

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Henry Robinson - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/873>

### Tape 1

00:38 **Good morning Henry. I'd like to start off today by having you tell us a bit about your early background?**

Well we lived in the northern suburbs of Sydney. My father was just a bit too old to be involved in the

01:00 Second World War. It got to the late 20s ...

**Where were you born?**

I was born in Killara in the northern suburbs of Sydney. My father

01:30 had a house built on 2 acres of land on which he was going to retire. He developed that as a small hobby farm I suppose you would call it, although very small. We had our own orchard and vegetables and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and ducks and eventually we had a cow.

02:00 We were pretty well self sufficient in all sorts of fruits and vegetables and that sort of thing. As he retired, and he had four sons, we were all at school and so on and the Depression hit us and it was somewhat difficult but we survived and generally had a pretty happy sort of childhood.

02:30 **You were talking early on about the Depression. How do you think living on a couple of acres helped?**

Well I think my father had his pension and a bit of other income and a lot of our clothes were handed down, patched and mended by Mum who was pretty handy at that sort of thing. We generally had shoes and socks which a lot of kids didn't have.

03:00 As I say being self sufficient, and Mum knitted and that sort of thing so we were pretty well clad, and as I say we were pretty happy and content. A very happy childhood.

**And I'm wondering, can you tell me**

03:30 **how many siblings did you have?**

I had 3 brothers. The two elder ones were very good at sport and their school activities and so on. I was the third one and I probably didn't match up to them and I was told so by my various teachers. My younger brother didn't come into the position. He was five years younger than me.

04:00 So he missed out on a lot of the problems of the Depression.

**And where did you go to school?**

I went to a little school in Killara which was a Congregational school called Milton Grammar School. There was a kindergarten and

04:30 upper school and from there I went on later to Shore [Sydney Church of England Grammar School], then finished up doing my Leaving Certificate through private study. My father thought that was one way I would manage to get my matriculation which I did.

05:00 I suppose I wasn't very happy with the life of a very strict disciplined school. I found I wanted to do certain creative things which were not available to me. Somehow or other through private study I managed to indulge in the pleasure of literature and languages and so on.

05:30 That made life quite pleasant for me. From Shore I was able to watch the ships coming into the harbour and so on and I was interested in ships. I was interested in adventure stories and novels of the sea and that sort of thing. I had a collection of models of ships and I had scrap books

06:00 of...particularly naval ships and so on which I suppose made me lean towards the navy when the war

was going on. That probably created my interest in it. Apart from that, one brother was in the army and the other brother was in the air force. The brother in the air force was killed in about '41.

06:30 So I was forbidden to go into the air force anyway. But I knew I was going to be called up eventually so I enlisted in the navy. I wasn't a very good shot with a rifle and I didn't think I was going to be much use to the army, but I could do something in the navy which wouldn't require that sort of expertise.

07:00 So that was how I found my way into the navy.

**I'm also wondering as a young boy, how you learnt to swim?**

When I was at Milton Grammar School we used to go down to Roseville Baths during the summer which I think it was a Wednesday afternoon. We had a teacher there who taught me to dog paddle and to swim overarm and

07:30 one thing and another and I used to swim amongst the mangrove seeds and one thing and another in this particular spot. I think it's all gone now. There's a bridge built over there. But Roseville Baths was quite a popular spot in that part of the world.

**Well Australia's got quite a strong tradition of swimming; I wonder how that contributed to your love of the sea?**

08:00 I don't know if swimming had that effect on me. I used to make boats and we had a duck pond at home and it was always great fun to sail boats on that. As I say I read many stories of the sea and I think Australians...

08:30 I think you'd be quite surprised of how many Australians are interested in water. We've got a very deep coastline, so for some reason or other most Australians go to the water don't they for their holidays. They try to get as close to the water as they can. Even if they can't they'll use the rivers and dams and one thing or another as well. I think this helped

09:00 produce a navy when war broke out. So many Australians were yachtsmen or rowed boats or paddle canoes or one thing or another in those days. We used to...later on I remember with friends we would go down to Roseville Baths and there was a boat shed there and we'd sometimes hire a canoe or a rowing boat if we could afford it, and row

09:30 around there and have picnics and one thing or another and this is what kids did. And so there was always people in Australia who had a little bit of maritime experience. It was very difficult...when the navy started out at the beginning of the war, it had a certain number of ships but they had to call up all sorts of merchant shipping which had to be converted to naval vessels

10:00 and we had of course coastal ships. In most of the coastal towns in New South Wales you'll see the remnants of the maritime sailing and so on down the north and south coast. In South Australia, Melbourne and Tasmania and so on. There was a lot of people involved in shipping until railways knocked them out. But there's always been a maritime interest in Australia.

10:30 Some people expressed the opinion after the war that shipping declined and where were we going to get our ships for a future navy. But probably techniques and one thing or another have changed and government policy has changed.

**I wonder...you were talking a little bit before we started about**

11:00 **a couple of your relations who were involved in World War One. What did you know about them growing up as a young boy?**

They didn't talk about it much. I had uncles who had been in France and had fought in the trenches. They didn't say much but some were on the Somme and that sort of thing. The conditions they suffered under were pretty

11:30 horrific. I can just faintly remember discussions with my parents and so on about these uncles and what happened. That was another reason I didn't fancy going into the army. It appeared to be such a sorry story that it didn't appeal to me.

12:00 I remember one uncle talking about how they had been in the trenches for so long, a week or so and then they were taken out and they stripped off their uniforms to get rid of the lice and so on. And their clothing was boiled somewhere and they were given fresh uniforms to wear. And in the winter time they had been up to their knees in mud

12:30 because the creeks and rivers were flooding. They were generally horrific conditions that these fellows lived under. That sort of thing didn't appeal to me. So I thought at least

13:00 in the navy I'll have a clean dry bed at night, and 3 meals a day which was the case.

**I'm wondering when you were at school, a lot of schools had cadets...**

Yes when I was at Shore I was in the cadets. I suppose the tendency there was...well the war was on and we were virtually cannon fodder I suppose.

13:30 We were being drilled and trained, rifle drill and marching and general discipline and so on. I suppose we were being prepared for the future years if the war continued. So the discipline in the navy didn't particularly worry me because I was used to that. I knew what to expect.

14:00 There was no room for rebellion.

**I understand Henry that you had a chance while you were at school, and maybe it was through the cadets, to handle some incendiary bombs?**

14:30 Young people my age...when the war in the Pacific had broken out, we were encouraged to volunteer as air raid wardens, and other things, messenger carriers and all sorts of things

15:00 that might occur should Australia be invaded. And one of those duties was being an air raid warden and you were put under control of someone in the district who was a district leader of some sort. So he was the Chief Warden. But you were taught how to put out fires, and how to handle incendiary bombs was one of the things.

15:30 A building was bombed and generally to create fires a bomb would hit the building and be followed by the dropping of incendiary bombs. So you were trained on how to douse fires, pick up these bombs by means of a thing like a shovel.

16:00 It was about the size of a garden rake and in the place of the pronged part of the rake there was a box and you had a sort of flat rake made out of timber or masonite. The idea was you would rake this incendiary bomb into this box and then throw it out of the window or into the street or whatever. Or you would cover it with sand or something like that to douse it.

16:30 So those were simple things that you learnt. How to handle situations such as that. You learnt a certain amount of first aid and that was it. Minor duties and you were enlisted for that sort of thing.

17:00 Fortunately it didn't have to be used in major parts of Australia except in Darwin. I don't know quite what happened there at the time. At the same time Mum and other ladies in the district would get together and they would spend their spare time knitting nets for camouflage which

17:30 they used for the anti aircraft guns and weapons. So everyone was involved in something like that. There were all sorts of other duties that people were associated with. Not only were they carrying on their businesses and their work and what ever but they had other jobs as special police and

18:00 intelligence and those sorts of things in their spare time. As well running their own businesses. They were very very industriously employed.

**Well that's quite a position of responsibility that you volunteered for?**

I don't know.

18:30 I just felt I should be doing something. I don't think my parents thought I was getting into much trouble. It seemed a pretty straight forward thing. It was just like being in the scouts or something.

**Being in the cadets and being an air warden, it sounds like you were quite well aware**

19:00 **of the war coming.**

Oh yes very much so. I would read the papers and I used to collect magazines. I used to subscribe to a magazine which was called The War Illustrator which would come out from London rather irregularly, but that gave a description of all the various campaigns that were going on. Although it was a few weeks behind though getting the stuff to Australia.

19:30 But it gave you a very good idea of the geography of the war and I was very very interested in that.

**I'm wondering how much of a threat did you feel Australia was under?**

Certainly it was a very worrying time. The Japanese were getting closer and closer all the time.

20:00 Some of my friends who were a little bit older than I was were already involved in defence activities in the north of Australia and even into New Guinea and Darwin or so on, and I knew that sooner or later I would have to be involved in it one way or the other. I remember one fellow coming home on leave. He had been trained in Queensland somewhere.

20:30 He was in the army and he had a bit of leave and he was talking about some of his friends who were being sent up to some of the islands on the outskirts. They were all those poor devils who got caught up in Ambon and Timor and New Britain and New Ireland. But they were only boys of 18. So I wasn't far away from them.

21:00 So I knew that soon or later I would have to face up to the fact that I would be called up. I thought I should do something in the meantime.

**Can you tell me a bit about your brother?**

He sort of took over the farming side.

21:30 His elder brothers were away and I was about to go away so he took over the farming of the vegetables and that sort of thing.

**I was actually referring to your brother who was killed?**

Well of course he went away in the beginning...he joined the air force at the beginning of '40.

22:00 He trained first at Lindfield at the Elementary Training School then he went up to Narromine where he completed his flying training in Tiger Moths. Then he went to Canada to train in Harvard Trainers which were the American equivalent to the Wirraway, or shall I say the Wirraway was the equivalent to the Harvard Trainer.

22:30 They were used for training before they went into Spitfires and Hurricanes.

**I understand he was killed fairly early on in the war?**

Yes he was in a flying accident in Canada.

23:00 He was doing his final flights before he would get his wings. He was doing his last flight I believe with an American trainer. At this time the Americans hadn't come into the war but some of the Americans had volunteered for the air force. He was in an Eagle Squadron in England and some of the Americans felt they should be fighting the Nazi menace and he was

23:30 one of those and being an experienced pilot he accepted a job of training British...the Empire Air Training Scheme and he was one of those, an Instructor.

**And how old were you when you got news of his death?**

24:00 About 16 I think. About 16.

