Australians at War Film Archive

Melville Davis (Sticks) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Your childhood, where were you born?**

I was born in Hobart and I lived in the country. I was brought up in the Huon district at a place called Ranelagh where my father had a business, and I went to school at the Ranelagh State School.

01:00 And at the age of 12 I went to special tuition, geometry and those sort of things that are not in the state school curriculum, under my belt to sit for the examination for entrance to the naval college,

01:30 but there were only 11 selected and I wasn't one of them. So I found that that extra tuition was most helpful when I went to the Junior Technical School in Hobart which I did when I was, in 1937 I think it was when I finished, and I

02:00 got myself a job in Hobart at the Electro Letics Inn Company. And I wanted to become independent rather than be a weight on my parents all the time. And I was quite happy with the work I was doing there, and when war broke out I

02:30 phoned the naval officer and told them I thought I'd be more useful there, as I was in the reserve, that I would be more useful to them than where I was.

Sorry to interrupt, were you in the naval reserve or the…?

Yes, I was in the naval reserve. I was in the cadets initially and then I changed over to the adult service when I turned 18, which was in June 1939.

03:00 **Well you were right on target then I suppose.**

I was. So anyway, I was mobilised on the 15th of September 1939 and I did my depot training in Hobart. They weren't very well organised at that time apparently, and I did the usual drills and things in

03:30 Hobart and I got a job in the Naval Staff Office as a switchboard operator, and I hung onto that for a while. And I got a draft to the HMAS [His Majesty's Australian Ship] Swan, and we were in the 20th Minesweeping Flotilla and we were sweeping around in our home waters

04:00 more or less for quite a while. We swept up a mine which we found, or reckon was laid by a German raider, the Penguin, and it was known she laid these mines around about June in 1940 outside the Derwent estuary.

They didn't waste any time, did they?

No, they were on the ball,

04:30 they really were, and that happy situation remained until December the 7th. And after Pearl Harbor we up pick and away we go up to Brisbane in time to escort the first Americans

05:00 into Brisbane. We had escort duties in that area for a while up to Milne Bay and that sort of thing. But then we finally, we were deployed to Darwin on escort duties and that's where the fun started, for me anyway, and for the ship's company.

05:30 One of the first jobs we had was to escort the Bataan up to Amboina. Ambon was the name of the town, that's in the Celebes, and it was quite interesting like a Cook's tour. And we came back to Darwin and next time we went up it was

06:00 completely different. The Japs [Japanese] were very attentive and we had quite an experience of bombing.

I like your euphemism.

Well they, we learned the tactics very quickly. The came over in V formation like seagulls, you know, and the lead

06:30 plane had a blue light underneath which was the signal for the bomb aimers to unload their rubbish, and it was rather helpful. They were flying too high for our gunners to do any damage, but we kidded ourselves that we were keeping them up. And the blue

07:00 light would flash and we'd peel off up wind to dodge the rubbish as it came down and that was how we survived for a couple of days on that trip, and the Bataan was not damaged. So we got back to Darwin again and we'd been changed and

07:30 designated as the 24th Minesweeping Flotilla by then. We were previously the 20th, and we used a lot of depth charges in a location near Melville Island in January 1942, and the Deloraine was credited with sinking the sub [submarine] because she used the

08:00 most depth charges. Well, she used her full kit of 20, and it was a positive kill. It was oil and bubbles coming up and by this time I was bosun's mate on the ship, which meant I was on the wheel and we stood the watch over the site where the oil and

08:30 stuff was coming up for the full watch to make sure the thing didn't move, and there was nothing else came up. I met a diver after the war in the Navy Club in Hobart, and old friend, and he dived on this sub and I was able to tell him that it was upright and it was 36 feet above the seabed at the top of the (UNCLEAR). He said, "How the hell do

09:00 you know that?" And I said, "Well I was on the wheel and the ping set was right alongside of me and we pinged it up and down the full length and sideways." It was quite an entertaining past-time. It was the I124 Jap sub and that was I think the first

09:30 kill that an Australian ship had made.

Would it have brought the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] very much to the attention of the Australian public?

Hmm?

I'm sure it brought the RAN back in front of the Australian public's conscience.

The Australian public wouldn't know anything about it because the censorship was absurdly strict at that time. When we move on into the area where we did a convoy,

10:00 we, the USS[United States' Ship] Houston, an 18 foot cruiser, and the Peary and the Warrego and ourselves and we were taking these four ships which were loaded with troops up to, I think, Timor anyway. I can't recall which port we were heading for, but however, we

10:30 never made it. We left in the early hours of the morning in the dark. Actually it was quarter to 3.00 in the morning we left Darwin, and in daylight we had Japanese flying boats hanging around and we fought them off, and then there were

11:00 other aircraft and they gave us a very torrid time. The captain of the Houston requested air cover which we didn't get, we only got Japanese, and we were recalled to Darwin. We left on the 15th and

11:30 we were recalled on the 17th, I think it was. No air cover, and we got back to Darwin on the 18th of February. We learned from our Houston reccie [reconnoitre], that had we kept our course there were 85 Japanese bombers waiting for us. So we were lucky on that occasion.

12:00 We got into Darwin on the 18th in the afternoon. We got the four ships unloaded and we went over to the ammunition ship because we'd used all our ammo. In fact we were using practice ammunition, which was more effective than the live stuff – gives you great black cloud, you know, and it seemed to put them off their

12:30 course. Anyway we got alongside the Neptuna, the ammunition ship, and the next morning it was the 19th of February and it was a beautiful calm morning. And we were getting the ammunition in as fast as we could and it was about a few minutes to 10.00 in the morning when we saw our familiar friends in their V

13:00 formation with their blue lights above, and the first bombs separated the jetty from the mainland and rocked the boat a bit. And one of our fellows hopped over onto the Neptuna, threw off our lines and we got the hell out of it sort of thing. And I've got a photo that I could show you after which was taken by Captain

13:30 Carroll, I think, showing the Swan with the Neptuna background where she blew up. We were fairly close. We then went to action stations. I managed to get a photo of the flying boat which was just laying off the end of the wharf. She was taking off, and then I had to go

14:00 to action stations, which in my case it was the OTA [?] magazine in the fore part of the ship. I was rather

happy that I was in the fore part of the ship because shortly after we got there, there was a dickens of a thump and a bomb landed underneath our stern. And

14:30 when we came up from action stations, oh, one of my chaps, I was the senior rating, there were three of us in the magazine. I was supposed to know all the shell types, pass the right stuff up. A chap named Spike McCann was a cook, was a very strong fellow and very helpful, and the other chap was named

15:00 Bombo Williams. He was a survivor off the Waterhen that was sunk in the Med [Mediterranean]. And he made some remark that, "I've seen these so and so's before and he shot through." The chappy we call the 'jonty', the master at arms, was at the top of the gangway. His job was to take the, it was all hand work,

15:30 you know, on the Swan, he had to take the shells up and that's how we got them up to the guns. And old Bombo nearly knocked him over flying out and he got up on the upper deck in time to get a bit of shrapnel so he would've been much more comfortable had he stayed with us. When we got a bit of a break, we got

16:00 another chap, Doug Newton from Western Australia, and I still see Doug and correspond with him. He was a great scout, and he made up the three. And I learned afterwards that jonty's job was quite responsible because if they had to flood the magazines it was his job to shut the hatch, you know, and bottle it up. Fortunately the only flooding occurred down

16:30 aft. And when we got up top around about midday, it was quite a sight to see the ships that were still afloat. I've got some good photos of the Solandier burning before she sank. And

17:00 we were really shocked to look around the harbour and see the mess. All we knew about it was it was like being in a 44 gallon drum with people hammering on the outside of it all the time. So we got the sound effects but no vision of the actual raid. It was

17:30 interesting to note that the Australian public were never informed about Darwin, the true story. The Japanese used all the planes from the four carriers that they used in Pearl Harbor, plus 36 bombers from Ambon. Their object was to get the Houston but she sailed

18:00 out the night before. And because the ammunition that was available in Darwin didn't suit their guns, the Peary and the Houston went out at nightfall on the 18th. I'm going back a little bit, but the Peary came back. They'd pinged a sub outside and

18:30 they used a lot of oil. So she came back to get oil and some depth charges and that's how she came to be one of the casualties in Darwin. Fortunately we had…We were talking about the Peary,

19:00 how it came that the Peary was one of the ships sunk in Darwin because she'd run out of depth charges and needed oil, so she copped it. I've got a photo of her bow just disappearing under the water. And the British Motorist was another one – that was a tanker

19:30 that caused a lot of smoke and what have you. Anyway, suffice to say that Darwin was an absolutely shocking turnout. We couldn't go on our quarter deck because the stern was flapping up and down like a duck, and our carpenters did a pretty good job in tearing up the officers' shirts.

20:00 We didn't have shirts, to plug all the holes on the ship's side above the water line. There was a second raid in the afternoon which didn't make things anymore comfortable. About 2.00 o'clock the next

20:30 morning we got the clearance to leave the harbour and make for Brisbane. We went out with the Warrego and an escort to make sure we were seaworthy. I forgot to remark though, when we were alongside the Neptuna, our motor boat was in the

21:00 water, just come back from the post office run, and when we were clearing the Neptuna, the ammunition ship, the motor boat was ordered to get the hell out of it which they did, and we just saw a cloud of water and what have you and some bombs exploded as we were leaving,

21:30 and we thought the motor boat had copped it. We were very relieved when they came back at night and we got their full story, but they had made the mangroves and they were out of sight of the planes and they had a grandstand view of the raids, and the tide went out and they had to

22:00 wait until about 9.00 o'clock at night before the full tide for them to be able to get back. They had a bit of difficulty finding the ship amongst all the rubbish in the harbour. They'd picked up a few fellows that had been blown off the jetty and one of our men, Charlie Weir by name, had come up underneath the propeller

22:30 and had a nasty gash in his back. The fellows were saying, you know, "We could see all his engine room," and they had a little bit of trouble there. There was not much in the way of bandages on the boat. There was a first aid kit and they made him as comfortable as possible, but we were very pleased when they came back. You know, we thought we'd lost them. As it was we only lost

23:00 three men and a chap named Purdon, and a Bobby Breen, and Johnny Salk. Bobby Breen was a

Victorian, and Purdon was Tasmanian, and Salk was, I'm not sure where he came from.

23:30 And there were 26, I think it was, were wounded, and I remember taking a photo of them while they were waiting for the boat to take them over to the Manunda.

Did they survive, the 26 wounded?

Yeah, I don't think any of them died of wounds. It was,

24:00 they were strafing you see, it was mainly bullet wounds and a bit of shrapnel, but we had to provide our own protection against those sort of things by improvisation and we tied our hammocks around the guns in the vertical way to provide against

24:30 splinters and

Is that metal or wooden splinters?

Hmm?

Metal or wooden splinters?

Oh, metal splinters, shrapnel.

Yeah.

And it tore the ship about. There were holes there, it was like a copper pot. I've got a photo there, and anyway we got out of it. We got out motor boat

25:00 on board and away we went to Brisbane at 4 knots and it's a long way. It took a long time, and when we got into the dock in Brisbane, Morts Dock, they pumped the water out. First of all they put the whalers and our lifeboats in the water and they

25:30 sank immediately. They were riddled with shrapnel. I can't remember what happened to the motor boat, but I do remember what happened to our captain's eyes – they stuck out further than those on the ship, the fish that we got out of the water after the raids.

For example how many hands high, or bodies high, would that hole be by comparison? You know, how big actually was it?

26:00 I have a photo of it there. It was a plate which would be eight or ten feet by four feet and you could drive a bus through it.

Big, you could sink a ship with that size!

We went out through it ourselves to get ashore when we were not supposed to while we were in dock. It was a good back door entrance.

Where to, sorry, where,

26:30 **how long did you have to stay in Brisbane to repair it?**

About a month. We were give leave whilst the ship was being repaired and I was bomb happy and we got married about that time.

Did you stay in Brisbane?

Hmm?

27:00 **Did you stay in Brisbane while they were repairing?**

No, we came down to Hobart. We got 10 days leave without travelling time. So we spent most of the time travelling. I've forgotten, four days or eight days, we got about two days at home, and I had an engagement party when I was home. My family

27:30 gave us their blessing but they wanted us to wait until after the war before getting married. That's another story. Anyway, I got down to, got my leave, got back to the ship and I was drafted to Flinders Naval Depot to take a course.

28:00 All those who did not have a, what they called a non-substantive course, were given the option of choosing a course to do at Flinders. I chose torpedoman's course, which is the electrical basically, and I did so very

28:30 well with it that I was given a second course to progress. I forgot to mention that when I joined as ordinary seamen we were paid one and six a day. When I became an able seaman we got seven shillings a day. And when I went down to Flinders to do these courses – each course you

29:00 get a few bob extra, you see. So I was rather pleased by that and we celebrated it by getting married. My wife had gone over, she was a nurse and she went over nursing in Victoria and I was down Flinders and I was able to get away every weekend and we decided to marry and we never regretted it.

29:30 And I was there from April 1942 until December ‘42 because I did these courses one after the other and my pay increased a little bit, and while I was there in the depot I met a chappy who wanted to sell his sewing machine and it

30:00 was a portable Munloss, and I decided you have to do something to make money in the navy, so I decided to become a tailor. I’d buy his machine providing he showed me how to cut out the suits. In other words, get his pattern procedure and that sort of thing. Well that was very successful and I was knocking out some suits whilst

30:30 I was at Flinders Naval Depot.

Were they the tiddly suits as well as…?

Tiddly suits, yeah.

Is that the correct term?

That’s the correct term. As a matter of fact I’ll mention that again later. It was rewarding. I was doing all right with the suits and doing all right with getting up the line as we called it,

31:00 quite frequently, and I was sorry really in a way when it ended, but I got a draft to the [HMAS] Shropshire. I more or less talked the navy into that too because I said I’d completed these courses. I was a leading torpedoman now. I hadn’t had any experience on a ship with

31:30 that branch. I considered it would be better for me to be on a large ship and I knew the Shropshire draft was in the offing and I got the draft to Chatham to pick up the Shropshire.

Was that a coup for you?

It was, and we got to Chatham. My wife came back to Tasmania

32:00 while I was overseas. We left on the New Amsterdam [Nieuw Amsterdam] on the 6th of March 1943, and we got into Chatham, into Nelson House, were the barracks, and I asked a chap was there any hot water in the shower and he said, “I don’t know, I’ve only been here a week.” So I thought, “God, what have we

32:30 struck here?” But however we went onto the ship and we had to go ashore for facilities and we had a little bit of fun there. One of our chaps who lived at Lindisfarne was a radar operator and full of devilment, and the dockyard fellows were not very friendly towards

33:00 us. Well, some of them were, the female welders were very talkative but we weren’t allowed to interfere with their work of course, but the dockies [dock workers] had to go ashore and use the communal toilets as we did and they consisted of a long line of trough of

33:30 water rushing down it and a series of seats over the trough. And of course Greg made a little boat with a fire on it and sent it, launched it down the trough and there were a lot of hasty retreats from the exit and singed bottoms. Anyway we

34:00 had our time in Chatham. We had a good time in Chillingham and the adjacent town or village, what have you, and then eventually we went up to, oh, of course we went to London a few times and we had a good time in London, and then

34:30 up to Grenwick, Glasgow, we called into Grenwick and were able to go over to Glasgow and see the sites there in bonny Scotland and then we went up to Scapa Flow for our working up period. And we were mainly gunnery

35:00 that I was concerned with, communications and that sort of thing. And actually I was given the job of maintaining the eight inch table as we called it – it was a computer which controlled the main armament, eight inch guns. And my boss,

35:30 the PO [Petty Officer], knew what I’d done in the torpedo school and he didn’t want to have any part of the eight inch TS [Transmitting Station] and he said, “That’s your job. Don’t fall in. Nothing else touches you. You just make sure that damn thing goes,” sort of thing. And I did, and I did it most conscientiously. I even had my hammock down there and laid out as a bed and saved

36:00 getting up and down the stairs and hatch. It was on the bottom of the ship and I, you know, I suppose as a kid I was very conscientious and everything worked and I had everything always set up ready when we closed up for exercise and that sort of thing. And the

36:30 gunner down there was a warrant officer. He was very pleased with the progress there. Nothing went wrong. It was, you know, one of those lucky breaks. And I was there for eight months and the only unfortunate thing was that when you closed up you were in the blessed box again. It was reminiscent of my old

37:00 job on the Swan. You could hear everything, couldn’t see what was going on, but however, we had some

problems I suppose in various activities. I've jumped the gun there, we were in Scotland in Scapa Flow, exercising, and

37:30 when we completed our work… And they could hit the sleeve when they had to with the gunnery. We joined up the convoy to bring it home. We escorted it as far as Gibraltar and then we were relieved by

38:00 another cruiser and they went into the Med and we came on to Sierra Leone. We got a message four hours after we left the convoy that the convoy had been attacked and the cruiser that relieved us, you see, was sunk. But we were not permitted to go back for

38:30 any reason. We pressed on to Sierra Leone and Freetown was the port, very strange sort of a port. We got ashore and I got a pet. Some of the fellows got monkeys and all this sort of rubbish, but I got a chameleon, 'Charlie' the chameleon,

39:00 and I sent him mad on the way back to Australia by putting him on Scotch plant.

I'm going to have to interrupt while we swap tapes.

Tape 2

00:31 **So you're sailing back.**

We're sailing back from Sierra Leone where we went to Capetown. Capetown was an interesting place, all new to me, and we had an unfortunate experience there. We were warned about going to a certain

01:00 district, District 6 they call it, and we took heed of the warning. But two of our chaps were having a few drinks together ashore, and one of them was a chief petty officer and the other one was an officer, and they

01:30 separated at the dockyard gates – didn't want to be seen together, protocol sort of thing. And unfortunately the chief was – the natives got him and they fished him out of the water the next day. So he was lost, but it was not a war time sort of thing, it was

02:00 just unfortunate. We left Capetown and got into Durban. We had leave in Durban and that was a very interesting experience because, coincidental with our arrival in Durban, the Italians had thrown the sponge in and the local people were celebrating this.

02:30 It was fairly important to them, I suppose, but we were quite blasé about it. I managed to knock up a bit of money in the meantime in making a few suits and that sort of thing, or altering uniforms really at that stage. I didn't have access to the stores

03:00 to get the material for new ones. And anyway, we spent up big in Durban. Of course I neglected to say that on the way over we went from Melbourne in the New Amsterdam, and then we had five days crossing the United States.

All right.

03:30 **I'll ask you about that when we come back through the time line again because I imagine you would've gone up through**

Yes.

San Fran [San Francisco] to Halifax and

That's right.

did the… I hope you had a good time in New York then.

Oh we did. We had a good time in New York too.

You were heading back to Melbourne or Sydney at this stage?

What's that?

Were you heading back to Melbourne or Sydney on the Shropshire?

We were heading back to Fremantle from Durban, and

04:00 we gave the locals a bit of leave in Fremantle. I can't remember whether we were there for two or three days, and then we left to go to Sydney. And we got in there and we were given leave, but before we could go on leave the dockyard

04:30 people declared the Shropshire black because they couldn't be paid extra danger money. They were already getting danger money for working on the ship, but there was some technical problem anyway,

and we had to de-ammunition ship before we could go on leave. Anyway, and then when we got back we had to reverse the

05:00 procedure and load her up again. We were not very happy about the dockies.

I'm sure you didn't get any danger money either?

Oh no, they were communist inspired, we thought. The had a confrontation with them at Garden Island when we got back to Sydney at Garden Island. We were given leave to go ashore,

05:30 in sections – we could never go off all together, of course. But we were waiting to get on the ferry, they said, "No, you can't. This is for dockyard workers only." And we disapproved of that and we won. There was a little bit of unpleasantness, but however we had our leave.

06:00 We got back to Sydney and we got the ship re-ammunitioned and off we went to war and we were, let's see, from Sydney we went to, did all the bombardments of New Guinea.

06:30 Cape Gloucester was on New Britain, Arrowee, Hollandia. Hollandia was a fairly big show, and these were, as far as our ship was concerned we were bombarding the targets ashore and softening it up for the landing troops.

And that's some time in early

07:00 **'44 or a little bit later on?**

'43.

'43, my apologies.

And we went along to Biak. Biak was quite something. Our gunnery was very accurate there, our chaps were right on the ball, and the Americans used the ammunition

07:30 like, you know, they had it forever. They chopped all the palms off. It just look like it had been, the island had been run over by a gigantic lawn mower. We were more selective and we had to even count the empties and store them and take them back, you know. Quite a different navy. But however, after Biak that was getting close to the Philippines

08:00 and we, Humbolt Bay became very important to us later on as we, that was the assembly point for some 700 ships to go up to the Philippines. This is where we got really in,

08:30 well, opposition, you might say. The Japanese were very keen to retain their grip on the Philippines and we had a lot of trouble even getting up there with air attacks and that sort of thing. And when we finally, on our way up we hooked up a mine

09:00 which was very awkward because it was around 3.00 o'clock in the morning and we couldn't do much about it in the dark, and bearing in mind that we had a line of 40 miles of ships behind us, we had to be careful about letting it go without endangering the other ships. So our

09:30 captain was a marvellous fellow. They woke him up and told him the precautions that had been taken and he looked over the side in his pyjamas and said, "What a beauty!" And he said, "Righto gunners, thanks, you wake me up a little bit earlier before action stations in the morning and we'll see what we can do about it," and he went back to bed. So he was a marvellous

10:00 fellow. He, you know, he had his confidence in the crew. We got rid of the mine. We were in daylight, we were pulling the PVs [paravanes] in – they're the wires that are strung out from the bows of the ship – and this mine had fouled up on the portside and it hampered us, you see. We couldn't manoeuvre

10:30 as we might wish to if we had an attack. So we had to get rid of the darn thing and fortunately as we were pulling it in it shook free. And we had a chappy on the quarter deck throw a smoke flag over the mine and then we signalled the other ships and told them, you know, there was a mine there marked with a smoke flag,

11:00 so that was that. There was another one floating free, it just went down the ship's side without touching. That was on the way to Leyte, and we got into Leyte, we were talking about October now, 1944, and we got

11:30 into Leyte with a massive armada of ships, 700, and our job was to soften up the area ready for the landings to take place, which we were able to do without any real opposition. Let's

12:00 see, this is the 20th of October. We had what we call bomb boats. The population was coming out in everything that floats to greet us and say how happy they were. They wanted all sorts of things too.

