lot. I won't go into detail, but anyway, I passed the exam for that. And I couldn't make out how I kept going back to Sydney. I left Sydney to or three times and went back. But I've been conceited enough to think, since then, that the captain asked that I come back each time, because by this time, I had what you might call a plum job.

40:30 I'd been made captain's coxswain. It was a plum job. You were the sort of captain's offsider. The captain in those days carried quite a staff. He had cabin hands. ABs looking after his cabin. He had a PO [Petty Officer] cook and a couple of stewards. And he had four or five ABs, who were his boat's crew also, if he wanted to go sailing or anything. And the leading seaman who got made captain's coxswain, he was somebody.

41:00 He always had to be very immaculately turned out, and you carried out all his instructions. You followed him like a faithful hound. It didn't matter if it was day or night. All he had to do was yell out,

"Coxswain." And if you weren't there, the whole ship knew about it. You'd follow him up on the bridge and everywhere. But it was a very, very nice job. And it had its perks in as much as the captain, if you knew the captain was going ashore for a couple of days,

41:30 you could walk on and off the ship and have a couple of days yourself, because no officer would dare say to you, "Did the captain say you could go?" Because the captain those days was sort of ranked with the junior to God. There would be fellows who served twenty years in the navy and probably never spoke to a four rank captain. I was in charge of his cabin and I had to see that all of the staff had it polished and immaculate. Which was essential, because a war ship in those days, on of the reasons that they kept them in such immaculate condition, they were really sort of…

Tape 4

00:30 As I say, it was a pretty plum job, and it had a lot of perks, and although I didn't realise it at the time, I worked a lot of these things out afterwards, he made me a petty officer before very long, and I worked out afterwards, because other people said, the captain, when he picked a coxswain, apart from picking a good-looking bloke or somebody that he'd been observing for a while,

01:00 he always picked a chap who was passed for leading seaman so that he would, it was like the Queen's Birthday Honours, if he was satisfied he got him made PO. Probably ahead of his time. Because I was absolutely amazed. We'd set off on a cruise around Australia, and we hardly started when I got told I had to go up and apply to be made petty officer. And…

01:30 **Why do you think you got, you got a lot of promotions in a fairly short period?**

Oh, I was studying all the time and passing for these things. Don't worry about that. A petty officer, I had to go to Jervis Bay or somewhere and join the fleet and sit before a board, you know. Oh, my word. And ship's construction and towing and everything. And of course, your conduct and your ability, everything, was always on your papers, and you had officer's confidential reports. They were looked up to see what you thought of him. Or what he thought of you.

02:00 Oh, no. I was passing these exams. Studying like billyo all the time. That particular time when I went for diver and gun layer, and petty officer, oh, crikey, I might as well have been full time at school, because it took a lot of study. Particularly for PO. And PO you even had to send a message by morse code, with the lamps, you know. That was one thing I never learnt,

02:30 so I left that till about the last week, and I dropped everything else and concentrated on morse code and learnt it enough to be able to send a message, and I've never sent one since, thank goodness.

So this was full time study?

Oh, in your own time.

In your own time?

Yeah. Apart from the courses when you went for depot, and I was passed for PO of course, and I passed that about the same time as that gun layers. As I say, I was studying about twenty-four hours a day.

03:00 Anyway, I got made PO. And you were made acting petty officer in those days. You wore a petty officer's badge and you had the full authority, but you still kept sailor's uniform, and after twelve months you got confirmed and then you got a veranda on your cap, and your brass buttons. And you'd really made it, you know. I was with the Sydney a long time. As a matter of fact, getting ahead, Captain Fitzgerald, ooh, he was a tough character,

03:30 and if you did the wrong thing, he'd bawl the life out of you. But he must have loved me under the skin, you know, and I had a lot of respect for him. And he was one officer who, some years later when I was in London, he was in the admiralty, and I actually called on him, and you might think, well, that was a surprising thing to do, but in those days, it was almost unknown, you know. But I thought, "Well, I wouldn't mind seeing old Fitz." This is getting a bit ahead,

04:00 but I thought, you know, "I reckon he'd like to see me, being his old coxswain." And he could well have said to me, "Yes, Walker. What do you want?" You know, it could have been very embarrassing. But anyway, I went to the admiralty and I asked where his office was, and he came roaring down the centre of his office with his hand out the front, yelling out, "Walker! Walker! How are you?" And he was really delighted I'd looked him up. But you wouldn't have done that with most officers. But that's jumping ahead.

04:30 We circumnavigated Australia when the Sydney arrived out here, largely to give the taxpayers a chance to look at their new ship, and we went to Brisbane and we took in a lot of smaller places. We went to Darwin and Broome and Geraldton and Albany and Bunbury, and places like that. And that was a lovely trip, right around Australia. And when I got back from there I put in to qualify gunner's mate.

05:00 That's was the top in gunnery, gunner's mate. It was an old title. It would really be more explicit if it

was called gunner instructor. It was as far as you could go in gunnery, and you instructed everybody if you were gunner's mate – officers, and everybody. The gunner's mate, you know, he was the bloke that made everybody stand up and click their heels and so on, but at the same time. I went to depot anyway.

05:30 It was a twelve months course. And I would consider the gunner's mate in the navy was probably the most underpaid NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] in the whole of the British forces. Because to start with I was a Seaman Petty Officer, which only ranked as a sergeant. So this twelve months' course for gunnery instructor, that was on the right arm. So you started off,

06:00 you had to be pretty highly recommended, I mean, tell you, before you went in, because they didn't qualify hundreds. There was four in my class. Four petty officers. And you started off with a couple of weeks' school and you did arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and a thing called radian measures. Whish dealt with turning circles. Algebra, I hated.

06:30 I couldn't even understand it at school, and yet it's just the difference when you're not frightened of the teachers or anything, and you can't understand it. The poor wretched teacher, Mr Flood, he would give us a thing all morning you know, and then he'd say to you, "Do you understand it?" and I'd say, "Look, Mr Flood, I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about. I'll never learn this." And he'd say, "Yes, you will, yes, you will. We'll have a go at it after. It'll come to you." You know. This was a different approach to schooling than what I was used to.

07:00 In other words, put it bluntly, I wasn't frightened of the teachers any longer. That's what it amounted to. And bless my soul, when I did this, I got about ninety two percent or something. Passed with flying colours, and two or three weeks' training. If you didn't qualify for that, you were off the course. You had to know. The reason was that practically all gunner calculation, although it was done by machines and things, you had to instruct in;

07:30 it was based on the right angle triangle. You had deflection and rate and particularly high angle warfare. The machines were all geared on trigonometrical ratios. Cosines and cotangents. And that was a hard start. But then of course you went right through the all gunnery side. A lot of it you'd done, but this time you went right further and you did it to instructional standards. You know, machine guns,

08:00 and then every gun in the service. And when you got to eight-inch turrets, you had to be able to lecture on hydraulics because they were all controlled by hydraulics. There were subjects like fire control and sights and director and, oh, drill of course. You had to take your drill. And two or three times a week we did company drill. And then battalion drill. Oh, thousands of sailors out. Because you must remember, at this time we had no permanent army.

08:30 The navy was the only force the government had that they could send anywhere. When the war come on, they had to recruit a civilian army. The whole basis of the country's defence was based on Saturday afternoon soldiers. But the government had no power to conscript them. A chap could spend years on the local battalion. When the war came on he said, "I'm not going to it." And they couldn't send him. The only people they could send anywhere in a hurry was the sailors because, for one thing, they were the only ones that had transport.

09:00 The day hadn't arrived when the air force had planes that could pick up a hundred soldiers or anything. These permanent infantry, they only came in in what to me is recent years. Probably, I don't know, around the Korean War or something. We used to get these splendid infantry regiments. The Royal Australian Regiment. But in our days, the sailors were the only ones the government had any power over. And I don't really know why that was, because under the Defence Act they couldn't even recruit permanent infantry.

09:30 They could recruit artillery for the forts. We came under the Naval Discipline Act and they could send us anywhere at the drop of a hat, which they did. This year they've sent forces to the Solomon Islands. The same thing happened there just before I joined the navy. HMAS Adelaide went up. When they went up, the poor soldiers went ashore and put full marching orders and marched up in the mountains. No song and dance about that. I suppose the only thing they got out of it was malaria,

10:00 and if they had, they'd have just been discharged physically unfit for the naval service – PUNS [Physically Unfit for Naval Service].

So was your training also geared for land action as well?

Yeah, we did a lot of land training. A lot of bayonet fighting, section leading. We did company drill twice and week, and once a week we did battalion drill. You got three companies of sailors at the depot. All the schools would have to come there, and of course, you had to get out and give the whole detail. There was no reading out of the book, you'd have to learn all this. You know, the battalion commander would order, "On the left form mass,

10:30 the company component will do this and that." You had to get out, to say nothing of the strain on your voice, there were about three or four hundred sailors, and then manoeuvre them, and you could get them into some awful messes, I tell you, if you gave the wrong orders. No, we did a lot of military training.

So what about the guns that you were trained in? Were they more than just the guns that would be used on ship?

11:00 Oh, at the depot they had duplicates for practically all the guns. Three inch, four inch, four point seven inch, six inch. And you had to drill all the crews on them, teach them their different positions and teach them to strip down the mechanism and everything, and then you had to go out to sea for a week or something, operate the eight inch turrets. Oh, they were most complex,

11:30 with all the interlocks which prevented one thing happening before the other, and so on. It was a most intensive course. And you see, we did things that, not having an army, we did things that the present day navy probably wouldn't do. We did a thing called aid to the civil power. You had to learn how to clear the streets of people, and the drill we did was based on a system adopted by the Shanghai International Police force,

12:00 and consisted of a baton squad, a support baton squad and a bayonet squad, and what you were authorised to do, and the 'reading of the Riot Act'. I used to think. I had a good sense of the ridiculous, I suppose, and when I was teaching this, I used to think, "I'd like to see this," you know, huge mob and a man getting up calling out, "Our Sovereign Lord the King charges and commandeth all persons here assembled peaceably to disperse," all that sort of stuff.

12:30 And what it meant legally, you know. And when you'd read that, or if they stopped you reading it, you had the power then to get stuck into them. But it was all very sensible stuff. I was at a seminar some years ago at the staff college at Queenscliff with another organisation I belong to, and I heard that, during the Whitlam regime [Gough Whitlam, Labor Prime Minister of Australia, 1972-1975], they stopped the forces from teaching aid to civil power. I don't know why they should, because if you get police overpowered by riots, or insurrection breaking out,

13:00 well if the forces don't know what to do it's a pretty poor show, isn't it? But the thing is that we did a tremendous amount with that, and when you think that I had the knowledge, but I was still only in the services equivalent of sergeant of the infantry, whereas a gunner's mate, maybe, when the war come along, he could have got a commission in the artillery. He knew more than anybody. He could have got a commission in the infantry.

13:30 And the same time, he's a qualified seaman. So I reckon I was terribly underpaid. I got, I was getting nine pence a day, say nine cents, as a gun layer, and I did that twelve month course to instruct everybody in the navy in everything, including officers. And I got an extra nine pence a day for that. I went up to one and six a day, what's that, fifteen cents. It was hopeless pay.

14:00 That's on top of my petty officer rate. I mean, I got paid ten shillings a day for being a PO, but for twelve months I got an extra nine cents a day. And anyway, to cut a long story short, I qualified there. And we're getting to the part you want to hear about now, shortly. I went on the staff at the depot. And I trained classes in all these other things. And the gunnery started to get a bit complicated,

14:30 and they realised that air war was going to come in, so instead of the first qualification being seaman gunner, and then gun layer, they brought in four sub-divisions, and you become a third class rating. Anti-aircraft rating third class or control rating third class or quarters rating third class or layer rating third class. They did much the same as a seaman gunner but they specialised more in one thing. Either in controlling gunfire, or anti-aircraft weapons or like that.

15:00 So I had to take all these, and as I told you at the start, a lot of our officers used to do exchange service. They all did. They, from to time, they would go and do two years in the RN, and an RN officer would come out here. Well somebody got the bright idea that it would be a good thing for the lower deck to do this.

15:30 So, I was it. The next thing, after I'd been on the staff there for a while, and having the pleasure of living at home in Melbourne for a bit, you know, I got a draft for two years, what did it say? It just said, such as the date, to the UK, to the United Kingdom, for two years for service to the Royal Navy. No song and dance like they make now if they're going away for eight weeks or anything.

16:00 Two years, go to the RN. So the idea was that I would go over and serve two years in the RN. Well, I was unmarried still, and I thought, "By gosh, this'll be something," and in my misguided endeavours I took a dinner suit and I took my civilian clothes and everything else and I thought, "This is going to be a beaut two years," you know. Oh, no, no. I think I was there about eight weeks and the war started. But I went over in the Autonocus.

16:30 I didn't even have the good luck to get a line of passage. That was every sailor's ambition, to get a line of passage. There was no air travel. Go home on a passenger liner, you know. Oh, no. At that time, they acquired HMAS Perth, and they sent us on that, so they got a troop ship, a cargo ship, the Autonocus, and they fitted her out with hooks and things for hammocks,

17:00 and she had to take the ship's company home. So of course, I was going over at the same time. When I say 'home' I just realised, that sounds funny doesn't it, to present day Australians, but to us Britain was the old country. We weren't born there, our parents were, but you still talked about going home to the old country. Because I suppose you'd heard this at home. Everybody said, "Oh, he's had a trip home," or "He's gone to the old country," you know. And I still like that expression, 'the old country'.

17:30 But I had to go over. What they did, they picked a PO from each branch to go with them, to keep them entertained on the way, you know, put it that way. And anyway, oh, I was annoyed. But anyway, I had to

go and join the Autonocus. Now here's another good example of the outlook of these officers towards discipline.

18:00 My mother and my sister came down to see me off at Port Melbourne, and we were all piled up. We weren't falling in, of course, on a merchant ship, but we were talking to everybody on the gangway, on the jetty. It was at Port Melbourne. And I was going away for two years, you see. So I said to Mum, "I'll come out and say goodbye to you." Famous last words, I might tell you.

18:30 I went up to see the commander who was in charge of the draft. Commander Harries, and I said to him, "Oh, my mother and sister are out there, I'd like to go out and seem them, say goodbye to them." "No, no, no. There's no jetty leave." When I see now on the TV, they take the whole family, they get taken down to the bay for days. "No." And I said to him, "I'm not just going over with this draft to come back again, Sir. I'm on two years service." "It doesn't matter. There's no jetty leave."