**And can you tell me about the impact on your family?**

Well I do remember the ...I was sitting around talking to my mother and father and

24:30 there was a knock at the front door and I went out and there was an air force chaplain and an air force officer and they said, "Can we speak to your father?" And immediately when I told my mother who was there she

25:00 said, "It's David." So that was it. They were there to tell them the bad news. It was really a very pathetic sort of thing but this was happening to hundreds of mothers and fathers all over Australia. It was a terrible thing for the women. They had seen their kids grow up and nurtured them and so on and they had been

25:30 taken away. That was happening all over the world. War is a dreadful thing. Anyway it most affected my mother. She was a wonderful person and she felt it very very much. It was

26:00 something she never forgot.

**I'm wondering how much his death, or what type of influence his death had on your decision to enlist?**

Oh well. It wasn't so much about enlisting. See once you were 18

26:30 you received this brown envelope from the Government and you had to go to such and such a place for a medical examination and so on. I went to Hornsby Town Hall and you had a medical examination by the family doctor who it happened to be and then that was it. So you had no say in it at all.

27:00 I said I don't think I want to go into the army. I said I think I would prefer to go into the navy. So I went down to the Naval Enlistment Office in Sydney and signed up there and then. In due course...before I was called up by the army, I was in the navy.

27:30 **Well I'm wondering...You mentioned that your brother was killed when you were 16, in that intervening couple of years, what can you tell me about living in Sydney....I'm wondering if you experienced a blackout?**

Oh yes, right. Well everything had to be blacked out.

28:00 There was the black out and the brown out came in later I think. But you had to put tape over your windows and make sure you had blinds that were close fitting and everything was blacked out. You were very careful about showing any lights at all. The railway stations had been painted over and all their names and signs had been removed.

28:30 I remember the night of the attack on Sydney Harbour with the Japanese submarines and all the sirens going off. All over Sydney and they were expecting something more to happen. So the whole of Sydney was alerted. Well that was...

- 29:00 But there still times for a bit of enjoyment. You could go to the beach and so on. Even if you had to go down and swim between the barbed wire. The beaches around Sydney were secured with barb wire and sandbags and machine gun posts and so on.
- 29:30 There was a huge trench dug across the northern beaches at Bungan [Beach] and this was an anti tank ditch. If the Japanese had landed on the Peninsula they would be halted and if they couldn't halt them there then they would be halted...if they could hold that area there then they would be halted at Bungan where it was a narrow part of the Peninsula.
- 30:00 This huge ditch was supposed to stop the tanks. I remember at French's Forest on the way through from Roseville down to the beach, there was a huge army depot there and they hundreds of machine gun carriers there
- 30:30 ready to carry men and machine guns down to beach should the Japanese land. That's all houses but in those days it was a huge camp. And so we could still do a bit of swimming and boating and that sort of thing, as kids do. But there were these rather interesting things going on.
- 31:00 **It's interesting, you're telling those stories almost with a sense of humour and affection. But there was a real sense that Australia was threatened**
- Oh certainly, but of course youth don't quite see that way.
- 31:30 Our parents were very serious about it. They were very worried. But it was a great adventure as far as we kids were concerned. It was quite fascinating. Some of our friends who were a bit older than us would come back and tell these stories about what it was like.
- 32:00 **I'm wondering if there were a few tall stories getting around?**
- Yes there were plenty of tall stories. The young fellas in the army would talk about the girls they met here there and everywhere, and what parties they had been to and booze ups and all sorts of things. We would think well this is manhood and it's great fun.
- 32:30 In spite of the fact you were going into a service and it was going to be pretty strict discipline there was still a lot of high jinks. And that was a fact.
- I guess...I mean Sydney has never seen a blackout since then, so there must**
- 33:00 **have been I imagine some kind of novelty?**
- I wouldn't say that. It crept up a bit on you. Conditions were getting serious in the north and as the Japanese got closer people became more and more concerned about what was going to happen, and what everyone's future was going to be.
- 33:30 There were groups of people, particularly...the Communist Party became very interested at that time and they were bringing in some of the ideas that they had of...some boys' idea was to go out and train in bush craft and
- 34:00 so forth and they were expected to go up into the Blue Mountains later on if the Japanese came. They were going to live in the bush. This wasn't approved by the army but it was going on. These kids were learning bush craft and how to survive in the scrub. They didn't have to make use of it but that sort of thing had gone on in other places
- 34:30 in the world...in Russia and Europe and so on. The same sort of thing was happening elsewhere. I didn't sort of understand it at the time but I can when you read the history of the occupation of countries,
- 35:00 and how young people did get involved.
- Well I'm wondering if you and your mates or you and your family had discussions of what you would do if the Japanese landed on your front door step?**
- No not really. I don't remember any particular discussions about that sort of thing. I suppose it was just unmentionable.
- 35:30 **You've mentioned that there was a sense of growing up, manhood, and perhaps a sense of adventure and almost romanticism in a way. I wonder how much that contributed to your idea of joining the navy?**
- I think the navy sounded a very romantic sort of service. Always has done.
- 36:00 Boys always went to sea didn't they? I think that had a strong influence on me. I didn't see anything romantic about digging trenches and that sort of thing. Maybe other boys did. I thought the navy sounded a lot more romantic. A lot of boys found a lot of romantic ideals in the air force for instance.
- 36:30 Fighter pilots and these people were very much the heroes of that age, but that was denied me by my parents so the navy was the next best thing. I mean boys read Boy's Own magazines and Triumphs and

Champions and

37:00 such journals that boys read in those days. They were ripping yarns about Biggles and all this sort of thing. That developed a sort of folk hero sort of thing with people in the air force and whatever. There were romantic stories

37:30 that were delivered in these serial magazines that kids read.

**You've just mentioned that your family denied you permission to join the air force, did you want to join the air force?**

I wasn't particularly...I wasn't set on that. Other boys were.

38:00 But the navy did always have a romantic feel to it. If you had read Treasure Island and things like that... it was the sea and it had always been a romantic sort of thing. The books that I had read...the book we read for the Intermediate Examination in England was

38:30 a book called The Gypsy of the Horn. A story about sailing ships and so on and a man who served his time before the mast in the previous century. And what a wonderful story that was. Fascinating for kids. Although there was a lot of hardship in it, it was just a wonderful thing to read.

39:00 There was something about it that made me lean towards the sea.

**You mentioned that you studied languages. What languages did you study at school?**

English, Latin and French. And mainly

39:30 because the particular teacher I had under private study was ...he introduced the love of languages and so on. Not that I had a chance to use Latin and French but there was a certain amount of history in our Latin studies and that always appealed to me.

40:00 I was always fond of history. History is I suppose a history of adventure isn't it. And that sort of thing really appealed.

## Tape 2

00:34 **Henry you just mentioned that even though you wanted to enlist in the navy you were in fact called up as a kind of conscription. How did that sit with you?**

I just

01:00 realised that you had to do it. You had no option, and also there were some very alarming things...you could pick up news even then about the ways the Japanese were treating prisoners of war. You just had to do something about it. You couldn't avoid it.

**How much did**

01:30 **you know about Darwin?**

Not a lot. Only what the papers were permitted to publish. We didn't know exactly what had happened there. But it was a forerunner of what happened elsewhere. See it wasn't only Darwin. Broome was heavily bombed and that area there.

02:00 The Dutch flying boats came down to Broome flying their women and children out first from the East Indies which is now Indonesia, and these planes landed in the harbour at Broome and the Japanese trapped them and got the lot. Nothing was told about what happened. I

02:30 heard from a man who was well up and one of our neighbours. And he happened to be in Broome at the time. He got a boat and rowed out into the harbour and rescued some of these people. That was one of those things. They were coming further south than Darwin.

**You also hear stories about the Brisbane Line.**

03:00 Yes, that was...of course you didn't hear much about it except in parliamentary discussion about where will the resistance take place. I don't think the northern Queenslanders were important in terms of armament production and so on

03:30 so how were they going to service the troops. Some of the boys I knew at school came from northern New South Wales and they were enlisted in a group of farmers' sons or graziers sons who were going to shift all the cattle from northern parts of Australia and drive them south.

04:00 There were hundreds of these fellas signed up for that. That was their job. So they would lay waste the whole of the area that the Japanese would occupy. They would shoot all the cattle, blow up all the water

supplies and make Australia a hazardous place to invade.

04:30 Logically. Now how far south would you go? What would you do with a scorched earth policy? If you had troops in north Queensland, would they be trapped in those towns? About the only connection was a rather antiquated railway system that went up there to supply them, and limited road access. Limited water supply and all sorts of things.

05:00 So the Brisbane Line although it was a very contentious matter for people living in Queensland, but for people living in the rest of Australia, was it so? Not necessarily being aware, I didn't have an opinion on that, but I could see and understand

05:30 that most of the engineering works and that sort of thing...building our ships, manufacturing weaponry and so on was in the south. It had to be. Somewhere where that manufacturing base could supply the army in the north.

06:00 But I can surely understand that if you lived in Queensland you would take a very dim view of it.

**Well even though you had no choice to enter the services, you nevertheless were able to exercise your choice about which particular service you could go into?**

Another reason as I said early on,

06:30 I've never been much good with weapons, so in the navy I could find an occupation there that I could satisfy myself with, which I did eventually because I became interested in anti submarine detection and so on.

07:00 So that gave me an interest anyway.

**You just mentioned that you signed up in Sydney. Can you tell me where you went and what happened?**

I think I went to a navy recruiting office in Bridge Street or somewhere. They

07:30 said come back next week or whatever it was and I came back next week and they said here's your travel warrant. Be at Central Station at such and such a time and the troop train will take you down to Victoria Quay for elementary training. So I remember getting into this train with a lot of noisy boys.

08:00 The first time many of them had been away from home and they were exercising their rather interesting language and so forth. Saying goodbye to weeping mothers and parents and so on and whatever. Off we went south in this train. I remember waking up in Goulburn and it was cold.

08:30 And everyone else was cold. There was no heating. Then we went on further and changed trains at Albury onto the wider gauge and that took us straight down to Spencer Street where we changed trains at Spencer Street Station and then went down to Flinders Naval Depot south of Frankston.

**I'm wondering if you're able to go through that process**

09:00 **with a mate or if you were by yourself?**

No I wasn't. I didn't have any mates at all. They were all strangers to me. And they were a strange mixture too, but we got along fine. Some of them obviously had the larrikin spirit

09:30 when we went through railway stations and so on. If they saw anyone....they were whistling the girls and one thing or other and saying all sorts of unmentionable things. But it was surprising how quickly we all sort of blended into groups and messes down at Flinders.

**Well I'm wondering...you've described**

10:00 **yourself this morning as very well read and interested in things creative and languages. That's quite uncommon for a navy boy to have those kind of interests. How well were you received in that big bunch of boys?**

Well good. The first thing...I used to help some of my friends.