12:30 We had cigarettes and chocolates of course, and tins of fruit. When we threw a tin over they all shot through. They thought it was a grenade until they really woke up that we were trying to help them, and there was one lass. A funny incident, there was these people in boats, they were quite young, attractive people and

13:00 one fellow lent over and he said, “Do you speaka da English?” She said, “Yes, I speak English quite well. I was educated in the Manila University.” That set him back a pace, but they asked for all sorts of things, but one that really stumped us was this lass wanted Modess [sanitary napkins] and we didn’t cater

13:30 for that sort of thing on the Shropshire, so we got a roll of cotton wool and a bundle of lint and sent that over to her.

A good bit of improvisation there.

Hey?

A good bit of empathetic improvisation

Oh yeah, well it’s the best we could think of. And this went on for about three days we were

14:00 dodging these people. We told them to get the hell out of it really because the fun was going to start soon. We couldn’t tell them the time of course, but we told them to shove off and most of them did. Some were still hanging around when we had to start firing. The landing was very successful. We had 11

14:30 Australian ships involved and the three Landing Ships [LS], the Manila, the Westralia, and I can’t think of the other, but they did a marvellous job. They got 70,000 troops ashore in 15 minutes, and

15:00 **Was the other the Kanimbla?**

Kanimbla, yes, the Kanimbla.

That’s fast.

That’s right. Hey?

That’s very fast.

Yeah.

Getting all of those.

Marvellous job, wonderful coordination. And in 15 minutes they were 700 yards inland. It was pretty good, but then we

15:30 were harassed by these blessed bogies as we called them.

They

Hey?

No go ahead. I’m sorry for interrupting.

Yeah, hey?

I just wanted to check the bogies.

Bogies, yeah.

Kamikazes?

Well, later we, they were called kamikazes. We called them bogies because we hadn’t heard of kamikazes, but by jingoes we learnt.

16:00 We had an incredible record, you know, the Shropshire, because we had the most modern British radar fitted. We had radar direct us, what we called Automatic Barrage Units, ABUs, that controlled our eight inch by radar and

16:30 they’d lock onto a target, incoming aircraft, and when the aircraft was in the appropriate relative position to the ship they would fire the guns, which was very comfortable. I got a very uncomfortable experience, by that time I was four inch

17:00 and I had a roving commission. All I had to do was keep the four inch guns going electrically. We had a Metadyne system which meant that the guns were powered by, to follow the direction of train, elevate, you know, quite a good system, and unfortunately though when I had

17:30 a roving commission I didn’t have a gun to fire. I was standing in the four inch gun deck in the middle of the ship and this plane was coming straight at me and he was coming at me, no one else, and I couldn’t get my legs to work to get my camera off the adjacent gun mounting, you know. It would’ve made a marvellous photo but I was scared still. I suppose that’s what it was. My legs wouldn’t function.

18:00 The ABU functioned on ex-gun. It blew off; it burst underneath the aircraft and he recovered, the

aircraft recovered, banked around and flew into the New Mexico which was a battleship following us. Fortunately there were no casualties on that occasion

18:30 on the New Mexico. I don't know how or why. The thing exploded and made a hell of a bang on there, but however, that was our main trouble in Leyte [Gulf], these blessed bogies. Our British radar could detect them 90 miles away, which was a marvellous effort and it was realised

19:00 by all the American ships. Our captain got all sorts of commendations and congratulations, you know, on the effectiveness of our radar. On one occasion, Barrington was our best radar operator and he said, "I reckon I've got 100 coming in, they're

19:30 like pimples on a teenager's face with acne." He could read around the side of the tub and he was able to pick them up at 130 miles but that was unofficial. 90 miles was the limit, so-called limit. Our survival depended on the

20:00 Beauforts [aircraft]. We had 13 Beauforts fitted on at Manus [Island]. Our gunnery officer went ashore with a case of whisky and came back with a lot of SeaBees [US Naval Construction Force] who put these guns on, and they saved our bacon really, and the chaps who were using them.

20:30 The difference was all the guns that they pulled off had a limited range of 1,000 yards. Beauforts 5,000 yards, that was all the difference, and the size of the projectile of course had a lot to do with it. And with these bogies as we called them, you had to shred them or blow them apart before they got to you. That was the only way

21:00 you could defend yourself, and they came at all angles and in large numbers and it was terrifying really to think that these fellows were hell bent on killing themselves on your ship, you know. This fanaticism

21:30 is so strange to the British people and we could never understand it, but it comes back to their beliefs and their religion and they reckon they got a free pass to paradise. Bloody fools.

Did you know that at the time?

What?

Did you know at the time that you were being attacked that they held these

22:00 **beliefs?**

Oh yes, well it was evident to us. We didn't realise at first what they were at, but it was so blatant. We were alongside the Australia and this one came at us. We fought it off, it went away and came back again and it got the Australia, and that prompted

22:30 the skipper to, we got a signal. They killed the skipper on the Australia but she sent a signal, "You knock 'em down and we'll catch them." Later on she caught this one and she went away for repairs and she came back after the Leyte business,

23:00 but we'll get onto that. In Leyte we had the problem of knowing that the Japanese Fleet was out and we had the information that they were attacking in three sections, two fleets on the south and one from the north that we knew of, and we were in

23:30 the Leyte Gulf in Admiral Oldendorf's taskforce, and we had six American battleships that had survived Pearl Harbor or they'd been rebuilt after Pearl Harbor, and we had two flanks of cruisers. There were four on our side,

24:00 the right flank and five on the left flank, and we were lined up across the gulf which was 13 miles wide at that point. And we knew that the Jap fleet was coming from the south through Surigao Strait and we had the knowledge that there were two fleets. We

24:30 were all set for a night action. And they came up on the 14th of October and we were in a position of Admiral Oldendof, the American bloke in charge was crossing

25:00 the Ts. We were strung out across the top of the bay so that anything would have to get past us to get at the prize, the landing force in the gulf if you can picture it, and these blighters were coming up from San Fernando Strait from Surigao Strait. We had

25:30 Admiral Halsey with the most powerful navy fleet at that time guarding the northern entrance. We were strung out to guard the southern parts and the balloon went up around about 2.00 o'clock in the morning. We call see all the flashes and that. He had

26:00 30 PT boats, motor torpedo boats, guarding the Surigao Strait entrance to greet the Jap ships as they came in, which they did, but they were not terribly successful. They lost one MTB [Motor Torpedo Boat]; it was seriously damaged.

26:30 I can't remember whether it was sunk or not, but they certainly harassed the oncoming ships because we could see the flashes and the noise and what have you as they were coming into the gulf proper. They were coming up in line ahead, and our

27:00 destroyers got busy and put a few torpedoes into them. They hit the Fuso, which was one of the battleships, and slowed her down and put a few more fish in and eventually broke her back. And as we saw her sinking, she was just burning

27:30 from one end to the other, but the Yamashiro kept on coming with the other Jap cruiser, heavy cruiser, the Mogami, and we opened up at, I think it was shortly after 3.00 o'clock. And the only light that you got was from the explosion

28:00 of the shells, the star shells and that sort of stuff, and the Yamashiro mistook us we think for a battleship because of all the smoke and flame that our guns emitted when we fired them. The Americans used a different type of ammunition which was not as noticeable.

28:30 The, we opened up on the Yamashiro at a range of seven miles and were firing by radar. And she fired at us and it looked like the rear lights of a car coming towards us. It was an amazing thing to realise that this high explosive shell would get red

29:00 hot with the friction of the air and glow like a blessed red light. But four went over the top of us and they must've been pretty low, plopped in the water, and two in front of us. That's what they call a 'strattle'. So the next round theoretically should've been a hit, but we and the other battleships behind us were pouring so much

29:30 stuff into her that she didn't have a chance of getting away another shot and she finished up burning from over all, and she rolled over and sank about 20 past 4.00 in the morning. The battle started, it didn't last all that time really,

30:00 but then we had to chase the others. Two of the Jap cruisers collided when, you see, they had to swing around to bring their guns to bear. As they were coming straight ahead they could only fire their for'ard guns and when they swung around they collided and did the job for us.

30:30 Anyway we had a very successful turkey-shoot you would say. There were over 6,000 Japs in the water. That was estimated. There were three accepted lines that were (UNCLEAR). I wonder what that noise

31:00 was? And they were Oxford University graduates, possibly Christian and didn't have quite the same fanaticism as the rest of them, but most of them just pulled their heads in and they just wouldn't take a line and we went down to chase the others that turned back and got

31:30 them. And there was only one Japanese ship that we know of that got away. It was a destroyer called the Shigura, but the Hellcats [American fighter aircraft] got her outside Luzon the next day. So she didn't actually

32:00 get away. We were picking off these ships in the daylight now and we could see what was going on and we chased them right down through Fernando Strait, the way they'd come in, and the last thing I recall seeing was a Jap cruiser, or a destroyer, I wouldn't be sure

32:30 which, and another destroyer try to help her close in shore just in Fernando Strait, and the Americans just opened up and blew them both up. So actually it was a glorious victory you might say for outside.

It would be easily one of the biggest battles of

33:00 **the entire Second [World] War.**

Hmm?

It was one of the biggest sea battles of the entire Second World War, was it not?

Yes. We were told it was. It was bigger than Jutland. The size of a battle is governed by the tonnage of the ships involved plus the calibre of their guns, and in this fight for Leyte Gulf, we didn't know, but at the same time in the day time, about 10.00 o'clock in the morning,

33:30 the American Air Force, I can't think of the chap's name, they got the Misashi. There were two big battleships that the Japanese, the biggest in the world, 70,000 tons and the Yamato and the Misashi,

34:00 they were the two, and they got the Misashi up in the Sibuyan Sea, which was just outside of Leyte, and they got 20 torpedoes and 17 bombs to sink her.

Look, I have many, many questions about this. I'm just wondering if this is the push forward for the Philippines as far as your

34:30 **trajectory is concerned in your service?**

Yes.

Do you move further north after this?

Pardon?

Do you move further north after the Battle of Leyte Gulf?

Yes, yep, we moved up to Lingayen Gulf. We consolidated in Leyte and we moved up on the 6th of January to, or that was our target date to get to

35:00 Lingayen Gulf. On the way up though all hell broke loose. The Japs had brought extra planes from Formosa we understand afterwards, that's where they came from, and they were coming around like blessed hornets, you know, and we had a pretty terrible time fighting them off. The Australia had rejoined us,

35:30 having been patched up after copping the first one, and she copped five more in Lingayen, and that's where she said, "You knock 'em down, we'll catch 'em." There were more ships sunk in Lingayen Gulf than in any

36:00 previous operation in the Pacific including Pearl Harbor, and there were only four heavy ships that were not damaged and the Shropshire was one of them, and that could only be put down to the efficiency of their gun crew. They'd come at us and we'd blow them off

36:30 and then they'd go around and find some easier target. They had a spotter, which we didn't know at the time, but they had a spotting aircraft which was directing them to good targets, you see, and we found out afterwards that the kamikazes were instructed to get the ships with the three funnels because they had important

37:00 officers on board. And it was because our idiot bloody captain would fly his ensign clearly marking us as a target. We tried to get 'tail-end Charlie' [rear gunner] to shoot it down, but they weren't game.

I'll ask you later how you do such a thing. If you had the Beauforts and not the Oerlikons, do you think your chances would have been as good?

What?

37:30 **If you had, sorry, if you had the Oerlikons instead of the Beauforts…**

Oh, we'd have gone. The Beauforts saved us. There is no doubt in my mind. You see, we had one come in on our way up to Lingayen Gulf that Cazaly got with his multiple pom-pom, now that's six barrels, equivalent of six Beauforts

38:00 you might say, and he shredded the thing, and this is the remarkable thing that nobody's been able to explain. He shredded it, everything fell apart, the engine and the propeller kept on going and hit the ship's side but it didn't do any damage, knocked a bit of paint off I suppose. But the strange thing, from where the plane came two parachutes

38:30 came down. One was, and this I'll never forget because I can clearly see it without using binoculars or anything like that. The pilot was leg-less, just his torso and his arms waving and we were screaming out, "Shoot the so and so," and we were told, "Do not open fire." But the second parachute, and he dropped his, we reckon he could

39:00 understand English because he slipped his harness and dropped into the sea to kill himself, and the second one was a, I'm sure it was a mine, it was a round shape under the parachute and it just drifted slowly across and fell into the sea on the other side of us. Whether they came from that plane that Cazaly shredded or

39:30 from another plane but I don't know, but they came from the same cloud. It's very difficult you see, there's cloud around and that sort of thing. Sometimes your vision's impaired but I'll never forget this chappy coming down with his parachute and we thought, "That goes against the grain." They're trying to kill themselves and why would they have a parachute? Dunno. Anyway.

40:00 **Perhaps they thought they might've had some chance of survival. That's why they had them. Who knows.**

Perhaps.

Tape 3

00:33 **I'm sorry if it seems like we're skimming over the details but we will revisit it. After Lingayen, where did you set sail for?**

Gosh. Well Lingayen, we came down from there

01:00 to Corregidor, and Corregidor was the famous, "I shall return," job again from Douglas MacArthur [United States' general]. He waded ashore in Leyte to honour his promise there – he'd return, get his feet wet. And this time he didn't get his feet wet because he flew over Corregidor at 30,000 feet

01:30 in a Flying Fortress [Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber] with a couple of Lightnings [Lockheed P-38 Lightening aircraft] as escort. One of our wags on board said, “Attention on the upper deck, face upward.” It was one of the things to salute a senior officer, but Corregidor was remarkable in that by this time

02:00 they’d run out of planes and they were using two-ton boats driven by car engines loaded with amatol, or loaded with the explosives, and their idea was to get alongside a ship and blow themselves up. They did it once in our vision

02:30 at Corregidor. The Yank [American] destroyer thought it was a mail boat and they were all leaning over the side, you know, waiting for the mail and this thing blew itself up. I can’t recall whether there were casualties on the American destroyer but I guess there must’ve been.

Did those motor boats have a name?

What?

Did the motor boats have a name, the suicide boats?

No, not to my knowledge.

03:00 The Japanese had suicide boats, the ‘backa’ craft, but no, these things were just a spur of the moment job I think. I don’t know where they had them hidden. They brought them out in the Lingayen Gulf and they didn’t worry us much there, we just shored them up. But it was sort of a last resort. They’d run out of planes

03:30 and they used this tactic to try and do damage. You might remember in recent years they got the USS Cole by a similar tactic with a runabout loaded with explosive, in Yemen or Yamen or you know, something.

04:00 Where did we get to?

After Lingayen and Corregidor.

After Corregidor. Well Corregidor is remarkable in that the paratroopers made a landing and there were a twin line of biscuit bombers, DC3s, flying from horizon to the islands, you know,

04:30 and they came over and they dropped all these parachutes, multi-coloured and it was quite spectacular. Some of them missed the island, you know, they’d get blown off. Some of them were hanging on trees on the cliffs of Corregidor. The Japs were firing at us with their field pieces they had mounted on rail truck and you’d see the

05:00 flashes and you’d get on to them and they’d run back into the tunnel, like blessed rabbits. And all in all the Corregidor was just like a blessed Movietone hotted-up movie. It was rather an expensive exercise. Some of the paratroopers were killed

05:30 and they were firing as they came down in their parachutes and the Nips [Japanese] were firing at them as they were landing.

The Americans seem to have a great sense of theatre about their battle methods.

Oh, oh no. Anyway, Corregidor was the finale as far as we were concerned. We came back to

06:00 Sydney, went to Manus first in the Admiralties [Admiralty Islands]. The Manus was the base we captured after the landing along New Guinea and New Britain. We went over to the Admiralties and we had a bit of fun there. The Japs had field pieces mounted in several areas there and

06:30 they were landing shots quite close to us and that annoyed us a bit, and we finally got rid of them with our eight inch. And Manus became the main base for the American force in the south west Pacific area. Anyway we

07:00 came back from Corregidor, into Manus, and then down to Sydney and home on leave. I got a draft to the torpedo school to qualify for the job that I’d been doing and not being paid for for the last 12 months. We were away for 10 months.

Was that in Flinders or somewhere in New South Wales?

In Flinders, that was the torpedo school.

07:30 I had an interesting experience in the torpedo school. They got the subs out of Sydney Harbour and I was pulling the Jap torpedo apart to find out what made it tick and what made them so much better than ours, and I found that they’d used the best features of the English Whitehead

08:00 depth-keeping mechanism and the American air-blast gyro, and more importantly they had discovered or realised that a torpedo was only meant to fire once. We had to pull ours down, strip them like a motor car and all that sort of jazz. The Japanese had

08:30 an orifice which, as it progressed through the water the salt water came in, and that pressure was used to force the oil through the engine. The salt water, it didn't matter because you only used it once and they got a range with their Long Lance torpedoes of 49 miles. By economising

09:00 they used all their, they used oxygen. And anyway, the stuff that they used was economised and it was just used for driving the torpedo.

Just to deviate for a second, do you think that they would've had this technology before they declared war?

Oh, certainly did.

09:30 When I went through Tokyo and Tokyo University I was a radio mechanic or ham, you know, and I had Magnavox speakers here at home which had self-tapping screws, something which we never had in Australia. They were very, I found that the

10:00 Japs had the Magnavox, they called it a Fuji but it was made from the same dies, you know.

Well they're certainly not a nation that's ever been backwards in copying or dare I say plagiarising technology to suit their purposes.

Oh absolutely. They were copiers, but the copied the right stuff. Oh yeah, they were smart.

10:30 **After the torpedo school draft did you, were you sent back on another ship or did you go back to the Shropshire?**

No, I was drafted to the Bataan, and the Bataan was a new destroyer. And I was sent to Balmoral to wait the draft on, you know, wait for her to be ready.

Not a bad

11:00 **place to spend a few days in waiting.**

Well as it developed, it's an almost unbelievable story but this is true. I'd recently qualified, you see, in Flinders for the Slope RLTR [?], that meant that I had a blaze of gold on my arm and three badges underneath it and that sort of stuff.

11:30 I was a leading hand by that time, and I was detailed to look after the grounds party in Balmoral and the old chief, chief petty officer who was responsible for the grounds party and what have you, clapped his eyes on my badges and he said, "Oh Davis," he said, "come over here to my cabin." I thought, "Uh huh, what's this?" And he

12:00 showed me some examination papers that he had from the Ultimo, the tech [school] in Ultimo. He said, "Do you know anything about this?" I said, "Oh yeah, I've done that course, chief." "Ah," he says, "right. Well look, forget about the grounds party, here's my examination papers, there's the fridge full of grog, go ashore whenever you like but finish this bloody examination paper for me." So I did. Well at least I tried to. Naturally

12:30 I went ashore and I only worked during the day and I would just walk out of the place whenever I liked, but then the draft came to go to the Bataan and he said, "You can't go." I says, "Why not?" He says, "Well look," he says, "you haven't finished your work." And he said, "We can't find your hammock."

13:00 "No, I've got to go." "No, you can't go because we cannot find your hammock." And anyway I had to finish his papers. Then I can't remember whether it took me two or three days but I missed the blessed Bataan. So they flew me up to Jacquinot Bay.

13:30 I was with the 8th Infantry AOD [Artillery & Ordnance Division], that's an army, Australian Army division in Jacquinot Bay. Went swimming there and I said, "Crikey, lovely water," and that. He said, "Yeah, but you don't go swimming there, it's full of sharks." But however, he told me that afterwards. We were in Jacquinot for a little while and a blessed earth tremor. I wondered what the hell I'd struck. You know, the place

14:00 was shaking like a jelly. But however, I waited for several days and a draft, I was put in charge of this draft of 250 blokes came from somewhere and put on the Manxman, a fast British mine layer. And

14:30 on the Manxman I was greeted by the master at arms who is responsible for discipline and everything else, and he had a perpetual smile on his face. It was most unusual to see a master at arms who was smiling, and I didn't realise until the first meal and I was his killick in charge of the mess and had to

15:00 distribute the rum and the non-drinkers, it was traditional that they gave it to the killick of the mess. So I was smiling as much as he was.

And would it be fair to say the war has been declared over by this stage too?

No.

No, not yet?

No. The war is still on.

I'm wondering what the rum was for.

15:30 The British navy have rum all the time – Nelson's blood. That's where they get their…

Is that pass the port kind of?

Hmm?

Is that where the pass the port tradition came from?

The?

Pass the port? I believe in the navy it was a tradition.

Pass the port? Yeah, yeah. But this was rum we're talking about, and that was Nelson's blood they called it, and it was

16:00 strong stuff and it gave them the will to fight, I guess. Anyway that was my experience on the Manxman. We went from Jacquinot Bay to Tokyo. The war was over. That's right, and we stopped at Guam for fuel. And four and a half days from

16:30 Jacquinot Bay, which is the southern part of New Britain, to Tokyo is a fair distance and we travelled at a fair speed. The Manxman was capable of 47 knots full speed. She had six boilers and we cruised at 42 knots. She could lay

17:00 mines at 38 knots, if you want statistics, and she had twin rails for laying mines and predictors. And I was interested in the technicalities of that aspect of it because I hadn't struck it before, and anyway we had a marvellous trip up to

17:30 Yokohama where I picked up the Bataan.