19:00 So I couldn't argue. I just had to go back like a little boy and say to my mother, "I'm not allowed ashore," you know. This was quite unnecessary. They were all permanent troops. All he had to say was, "Anybody wants to go out has ten minutes' jetty leave. As soon as the bugle sounds the retreat, all back on board." And that was it. No, oh no. And I never forgot those things. I've always been a keen disciplinarian myself, but I hope that I exercised discipline with a bit more discretion

19:30 than some of those Australian officers did. But that's over and past. Actually we had a bonzer trip home on there. It was like a great big moving playground. There were four, five hundred sailors and there was no restriction on the ship. You could go where you liked. We took a ton of ammunition and rifles and everything with us, so I got a lend of some billeted timber hatch covers off the bosun

20:00 and I rigged up a miniature rifle range, and some blokes spent all their day firing .22 [calibre] rifles. And we used thirty three thousand rounds of ammunition going over and three thousand rounds of .45 revolver ammunition. We had a great time that way. But, oh, they rigged a swimming pool. And it was just a teeming mass of activity. And the sailors lived it pretty rough down the holds I might say. The POs didn't have a bad mess,

20:30 but down the holds the sailors were packed in like an ant colony. Crossing the line [equator] we had a great ceremony. One of the POs was 'King Neptune' and another bloke was 'Queen…', his wife. I was the 'Lord Chief Justice', reading out the sentences. And we had a lot of ordinary seaman and people that hadn't been to sea before, so they put them all through the hoops and we had certificates printed to give to everybody to say that they'd crossed the line.

21:00 When we reached England, I'll tell you an example; I know this is lengthening it a bit. We had to find things for them to do recreationally, and we decided to make medicine balls. You know what they are. A big ball packed with rope or split peas, or something heavy for throwing to each other, and what we called grummets,

21:30 what the civilian would call rope quoits, you know, and endless rope. And we wanted these for games and exercise, so we picked perhaps eight or ten of these ordinary seaman that had just joined the ship, and we got, we had sailmakers' palms and needles, and sailmakers' twine, and we got the bosun of the ship to rake us up some canvas. And we set these boys to cut out the segments

22:00 and sew up a ball, and others to make grummets, which meant taking a single strand out of a bit of tarred hemp, and then laying it up again, until it was endless, you know. Like a quoit. And these boys were sitting doing that, and I remember, this is an example of our training, the bosun of the ship, a merchant ship, he was a Welshman, and he was, he belonged to the Autonocus.

22:30 Oh, bonzer bloke, a big fellow. Tom Jones, I think his name was. One day on the upper deck and I was walking along past these chaps, and he stopped and, "Hey, Guns," he said, "How long are these fellows been in the navy?" and I said, "Oh, they're just out of depot, Tom." I said, "This is their first trip." He said, I always remember his words, he said, "There wouldn't be a man on this ship that could do what they're doing." And they were just out. But that was the thoroughness of the training

23:00 that had gone out with merchantmen. I suppose they had brought that sort of stuff in dockyard. But to see these boys sewing canvas so meticulously and the others, they were the very words he said, "There wouldn't be a man on this ship that could do that." So that's only a reflection on the type of training we got. When we reached Portsmouth, HMAS Perth was there. She had meant to be HMS Amphion but

23:30 the Australian navy bought her to be the Perth. They bought one called Apollo I think it was, and she became the Hobart. But the Sydney had been specially acquired. But alongside the Perth and everybody went over, But of course, I wasn't joining the Perth. I was over there to serve in England. So, I went aboard her and I got paid. It was the only ship I was ever on where I was number one on the ship's books. I got paid, and then I started to make some enquiries.

24:00 I think I went down to the naval barracks or something, and tried to find out where I was supposed to go. They said, "Oh, HMS Excellent." Well, that was the gunnery school, commonly called Whale Island. But it operated as HMS Excellent which it had always been since the old sailing ship days. This was the world's best gunnery school. Strong men trembled when they went in there.

24:30 And so I got a taxi and I said to the chap, "Do you know where Whale Island is?" Well, that was a

ridiculous remark as I found out. So he said, “Yes, yes.” So I got my bag and hammock got taken up there. So we arrived at Excellent. And it’s a funny thing. A chap said to me some years later, he said, “I always remember the day you dame on draft over here.” I said, “Why do you remember that?” He said, “You came on draft in a taxi.”

25:00 I said, “How else did you expect me?” Well, to an RN chap in those days, for a fellow to arrive in a taxi was just out of this world, you know. They’d have got a handcart and pushed the bag and hammock. So, I called into the office there and I said, “Where do the gunner’s mates go?” and they said, “Oh, you’re in the staff instructors’ mess, A block.” They had a row of blocks at Whale Island, A, B, C, D, E, F, but they were all called after famous people.

25:30 There was Anson, Codrington, Effingham and Frobishire. And A Block was the staff instructors’ mess, and I tell you what, there was only one thing I admired about Whale Island, a lot of it made me laugh, but, oooh, it was run as a school. It was a huge place with schools for every section of gunnery right around it, you know,

26:00 and there was only two classes of people at Whale Island – instructors and students. It didn’t matter if the students were ordinary seaman, or whether they were lieutenant commanders, they were less than the dust; they were students. And if an officer played up in a class, you just said to him, “Right, you. Take a double round the depot.” And away he went and ran round. And not only that, but to aggravate the offence, the chief of your section rang up the next school, and said, “There’ll be an officer coming past

26:30 the V&W [class destroyers] in a minute.” So, righto, so as he was passing that school, the chief of that school would come out and call out, “About turn, double march,” and he would turn around and double him up and down and then let him go, and then he would ring the next school, and that chap would do that, and he had a couple of rings on his on his arm, you know. But the same thing, when they fell in in the morning. On the parade, no smoking allowed.

27:00 Everybody was waiting for a bugle; the gunner’s mates could walk up and down in the drill hall, having a smoke, you know. And nothing was done that didn’t point out to the students that they were in the gunnery school and the instructor was boss. It was really a very good system, and it mightn’t have done much to enhance the popularity of gunner’s mates in the navy, but it was a very, very fine system. And it was the only place – it was much different from the Royal Australian Navy in that regard –

27:30 that you could push an officer around or even send him for a ‘dubber’ if he was doing gunnery course. You would have been very indiscrete to have done that in the RAN. And it was the done thing, and not only that, they’d been doing it since before most of us were born, so they must have been on the right track. I went into what we called the West Battery there which was teaching gun drill. And it was interesting. You got Dutch sailors, you got everybody,

28:00 used to come over the do courses there. And of course they had all the equipment in the world. They had hundreds of guns and everything. And I got a bit jack of this after a while, and a fellow asked me if I looked to be in the HA [Heavy Artillery] section. HA to us was what most people called anti-aircraft. We called anti-aircraft two pounder and below, machine guns against all aircraft. HA was in charge, controlling of the long range. That was a very, very complex business. Very complex.

28:30 You know, these big calculating tables with six or eight sailors turning handles. But I went there and I was glad I did, because I liked that. But during this time, troops were filling sand bags and putting them around the sick bay and everything. And I often thought, “It’s a very different thing being in Europe when a war starts, and being in Australia.” We’d been used to reading about situations developing and eventually a war starts.

29:00 And then they decide, “Well, what’s Australia going to do?” and you start recruiting an army. And in six months time you hear they’re in action. But in Europe it’s a very different thing. It’s a fearsome business when you’re reading every edition of the paper, you’re listening to the radio all the time. And they got to the stage then that the proclamations went out, this was before the war started, and they called up the Naval Reserve, and they called up the Army Reserve,

29:30 and you could see fellows turning up at the depot in civilian clothes and bokker hats and everything, and getting back into uniforms, and it developed to the stage where it wasn’t a question over there of not whether we were going to have a war, but what day does it start. And it’s a very suspenseful thing. And in actual practice, two days before the war actually started, they bought the blackout in,

30:00 and you’ve got to experience that to believe it. You know, to be walking around in a big city and you come off a train and you don’t know, and there’s nothing. You’re just stepping out, it might be in the Australian bush, and I have told my family, when we said anything about the war, to me, with all the excitement I might have seen later on, the most impressive thing that stays in my mind is the outbreak of the war.

30:30 It was a Sunday, a beautiful day in the English summer, and by this time Whale Island was packed to the bone. You know, all the reserves were back, and everybody was back. Having the time of their lives there. And on the Sunday morning, we went down to prayers. The navy was a service that prayed at the drop of a hat. Peace or war, you always had prayers in the morning and everything. Well, there were about two thousand people were in the depot by this time.

31:00 The things was so organised that the day the war broke out there wasn't one draftee at the depot, or out of it. It was organised. Well, while the service was on I saw a signalman walk across the parade [ground], which was absolutely anathema at Whale Island. It had to be something earth shaking for that, and he came and spoke, he handed a signal to captain and I thought, "Something going on here."

31:30 So sure enough, when the service was finished, the captain said, read out that he'd received a signal that the Prime Minister would address the nation at eleven o'clock, or whatever it was. And so, of course, as soon as they dispersed, all hands up to the blocks, you know, switched the radios on, and the mess I was in, for a Royal Navy standard it was a very fine mess. A billiard table and everything, being the staff instructors' mess. Nice comfy chairs and a piano and everything else, so some of the chaps were playing billiards.

32:00 And it got around to the time for Chamberlain [Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain] to address the nation. And of course, everybody stopped then and grabbed a chair and sat down. Chamberlain announced that the Germans had been given notice that they had to be out of Poland, or else by eleven o'clock we'd be at war with them,

32:30 and they hadn't done it. So, as a result, we were now at war. And oh, he went the usual thing. What a heartbreaking thing it was for him. It was for us, too. But as soon as he finished his address, the drums I suppose, or the music on the radio, started to strike up the national anthem and the whole mess stood as one. And everybody stood, not looking right or left, but stood to attention,

33:00 and I moved my eyes around, and I thought, "I bet these blokes are thinking the same thing I am – how many of us will see this out." It was, what you'd call, I suppose you'd call it awe inspiring. I never forgot that. Everybody standing rigidly at attention, while the national anthem was played. So I made the great mistake, of course, that a lot of enthusiastic people do, of thinking,

33:30 "This thing will be over by Christmas, I'd better get into it," you know. I forgot to say which Christmas. There was six years of this. But we thought you know, "It'll be a slash bang and it'll be over." So, perhaps foolishly, I immediately put in a request to be sent to sea. You shouldn't do that sort of thing, ever. Anyway, needless to say, I got drafted quick smart. I was drafted ship called HMS Vigo.

34:00 It's a big job for me because I'd never been on a destroyer as a gunner's mate, never on any ship as gunner's mate, and I didn't realise the amount of work a gunner's mate did on a destroyer. He instructed everybody, but not only that, he did what they called the regulating, because the ship's company was based…the strength of a ship's company… You had no spare men and you had none short.

34:30 But it was based on one job for everybody at action stations. These people had to be split up so that at sea you had half the armament, so you had the job of working all these watches out, and what jobs chaps had that couldn't be spared and all this thing. It was a very hard job, the Gunner's mate on a destroyer, particularly if you were inexperienced, like I was. I make no excuses. I didn't even know you did that much work.

35:00 But when I joined Vigo she was in Plymouth dockyard. Or Devonport, to be precise. That's the Plymouth dockyard. And she was being converted. She was a V&W class destroyer. They were ones made about in 1918. They were considered a big destroyer in the '18 war. And it was being converted. Instead of having four single guns, it had a twin gun either end and torpedo tubes taken off it, and machine guns put on.

35:30 In other words, they were called Fast Escort Vessels, and they were meant for convoying, but they were faster than the old trawlers, and all the other things. They were still destroyers, in effect. And I joined her and went to the office in the dockyard. The first lieutenant was there and a couple of officers, and I found out that we were getting a draft of what we called "Rockies." In the permanent navy, naval reservists were called Rockies.

36:00 I was getting these Saturday afternoon sailors, you know. A batch of them from Liverpool. They were called Irish Rockies. But I will say this, that in anticipation of this, and when the war broke out, they trained them as a unit. Like one guns crew and a TS [Transmitting Station] crew. That was a control room crew, and a directors crew. So they'd had a bit of basic training for the type of ship,

36:30 and the rest of them you had to train and do what you like with them. Eventually, to cut a long story short, this mob arrived there, and we had to commission the ship. Buy this time, we were starting to get into the English winter. And it was a winter to remember. And it turned out to be the worst winter in Europe for, I think, forty seven years. I'd never even seen snow.

37:00 And another thing was about it that was different from out here, was that you could get these inexperienced civilians, actually they were, and you're knocking them into a ship's company. If you only went out of the harbour to do speed trials, or gun trials, you were in a theatre of war. You could get torpedoed. You know, you could get attacked and here is a ship's crew of civilians you might say.

37:30 Gosh, and the weather was appalling. By this time, you know, it had started to rain continuously, and sometimes you might got out to do some sort of trials, depth charge trials or something, and there'd be a report of a U-boat [Unterseeboot – German submarine] and you'd stay out all night, hunting, and I don't know what we'd have done if we'd found one. But you'd be sitting there in this pouring rain, and

pitch black, you couldn't see a hand in front of you, but still it had to be done.

38:00 And I'd had weeks and weeks of this, and I was soaked to the skin at times. I finished up getting carted off on a stretcher with pneumonia. But that was just one of the trials of my poor life. Anyway to finish up with, we got them knocked into shape, and I was coughing and coughing and coughing, I was that sick, but I had a very hard first lieutenant. He became very famous during the war, and I'm not surprised.

38:30 But he had no sympathy for me. He drove me like a slave. But I'm not going to complain about it. There was a war on. So by the time we got trained, it took a couple of week's training. We got sent up to the Forth of Firth in Scotland. By this time I was out to it, I was lying in the sick bay, if you could call it a sick bay; it had one bed in it. I went up there, and as soon as we got to Scotland, the Firth of Forth, up near the Forth Bridge,

39:00 I was carted off and sent to hospital. Oh, best thing that every happened to me, too. When I got in that hospital bed with the warm blankets, and no work to do, I could have slept for a month. Actually speaking, I was suffering from exhaustion. Too much work. Day and night, day and night. Anyway, I was sent with tonsillitis and I was put in the isolation ward. And when the doctor came to examine me,

39:30 "You didn't have tonsillitis," he said, "You had bronchial pneumonia, and you started to get over it." I worked right through that working up period with pneumonia, you know. It was a wonder I didn't die. But I didn't anyway, so I went back from, I was in hospital for, I don't know, ten days or something, but the great thing was I got a week's recreation, no, not recreation. What do you call it? Sort of recuperative, convalescent leave. So I went down to Campbellton in Argyle shire

40:00 and spent time with my people down there. Blood's very much thicker than water, you know. These people just absorbed me as though our family hadn't been away. Instead of being away for a hundred years, they hadn't been away for ten minutes, you know. And it was very nice. So I came back and joined it. Now, we'd started the war. The job we were put on…

Tape 5

00:32 Yes, well as I say, I was in hospital and I get a week of leave and I came back and join the ship. Now, she was on a run on the east coast of England and Scotland, running convoys from the Firth of Forth down to the Thames. (UNCLEAR), they were called. And it was pretty constant job but apart from that,

01:00 the worst part was the weather. We did a regular run, up and back, up and back. It only took a few days each way. And all we did, really, was fuelled and turned around and came back with another convoy going in the opposite direction. The trouble was the weather, that was the worst part, and also the fact that the North Sea, along there, is a very shallow sea, so the Germans mined it a lot,

01:30 and not only did they sow mines, but they dropped magnetic mines and then acoustic mines. My main worry was sitting on a mine. The weather had to be seen to be believed. And this is a thing that would interest people. I don't think anybody could understand the conditions that we lived under and worked under. It was, as I say, the worst winter in nearly half a century,