10:30 They weren't particularly well educated and they used to call me The Prof. So we had certain mathematical things we had to do. I've forgotten what they were, but it was elementary maths one and two and so on. I used to go and do them just for something to do.

11:00 The examinations and sometimes you would find chaps who had been in the navy for 10 or 15 years and they'd sit for these examinations before they became a petty officer. They would have to pass this examination on mathematics. Anyway I was coaching some of these guys. Anyway that's another story.

11:30 But as I say, it was interesting. And I was learning about people. They were just not fortunate enough to have had the education I had. And I would have to show them the procedures they had to go through. Some of them were quite grateful.

12:00 **You've mentioned maths and things...what were your core subjects that you had to do at Flinders?**

Well there wasn't a lot of that sort of thing. I forget now but I think it was something to do with elementary navigation and that. I suppose some of these fellows were going to go into gunnery

12:30 and study the projectiles or whatever. A certain amount of mathematical knowledge was required, particularly in emergencies and you had to know the points of the compass and all those sorts of things, winds and a bit about astronomy

13:00 and such like if an emergency did occur. You had to get out of strife.

**And I'm wondering when you were issued with a uniform?**

That's easy. The first day you arrived there...we arrived...no, I got to Flinders and it was dinner time at night, or supper time as they called it. I had the toughest steak I ever had in my life, I know that.

13:30 Mainly I think because we were a bit late in getting there. The rest of the establishment had been fed. So I think our steak had been sitting in the oven and drying out. But anyway, the next day we were marched down to the clothing store

14:00 and we each had a bag and we stripped off and dropped everything in that bag and then issued with a complete uniform and then we were marched. No...we were issued with a uniform and then we were marched into the next room where we were shown how to get dressed in the naval uniform. It was different to civilian clothes. And then we had this thing that we had to label to get sent back to our parents.

14:30 There was an old, a very kindly old fellow who was our instructor, Chief Petty Officer Oakey. He was called Jacko because at that time there was a fairly well known American actor named Oakey. But he was a Tingarra boy. The Tingarra boys were in the early part of the century. It was a sailing ship but she was demasted and so on.

15:00 But I can remember it in the harbour. It was a hulk and it was used as a training ship for boys who went to the navy and most of them in those days were orphans or perhaps uncontrollable kids and they went into the navy as boys. They might have been 10 or 11 or something like that. Anyway, he'd been in the navy all his life and

15:30 he had been retired and he taught us how to dress. How to put on your jacket and collar and all this sort of thing. And we were under his ...he was our instructor for all things during the first couple of months. Two months I think it was. He taught us the elementary training,

16:00 drill and so on. He was a very kindly old man and we were very fond of him. Later on we came under the control of the British marines. They had sent them out from England and they were almost brutal in their...what they expected from you. Well marines didn't have a very good name in the navy; most of the sailors hated them anyway.

16:30 But they were very demanding. You were running everywhere. You weren't allowed to run anywhere, you had to run. When you were being lectured the only way you could have...say you were being lectured on a machine gun, you were allowed to stand at ease,

17:00 then you could stand easy but you had to have your hands behind your back. You were never allowed to have your hands in your pockets. That was forbidden. And why he was lecturing you had to stand there with your hands behind your back listening. And if anyone moved like that he would bellow at you. Although you were standing easy you had to keep your hands behind your back.

17:30 Unless you had to do something on the machine gun or weaponry or whatever it was. And if you disobeyed him then up around the goal post on the playing field and you'd come back and he might say you took 2 minutes more than I think you should have. Do it again and if you didn't come back in the correct time then he would make you go around a third time. And of course there was a decent sort of flu ranging and you were coughing and spluttering.

18:00 And he would say, "Stop coughing. You can stop coughing!" And you'd see boys almost exploding. Then of course there was a very intensive physical training. They were just about as bad, the PTI's [Physical Training Instructors] . The Physical Training Instructors. You'd go down there at 6 o'clock in the morning

18:30 stripped to the waist and there'd be ice along the wharf close to the water's edge. And you'd go into this covered PT [physical training] area because they didn't want you standing out in the rain but you were stripped to the waist and although it's all iced up around you, within 10 minutes

19:00 you were perspiring. But you came out physically fit. We were in magnificent condition. We'd go up a rope in the drill hall. We'd just go straight up that rope. You had to haul your body up hand over hand. Those sorts of things. You were in very very good condition when you came out of that place. I don't think I've ever been so fit in all my life. But you were well fed and you were well clothed.

19:30 You lacked nothing. There was always plenty of food at your meal and if you wanted more you would go

back to the galley and come back for another load. But you would have a big breakfast and you'd come back in an hour and you were still hungry. They'd have you working it off.

20:00 And you were running all the time wherever you went, at the double. You would have a break at 10 o'clock and they might have a mug of soup for you, then you'd go back to it again. Then you'd have a big lunch, a 3 course lunch. Then in an hour you were hungry again because

20:30 you would be hard at it. So you were in a physical condition to stand anything after you came out of that place.

**And you mentioned there was quite a procedure learning how to dress with your uniform. How did you feel putting on that uniform?**

Oh a bit strange. But once

21:00 you ...you took pride in it. Every sailor is very proud of his uniform and they kept them in spotless condition. There was a pride in the navy about the uniform, so much so that...you've probably heard of the Tiddy suits and this sort of thing.

21:30 Although it was a uniform, it wasn't uniform in as much as you could change your uniform slightly to express your own individualism. You probably don't notice it but every sailor had a different sort of uniform to suit his own particular liking. In other words the jacket was V shaped

22:00 but someone may widen it to a U shape. The width of his bell bottoms may be larger...they were always a lot larger than the issued uniform.

**And how wide did you wear your bell bottoms?**

Not particularly because I wasn't interested in being excessive. I had

22:30 certain alterations made by the tailor at the depot. There was a tailor there in the depot itself and within reason he was always making certain alterations. But of course a lot of sailors when they were waiting to pick up a ship or something like that had special suits made at tailors in the cities.

23:00 There were people who specialised in this sort of thing. Different sort of tweed to the issue. And strangely enough the commanding officers of the ships encouraged this sort of thing because it created a sort of esprit de corps amongst the crew.

23:30 They were known...various ships were known for the type of uniform they had and this was understood by other sailors and understood by the community at large.

**It is interesting to hear you talk about self expression and almost individualism that you were allowed within a large team. Why**

24:00 **was that important?**

Well I think it's important in amongst a ship's company which is a fiercely loyal organisation ...is that what you're getting at?

24:30 I remember later on, towards the end of the war when we were up in China, some of our boys got into some trouble somewhere...I can't remember where it was. I think they were probably under the weather or something and they were reported by a captain of another ship in the flotilla.

25:00 Of course it came before the captain and there was a certain punishment required or stoppage of leave or whatever, but our captain went out to find some men off the ship belonging to that officer who had reported our fellows. He picked them up and ran them in and put them on a charge or whatever. I forget what it was,

25:30 but he had the loyalty of the crew. That was the talk of the ship, and that fixed him up. It was another tradition. I believe it did happen with Lord Louis Mountbatten for instance. After he was promoted to the Commander of the [HMS] Ark Royal or one of those carriers. It was in America for some sort of refit or repairs or something and

26:00 some of his sailors got into a fight or something and he went to the lower deck and went for a sailor's uniform that would fit him and he went ashore as a sailor and they chased around Boston or wherever it was to find these Americans which they did and they gave them a hiding. You can imagine how loyal his sailors were.

26:30 This story might be fantasy but I think it's the sort of thing the guy would have done. So as I say there was tremendous loyalty about the ships. Even bringing a ship alongside the wharf. It was a very anxious time for the whole crew, as the ship comes in. Now it doesn't matter, they just bang them against the wharf.

27:00 But it was a matter of pride that that ship be brought alongside gently to that wharf and tied up. If you were tying up along another ship it would be, the other ship would have all their sailors along the side with grins on their faces waiting to see if you could get the ship alongside without banging into the

other one. So there was that sort of pride in your seamanship.

- 27:30 We can do it better than you can you know. Sometimes these little corvettes were often very difficult things to manoeuvre in a harbour. There might be the current or the wrong movement or the wrong propeller being turned in the wrong direction or something and you could mess up the whole operation.
- 28:00 That was just a bit of seamanship that came into it. I remember someone used to talk about the Queen Mary I think it was going across the America on its maiden voyage. They got to New York and the American tug boats went on strike when she came in there. They were going to fix these Limeys [slang for British and specifically British sailors]. Anyway the captain said, "That's no trouble we'll take the ship in." He took it in without tugs,
- 28:30 brought it in and stopped it at the wharf 2 or 3 feet off the wharf and they just dropped the lines over the bollards and tied it up. That's the way it's done. Captain Bissett I think his name was. That was master of seamanship which had been his life. He could manage to bring in 80,000 tons and bring it in to stop on the dot.
- 29:00 **Well I'm wondering, going back to Flinders. You've described some of the physical training that you had to undergo and the mathematical studies and navigation, I'm wondering if there were any unspoken initiations that happened?**
- 29:30 No, there was no initiations or bastardry or whatever it was. No. It was a very matey sort of arrangement. There were boys from all sections of the community and we got along famously. There were a couple of people
- 30:00 who were just unpopular because of their habits or their attitude or so forth and were on the outer with the general run. And sometimes there were...in their hammocks at night, there would be some fellows reading their Bibles.
- 30:30 And that today...but they were boys from religious families and so on. They were still carrying on with their beliefs the same way they had been before. It was a different sort of attitude in those days. I don't know how long...
- 31:00 most of those fellows carried on their upbringing throughout their service time. I took my hat off to them because they were prepared to put up with ridicule. I think in some ways it was quite courageous of them. I wasn't particularly religious myself but they were and I take my hat off to them.
- 31:30 **Was this your first time away from home?**
- Yes.
- And whether perhaps you were feeling... 'oh my goodness what have I got myself in for?' Or whether you were feeling quite happy?**
- 32:00 I think most of the boys who I was with, most of them became mates and most of them did fairly well after life in the navy. There
- 32:30 were not too many who ended up on skid row type of thing. And I've found that at reunions and so on... where have I been? Very few of them fell by the way side. Most of them have been successful in business or in their jobs.
- 33:00 I don't know if it was the navy training that had something to do with that. But they endured hardship and knew what it was to put up with that sort of thing. It's true. There were some who missed the bus but generally speaking it was all part of character building.
- And how were you all**
- 33:30 **given your postings?**
- Oh right. They might have said, you've done this so you can have a week's leave and then present yourself at the railway, light transport office at such and such an hour and so on and you'll be on the train to Brisbane. So that's what happened.
- 34:00 On these troop trains...you were put on the train and it was 4 men to 3 bunks. The ones on the ground floor had to sleep head to toe sort of thing with the two above. So
- 34:30 we got on the train and they sent us off to Brisbane. We were fed at Gosford, no at Gloucester We got a meal at Gloucester and somewhere else. We got out at Roma Street Station and we were bussed to Norton Naval Depot which was
- 35:00 on the Brisbane River. You presented yourself there and they said "Your ship's down the river somewhere". You were bussed down to that and I went onto the [HMAS] Lithgow with my bag and my hammock. And one other fellow who was joining from Tasmania. I was there with a Tasmanian boy who had been

- 35:30 through the gunnery school in Flinders. So we walked on board and that was at 12 o'clock. The coxswain of the ship said "You're in such and such a mess." and I went down there and they were just having lunch. So I had lunch on board and I think the next day we put to sea.
- 36:00 That was after three months at Flinders and I think I was delayed leaving Flinders because I got dysentery or something which was raging down there at the time. I was in hospital for a week and so it was about four months before I was on board a ship.