I read that the Bataan was named in honour of MacArthur.

It was, because that was his last stand at Corregidor. Corregidor being an island, fortified island on the end of the Bataan Peninsula.

Looking at all the ships that you sailed on they all seem to be,

18:00 **coincidentally or otherwise, very, very new to the waters.**

New to the?

They seemed to have been commissioned quite recently prior to you joining them.

Except the Shropshire. The Shropshire was laid down in 1928.

I beg your pardon, yes.

And she was refitted several times and before we took her over from the RN [Royal Navy] in March '43 she had a complete

18:30 refit with all the most modern stuff about the place, and I was like a pig in clover. You know, it was very interesting, new equipment and that sort of thing, but that was the only new part of the Shropshire, our gun control and radar, very good.

How long, sorry, how long did you spend in Tokyo?

About three months.

19:00 I've forgotten really. Actually, my main idea in the navy was two things. To get me out and to make a bit of money while I was there so I could enjoy myself when I did get out. And I neglected to mention that when we went over to

19:30 America we ran the crown and anchor on board the ship and had a captive audience you might say, and we made an awful lot of money.

Did you have to pay anybody off?

Hey?

Did you have to pay anybody off?

Oh yes, yeah. You don't get away with those things for nothing, but they make a lot out of it but so did we. And

20:00 crossing the Atlantic, we were only there for four days on the Louis Pasteur, I was selling bottles. The cordial bottles and what have you. You're not allowed to throw them over the side so I collected them and took them back to the canteen and got money for them.

20:30 Did I tell you about the sewing machine?

Yes, you did, you did. I just want to finish off this chronology of yours. I'm just wondering when you were sent back to Australia how long until you were discharged?

I was discharged on the 3rd of April 1946

21:00 I think it was.

All right, so they kept you in for a good six or seven months after it all finished.

Yes. Actually I had such a lucky break. You see, on the Bataan when we were in Japan we liberated a lot of stuff. I went to the Tokyo University and got a lot of stuff there, microscopes and that sort of thing,

21:30 and on the Bataan we came back to Hobart. I went home and got the family car and went down to the gangway and the boss's eyes poked out when I arrived there with a relatively new Chev [Chevrolet] and proceeded to load it up with the stuff that I'd, "You can't take that, that's part of the ship's, you know,

22:00 it's bolted down on the bridge." "No, it's not on the inventory, it's mine." Anyway we came to a gentleman's agreement over that lot because I had him on toast actually. When we get back to the Japan business in Yokohama, I could've had, if I'd been an officer

22:30 I would've brought the Zero [Japanese fighter plane] back, but as it was I just photographed it and took all the instruments and the battery and the wireless out of it and brought that back, out of a Zero. The Zero was complete except for guns, they'd been removed and I was bringing this stuff back on the ship and the boss said, "Where are you getting that?" I said, "From the bloody aircraft factory just across

23:00 the way there." "Oh gosh, let's have a look at it." So he comes over with me, but the silly blighter wore his cap and as we walked in the fellows, they dropped everything that they'd unbolted and shot through. We went around and collected what we wanted that they'd dropped and shot through likewise. There was, well I suppose we were vandalising you might say,

23:30 but we didn't see it that way.

I guess the sentiment at the time was also a lot more easygoing than before the war finished.

Oh yeah, yeah.

It was a bit of a free-for-all. Can I ask if you'd attained, or what rank you'd attained by the end, by the time you were discharged?

I was a leading seaman and I was recommended for a warrant officer's course in torpedoes.

24:00 **And was that your rank in terms of your, is that what you retired on, that rank?**

I retired as a leading torpedo operator, low power, and a leading seaman.

Okay.

I never made the PO.

Imagine what you would've accrued if you had

24:30 **in the way of souvenirs.**

I couldn't have pulled some of the stunts that they did.

You're a dangerous man.

Hiding your hammock so you can finish examinations papers. I met him after the war in Sydney and he was the chief operator in one of the suburban picture theatres. He was very grateful.

I'm sure he was. Listen, I want to go back to 1939 if I

25:00 **might.**

Yep.

You were dead keen already to get into the service and then the war was declared. Did you already know that things were going to hot up?

Mmm.

What was your knowledge of pre-war?

Well I was reasonably observant for a youngster. I could see what was going on in England

25:30 mainly and it was quite apparent that something was going to happen. Actually I was on night shift at the zinc works when war was declared on the 3rd of September 1939. It was a Sunday night, I think,

and on the Monday I rang the staff office

26:00 because I could see that where I was situated in the zinc works it was going to be difficult to get away. And I rang them and that's how I came to be mobilised. See, I had to have a medical test and all that sort of jazz. And I was mobilised, I think it was the 15th or 18th of

26:30 September 1939.

Just fairly quick, fairly quick?

Oh yeah, they didn't waste much time, but I wasted a bit of time afterwards hanging around. I changed from a signalman to the seamen branch and that's what kicked me off again as an ordinary seaman. And I did that because the signalmen were being sent to lighthouses to count seagulls and what

27:00 have you and that wasn't my ambition.

Not for you. Listen in that, what they call the phony war, those six to eight months,

Yeah.

what were you mainly tied up doing? Is that when you were minesweeping around Tasmania?

Yeah. Before that I was on the switchboard at the Naval Staff Office in Hobart.

Yes, you said that. What sort of work did that require you to do? Was it literally

Make the officer's bed at night.

27:30 Go over the pub and get some grog so we could have a bit of a scallop supper and that sort of thing. One night I made his bed up and I woke up – he was looking after the switchboard while I was making his bed – and I went to sleep on it. He was asleep in the exchange.

Was it a bit of a batman's role?

We mustn't tell that. Hey? Oh, it was, yeah.

28:00 **And in terms of the switchboard operating were you, now that I know a little about your personality, were you listening in on the information that was channelling through?**

No, no. I wasn't concerned about that sort of thing.

So you figured out fairly quickly that signalling wasn't for you?

Oh yes, I really did. Well mainly I think because I was not terribly good at it

28:30 and, button tosser, they called it. We had a couple of tassels hanging down here you see, and we'd be talking to each other, you know, wherever we were with semaphore, and I was a bit slower than the others. You know, some of the jokes were over my head, I'd miss out. So I came to the conclusion that

29:00 I was not going to make a good signalman.

Would you have ranked yourself as naive at the time or were you reasonably aware of…?

I was naive, I was naïve. You see, I was only 18 and I had some good times but I don't know. I wasn't terribly keen

29:30 on sticking in one place, although I did stick with the staff office for quite a while before I got the draft to the Swan.

What was you idea when you were a young 18-year-old of what getting into the war meant?

It meant protecting my family.

Did you anticipate being bombed by Zeros and attacked by torpedoes?

No way.

30:00 No way. I didn't anticipate that. I rather thought that I might get a draft to the Med. That was one area where I didn't have any experience. We had a good trip across America, you see, when I was, later on, and that fulfilled some of my ambitions to see part of the

30:30 world. But, oh no, I was keen to get in the service to basically to protect my family. That was my aim.

And living all the way down in Tasmania, did you think then that Tasmania was vulnerable to invasion?

No. No, I didn't. I thought

31:00 Australia was. You see, I grew up very smartly after the Darwin episode. Darwin changed my outlook completely, and when I say completely I must confess completely. It really shattered me to see what was

going on, what could happen and what could happen to our people if

31:30 the Japs did get in here. And there was no doubt about it – they wanted Darwin. They really basically wanted the Houston and missed out on her because she went out the night before. But they wanted to neutralise Darwin so that they could consolidate in the Ambon, and Biak and some of those places. You see, their main

32:00 aim was oil, and to protect that.

Yes, and I think they were very successful for quite a period of time in their endeavours.

Oh, they were. They were successful until the Philippines, and the Philippines was the event which rendered the Japanese Navy non-existent as an

32:30 offensive force. They were neutered.

They were kaput by then really, by the looks of things in terms of the sea.

They only had a few ships to protect their mainland. They sacrificed the Yamato. I told you that the American Airforce got the Misashi.

33:00 They sent the Yamato on a one-way trip to Hiroshima with enough fuel to get her there, and the captain was given instructions, we learned later, to drive the ship ashore and use their main armament to protect, you know, knock the invaders out.

33:30 A suicide attempt with a 70,000 ton man-o'-war. What fanaticism, hey?

May I ask you a little bit about getting drafted to the Swan and if you could talk to me or describe for me how you go about sweeping mines in an area?

34:00 You have a pattern and you divide the area into zones like a draught board really and just clear that area and then move into the next quadrant. It takes some time, but that's how it's done.

From the movies everybody knows that if you hit a mine it will explode and so on, so

34:30 **how does a ship and how do you as sailors on a ship get rid of a mine? Technically how does that happen?**

We sink it with rifle fire.

Just blow it up?

Yeah, yeah, or we try to blow it up, but invariably you just put bullet holes in it and it sinks without an explosion.

Oh I see. There you go. I didn't know that at all.

It's

35:00 quite spectacular when you do hit one. You've got to hit the horn and clouds of water and what have you.

What did the German mine look like in the early stages of the war?

These were the 'moore' type mines. They were designed to form a field and they were

35:30 500 pounds of explosive and the horns were in a liquid form to form a battery when the horns were broken. It broke the glass and let the acid into the other part of the thing and

36:00 triggered the mine.

About how, can you show us on camera about how big a mine would be, a sea mine?

Roughly a little under three feet, about that diameter. That's the old type of mine. Of course the other mines were developed much more sophisticated.

I'm sure they were.

36:30 We had special instruction on them.

Later on?

Mmm.

So in the early days of the war, or still during the phony war as they called it, whose job on ship was it to spot the mines and what process did you go through in terms of [UNCLEAR]?

We had our watch keepers and we had people. We didn't have radar, it was purely

37:00 observation and sweeping. You'd be sweeping; if you popped a mine, well you beauty. You'd sink it and, as I said with rifle fire, that was the only means we had and there was only one that we exploded actually and I've got a photo of that somewhere.

So when you say sweeping, does that mean you have searchlights moving ahead in front

37:30 **of the ship?**

The PVs are strung in front of the ship. The main sweepers, they are strewn astern, and we'd tow what we called 'otters'. They were like a sloping board which takes the wire down, and

38:00 it's strung out in a horizontal plane straight out from the ship to cover as much of the area as you can with one sweep.

So like kind of crazy broom wires coming off the side of the ship?

Yeah, there are several types of sweeps. (UNCLEAR) sweep was the one that we used and 'otter boards'.

Ottoboards?

Otter, otter.

Oh, otter,

38:30 **otter boards.**

O-double T-E-R.

And just before this tape finishes, how dangerous was it to have a mine explode near the ship? I'm wondering how much damage a mine exploding could do to a minesweeper?

It could blow it out of the water. No risk, as has happened, not to our flotilla.

So there is a fair degree of danger in exploding it with a rifle?

Oh, there is, yeah.

39:00 That's what makes it laughable afterwards when you run across a dockyard mate, dockyard people who demand danger money to work on these ships when we're sleeping on it, having it thrown at us and all for seven bob a day, and they get overtime. No, I'm black on 'wharfies', I don't like them.

From a lot of people that we've spoken to

39:30 **regarding that wharfies' strike, you can see the effects going all the way around the top of Australia and over to New Guinea and all sorts of places?**

Oh yeah, they didn't know there was a war on. They were more like saboteurs.

Tape 4

00:30 **...what your specific job was in the minesweeping operations?**

In the minesweeping operation I was bosun's mate, I was on the wheel and it was a good number.

How so?

I stayed away from the...

So you were telling us about your role in the minesweeping.

I was a bosun's mate which means that I do my watches on

01:00 the helm and obey the orders of the officer of the watch, if he's awake.

Does that mean you're doing, you're keeping an eye out for mines yourself?

No. I'm keeping my eye on the compass because we're given compass bearings and a course to keep and my job as a quartermaster is to steer the ship to keep her on track.

How many people on

01:30 **board?**

68.

That's quite a few. I would've thought...

It's a small ship, it's only 1,060 tons and it was built in 1938 – a relatively new ship.

Now did you get a crack with a rifle at one of these mines? It sounds like fun.

No, I got a crack at the crocs, crocodiles, but that was another story. I've got a photo of myself over there in the,

02:00 in a book and the crocs and we were just idling the time around in the harbour and we had to have rifles to keep the crocs off if any of our blokes had a swim. They didn't know how lucky they were that we didn't have to shoot anything.

Before

02:30 **the Japanese entered the war, did you know anything about them? We've heard stories that…**

Oh, we knew lots of things about them. We knew that they couldn't see properly, they had poor eyesight and they were weak and we were strong, sort of thing. There was a lot of propaganda which was all proved to be propaganda.

03:00 They were very astute. They copied the best features of anything they wanted.

What were you told about their navy?

Oh, we weren't told a great deal about their navy. At the stage when I was on the Swan we never considered the, pardon me, we never considered the Japanese because

03:30 until Pearl Harbor, and then we didn't know much about their navy. But we found later that they were quite good. When we had the encounter in the Surigao Strait, their gunnery was first class under the conditions that they were fighting under, and they were just having an avalanche of

04:00 shells going into them from four inch, five inch, eight inch up to the sixteen inch of the battleships all going into this one ship and she was still firing.

This is, it's jumping around a bit but you mentioned before action stations.

Yep.

What does that exactly constitute?

Each

04:30 person on the ship is allocated an action station which is, it's his duty to get there by the quickest manner in which he can get there to perform his duty. When action station sounds you go like hell to get to where you have to go. On an

05:00 organised ship like the Shropshire we had a rule that if you're going forward you go on the port side and aft, you come so you're not bumping into each other, and a funny thing there, the lookout was trying to get up to his place on the compass platform and there was this, and he was going the wrong way, and there was this very

05:30 large bottom in his face going up the ladder going the wrong way too, and he slapped him on the rump. He said, "Move on, you slow so and so," and it happened to be the admiral. That was quite an embarrassment for the lad but nothing came of it, it was all right. No, you had to get to action stations by the shortest route.

06:00 On the Swan it was not terribly well organised, but we knew where we had to go and we didn't have far to go to get there. On the Shropshire it was different; it was quite different on a large ship.

You said the Swan was less well organised. Why was that? Did you have less action stations drills?

06:30 I guess that would be a fair comment. We weren't action station conscious, you know. You see, I call it a phony war. We were, you know, we were just like in peace time until Pearl Harbor.

Did you have a sense then that it was a phony war, cause it sounds if it's an historical sort of

07:00 **comment these days? What did you think of the war then?**

No, it was just a feeling that we were, well, we were not seeing any action apart from a few mines popping up and they were few and far between. We actually only swept one up and they were laid outside the entrance to the Derwent by the Penguin, a German raider,

07:30 in I think it was April or June 1940. We learnt afterwards, we didn't know at the time who had laid them.

Was there much talk of Japanese activity in our waters then?

No, there was none at all that I know of, no. There was,

08:00 later in November when the Sydney was lost, there was rumours about a Japanese submarine may have

got her, but that was just media gossip and I'm sure there was no substance in it. The Sydney was lost by the strategy of Ditmars, the German captain on the Kormorant.

08:30 He put fish into her before he dropped the flag, or put his flag up, and why they let him get away with it, I don't know. Well, they couldn't prove it, I suppose, because there was no one left to, except the Chinese laundry man and they put the kybosh on him really. If anyone had believed them, but it was an act of, against the Geneva

09:00 Convention and all things that lost the Sydney. Of course Burnett should never have put the Sydney in the place where he did. He was completely fooled. That's happened a lot in the war though. We had an admiral who was completely fooled. This is going on now up to Leyte, that he was completely fooled by the decoys that the Japs

09:30 put out with aircraft carriers and what have you, and he took his whole fleet after this decoy and left the Leyte Gulf exposed, and we were extremely luck that the Japanese admiral had to put in. He'd put up with so much in the last three days. He'd lost one of his major battle ships,

10:00 the Misashi and cruisers up in the Sibuyan Sea, and he was rattled and he decided to go back home. We were very happy about that because – we're skipping about a bit – we were happy about that because we were formed into a strike force in Surigao Strait

10:30 now to go and protect Leyte against Kurita's main force, and we were very fortunate that he went about and disappeared.

You mentioned the decoy that they sent out.

The sent an Admiral Ozawa

11:00 and four carriers and a couple of cruisers from the Inland Sea in Japan to approach the northern part of Leyte. See, Leyte is in the Philippines and there are over 1,000 islands in the Philippine complex, and he

11:30 was sent down to decoy Admiral Halsey's 3rd Fleet, which was the most powerful fleet in the world at that stage, and he was successful. Pardon me. Halsey took the bait and took all his ships in pursuit of Ozawa's force which he thought was the main Japanese force

12:00 and Kurita, he was the main force, and he came around but as I say, the Yamato drooped a few shells in the landing area in Leyte, but Kurita had a change of mind and he wasn't inclined to be the

12:30 kamikaze type; he withdrew. We said, "Three bags full." We didn't know the force we were up against, if we'd caught him, but we just paddled around in the area for a few hours and then went back to Leyte Gulf.

At the time, how conscious are you of strategies?

13:00 **I'm guessing on a ship you're so caught up in your personal role and activity, are you aware of what's going on in a broader sense?**

In where? In a broader sense?

Yeah, in the Leyte situation.

Well no. You're devoid of information. The most telling thing on morale is the absence of mail from home. We were let down terribly with

13:30 that lot. As a matter of fact, when the Warramunga came into the harbour with mail and she made a signal, "I'm going to Shropshire first," the captain replied, "Shall open fire if you don't." He was one of our, the captain of the 'Munga [Warramunga] was Alison, and he was one of our officers before the captain of the

14:00 Warramunga took ill and he was relieving him, but you know, it's just one of those things. We needed mail from home too, you know, that was the most difficult thing, not knowing what was going on at home. Tokyo Rose [Radio Tokyo radio propaganda host] was telling us, of course, that these big buck negroes were looking after our wives and our children and all this sort of thing.

14:30 Tokyo Rose was a very popular commentator. We had her tuned in most of the time and she was saying, "These unfair Australians are using flame throwers to singe the wings of our butterflies." That's when we were shooting down their 'Zombies'.

Sorry, would people get worried about what she was

15:00 **saying or was it all just a laugh?**

Oh, it was just a laugh. We recognised it as propaganda and we never had any serious problems there. The only problem we had was sometimes from mail at home. We could only conject [conjecture] as to what could be in a letter to cause one of our fellows to commit suicide,

15:30 which he did after we received mail. So these sort of things are conjecture, you never know for sure, but

we figure that there was something on the home front that disturbed his mind and it doesn't take much when your nerves are really keyed up to, I guess to throw you. I get very amused sometimes at every trauma

16:00 that happens these days they talking about counselling and all the rest of it. Well we went through the war, the most torrid time, and we never got any counselling. We weren't looking for it anyway.

Do you think some men would've benefited from some counselling?

I don't think so. I think they would've told the people, the counsellors, where to get off. They wouldn't have been very

16:30 well received. I think you were, in those situations I think you are your own counsellor. I mean either you stick with it and do your job and that's the main thing that enables you to carry on. You know, you have your duty to perform and you do it.

I was also interested in your perspective on a battle, a major

17:00 **battle like Leyte Gulf. What is your perspective on what's going on in a more general sense? Like you were mentioning the decoy and that strategy.**

Yeah.

When you're actually in the battle how much do you know? How much comes down from the top?

Well we got information from our scout aircraft of the number of ships that were coming in towards us. We knew there were two fleets

17:30 coming in through Surigao Strait. We knew that there was a force and we didn't quite know where it was, it was – Admiral Kurita – and he'd lost his mainstay, the super battleship on the same day that we were in Surigao Strait, and we didn't know about that at the time.

18:00 I guess we didn't know a great deal other than the fleet that we were faced with, and it was just as well I think.

Well how is morale maintained in such a chaotic environment?

Well, whenever we could we'd have a picture show. Earlier on we didn't have many picture shows then. We were

18:30 closed up at action stations 148 hours out of 168, and you didn't have much time for picture shows. There was too much entertainment going on around you to be bothered with it, but earlier on we had picture shows in the early part of the New Guinea campaign and what have you, and

19:00 on one occasion I was, I didn't mention that I, my father ran the pictures at my home in Ranelagh and I learned the projecting business as a kid with him, you know. Only silent movies

19:30 in those days, but anyway I learned enough to be able to be a proficient cinematograph operator according to my service certificate on the ships that I was on, and you get paid for that too, and in more ways than one. I used to run the movies on the Shropshire in the torpedo space as it was called, and I

20:00 built up with the help of one of the radar mechanics, I built up an amplifier to enable us to have two projectors and we had a continuous show. I knew the old drill about putting a penny in the film when you wind it up so when it dings you know it's time to change over to the other reel and you have, you know, all those finer points which, it was useful information that came back

20:30 after a few years. Made life worthwhile. The other thing that made life worthwhile was in the torpedo space it was stinking hot. We didn't have much beer, we had a ration of one bottle a man occasionally and I used to get the beer from the chaps who were non-drinkers to keep a seat for them. And I had a large

21:00 container in the cinema hut which we, I made into a refrigerator simply by putting all the beer into the container and releasing a mosquito repellent canister. And of course that dropped the temperature rapidly and you know, Bob's your aunty. We had our good times.

I'd like to go back to action stations a bit more.

Yep.

21:30 **Could you explain to me, or to us as if we've never seen it, the space you're in? So you're in four inch guns, is that right?**

Four inch guns?

Yeah, so what sort of area are you in?

What are you talking about? The Swan or the Shropshire?

Sorry, the Shropshire for example.

On the Shropshire. Well my action station for the first eight months was the eight inch transmitting station.