02:00 and the North Sea, a fairly shallow sea, it's very, very rough and choppy, but in the winter, a lot of the time it was covered with an absolute gloom. I spoke to a German fellow once who fought in Russia, and he said to me his memory of the Russian War was the terrible gloom. And immediately I knew what he meant. It was like bushfire smoke ahead of you. Range was very limited,

02:30 the visibility. And of course, you had about perhaps thirty ships, merchant ships, coming along beside you. Zigzagging. So I was always in fear that we would eventually get run down by one of these merchant ships. But I'll give you some ideas. The decks were covered in snow, and any water lying about froze. But inside the mess deck, we had about a hundred men packing inside this old-fashioned mess deck. The atmosphere was that warm in there

03:00 that the atmosphere itself condensed, and it was dripping all the time; the men's blankets were wet, and so on. And it's hard to believe, but I've seen that water get nearly knee deep. Of course, our fellows got worried when they saw this. They thought, "Oh, there's a leak or a crack somewhere in the ship's side," and eventually when we were in dock, they sealed everything off and put the compressed air in,

03:30 but the ship was quite sound. And they woke up then, all it was was condensation. You could see water nearly knee deep, and that was actually men's breaths. That was what it amounted to. It was appalling conditions. And I remember lying off Newcastle or somewhere one night. We were waiting for a convoy to come out, so we were just rolling backwards and forwards, and the noise was deafening and this water was rushing from one side of the ship to the other,

04:00 and there was buckets and mess kettles and sea boots and everything. And to think that men lived in those conditions, you know, it makes you wonder that they even survived the war. My mess was further down below, over the magazine, and at least it was dry, but it wasn't the best place to be if anything went bung. And on deck, I remember going up on the .5 machine gun deck one day, it had angle irons around the side,

04:30 and the water lying on the deck had frozen, and there was a hammer lying under the ice. It was a hammer we used to use to knock out stoppages on the machine gun, and it was frozen like you used to sea a fish sometimes in a shop window. They'd feed it in a block of ice. Those conditions were appalling, and the clothes we had to wear were depressing. You had on everything that you could possibly have on, and then over the top you had a 'lammie' coat which came right over your head like a nun's habit,

05:00 and it was made of stuff like feltex, and then if you could get one, an oil skin over the top of that. Well, I used to keep watch up in what was officially called the range finder director – we called it the bird bath. It was right up the top where you controlled the guns from, and I used to keep watches up there, four hours on and four hours off. You'd be stamping on your toes with the other heel to try and get some circulation in your feet,

05:30 and I found one of the worst things with the snow storms, was suddenly you'd get a bit of a blizzard, and the snow would come horizontal. It was like sugar. It would cut your face. And you were standing with your hands crossed in front of your face, looking through your fingers. It was an uncivilised climate to live in. I agree that British fishermen earn their living out on that, but the only thing was, we had to do it continuously, under a timetable. There was no rest.

06:00 And of course, a depressing thought was, that if anything happened to the ship and you got in the water, you were gone. There was no picking men up alive when they'd been in that water. If the ship went, it went with all hands. They sowed plenty of mines, the Germans, and the minesweepers, the trawlers, used to be working up and down all the time, on this coast, and at some spots like Flamborough Head, and places they knew where you sort of had to come to turn a corner,

06:30 I've seen mining that bad there that the whole convoy, led by ourselves, had to get into single file. And the sweepers would go ahead of us, and we would follow them through. The Germans, of course, knew that if they sowed mines, we would be sweeping them to the best of our advantage, so they came up with the acoustic mine there. The water being quite shallow

07:00 close into the coast, they dropped these acoustic mines by aircraft. Magnetic first, and if you went over them, the magnets in the ship set the mine off. It went off in the worst possible place. Underneath your keel and broke the ship's back. And we frequently passed the masts and funnels of merchant ships sticking up out of the water, that had been sunk there. And after the magnetic mine,

07:30 they realised the British were sweeping for them with magnetic sweep things, and they brought in the acoustic mine, which operated from the noise of the ship's propellers. And the result is they had to put a device on the bows of the ship that sent a noise ahead, to detonate any of those. The mining business was a pretty depressing thing. Although I'm glad I didn't know a lot of what was going on. The ship I was on,

08:00 she was good for convoy, but she would never had been much good in a surface action. She had high angle guns, which meant they were high up to reach to load, and they weren't very suitable and I used to think, "If we ever meet a German destroyer or anything, they'll sink us hands down." But we were under the impression that all these mines were being laid by mine-laying submarines. But in recent years, of course, I've read German books, and I read where,

08:30 I think on twenty-three occasions the German destroyers just came over and laid mines. So it was a case of, "there but for the grace of God." If we'd met one of those, they would have knocked us off, there's no doubt about that. But as ignorance is bliss, we didn't think that they could do it. It was really a rotten thing. And in fine weather it wasn't too bad, although it was more dangerous actually from a point of view of getting torpedoed or anything. But it was bearable then,

09:00 and we did four hours on, fours hours off, four hours on, four hours off. This was the one place where the sailor wasn't as well off as the other services. In most cases, he was. He could keep himself clean and he could wash his clothes and everything. But you take a soldier, you know, ten miles back from the line, he's in a sort of a rest area. And the same with airmen that flew out of the Channel. They came back to very good quarters on ground.

09:30 But if you were in Bass Strait, you were in a theatre of war. And you were four hours on, four hours off, and in the English climate, it had its disadvantages. If you got the summer, remembering that every night you went to what they called dusk action stations, just before dark, to check all your circuits and everything for the night, and then about half an hour before dawn, you went to dawn action stations, when we were likely to sight an enemy or U-boat.

10:00 Well, when you got the middle of summer, in England, it mightn't be dark till half past eleven at night. And it would be light again at four o'clock in the morning. Well, if you had the middle watch, it was midnight till four a.m. It was no good going to bed because you had to go to dawn action stations. And by the time that was over, it was almost time for you to go on watch, so you could say in that twenty-four hours, you just didn't have any sleep. And this went on for months. We had our exciting moments.

10:30 We run aground at one stage. It was in a gale and they could only navigate, there was no radar or anything. It was all field glasses, opera glasses in those days, and we were zigzagging ahead of the convoy, which the officer of the watch had to do just by so many minutes on one course and so many minutes. It was four o'clock in the morning. I'd just got out. I was going on the morning watch, and if you're a sailor you can sense anything peculiar in a ship,

11:00 if she's not making the right feel, and all of a sudden, you get this peculiar feeling. My first worry was that we'd been run down. That was what worried me. But they all flew out of the hammocks. But I could hear on the side of the ship, I could hear the wind blowing like billyo, and I thought, "Well, whatever's wrong, I'm not going up there to freeze to death," so I stepped into some warm clothes, and grabbed my lammie coat and put my feet into my sea boots, and went up the ladder, and it turned out, of all things, we were aground

11:30 under the cliffs at Whitby – fortunately, on a sort of a beach, a few hundred yards out. So of course we started to make frantic signals in the dark, and sounding off, "Dit dit dah, you are standing at a danger," to the convoy, and hoping the whole lot wouldn't pile up. They must have woke up something was wrong, because they must have veered off and they went past, but we were there for hours and hours, and of course, we thought, to be caught aground in daylight, if the German aircraft come over, "We've had it," you know.

12:00 But the old engines went flat out for hours, and it was marvellous how resilient those ships were. You could see the ship bending, more or less like a coat hanger, as you looked aft. The wireless aerials were going slack and going tight as she bent. But she came off, and she only had stumps for propellers. She vibrated all the way down to Chatham. But I'm going to be quite ruthless here and tell you that in those conditions, we loved getting damaged, provided nobody got killed or anything.

12:30 It was the only way of getting a bit of leave. So we did get a few days, ten days' leave or something, because she had to go into dockyard and the shafts had to be straightened and everything. I think it was on that occasion I shot up on the train to Scotland and I went to the station at Edinburgh, and I said to a chap, "Is there somewhere that's quiet? Where there's no water on it?" And he recommended a couple of places,

13:00 one of which was in Loch Orr, the Western Highlands. And I put civilian clothes on and I went over there, and I had a beautiful week over there. You know, with the butler laying out the hot water bottle on your bed and everything. Beautiful scenery, so I enjoyed that. Anyway, I came back and they fixed her and we got back on the run.

What was the Vigo intended for? What actually were you doing out there in the North Sea?

Convoying, all the time.

13:30 Convoying up and down the east coast, from England to Scotland. The fun started then. That was rather trying and rather monotonous work, but the best was yet to come. The summer arrived then, of course, and everything got beautiful weather, and of course, the Germans started to go mad and roll up Europe, which they rolled up like a carpet, let's be honest. They'd already, while we were on that run,

14:00 they'd already subjugated Norway, and then all of a sudden they started into Belgium and Holland. Well, it was on for young and old then. So we were taken off that immediately and we were sent down to the Thames estuary and looking back, I think that they gave all the dirty work, quite rightly, to older ships, and all the beautiful new destroyers

14:30 and big cruisers and everything, they were held well back, because it looked as though, if they couldn't stop the Germans, we were going to face invasion in Britain. With the result that we got all sorts of dirty work, but what happened to us, we went down to the Thames estuary, and it was well into May by this time, the end of May, and that's when the Germans broke out and started to go across Europe.

15:00 The first thing we did, they had three block ships lying in the Thames. Old merchant ships, still operating, (UNCLEAR) but they loaded them with concrete down to about the water line, and they had explosives in the bottom of them so that they could blow the bottom out and the ship would sink, and we were told, "Righto, you're going over and you're taking three of these over, and you've got to sink them at Zeebrugge on the Bruges Canal."

15:30 Well, It wouldn't have been so bad if I'd never heard of Zeebrugge before, but being an avid reader on war stuff, I'd read the appalling bloodbath that took place when they did that job in the First War. But they left it too late then, it was about 1918. The idea of blocking the canal was to stop the Germans having good refuges for U-boats, and they could come out from Zeebrugge in Belgium into the North Sea. But this time, they apparently decided that they'd disable all these harbours right at the start, which was good thinking .

16:00 I don't know what the Belgians or French would say, but we couldn't be worried about that. So, oh, this is pretty rotten, so we set off. And Australian people must remember that the distances there are nothing like they are here – you could ride over to France or Belgium on a bike, with a bit of energy, if there was no water there. And so we set off with the idea of getting these ships sunk in the dark,

16:30 in the early hours of the morning. But we got on our way, we were leading and we had a couple of smaller vessels. One was a motor torpedo boat. It probably didn't have any torpedoes in it, but it was there, and a couple of little, I suppose what you'd call sloops in those days, little vessels, and ourselves in charge, the old Vigo. And we were in line ahead, with these three block ships behind us.

17:00 It was glorious weather, it was as flat as a mill pond, and a huge full moon. So it wasn't long before aircraft picked us up, and we were a bit of a sitting duck, because if you got on the opposite side to us,

with a low full moon, we were silhouetted, you know, and we couldn't see him. Saw him flash across a few times. I suppose we were lucky; he probably was like us. He probably hadn't had much experience of warfare by then. It was probably as well,

17:30 because he tried all night to hit us, and he was only doing four knots, which was a little bit faster than a man marches at. And it was pretty terrifying when you hadn't had any warfare before worth mentioning. And you'd hear him manoeuvring about, not far out, and he'd be following us down, and all of a sudden he'd rev up, and you'd say, "Here he comes." And he comes tearing down with all his machine guns blazing,

18:00 and then he let his bombs go as he'd go over the top of you. Well, he couldn't have had a lot of experience, because he couldn't hit us for nuts. He went very close every time. The first bomb would drop on the port side, and he'd go around, and whether he went around and kept refilling up or whether he brought a mate out after, but he kept it up for hours. And it was machine gun bullets flying in the water everywhere. Strange then that he couldn't hit us. I noticed, I suppose, when you're a professional, you take more in than other people.

18:30 One thing that impressed me was that he was using different coloured tracer bullets, which probably let him know which guns were firing or whether one was misfiring. And it's not a pleasant experience to be fired at with machine guns. It's a most unpleasant experience. And we were firing barrage fire with our guns. That's firing them all to burst at the one range, as fast as you could load them,

19:00 and he'd swoop over the top. Well, finally, he must have thought up a new idea. If it was the same bloke. And he come along and let the lot go at once, and would you believe it, they straddled the ship. They went either side. So we had a charmed life. And we went over, we got off Zeebrugge about dawn. And it's an interesting place. It's a fairly straight coast, but to preserve the coast, they built at the entrance to the Bruges Canal, they built a knoll which was famous during the First War.

19:30 It was a mile long, a great big, like a roadway it was, and height out of the water, like a pier, but it was a mile long, so anything that went into the harbour had to go the full length of this knoll. Well, we arrived there, and sent the drop ship in, we lay off the end of the knoll. Well, the next thing machine guns opened fire from the knoll at these merchant ships. I found out afterwards

20:00 that they were Belgians and French who were supposed to be defending the place. And we thought, of course, that they were Germans. But they were the local troops and I suppose when they saw these ships coming out of the dark, they imagined it was a German landing or something, and they fired at them. But we had, as I say, two motor torpedo boats with us, and they had a quadruple Lewis gun, that was four guns, Lewis guns on each side, and they whizzed down between the ships, and by Jove, did they silence the knoll.

20:30 Goodness knows how many they shaved off, but anyway, it stopped the machine gun fire from the knolls, and then the ships went in and we waited, and waited and waited, and thought, "Oh, cripes, what's happening here?" And then we heard three tremendous explosions and we knew they'd blown themselves up. And the torpedo boat took their crews off and then we tore back to England. But by this time it was full daylight, and so we were well quit of the place. But coming back I anticipated,

21:00 I was in charge of the after gun, and I anticipated that the Germans would be on our wheel, and it's marvellous how hard it is to pick an aircraft if he's a skilled man. And the Luftwaffe [German Air Force] must have had some good men then. I actually had chaps who, I had dark glasses, square glasses, like mirrors, but they used them in the engine room for looking into the fires with, and I had a couple of blokes lying on the back with these, and I said, "You just look all around the sun, all around the sun, all the time."

21:30 And everybody else was looking, but despite this precaution, amazing thing. A fellow got a good attack in on us, the first thing that we knew of it was when we heard him rev his engines. He must have gone high up in the sun, which was dead astern of us, and he come right down. And when he got close to us he revved the engines, went into a full-scale dive, and let the bombs go. And actually, it was the first time we'd heard a big salvo of bombs coming,

22:00 because they whistled all the way down. And you're sure they're going to hit you on top of the head. And they banged, they hit the water, just I suppose, just a hundred yards astern of us. They let the whole salvo go, and they threw a lot of water up, but he missed us anyway. But he had machine guns as well on the way down, and they ripped the water either side of us, but we undoubtedly had a charmed life. We fired a few shots at him, and away he went for his life. So I thought, "Oh, that's enough for us,"

22:30 remembering that none of us had ever been under fire worthwhile before. So anyway, we got back to the Thames, sort of praising God that we were back, and a bloke, a four-ring captain who we learned to hate because he seemed to be in charge of all the landward operations at that time, he came aboard, and he was very blunt about it, and he just said, "Those ships were in the wrong place," meaning the block ships.