**Perhaps before we hear more about the Lithgow we can go back to ...**

- 36:30 **Just tell me. You mentioned you had to pass exams. What was your ranking?**

Ordinary seaman. Or OD[Ordinary Seaman] as they call it. It was a term of contempt but that's all part of it. OD, I think that meant Ordinary Deckhand. It's going back to historic days.

- 37:00 See you could join the navy at 17 and some boys I met were at sea at the age of 17. And they were called Ordinary Seamen Second Class, so OD2s. When they became 18 well they were able to apply and
- 37:30 become an Ordinary Seaman, then after 12 months of that or thereabouts, probably with an exam or something, you became an able seaman.

**It's interesting to hear that you fell ill while you were down...**

I think it was one of those things...a bacteria or something that went through. There were about 7000 ratings down there at the time.

- 38:00 I can't remember now, but something like that. Of course you were living in pretty close quarters. You were right next door to each other. You slung your hammocks down and that sort of thing and the fellow next to you was hard up against you. So whatever anyone had they pass it on.

- 38:30 So this bacteria went very rapidly through the whole barracks. Anyway I was in hospital for about a week or so.

**And you've just mentioned that you were actually sleeping in hammocks at Flinders?**

- 39:00 Yes. Immediately you got there you were shown how to sling a hammock and you had to learn how to do that because that was going to be your bed for the next so many years of your life.

**And how did you react to that?**

I thought it was fun.

- 39:30 It was quite a comfortable sort of bed once you got used to it. If you were tired enough. You were exhausted by 9 o'clock and you wanted to sleep. You grabbed the bar on one end and threw your legs over it and slid down into your hammock.

- 40:00 The hammock was canvas and a thin mattress about that thick. Then you had two blankets which were tucked around you and then the hammock folded around you and you were warm. It was a good system. Every sailor had his hammock over one shoulder and wherever he went he was self contained.

- 40:30 **So did you take that hammock you were sleeping in with you when you left?**

Yes. Wherever you went. The first thing you grabbed was bag and hammock. In your bag you had every scrap of clothing and toiletry and everything in, and in your hammock you had something. It was like a swag.

## Tape 3

- 00:34 **I wonder Henry, you mentioned that you were quite a good reader, what books did you take with you when you set sail?**

I can't remember much in the way of books that I took but we had a library on some of the ships. Yes, both ships we had a ship's library.

- 01:00 It had some quite interesting books to read. Admittedly there was a sea going bias in the selection of stuff there. But in the amount of time that you had available to read in your hammock, or where you could find a spot which was quiet and peaceful where you could read...I read every book in the library.

- 01:30 Occasionally I would buy some books if we were in port in Brisbane. Mostly during time off I would go through the second hand shops and book shops and see what was available. I'd pick up something occasionally but I can't remember exactly what I did get up there. It was a habit I developed and I've still got the habit of going into second hand book shops looking at old books and so on. I read quite

- 02:00 a bit while I was away in the time available. I didn't have much time for it of course because you were

hard at work and when you weren't at work you were pretty tired. But I managed to keep reading. A group of us on one of the ships...

02:30 the [HMAS] Maryborough later on. We took up a correspondence course with the Sydney Technical College. We did double entry book keeping or something like that and amongst other things.

**I wonder. The first ship you were on the Lithgow. I wonder if you could describe for me the Lithgow and your first trip on it?**

Good question.

03:00 Yes, the first trip. As we joined it we were sent to sea the following day as I recounted earlier, and that day we went out with one of the submarines and the mother ship [USS] Fulton, an American mother ship who had about a dozen submarines attached to her.

03:30 She was berthed in the Brisbane River. We went out to do exercises that following day. We were about 100 kilometres off the coast. We would attack it and it would attack us and we would play war games out there developing methods of attack and defence and so on.

04:00 We'd chase it and drop hand grenades on it which would come up on their sonar system and they would find out how close we could get to them and then the final thing was we would drop a depth charge on them...just to prepare them for the case that they might be attacked

04:30 by sub chasers or something of that nature. And they would have that experience and know how to handle it. Then we'd eventually come back to Brisbane and off we'd go somewhere else. This was always very rough out there. We did this with a number of submarines. We were training them all. In between times we would convoy

05:00 ships from Brisbane up to Gladstone. And that's where the Barrier Reef comes into the picture. It was assumed that Japanese would not try and send submarines in behind the reef because it would be too dangerous for submarines to go in there. So we would escort these merchant ships up the coast. They might be ships that had come up from Sydney or Melbourne. We would pick them up from Moreton Bay and escort them to Gladstone and then come back to Brisbane for another convoy or

05:30 take a convoy down to Brisbane from Gladstone and back. Then probably out on another training exercise with the Americans. The Americans were creating havoc with Japanese shipping of course. They were being very destructive. But they still had to sail all the way up

06:00 around New Guinea and then further up towards the South China Seas or wherever they were having a shot at the Japs. It was my first time at sea and for the first week or the first fortnight or so I was extremely sea sick because these ships were murder to everyone subject to seasickness. Some

06:30 would be chronically seasick. You had boys who didn't eat any food, they just couldn't take it. Some would go to the canteen and you could buy canned peaches and some of these boys would just swallow canned peaches, but then they'd still vomit those up.

07:00 And so what would happen to them, they would be sent to a larger ship. The motionless ship is more gentle. Some unfortunately went to other ships. One good friend went to ...two of them. They were both good friends in my watch and they went to the [HMAS] Australia. One of them unfortunately was killed in the kamikaze

07:30 attacks on the Australia up in the Philippines. But after a while I found I could stand up to most of the ship's movement. Rolling from side to side, no trouble. But the thing we used to call pile driving was when the ship rose up through a wave and drops

08:00 like that. You get the same effect when you're in a fast lift. But you then you come down and then it lifts you up and then you're down again. That I found very difficult to get used to but eventually I did.

**What could you do to cope with the seasickness?**

About the only thing to do was...I found that fresh air was the best thing I could do.

08:30 I would always get on the upper deck somewhere and spend as much time as possible and never go down below deck because down there the air is foul. You've got about 100 people living and sleeping and everything else. And you've got all your portholes or scuttles as we call them closed up. So the only bits of air are coming in through the ventilators.

09:00 And that wasn't much. But the air was always foul and that was enough to make anybody sick. Even at night in your hammocks...your hammock is rising or falling and rocking side to side or which ever way it is going. Some fellas when they had been sick a couple of times and had nothing in their stomachs, so they could sleep.

09:30 Other times I'd see men...these boys in severe weather they would even be lying in their own bile. They would be in companionways from the mess deck to the outer deck. And you'd have to pick them up and wash their faces and put them somewhere where they could lie down. But they were just hopeless

cases.

10:00 **How much could you do around the ship when you were suffering from seasickness?**

Well you just had to. Even if you were on watch. If you were up on the bridge and you called out to the officer of the watch you would have to say, "Sir permission to vomit."

10:30 So would still have to get back to your position as a watch keeper, or whatever you were doing. Even if you were doing something with the ropes or the rigging or whatever. But ok, most everyone was sick too.

**I wonder if there was any prejudice or stigma against people who did suffer from seasickness?**

Oh no no. Everybody understood. And you had sympathy for the fella who

11:00 was sick.

**How long would it take before you settled down?**

About a month and I was right. I got used to it and I had no trouble after that. Even later on when I was on the Maryborough and we were coming back from China and we went through a typhoon. I've got photographs of that I'll show later.

11:30 That was really ferocious weather. The South China Sea is noted for it. But then there were fellas who had been in the service for many years, and out of our mess of 12 men,

12:00 we were down to two, myself and another one. Crossing the South China Sea...Nicholas Monserrat who wrote the story about HMS Corvette, he said the ships had a maddening rhythm. It was something about them that would drive you mad.

**Given that there were so many people being sick in quite dangerous weather conditions,**

12:30 **where were they being sick? Were they able to get onto the deck?**

It depended. If you were in a closed space you'd have a bucket. You'd vomit into the bucket or otherwise you'd let fly over the side. It depended on where you were. Just to state a gruesome case. I can well remember a man being in the crow's nest and he couldn't come down. He was watch keeping in the crow's nest.

13:00 He was violently ill there and I can remember this bile going over the top of the funnel and going down onto the quarter deck where there were a group of men mine sweeping. And then there was a hardened seaman...I can remember this vividly; he sort of licked his lips and then went over to the side and vomited.

13:30 It was a matter of psychologically...he thought he was going to be sick and he was. Some people never conquer it but others can put up with it.

**You mentioned sleeping in the hammock before. I'm wondering where you were stringing the hammocks up?**

14:00 We were very very tightly packed. You were allowed about 450 millimetres of space...for each hammock. Not between them. So you would be rubbing against the two fellows on either side of you...

14:30 if the ship was rolling because they were slung fore and aft. But that was all the space you had. But in a room say 3 metres by 3 metres you might have 15 men living in that, eating, sleeping and living.

15:00 That's their house or whatever it may be. But it was very very crowded.

**Was there ever a case where there wasn't enough room for anyone to sling their hammock?**

Yes as the ship's company built up and more equipment was put on the ship, they had to put more men on and so there were other spots which you could use. There was a mess deck table and then there was a settee against the side of the ship.

15:30 That was always occupied by someone who got there in the first place and he had bagged it as his. So there was room for two there. And in heavy weather I used to find the best place was the mess deck table and I'd sleep on that. And I've even slept on what you would call a form.

16:00 A school form, the two legged things, about 15 inches wide. I've slept on one of those. While the ship was rolling you'd hang one leg around the mess deck table and then the form wouldn't fall over and you wouldn't fall off and you'd sleep under those conditions. That's not at night but under daylight conditions when you did have time for a bit of a sleep.