22:00 A bit larger than this living room and it contained all the communications from the ships' positions and the, what we call the table, it was the computer to control the eight inch guns and that was my action station. And

22:30 we all had to get there as quick as we could when action station sounded off. The personnel in there would number around 15, which crowded the space a little bit. They were mainly bandsmen. That's how they were employed, you see, and we called them noisemaking so and sos, but, you know, they did their job. And

23:00 particularly I remember one bandsman named Spence. He was sort of a comedian. He was counting his money at one stage and he says, how much would it cost me to get a one way trip to Sydney? As if he could! But his job in TS was to ride a bike. If you lost power

23:30 you had to clutch up to a bike which was on a stand and he used to peddle furiously to drive the table.

How was he selected, was he the fittest?

It was mechanical, it was chain driven, linked up.

Yep, how did he get that job?

He just had the clutch. Hey?

How did he get that job?

Being the fattest there and most need of exercise.

24:00 Yes, Spence.

Forgive my ignorance, but was this an enclosed room? Did you have windows, could you see anything outside?

It was on the bottom of the ship.

Right.

It was completely enclosed and it was the most vulnerable part of the ship, you see, because we only had one eight inch TS. We had two control positions for the four inch

24:30 but eight inch were all controlled, central control.

Whereabouts was it, midships? Because that's a dangerous spot, isn't it?

It was close to midships, a bit forward of the centre line, and it was a long way down cause I know. That's how I got into trouble.

Did that make you worried being, I mean to evacuate would be

25:00 **so difficult from there, to escape.**

Well quite honestly we didn't think about that. In retrospect we should've been worried because if there's any trouble there they flood that and you don't get out. It's on the bottom of the ship and if there's any trouble, the sort of trouble that we envisaged would be torpedoes, but no, you don't think of those things. You've got other things to worry about.

Well, what were

25:30 **you worrying about? What was your job in that room?**

My job, my responsibility was to keep the table working and everything electrical working in the TS. That was my job for eight months and I didn't have anything else to do. I was given charge of the eight inch. I told you, or I may have mentioned that I got pretty good marks when I did the

26:00 torpedo's courses because of my background having done night school and all that sort of jazz; it was just a piece of cake. And I was given the responsibility of looking after the eight inch TS electrically. And while I was there for eight months there was not one hiccup or nothing went wrong.

So you did your job well?

I think

26:30 so, yeah, and so did the others. They reckoned they were happy and they were sorry when I left.

So would you take..

The OA [?] that took over got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] or something or other, yeah.

So in the TS would you take orders of where to fire, take direction? I mean, or did you have

Yes, the TS is a transmitting station and that relays

27:00 all the messages received from the directors to the guns, and it's with a four inch the Metadyne system that we had which was unique really enable the four inch guns to follow the information that we fed from the TS.

27:30 We had our own directors for the four inch though, and they were situated in the forward and after part of the ship. The ship depended on the compass platform mainly which was forward, but the after control was the secondary control position and if the

28:00 bridge got knocked out, which has happened, it did, in most cases of the ships that what they aimed for, the after control would be able to keep going, you see, maintain control. That was broadly the system.

Sorry, in this room, in the TS, if you had a near miss or

28:30 **those shells that dropped forward or behind, could you hear the noise, could you feel the vibrations? What could you sense?**

Oh crikey, yes. You could hear the thumps and the noise. On one occasion there was what they estimated was 1,000 ton bomb dropped near our stern and it lifted the stern out of the water. Other ships could see our screws

29:00 and the water, and the front of the ship, the bows, came back to B turret; on the ship there you've got A and B turrets. A is near the sharp end, the bow, and B just behind it, and the bows, when this thing went off underneath us, it damaged the shaft and it,

29:30 you know, it tipped us upside down. You had to hang on to something.

Do you get any warning? Is there any sound preceding the explosion?

You don't get any warning unless you can see them coming in. Those on topsides would have warning and the drill there was too – if you weren't behind a gun you lay down to avoid the shrapnel

30:00 and stuff. Down below you didn't have to worry about that.

You just had to worry about a torpedo in the guts?

Yeah, that's more or less what it amounted to, but actually you're too busy to worry about those sort of things. In actual fact you don't worry about it.

In that room, who had leadership, who had rank?

A gunner,

30:30 he's a step below a sub-lieutenant. He's a warrant officer and he's experienced in gunnery. And the chap we had was Perron, and he was a very nice likeable fellow and I got on extremely well with him. My job every time we had

31:00 action stations was to line up the table. And it was a trigger and a metrical arrangement, you know. You just had to set the thing up and you'd make a triangle, a right angle triangle with the range and that and it had to line up, that was it. If it didn't line up you'd have to find out why and correct it. But as I say, I never had any trouble with it. I really liked

31:30 the TS, but I was very pleased to get out of it because I couldn't see what was going on, but then after I could see what was going on I was rather inclined to wish to God I was back in the TS, yeah.

Where was your new place for action stations when you could see?

When I was, my action station was the four inch gun deck and I had to be on hand for any

32:00 communications, the Beauforts or what have you, if their headphones went on the blink I'd have to fix them, and the four inch though, they were a piece of cake. I was very interested in that. It was because of my interest in radio. One day I had, we had what we call Metadyne amplifiers and they were quite a

32:30 heavy thing. I couldn't handle them now. But we only had two spares for four units and one of them went on the blink and I was able to find out what it was and I got the soldering iron out and got the thing up on the upper deck because it was too hot down below and I'm stuck into it and my boss comes along, "God Davis, what are you doing?" I

33:00 said, "I'm fixing this amplifier." He said, "Do you know what you're doing?" I said, "Well I wouldn't be into it if I didn't," and he just breezed off and I never heard any more about it. But we used that

amplifier right up to the end until I left the ship, you know, it was going. I deliberately put it in to make sure it was right.

I'm not a very technically minded person. What does that do for a four inch gun?

Hey?

What does the amplifier do

33:30 **in the gun mechanism?**

It amplifies the signal from a repeater, which is a very weak signal, into a high amplitude current sufficient to drive the motor which drives the gun. It's well, it's called a Metadyne amplifier

34:00 and it's a specialised thing. You have a special generator, it was something that interested me right from the beginning. And I was sorry that I wasn't into it earlier on the Shropshire because I was earwigging with the dockyard people who were installing the gear and that's where my interest was awakened.

34:30 And I knew a bit about it from, you know, from getting information as they were installing it, and it was quite good. It enabled our four inch guns to lay or train following the director, you know, without any human

35:00 agency.

Did that, did it ever not work?

It worked, it worked very well, yeah. It worked well until once they were missing out on something and I found out what it was. They were putting in what we call U [enemy speed] over APV [average projectile velocity]. It was enemy speed over average projectile velocity. And they were feeding false information in when we were firing at a surface

35:30 target. That's why they weren't hitting the thing. But yeah, we sorted them out, that was all right. But the Metadyne was very good.

Now the four inch gun position, how many people would be manning it?

About eight.

Okay.

Ammunition numbers and what have you.

And what were you doing?

Waiting for something to go wrong.

So you were more an overseer sort of supervisor position?

36:00 Yeah, that's right.

Can you tell me…

It was worse really than having something to do.

Is that because when you're busy you don't worry so much?

No, because you're scared stiff. I told you I think I was standing in the middle of the four inch gun deck and this bogey as we called them came in at us from astern at a rate of knots. They're travelling at about between 300 and 400 knots,

36:30 heading straight at you, and me, I thought it was coming straight at me. Fortunately he wasn't firing his guns and I told you that I had my camera on the mounting there but I couldn't get my legs to work to, I was paralysed, and our eight inch saved the day as far as I was concerned. He blew it, blew him off and he crashed into the New Mexico astern of us.

37:00 A four inch, the four inch was effective but I would say that the eight inch barrage and the Beauforts that the gunnery officer got for a case of whisky saved our lives. No risk about it.

They're good guns?

Yeah, good gun, high rate of fire, 5,000 yards range and you could shred the plane, you know, with

37:30 it, and the eight inch, that scared seven bells of what name out of their pilots because Tokyo Rose said, "These unfair Australians are shooting our…" gotta giant flame thrower, and, "singeing the wings of our butterflies."

That's a compliment to you guys isn't it?

Oh it was, yes, but compliment on their communications

38:00 because way back Napoleon's axiom was, "The man who commands the communications will win the war." It's very true. You have to have communications. And we had the benefit of this English radar which gave us an edge on everyone else in the area, and our early warning

38:30 was most helpful for the people to be ready for them when they came in.

With a four inch gun, is it similar to perhaps an artillery gun crew in the army? Do you need to have that sort of friendship and relationship where you know each other really well and know what's going on? Did you have, I guess I'm getting at the sort of understanding of each other's roles. Did you understand how each of the eight men did their job?

Oh yes, you have

39:00 to. The drill, the gun drill is such that each man can do the other man's job if it's necessary.

Was it necessary sometimes?

Yes, it certainly was on the Australia. They finished up with only one four inch gun crew left. They lost a lot of men. As I said, we were so very fortunate

39:30 in not losing any, but it's not luck. It was just good drill, good equipment and the ability to use it.

Okay, thanks for that.

Tape 5

00:31 **The thing is that you have your, it's best to have a look at a film I've got there on 'Dad's Army' [British television series about the Home Guard] when they received a gun to play with. You have your gun screw and a breech worker, a layer and a trainer. Well, with our four inch guns on the Shropshire we didn't really need the layer and trainer because**

01:00 **the Metadyne did it for us. It fired the… What was that noise?**

Oh, it's right.

It followed the director and that took care of the laying of the gun, that's the elevation, and the training, the lateral movement, and the actual fuse setter, he had to poke around in the

01:30 fuse machine. As I've said, that's automatically set and then the breech worker opens the breech and that device has got an interrupted thread, and you just pull the breech working lever back and slide it aside, poke the round in, close it and then fire it.

02:00 That's all there is to it.

What's the firing mechanism? Is it a button or a switch?

A trigger.

Trigger, yep.

Yeah, the layer has the trigger and he's the captain of the gun, and fires. You can fire by remote control, too, with the radar devices that we had.

Now, if the fuse is set and the lay and the train,

02:30 **is there much in the way of timing for when the trigger's hit?**

Is there?

Does it make much difference when he shoots it off, or does he just straight away get it off?

Oh, it's instantaneous, providing there are a few things, safeguards. You've got certain areas where the gun cannot be fired otherwise you'd shoot your mast off or something like that,

03:00 you know. There's those interlocks, but other than that, all things being equal, if she's laid and trained correctly it fires as soon as you press the plonker.

What sort of impact is there to be next to a gun when it goes off?

Well, there's recoil. Your gun screw has to be quite

03:30 well aware of that. Because it would be an irresistible force hitting an immovable object or something. No, your gun screws are well trained and I mentioned you've got to change around, you're numbered from one to eight and you change around. It's drilled into you. It

04:00 becomes second nature, you know precisely what to do, and to pull your head out of the way before she

recoils otherwise you'd get it knocked off.

Do you have shells come out hot, like I'm thinking of an artillery gun I suppose.

Yeah, the cases are smoking hot when they come out and you kick them into the cupboard. You don't handle them

04:30 for a while. We had to count our empties and bring them back, but the Yanks just threw them over the side. The eight inch turret was a most fascinating thing. It's all hydraulic, and to see this heavy machinery going, but it's hydraulic and you have a pump down in the lower part of the

05:00 turret which is essential to be able to do anything, and we had a new subbie [sub-lieutenant]. They changed the officers around too to give them experience, and he was saying, we had an instance of wanting to train the turret. Captain was going to start the pump. He said, "Never mind about the bloody pump, train the turret."

05:30 We had some funny incidents.

So were you involved on deck with shooting the eight inch as well?

On?

Well you said you were in the TS with the eight inch, were you upstairs, sorry, I don't know the terminology, on deck for the eight inch as well? Were you involved in firing those off?

Only when we were bombarding along the New Guinea coast. We weren't

06:00 closed up to action stations then. We were in second degree of readiness some of the time and I was on deck then, but really I spent that early part of the tour in the TS, and rather than, I only went up for the toilet and that sort of thing. I had my own home brew

06:30 laid on. We had coconuts with raisins and coconut juice fermenting in the bilges underneath and it was not a bad drink.

I'd just like to get more of a picture of what it's like to be in a really pitched battle. You mentioned being on a four inch gun and you see a plane coming towards you, do you find

07:00 **people mostly can get their job done under those sort of conditions?**

Yeah, yeah. Yes, they all did their job. None of them nicked off. Like on the Swan that was different. It was pretty shocking in Darwin because of the number of planes that were buzzing around there and all the rest of it. I was fortunate in

07:30 being out of it most of the time at action stations. I was right out of it, but when we were caught on deck, you know, before we went to action stations and that, it was pretty hair raising, scary. Yeah, the main thing was if you had something to do. That was my worst experience

08:00 later when I got onto the four inch and that, and you know, just waiting for something to happen and when it did happen you weren't very pleased about it because you had nothing to throw back at them.

You're bored or terrified if you had nothing to do.

Not bored, but you had nowhere to go and nowhere to hide and

08:30 all in all it was not so good.

Did you think you were going to die?

Only on the one occasion that I mentioned. I couldn't possibly see him stopping. See, he got past the stern, tail-end Charlie, the Beauforts, and he was getting very close and I thought it was curtains

09:00 on that occasion, but he got blown off and he worried somebody else.

Did you later on buy that gun crew a beer, the one that blew him off?

Oh no, we had some fun afterwards, but after the war. We didn't have the opportunity at that stage

09:30 to even have a beer. We didn't get any mail nor beer or anything. It was just work.

I'd just like to ask a more general question. How was the captaincy of the Shropshire?

How?

How would you describe the captain and his captaincy?

Well Nicholls, Godfrey Nicholls was the captain who was

10:00 in charge when we went to the Philippines. He was the best captain that we had, he was a remarkable man. I mentioned when we got the mine caught in our PV, it could've caused a panic if the ship's

company had known, and it was only the few that observed the thing were aware of it. We kept it

10:30 from the other ships that were with us until we solved the problem and that's how it went.

What qualities make a good captain?

Well actually, quiet demeanour, confidence that he instills in his men

11:00 and exemplified by the episode I told you about – the mine. And after he'd had the report from guns, the gunnery officer was on watch when it was reported and he'd taken the steps which were necessary for the safety of the ship, and the captain exhibited perfect confidence in his men going

11:30 back to bed in his pyjamas. I mean that constitutes a good man. Some of our fellows were not so good. I had the captain, John Collins, up for defamation of character in England, successfully. We had the episode where we'd been ashore at Chillingham

12:00 and we, the torpedo party, had a party at a local pub and the others went back to the ship. And Sandy and I had a date with a couple of nurses we'd made friends with on a previous occasion, and we'd arranged to meet them at a certain time

12:30 after the beer-up. And we were just passing the time of night – and you have to wait an awful long time for it to be dark in England too – and we heard this almighty bang and we found that one of our fellows had walked into a minefield and got blown up. And

13:00 Sandy and I waited until the Home Guard turned up and we worked with them to clear up the mess. And when we went back to the ship we were greeted on the gangway by, "Gosh, it's shocking news about Aggie."

13:30 And this Aggie Stanbury, the chappy who got killed. And we said, "Yes, it was nothing could be done." And obviously the ship knew all about it before we got there. Next morning the captain clears lower deck. That means everybody when you clear lower deck. And we were all lined

14:00 up and he upbraids the torpedo party of which I was a member for their callousness in returning to their ship, not reporting the death of their shipmate and turning callously into their hammocks doing nothing about it, and not even reporting to the officer of the watch. Well on that, Sandy and I had him up for defamation of character.

14:30 And we had an experience there of how the officers club together to protect their own, which is natural, and they did everything possible to try and stop us with this thing, and we quoted KR [King's Regulations] and I, that's the King's Regulations, that we were entitled to do this, and they had to give us one of the officers to act as a lawyer,

15:00 you might say, and he did quite a good job. He checked up on the girls. He said, "Do you know the girls' names?" And we said, "We are not in the habit of going out with people we don't know." And yes, we gave them their address and he contacted them and he found that our story was verified and put it through to the captain.

15:30 And the captain said to us, "You shouldn't have fallen in. You shouldn't have been there." We said, "Clear lower deck, Sir? What does that mean?" He said, "Well look, I'm sorry, but you shouldn't have been there." He said, "My remarks are not directed at you." And we said, "Well clear lower deck and give us the apology in front of the ship's company where you defamed us."

16:00 And, "No," he said, "I will not do that. I will put it on the night orders." And I've got the copy of the night orders, there are eight notice papers around the ship of that size and the captain has these typewritten orders pinned on the notice board. So I've got a copy of the night orders that Able

16:30 Seaman Davis and Wireman Campbell were not included in the captain's remarks on the quarterdeck this morning. He said at that time on the quarterdeck that while he was in the ship no torpedo man would make any advancement in the navy. We had classes for leading seaman I was concerned with

17:00 and we were given time off for study from 4.00 till 6.00 in the afternoon. I was not allowed to go, torpedo man, couldn't go. I got the highest marks when we had to go over to Australia in Milne Bay to qualify for leading seaman

17:30 and I fluked the highest marks of the batch that went over. I was rather pleased about that, and I was pleased about getting the rate of leading seaman too because that was another increase in pay.

Did you find the class system pretty prevalent on the ships you were on?

Very much so.

How did that affect morale?

Well, it didn't help really.

18:00 We, that's the experience that I had in England with the way they banded together. And they did

everything possible to stop us getting to the captain and that was, you know, an infringement of human rights I suppose or they'd have some name for it nowadays, but no, it was

18:30 definitely a club system. Either you were in it or you know, just on the lower deck, class distinction. But we had some very good officers. We also had some useless ones and I guess there were a lot of useless sailors too.

What did the rest of the lower deck men think of you taking the captain up on defamation charges?

19:00 They didn't really register very much. They thought, they said, "Good on you," you know, "You stuck to your guns and you got the apology." I said, "Yeah, but he didn't clear lower deck to give it, did he?" to the people I spoke to. And he was a funny sort of a fellow. He was a very cleaver

19:30 gunnery officer and a good seamen. He could handle a 10,000 ton ship like a motor boat, you know. Very good seaman, but he wasn't a man. He had no gumption of human relationships, you know. So he wasn't popular and his popularity went to zero when

20:00 we were in the Philippines and he persisted in flying his blessed great flag that advertised the fact that we had a commodore on board. It was you know, unreal. Now the chappy I'm talking about, Nicholls, he would never do that. He was a human, a jolly good man, couldn't speak more highly of him.

Do you get

20:30 **the sense that there was a difference between Australian naval discipline and the discipline of other navies?**

Well yes, there was. Mind you Godfrey Nicholls was an RN, Englishman, and a very good man. We had Frank Alison, he was a lieutenant commander and he'd been through the Mediterranean on destroyers. He was a destroyer man

21:00 and he was a marvellous fellow. He bought Three Hammock Island after the war and retired there and he came to reunions with us and that sort of thing, but he was a remarkable ship handler. He could do anything with a destroyer and he did a good job in every sphere.

21:30 There was others, they left a lot to be desired, but who are we to judge their capabilities.

Just changing the subject, I wonder what did the men think of Douglas MacArthur's promise to return to the Philippines?

To return to the Philippines?

Yeah. Did that seem reasonable, a good thing?

Oh yes, it seemed a reasonable thing to do. Mind you,

22:00 we gave him full marks for getting away in the first place. And he was a very astute politically minded general. He knew the Philippines. He'd lived there and he knew the temperament of their people. He knew also that the Philippines was the most important stepping

22:30 stone to Tokyo, and he won. Out of the three American admirals who were tossing up which way they'd go, he won the day when they agreed finally to go for the Philippines, and that was the wisest choice and certainly the best choice. And he advanced it six months to

23:00 October when we did so well with the cleaning up the Japanese positions that they'd taken in New Guinea and New Britain. He advanced it to the 20th of October and partly caught the Japs with their pants down because they didn't know for sure until the 15th of October

23:30 where we were heading. They had to divide their forces. They thought that we were going perhaps to Formosa and you know, their communications. It was the 15th of December when they realised that we were heading for Leyte and that's when they marshalled their forces into four main

24:00 fleets and they brought their aircraft from Formosa and from Indochina, pardon me, into the Philippines to defend it and that's why we struck it so hot because they'd reinforced the place. They brought 60,000 Japs in to reinforce the Philippines. Now the reason

24:30 why we went to, after Leyte, why we went to Lingayen Gulf was that Corregidor was guarding Manila Harbour and Manila was too strongly fortified, so MacArthur decided to go up to Lingayen and we'd land there. It was considered not suitable for landing by

25:00 the Japanese because they'd been there for quite a while and they knew the place. But we went there because they had a railway system, you see, running down to Manila. One of our destroyer's captains, oh no, it was Buchanan on the Australia, they reported a train going along

25:30 in Lingayen. He says, "Catch that train!" Of course it was quite inspiring. We were using the eight inch on it and that and seeing the train go up in the air. Quite good, good way to catch a train. But the reason why we went there was to come down through the Plain of Luzon and attack

Manila from the rear, which is the sort of tactic that the Japanese had been using all the time.

Again, I'm just interested in how much you know at the time. A great captain at this point, would he let you in on what the strategy is or what's the objective?

Well we only knew the objective was to get the troops ashore

and let them fight it out down through the plain to get to Manila because that was the objective. And the B29s absolutely flattened Manila. They wrecked the joint properly. We never saw it. We only got to Corregidor, but those who saw Manila,

Manila, there was nothing left. They really demolished it and it was quite a big city and large population.

The reason I asked about MacArthur was now with the knowledge of history as we have, we have a certain opinion about people, but at the time I was wondering what you thought of him and his motives?

Well, all we had to measure him against was Blamey [Australian General Thomas Blamey], and Blamey

was a useless twit in our estimation. He was a blowhard and he didn't have a grain, well he must've been, had some substance but we didn't like Blamey and neither did the troops under him.