23:00 He said, "If you can't do it in the dark, well, got over and do it in daylight." He gave us two more block ships. Well, we reckoned this was it, you know. We weren't the only ones who thought it, because as we were going out, it was about sunset, I happened to be on watch up top, and they stopped the ship for about half an hour, and they said if anybody wanted to send a letter ashore, they'd send mail off in a tug

or something, and I thought, “Well, that’s a lovely thing to be told, to write a letter home before you start off.”

23:30 They got a bloke to bring a pad and I snatched a quick letter off, and took it down for them to post.

What did you write?

Mmm?

What did you write?

Oh, I wrote to my mother. I didn’t tell her what was going on. I just sort of wrote the letter, and I thought, “Well, at least she’ll get that.” But this was one of the things that depressed me a bit, when we started really fighting like this. I always, you now it’s all right for these RN blokes, but if I get shaved off here,

24:00 my family in Australia will never know what happened to me. Whether I got drowned, or whether I got killed by the Germans had captured me, or anything. But that wasn’t a cheery thought. But that’s a minor part of the war effort. We went back then, and strange enough, we didn’t get detected during the night. I might tell you, all this time the sea was as flat as Albert Park Lake. There wasn’t a ripple on it. And we got off the knoll

24:30 well after day break, and let the ships in. But this time the Germans were on the job and there was, oh, about eight or nine German bombers, the proper bombers, arrived. And did they put up an exhibition of dive bombing. We’d seen aircraft in daylight, and of course, all the German bombers, Heinkels, were all designed so they could dive, and they could. It was a very valuable experience to me, in later years,

25:00 when I was at anti-aircraft school, to see it done, you know. And I soon learnt to realise that as soon as you saw the plane turn upside down, you’d think, “Here she comes.” For all their skill, they couldn’t hit those ships. And I always remember, one of the engines broke down in one of them, and a sloop went alongside and towed abreast, and pushed it in,

25:30 and there was a chap on the stern of one of these little ships with an Oerlikon gun. It was adopted by the British, the Oerlikons. A .22 calibre gun, and he did a splendid job. He was firing straight up in the air at these, and I didn’t see him bring any down, but I saw at least two of them whiz past us and drop their load of bombs in the sea and go low down, across the water. Unless they were trying to get home.

26:00 They probably had fellows wounded inside or they were damaged, because a couple put out. But anyway, a whole squadron bombed those ships, and they couldn’t hit them. By this time, of course, being daylight, they got the ships right up on the sill of the canal, and blew them. In later years, in all these years, I’ve been over to Britain, and I went over one day to Zeebrugge and I had a look at what it looked liked from the shore end, and it was quite an interesting experience.

26:30 **What did you see there that was so interesting?**

Oh, the actual canal itself, and the knoll from the endward end, you know. There was a memorial there to the men of the First War that died storming it in the First War. There were a lot killed in it. They had to sort of put landing parties of Blue Jackets onto the jetty to try and cover the harbour while the block ships came in,

27:00 you know, and it was quite an epic of the First War. But we didn’t do anything to that extent. And we went back and we thought that we hoped to see no more. That, to memory, was near enough the thirtieth of May. I’d never smoked in my life until then, and that’s when I started. The Germans, you see,

27:30 started pushing out through Belgium and Holland and blew everything up before them, and our troops were falling back, and we were sent out then to do sort of patrols off the Belgian coast, to try and intercept E-boats, enemy torpedo boats, and gun boats, and U-boats, if possible, from coming down to where the fighting was, and they were very eerie nights those.

28:00 I didn’t like those at all, to be quite honest. I had the wind up. And we used to be at action stations all night, and we’d be only steaming at about four knots, just slowly drifting along, and sometimes you could hear E-boats’ engines. They were looking for us, too, and hoping that, you know, never the twain should meet. But the atmosphere was that tense there, that you didn’t like to talk out loud. You had an idea that the enemy could hear you if you spoke, you know.

28:30 So I got that way, that I used to send one or two of the chaps down to the lobby below, at a time, to have a smoke and relax, and I used to do the same myself. And I don’t mind telling you, I was scared stiff there. I didn’t like this idea of sneaking around in the dark seeing who got hit first. And one night I remember, we saw the most appalling explosion, and some ship, it must have been a tanker, it just went up in a great red ball of fire like a volcano,

29:00 and then everything blacked out. And there was nothing, except the smell of oil. And a little after that, we heard somebody get hit, and we could hear steam hissing out and when daylight came it was a French destroyer that had been with us. They’d blown the bows off that, probably with a torpedo. And this went on for some time, and then the real fun started. The Germans broke though, and pushed, and they realised that they had to get the British army out.

29:30 **Don, before**

So this famous evacuation of Dunkirk started.

Can I just ask, I definitely want to talk about that some more. Just going back a little bit, Don. When you were first attacked and you were manning the after gun, you were saying.

Mmmm.

30:00 **How many men did you have working with you at that point, or under you?**

About sixteen all told. It was a twin mounting forward, and a twin mounting aft. And that included everyone. The chaps that supplied the ammunition, the ones that raked the empties out of the way and everything. But, oh no, they were very good anti-aircraft guns. They were excellent, but they were anti-aircraft guns with the result that the breeches on them were up that high. I wouldn't have liked to do surface action with them. You couldn't load them. You could load them up with twelve of fifteen round per minute, at high angle. They were all hand loaded. But you couldn't when they were on the surface action, because the breeches were too high up.

30:30 But oh, we got a bit of that, and then as I say, the warfare got more intensive then. We thought that was good enough, but really, it was nothing. They started to withdraw the British Army, and this was an amazing episode, amazing episode. They were the only seafaring nation that could have done it, because it wasn't purely a naval operation. I mean, everybody that had anything that could float, yachtsman and all sorts of people,

31:00 they called them all up, and they went to Dover and they were detailed how to get there, well, they didn't need to be told. They could see the smoke from England. All those ports were on fire. There were sea scouts there, boy scouts. The London Fire Brigade sent their fire float over. And coastal light boats. And a lot of private people who had motor yachts and things. Everyone. It was like a procession.

31:30 And saw some funny things. Things that really could shift a lot of people were things like big ferry steamers, paddle steamers and things. They could shift a few thousand at a time. But destroyers and people went in, and they were very overloaded. Which made it very difficult. If you've got five or six hundred soldiers on board, you're almost frightened to put the wheel over in case the thing capsized. I saw a very sad sight there.

32:00 We passed a sister ship of ours, the Wakeful, I think it's name was, and it was up, just lying in the water upside down. And nobody around. And all you could see was the keel, and the propellers were sticking up, you know. And it would just have to stay there till somebody torpedoed it or something to get it out of the way. But I read afterwards that most of her crew were inside her, and something like eight hundred soldiers were in that floating coffin.

32:30 It's a terrible thing to think of. A terrible way to finish up. But a lot of things like that happened. A lot of them were badly hit.

In those instances, did you ever pick up survivors?

Yeah, we got them from odd places. Actually, we were not supposed, in the Vigo, to be evacuating troops. Sort of north of the evacuation, I suppose it would be, and we were patrolling backwards and forwards on our own,

33:00 to try and guard the evacuation against any German E-boats or U-boats that came along, you know. But you couldn't help picking men up. We picked up a boatload that came out of Newport. They'd commandeered a big sailing boat, a big sort of lugger thing, but of course they didn't know anything about sailing, and then they got out to sea, and then were becalmed, but fortunately we found them and we took them all aboard.

33:30 A mixture of British sailors and French merchantmen, and French and British Officers. The French officers were done up beautifully. They looked as though they didn't have a hair ruffled, you know. Rather amused the sailors. One bloke had two letters. I think it was 67, in brass, on his lapel, and he spoke good English, and we were all talking to him, and one of the boys said, "What's the 67 for?" And he said, "67 Pursuit Squadron." Well, the sailors were all laughing. Pursuit was right. They were going for their life with the Germans on their tale. Can't blame them.

34:00 But it had its lighter moments. But it was a very depressing time, because let's face it, we were facing defeat. And after a while, it got heavy going. Most of the ships that were evacuating troops, they could have a bit of a sleep overnight at Dover or somewhere, and then they'd resume at daylight, but we went twenty-four hours around the clock, because we weren't evacuating –

34:30 we were covering the evacuation. But you didn't have much advantaged whatever you were doing, whatever way you were doing it. But we did evacuate, picked up odds and sods like that. A lot of bodies floating around, and that sort of thing. It was still fascinating when you look back on it. I've seen those ferries with lots of civilians tearing across, with loads of civilian evacuees,

35:00 and we'd be racing in the other direction. And women would lift a little toddler up to stand and wave to you and that sort of thing, and all you could do was hope they got there safely, and, which I suppose most of them did. A lot of lives lost, but the majority were saved. And I might tell, you contrary to what

you might read in history books, we did all this without any air cover. The government, I suppose for public morale, used to say, you know, “Due to the great heroism of the RAF [Royal Air Force] we have evacuated three hundred soldiers.”

35:30 But you couldn’t tell the three hundred soldiers that. They’d spent days and days getting chased by the Germans, with guns from the air and everything else. And it was a low point for the air force, unfortunately. It wasn’t their fault. It’s no good saying that they gave us tremendous support. The Spitfires [Supermarine Spitfire fighter plane] and Hurricanes [Hawker Hurricane fighter plane], and those first line fighters were built for a specific job, which they did very well,

36:00 for the defence of the homeland. Even when we went over to Zeebrugge and places, which is only an overnight trip, we didn’t get any air cover, despite how much we were getting attacked. I mentioned this to a fellow I knew years later, had done about six hundred hours in Spitfires, and I said, “You weren’t much help to us,“ I said, “we were always going to get air cover and we didn’t.” And he said, “Look, Don, we just didn’t have the range to do that sort of thing.” He said, “We got over there and it was time to turn back. We couldn’t stay over there.” But that’s an aside.

36:30 But it was a low point, and it caused a lot of trouble in Britain. I always think the Battle of Britain, where the air force did such a magnificent job, was not only a good thing for Britain, it was a good thing for the air force, because their stocks were very low, and I know they stopped air force leave in a lot of barracks. People used to catcall them in the picture theatres, when there were newsreels on, if the air force was shown. It was bad luck all round.

37:00 But they were lucky. They had the chance to vindicate themselves over and over again later on. They were marvellous. But as I say, you couldn’t cover all that stuff up in the press when you had three hundred thousand soldiers go home and talk to Mum and Dad and everybody. So it was a pretty rotten time, but fortunately, it doesn’t give me any pleasure talking about it really because it was more and more patent to us that we were losing the war,

37:30 and it’s not a good feeling, you know. You never had that feeling in the Pacific. Anyway, I think Dunkirk climaxed over a period of about nine days, if I remember rightly. And at the end of that, they were able to announce, “Right, the troops are withdrawn,” including a large number of the French, and they considered the withdrawal over. But we pulled out of that, and it’s a sort of an amazing anti-climax.

38:00 It’s unimportant little things like this that I remember mainly. We went up off the coast of England somewhere, I don’t know if it was around Howich, or somewhere like that, and we went into the most beautiful estuary. It could have been Howich, I don’t know. It was one of those places. And after all this carnage we steamed through this beautiful, like an English postcard – there was haystacks and there was green fields and everything –

38:30 and we anchored. It was a Sunday morning, I recall, and when I went down to the quarter deck and read prayers and everything, and while it was going on I was looking around that place, and I thought, “Well, it’s a different world. You wouldn’t have believed this existed,” you know. I thought of this a little while later, when they brought out a popular song in England. It was called, ‘This is worth Fighting For’, and I couldn’t help thinking afterwards, that’s how I felt when I saw these ‘green and pleasant’ fields of England,

39:00 after Dunkirk. Well, we didn’t get out of that because Dunkirk wasn’t the finish of the fighting, of course. It went right down till we ran out of Europe to retreat to. We went into Portsmouth then, and we picked up three block ships – how I hated those things – and we were sent over to sink them at the entrance to Dieppe Harbour. Dieppe had a sort of an artificial harbour with two knolls or breakwaters, and we were sent to these ships in the entrance.

39:30 It was very foggy as I remember. We had trouble keeping station on them going across the Channel, but it was daylight; got there in daylight. And unfortunately the first one sat on a magnetic mine, and there were a couple of lives lost among other things, but she just settled, not in place. But we didn’t get any opposition.

40:00 We were able to get the two of them linked together in the entrance to the harbour, and Bang! Bang! Down they went. I remember that was the tenth of June, because our state of depression couldn’t have been much lower by this time, and when we sunk those ships we tore over to England, and we turned on the midday news, and blow me down, the stinking Italians came into the war. As though things weren’t bad enough, Italy declared war on us!

40:30 And oh, cripes, what we had to say about that was nobody’s business. They came in for the carve up of the British Empire, as they thought, you know. And the only satisfaction I got, was that they lost their own instead. But it was a terrible thing for us to think we had another enemy. Well, we kept going. I could make some interesting observations on this work along here.

Tape 6

00:30 What we were doing, actually, was trying to destroy installations and things that would be, and we

weren't the only ones. We had Blue Jacket landing parties and everything. They were blowing down big cranes, or setting fire to big tanks. Anything that would deprive the Germans of the use of these. That's why we were blocking these harbours, so they couldn't use them. We went next to Le Havre, quite a big place,

01:00 and there was a lot of action going on there, and all sort of things. I remember one night, a British MTB, Motor Torpedo Boat, came up beside us, called out they had some casualties on board. We were moving about, up and down the harbour, and so they called out to come alongside. Anyhow, they had a man who was dead, an RN engineer, and he'd been hit, a couple of others were horribly injured,

01:30 and they only had a small crew, you know about six or eight. But what happened, they'd been up to a place called Fécamp, which was just next to Le Havre, and their instructions, apparently, were to go in there for some reason as part of a general overall operation, but they'd had a couple of shells fired that were beautiful shots. As a gunnery man I could admire them. They burst right over the E-boat, the motor boat, and so they got this captain. Well, the captain of it was a young sub-lieutenant.

02:00 I suppose if the truth were known, he'd been a bank clerk a few weeks before. And he came down and came alongside, and we took the dead fellow off and laid him down on the deck, and we got mess tables out the put the wounded on them, and took them up to the fo'c'sle because we had no other facilities. But this four-ring captain we were carrying, who was in charge, he raced down and he blew the life out of this young sub-lieutenant, "What the hell are you doing in here?" you know, and he said, "I've got casualties,"

02:30 and he said, "Well, that's no reason why you shouldn't be up there." And he said, "Get back into that harbour at Fécamp. You get back there straight away." And the chap said, "Well, what about my RA [Rear Admiral], Sir," and this captain said, "What about him?" and he said, "He's dead, Sir." And he said, "I can't help that. You get back and do what you're told." And the poor wretch said, "Half speed ahead," and went. And I thought, "My God." There's no sentiment in it, you know. We were there for quite some days and aircraft used to come over

03:00 and bomb us quite a bit, and bomb installations. It was very sad to see. I was brought up fire-brigade minded as a youngster, and to look along these great city streets, and see a building with smoke coming out, and you'd think, you know if you got up there with a length of hose, you could put that out. But it's just burning and nobody was stopping it and it was gradually spreading. I don't know where the population was, in the fields on their way west, or something. But I saw ships hit there.