16:30 **What kind of sleep would you get in a situation like that?**

Well you were just so desperately tired always. You were always ready to sleep. That's a sailor's life. Your whole life you were living for the time, as we said, that you could get your head down.

**You mentioned 15 men living in a very small area. How do you cope with that?**

- 17:00 Well it gets bigger and bigger and bigger the longer you are at sea. It's a funny thing. After a while there's plenty of room. You get used to bumping into someone all the time. The bathroom is possibly 2 metres by 3 metres
- 17:30 and there could be 10 fellows washing and bathing in that space. Two hand basins I think and two showers. Four men would be shaving, one putting his head across the other to get a shave or washing his face or doing his teeth or whatever, and some
- 18:00 one be occupying the shower and someone waiting to go under the shower. And if you were in a bit of a hurry then you'd bring a bucket in and tip that over yourself. But you're up against bodies all the time. That's the thing that sailors are just used to. The ships were designed in England mostly and they didn't have
- 18:30 much room for bathing. It was a different climate. In the tropics where we're used to it, the bodies have to be washed. But we're allowed one bucket of water when we're at sea. They wouldn't allow the showers. The showers were only allowed to the stokers who were covered in grease and what have you. We were allowed a bucket of water so you had to soap yourself over and it wasn't a full bucket either.
- 19:00 But you would soap yourself down and what was left over you tipped over yourself.

**What could you do, given that you were so close to these people if there was someone in your mess that you didn't get along with?**

If there was anyone you didn't get along with in the mess, they were no trouble to you

- 19:30 because ...you're talking about homosexuality are you? If there was anyone in the mess that you didn't get along with, you just took no notice of them and just disregarded them.

**What if they were sleeping in the bunk next door to you?**

Well you'd just put up with it. Even if he was snoring or whatever.

**I was just wondering about the very close quarters. I mean there's 15 very different personalities?**

- 20:00 Oh sure. But you just had to get along. If you hated the guy next door then you just disregarded him. You didn't look for an opportunity to stir him up or anything like that.
- 20:30 There were fellows that you didn't like and as best you could you avoided their company and if it wasn't that you just avoided any communication. But there wasn't too much of that because you were dependent on one another.

**You mentioned homosexuality?**

- 21:00 I didn't find it in both the ships I was on. In one case there was one. There was one chap who was homosexual but he didn't show any attempt to practice. We didn't find out until later on that he was. So he had enough sense to maintain his equilibrium whilst he was on ship.
- 21:30 **Given how closely you were showering together, what would have happened if you had found out that someone in your mess was homosexual?**
- Look, when you were having your shower, there was a lot of ribaldry going on in the shower all the time and this was part of a sailor's life.
- 22:00 For what of a better term it's a very ribald community. They get up to all sorts of tricks and jokes and acting and one thing and another, just to...they're great humorous sailors. They express themselves in that way. And in both cases I found, on both ships, and I suppose I was lucky...to be on ships
- 22:30 that nothing strange was going on. Mostly...now I don't want to be...how will I say? Fellows who were homosexual found themselves not necessarily amongst the seamen. They might be stewards or
- 23:00 something of that nature. I might be saying the wrong thing. Just as certain occupations seem to suit homosexuals, the same thing happens on board a ship, but they were not the normal run of seaman. Homosexuals as a rule have very very refined taste
- 23:30 as a rule, and so they would avoid the rougher side of life.

**Given how close you were all living together again, what could you do for some privacy?**

I don't know.

- 24:00 If the ship mates were together and you wanted privacy, I don't think you could do anything about that. It's hard to give you an answer.

**Was there anywhere you could go to be alone?**

Oh yes. That's right. If someone

24:30 was playing cards or something and there was a lot of talk. Sailors are great story tellers and one thing or another. They can create a lot of noise and yes there were certain places you could find where it would be quiet and you could sleep. One was the favourite spot of some of us and that was the hammock bin. All the hammocks were thrown into a square

25:00 sort of box. You could climb into that and you could curl up in amongst the hammocks and have a snooze if you wanted to. Another spot was down in the mine sweeping store. I would sometimes get into a coil of rope. They were wound in a coil and you would get in and curl up in that

25:30 and you could have a snooze. There were all sorts of places like that. You might have a favourite spot if no one was there before you. You could get a bit of peace and quiet for half an hour or quarter of an hour's sleep or something like that. Even on a small ship.

**I was just wondering how important it was to have even a half an hour?**

26:00 I think it was very important, yes. You could sort of forget the world and as I say, I did that on quite a few occasions. In your stand down time and you were lucky enough to get enough of it and you could have a sleep. See you were broken up into the watch keeping. You were broken up into four hour stints

26:30 so if you were on watch at 12 o'clock until 4 o'clock in the morning, you could get some sleep from 9 o'clock to 12. You'd get up and dress yourself then be on watch for 4 hours. Then at 4 o'clock in the morning you'd get undressed and get into your hammock

27:00 and get another 2 or if you were lucky 3 hours. Then you were woken up and had breakfast and then you had to get out and do what we call part of ship work which was painting the deck or removing rust and all those sorts of things. The pumping of water for the showers, the scrubbing the decks and keeping your mess deck clean and so on.

27:30 The ship had to be scrubbed down. It was surprising how you could be at sea for months and it would still get dirty. Where it comes from I don't know. No one ever knew. The first thing in the morning, one of the first duties on duty watch was to scrub the mess deck. You scrubbed the tables and you scrubbed the floor and you scrubbed the toilets and the showers, and the passageways.

28:00 And you polished up this and that and you still had to do the washing up afterwards. You still had to prepare the...someone had to peel the potatoes for the next meal and that was all part of your duties. You were fully occupied all the time. But you had the first dog watch which was from 4 o'clock to 6 o'clock,

28:30 then you were stood down and you could have your afternoon tea, a cup of tea and a slice of bread and jam, and you could play a game of cards or write letters home, read a book or have a snooze or whatever it was until 6 o'clock when you had supper and then 6 o'clock was the beginning of the second dog watch. And then that

29:00 went on until 8 o'clock, then that particular one was off duty and they would go on to the evening watch. Then the previous watches on deck would be changed and they would change over and come down at 4 o'clock and so on.

**You mentioned the daily duties on the ship,**

29:30 **what was the worst duty to be assigned to?**

I suppose doing the scrubbing out and that sort of thing. But the duty watch would do that and that would be scrubbing the floor and cleaning up and polishing everything up. Scrubbing I suppose the latrines.

30:00 And seeing everything was spotlessly clean there. But that was usually performed by a gentleman who was known as the Captain of the Heads. It had certain...although it was the bottom of the line as far as duties went, it had certain compensations for whoever was doing it. Privileges. It was a small area to be scrubbed and cleaned out so

30:30 he was always finished and had his feet up. But that was a particular person who was satisfied to do that. He had the privilege of probably having a snooze for a bit longer or getting somewhere where he could have a snooze. But he was Captain of the Heads.

**Did that seem a suitable privilege for the job?**

It was surprising. Someone always seemed to not mind.

31:00 A great enjoyable time in the navy was peeling potatoes. In the army and other services that was considered non use, but to get on deck with a basket full of potatoes and a tub of water and two or three friends with a sailor's knife. You could peel potatoes and tell stories

31:30 to one another. It was a very enjoyable thing. Particularly if you had a nice tropical breeze blowing over

you. An hour of that was a very pleasant occupation I found.

### **Who was doing your cooking?**

We had 3 cooks. One was the officers' cook. He was a pretty senior bloke in the culinary side, and then there were two other cooks.

32:00 And generally there was one fellow...they were generally made up of enlisted bakers or something like that. We were lucky in as much as we had a very good baker. One of the cooks was a baker by profession. Even in port when bread was generally bought from a bakery, the captain would insist that this guy bake bread.

32:30 So he got certain privileges because he did that...because the captain thought his bread was so good. And it was good bread. So as I say he as the cook got these privileges for doing those sorts of things. So again getting back to it. We had 3 cooks but we had to prepare the food. That was the duty watch would prepare the food and take

33:00 it to the galley where the cook would put it in the oven or fry it or grill it or casserole it. But we would prepare the vegetables.

### **What was the health like on the ship?**

33:30 Pretty good. We had one sick berth attendant. We weren't big enough to have a doctor. So we had one sick berth attendant who was trained in paramedics, and he would generally look after us. The health was pretty good. I don't remember anything extraordinary happening. I know two guys

34:00 were drafted off the ship as alcoholics. But that wasn't as a result of the ship. They had collected their excessive drinking ashore. The health on the ship was pretty good generally. We had no cases of venereal disease on those two ships.

34:30 The only thing that did happen was, living in close quarters, some ships, and fortunately not in my case and time, we did have...after it was discovered there were cases of asbestosis. There were a number of our fellows who died of that. You fire a gun and you rattle the ship and the asbestos would fall off the ceiling, the deck head.

35:00 But one thing that did happen on a number of ships was tuberculosis. One chap might have TB [tuberculosis] and that would very rapidly pass through the crew, living in such close quarters.

35:30 I know it did happen on some particular ships. There would be an outbreak and later on we found out.

### **Just before we go on can you give me a description of the Lithgow ...just describe what it looked like?**

36:00 Well there's photographs I can show you. It was a lot smaller than the Manly Ferry, and you had space for 90 men in the fo'c'sle, and you had 6 officers in the wardroom. The rest was taken up with stores and so on.

36:30 Ok let's have a look at it. You've got ...we were talking about the galley. They was right in the heart of the ship where it was close to the boiler room for steam and one thing and another. There were store rooms down below, a cool room, like a butcher's cool room where we stored the meat which would keep us going for a few weeks.

37:00 It was close to the store for dry goods and so on, flour and the like. And all the other things like canned goods to keep the crew fed. Then there was ...the Mess Deck was in the fo'c'sle which is the higher part of the ship and where it comes down to the break or the other main deck. Below the crew's quarter, the seamen, stokers, coders and signalmen were in the main part of the fo'c'sle. Below them were the petty officers. You went down

37:30 one set of ladders to the petty officers quarters and artificers area. Then below them were the stores and some of the ammunition which was kept as close to the underside of the ship as possible. Then going astern from there you've got on each side of the galley you would have the bathrooms for the men, the bathrooms and toilets. There were two passageways which would separate the galley from the bathrooms. Then going back from that you would come to the boiler room which

38:00 astern of that, which was accessible from the deck. Then astern of the boiler room was the engine room and then astern of the engine room would be the wardroom where the officer's cabins were. There were four officers cabins and then the wardroom itself where they ate, and which was their recreation area.