We've heard a bit of that opinion.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, so we, it was all secondhand as far as we were

concerned. We didn't have any contact with the man but we weren't keen about him. On the other hand, MacArthur was a doer and he was getting the material into Australia to make some progress. We were sort of stalemated until he came in.

Well you had quite a bit of experience with the Americans all up didn't you, in Brisbane and then later on?

We did?

Yeah.

Oh yeah, well actually they saved our bacon. When I was on the Swan, the Houston saved our bacon. There's no risk about it. We had these blessed air force, 38 of them, at us without any air protection whatsoever, and the Houston took off and led them away from the…

We had four freighters loaded with troops and she led them away, and they expended their bombs on her rather than us. And she, marvellous seamanship to get away with it, but she was using that technique of knowing that they flashed their light and they were sure of bomb sights and all this sort of thing,

and she got away with it and we got away with it too. But when Australia could not supply the air cover that we needed to reach our objective in time, the Houston wisely got our commission to go back to Darwin and that's where

we did what we did.

How much did you have to do with American servicemen themselves as individuals?

We got on extremely well with them. For instance, after Darwin on the night of the 19th when the Houston had to go to head for Java, Batavia, to get the right

ammunition for her guns and the Peary went with her, we gave them a terrific send off, you know, cheering and shouting. We didn't have much personal contact with them at that time, but we previously had contact with the Americans in Brisbane and we got on very well with them.

The Australian Army and the

Yanks, any fighting among the sailors?

Well yes, they didn't show up very well in Milne Bay. The Yanks were at a standstill and they weren't making any progress at all against the Nips until the, I've forgotten which crowd it was, but our

AIF [Australian Imperial Force] that were brought back from Tobruk and what have you, and experienced people, they went into Milne Bay and cleaned it up very quick smart.

How did you and your mates feel about all those Americans in Australia?

How did we feel about it?

Yeah.

We weren't very happy because they were over sexed, over paid and over here, and we believed that, and see they

32:00 could throw their money around and we were poorly paid by comparison anyway. In fact when we were in America it took us 10 days to get across America and we went through quite a number of states and the Australian government made the wonderful gesture of giving us £5 to equalise

32:30 the cost of living or something. God, they had no idea! But fortunately as I told you, we had our own devices and means of making money which we did and we were able to enjoy ourselves.

That was the occasion when you were running, it wasn't a book, it was a?

Crown and anchor.

Were you trained or bused across America?

We trained across America.

33:00 We went from Frisco [San Francisco] to Boston in, I think it was 10 or 11 days. We travelled through 10, wait on, we travelled through 11 states in a Pulman, air-conditioned Pulman. We didn't have much time at stops. We went through places of note like Salt Lake City, Omaha and

33:30 Nebraska, and we got up to through the eastern states and up to Boston. And we were put in American barracks. It was called USS Fargo and it was an 11 or 12 storey building absolutely self-contained. There was no need for you to go down town if you didn't want to

34:00 because they just had everything laid on. I was pressing my uniform and this Yank came in, "Say guy, will you press my silk?" And I said, "Yeah sure, give it here," and I put the iron on it and the silk disappeared. That was my introduction to rayon. We'd never heard of it in Australia. Anyway I had a spare silk which I gave him and I bet he cherished it more than the Yankee

34:30 stuff because it was genuine silk. Yeah, it was quite a shock.

Did you get a chance to go out and about in America?

Oh yeah. Yeah, we had a good time. Actually we went down to, I think it was 10 days we were there in Fargo. We went down to New York twice. We

35:00 saw the old Normandy lying on its side in the harbour. We went to a couple of popular, Jack Dempsey's show in New York. It was quite an interesting experience.

How was America at war different to Australia at war as a nation at home?

Well Americans, they had everything laid

35:30 on. They had incredible resources. That was the American stock in trade and that's why they were even able to beat the Japanese because of their recovery, their industrialisation and their ability to come back. You see, I mentioned that the six battle ships that we had in Leyte were resurrected from Pearl Harbor.

36:00 They rebuilt them and they were serviceable. They didn't have any regard for saving ammunition. They just wasted, they shot it off and we had to, as I said, we had to count our empties and account for everything. It was ridiculous, quite a contrast.

36:30 **What was the attitude of the American home front?**

Well, 'Remember Pearl Harbor', that was their emphasis. Even their butter pats had 'Remember Pearl Harbor' in a box of butter. They were keying their public up all the time for the support of the forces

37:00 and were very anti-Japanese. Their big trouble was that they had so many Japanese in their country and it was rather difficult, the information that was going out was almost as much as, you know, more than they could bear. Tokyo Rose was putting over stuff, the movement of our ships

37:30 and all the rest of it, and it was all coming from spies you might say in America. They were probably naturalised Americans, but they were Japanese.

A lot of those people were interned though, weren't they?

Interned?

Yeah, is that the case in America?

I don't know about that. I really don't know. We had internees in America that had been captured

38:00 in ships and that sort of thing, but I don't know anything about actual saboteurs in America, but they

were there.

Okay. How did the locals treat you as Australian, well Australian navy, Australian service?

What, the Yanks?

Yeah, the Americans.

Oh, we got on very well with them. They were really good. We shared things. We were on

38:30 good terms with the Americans and when I say we, I speak about the ship's company that I was on, you see. In the Swan we had every reason to have a high regard for them. The Houston, as I said, she saved our bacon. She was lost with the Perth on the 28th

39:00 of February just after the Darwin episode. She was really good. She'd had a lot of experience. She had one of her turrets knocked out before we met her. But no, they were good fellows, you know, and they were very generous. We'd get uniforms from them. We

39:30 mainly benefited from American ideas. When we went across through America we had the benefit of cafeteria service for meals, and we managed to get our powers to be to initiate that system on the Shropshire. And we were the first ship in the

40:00 Australian navy to have cafeteria messing, which was a terrific advancement from our point of view, especially from the lower deck. The ward room wasn't too badly off beforehand because they had their cooks, but we had to do our own cooking and catering, you know, on the other ships, but the cafeteria messing, it was fantastic. The American

40:30 system was they had the signs up in their cafeteria, "Take all you want but eat all you take', and you know, that sort of thing. Very good.

I'm just going to stop you there Mel.

Tape 6

00:31 **You're ready?**

Yeah, okay.

I wanted to talk first of all about Ambon.

Yes, the Spice Islands, a very, very pretty place in the Seychelles or something.

Your patrol particularly on the Swan, what were you doing there?

I was quartermaster, bosun's mate and we, let's see,

01:00 Ambon? We were fighting off aircraft mostly and four inch, and we had a bit of a problem. The first time we went up it was plain sailing early in January. Nothing happened, just a peaceful cruise to the Spice Isles and then

01:30 in February around about the 14th of February, I'm talking about '41 I think, we, wait on, it was close on when Singapore fell, 15th of February '42. It must've been early in '42 and we got

02:00 a lot of attention and had to fight our way up and fight our way back.

Well yes, that's why I'm curious I suppose because Pearl Harbor and Malaya have come under attack and still nobody in Australian knows that Japan has some serious intentions for its north, and I'm wondering if that was the first time you'd clapped eyes on a Japanese aircraft?

Yes, that was our first encounter

Can you tell me...

at Ambon. They wanted

02:30 Ambon for the airstrips and what have you, an excellent position for their strips.

You said earlier today things really did change for you when the Japanese got involved.

What?

You said earlier today that things changed for you as a sailor.

Absolutely, changed from sort of peace time forces into

03:00 fair dinkum war.

Was there a point, you mentioned to Ianto [interviewer] that once or twice you were quite concerned for your life.

Yeah.

But when the Japanese came in, did the sight of their aircraft make you wonder whether you would see the days through?

Survive? Well, yes and no. Yes because, well

03:30 we had the experience of striking them at sea and we got to quickly learn their tactics and we felt we could overcome it, so we were not particularly frightened of them. It was just a matter of luck if you could manoeuvre quickly enough to avoid the stuff that they were dropping on you. You see they didn't strafe us at sea, it was mainly eye level bombing and they were operating

04:00 from 20,000 feet which was just above our range. So all we could do was frighten them and keep them off.

The V formation that they flew in,

V, yes, like seagulls going to the tip.

was that adopted by the Allies as well, V formation flying?

Yes, it was. The idea was the chap on the flank could keep an eye on, you know, the others. It's just a strategic position to

04:30 fly in.

And I'm interested in this blue light that came on underneath the fuselage.

Oh yes, that was a blue light. It was quite a bright light on the leading aircraft and he was the only one that had it in each group.

The leader?

Mmm, but sometimes they came over in groups of, there was 28,

05:00 28 or 30 of these V formations.

Was it, was the light attached to...

It was attached to the underside of the aircraft like a beacon which we are familiar with today on our aircraft; the thing was flashing all the time. Similar to that.

And was it a neon blue or a royal blue?

Oh.

05:30 It was a blue that mostly resembles the blue that we currently have on our ambulances.

So the first time that came on you wouldn't have known what that meant.

Well, we could see the bombs coming down.

Right, so you worked it out pretty quickly.

It didn't take us long to work that out.

I'm interested in some of the vernacular that would've been used at that time in such a state of

06:00 **shock amongst the men that you're working so closely together with.**

Yeah.

I don't suppose you can recall the kind of conversations that start erupting amongst you all?

Well some of it's not recordable and we were, I think we were matter of fact about it. "Here come the bastards again," you know, and, "Let's get them, give them what ho." That was the sort of camaraderie.

So it was rallying camaraderie?

Yeah.

And did anyone in those circumstances

06:30 **panic?**

Yes. Two deserted in Darwin.

Okay, all right, well let's talk about Darwin then. So two, in fact there was a serious business

of potential desertion in Darwin when the attacks came?

Oh, it was absolutely disorganised panic. It wasn't organised. The thing was for starters we were trying to keep our calm

07:00 and remembering that I was in the blessed magazine and all I had was the SRE [S Band Ranging Equipment], like the broadcasting business on the ship which was mediocre. But the 'jimmy' or the first lieutenant who was a taxi driver before the war, prior to him being cashiered from the navy for carrying on with a senior officer's wife

07:30 in peace time, he panicked. He said over the SRE for everyone on the ship to hear, "They've got us! They've got us! We're gone!" And that was not very helpful you know, and it took a few minutes for him to recover his cool and come back on the air. He was in

08:00 an invidious position mind you, he was up in the director and these planes were buzzing around him.

That's a terrible thing to do over the airwaves, panic over the, like broadcast his panic.

Well the panic wasn't organised, I tell you. The panic wasn't organised in Darwin to such an extent that they closed down on us, the authorities, on censorship. When we

08:30 went on leave after getting back to Brisbane, we had 14 days leave as I told you, we were counselled that we were not to mention anything other than the 14 people who were killed in the post office in Darwin for example.

Had the information about those 14 already been leaked or broadcast to the press elsewhere in Australia?

We didn't have access to the press so I can't answer that.

I'm just curious, cause if they said you could talk about the 14

09:00 **who died in the post office…**

Because they were civilians. We were not allowed to speak of any service personnel. You see, in the service personnel there were over 180 or so that we knew had gone from the ships that were hit, and the Peary, the USS Peary lost half their ship's company for instance.

09:30 When we were alongside the Neptuna and she blew, there were an awful lot of people on the wharf that were killed. There were a lot of Chinese there loading timber or something or other and they couldn't get off. As a rough estimate there was at least 500 and they'd never know those that were blown into the water. There were crocodiles

10:00 as well as the air raid to compete with. It was really horrendous.

Well over 200 people died in the bombings of Darwin.

Hundreds of people died. The official, in what I've read later in Gill's war time record of the navy, I think he put it down as

10:30 175 or 180, but it was grossly underrated, you know.

So from your perspective, you'd come back form Ambon and you'd seen an attack there and a ship blown and so on, did it occur to you that they might be coming to Australia? Ambon's just a hop, skip and a jump away from Australia.

It didn't occur to us really until we were trying to get the four ships loaded with troops up to, in the Timor [Sea].

11:00 And we knew then that they were coming to Australia, or trying to establish a base here, and they were. That was why the Darwin raid occurred at that time. I think they mentioned this. They missed out on us up near when we turned back,

11:30 and they knew we'd gone into Darwin and they attacked the next day. But the Houston, which was the main thing that they were after, got out the night before.

Was that luck do you think or intelligence?

It was necessity; it was not luck. It was just the fact that we'd used so much ammunition and they badly needed the ammo [ammunition] and they were going to

12:00 Batavia to get some.

Okay. For you personally, did you have any concerns about not being able to contact your parents about what was happening?

Well yes, but there was censorship and we knew that we couldn't. We couldn't tell them; we couldn't tell them in a letter. I had an instance where the war changed my opinions in many things, especially this

Darwin business, but we

had a parson on board. I'm skipping now over to the Shropshire. We had a parson on board, 'Sin Bosun' we called him. His job was to censor our mail and he called me into his cabin one day censoring a letter that I'd written to my wife and mentioned that he was removing part of the letter. I said, "Which part?" He told me. I said, "No, you can't

do that. You are here to censor the letters for any material that could be of use or interest to the enemy, and," I said, "that has got nothing to do with the enemy. They wouldn't know what it was about anyway, and you must let that go or we'll try and do something about you." And he let it through, but it

was some frivolous thing that I'd mentioned, sort of an intimate thing that I mentioned to my wife in my letter and there was no reason for him to stick his nose into it. Anyway I got even with him because I was in charge of the motor boat taking him over the Labuan or something in the show and unfortunately, just as he was stepping into the boat, the boat moved away from the ship and his

case of tricks and biscuits and water fell in the drink.

Dear oh dear.

Most perturbed. I was most apologetic, of course. You had to be tactful as well as being mischievous in the navy.

From a number of the stories that you've told us today I get the feeling that you were no mug even though you didn't have rank to pull.

Who?

You.

I didn't have any rank.

No, but you were no mug anyway. You managed to stand your ground.

Well yeah. Actually it was through the navy that I had the benefit of a better education than most people from the country would have. I told you the headmaster down there gave me special tuition for that examination that I sat for when I was 13 years of age, and that stood me in good stead, and you have to have your wits about you.

I'll get back to your

presence of mind in the face of superior browbeating for want of a better word, but I'd like to know more about this organised panic in Darwin, or the unorganised panic.

Well it was organised because, panic, for example, the bank, everyone fled. They were told by their superiors to disappear into the bush or what have you for one thing. I'm speaking about air force

and army personnel. We had to stick it because we had to stay on our ships, of course.

And what could you see from that point? Could you see into Darwin Harbour and what was happening? Could you see civilians running?

We were in the Darwin Harbour.

Yes, but could you see onto the mainland?

Oh yeah, yeah. You could see the post office, or where it was.

Can you kind of give me, you know, from the beginning of

the air raid kind of a description of what it was that you saw? Whether it was an explosion and a lot of smoke or people screaming?

I've got it in notes there, I could give it to you to read.

You could but the people watching this video ought to figure that out.

Well it was, it kicked off a few minutes to 10.00 in the morning when this aircraft came in from the unexpected quarter of the south.

We didn't expect that. Some of the people mistook them for friendly aircraft. We knew they were not as soon as we recognised their formation with the blue light, and we, our fellow, a chappy jumped over onto the Neptuna, threw the lines off so that we could get away from the Neptuna.

I need to interrupt at that point because I'm interested in that. Your boat's

pretty big.

Hey, we were pretty small by comparison with the Neptuna.

Fair enough, but how fast can a boat pull away under those circumstances?

Very slowly. We had both screws going astern as far as I can remember. You see, this happened before we went to action stations and I was unable to see what was going on then.

17:30 A chap named 'Howie' Wing, he was an able seaman, he hopped over of his own volition onto the ammunition ship which was burning or smoking because she'd been hit with a bomb, and he threw our lines off and that enabled us to move astern and get away. The motor boat disappeared in a cloud of water

18:00 and what have you because a bomb burst quite close to us. And we never saw the motor boat again until late that evening when the tide came in they got back into the harbour proper from the mangroves. Pardon me. The ammunition ship then blew up and

18:30 we were quite close. There's a photograph there taken by Captain Carroll showing the Swan in front of the Neptuna blowing up, which gives you an idea of how close we were. The water was flying around and we were just really lucky there. We couldn't manoeuvre away from it. We just had to get away from the ammunition ship before she blew up.

19:00 **Did you keep a clear head throughout all of that?**

I knew which way I was going. Oh yeah, yeah. We had the advantage of being very young. We were only kids, you know, and had we been older I suppose we might've had more troubles.

Could you, what was the smell at the time with all the oil burning among the sea?

Oh, it was

19:30 pretty horrendous really, the smoke and the soot and rubbish that was around. The oil lighters were burning on the shore. There were some oil tanks went up and there was a combination of flame producing and they made a hole in the ozone layer, I reckon.

20:00 **Are there any wildlife around at that point or have they...**

Wildlife?

Scarpered totally?

The only things we saw alive apart from ourselves were crocodiles.

Where could you see them from? From the Swan?

The crocodiles, from the Swan, yeah, in the harbour. That's why we'd never know how many were killed there, right?

So it was entirely possible that people that were blown off ships were eaten by crocodiles before

20:30 **they died?**

Possible.

They would have to be some of the most unlucky people in the world, wouldn't they?

Two of the fellows were very lucky that deserted the Swan. At the court martial they reckon they were blown over the side, but I never actually saw them, but one of our fellows did see them make a perfect dive off the top of the ship. One of them was our

21:00 main gun layer and I can't remember who the other one was, but the gun layer bloke, his father was a doctor on the Manunda, and he wanted to get home to dada. They went over and swam to the Manunda. Never mind the crocs [crocodiles], never mind the bombs, just get home to Dad. And they got court-martialled and kicked out of the navy.

Did they get to the Manunda?

21:30 Yeah, they got to the Manunda.

That's extraordinary really, isn't it?

Yeah, yeah. They were good swimmers.

So I'm suddenly seeing, you know, hungry crocs.

I don't know whether that's a good thing to publish. It doesn't show very good for the navy, does it, but these two fellows, well I wouldn't say they panicked. They knew what they were doing. They were intent on getting off the ship because we didn't think we had a hope.

22:00 When we went to action stations we thought, "Oh God, you know, this is probably goodnight nurse."

When you are going through your training is there at any stage rules and regulations set

down in the event of an air raid like that, of an air attack?

Not to my knowledge.

So just from a hypothetical point of view, if those fellows had dived off, swum to the Manunda, the Swan had been sunk with no survivors, would

22:30 **they still have been court-martialled do you think?**

If they had?

If they had survived and the Swan had been sunk, would they be court-martialled?

Yes. Yeah, they'd be court-martialled for deserting the ship.

At what point does saving one's life constitute not deserting a ship?

Well that's a very small point but it's a fine point I should say. But one chap was leaning over the

23:00 guard rail and he fell overboard and it took, he was about three miles away before our boat picked him up, and he just actually fell overboard accidentally, quite accidentally. He got run in for leaving the ship without permission and got a certain number of days' punishment.

And discharged?

Oh no, no, he wasn't discharged because it was an involuntary

23:30 thing. He just did something that he should not have done, and that was lean on a guard rail.

So that was his crime, not falling in the water, it was leaning on the guard rail?

'Leaving the ship without permission' was his charge.

There's a lot of semantics in the navy or in any of the services, it seems?

Yeah. It was quite humorous really. This was in Milne Bay when he fell overboard, yeah, and it was mentioned, "No other rating will fall

24:00 overboard." That was a command. They thought he must've wanted a swim because it was very hot.

On that note, I've heard of other similar curious semantics. For example if you wanted to grow a beard you'd get permission to stop shaving.

That's right.

You wouldn't get permission to grow a beard though. You'd just have permission to stop shaving.

That was right, and then

24:30 you had to have a voluntary inspection in five days or seven days to see if it was productive and if it wasn't you were told to shave off.

Can you give me any more examples of that sort of behaviour that would happen on a ship in the navy?

Well I can't imagine any civilian person really appreciating the life on a ship. I really can't. It was quite strange.

25:00 **Well it's very much tiny cogs in a big wheel, isn't it?**

Oh yeah, yes, you were a very small cog and it's a big wheel.

Well did you tell me or did I read that one of the fellows on board the Swan during the raid on Darwin was also on a ship that was sunk, was on the Waterhen?

Yes, it was Buggy Williams. He was on the Waterhen and as a survivor of the Waterhen –

25:30 it was on the Tobruk ferry and Malta raids and all that sort of thing in the Mediterranean which was pretty bad, but although the survivors and chappies we had who had been through all that reckoned Lingayen Gulf was twice as bad, if that's possible. But Buggy Williams, yes, he deserted his post but I didn't report him. I didn't have to.

26:00 He had to pass the jonty to get up onto the upper deck and it was one of those things when he was not punished. He was sent to the Manunda hospital ship with the others who had been wounded.

So after you survived something like that, what sort of a debrief does

26:30 **the captain arrange?**

Well it would depend on the circumstances. In this case he didn't have to arrange anything because we

didn't report it. Although he must've known because I had to get a replacement, but I can't answer that.

Wouldn't there have been some group order or group discussion? I'm sure you didn't sit around holding hands, but

27:00 **you've lost three men, you've been hit badly, the ship needs serious repair and you're only doing four knots.**

Yeah.

Is there not some order sent down throughout all the men in terms of regrouping?

Regrouping? In what sense do you mean? We lose people and they have to be replaced from somebody else who has some sort of training,

27:30 and for instance our fatal loss was the three chappies who were killed and one was a signalman. Well we have half a dozen signalmen on board. One was a carpenter, and we had quite a few good 'butchers' [wood butchers – carpenters] as we called them, so there was no problem there.

28:00 Johnny Salk was just another mat layer as we call them.