03:30 There was a liner lying there. I don't know what she was, but a dive bomber come over, a Junker, a Messerschmitt. And he hit it beautiful. Just looped and put a bomb right into her bridge, and she just lit up from end to end. No trouble. And she was left there to burn. And that sort of horrible destruction went on. And then we went back to Portsmouth and we picked up a Blue Jacket landing party, sailors, and they had cases and cases and cases of gun cotton, so it must have been their job to blow up cranes.

04:00 The oil tankers were on fire by this time. We steamed in and we put these sailors ashore, all in full marching order, and off they went. I don't now what happened to them. We had our own worries. A lot of these sort of jobs, until eventually, and this is what I was going to say. You make some interesting observations when you get into close action, and I concluded then, that what you call bravery is very largely a matter of man's training. It's like you could sum it up and say, "Every man to his own job."

04:30 We used to admire these air force blokes in these old Ansons [Avro Anson fighters], which were like flying tram cars, carrying out reconnaissance up and down the Channel, and you'd think, "What hope would they get, if they met anything?" you know. And yet one day I saw one shot down. In fact a trawler of our own shot it down, a machine gun I think. It lobbed on the water and we went and whipped a boat down and picked up the crew, and it was a sergeant and three officers or something,

05:00 and they were standing on the top of it and we picked them up, and he came aboard. They said to me, "When are you going back?" One bloke had a bullet in his foot or something. Nobody was hurt much. And they said to me, "When are you going back to England?" I said, "I don't know. I suppose we'll be a few days out here, but we'll go back," and they virtually went pale, you know. As they walked away I heard one say to the other, "Did you hear what he said? We'll be out here all night."

05:30 The thought of being out there in a war ship was terrifying. They were out of their own element, you see. And the same thing. We always had great admiration for the 'squaddies', as we called them, the soldiers. And one of the last jobs we did at Le Havre, probably was the last, was to lie in the harbour and pick up the last British troops that reached the port. And we manoeuvred around there, dodging bombs and everything, and by this time I might tell you shells were starting to land in the water,

06:00 I suppose from the fighting; they were starting to hit the water. Anyway, these Tommies came running up the wharf. It was a big city. Like the wharves in Melbourne, it was. And we raced in alongside, and as exciting as it was, I couldn't help laughing. I quite enjoyed it. We came alongside and put the wires out, and slipped a little gangway onto the jetty, and these came running up.

06:30 Poor wretches. God knows what they'd been through. "Come on, get on board," you know. And just as they sat down, German fighters came over and started shooting down the barrage balloon. Which meant they were going to bomb the place. It was almost funny to see, particularly as I say, for a professional like me, watching all this. The soldiers were trying to fight their way back down the gangway. And the sailors were calling out, "Let go the wires. Let go the wires."

07:00 And it just showed it was every man to his own job. The soldiers were terrified of getting on that ship. And the sailor was terrified of being caught ashore. Once you got out, with some deep water under him where he could manoeuvre, well, it was all right. At least you could fight. That was your trade, you know. Where the soldier would have been better than us on shore. We were sort of pushing them up on board, ripped the gangway up, and I still the remember the beautiful feeling when I felt the deck trembling and the old propellers started to go round, and we got out into the harbour.

07:30 But I always thought that, you know, there was an object lesson to be learnt there. It was just a case of every man to his own job. And at one stage, you asked me whether we'd had anything to do with a U-boat, although we were chasing them but never really saw them. But we had a very close escape. When I told you earlier, we were patrolling backwards and forwards, to cover the Dunkirk retreat, it was beautiful sunny morning and calm weather, and we were away on our own, out of sight of everybody else,

08:00 and we were doing a fair speed, I suppose twenty-five knots, and a U-boat fired a fish at us from about six hundred yards away; it was very, very close. But I've since heard U boat commanders say that was the perfect distance. And we saw the bubble hit the surface. And the moment it did, and this fish came towards us and went straight under the ship and out the other side, because I remember wondering, I turned round, I suppose I was the only bloke on the ship, I turned round, and sure enough, there it was going for its life for the horizon.

08:30 And we turned around to attack the U-boat. We would probably have got a shake up, but we didn't know as much about anti-submarine warfare as we did later in the war, of course. But the interesting thing was, while we were heaving depth charges at this, this squadron of aircraft came high up, and we opened up on them, so we were actually firing the anti-aircraft guns at the aircraft, and attacking the submarines at the same time.

09:00 It took me about forty years to find out why that thing didn't go off. Why it didn't hit us. In our ignorance we always said, "Oh, he's fired it too close and it hasn't found its depth properly and it's gone under us." But this was not the case. They were meant to go under us. The Germans, instead of having percussion heads on their torpedoes, they thought they were miles ahead of us, and they had magnetic heads. So they could fire to go under you and when they went under you they'd explode and go up.

09:30 And if that had happened, we'd have been in the water in five minutes, the speed we were going in the old thing we were on. But what they didn't realise, that the British, we might be stupid in many ways, but we'd done our best and our homework, and when mines came on, they what they called degaussed, I think it's an electric term, named after gorse or gowse, G A U S S. They put wire cables around the ship by some means, and they rendered them non-magnetic for the northern hemisphere,

10:00 so it was safe from magnetic mines. And of course, this is what caused the Germans so much anguish. I read in German books that all heads rolled after that. They said they hit ship after ship in the Norway campaign, and for some reason they were blaming the torpedoes, you see. But in our case I know that's what it would be. But it probably saved my life. We would have been in the water in five minutes. We wouldn't have had time to send a message.

10:30 But that just about brought the warfare, that intensive warfare, it certainly brought the land warfare almost to an end.

So, Don, you didn't know about the gauss, you didn't know that the ship was de-magnetised.

Oh, we did. Oh, yeah. The ships were all called in for that purpose. They set up a permanent system in them after, but for the time being they what we called 'wiped them'. I don't understand electricity, but in some way they wiped them until they got time to get you into dockyard,

11:00 and then they built in a sort of circular cable right around the hulk, inside, and it sort of de-magnetised you, and that's what it was done for.

If you'd been hit by a 'fish' or whatever, and you said you had maybe five minutes before the ship sunk, what were your chances of survival then?

I don't know really. Fortunately, it wasn't winter. The water over there was colder than it was here. But anybody that got anything to hold onto might have been able to hold on.

11:30 But I don't think we would have got out a chance to send a signal. I think it would have just gone. And hope that an aircraft passing overhead would send a signal that there were blokes in the water ahead. I don't know. But I think our chances would have been pretty slight. But anyway, we got back, put back on the east coast then,

12:00 and I'm pleased to say I wasn't on that run very long. It wasn't a very attractive coast, and because only being a few minutes, it was now only a few minutes flight from the enemy. They were in Holland and Belgium and these places, just like flying from here to Eaglehawk more or less. So I suddenly got a draft, to my surprise, to HMS Somali. And I was rather pleased with this, because I thought I got a chance of putting up a fight now, because Somali was the flotilla leader of the 6th Flotilla, which were fighter craft.

12:30 Quite the opposite to the old Vigo, you know. They were only a few months old and they had six 4.7

guns, and four-barrelled pompom and everything that opened and shut. Modern fire control system. And they were a very big destroyer and I didn't really know why I got a draft to her, but then by some chance I received an Australian newspaper, and I found out they were building them in Australia, these Tribal class [destroyers] –

13:00 the ones they named after Australian tribes. The Tribals that Britain built, there were about fourteen of them, but they were all named Zulu, and Sheikh and Ghurka and Ashanti and Matabeli. And the one I went to was the Somali. She was the leader. And so she carried a four-ring captain. And when I joined her, she was getting repaired. She'd mean near-missed by a five hundred pound bomb in the Norway campaign

13:30 and her mess deck was twisted all out of shape, but they'd got her back all the way to Liverpool. And so I went aboard and there was about a half-ship's company there, and I met the first lieutenant, and he greeted me very cordially. And he was the chap that run a ship all the same, sort of on peace-time standards as close as possible.

14:00 And the captain, Captain Caslan, my daughter would have said, "He's got the small man syndrome," you know. He was a very powerful character. Everybody was scared stiff of him. But he'd have been a good man in a fight, don't worry. But he didn't relax or anything. He was a pretty tough hombre. Even the officers were frightened of him. But he had command of a division of these destroyers.

14:30 She was out of plumb at the time. Well, she was getting repaired. So I came aboard, and of course, nobody knew me. I was the only Australian on these ships you see, I was only sort of on loan, if you could call it that. Anyway, I got to know the ship and had a good look over her, and an interesting thing, with all the action she'd seen, she carried eighteen boys. They were lower still than ordinary seamen.

15:00 They were out of the training ships in places, and they had a tough time, these boys, you know. They were only sixteen and seventeen years of age, and they were doing the same fighting as a man, and they were dying the same as the men were, and they got a miserable pittance. About a shilling a day, I think it was. And they only let them have two and six a week. In case they had an orgy. Even when you got into harbour, they only had leave till seven o'clock at night and this sort of thing, you know. The same as though it was peace time and they were in a training ship.

15:30 They were well-trained boys. They'd been hard disciplined from the time they joined the training depot. But we carried eighteen of them, and had a boys' mess deck. There was a lot of restrictions. They did the same work as everyone else. And I rather liked them, you know. You never run a message for yourself if you had a boy around. Just grabbed a boy and said, "Go up to my mess and bring down a towel or something like that," you know. They were at everybody's beck and call. But they were on gun crews and things, the same as everybody else.

16:00 But anyway, this is a good example of how the RN was prepared to treat you compared to what my own navy did. The first lieutenant said to me one day, he said, "Walker, these boys, these men have had a pretty rough time, you know, with the Norway campaign, and everything," he said, "I want them all to go into camp." And he said, "I've arranged tents and cooking utensils and everything that opens and shuts." And he said, "They're going out to a military camp,

16:30 camp in the country," some miles from Liverpool, a place called Oodkaa [?], it was. A British officer told me recently, it's still operating, that camp. And I said, "Oh, yes." And he said, "You can go." He said, "I'm going to send half the ship's company and they'll do ten days or something out there, and I'll arrange to bring them back and then I'll send the other half out." I said, "Oh, yes," I said, "and what officers are coming out there?"

17:00 He said, "I've got no officers to spare," he said, "you'll be in charge." And do you know, never once did anyone come out to see if I was as full as a boot, or whether the blokes had cleared out of camp or anything. I was a petty officer's gunner's mate and I should be trustworthy, you know. That was the attitude. But…

And could they trust you?

They could. I run a pretty tight ship myself. I was a gunner's mate, don't forget, and I didn't stand any funny business. So I thought, "This will do me. Get under canvas." And I went and I got a military officer to show us where to go

17:30 and he showed us how to put up a bell tent, and so I rigged a row of tents and I had to allocate so many to a tent, and I detailed off a boy for my batman. And I had all the ammunition and stuff because you went out fully rigged, because there was always this danger of invasion at that stage, you didn't know whether you were going to get an airborne invasion cases, and all that sort of thing,

18:00 so we had rifles and bayonets and tin helmets, and stacks of ammunition. Cases of… And the only think the Jimmy said to me, the first lieutenant, when I was going, he said, "You do what you like with them, mate, but I would like them to learn to shoot." I said, "Yeah, righto." And I think, compared to the average Australian rating, they needed to be taught. You struck blokes who were instinctively good shots, but most of them were not much good. So then I had all this arranging to do, to go and arrange and be allocated a rifle range, but mostly it was recreational, you know.

18:30 They played games and football, and anything interesting cropped up, I heard the army were

demonstrating the two-inch mortar. It had just come in. They were going out in the hills there, and there were experts coming from all over England to watch an assault by a platoon firing smoke mortar bombs, and those bombs. So I went to a Major Tarr there, who everybody was frightened of in that camp, but he thought the world of us. I went around to his mess, and I said, I'd heard about this and I said, "Do you mind if I take my boys up?"

19:00 "No, no. Love to have you." So we went up for the demonstration. Anything exciting like that, I used to take them along. And one day, I decided we'd go for a route march, and we got our rifles and equipment, and we went for a march out in the country. It was lovely. You know, the English countryside. It was quite nice once you got out the camp, and we went through a little town. I think it was called Formby.

19:30 Made me think of George Formby, the comedian. And when we marched down the street, I saw a nice little tea rooms, or café, there, so I halted them and I went in and the two old dears that were there, ran it, and I said, "If I give you an hour or something, could you knock up some tea, some cakes, or sandwiches or something?" "Oh, yes. I'm sure we could." So I said, "Right, I'll be back in an hour." So we marched out in the countryside and came back into town and marched back up on the footpath, and gave the order, "Pile arms," and in we went in,

20:00 and of course, this was rather amazing to those fellows. They must have thought I was a millionaire. It only cost me about eighteen pence a head or something, but to them it was good stuff. Anyway they all had a good afternoon tea, and I paid these old ducks, and we marched back. So generally speaking, I'd say we had a nice time. And I had a second-in-command under me, Bert Orff, he was an RMPA [?], he was a nice chap. And I had an orderly used to go in –

20:30 I don't remember how you got into Liverpool, whether it was a train or a bus – but he used to go in each day and bring out mail or anything we wanted, you know. Tobacco or anything like that. But I quite enjoyed that, and I thought it was good. But anyway, we finished rounds, and the other mob came out and we did much the same thing. Finally we got a signal to return to the ship and a bus and that come out and we went back in, and then the ship got fixed up by then, of course, and the usual thing,

21:00 out doing trials and everything. It was an interesting thing. One day, when we were heading out, we were supposed to get back into circulation again. The ship bumped the side of the dry dock coming out, and the captain was worried in case one of the screws was damaged, so back they went and stopped, and they sent to the dockyard for a diver. It amazed me. I thought those great big dockyards, they'd have a permanent diving party of their own, you know.

21:30 And after a while an old bloke come round. Oh, the first lieutenant said to me, "There's a diver coming round. Grab a half a dozen hands and go and give him a hand." So along he come pulling a handcart with his pump and his helmet and all his air pipes and everything on it. And so I went and met him, and I said, "I'm a diver. I'll rig you up," you see. And it was quite an art rigging a diver in those things, and how he got on getting casual blokes to help him, I don't know,

22:00 but I soon whipped him into it. And I remember he said to me, he was quite an elderly man, or he was to me, and he said, "It's a pleasure to be dressed by a navy diver." Because I knew all the drill you know, so I put him over the side and he went out. And I don't mention the fact that that was one time when diving came in handy. I was able to help this old bloke out. So away we went, and we went up the north of Scotland and we went up to Scapa Flow.