38:30 Then astern of that is the mine sweeping store where all the gear, the ropes and cables and so on are kept. Going ahead of the forward of the seamen's mess, there was a paint store where they kept the paint and ahead of that again was the chain locker where all the cables for the anchors were kept. Underneath

39:00 the forward part of the seamen's door was the anti submarine detection apparatus and also the gyro compass. A compass room. The anti submarine detection ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Commission or sub detector] dome was a ...the dome used to slide up and down

- 39:30 and when it was operating it would be sent down below the underside of the ship to pick up echoes. So that's the general confirmation of the ship itself. And then above that you've got the captain's cabin which was above the upper deck. He had a cabin of his own and his own bathroom and whatever. Then above that again and to one side of that you had the communications
- 40:00 section where they had the wireless telegraph room and the decoders room, and over the top of that was the wheel house where the steering took place and also the chart room which had the charts for all the areas where the ship would be going to.

## Tape 4

00:33 **Henry you were going to describe what your job was on the ship?**

Well as I say I became fascinated with this anti submarine detection business and on the Lithgow we were short of an ASDIC operator and the ASDIC officer asked me if I would be interested.

- 01:00 I said I would give it a try, so he put me in this little box and I was shown how to operate this little wheel that you turned around which had a compass repeater on it and that repeated the position of the main compass, the gyro compass. You turned the wheel.

- 01:30 You could turn it two and a half degrees and it would fire out a signal, what we used to call a ping. It would ping off until it struck something and then it would come back, the echo would come back. It had a little dial on the side with an iodised paper and it would mark out on this paper roll as it was

- 02:00 turning over how far this echo was. If that object was moving either way, it would be a ship obviously, then it would trace its position. So this process interested me and he said "Would I like to do it?"

- 02:30 So they gave me further training on it during the quiet times and eventually I became reasonably expert at it without any formal training.

**Was the training they were giving you in the quiet times?**

I would sit in there and if anything happened I would call out to the senior rating in that branch and he'd come and investigate what it was. This happened until such time as I went down to Rushcutters Bay to train. But anyway

- 03:00 So that was as far as watch keeper was concerned, I was doing that. But also as well as that you had to do your normal watch, your observations sitting up on deck with binoculars keeping a watch on the horizon or going up to the masthead in the crows nest and watching it from there.

- 03:30 So you had...that was the normal business of watch keeping. Or you might be the messenger on a ship which was the bosun's mate. There was always one fellow who was designated as the bosun's mate and you'd go around with the bosun's pipe and you'd blow the pipe and

- 04:00 give out any instructions from the officer of the watch or the captain or the first lieutenant as to what should be done or whatever. That was the communication system. So that was watch keeping generally.

**Just on watching the horizon, how hard was it to maintain your concentration?**

Difficult.

- 04:30 You would be sitting there with binoculars and sometimes your eyes would get fatigued and you would do certain tricks. You might turn around and look out of the corners of your eyes for awhile. You would keep switching your focal position, and after an hour...

- 05:00 that's about enough. You've had enough of that, so you would swap to some other job. And what we used to do...if you had binoculars to your eyes all the time then you would probably go to a position where you weren't using binoculars and watch certain other things. Not so much in the Pacific I suppose, but in the North Sea and places like that, keeping an eye out for submarines and periscopes

- 05:30 and things was important. That was particularly hazardous. You could spot torpedo trails and that sort of thing but that would be extraordinary if you did that. You could sometimes though. But it was... whatever you were doing you could only stand it for about an hour, then you

- 06:00 would have to turn around and do something else. During the four hours you generally got one hour where you could get down behind the bridge somewhere out of the wet or wind for a ....someone might go down and get a mug of kai which was cocoa. They would dish out mugs of cocoa to the watch keepers

- 06:30 every hour, to freshen them up. That was another part of the scheme of things. But you had to watch... during your watch keeping, you had to be very intense about your duty. Not only were you dependent upon it but the whole convoy was.

07:00 **How great was the treat of either enemy submarines or shipping?**

There were a lot of ships sunk off the Australian coast. It's been recorded of course. First of all the Germans were active with the raiders around the place.

07:30 There were also German submarines who were around and got as far as Tokyo and back. They were active. But the Japanese themselves were very active. See, iron ore was being brought from South Australia up to Newcastle to manufacture steel and of course they knew that and a number of the ore carriers were sunk. And coal was sent back to Whyalla from Newcastle on the

08:00 return trip and they also knew that. So a great spot for them was around Cape Howe and Gabo Island down there as the ships turned the corner. There were some ships sunk there. Just prior to my joining the Lithgow, the Centaur had been sunk. The captain's sister was a

08:30 nurse on the Centaur and he was very upset naturally. He announced to the ship's company at a gathering that if we ever got any of these guys just what we would be doing to them. Some raised their eyebrows at this but anyway it wasn't long after that that I joined the ship.

09:00 We were going out to sea with an American submarine. Here was I straight up from Flinders fresh from training and so. I had been in the navy for about 4 months and we were going out to sea with this American submarine at night. We were on watch and we saw flashes on the horizon. And of course the captain thought this

09:30 was interesting. Something's being attacked out there so he ordered full steam ahead. Action stations. My job for action stations was to operate one of the engine room's telegraphs which was up on the bridge. You've seen these things...ding ding ding. I was operating one of these things and I

10:00 requested to be able to go down and get my...I didn't have my Mae West [lifejacket] with me. Anyway I was given permission to go and I wrapped it around myself and tied a knot and then I was back on this wheel. There's the wheel in a box and when you go into this box where the wheel is you take your knife off

10:30 so you haven't got anything magnetic. In this case there was an old seaman...when I say old, he was fully 30, but he was known as Old Sam to us kids. Sam looked at me and he said, "Robbie, take that Mae West off and blow it up and tie it on properly." He was an old sailor who had been in the North Sea and had been sunk

11:00 and God knows what. He was very experienced. I remember going back and blowing this thing up. And there were flashes on the horizon and action stations. Have you ever had the feeling when a person with a very cold hand reaches down and grabs your heart, it's that sort of terror. It really is an extraordinary feeling.

11:30 Anyway this particular time, after about 10 minutes, we're getting closer to it and it turned out to be the Australia and the [HMAS] Arunta having a practice shoot. But that was within 4 months of my training... and I was thinking this is it.

12:00 I can remember that cold feeling. It was extraordinary. But anyway, just a little story.

**What did you do to overcome that feeling and keep working?**

I don't know. Everyone experiences it. But when you're busy at something else you tend to forget it. But it was just these few minutes when you were just waiting and it's rather terrifying.

12:30 **What drills did you have or what plan did you have if the ship was attacked?**

Oh you had the operational training. Every morning at 6 o'clock you would have action stations and what ever you had to do. It didn't matter...it was every morning.

13:00 It was dawn action stations and everyone had to man all the guns and prime everything. If there was going to be an attack it was the most likely time they would attack. Everyone is at their lowest ebb just before dawn, so you had that training. You knew what you had to do. Do nothing else but that.

**What was your plan if the ship was hit and sinking?**

13:30 Oh I don't know. I knew what life boat I had to go to. There were two boats. There was a motor boat and a whaler and you were lucky if you got one of them. But the other ones were Carly floats [flotation device for seamen] and I was port Carly float or something. Starboard Carly float, nearest the seamen's mess. You knew exactly how to release these things.

14:00 You knew exactly what your duties were. You had been shown that and trained in that at Flinders. But there was nothing like being trained in actual service. You learn more rapidly that way with practical experience. You knew, if we were under attack you knew exactly what you had to do.

14:30 **What chance would the Lithgow had had against Japanese submarine?**

Well none of our ships were ever torpedoed. They were very small ships. And if you were a Japanese submarine you would attack a ship carrying ammunition or troops or something like that. That

15:00 would be a much better target than trying to pop one of these small ships off. Although often it was the case...depending on what the ships were doing. Ships like the Armidale which was sent over to Timor, well she was a sitting duck. That story is fairly well known.

15:30 That wasn't submarine. That was aircraft bombing.

**What chance did a submarine have against the Lithgow?**

Well we often discussed this ourselves. Some of the Japanese submarines were big submarines. They were very heavily armed.

16:00 I've overheard conversation with the officers discussing if we met one of these on the surface what would we do. Well we could certainly attack him but he had a lot heavier weapons than we had. And I'm not even talking about his torpedoes but the guns they had on the big Japanese submarines. And they're a hard thing to hit from a distance. They're not a very big target.

16:30 There's not much you can do about that. Some extraordinary things happened. I think one of Indian corvettes built here in Australia, she sailed up and attacked a German raider. It drove

17:00 it off. It was attacking one of the merchant ships. It was very cheeky. I forget the story now but the Japanese admiral reckoned that the Indian only had to land one shell in the right place...if he was carrying mines or something. It would have been goodnight. So it wasn't worth while staying around to pop him off.

17:30 Far better to attack a large merchant ship rather than the corvette. They had their advantages.

**What was the greatest disadvantage about the corvette?**

Well I think mainly they were under armed and they were too slow. They would make no more than, flat out than 17 knots.

18:00 But I guess they built the engines at the railway locomotive workshops at Eveleigh or somewhere or other and took them down to the dockyard and put them into a ship and said there you are, off you go. So virtually the ship was propelled by two railway locomotive engines, or the equivalent.

18:30 So they couldn't make much more than 17 knots which is not very fast. And they could only just keep up with the submarine on the surface at that rate. Sometimes the submarine could outstrip them, but if the submarine was submerged then they could always chase the sub and get the depth charges in.

19:00 Even the depth charge in a depth charge attack, it had to be awfully accurate to do any damage. So you frightened the enemy sub to stay on the bottom or give up the attack and then to return to your position as rapidly as possible, and maintain your convoy position. This sort of training and the methods

19:30 were practised up against the German Wolf Cub and the submarine wolf packs that they had in the Atlantic. They would attack a big convoy with half a dozen submarines. You might be chasing one but you might be having five more firing torpedoes at you. That was rough stuff.

**I wonder with the convoys that you were**

20:00 **escorting, how quickly were you moving in those convoys usually?**

Well we would be making about 12 or 13 knots. A lot of times the old ships that we were escorting, carrying coal and iron ore they couldn't make more than about 8 knots. So they would hold the whole convoy up.

20:30 As one of the stories that the sailors put out, that there was a submarine in the area and this chap was making about 8 knots and complaining that he couldn't keep up and someone told him there was a submarine in the area so he made about 12 knots. But as I say the convoys were...they were down to about 8 or 10 knots.

21:00 It depended on what ships were ...how fast they were and how they were organised.

**How nerve racking was it to be going slower than the bigger ships?**

It would have been pretty nerve racking on those ships.

**I was just wondering for the crew of the Lithgow?**

Oh, well...it didn't seem to occur to us much.