Okay. I'm probably fishing in the wrong area. I just imagined that after surviving a serious attack like that and on home turf, that the captain wouldn't have sent around some message to see how everybody was travelling?

How everybody?

I'm using a euphemism. How everybody was, how they were coping after the attack?

I guess

28:30 he was a bit concerned himself. Well his eyes were certainly sticking out. As I told you I've got a photo there of the fish that reminded me of Travis.

But would anybody be reprimanded afterwards, like the fellow on the…

Oh no, no, not that I heard. No, there was no reprisals or anything like that. Everybody did, I think, did a good job. We

29:00 had two discontented people on board and I never got to the bottom of why, but they were against the captain and they wrote some unkind things about him post-war which were to my knowledge quite incorrect. I had the opportunity to observe him under several conditions, as being bosun's mate on the wheel on the

29:30 same area as he was and alongside him, and I'm quite confident that the person who put this stuff out, I know his name of course, but he had an axe to grind as we say and he handled the truth carelessly.

All right, what about on a less formal level, can you recall the

30:00 **conversation that you and your friends on board had when all was safe again and you were travelling back to Brisbane?**

You beaut. We were very apprehensive because we didn't know the extent of the damage to the ship's bottom. We knew that we couldn't walk on the quarter deck because it was flopping up and down like a waddling duck sort of thing, and we were apprehensive

30:30 about that as to whether we were going to make it or not. The Warramunga stayed with us for a day, I think it was, to make sure we were seaworthy and then she went back to Darwin, and we just paddled by. And we could only make four knots on one screw and we were just hoping that we didn't have an attack, and we were

31:00 lucky there.

When the Warramunga was travelling with you, are there regular signals

The Warrego.

The Warrego, sorry, are there signals between the two ships?

Oh yeah.

Is that a constant thing?

Not constantly, no. We didn't use the SBS [Ship's Broadcasting System] all that often but we, if you had a signal you just made it either by

31:30 lamp or by flags. We were not very sophisticated in those days.

No, I understand you didn't have radio contact between the two but there would be, yeah, semaphore and would there be morse as well?

No, we didn't use that very much.

OK, I want to back track a little bit if that would be all right. You mentioned something earlier about when you

32:00 **sunk that Jap sub off Melville Island.**

Yes, we sat on it overnight.

Yes, and you said you pinged it.

I pinged it, yeah, well ping is the common name for the sonar because it makes a pinging sound, ping pong, ping pong, you know, as it bounces back.

Can you give me sort of more of a description of how you managed to ping the whole

32:30 **sub and how you knew it's size, weight, tonnage, etc?**

Yeah. Well we found out how it was lying by the echo sounder and we manoeuvred the ship to just go over it along it's alignment from stern to bow, or bow to stern, we didn't know which was which. And then we would go across and check

33:00 on its height and size of its conning tower and all that sort of thing. We formed, over the four hours that I was on the wheel on the thing, we formed a pretty accurate picture of that sub laying on the bottom and we knew that there was no survivors because of the length of time from the attack, which was in daylight, and I'm speaking of the middle watch from 12.00

33:30 to 4.00 in the morning, the next morning.

So when you get the information off the sonar how do you chart it for yourself? Do you make notes or do you draw diagrams?

What's that? When you get the sonar?

Well you're getting the pings.

The pings? You plot, you plot the direction, source and that sort of thing and you form a picture.

Do you put it on a little graph and make a report to the captain?

34:00 Yeah, well he gets the same report that we get on the ping set, yes.

I was just wondering whether they was a way of reading it, a language to the reading of sonar that people might not be familiar with.

Well, it worked on a sort of a graphic display and you would see the iridescent screen light up where you

34:30 were getting the echo from and that represented the area of search or what you were doing.

Sure. It seems very simple to you I'm sure because you did so much of it, but to somebody who's never seen or heard of it before.

It's a trace which draws a circular pattern around on the screen. Imagine a flat screen and a beam of light

35:00 emanating from the centre of the screen to the outside. Now if you get an echo it shows up as a bright green, in our case it was green, a green spot and as it rotates it repeats you see, and if it moves it comes up in a slightly different position radially.

Fantastic.

It's as simple as that.

Comparing that to radar which the navy

35:30 **had much to do with the advance of technology in the Second World War.**

Yeah. We didn't have it of course on the Swan.

You did on the Shropshire though.

Oh yes, we had the best in the Pacific.

Can you give me a similar description of what, I know you didn't work in radar per se,

Reading the radar screen, of course we had several sets for different purposes but the main search radio, this one basic

36:00 form for navigation, that was the PPI, Plan Position Indicator, and that drew a map of the surroundings

and you see it today on aircraft. They have that draw a map for you. The main screen on the ranging set

36:30 was simply a screen which had the same idea of a rotating beam and it would show the echoes from the feedback and if they varied by the size of them, what have you, a skilled operator could estimate the number of aircraft were involved. Our chappy was particularly skilled, a chap named

37:00 Barrington, and he got commendations from all over for his skill in interpreting the radar response. The Americans were dumbclucks, you know. They sacrificed range for the spectacular. Their sets painted a silhouette of the target or the

37:30 ship which you could see if you sent someone up to the crow's nest with binoculars and it wasn't worth a crumpet, but ours was just no spectacular thing. It was just a spot on the screen which was the echo off a flying object and depending on the number of flying objects or so you got an indication on your screen as to how many aircraft

38:00 were there, and what was more important, the range, and our range was up to 90 miles.

And you said this fellow could read around...

He could read around to 130 miles around the side of the screen. He practised that when we were in Scapa [Flow] working up.

Very interesting, and was the radar capable of indicating friend or foe?

Not the radar. We had a different device

38:30 for that, IFF [Identify Friend or Foe].

Yes.

Yeah, you could determine whether they were friendly or not, and in our case they were all non-friendly. When I was on the Swan we didn't need radar, we knew they were unfriendly cause we didn't have any of ours.

Would the navy read the IFF signals the same as the air force would, in that, would a plane use the same information regardless of whether it was dealing with the navy

39:00 **or other members of the air force?**

You could determine whether it was friendly aircraft from the IFF. As far as I know the Japanese, and neither did the Germans, or the Germans went pretty close to upsetting it, but I don't think the Japs did. They couldn't

39:30 simulate our IFF. It was pretty positive.

Right.

You could definitely tell whether it was friend or foe.

We're going to swap over tapes.

Tape 7

00:41 **I wanted to ask about some of the more light-hearted aspects of your service and what you felt you had as an individual that made you a good sailor?**

As a?

What made you a good sailor?

Well, learning

01:00 my work, trying to be proficient at what I was supposed to do and generally behave myself.

What about some really basic things, like being thin for example?

Thin? Well I was born thin.

Not just you, but other sailors as well. Could you cope if there were tubby navy men in those tight little corridors?

Oh yes.

01:30 We were not that tight. We weren't like the midget submarines that the Japanese used. No, we didn't have any great problems. The biggest problem from a sailor's point of view was 1, our ships were not built for the tropics. 2, They were like a hotbox, there was no air-conditioning. 3, You had to keep all the

scuttles closed because at night-time of course you couldn't show lights, and at daytime, well you

02:00 had to keep them closed anyway. And it was not very good living conditions. We didn't have ice creams like the Yanks had, and we had our problems. The best feature that we had in the navy was the introduction of the cafeteria system which we enjoyed on the Shropshire and

02:30 it was copied from the American style you see and it worked marvellously until one chappy left one of the scuttles open, the porthole cover, you know, to get a bit of air and we copped a heavy sea and flooded that section of the cafeteria. And Otto Smith, the chappy who was in charge of the cafeteria,

03:00 was a fellow who was more or less illiterate. He talked about a 'revenue' of trees and this sort of thing, Otto, and he was very perturbed about the mess that was made of his cafeteria (UNCLEAR) on that occasion. He never found out who opened the scuttle. We

03:30 had difficulties though in living in the conditions that we had to live under without any air-conditioning.

What about personality traits among others that became difficult to live with?

Hmm?

What about…

Incompatibility between people? No, that didn't worry us at all really. I don't know of any

04:00 instances of any real disharmony amongst the crew. Of course, naturally you don't know everyone when you're talking about over 1,000 men.

Sure. What about after you experienced the several attacks that you went through, did you notice, say, a shift in the level or morale or the level of energy or the attitude among the other men?

Our morale was

04:30 very high because we had a good organisation in that way. I may have told you that I ran the movies on board.

Yes.

And that was, when you could run them, that was a big morale booster. It was a pain in the posterior though when the film broke or something like that. They'd scream at you and all the rest of it, but you became

05:00 proficient at getting over those little problems too.

What movies were you able to show?

Most of the latest movies, 'The Road to Rio' and gosh, I can't recall the names of them now. Rita Hayworth was very popular in any movie that she was in. We got the

05:30 latest movies from the Yanks on an exchange basis and that was really good.

So when you went ashore and had some leave, was it easy enough to separate yourself from the tiny world that you lived inside the navy to having to be a civilian briefly again?

There was no embarrassment or trouble there.

I don't suggest embarrassment. I mean going from having to live a

06:00 **coordinated lifestyle with everybody to a life without too many boundaries.**

We'll, not too bad. I can only speak of my immediate circle there. We formed groups of friends and we'd go ashore together. Those of us who had a money source used to stay at the best hotels and live it up,

06:30 because tomorrow you may not be able to. That's what we did.

What did you do on leave?

We went to shows, we went to the best pubs as I said, and we had a few drinks together. We had a funny experience in, where was it?

07:00 Brisbane. We were invited up to the sergeants' mess in Brisbane and one of our signalmen decided to have a rest in the telephone cabinet. And I may have mentioned this before, anyway he said, "Look, I'll catch you up. I know the way well." And, "We'll see you in the

07:30 sergeants' mess, Tom." "Yeah, righto." When he turned up he was objectionable because his odour, he wasn't smelling very good. His white uniform looked absolutely shocking and his story was that he'd gone to sleep in this telephone box and when he woke up it was raining and when he looked up it was a big buck black nigger, thought it was a toilet

08:00 and he…

In the first instance, going to sleep in a telephone box would suggest that the fellow was already a few sheets to the wind [drunk], wasn't he?

Oh yes, he'd had a few. We'd all had a few, but he just didn't, he wanted a rest before he

08:30 kept going, you see.

Did you believe him that this African American soldier just decided to open the door of the telephone box and relieve himself like that?

Well yes. Some of those ignorant negroes, they wouldn't know the difference between a telephone box in a strange country. They may think it was a urinal.

Do you really believe that?

09:00 No, but

What do you think the real story was?

Hmm?

What do you think the real story was?

Oh, I don't know. Perhaps the negro had had too much to drink and didn't know what he was doing.

That sounds more like it.

I don't think it was deliberate, but Tom thought it was. But he was the best of friends after. He got in there and the chappy

09:30 we were drinking with happened to be a negro and passed him a burgundy or whisky, and Tommy took it and they were the best of friends after that.

It's a good story.

It's true.

What did you make of the black Americans serving in Australia?

10:00 Well actually we couldn't have done without them. You have to be honest, we didn't have a jolly thing and Darwin, to get back to Darwin, when we left there we thought, "The first thing that will be done after this war will be to complete the railway between Darwin and Adelaide," and

10:30 they're just getting around to doing it now. It was a matter of logistics. How could you get army and move people up there in a hurry, in an emergency? You couldn't do it.

No, pardon me. What did you make of segregation during the services in the war?

Segregation in what way? What

The black Americans were not allowed certain privileges that the white Americans were.

11:00 Not in Australia. In America that was rather shocking. No, I'm wrong. It was in Africa. It was really shocking. They had to walk on the other side of the street and all that sort of thing.

I think there was a fair amount of segregation in Australia with regards to the black Americans as well, amongst their own?

Maybe. I haven't struck it.

Okay.

11:30 **We were talking about what else you did on leave?**

Where we?

What else you did during your leave. You went out, you went to…

When I could get home, naturally I went home. But we didn't often get leave for a sufficient period to be able to do that.

No, and I couldn't help thinking how much more penalised you were the further south you lived with those conditions.

Hmm?

12:00 **Well if you were a Brisbane boy and you got leave, chances are you could go home for a good period of time, but you're from as far south**

Woop Woop [out in the bush].

as it goes.

Well, this is right. The people who had to travel the furthest usually got preference for first leave and you needed it, because when we got leave from Brisbane when the ship was in dock

12:30 we got 10 days' leave, but most of that was spent in travelling to and from. I think we got two days at home.

Now I'd like to ask, what that was like then trying to maintain a relationship with your girlfriend or your fiancée?

It was extremely difficult.

When you saw each other did you have not enough, did you just want to talk all the time, you know, apart from the other things that you might have

13:00 **liked to have done? Did you try and do everything in two or three days or did you do nothing because you didn't know what to do? I'm curious as to how you managed yourself.**

Actually we made the most of each other's company. We'd go for walks and that sort of thing.

It must've made everything very intense between the two of you, though?

Oh yes, it did. If you were glancing through that album you may have noticed one of a party. That was our engagement

13:30 party with my father and mother.

The bespectacled couple?

Hmm?

There was a couple with spectacles on and yourself?

Yes, there was my father at the end of the table and my mother also wore glasses. They were on the front on the left-hand side in that photograph and my fiancée was sort of half hidden by the floral decorations or something. And there was a cake in the middle of the thing as far as I remember. I've only seen it once

14:00 recently when I was looking through the album.

So when you ask a woman to marry you and there was a war going on, how does that work?

Well it works in a strange way. We agreed with our parents at the time that we'd wait until after the war, but in the meantime Darwin came up and

14:30 the next time occasions changed, opportunities presented itself with me being able to say, "Well, for the next couple of months or few months I'll be here." And that was why we decided to marry because we couldn't get along any other way really, and that's

15:00 what happened. My parents didn't kick up a fuss or anything like that. They realised it was our decision and no one else's. My wife and I realised life could be so short and we decided to live it while we could.

When you went back into the service after you got married then, did it make,

15:30 **did it give you a greater sense of security or did it make you worry even more?**

It made me, it gave me a greater sense of need to do what we were trying to do, and that was win the war.

And did it change how you felt when you had leave in the future when you were away from home?

It hurt, it was difficult, especially when we were in Japan.

16:00 **Why there especially?**

Well things were so different there. We'd had such a trauma getting there and it was a place of milk and honey you might say in the human sense. If you can understand

16:30 that. We had to unwind, we had to let go and I think that was our general feeling. In the occupation it was such a strange thing to see how the Japanese were coping. They were coping extremely well. They were rebuilding before the dust

17:00 settled, you know. They were eager beavers. I was an eager beaver too. There was one little funny thing that happened in Tokyo. See, we were at Yokohama and quite close to Tokyo. We'd hop on the tram, they got the trams going very well very early, but I had a motorbike at home and I needed a headlamp for it

and I

17:30 saw this blessed vehicle stopped in one of the streets in Tokyo and I thought it was a Jap vehicle, but it had a Ford headlamp on it, which was just the thing I wanted. So I went back to the ship and got the tools and went back and got the headlamp and put it on

18:00 board. Then we went somewhere else, I've forgotten where were going, you know, just sightseeing and there was a bus of Yanks standing around this car, you know. It was quite obvious that it was an American vehicle that I'd knocked off.

Oops.

I didn't go and volunteer the information that I knew where it was.

You. I'm sure that was very wise. I like your tales of

18:30 **scrounging. They sound...**

Oh, we had some fun.

Lots of improvisation. But I didn't understand before what you meant about Tokyo being a bit of a land of milk and honey after the capitulation. I'm quite serious, I don't really know what you meant by that.

Well neither do I really, but it was such a contrast to what we'd been living in the last few weeks prior to that. We were

19:00 getting, you know, getting very highly strung I suppose. We were having air raids every day and it was a time of relaxation and we got leave and we stayed at a Japanese hotel and it was just a classical paper

19:30 dividing walls and this sort of thing. The mattresses were filled with rice on the floor. It was a complete change to what we'd been used to and I guess that, when we went back there in 1974 I took my wife to find this Kineshi Inn. I could remember the name quite well and I remembered

20:00 where it was on the hill overlooking the Sacred Bridge, but it was there no longer and I had some photos that I'd taken at the time with me in '74 and I showed it to the person behind the reception desk in this new posh hotel and I said I was looking for the Kineshi Inn and I thought this was where it was,

20:30 and she said, "Yes, you're right, this is where it was. It was burned down and this is the replacement." And I showed her the photo and she got quite excited and called an old fellow with a beard down to his knees from the corner of the room, and he padded over. He was one of the staff of the hotel when we were there.

When you were there originally?

She recognised his

21:00 **So it must've been unusual being in Tokyo in that time, and did you mean that it was harder missing your wife then because it was over and you should be able to go home?**

It was, yeah.

Sorry, is that what you meant before when I asked about was life more difficult in the service after you married?

Yes, it was a very difficult there, yeah. The thing was we were rather anxious to get home

21:30 and we had to put in the time there, and the most fortunate part about it, I didn't know it at the time, was that on the Bataan, I came down to Hobart and pulled up alongside the pier as I may have mentioned. The remarkable thing about the Japanese though was their powers of recovery.

22:00 One week we were trying to kill each other and the next week they were trying to please us to do everything they could to, you know, make us happy. And the Ginza, the main street in Tokyo, was flattened. There was very little left in it. The only buildings of note that were not damaged were Diet,

22:30 the houses of parliament, the Imperial Palace and the bank. The precision bombing that the Yanks did was rather good. They picked everything, or they avoided hitting those couple of things that they were told not to hit.

How did you sort out for yourself that sensation of

23:00 **being enemies one day and then no more enemies, being occupiers?**

Well it was a strange transition. We didn't go ashore. We didn't hate the Japanese as individuals. We only hated these fellows that wanted to use us for their funeral pyre and we took a dim view of that, and we'd do everything that we could to knock them down. But no, we sort

23:30 of found that the Japanese were very friendly people. They were doing everything that they could to help us, kowtow. Funny, can't understand their mentality. They have a beautiful country and strange beliefs and I'll tell you quite frankly, the war put me against religion because I felt

24:00 that the branches of religion are the main cause of discontent in the world.

It seems to be the case all over. Were you witness to any of the signing of the surrender?

Yeah, the main one in Tokyo on the Missouri. I wasn't on the Missouri but we were there.

So you weren't on the ship to see the signing?

I wasn't on the ship to see the signing of it. I've got the photos there of it.

24:30 **I did see the photos and I was curious to know if you took those?**

No, I didn't take those. I got them from the press.

Okay, can you tell me a little bit about what that day was like then because everybody must've known that that was going to happen that day?

Oh gosh, yes indeed they did. The sky was just black with American planes, a contrast to what we had been accustomed to.

Flying around in victory circles or keeping…

No, they flew over. I can't recall whether they flew

25:00 in circles or not. There were so many of them it would be a big circle. They, it was like the sort of thing we do here if you have a regatta, you know, you have a fly past and that sort of thing. Well this was just a fly past on a massive scale to show their power because the Nips didn't have any planes left and the

25:30 Americans, they really had a lot.

They did, and were there, as well as planes were there any other shows of victory like, about to say something really stupid then like fireworks, but you know what I mean?

No, we didn't want to see fireworks.

I'm sure you didn't.

No, no. The ships were just stationery in the harbour. There was,

26:00 I don't recall any celebration of that form.

Water cannons? Listen, do you need a break?

I've got the cramp in this leg.

We'll just stop for a second.

I think the main thing I was keen about was to get back to Yokohama where we had the picture show to run and…

And scrounging.

Hey?

And good scrounging.

And the scrounging.

26:30 Did I tell you about the scrounging when I took my boss over?

You said his eyes bulged.

Hey?

You said he was shocked.

He was shocked?

At the extent of which your scavenging had produced.

Oh yes. He wanted to know where it was all coming from. I said, "The aircraft factory." He said, "Where's that?" I said, "Just over the road." He said, "Take me to it." And I did and he wore his cap and when the

27:00 fellows sighted the cap they shot through like a Bondi [tram], see.

What were the rules or the lack of rules as to what you could take in the spoils of war?

Oh they were very strict. You couldn't do it. If you got caught you'd be in trouble.

But you even told an officer what you were doing and you didn't get caught.

It wasn't our officers. It was the US [United States]. They were,

27:30 they'd search our bags when we'd go ashore for contraband and stuff that we used to take, cigarettes and chocolates for the locals and barter. You're not allowed to do that.

So was there a big difference for you in regard to the women and the children and the men in Japan?

The women and children?

Well I can imagine making the difference between the women and children of Japan, but I imagine

28:00 **it must've been hard to look at the men of Japan and think, come on, these are people that were just trying to kill you.**

No, actually they didn't of course. Those that we met, I met a chappy who'd been a school teacher and he was a meter manufacturer. He had the

28:30 camera, the factory in his home around the, what's it called? The dining table I suppose. And members of his family along each side of it. Each of them had a basket of parts which they assembled and it finished up Multi Meter, not in the modern Bakelite cases, but in a wooden case. I brought a couple home as

29:00 samples, and in this case I paid the joker for them or offered to. He may not have accepted, I can't remember, but they were very mediocre meters, the only good thing about them was the actual instrument itself with the moving coil. The switches and that were pretty (UNCLEAR) and wouldn't last long.

29:30 **What else...**

He was all right, he gave me a doll for my daughter and you know, that sort of thing. We had quite a good liaison.

A daughter, you didn't have a daughter at that stage did you, or this afterwards?

Yes, I had a daughter.

Oh, something we were unaware of, you had a daughter while you were still serving in BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force]. Not BCOF, in Tokyo after

Jennifer was born

30:00 in 1943 I think. Yes, she was, I had two children born during the war.

Did your wife send you photographs of them?

Oh, we've got photographs of them, oh yes.

Were you close by when they were born?

30:30 Hmm?

Were you nearby when they were born?

No, no.