22:30 The Somali being a bigger destroyer, it operated more against Norway, and out into the Atlantic, the North Atlantic. And we used to escort ships like the Hood, and the Repulse, and those things and the aircraft carriers, when they'd do sweeps out into the Atlantic, looking for German raiders, and so on, and we used to do interesting asides. One day, just ourself and two destroyers set off in the afternoon,

23:00 and we raced across to Norway, which you could do from there, you know. If you used Australian distances it would take you a while to get used to the map of other countries. I don't know. Of course, the captain and all these people, they knew more than we knew. They had access to intelligence and everything, and very often you didn't know why you went to certain places. But the history books now can tell you why, you know. But the first lieutenant said to me, "You can get on the public address, and,"

23:30 he said, "you can do this." He said, "Talk to the ship's company and say we're going over the coast of Norway," and he didn't tell me what they knew, but they must have known something. He said, "And tell them if we have any action at all, we can expect it round about midnight." So they had good information. We thought we were just going to do a sweep along the coast, but they must have had information about this unfortunate ship. It wasn't a war ship, it was a small merchant ship.

24:00 It could have been carrying heavy water for atomic research or something. They used to get news from the agents in Norway, so their timing was good. I was down below at what they call the TS. It was the room where all the calculating mechanisms were. There was a PO in charge of it, but I was generally stationed there just so they'd know where I was if anything went wrong with the guns and everything. And I'm sitting there, and twenty past twelve, he had on phones, the chap,

24:30 and I heard him say, "Alarm port, a dark object." And I heard him say, "Open fire." And I thought, "My God." And away he went, the first broadside. And I thought – I was looking at the walls – I thought, "There'll be ones coming this way any minute." I said, to him, "I'll go out and see what they're firing at." And I ran out and looked up a deck, and this ship was lit up. It was the only time I saw a search light

used in the war. Apart from the towns you know, after aircraft. But they were all found by eye in those days.

25:00 There was no radar. And it was black as the inside of a cow. Anyway, they switched the light on and wang! And we whacked ten broadsides into him, and I don't think we missed a shot. And it was a real experience. It was a sad experience for them. But it was a good experience for me, because it's not often you get a chance to fire in what we call the 'fixed sight zone'. That's when the range gets down to the stage where the trajectory is practically horizontal. And provided you aim properly you can't miss, you know. Bang! Bang! Bang!

25:30 And of course the other two behind us joined in. I don't know if they got any hits, but we did. And all of a sudden they switched the light out and kept going. They didn't stop, see whether he sunk or whatever; it's just one of the horrible things you do in warfare. I had an occasion to think of it later when I could have been in a similar position, the other way round.

What sort of a ship was it?

I don't know what the story was, but she must have been, whether they just wanted to give them a shake up, and frighten shipping from using the coast, I don't know.

26:00 I didn't see all that much action, but there was a tremendous amount of exercising, and the worst part of the life in her, I wasn't there all that long, was the appalling weather at sea. The North Sea, where I'd served my time before, was a dirty choppy sea. It was pretty rough. But when you got in that Atlantic sea, it was like the big dipper at Luna Park, you know. Enormous seas. Nothing like it. And these big fellows that we were escorting, the Hood at forty-two thousand tons, they were beautiful ships.

26:30 They were like yachts and they could go right through it. We went all the way. and it was a terrifying experience. Any destroyer man will tell you. You rush right up the top of one of these billows, and then there'd be nothing under you. And the whole ship would fall perhaps twenty feet and crash into the next trough. The noise when it hit that bottom was louder than the noise of the guns going off.

27:00 It shook the life out of you. You had to eat standing up and everything, and you'd be doing that for days some times. Days. Oh, but I'm not complaining about it, because there were RN fellows in much smaller ships than that, that served the war out in the North Atlantic. There was thirty thousand men lost in the Atlantic you know. Thirty thousand, and it was a terrible business. But of course, the war depended on it,

27:30 and I always raise my hat to anybody who served in the Atlantic, particularly those RN chaps who went on for years doing it, and in little ships. At least we were in a big ship. And if it come to a fight, we had a pretty good chance, too. But it made me think of one time when I was on the old east coast run, we pulled into somewhere and we had a few hours and they gave a couple of hours' leave,

28:00 and I went ashore there and the snow was thawing and you were up to your ankles in mush and everything, and I found my way into this big town, and I found a café in the blackout and I went in, and these are little things that stick in your mind. I went in and I sat down to have a meal, and the girl came and she laid the table, and she put down a little dish with two tiny cubes of butter, like little dice on it, which is fair enough, that was all that there was, I suppose, for everybody,

28:30 and I ordered whatever it was, and when she brought it out and put it down, had two more bits of butter and I always remember, she said, "There's a couple more for you, Jack." And I said, "Thanks, that's very good of you." And she said, "No, it's not." She said, "If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have anything." My word, she didn't know what that meant. You know, the fact that those people were living hand to mouth, you know, for food. The food supply and everything in England was measured by the week, according to what convoys were lost, and what got through,

29:00 but I never forgot that woman saying to me, "If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have anything." So, I always think that those people in Britain, they were the heroes of the war. I had a similar experience once. Going through London, and I went down the underground railway. It shocked me. All the way down those iron bound stairs that you get in subways, there were families, old people and people with babies and everybody, spread out on these, getting ready to spend the night,

29:30 and when you get down to the platform level, the platform was just a mass of people lying down on the platform with about four feet along the edge, for people to get in and out of the trains as they went through, and I just looked and I felt appalled. And would you know, that they looked around and they saw me coming down with brass buttons on, and they gave me a cheer, and I remember a bloke's voice called out, "Good on you, Jack, you're doing a great job." And here they were every night, coming down and sleeping there, and they didn't know if their street, let alone their house, was going to be there, when they went up.

30:00 And of course, every factory that they worked in was a legitimate war target. And I find it hard to explain to people over here. I've even heard people say, "Oh, they didn't come out and help us." Gor blimey, help us! We didn't know there was a war on out here. It didn't take statesmen, it only took the working men and women of England to say, "Look, we've had enough of this, anything's better than this." And that would have been the end of the war as far as we were concerned.

30:30 You get cities like Coventry that were purposely obliterated off the face of the earth, you know. And

even as early as I was over there, there were people that didn't have a living relation. Every relation that had been killed, you know, in their own homes and that. They lost, I think, two or three times more civilians, than we lost in the three of our fighting forces put together. And I always think they did a magnificent job, because they were on food rations and everything.

31:00 You couldn't even give your children chocolates or anything, you know. Mum would have to get up and go down to the butcher's shop and get in a queue before the shop opened, and hope she might get her husband a couple of sausages, and in a lot of ways they put up with far more than I did. I had not much more to report on the war over there. My time had expired, and eventually I got a draft then to Excellent again. That was the gunnery school at Portsmouth. And I took the opportunity to do a bit more advanced anti-aircraft course.

31:30 A lot had been learnt by then. And then I came back and I had one of the luckiest escapes of the war. I came back on an old ship called the Thermistocles, according to which school you went to. She was an old liner from the First War days – creaked all the way home. Loaded with passengers, she was. But I come home, and a few other naval men, some of whom I knew,

32:00 and some soldiers that were being sent back SNLR, Services No Longer Required. And we left Liverpool with a smaller liner called the Britannia. As a matter of fact. I knew a chap that was on her. Had dinner the night before. Knew him from Whale Island days, and he said, oh, he was on his way out to the Med. And so anyhow, we left together and after about a day we weren't escorted. We just sailed unescorted right down the middle of the Atlantic.

32:30 And down about between Africa and south America, the captain of the merchant liner got a signal that there was a raider expected to be in the vicinity, and to take different courses, and where we'd been steaming abreast we opened out like that, and we waved to all the mob on the Britannia, and they waved to us, and within twenty-four hours, the Germans had a ship called the Lathor. I didn't know at the time, but I read since the war, it was an armed merchant ship

33:00 like the one that sank the Sydney. It blew that ship to pieces, by gunfire, you know. Passengers, of course, they lost a terrific amount of life. It was in a book called Lifeboat 17, I think was the name of it. It was a young Scotsman named McVicar. He was a young officer, and he had a boatload of people packed to the bung, and they decided that, rather than head for the coast of Africa,

33:30 being a merchant officer, he knew a bit about tides and winds, and he tried to get to South America. I think it took about a month, and by that time there was very few left alive. They nearly all died. And, oh, they had a shocking time. And eventually they washed up, what was left of them, on the coast of South America. And that's the luck of the game. It was just a matter of who put the wheel to port and who put the wheel to starboard. Because we knew straight away.

34:00 I suppose the ship was intercepting radio. But the word went round that they'd got the Britannia, and they did, too. When I came back here, nothing very exciting happened. I came back, and I'd been away for two years. I went to the gunnery school. And what I'd learned was a great deal of use to me, and to the gunnery school, because when I took classes I could tell them exactly what happens when, not as per the book, but in actual practice. "You'll see this," and, "You'll see that," and, "You'll do so and so." And I had a good spell,

34:30 a good many months in depot. Particularly taking AA [anti-aircraft] classes we called them. Anti-aircraft classes. And by that time, the [HMAS] Arunta had commissioned and then I was earmarked for the second one, the Warramunga. And eventually I went over, a few weeks before she commissioned, and got everything lined up. But the time in the Somali was a terrific help to me.

35:00 I was about the only one, I was the only one on the ship that had ever been on a tribal, and I knew, as the stores came, I knew exactly where everything went. And how much ammunition to have there, and what was there, and eventually then, a few weeks later after I get there, I was living ashore there, a funny thing, looking back, you know. I got paid what they called lodge and comp. That was lodgings and compensation expenses to live ashore, because the ship wasn't in commission,

35:30 and you'd be surprised how we went for perks like that. I got seven and six a day and I always had to find my own accommodation and meals. And that would do me. That was better than living on the ship, you know. And it's funny how you value it. Even though you're out of pocket to billyo. The fact that you could go, I got accommodation at McLeay Street, a nice place up near Kings Cross. A nice place in McLeay Street,

36:00 and I boarded there for a few weeks until the ship commissioned. Then, of course, the ship's company arrived, and I must say this, right from the very start they were a very superior ship's company. By then were enlisting a lot of lads who really wanted to enlist. They were too young when the war started, but we had chaps stopped halfway through accountancy, and halfway through medicine and halfway through, to come to sea,

36:30 and they were a very, very fine class of chap. And I put the happiness and the efficiency of the Warramunga down very much to one thing. Most of the ship's company were entirely inexperienced, and strangely in war time, every petty officer was a permanent man. And this was the perfect combination. Not having people say, "Oh, on the last ship we did this." "Hey. Get away, you're not on the last ship. You're on this one," you know. And it was a perfect combination.

37:00 Of course, the same old thing then. Gun trials and depth charges, and speed trials. Although you weren't doing them under conditions I did the previous ones under. We did when we first commissioned, come back one morning off leave, and there was clouds of black smoke coming out the funnel. And I thought, "Something's happening. They're raising steam." An American merchant ship called the Star King had been torpedoed, some hundred, couple of mile, hundred miles outside Sydney.

37:30 And we raced out there, and they were in the boats, and we picked them up, and then we tried to tow her, but she was almost standing on end. But anyway, the bulkheads broke and during the night she disappeared. We brought these American blokes back. So there were the odd Japanese U-boats operating about that time, and of course, there were ships lined up in Bass Strait,

38:00 off Apollo Bay and those places, you know. But generally speaking, there wasn't much to worry about. Not to worry me, anyway, after what I'd seen at close quarters. But eventually then we got into full commission. And we went first of all to Townsville, really. Running between Townsville and Milne Bay, escorting convoys. And then we went up to Palm Island and those places. Exercises. And they eventually formed a bit of a task force, Australian and I think a couple of American cruisers.

38:30 Arunta and us and a couple of American destroyers, I forget the number of it. But we operated them on various things. Like we went out to Woodlark Island – I think that was the first landing we did – and then, from then on it was just landings, one after the other, but a lot of young fellows that only served in those ships, would consider that they had quite a good war experience.

39:00 And they certainly gave good service. The war never worried me at all in the Pacific. I tell you one of the great differences. We knew that if the war lasted twenty years, we were going to win it. That's a very different feeling than when you're getting pushed back and pushed back, and you're evacuating soldiers, which they did in the Mediterranean after us, and Europe. And at the time after Dunkirk you couldn't see any way.

39:30 The Germans were twenty or thirty years ahead of us. They were a race that was able to say to the people, "Guns before butter," you know. Even the autobahns they made to popularise motoring, they were all military roads. They had the game sewn up. And you could not see, and even living ashore in England, it was depressing. There was no church bells allowed to be rung, for instance. The church bells rang, that was the sign of an invasion. And you all got out on the street and fought. And so it was a different aspect.

40:00 People have often said to me, "How do you reckon the Germans would have got on? Do you reckon they would have been able to invade it?" Because nobody ever knows that. I don't know. That water was still the obstacle. If it had been on land, they'd have gone through Britain. Because we had nothing. The only thing I always say to people, "I'll tell you this much. It wouldn't have been like invading Denmark or Belgium, because in Britain, I'm quite sure every man, woman or child that was strong enough to carry a pick handle, would have taken a German out."

40:30 And they'd have had a lot of resistance there. They might have made a first wave attack, but I don't think they could have supported all the heavy stuff. And the British Navy, if necessary, they'd have sunk every last man and every last ship in defence of the homeland. It was an oppressing atmosphere. And to get back to the Pacific, you didn't have that. You knew that with the enormous might of American and its untapped,

41:00 all its factories were not air raid attacked or anything. They could turn it out like chocolates coming out of a slot machine, you know. We knew we were going to win.

So that's why you're saying that if it lasted twenty years we would have won, because of the Americans . . . .

We knew were going to win because the Japanese budgeted for a quick, short war. They were going the grab. I don't for a moment think that Australia was at any risk of invasion. It amuses me, every couple of weeks there's a celebration now for something, every one of which saved Australia from invasion.

41:30 When the Yanks sunk about four Japanese aircraft carriers at Midway, when the war first started, the Japs [Japanese] were more or less finished. They didn't have the shipping to come here. And I mean, when it was all said and done, what would be the good of invading Broome or Darwin? They would have all starved to death. The only places worth invading were places like Newcastle and Sydney. And they only had two hopes – Buckley's and none. At the same time, there was a lot of work to be done.

Tape 7

00:30 On the Warramunga we started to do something. It was just landing after landing. We did Woodlark Island. We did do a good warm up for our inexperienced youths. Quite early they decided to bombard Gasmata. Above New Guinea. Up in New Britain.

01:00 Nobody was game to go up to Rabaul, where the main base was, but the Japanese apparently had bases on the south of New Britain. Arunta and Warramunga and two American destroyers were detailed off to

do this, and did quite a bit of drill in the dark at night, just to knock the gumshoes into shape.

01:30 And we set off and we steamed at considerable speed, and got to Gasmata at midnight, and apparently there was a big sort of base area – they had a camp there and stores and all sorts of stuff – and at midnight we opened fire, the four of us, and we fired, I suppose four hundred rounds each, incessantly into this place. X-Gun, one of our anti-airfire guns, it kept firing star shells to illuminate the target area,

02:00 and the main armament fire, the 4.7, and we fired there, and as soon as we finished… I might tell you this, when it comes to a thing like that, if you cart a raid like that at night in a war ship, sometimes you had an advantage that the Japanese naturally thought it was an air attack, and they rushed down to their shelters. And it took them a long while wake up that in actual practice, they were being fired at, you know, from a couple of thousand yards out at sea.