21:30 It was just the normal run of things. You were occupied with your daily duties and you didn't think much about it at that age. The people in the wardroom, the officers were probably more serious about it than we were. I remember well, we were going up with a couple of troop ships up to Milne Bay

- 22:00 and on the way through we picked up a ping of a submarine and we attacked and then raced back to our normal position in the convoy. I remember our captain was a bit of a showman and he let one depth charge off at fairly shallow depth and it sent a huge mountain of water up and then we raced up
- 22:30 with our black flag flying and sailed up alongside, and as we went past these troop ships to get back into position and all the soldiers came back on deck and gave us a great cheer as we went past. But I think this was the captain. He was a bit of an actor. I think he was putting on an act...it was probably good for the soldiers knowing the navy was there protecting them. We thought it was goodoh, the soldiers gave us a cheer.
- 23:00 We got back into our position and proceeded on as normal. Just one of those little things that happened. I can remember that well.
- Did you feel that the navy was appreciated?**
- I'm sure they were. We got on well
- 23:30 with the diggers. They seemed to like what the sailors were doing. I think it would have given them a feeling of safety. If you've never been on a ship before, and a couple of thousand of you might be on one of these ships. It would have been good for morale.
- 24:00 And then again the corvettes had...earlier than this they had quite a bit of work to do up in the islands. They transported soldiers around to the north side of New Guinea for the attack on Buna and Gona and those places. We could go in there because they were shallow draft and we could get in close and put the soldiers ashore. There was a bit of camaraderie there.
- 24:30 **How would things have been different for a lot of those convoys had you not been there?**
- What the corvettes?
- Yes, just for the rest of the convoy if the corvettes had not been there?**
- It would have been hopeless. It would have been a free for all.
- 25:00 You just couldn't move the men. They made the movement of Australian troops possible. It's not only the fighting troops but all the other members in the army. There was all sorts of personnel.
- 25:30 The air force people had their own air transport. But all the other ancillary equipment that went with the army. Like the fellas who were in transport and supplies and hospitals and everything. They were all dependant on arriving at the point of action. The only way it could be done was by ships. See all the old coastal ships
- 26:00 were all commandeered for this work. It enabled the Australian war machine to function.
- You mentioned before that your captain had a sister on the Centaur, I wonder as a member of the navy, how did the sinking of the Centaur breach the naval moral code?**
- It certainly did
- 26:30 because a hospital ship is sacrosanct. It was a dreadful crime and I think that Japanese sub was sunk later on so he didn't have to face up to any court in the end. It was a horrible thing to do.
- 27:00 That's wartime and although not sanctioned it was just one of those things that happened.
- I'm wondering about the difference of sinking a hospital ship and sinking of a merchant vessel which was not involved in the war effort at all?**
- You know,
- 27:30 the sinking of a hospital ship is so contrary to humanity, but sinking of an enemy merchant ship is another matter. It's something that's aiding the other fellow's war effort and it's your duty to sink it.
- I was just wondering...they weren't considered to be civilian ships?**
- 28:00 Yes because they were conveying provisions for war for the opposite number. It's virtually the same as trading with the enemy if you don't destroy it. And war is total war, that's the unfortunate thing about it. There's no short cuts.
- 28:30 **Going back to your work on the Lithgow, you mentioned anti submarine detection, I wonder if you can tell me about the actual process of detecting a submarine and what you would be physically doing?**
- You've got this wheel...it might have been a wheel or a press button arrangement....and a compass repeater. Now as the ship
- 29:00 turns either way, you'll adjust that. If you're on the starboard side of the convoy you'll trace a position from say 45 degrees or less than 45 degrees up to zero which is due north shall we say, and

- 29:30 so you'll be protecting that sector, that quarter of the convoy. Now you might do more than that. If there were only two of you then you would do two sides. The ship on the other side of the convoy will be doing exactly the same thing. So you send out this echo and it strikes a ship. If the ship's coming towards you it will come back at a high frequency because the impulse of the ship
- 30:00 coming towards you...you hit it and it comes back to the ship fast. In other words, you send out pong... and the echo will come back ping if it's coming towards you. If the ship's going away from you, you'll send out ping and you'll get pong back because it's going away from you see. So you know the direction of that ship is coming towards you or away from you.
- 30:30 Now as it moves across your compass recorder, as you record that, you can trace its movement so you can find out if it's going left or right of you, port or starboard. So you've got the position of that ship coming or going or moving across. And as it moves you can find out if it is increasing its speed by checking on the graph, the iodised paper which is being printed out.
- 31:00 So you can by a protractor arrangement that you bring down on the graph, you can find the position....whether it's going slightly this way or that way. So then
- 31:30 the ship can be turned around in the general direction of that object, and the closer you get to it...you can measure its distance because it becomes larger as you get towards it. So by these means you've got a pretty good picture of where it is, how it is and when the ship... the cone of the echo which you send out... if the submarine is under that
- 32:00 then you know at the distance of what depth that submarine is. So then you can instruct the fellows down aft with the depth charges to set their depth charges at the depth that you've estimated the submarine to be at. So when you pass over it you lose contact because the cone of sound has gone, so then you've got
- 32:30 to again make another position and give to the depth charge operators. And again they can refine their depth settings and so on. And so it developed into a...it was primitive but it worked. It would depend upon the speed of the ship and you made certain corrections for that. And
- 33:00 the distance apart of when the depth charges were rolled off, you fired two out on each side of the ship, so that was four and you rolled...first of all you rolled two off the stern and then you rolled two off each side, and then two more, so you had a pattern of these depth charges. And that's how the Lithgow, long before I got to her,
- 33:30 the Lithgow and some other ships destroyed a submarine outside Darwin by doing that.

**What other objects could you pick up?**

Ah, lots of things. You could find ships...your own ships in the convoy.

- 34:00 We could know exactly where other ships were and if they were in their correct position, and then they could be given an instruction to get back on track or something. But you could also do that of course with radar. I've heard whales and seals and big fish, and shoals of fish; you would get a ping off those.
- 34:30 It was a different sort of sound. A softer sound because it was flesh and body and so forth. You can tell whether a ship is a diesel because it goes broom broom broom, or you would hear baum baum baum baum like that would be a steam turbine. So you could know the natures of the motors of these
- 35:00 vessels. What other things? Well then of course there were counter measures and in the North Sea these things were much practised. The Germans knew they were being very closely studied, so they had different ways to fool you. They
- 35:30 would blow out canisters of compressed air and you would chase this compressed air because you would get a ping off that under the surface and they would slip away while you were chasing a phantom. But then you were shown what the sound of a compressed air thing would be, or drums and things like that. They would put you off. But they had recordings of these things and of course
- 36:00 every couple of months you would go back to base and the ASDIC crew would go off and do a simulator course, as pilots do landing planes and that sort of thing. So you would have the captain of the ship; you'd have the ASDIC Officer; and the ASDIC ratings and you'd go through the procedures of attacking them and one thing and another in simulation. They would put on these things
- 36:30 with various types of ships and various types of submarines and various types of submarine tactics, and you'd have to do devise a means of ...the captain and the ASDIC officer would devise a means of attack and so forth. It was quite an interesting game.

**In a convoy you mentioned there were several corvettes for certain sectors. What**

- 37:00 **would happen if something was picked up in one corvette's area? Would they all go and help or was it just ...**

No. The thing was, one ship was probably...the thing was not to delay the convoy because they could be

attacked. The principal was to keep the convoy going as fast as you could and the attacking corvette or defending corvette would race

37:30 in, do its job and then get back on stations as fast as possible. That was the principal and the one I remember so well is the one I've recounted. Racing back in and waving to the boys on the troop ships. But we were getting back into position as fast as we could.

**Can you tell us a little bit more about that incident when the captain dropped the depth charges quite shallow?**

38:00 I don't know if it was the captain or whether it was a mistake or not. It was the general opinion that it was the captain who did this because he was a bit of a showman. I don't know. The story may be a furphy.

**I wonder what happened to the submarine?**

38:30 We don't know. We don't even know if it was a submarine. It might not have been. But no one was there to stop and find out. The thing was to get back and protect those troops. You would get a lot of alarms. A lot of them. And you'd be chasing them and sometimes you would be chasing a phantom. But you couldn't take the risk.

39:00 We just didn't know But there were thousands of depth charges thrown at nothing I'm sure. They had... the thing was you didn't take risks. You couldn't risk lives so whatever it is you had to have a go and get back into position and carry on.

**How much did you know about the placement of the allied submarine force?**

39:30 Not a lot, except these Americans that we operated with. But those submarines were going up to the Philippines or where ever the Japanese were getting oil from Indonesia and places like that. Balembang and Tarakan and places like that where they had the oil wells. And they were getting that oil back to Japan. So anything they could spot they'd sink it.

40:00 And the Japanese were running short of ships. They were running short of naval ships because they had had heavy losses and they couldn't replace them as fast as the Americans could. So any ships that were afloat then it was open season for these American submarines.

**I guess I just wonder about the possibility of dropping depth charges on an allied vessel?**

It could

40:30 have been possible but I think generally the communications and positions were known. See we were in wireless telegraph communication with Canberra all the time. The WT [wireless telegraph] operators would be getting messages from Canberra and messages from the headquarters in the South West Pacific, and even messages coming from London and Washington. These coded messages would come through and then they would be decoded. So all ships could report their positions. What happened to the Germans and also the Japanese, the code was broken by the British with the Enigma Code. And the Japanese code was broken by the Americans.

## Tape 5

00:33 **Henry I'd like to start off now by going back a bit if I may. We were talking early on this morning about your uniform, can you describe for me what you called a Tiddy Suit?**

Yes, wider than regulation bell bottoms.

01:00 Wide U shaped jacket. Instead of the regulation shirt, the flash sailors wore dicky fronts which were two pieces of

01:30 white material with the blue square note and they were tied on both sides to hold it tight so it was straight across the chest. In other words it gave the impression of having a large chest, a healthy male chest...over which you

02:00 put on your collar which was narrower than the regulation collar and a bit longer in that it came down your back a big longer. The whole thing was designed to enhance the male figure. And so of course by having a U front to the jacket,

02:30 the collar of the jacket which is under the outer collar was a bit narrower too. The Tiddy Suit was tight fitting, generally of finer twill than the regulation jacket which was a pretty rough blue serge.

03:00 What else? The cap was taller than the regulation cap, more square in shape. What other things did they have? Always shoes instead of boots. You were allowed to wear them.

03:30 I think that's the general run of it. Very tightly pressed, 7 times on the legs of the trousers. They were

pulled inside out and then they were folded so they had 7 creases. It was said that represented the 7 seas. They were folded 7 times and then put under the mattress of your hammock,

04:00 so they were pressed very neatly when you stepped ashore.