What was that like receiving photographs of your children then without seeing them?

Quite dramatic. It made you more anxious to get home than ever. Yes, my daughter was,

31:00 I can't recall, she was still being nursed in arms when I saw her first.

During leave?

Hey?

Was it during leave?

When I was on leave, yeah.

Gosh, I can't imagine that must've been like to come home and see your little baby for the first time.

It was quite a sense of enjoyment.

How did you manage your marriage in that sense then with

31:30 **the incredibly glamorous pay packet that the navy was offering you and the shortage of housing and so on. Was that a difficult issue?**

Well, the most difficult choice I had to make was after the war when they offered a victory cruise to go back to London in 1946 or ’47 and I said, “Well I spent the best years of my life in the navy. I can’t do this.”

32:00 I wanted to get home with her.

Did you have difficulty with the points system when it was all finished?

Yes, extreme difficulty. We bought a block of land out at Lenah Valley and a friend of mine drew up the plans and we had the foundations in and I got to the stage of chasing the materials. We didn’t get an agent to do it, you know. You do things

32:30 the most economic way you can. And this blighter in the shop wanted a bribe to give me the extra sheets of iron that I required for the roof because my house was more than 10 squares, I think it was, and I said, “I thought we’d left our enemies in Japan.” And I decided to, or we decided to, sell

33:00 and buy an established house which was this one, and I got a good price for the land and the plans, you know, the house. It was quite a decent house. I’ve had a look at it occasionally at Lenah Valley, but I never regretted what we did. We didn’t have the house exactly as we wanted it but we were very happy and comfortable here.

33:30 **Sorry was that after the war when you had difficulty getting…**

Oh yes.

Okay.

Yes, I didn’t start to build until after the war.

When the war finished and they were offering married men early discharge

Yeah, that’s right. That’s how I got it.

So was that considered an early discharge, late April, late ’46?

March.

March, April, sorry.

I think it was March, yeah. I was on the Bataan

34:00 and we were in Hobart, and Bob’s your aunty. I got my demob [demobilisation] business from there.

Sure.

Well, I had to go over to the depot first, but it was, you know, in that time.

Can we talk just a little more about Tokyo after capitulation? You were at such, the pointy end of things in the fight in Leyte Gulf and the Philippines area, when you came into Tokyo

34:30 **after that, how much evidence of destruction could you see, including…**

21 miles of it. From where we went, we landed in Yokohama which is not far distant from Tokyo, and there was devastation for 21 and a half miles from Yokohama to Tokyo. The place was absolutely ruined, flattened. People were,

35:00 the Japs were living in such circumstances like a 44 gallon drum beaten out and that formed their shelter. They were shocking conditions and position really. We felt sorry for them. Tokyo itself

35:30 was so knocked about and damaged. It was remarkable that they recovered as quickly as they did, but they were industrious people. I can’t imagine, although I hate to say it, I can’t imagine Australia recovering from such an ordeal with the way, the apathy of our people. I shouldn’t be able to say that but that was my feeling.

36:00 **Did you feel like a victor?**

Feel like a victor? No, not really. We felt, no, we didn’t, I personally didn’t feel that way. We were glad that we came out on top, for sure, but we didn’t feel like beating them down or anything like that. It was one of those things that it was a war that had to be

36:30 fought because they started it, as far as we were concerned anyway, and we finished it in no uncertain manner.

Did you see any evidence of animosity from the allies towards the Japanese in Tokyo?

Well no, I didn’t and I never cease to be amazed at how the emperor was able to control the mob,

37:00 and when I say a mob, in Tokyo the moving population was 8 million coming in in the morning, looking for some scrounging and going out at night. The multitude of people that they had to feed was fantastic.

Did many people in Tokyo ask you for food?

Hmm?

Did many of the locals accost you and want food from you?

No.

37:30 No, they, they were very subservient. We offered them food, we offered them chocolates and cigarettes and stuff for things that they had like trinkets and that, bartering. We had our watches cleaned and oiled on the spot while they were sitting on the footpath in Tokyo and we'd pay

38:00 them for it. No, we got on quite well really.

And did your CO [Commanding Officer] issue out daily orders as to updates on the Japanese situation and what you couldn't say or do in their company?

No. There was no governing our speech. We were not permitted to fraternise, that was made clear. If we

38:30 got caught giving them cigarettes and that sort of stuff we'd be in trouble. If we had been caught it would've been by the American patrols. They were dishonest anyway, because they'd pounce on our blokes and search their bags, which they were permitted to do, and if they had

39:00 an excess number of cigarettes, cartons like and that sort of thing, they'd confiscate them and use them themselves and probably flog them to the Japanese as soon as they got rid of us.

And just quickly, what were your duties then now that the war was over and you were still a naval officer, a naval seaman, what…

Our excuse for staying in Yokohama on the Bataan

39:30 was to charge the Embassy's batteries. I never got down to the real reason. I don't think I saw many batteries charged. We just recharged our own battery. We had the fantastic experience of going across on the Bataan alongside this third monster battleship which was the third.

40:00 I mentioned the two, the Yamato and the Misashi and they were 90,000 or 70,000 tons. This one was being converted to an aircraft carrier and we went alongside it in Yokohama, was on the other side of the harbour to where we were anchored, and it was just an immense thing. It was some 30 or 40 storeys high.

40:30 It seemed absolutely immense when you got alongside it and we were damn pleased that we never met it, you know, with its armament of 18 inch guns.

I bet. We're out of tape again.

Tape 8

00:32 **What attracted you to the navy in the first place? What attracted you to the navy, what led you to the navy in the first place?**

I think a desire for travel mainly. As I said, I tried to get into the college when it was offering but that may have been partly to escape the tedium of life here.

01:00 I had some sort of desire latent to get in the navy and I missed out on the officer's deal and I'm rather pleased that I did. And it helped me with my post-war vocation as well as during the war, with the extra education that I had to cram in in

01:30 about eight months of intensive study. And I still wanted to get in the navy and I joined the reserve, or the cadets first of all, and then when I became of age I transferred to the adult force which was the Naval Reserve, and I was called

02:00 up as a member of the Naval Reserve and we became RAN as far as the pay was concerned, but we were still classed as RANR [Royal Australian Naval Reserve] and we used to be quite happy about that. We'd 'shyack' the permanent service fellows. We joined when we were needed, not when we were feeded.

02:30 **How did that experience as a navy reservist compare with your experience in actual navy, was there much difference?**

Oh gosh, yes, there was a great deal of difference. We learned the rudiments of the service, the system of watch keeping and the system of marching in step with a rifle and not falling over your feet, that sort

of thing. It was of some benefit.

03:00 I'd recommend it to anyone rather than foot slogging. We did our share of that, route marches and that sort of thing, but by and large I felt the navy was well named the senior service in every way.

It has its own specific culture, doesn't it?

Oh yes. Well, you had your, it taught you so many things.

03:30 It taught you to be self sufficient, to be able to bend your hand to almost anything, and it encouraged that and I found it was quite good. I wasn't disappointed.

Did you find especially after the war or on leave you were able to relate more easily to other navy men?

Over?

Well compared to civilians especially, or maybe even other

04:00 **servicemen, do you find you relate to other navy people better?**

Oh yes. It was rather difficult to converse with what we call a civilian. They just didn't, we couldn't, we didn't have anything in common. We didn't want to talk about the war. None of us liked the war actually. It was only a necessity that was forced on us I think. We

04:30 just got on quite well with our ex-naval personnel. Of course you can't live together on a ship for months on end without, you know, being friendly and getting on with people, and I think that's the main advantage of being a member of the forces whether it be army, navy or airforce. It has the same effect

05:00 of men living together, getting to understand each other and generally shapes your mind to cooperation with people.

Did it take you long to get used to a society without women?

A what?

A community or a group of people totally men for so long. Did that take some getting used to?

Oh yes, it does. Actually,

05:30 I got caught on the Shropshire actually without my earmuffs. My job at the time was on the four inch gun deck and I was looking after communications, and one of the Beauforts crew lost his communication and I had to go up on top of the turret and fix his head set, and whilst I did the four inch opened up and I lost my hearing for several days. The navy lost all record of that.

06:00 I went to the first aid and both ears were bleeding and I told them what had happened and they said, "You'll get a hurt certificate for that." But I never did and it was not even mentioned on my service certificate. But it was one of those things that happens, and it affected my hearing quite drastically. After the war,

06:30 it was around about 1950, I decided to apply for a hearing aid, a hearing test and the doctor examining me said, "Why didn't you report this when you were paid off?" I said, well I answered the doctor's questions truthfully see. And he said, "Who tested you?" I said, "You did, Sir," which floored him. He

07:00 held up a blessed pocket watch up here and had to cover the ear, cover one ear you see and this sort of thing. They must've gone out with the ark that sort of thinking, and I found out afterwards that holding the watch there I could hear from the other ear, you see. Not this one. That floored

07:30 him anyway. I didn't have any trouble with him after that. I got the hearing aids.

In the services it's an all male society, just men, and especially at sea, you don't go home for weekends, you don't go into towns.

No, that's right.

How was that, being away from women for so long?

Well it was rather difficult. I'm reminded of something which I can tell you even on camera.

08:00 These two old fellows off the ship, they were both about 80 and one said to the other, "Do you remember that stuff they used to put in our food to keep our mind off the women while we were in the tropics?" And his cobber said, "Oh yes, vaguely, why?" He said, "I think it's just beginning to work." But they put bromide in our food and I guess it was

08:30 effective.

Did it stop you talking about girls?

Oh no. It depended on whether you were inclined to talk about them. I was more inclined to try and get

the good movies to keep the men happy, and myself, I enjoyed them too. And I wasn't bogged down with women, with the thought of it. We were very pleased when we had

09:00 a concert party come on board and we had three of our midshipmen who did a miming act with the Andrews Sisters with the recording and that, and a Yank, they pulled up alongside and they were watching it. We had a stage rigged up on the forecastle at the Admiralties, and they were putting on a first class

09:30 act and our middies [midshipmen] put on this act with the Andrews Sisters and the buzz went around Seeadler Harbour that the Andrews Sisters were visiting the troops you see, and they made a signal to us to send them over. The three midshipmen went over and entertained them. But no, it was one of those things. If you don't have ladies around, well,

10:00 you just don't have them around. I disagree with the present set up. I can't imagine how it would be successful and it doesn't seem to be entirely successful. It causes more trouble than it's worth, undermines discipline, favouritism and all that sort of thing. No, not a good idea,

10:30 but no, we coped all right.

You were married for quite a long time, were many of the men married?

Not too many. No, I couldn't say how many of our fellows were married. I really don't know. We didn't have any distinction except that you got a marriage allowance but that was

11:00 sort of a private arrangement. You didn't see another person's pay cheque so I don't know.

The navy seems to have a reputation for shore leave antics and so on. Is that true?

What's that, what sort of antics?

Well getting into town and getting drunk, finding a girl, that sort of thing.

Oh yes, there's different people, different personalities. We had

11:30 some group, you might say they would always go over, they were girl crazy. That was their thing. My group were more interested in going to a theatre if there was a good show on or going to a pub where there was good beer on and we relaxed in that way.

12:00 **I was just wondering, talking about Japan before, whether any of the men did fraternise with the locals, particularly the women. Did any of the men have relationships with the women?**

In Japan?

Yeah.

Oh yes. There were geisha houses. Yeah, ladies, of course Japanese have been brought up that way. During the war they

12:30 had their comfort women on the islands, but when we got to Lingayen Gulf and these bomb boats and we called them were coming around, they get that name from bombing (UNCLEAR) and what have you, but this lady said, we said, "What do you think of things? You'd better get away

13:00 from the beach and go bush." She said, "Yeah, perhaps I will." She said, "I'd rather have a Jap on my belly than a bomb on my head." That was her opinion of the invasion.

Was it sort of frowned upon, fraternising with the geishas, or was it accepted generally?

Well it wasn't pursued very

13:30 strongly. I saw an American colonel pick up a Jap girl over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and put her into his jeep and away he went. The Americans seemed to be oversexed to our opinion. That's the way they behaved.

14:00 Our fellows were not puritans either, but however we got on. We were not barred from going into geisha houses. We were warned about the hygiene and that sort of thing.

I was wondering about that sort of education. Was that an official warning? Did you have, what sort of education did you get about sexual diseases?

Oh well,

14:30 in certain areas you got definite advice, especially in Africa and Capetown in particular. We were warned to stay away from District 6 which was the common stamping ground you might say of people who were chasing women, and they'd get more than they bargained for

15:00 if they went there. One of our fellows was killed there. They picked him out of the harbour the next morning.

What happened?

The niggers got him, probably to rob him.

What happened when you lost a man? What was the ceremony?

Well, there's an inquiry as to try and establish what actually happened and

15:30 that's about all. You can't do anything when you're only there for a few days.

And on a more personal level do you have some sort of ceremony or memorial on board?

What, when we lost him?

Yeah. A burial of some sort, dispatching?

Yes, we buried him at sea.

Do you have a sort of, did you know him personally, that guy?

No.

16:00 I can't remember his name. He was a warrant officer I think. I can't remember but I remember the circumstances were that he'd been ashore and drinking with an officer on board and they separated at the dockyard gates because they didn't want to be, the officer didn't want to be seen with a lower deck man, and that was the feeling that

16:30 we had, what we heard of the circumstances, and he was wandering off, he was drunk and the niggers got him.

And the three you lost in Darwin,

Yes, the three men we lost, yes.

When did you find time to have a formal recognition of their passing?

Well, we didn't. Their bodies as far as

17:00 I know were taken with the other 20-odd injured people to the hospital ship. I don't know for sure but that's what I understand happened. I had a letter quite recently from Bobby's nephew who lives in Canberra

17:30 wanting to know. He'd chased the army records and all that and they gave him some strange story that he was buried in the harbour or something or other, but that didn't happen.

And was there some sort of, did the captain make an announcement or was there some sort of recognition of those men?

18:00 Well no, there wasn't really. Well, we expressed sorrow amongst ourselves. There was no ceremony as such. We were too busy licking our wounds actually to have any ceremonial. We weren't too sure that we were going to get back even as things were. You get a set of circumstances there, you

18:30 don't have, you don't have much time for ceremonies.

I'm not sure if you mentioned this before but during that, the limping back to Brisbane, were you worried about further Japanese attacks?

Yes. We were because we were more or less defenceless in our inability to manoeuvre. 4 knots you can't manoeuvre much, we were sitting ducks

19:00 and it was just extremely lucky that we weren't attacked. The flying boat as I photographed as the raid started in Darwin, this flying boat, her name started with C, I can't recall the name. It took off and we found out later that it landed in the Gulf of Carpentaria quite safe. But

19:30 there was no air activity that I can recall between Darwin and Cape York, which was the area that we were concerned with. We got some marvellous views of the reef travelling down at 4 knots. You had plenty of time to observe the beauties of the coral reef and hope to goodness that we could go faster

20:00 to get there. It's rather marvellous that the ship didn't sink. I'll show you a photo later on of the, I did show you the photo thing there. You could drive a bus through it. And they'd blocked all the holes up above the water line and we had this whopping great hole underneath, yeah.

Having seen what you'd seen, when you got back Brisbane were any of your

20:30 **men tempted to go AWOL, AWL [Absent Without Leave]?**

The men who went AWL?

Were there many men tempted, once you were in Brisbane, to not go back?

None of us went AWL, no.

None at all?

Not to my knowledge. No, we, the West Australians and the Tasmanians went on leave first as far as I recall

21:00 and then the other states. They had to ration the time because the ship was only there for a reasonably short time getting repaired and we had to be available when it was all steam to go. I was lucky in, some of them went for gunnery courses. I chose torpedo man and I was just

21:30 lucky in getting the extra time and I took full advantage of it.

Cause you were in those courses for quite a period, weren't you?

What was that?

Many months you were doing those courses?

Yes, from April until December. It was an exceptionally long time to be in school, most enjoyable.

Must've made

22:00 **it much easier after your experience rather than just getting back on another ship and heading out again?**

Oh yes. It was quite easy really. The navy has an excellent educational system and the torpedo school was no exception. It was very good, but I had done a correspondence course after I'd left

22:30 the school. I carried on with night school and I'd passed the certificate course and what have you and that's how I got lumbered for missing the ship later in the war when I did someone else's examination papers. It was very pleasing for me to meet the fellow

23:00 in Sydney after the war and he was very happy too. Got a good job out of it.

How did it feel to be back down in southern Australia knowing what you did about Darwin when no one else knew?

In what context are you…

Well you have this amazing knowledge that very few people had or were to have for years to come.

Oh well, you forget about some

23:30 of these things. And Darwin was something that one would not want to dwell over otherwise you'd go crackers. It was disappointing that the censorship was such that they were afraid to let the Australian public what went on, and I guarantee that a very large proportion of Australians still don't know what went on.

24:00 They wouldn't know for instance what I told you, that there were more aircraft in the Darwin raids than were used in Pearl Harbor and they used a sledge hammer to crack a walnut. It was horrific really, and I only saw a little bit of it on my way to my action station, but I saw

24:30 the result as soon as we came up at lunchtime and ships laying around burning everywhere. It was terrible.

Was it not tempting to just mention it to a close friend or something?

Hey?

Was it, I would've personally felt it hard to not mention what had happened in Darwin to someone I trusted or just let someone know.

Oh, well

25:00 I told my uncle in Sydney. He was a First World War man and a signalman and he'd been through Beersheba, if you know what Beersheba was. It was a charge of the, like the charge of the Light Brigade. He was a horseman and a signalman and Beersheba was a very famous First World War

25:30 charge and the Australians went through them like a packet of salts you might say, and won the day. They were fighting over the water, to get water, you know, in this arid area. And he had told me some things about Beersheba, and of course he lived in Sydney and I saw him first and

26:00 we had lunch together and I told him and he understood. But you wouldn't tell a civilian that under the circumstances, because you wouldn't know just what mischief he could make. 'Loose lips sink ships'; that was the slogan. We didn't need any loose lips though because they knew what was going on in Darwin. The

26:30 Japanese knew what was going on in Darwin. They had good information. But the Australian public never really learned what went on.

Do you think that was wise?

It's hard to know. Very difficult, you just don't know how people would react. I think it

27:00 possibly was wise because you get these people, politically minded, jumping up and down causing all the strife about the place and they don't know what they're talking about in most cases. So on the balance I rather think that it was a wise decision although we could never understand it at the time.

What did you know of

27:30 **the aftermath of Darwin, particularly what's called the exodus and the looting?**

Oh, the looting I understand was rather severe. The exodus was rather interesting. The bank took all their goods and chattels on the night cart with their anxiety to get away from Darwin.

Did you find that out at the time or is that something you had to find out afterwards as well?

No, no.

28:00 Found out afterwards.

Yeah, right.

Oh no, had no idea at the time, but the story was that they had a blowout on the way down and they were going through the, moving the cans to get at the jacks to get the wheel off and some wag pulls up and says, "What, are you stocktaking?" Going through the night-cart cans you see. The, but the mass exodus, they reckon one chap didn't stop

28:30 running until he got to Adelaide. The air force were told to go bush, depart. The head people in Darwin left a lot to be desired. The navy was the only organised situation, you know, and I'm biased but it's the truth.

29:00 The others panicked. We couldn't because we didn't know where to go or couldn't swim.

I'd just like to ask you some more questions about the nature of navy life. On board ship, were there major divisions between occupations? Like would the stokers mix with the other fellows?

No, they were separated. You had a stokers' mess deck, signalmen's mess deck, torpedo men's mess deck and you

29:30 had your divisions so that you had friends with you wherever you were on the ship.

And would that play out on shore on leave, the same divisions (UNCLEAR)?

Yes, invariably you'd have your go ashore oppos [operations] and you'd go ashore with them. You have a bond of friendship when you're living together that, you know, it's

30:00 quite enjoyable to have other people's company. We had the cafeteria messing on the Shropshire which didn't lend as much to that aspect of general messing, but it applied more on the Shropshire as a divisional

30:30 thing. Like gunners would bet together, torpedomen would be together. Stokers would have their own mess as it were, but we had the communal dining facility. So it made a little bit of a difference to

31:00 things having everything organised for us, but it was quite good really, successful.

With those sorts of divisions, how do you maintain the unity of a ship?

Well, actually you, overall you do your job and you don't worry about another person's job. You just look after your own particular division

31:30 and you're not to (UNCLEAR) someone else what to do. It works out all right.

How does survival of a major raid or a major battle change the nature of that unity?

Well I don't quite know how to answer that.

32:00 When you have a major battle or an engagement, it brings you closer together I think. You tend to realise that united we stand, divided you fall, and you pull together. I think that's the best way to explain it.

Is there much superstition involved?

Superstition carries a lot

32:30 of weight in the navy particularly. For instance it's not wise to sail on the 13th. We confounded that on two different occasions. I've forgotten which ones they were now, but we sailed on the 13th to Leyte and that was successful. I think the other one was on the

33:00 Swan. I mean these are just the occasions I can remember that people raised the issue of superstition. "Oh God, we're going on the 13th." That's, you know, that's not good, and I'm not superstitious. No, I never was and I don't think I ever would be. I'm suspicious but I'm not superstitious. I'm suspicious of the

33:30 intention of some of these bodies that claim to be do-gooders and all the rest of it and I don't think they're genuine in many cases. So I think the war did affect me in making me sceptical about things.

How did that result? How were you made sceptical, what experiences?

34:00 Well, I couldn't see much point of getting down and praying when you've got some blighter coming at you with an aircraft trying to knock you off. A prayer wouldn't do any good. Only a bullet between the eyes would stop him and sometimes that didn't. No, it changes your nature I think. I don't think it would make anyone

34:30 more religious, probably unfortunately, but religion now is not for me. I was brought up in a religious family. My father was a church warden at Deloraine and all the rest of it, and I used to go to church in two denominations, in Church of England and in

35:00 Catholic. I was living with a Catholic family and I was absolutely shocked by the browbeating and the things they used to extract money to buy people who had passed on out of purgatory. Well for anybody who would fall for that sort of stuff, you know, they're almost as bad as these

35:30 fanatics who want to kill themselves in my book.