02:30 So there was a fair chance you'd get away with it, particularly as we were using flashless ammunition then. As soon as we finished there, and nobody got hurt, we came flat out, right out the Trobiand Islands and back. And there hadn't been that much close warfare, not for Australian ships anyway at that time. A friend of mine, Arnie Cooper, he was gunner's mate on the Shropshire. And he was with a fleet in Milne Bay,

03:00 and when he came back the four of us steamed at good speed up Milne Bay, and I met him after, and he said, "By gosh, I envied you." And I said, "How do you mean?" and he said, "Gosh," he said, "Everybody came up on top to look," he said, "when you came back." He said, "All you blokes steaming up there with all the smoke burnt off your funnels, all the paint burnt off you funnels, and all the paint burnt off the guns. It really looked as though they'd been somewhere," you know. And of course, the speed we travelled all the paint got burnt off,

03:30 and when you fire three or four hundred pounds straight off, the paint used to drip off the guns too. He envied me greatly. Oh, we really looked as though we'd done something. After that we landed troops on Cape Gloucester. That was a very big landing, round about Boxing Day. That was a very big landing, Cape Gloucester. And what General MacArthur [United States General Douglas MacArthur] was doing, you could see. He wasn't advancing half a mile at a time. He was picking key points,

04:00 where he could say, "Well, if we get hold of that, you can forget all the rest, and leave the Japanese to rot and to starve." You know. And that's what they did. They took Cape Gloucester, and then somewhere on the opposite side, Saidor, or one of those places. But the most interesting thing we did, in my opinion, at that time, was the attack on the Admiralty Islands, and that was almost a turning point in the war. That was a beautiful base, because it nullified Rabaul and all sorts of places.

04:30 Once they had air bases and naval bases there. Reading history, the Americans made a great miscalculation there. They flew air reconnaissances repeatedly over there, but the Japanese weren't as silly as we thought they were, and as soon as they saw aeroplanes coming, they all went to ground. With the result the American intelligence built up the false belief that there was no Japanese there. And they sent a very weak force up to do what they called an armed reconnaissance

05:00 to go ashore and have a look. If things got too hot they could come off. But if there were no Japs there, they could stay. They got the greatest shock of their lives. Because all they sent up, there was two American destroyers, and, three American destroyers and the Warramunga. The Warramunga was the senior ship. Captain Deshano, I think, yes, it was. And the Americans landed this landing party in a place called Huyen Harbour. It was hard to get in and a damned sight harder to get out of too.

05:30 And they thought, oh, they didn't get any opposition, so they all landed and started to set up camp, and then the Japanese arrived in their thousands. They had them trapped. And I tell you what, those four war ships, although they were only destroyers, they were all good ones. They saved that campaign and they kept those soldiers ashore. And the American army were big enough to acknowledge it afterwards. They said, "If it hadn't been for those warships, we were gone."

06:00 But a warship's fire is tremendously accurate. Much more so than artillery fire on shore and everything. And they were signalling all the time, you know, "Fire into such and such a sector," and, "Fire." And we were that close we could actually see Japanese guns firing at them and everything. And we run in and put a broadside into them, you know. And I will remember watching that one. Japanese attacked an American post

06:30 and the Americans called out, "Quick. Fire into such and such a section." And we just came out. Really, it was like shooting fish in a barrel. Like firing at the rifle range. And bang! And a broadside, and you'd see it go right onto the very objective you wanted. And so they subdued the attack there sufficiently for the Americans to consolidate themselves, and to send back word, "For God's sake, send everything you've got," you know. But across this little harbour they were in,

07:00 there were Japs on the other side that were sort of machine gunning across them, and what Deshano did, he lined the four destroyers up in line, and we steamed slowly along the edge of the jungle at four hundred yard range, which is only like down to the second street from here, and as we went past we fired everything. The 4.7 guns were firing, right down to the machine guns. And you could see palm trees and everything just coming down, and the Americans told us, I don't know whether it was an exaggeration,

07:30 but they had to send the engineers in there to dispose of all the dead and everything before they could take it over. And I don't doubt it was true too. But that was very, very thrilling. We did a lot of shooting around Manus [Island], and once that was captured, it changed the whole nature of the war in the Pacific, really. As far as we were concerned, that was. We went then, came back into Dutch New Guinea. Places like Hollandia or right along to Numfoor.

08:00 Biak [Island] was a good one. I was amused at Biak. We arrived back there and motor traffic and everything was still riding, going around with their lights, and they didn't realise there was a huge fleet waiting a few hundred yards about to come in. As usual, what we used to do was bombard and demolish the whole joint, and then the waves of soldiers would go in. Then I think, having secured the whole coast.

08:30 Numfoor was another one, but there are too numerous to mention. Having secured the whole coast of New Guinea, and then got a hold in the (UNCLEAR) the next thing was obviously the Philippines. So they built an enormous fleet up in Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea, and we were there. Oh, there were dozens and dozens. But bear in mind, by this time we had the most beautiful radar.

09:00 All the previous part of the war, you know, you had to peer into the darkness. It was a very skilled game. They had special dark places where they taught you how to use these binoculars, because you weren't looking for a ship, you were looking for one spot that was a bit darker than something else, you know, whereas by the time we got out to the Pacific they had radar where you could see the shape of the ship you were doing. And when you were steaming in formation, you generally looked down on a glass plate and there was the whole of the ships laid out in line, and all this sort of thing.

09:30 It was a real pushover. And this was a great help. So, MacArthur's big landing then, of course, was the Philippines. There was a story going around that the Australian army and everything were going to be in that, but MacArthur didn't want them. I suppose for a number of reasons. He'd been kicked out of the Philippines, and it was essential for him to go back with American troops

10:00 to establish their prestige, apart from capturing the place. The same as the British with Singapore. They didn't want Americans or anybody else to take Singapore, either. So this enormous fleet up, and we went to a place called Leyte Gulf, and there was a few mines encountered on the way. I think the [HMAS] Shropshire caught a mine in her paravanes. The sweepers you put out the side. But of course, it was an enormous fleet, and the fire power they put down there would shake the earth.

10:30 But then these thousands and thousands of soldiers went ashore. You used to get odd aircraft come and have a go at you, but from our point of view, it was mostly firing ashore, and they got well established there. It never worried me much. In fact, nothing in the Pacific ever worried me much. The only interesting part about the Pacific was that for the first days since the sailing ships, ships could stay at sea almost indefinitely.

11:00 In Europe, a few days out, we could nip back to get fuel or ammunition, but all that was brought up by ships in the Pacific and they'd perfected the art of oiling at sea, and provisioning at sea, and we spent months in the Warramunga, and didn't get a day's leave. And I came back to Sydney and we got a few days' leave, and went back and did nine months and this requires very high morale for people like you and I to sit at the same table for nine months

11:30 and never have a day off or anything like that, and yet it was the happiest ship's company I think I'd ever served with. They were a great crowd. And we did some minor things. We went to a place called Savusavu, and we fired about eighty rounds into there while the Americans landed some troops. But the Lady Gulf was quite a big operation. There was all sorts of warfare there. But they got consolidated and Manila eventually fell.

12:00 We did get half a day's leave at Manila. We had an opportunity to see that, and it was the most destruction I'd seen since, because there was nothing much to destroy in the Pacific. Palm trees and things. But when you get up to a civilised city, it was demolished like a lot of the British cities were, but it was done mainly by the Japanese themselves, I've read, retreating. And one interesting thing. In Manila, was that it was an earthquake area,

12:30 and a lot of the buildings had been built for earthquake, and you could see where the Japanese had mined them, and a great big four or five storey building, fell over, and it was just leaning on the one next door. It didn't collapse like they do, in bricks, you know. But it was interesting to get ashore and have a look. The whole place was pockmarked and everything with bullet marks. But that was about the only time I stepped foot on shore, I think. So we were doing minor operations. The Americans built up a very big base at a place called Subic Bay

13:00 and they could set up bases. You know, they had picture theatres and stages and everything for people like Bob Hope and all these places to appear on. And lovely set ups at shore, which our people wouldn't have bothered with. They'd clear an area of the palms, and they'd paint around the bottoms of the palms for appearance sake, and they'd have a canteen there and when you went ashore you could get two tickets or something, and you could buy two bottles of beer. And all that sort of thing. They catered for their troops amazingly well, you know.

13:30 A pretty senior military officer once said to me, "You know, they call themselves soldiers and they get turkey and ice cream and everything," and I said to him, "If the blokes up the front can get turkey and ice cream, and our blokes can't, there's nothing wrong with their system. There's something wrong with

ours." As a matter of fact we had a hard time with food, even on a war ship. We got down to the stage of eating the rations out of the boats at one stage, but the Americans could soon rectify that. Our problem was

14:00 that as soon as you got beyond your captain, or somewhere, you had to deal with civilians back in Sydney. And if you offended them, well, they'd say, "Well, they won't get anything while I'm in the office," you know. And I'll give you an example. We broke a spring in a twin Oerlikon, hydraulic operated gun, a spring in the pressure gauge. So we sent what they called an air courier message down to Sydney, to Spectacle Island or wherever their stores were, for a replacement spring.

14:30 And we waited and waited, and eventually we got a reply and it said, "Your demand so and so, please advise if this is a new item, or a replacement one already borne." And we were in the Philippines! You know? So this was sort of exasperating. But the Americans, where they had say, a vice admiral, in charge of a fleet, a couple of hundred mile back they had a rear admiral, and he was in charge of the vittling [food].

15:00 And we could say to him, "Listen, my boys haven't had fresh vegetables, or something. You get them here." And they flew them up by air. So the Americans were in the lucky position. They never sent a boy to do a man's job. Same with some of the operations I did off the Belgian coast. If we'd have done them in the Pacific, we'd have had aircraft carriers and cruisers and everything. Instead of that, they picked a couple of old destroyers to do it. So, things settled down eventually there, and then we knew that the big thing was going to be an attack, the other side,

15:30 to meet the people and make a go, and it was Lingayen Gulf. Lingayen was a big thing again, like the Thames, like the Derwent. You went in, I think from memory, seven miles this gulf, and the town of Lingayen was at the end of it. But we went there D-Day minus four. Four days before D-Day. Not on our own, but some destroyers covering minesweeping for us.

16:00 And minesweepers so as to sweep the channels, because there was something like nine hundred ships due to arrive with troops and everything. And we were there to soften up anybody that fired at us from ashore. To soften them up. Because we knew they would have torpedo tubes ashore, and by this time, the Japanese had got to the stage where they were sending out suicide motorboats. You know, things would crash into the side of you and blow themselves up and everything. So you had sentries on deck all night that fired at anything that floated past.

16:30 Didn't matter if it was an oil drum or a fruit case, you fired at it. And you know, it was a matter of suspense then. That was a long, long four days. And it was a marvellous feeling morning. We looked up, and eight or nine hundred ships were coming down. And I thought to myself, "Well, that's eight or nine hundred more targets." Eight or nine hundred more targets for the Japanese, because they were sending these kamikazes by this time. And, oh, there was an enormous landing there.

17:00 I think it was. It could have been the biggest one before D-Day in Europe, I think. I think they put eighty-seven thousand troops ashore there, in that landing, from memory. But we still got a lot of nuisance business, as I say with suicide people doing all, swimmers, swimming out and all that sort of thing. And then these wretched suicide aircraft. And they developed a new technique there. At a certain time of the day,

17:30 smoke was anathema to a war ship, you didn't dare make a puff of smoke, you know, but instead of that everybody made smoke, and they lit smoke flows, so that the whole fleet in Lingayen Gulf was covered in smoke. It was hard for them, must have been an old fashioned technique, but they did that day after day. But I formed the conclusion that a lot of these suicide pilots, they could fly a plane and that's about all you could say.

18:00 They didn't have much military knowledge, because you'd see one of these poor wretches, he'd come down. And I admired their patriotism. There's no doubt about that, as mad as they were. But they'd come down and they'd fly through a great fleet, that consisted of transports, and things like that, and they'd crash into a damned tug, or an empty LST [Landing Ship Tank] or something, whereas they should have put their energy into troopships and things like that. But even so, they did cause a lot of casualties. And some of them were very sad.

18:30 I saw a ship, one of those big cruisers come in, and she had a terrific casualty list. Burns, she had burns, with the petrol exploding. And you wouldn't think there was much wrong with her, you know. But this thing had hit, it had been loaded with petrol, and it flashed right along the upper deck, and scorched dozens of blokes, you know, and yet the ship was virtually undamaged. The Australia, of course, was hit by five of them. And she was an inviting target

19:00 because she had three big funnels, and that sort of thing. And we went alongside her when she was hit by the first one, and I went on board inquiring after mates of mine, and as again, it was nearly all burns. They laid blokes out on the upper deck and they had, I can always remember the occasion, liquid stuff. And they were using paint brushes and they were painting them from end to end. No good dabbing them with cotton wool, or anything. And I lost a lot of good friends on there, you know,

19:30 and others were badly injured. But, strangely enough, with all the injuries, she carried on, and she carried on, and she carried out the whole of her firing program according to program. It was very creditable to her.

Was that at the Leyte landing? Was Australia there at the Leyte landing?

Yes. Trafalgar Day, I think it was. In fact, our late captain, Deshano, he was killed in that. He'd left us and gone to the Australia. We hated losing him, Emile Deshano, but he was killed in there.

20:00 Yes, that started there. And she had a rough time. And we escorted her back to Manus, to base, and unfortunately, because of that we missed the battle of Surigao Strait, where all the surface fleets got together, because we'd been sent away to see the Australia back. The next big thing we did, was as I say, this Lingayen Gulf. And we had an ordinary time for four days, and then the big fleet arrived and after that it was just a matter of banging away.

20:30 It was an interesting thing, I suppose, looking back. If you're in destroyers, it's marvellous how much warfare you saw that people wouldn't think of if you're a sailor. I've seen troops go into action with flame throwers. I've seen tanks go into action, and all of this, because it was more or less like being up the Derwent. You know the banks are there, and the army's progressing along, and in a destroyer, you always had a ringside seat.

21:00 If the cruisers were firing, they were generally firing from miles out and firing over the top of you, but you were up like snipers. And I saw the most interesting aspects of war. I tell you another thing that was worth mentioning. I don't know if it was before Lingayen or during Lingayen, but about that time they captured Corregidor, which was a big island, like a block of cake, in Manila Bay, and it was naturally a fort.

21:30 And that was an interesting performance. We carried out a sort of a feint. There was only one landing place; it had high cliffs and a flat high top. And we steamed past there. I know my ship only fired eighty rounds at that, and the others did much the same, to create the impression we were softening up the landing, but then, over come the parachute troopers, and we saw these enormous flights of DC-3s [Douglas Dakota bombers] or whatever, and I remember making the comment, "They've all got the doors open." You know, the innocence of youth.

22:00 And then of course, when they got just past us, down came these parachutists in hundreds. That was fascinating to watch. And some of them missed and tumbled down the side, but they had some pretty savage fighting there, I think. And talking about parachutists, the sailor was pretty quick off the mark with wit. When we were at the Admiralty Islands, and I was telling you, I'm going back a bit, that the Americans were a bit surprised. They'd landed there and they caught all this opposition.