Did you have a ship's chaplain or a padre?

Yes, we had a, yeah, we had two and we had the best one in the navy, was a Roman Catholic, Father Roach. He was the first Roman Catholic chaplain that we had in the navy. They were a bit bigoted; they only had Church of England prior to him,

36:00 and that was on the Shropshire first. He was a marvellous bloke. He built up morale, had his mouth-organ band, all this sort of thing, to keep the men together. In the action he was extremely good where people were injured and what have you, and I couldn't say a bad word for Pappy Roach. He was everybody's

36:30 favourite, a remarkable old fellow. He passed on a couple of years ago. I went to his funeral in Sydney as did a lot of other of the ship's company, we thought that much of him.

Did he sort of operate as an open ear or just someone to talk to as well, besides the religious function? Did he

Who, Pappy Roach?

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, had the mouth-

37:00 organ band organised and he didn't go to any activity to try and talk people into religion. He tried to help people. He was a genuine cleric, and some of them were not genuine I'm sorry to say, especially a Church of England bloke. He was, I had to tell him off,

37:30 his censoring my letters. He'd forgotten what his duty was. I hadn't and I reminded him of it.

With Pappy Roach, was he someone you might talk to about private or personal things, or just things you might not want to talk the men about?

He was the sort of person you would in those circumstances confide in, but some of the others that we had, no

38:00 way. You'd toss them overboard. But no, Father Roach, although I was a Church of England, Pappy Roach was the fellow that I would confide in if I had anything I wanted to talk about.

Did you have cause to talk to him for something personal?

No, only in a friendly way I talked to him, but no, I never had any

38:30 worries like that. We didn't have any counselling or anything of that nature. You just got over it if you had a problem.

What sort of problems might people have had at sea? You mentioned before someone actually killed themselves?

Well, that I believe was as a result of something he received in the mail. We

39:00 didn't get much mail, but we had received mail either that day or the previous day and I put it down to something that was written to him. Whether it was from family or a well thinking person, you know, self appointed angel you might say. I don't know, but he killed himself.

39:30 By and large we didn't have any trouble in that regard.

Did many of the men get bad news from girlfriends about having gone off with Americans for example?

Well they got bombarded with that sort of thing from Tokyo Rose. Tokyo Rose was very popular on board because she played all the best music and it was really a good program.

40:00 And it was a laugh because we knew the stuff she was talking about was carefully calculated propaganda. She talked about what the Americans were doing with our women at home and, "Come up to Tokyo with a white flag and we'll welcome you to paradise," and all that sort of jazz.

40:30 It was strange that, you know, that sort of thing went on. It did. I don't know what happened to Tokyo Rose afterwards. She had the gift of the gab.

I'll just have to stop you there again.

Tape 9

00:36 **I'd like to know more about your trade in altering the suits. How did you set up the business?**

Well the deal was that while I was in torpedo school for so long I bought this machine from a chappy on the score that he would show me how to cut the patterns for a sailor's suit because I

01:00 didn't have a clue at that stage. And that was the deal, and I bought his, pardon me, Munloss sewing machine. German, portable, beautiful machine, and he showed me how to cut suits, measure people up and that sort of thing. It's a funny thing you know, thinking about this recently I've realised that a lot rubs off from your parents. My father served his time as a blacksmith

01:30 but he was able to turn his hand to almost anything. In his business he sold everything from toothbrushes to suits. He was an agent for a tailor, and I just wondered whether subconsciously that rubbed off on me. But I got this machine anyway and I learned how to knock out sailors' suits and my friend

02:00 in Hobart was Phil Ems, his father was Ems the tailor in Murray Street at the time. This is early in the war, and he learnt his trade in London, the best circumstances for a tailor, and he was intrigued by my effort of making the suits.

02:30 And he asked me, "Well look, I'm doing one now," and he showed me the measurements. He said, "Now how would you lay that out?" And I laid it out in my method and it coincided with his, much to his surprise and to mine. One little thing, a difficult thing about a sailor suit was to get the seat right, the bum, you know, to shape properly without

03:00 being tight and uncomfortable, and I had that down to a fine art. What you did was to take the measurement around the butt and depending on that measurement, so you'd put a mark on your sailor's hat, you put this hat on it and draw the chalk around it to that mark. That's how you got the shape, yeah.

Very lucky coincidence, isn't it?

Hey?

Uncanny coincidence.

He was amazed. He said,

03:30 "God, we go to such and such a place, you know, this place in London to learn all about it and here you do it with a sailor's hat." Yeah. The marks that, my marking coincided with his from the person's measurements. We had a good thing running for what we call the chewing firm,

04:00 making suits, and it was profitable because we could get the seaman's serge from the shops on board, and you'd get a bolt of this material and there was quite a bit of profit with each suit.

I'm not sure, which trip was this? Was this on the way to London, to England sorry? No, on the way to the [United] States?

No, the way back. I couldn't use it

04:30 on the way to London. All I did was lose it. I gave a taxi driver, or the chap who was driving the officers' luggage from the ship in Liverpool to the train for London, gave him a carton of cigarettes to put my labelled machine with the officers baggage and

05:00 never saw him nor the machine again. So I had a little bit of trouble in London convincing the Singer Sewing Machine [company] that they should sell me a machine, which they eventually did. They said, "You haven't got ration tickets." I said, "No, of course I haven't," you know, that's (UNCLEAR). Anyway, I've still got the receipt for the, £17/10/- or something for this machine which I've still

05:30 got down below, I use for rough work, or I have used it for rough work. When I say rough work, my son was restoring cars and I showed him how to handle the piping and that sort of thing for the seating. He used my machine for that, very good.

£17 sounds like a lot for, what was your weekly wage at that stage?

My weekly wage in the navy at that early stage was seven shillings a day.

06:00 You couldn't live on it. Not the way we wanted to live anyway.

So when you were altering and making suits, these are uniforms, these are sailor suits?

Yes.

Why weren't they provided by the navy? Why did the men have to provide them?

They were provided by the navy but they were most ill-fitting and they were just not right. And when I mentioned in London,

06:30 in Chatham, they lined us up as an example to the 6,000 RN fellows, "Now that's how you should look when you're dressed to go ashore." And we thought that was a feather in our cap. First time we'd got any praise from them, but it was only because we made them neat, tidy, well fitting by alterations and they were more comfortable.

07:00 **It's moments like that you want a business card to hand around isn't it? You would've got a lot of business then.**

That'd be right. We had a slogan, 'Stick's and Sandy's Slick and Dandy Chewing Firm'; that was the name of my sewing business. Sandy was the buttonholer, putting the buttons on, and I was knocking the suits out, and as I said we got on very well together

07:30 and we were quite popular on board. We sold a lot of suits.

I'm interested in what England was like during that period, too. What were your observations on the home front here?

Well I showed you a photo of the butcher shop, didn't I? Horse meat for human consumption only. Conditions were very poor, rationing was very strict.

08:00 The local people were, when we'd finish our meal the scraps, were put in 44 gallon drums on the dockside and they were fossicking through this after. We asked them what they were doing. They were getting the meat out for their cats, but we knew that they'd eaten their cats long ago. It was very poor conditions that the English people had to put up with.

08:30 Of course London was bombed fairly severely, not to the extent of some of the other places that we saw but they were really knocked about and they couldn't use baths. They had vegetables and stuff trying to grow in their baths.

09:00 It was a cold climate anyway, so I don't suppose they were all that keen about stripping off, but I told you when we got there I asked this joker if there was any hot water in the shower. He didn't know because he'd only been there a week. Typical Pom [Englishman].

Did you find your idea of what England would be like and the people, was reinforced by what you saw?

Well I didn't form an opinion as to what it was like because my mother

09:30 had told me of her trip to England years before on the Persic. She travelled over with her maiden aunts as a sort of a companion and a carry-all for these two elderly ladies and she enjoyed England, what she saw of it, but I went there with

10:00 an open mind and the express opinion or desire to meet up with my wife's family, relatives and that which I was able to do. They lived in the pottery district in Stoke-on-Trent and fortunately I had enough leave to go there and I still correspond with one of them. She, and had two of them out here staying with me

10:30 for a while a couple of months back. So we still communicate with the English people.

I find it strange with all the deprivations of war you get all these opportunities as well. Did

that occur to you at the time that maybe you were a bit lucky to be in England and seeing things?

I think I was born lucky, absolutely. People were paying £20 at the time when I got my draft to

11:00 the Shropshire just for asking. You don't get anything in this world unless you ask. I got my fingers trodden on in 1980 by the protocol mob because I read where, I'm a secretary of our Canberra Shropshire Association, and I read where the duke [Duke of Edinburgh] was coming out so I wrote to him

11:30 and also to the Governor-General inviting him to come to our Anzac Park and open a couple of plaques that we put there for the Canberra and Shropshire Association. And my cobbers here reckoned I was bloody mad and the protocol crowd

12:00 descended on me like a bunch of angels like hell about it; but it got results. We got him, and the people in New South Wales are wondering how in the hell we pulled it off. It was simply by writing a civil letter to the bloke and that was my protocol anyway. I didn't know anything about this other stuff. I didn't know the

12:30 protocol committee existed until afterwards and by gosh they kept reminding me about that. And the chappy who came out from England to interview me, you asked if I'd ever been interviewed, I'd forgotten about that. The chappy from Buckingham Palace came out and he said, "What do you want to do? What do you want the prince to do? I said, "Well he's our patron

13:00 for the Canberra Shropshire Association Australia wide and I'd like him to spare the time of half an hour or something to unveil a plaque for on the Anzac memorial over at Lindisfarne, Anzac Park. Most people haven't heard of it even now. Anyway this guy said, "Well,"

13:30 he said, "Well, what do you want to do?" And I said, "Just have him open the, unveil the plaque." "Do you want a speech?" I said, "No, we don't like speeches in Australia," and he giggled a bit at that. He says, "Well." I said, "I'd like him to call into the local RSL [Returned and Services League] club on his way back to town just to show the flag.

14:00 He said, "Would there be drinks there?" I said, "I should hope so," and he shuddered and that was a no, no. And anyway I pulled it off just by being direct, asking, we received. We got some good photos of the duke.

Is that something you learnt in the navy, do you think?

What?

Just the gumption of asking to get something?

14:30 Well I guess so. I learned that at the beginning when I had to complain to the captain about his treatment. Oh no, it's something which you learn that, well you won't get anywhere by sitting on a stump sucking your thumb. You've got to go out and get it if you want it badly enough.

What else do you think you learnt from your war experience?

15:00 Well the naval habits, hygiene, the ability to do everything for yourself and be self sufficient. I think that was the best thing I got out of the navy because you have a make and mend every Saturday. You had to mend your own clothing and some fellows couldn't sew a button, let alone make a button hole. And

15:30 you learn those sort of things to give you a bit of pride and it gives you a lot of self satisfaction to be able to do these things, I think anyway, and without the navy I doubt I would ever do it. When I got the, on my papers I've got 'Good cinemagraph operator' or something like that.

16:00 I guess that rubbed off from my father, you see. We had the old silent movies down at Ranelagh and my half sister played the piano. She was a piano teacher and she had musical talent so she provided the background for the silent movies with the appropriate sort of music

16:30 and I guess, and that's how I learned to operate the machine, and it was natural that when I went on board I volunteered to help out with the machine.

How did that affect your popularity on board?

Immensely. It did a lot for you. They

17:00 were all keen to get to know you to get you to keep a seat for them and they'd give you a couple of bottles of beer or something like that, you know, as a bribe and they, some marvellous things. You know the navy was very dishonest in some ways. The first thing I struck was when I went to Flinders

17:30 Naval Depot the first time, and the chappy hit me with a raffle, and he said, "It's a marvellous little jewel box with candelabra legs and inlaid and a nice piece of furniture." So I said, "My gosh, it's a good one. Yeah, I'll have a couple of tickets." He said, "You'll win it." I said, "Oh, very good, I'd like to."

18:00 And I had in mind what to do with it of course, and sure enough I won it. I don't know how or why or

what have you, but I got it. I gave it to my daughter when my wife died. It was a beautiful thing lined with satin and you know, it was one of those things. So I learned from that you can never

18:30 trust raffles in the navy.

And the value of friendship as well (UNCLEAR)

Oh well, they were friendly. They decided that I looked poor and destitute and that I'd be an appropriate person to win it and possibly because I was just passing through the college. I don't know, I don't know why they chose me to be the public benefactor.

19:00 They were able to say that I had won the thing and that cleared their yardarm. So that was all right.

I've heard a little bit about people saying they had a good war. Do you think you had a good war?

Well personally I did because I'm still here. It must've been good, but I wouldn't say it was a good war.

19:30 I don't think anybody with their right mind could describe war as being good. It's a foolish waste of resources and it's usually caused by politicians and I think they should be the first ones to go if it starts. No, I couldn't agree that any war is good.

20:00 **Did you generally have a good experience then?**

Hey?

Was your experience generally a positive one?

I think these sort of things are what you make of them. Possibly your attitude, if you're a sadsack well you're going to be a sadsack. You're not going to enjoy life at all, but I think if you're outgoing and

20:30 conscious of what's going on around you then I think you get by all right.

What have things like your post-war involvements with things like the Shropshire Association meant to you?

What's it meant to me?

Well…

Well, I didn't mention that in 1950 I rejoined the Naval Reserve.

21:00 I got a number and that was for three years, and then I received another note from them and rejoined for another six years or something. And the circumstances were there that they would take you back on the rank that you held or equivalent. So I think that might be a measure of my thoughts at the time

21:30 that in 1950 I figured that if there is another war, then I would be in it and I would want you know, a better starting price than what I started this first one on one and sixpence a day. So, but anyway that didn't come up. We didn't have to go away or anything like that.

22:00 Peace time reserve training was usually of a week or fortnight's duration. You'd go on, they'd take you onto a ship and get you knocked into shape. That's what they used to do.

Were there many World War II veterans in the reserves at that time?

I wouldn't know.

22:30 There'd be no way of my knowing because they didn't publish lists of personnel who were rejoining.

Okay. I was just wondering if it was unusual for ex-navy guys to go back into the reserve.

Well it wasn't unique, that's for sure. I spoke to a couple of friends and they said, "Oh yeah, that's sensible.

23:00 Yeah, we'll be in that." Whether they were or not I don't know. Anyway I came across the papers when I was digging up stuff to refresh my mind on things that you were likely to ask. That's the crux of it.

I've just got a few more questions. I'd just like to know more about your trip from the US to Liverpool.

23:30 That was interesting.

Pretty dangerous I imagine.

Well it was. It was the height of the submarine wolf pack business and they had the system there of zoning in on the ships. They had good information from the American side as to ship movement, they being the Germans, and we were pretty lucky to

24:00 1, be on a troop ship like the Louis Pasteur which was a fast ship. And we made the crossing in four

days I think it was, or five days, from more or less a direct from Boston to Liverpool, and we had a few scares on the way. Our escort was

24:30 pretty remote. We didn't really have an escort as such. We just had a few ships going ahead and checking on the pinging and that sort of thing. We didn't have an escort as we knew escorts. So we really went across unescorted but we were helped. We had

25:00 aircraft and they were a great help in indicating if there was any sub pack or what have you. We went across without any trouble.

Aircraft from both sides? So from the US and then from England?

No, we had aircraft from England when we got fairly close, yes. The

25:30 aircraft from America were really, I've forgotten what they were now, but anyway they were in radio communication with the ship. We never had any trouble going across. The only trouble we had was when we got to Liverpool and I trusted this possum who was

26:00 driving the officers' baggage bus with my machine and I lost it.

So the Germans were fine but you had to watch the Englishmen?

Hey?

The Germans weren't a problem at that stage, you just had to watch out for…

He was an Englishman, yeah. He didn't get the motor. I had the motor in my kit bag and I used that on the other machines I was able to get.

What evasive techniques…

Which?

26:30 **crossing between the States and Liverpool…**

Yeah.

what evasive techniques would the Louis Pasteur use? It seems like quite a fast ship. Did it zigzag as well?

Yes, we did zigzag. It would be prudent to do that, but we didn't have any scares that I can remember. Actually we were too busy playing crown and anchor and collecting the money.

27:00 **I'm not really familiar with how you run a game like that. How did you collect on it?**

They pay. We had a couple of scouts going around with a blessed bucket and we were getting buckets of cash, all sorts of stuff, and I've forgotten how we tied it to the individual,

27:30 but we never had any arguments.

No fights?

No fights. Oh no. If we had a fight they would've shut us down. No, we had a charmed life, worse than the casino I suppose.

I think you're just feeding back a little bit there on the microphone.

Hmm?

I think your hearing aid's reacting to your microphone just a little bit when you lean over there.

28:00 **You were worse than a casino you said?**

We were worse than a casino I guess, yeah. One-armed bandits. Oh no, we did all right, very well actually.

Now we are getting towards the end of the interview but I wonder if you could tell us some more about, I'm not sure how to pronounce it, the Langayen?

Lingayen.

Lingayen, sorry.

Lingayen Gulf

28:30 episode.

Yeah.

Well the Lingayen Gulf was the concentration of the Japanese secret weapon, the kamikaze. They'd

organised this show after Leyte as a last-ditch effort and they put everything into it to get the ships. And they figured that one pilot and a plane and one

29:00 ship was a very good exchange rate, and they got 87 ships. I've forgotten the proportion of those ships that were sunk, but there were more ships sunk or damaged in Lingayen Gulf than there were for the rest of the Pacific War including Pearl Harbor, and that's saying something.

With that sort

29:30 **of firepower and that sort of commitment coming against you, did you think you'd win or survive?**

Well we felt that we had to. The chappy, when Cazaly got the one that came in at us, sort of beat the rap, we had a lot of unsung heroes in the

30:00 shape of the aircraft carriers' aircraft that caught these blighters before they got into our zone. They reckoned that they got about 60 percent of them before they got to us in the gulf, and it was probably right because I remarked our radar fellow had so many pimples on his screen,

30:30 you know, and we never saw them. They'd knocked 60 percent of them off before they got to us.

Were you able to see many of those encounters up in the air?

Oh yeah. We had one on, this Hellcat pilot on our SRE, SOS [Save Our Souls – distress call] the ship radio.

31:00 And we were firing away at this Zero and he's chasing it. He says, "Keep on firing! Get the bastard! Don't worry about me!" We shot them both down and our captain was, as I have said, he was a marvellous man, he signalled the American admiral and apologised for knocking this Hellcat down. He said, "Oh,

31:30 it's his own fault, he's told not to do that, you know. When you're firing at them he should've left." So he got away with a broken leg, the pilot. They had some marvellous escapes from their aircraft, and oh dear. Yeah, "Keep on firing!" and we did,

32:00 poor bugger. But when they're coming at you every few minutes, you know, it gets monotonous after a while. I showed you the score sheet there.

Yeah, the time sheet, yeah, sure.

And you notice that as the, in the dark in the evening

32:30 they had hits right, left and centre because of the circumstances of the sighting. Difficult to see them.

Now on that sheet, cause it had the times of all the encounters, it's a full day.

That's just one day.

Yeah. How exhausting is it? How exhausted are you after it I mean?

Oh, we had lots of days after that.

How do you keep on going?

Until you run out of ammunition.

33:00 **How was your leadership in that?**

I said we had 148 hours at action stations out of 160 odd, you know. We were fighting all the time really, it was incredible.

Were you able to sleep?

No, too much noise.

What does that do to the nerves?

33:30 It doesn't help, it doesn't help. And you don't have any grog to help you either. A few blokes may have gone to first aid to get some tranquillisers, but I didn't have to unfortunately. I didn't have any cause to. I was just, I was scared. We were all scared, there was

34:00 no question about that, but some could carry it more than others I suppose.

In what ways?

Well, in not going to pieces and your nerves get on such an edge if someone drops a pencil or something you leap out of your shoes more or less, you know.

34:30 A nasty situation to find yourself in and it rubs off, tends to rub off onto other people so you do your

best to conceal it or suppress it, but the modern idea of counselling wouldn't work out in those circumstances I don't think.

What do you do instead? Do you find somewhere quiet to have a good shake?

35:00 Well actually you'd be going uphill to find somewhere quiet in those circumstances. We had to catch up on sleep wherever we could. Of course the cooks did a marvellous job to keep some food available for us too, that was another factor. With the concussion of the bombs and the

35:30 aircraft buzzing around, imagine a cook in a galley trying to balance a cauldron of boiling soup or something like that, you see. They did a marvellous job to keep the food coming up to us, and some of the movements of the ship were really dramatic, yeah.

36:00 But it was very pleasing when it was all over and it took a while to realise that it was all over. I was home I think then, like trying to relax and unwind. It took me a few months to readjust.

36:30 **How did it affect you?**

Nervous at night. I'd wake up and I'd be shaking and that sort of thing.

Did it give you bad dreams?

Pardon?

Would you have bad dreams?

No, I don't recall that. My wife was very helpful and she'd hop up and make a cup of tea or something like that. We'd have a yarn

37:00 and then I'd get to sleep eventually. But that was the big problem, being able to regulate your time for sleeping. You know we're like a clock. You sort of get into a habit of sleeping at a certain time. Well it's rather hard to readjust to that life, or at least it was in my case.

In that

37:30 **situation would you explain to your wife what had caused it or was it just understood?**

Oh, we shared a lot of information, you know. I'd tell her, she'd probably ask me what was the matter and said, "Oh I've got the goings off, comings on," or something like that you know. But we understood each other. That was the main thing.

38:00 We had a very happy life together and I couldn't have been happier.