22:30 They sent aircraft up to back them up with bombing, and a lot of them were dropping those terrible phosphorous bombs on there with white flame. And then others came with supplies. And they'd drop red parachutes and white parachutes – I suppose some were food and some were rations. And I was standing up at the after gun watching all this, and all of a sudden, a blue one came out, and everyone looked and said, "A blue one," and before you could say, "Jack Robinson," one of the blokes said, "That'll be the medals." This was our view of the Yanks at that time.

23:00 You didn't wait six or eight months for a citation. They'd pin the medal on you on the spot. In fact they had two when they arrived here from America. And this bloke, I'll never forget, this bloke said, "That'll be the medals." And I thought it was very good. But medals or no medals, we saw the campaign in what's-a-name finish, in the Philippines, and the only thing I didn't get, after all those years on the Warramunga, was a trip to Japan. I got a draft back to depot then,

23:30 and a draft that I rather strongly resented, really. I came back. They'd sent for me at depot, to be on the staff of the Officer's Training School. Which is ordinary seamen, who they picked out. Said, "Oh, he's a good-looking type. Give him some training and make him an officer," you know. This system didn't inspire me, and I was sent back to instruct there, you know. The only thing I missed after being from start to finish. In fact, I missed more than that.

24:00 When we got back to Sydney, and I came back after the Philippines campaign, it was the first time since my commission that we got a full long three weeks' leave. And I'd been about the longest bloke on the ship. And the captain gave the order that the gunner's mate was not to leave the ship until his relief arrived. He wouldn't be without a gunner's mate. So my relief didn't arrive, and the depot signalled, "Petty Officer Walker to join the depot by next Monday, having had leave." And out of the whole ship's company, I was the only bloke didn't get any leave. I thought, "You selfish fellow."

24:30 I really did, you know. But this was it. So I came back to depot, and I was there, and then the war finished in a couple of weeks' time. And they closed that ridiculous Officer Training School. And I was the chief instructor then in the anti-aircraft school. And I was stationed there till I got demobilised.

25:00 Now, they made it very hard for the permanent bloke. Harder than hard. When the war finished, everybody said, "Right, now when do we get out?" And the government produced a points system. They brought a book called Return to Civilian Life, and explained the point system. For each month of warfare you'd had in the service, you got, we'll say, five points or something, you know. So if a bloke had gone to the Middle East, or anything, he got demobilised pretty quickly. This was in theory.

25:30 And it applied in the army, but it didn't in the navy. You know, those cows, they twisted that. They worked it by ranks. So that an ordinary seaman had joined up about eight weeks before the war finished, he had enough points to get out. It took me to the following year to get out. My time had

expired. But the reason I'm mentioning this. This situation had a far-reaching effect on the Royal Australian Navy up to the present day. During the war, the system had been going for quite a few years.

26:00 If they signed on for twelve years, they'd already done fifteen or sixteen by this time. I did fourteen and I'd only signed on for twelve. And we used to say to the officers, "What's going to happen when the war finishes? What are you going to do for chiefs and POs?" And they said, "What do you mean? What do you mean?" We'd say, "Well, half the blokes here, their time's expired." "Well, what would you do if you went out of the navy?" This was the sort of thing you got. One officer even said to me, "Well, if the navy's in that state, it would be unpatriotic of you to leave the navy." Everybody else is going out and getting a job,

26:30 and I said, "I'm doing longer than I signed on for," you know. This gets back to what I first said about the naval college training. They couldn't see this. They couldn't see it at all. There was no promotion whatever for the permanent man. He did his full time as a PO, to get made a chief. With all the deaths and all the hundreds of ships commissioned, none of us got commissions out of it. So, I'll give you the final finale.

27:00 One day at the anti-aircraft school, oh, it was months and months after the war finished, telephone rang and they said, "You're to come down to the gunnery office." So I hopped on a service mangle and I rode down to the gunnery office. And they said, "There's an officer wants to see you." I went into a classroom, and this officer, he had all these books there, and he said, "Walker, I want to interview you. The Naval Board is very, very concerned about the number of senior chiefs and petty officers that are leaving the navy."

27:30 It might have been a surprise to him. It wasn't to me. I said, "Oh, yeah." He said, "We know you're cut out for the navy. You like the navy and you've got a terrific record. I wonder whether you'd be prepared to say why you're going out." Well, do you think that a lower deck man, in the history of the Royal Australian Navy, was ever served up on a plate like that the opportunity to give his views to the Naval Board. So I won't go into what I told him about the duties of the gunner's mate.

28:00 I told him how they were underpaid. Single men were underpaid. There shouldn't be married men's pay. Everybody should get more pay. I said to him, "When I was in Britain," I said, "at Whale Island, you could more or less name your own draft from there. I could get draft to a cruiser or a draft to a destroyer, and say righto." I said, if it was a draft to a magazine, up in Scotland, the mountains in Scotland, everybody would say, "Lay off. This is a job for a married man," you know. And some old stripey would get that.

28:30 But I said, "They started looking at me when it came around Party X1. Didn't know what that meant. But you had to be under thirty, in good physical condition and able to swim. You know, this sort of thing, because that was a single man's job, wasn't it. But I said, "I'm not even getting paid as much as the other bloke, and lots of things that you wouldn't be concerned with." They concerned the hard working gunner's mate, commissioning a ship and everything. So I thought, "I'll fire the finishing salvo." And this was the final. So I said, to him,

29:00 I said, "Sir, when I came back from the first two years' war, which was the worst years, when the Germans had everything and we had nothing, there were advertisements in the Australian papers, 'Wanted. Officer type young men to join the navy as officers'." I said, "If you were under thirty you joined as a lieutenant. If you were over thirty you joined as a lieutenant commander. Didn't matter whether you knew port from starboard." So I said, "If the Naval Board are so concerned about the gunners' mates and the torpedo gunner's mates, and the yeoman of signal going out,"

29:30 I said, "tell them to advertise in the paper like they did when they wanted officers." He just said, "I'm afraid I've got no answer to that, Walker," and that was the end of the interview. By crikey. Did they have to change the navy. They did go out to all those people. So they had to do what they should have done a hundred years ago. Start to promote people from the lower deck. The situation was, once you were a well-trained man, and you got up to instructor's rank,

30:00 let's be honest, and I'm not immodest in saying this, you were too valuable to promote. They said, "Well, who's going to teach the officers. Who's going to take their courses?" So they brought civilians in, and they could do that as long as they had blokes like us to tell them what to do. So that was my finale. "Tell the Naval Board to advertise in the paper for them." And I still sound immodest. But there was one officer I particularly liked, a gunnery jack. And I knew he was at the barracks after, St Kilda barracks.

30:30 And I was down St Kilda Road one day, and I thought "I'll go and see George," and I went in. Of course we were on Christian name terms by this time. And he was delighted to see me and we had a great yarn, and I'd been reading about the huge wages they got, even in those days, you know. And they went up to big wages, and they'd shift your wife and your furniture for you, and I said, "By gosh, George, aren't they getting some pay and conditions now?" I'm not lying, he said to me,

31:00 "Don, I can tell you what." He said, "They can thank you and about two other people who I could name if I wanted to. When you particular people said, 'No, we're going out'," he said, "they realised the game was up." And he was a permanent officer, himself. And so I got a bit of satisfaction out of that. Well, after that I had to find a job, didn't I?

Just before you go there, there's just still a bit more to cover I think, you know, back in you naval days. I mean, one is the mention in the despatch.

31:30 Oh, well, I don't know. It's up there on the thing.

How did you come to get it? What did you get it for?

I don't think it will thrill the empire or anything. I think probably just for doing a good job. I think the citation they typed out and put in the back. Something about for gallantry and coolness and courage in dangerous waters

32:00 and setting a high example in accordance with the highest traditions of the service. Something like that.

So who would have nominated you for it?

Oh, one of the captains I was with. I don't know who really, but that was the consolation prize, you see. But it was nice to get. By the citation, you would have reckoned I was going to get the Victoria Cross. Still, it was better than nothing. But I really didn't have much chance of getting a DSM [Distinguished Service Medal]

32:30 because, although, you know, I've got terrific papers, and I got on well with all the captains, I really moved about a lot. Just when the ship did something spectacular, like the Somali did over there, I got a draft to somewhere else. Something like that would happen and I went somewhere else. As far as the Pacific war was concerned. I didn't do anything spectacular there, except work like billyo and train ships' companies up.

33:00 The greatest reward I got is the deep and lasting affection that the surviving ship's company seem to have for me. They never leave me out of anything, and they make the kindest remarks and they've given me the honour of leading the ship's company on the Anzac Day march ever since, and all this. And that is sufficient reward for me. Where I had a job where I had to make everybody jump – I was the sort of navy's sergeant major, you know –

33:30 and yet I never struck a bloke that disliked me. And amongst all the old three badge men who'd been in before, when I was still at school, they were marvellous. I've never struck one that ever resented my position or anything like that. Then again, I know I was the chap, if I was going home on leave, and looked in the compartment of a train, and it had all the fowls they called them, these old three badge blokes. I'd always go in and travel with them, you know.

34:00 Although I had brass buttons all over me. I loved those blokes and I reckon they were the cream of the crop. Some of them, not much use for anything other than their job. Didn't matter how interesting a place was, they only went as afar as the nearest pub. But I tell you what, to me they were the salt of the earth. They never let you down. I said to an old friend of mine, Ray Parkin, met him one day in Melbourne, and I was talking about these old badge men, and I said, "They'd never let you down."

34:30 And he said, "Do you know why?" And I said, "No," I said, "They'd never do you a bad turn." And he said, "Do you know why?" and I said, "Why?" He said, "They wouldn't even know how to." They were what you'd call the old British Blue Jackets, you know, whom everybody loved, you know. Oh, no. I had a great affection. People have often asked me since, "Did you ever miss the sea when you came out?" I say, "No, never for a day. But it took me a long time to get over the chaps that I used to live with." They're what I miss. The type of sailors you know.

35:00 They were straight to the core and if you had an argument with someone you told him what you thought of him, and that was the finish of it. And if he didn't like you, he told you, and then you went ashore together or something like that. Different type of people than I struck afterwards. Well, the only way I really got over, weaned myself back, was by going into the fire brigade. I wish I could have gone to the permanent fire brigade, but this was our disadvantage with the navy hanging on to us.

35:30 We were too old for things that we could have done. Even things like the police force and the fire brigade and that sort of thing. We'd have done a marvellous job on those. We were practically trained for them, before we applied, but you were just over the age. You were all about thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six, you know. And I'd have dearly liked to have gone to the police or the fire brigade, but I got a lot of satisfaction in my civilian years in being the captain of a big volunteer brigade.

36:00 I was the captain of the Colac brigade for years. There's some of that silverware they gave me and stuff in there, when I left. And it was a good volunteer brigade, but I decided it was going to be a real fire brigade, you know, and I introduced foot drill and all that sort of thing. And when I yelled out attention I expected to hear all the heels come together. I did a lot of stuff I'd learnt, you know, that I made their training interesting for them.

36:30 We spent half the time, instead of standing around in competition, I'd get out in the street with the trucks and run out hose, and replace it, and all that sort of thing. And actually lectured to them on pumping and vacuums and all that sort of thing, and to finish up with they all became fascinated with it, and the Colac brigade had a very, very high reputation with the Country Fire Authority, and I put it down to that. But of course before that, when I came out I didn't know what to do.

37:00 So I bought a store up towards the range, Mt Dandenong, no, The Basin, sort of general store and I was in there, and my brother came. My brother was a major in the army. He got two MIDs [Mentioned in Despatches] and he came out, and we'd married two sisters. You only get one set of in-laws by doing that. So he come up. He knew more about business than I did. And we worked like slaves there for

about three years, but it had a milk bar and everything, so long hours.

37:30 We decided we wanted something different to this. So we bought a big general store in the country at a place called Koroit, outside Colac. We were there for five years and my brother got leukaemia, which meant he was doomed. He had to go to Melbourne, so we sold out there and I moved in and took a job in Colac which was only about six miles away. By that time I knew half of Colac. I'd talked to the Rotary Club, so I moved into Colac and bought a house there.

38:00 I was married of course. I married immediately after the war. And we had the two girls. And we had quite a happy life, really. But we had a very big house and had a big block of ground, and I kept it in very good nick, but as I got older, I said to Jean, my wife, "I can't be climbing up on scaffolds and painting these ceilings for the rest of my life." And I always had the urge I wouldn't mind going back to Bendigo. My roots were there.

38:30 Well, I had a wife, who if I said to her, "I've got just the job I want, but It's going down to Heard Island," she'd have said, "Well, we've got to move to Heard Island." And wives like this are worth a lot to men. A lot of men could go a long way in business, only their wives won't move to a country town or vice versa you know. But Jean would have gone anywhere. So to cut a long story short, I was twenty-one years with that firm. I was a sort of office manager. Did all the pay and the taxes and the budgets and everything else.

39:00 And about the day I retired, turned sixty-five, I was out. And I reckon that retirement was the greatest invention since the double bed. The house got a bit big to look after, the lawns, so I took a couple of days and we came to Bendigo, drove up here. And struck a bloke in the estate agency that I started school with and went right through school. And he said, "Give yourself a couple of days here," and in a month's time I was living here.

39:30 I sold the house and bought this one. I had a lot to spend on it. It was dreadful with carpets and colours and everything, but that's beside the point. So Jean and I were very happy here. But she had a stroke, before she died, and I sort of virtually looked after her for eighteen years. She made a good fight. She could walk on a four-legged stick and everything. So we went to all the Caledonian Society dinners and functions and all those sort of things.

40:00 We used to go. Did everything like that. And she died about nine years ago and so here I am gradually decaying. Last year, my daughters gave me a lovely party in Melbourne. Strangely enough, at a big restaurant at the Waverley RSL [Returned and Services League] called the Warramunga Restaurant. And it had souvenirs all over the walls. It did everything but rock. But we had quite a nice clan gathering then for my ninetieth birthday.

40:30 So here I am. I'm settled down. That's about it. I hope it hasn't been boring. What I've tried to point out, considering the Australian people of future generation might listen to, aspects that are slightly different to what you might read in history books, you know. The individual efforts by people. But I won't say I loved every minute of it. I was dead scared of getting killed the same as every other sensible person would be.

41:00 But this was phases of life. The military aspect of the navy, you know, marching around and taking classes and all that sort of thing, I loved that. And I was really rapt in it you know. When I got a class I used to introduce myself, as if they didn't know, and I used to say, "Now, in my class you'll be different to everyone else's. When you're marching up to dinner, you knock off and you're going up to dinner, you're not shuffling up there. If I'm not with you I expect everyone in the depot to say, 'I bet that's Petty Officer Walker's class'."

41:30 Tons of bull, but it went over well. And they developed a pride like that. I seemed to be able to get the right side of blokes, somehow, make them do anything I wanted them to, without being unpleasant about it. I was able to get blokes to develop a pride in themselves or the class they were doing. And be better than another class, that sort of thing. A very gratifying life to look back on. Very gratifying life to look back on really. I've done my bit, so now I'm just waiting the call of the grim reaper.