**And why were they called Tiddly Suits?**

Don't know, couldn't tell you that. It's a funny thing. I've asked other people and they don't know. Generally tiddly means something small. I don't know what the story was. But there were many things that were considered tiddly.

04:30 It goes back into naval history. In Nelson's day the sailors made their own suits. You were still given the make and mend on Saturday afternoons when you mended your clothes and you made your suits or whatever. So most sailors were very good at making cloth, sails and so forth in the old days so I suppose the tradition carried on.

05:00 There were many fellas who used to amuse themselves by making clothes on board ship as recreation. So I couldn't really tell you where the word tiddly came from. Wait, a ship was called a tiddly ship if it was very up to date and very smart, yes.

05:30 So that I couldn't tell you. Someone else might have the answer to that one. I should look it up one of these days.

**And I'm wondering if the Lithgow could have been described as a tiddly ship?**

Don't know. Don't think so. I think the corvettes were a little bit looked down upon by

06:00 destroyer men or the men off the boats. The corvette crews were usually very satisfied with their lot and were generally very happy ships. Small ships were happy ships and large ships were not so happy because of the regulations and stricter discipline and that sort of thing. But the smaller ships were like a happy family. Very few of them...as far as I can make out they were always very proud of their ships,

06:30 and that sort of thing. Well we were anyway. I think the latest destroyers; I think they were always tiddly. That was the aim of most sailors was to get onto a destroyer. Give me the boats Jack was the saying. If you were on a destroyer that was really something.

**07:00 Can you delineate the difference between a boat and a ship?**

I think the delineation is something like 20 tons dead weight or something like that. Below 20 tons I think it's a boat, and above that it's a ship. You often hear people talking on radio and television about going on a boat

07:30 of about 20,000 tons. People talking about coming out to Australia in a boat or something like that. Shock horror. I couldn't say exactly what it is, but sometime someone told me it was something to do with dead weight.

**08:00 You've mentioned that the Lithgow was a happy ship and like a family. I'm wondering what opportunities you got to mix with all the officers?**

I think...you didn't mix much with the officers. It just depended. They knew they had to get along with us as we had to get along with them.

08:30 I remember one of our officers getting...yes that's an interesting story because it's part of the story. We were waiting for a convoy at the top of...what's that island north of Brisbane...a

09:00 long island and it's got a hook at the top and it comes down to the Mary River. Anyway we were at this island and we were waiting there for a convoy or something. And we had to drop anchor. In those days the official order coming from Canberra was be very careful dropping anchor, where you drop it and

09:30 when you do drop an anchor you had better drop it with a rope and a buoy attached because if you lose the anchor we'll have to get one out from London or somewhere or cast a new one. I don't know what that story was, but anyway it was something like that. Anyway we duly carried out the action and dropped anchor and waited for most of the afternoon for this convoy to turn up.

10:00 Then some ship turned up and the captain decided it was time to weigh anchor, so when he weighed anchor what should happen was there was a strange current running and it stretched the buoy out and just at the precise time that the captain gave the order to 'slow ahead.' And as we went slow ahead we ran over the rope to the anchor and of course it got round one of the screws.

10:30 Then the captain gave a lecture to the officer on the fo'c'sle, poor fellow. We felt very sorry for him. I think it was a matter of circumstances and all the officers lost their tempers and we felt very sorry for this guy because he was a good officer and he was quite friendly with us and so on. He was the ASDIC Officer and

11:00 he got me the job. He was a very intelligent chap, a very clever fellow because he was doing science at university when he was called up. Then we found out who could dive on the ship...I didn't do it but

- several of the fellows were good swimmers and good divers and they dived down
- 11:30 and tried to cut this rope off the screws but they couldn't. But they tried hard. So we went back to Brisbane following this ship. We managed to catch to here on one screw. We got back to Brisbane and a diver went down in a diver's suit and cut the rope off.
- 12:00 But how did this all start...it started with one officer who we all appreciated. His uniform was always a bit ragged but that was because he was pretty poor. He came from a poor family and he was a clever scientist at the university. He put himself through university somehow, but he was a very decent fellow and
- 12:30 we were very fond of him. But he was one we respected. We respected them all, but more so this particular guy. It was just one of those things and there was that sort of family thing about it which was good. And in subsequent Anzac nights he was always there to lead the march when there were no other officers available.
- 13:00 But he was well liked.
- You've mentioned that your captain was a bit of a showman, I'm wondering given that you've described the Lithgow as a happy ship, how did you feel it was being run generally?**
- Well we were pretty happy about it. The permanent service fellows on board the ship were not really. I
- 13:30 think they thought that the corvettes were too small and not worth a mention sort of thing. And the captain of course not being a permanent naval officer. He was merchant captain who had gone to the navy, so he wasn't quite...they would expect a permanent navy officer to be the captain.
- 14:00 But strangely enough our captain had been in the Royal Navy before. I don't know if he had been axed or retired after the First World War...I think he had been a midshipman and a sub-lieutenant before he came to Australia. His family migrated to Australia. I quite liked him but some didn't, particularly the permanent
- 14:30 navy fellows.
- On that note can you tell me a bit about the possible tension between the permanents and the others?**
- Yes. It was prevalent in the lower deck amongst the seamen. 98% or 96% or thereabouts of corvette seamen were wartime only or Rockies as the permanent seamen called them.
- 15:00 So there was always a certain amount of tension that these fellows were war time only...that's the Naval Reserve, the RANR [Royal Australian Naval Reserve] and were a bit beneath their dignity. But generally speaking it was taken in good faith. But there were some
- 15:30 who could be a bit nasty.
- When would that show itself?**
- Well I remember one fellow, he was a torpedo man on the ship. We didn't have torpedos but a torpedo man mainly looked after electricity and so forth. After you've done a torpedo course what more can you do, you press the button and the torpedo fires? So they had to give them something else to do.
- 16:00 So he was there as an electrical tradesman or whatever...electrical maintenance and that sort of thing. But they were in short supply...a few ships had been sunk so we were a bit short of torpedo men. So the torpedo men were reserved for the destroyers which were armed with torpedos and the other ships had to make do with someone else. So they brought in this new rating called wiremen.
- 16:30 And of course our fellow in our mess was a torpedo man and he had wiremen because they were intruders in the scheme of things. Scabs or whatever you'd like to call them. So there was this constant wrangling between these two which used to amuse the rest of us. But it wasn't very nice for the poor unfortunate wireman.
- 17:00 He was a decent fellow. But there was always this continual wrangling going on between them. Cutting remarks generally coming from the torpedo man. But the same thing existed further up. Particularly if the
- 17:30 permanent navy seamen on another ship had a permanent navy captain or officer on board, they considered themselves a cut above us.
- I was just going to ask whether that tension was about some sort of one-upmanship?**
- I guess it was. But I still think, we were given 3 or 4 months to
- 18:00 get ready for sea and I think we did a damn good job in that time and learnt very rapidly on board those ships. And our captain who I often talk to on Anzac Days and that, he will say we were a pretty good crowd. If anything went wrong you could fix it, and we knew how to splice ropes and do things which you're not allowed to do today. That's got to go to the dockyard and be done by specialists. We

18:30 did it all ourselves. We had to. We were at seas for months and away for years some of these ships. And if something broke down you had to fix it. You didn't have a chance to get to the dock yard and have it fixed there. There were fellows ...out of a 100 men there was always someone who could make a good fist and doing this and that. And I think this was the same with the army and air force probably.

19:00 But that's the way we saw it you know.

**In a sense what you're describing is a much older version of what we might call today, multi-skilling?**

Yes.

**I'm wondering then, what were the different pay rates?**

Not much.

19:30 You would get about sixpence a day extra for another rating. In corvettes we got sixpence a day extra for what was called hard lying because we were rough little ships and it was uncomfortable and cramped and all this sort of thing. You got an extra sixpence for being in the tropical areas

20:00 where it was impossibly hot with the darn things being steel decks and very uncomfortable.

**You mentioned the term Rockies. I'm wondering where that came from?**

God knows. I couldn't tell you that. RANR, it might be something to do with reserve or something like that. But it was a term used.

20:30 **Well you've described how later you went on to anti submarine detection. But to begin with you were doing regular seaman's jobs. I'm wondering if you could describe what the fo'c'sle meant?**

21:00 In Henry the Eighth's day the ship had two castles, one on the front end and one at the back end. The fo'c'sle was the fore castle and the one at the stern was the after castle, and later on it became known as the quarter deck because it was a quarter of the deck and

21:30 it was on a higher level and up forward and also it was where the officers lived, on the quarter deck. That was their area. So they still call the part up near the bow the fo'c'sle, or fore castle.

**And you mentioned you had very compressed**

22:00 **time for training and you set sail immediately. How long were you at sea before you started doing your submarine detection?**

I think about 3 or 4 months or something like that. I was just learning general seamanship on board and being instructed by my peers really.

22:30 What was expected to be done here and there and so forth. You had very very little time in 3 or 4 months to learn all these things, but you soon learnt how to coil a piece of rope in the right way and keep all that part of the deck and equipment in order. And there was a reason why it was done that way because it uncoiled rapidly and quickly and neatly and

23:00 it would come back again like that. You knew what echo sounding gear was and you within a matter of a week or a few days I was operating the echo sounder. You had heard all about Mark Twain and why he was called Mark Twain and you learnt how to use the lead weighted rope with the fathom markings on it.

23:30 And how to handle that very rapidly. All that sort of thing which were normal seaman's duties. There were things like...when you dropped anchor and where it was wherever you were, you knew the depth by the number of cables that went out and how to put a shackle on to secure it,

24:00 allowing for certain currents to give it enough cable to snag the anchor successfully in the mud or where ever. Where to keep the hose and water pump to wash the mud off when the cable came in and all those sorts of things.

24:30 To know what the stoker petty officer was doing when he was operating the winch, and how he wanted it done. You didn't have to worry about instructions. You knew exactly when to do it and what your job was. That's just good seamanship generally.

**You've just mentioned the kind of very precise routines**

25:00 **that needs to occur on a ship, but I also imagine that there's quite a lot of repetition of daily tasks and routines?**

Oh sure, yes. I didn't like it much at all. I didn't like painting the ship's side or something like that. That was dreadfully boring but it had to be done and so on, because you took pride in your ship. You didn't want to show rust marks and so on. But that's

25:30 just like any yachtsman who likes to keep his yacht in good order, and he takes a pride in it, just like someone does with their motor car. He has to wash and polish and keep it clean. Well it's the same with a sailor. He doesn't want to be ashamed of his ship and so you put up with those chores and get them done as quickly as possible.

26:00 **And I understand the shifts or watches are colour coded?**

Oh yes. Red, white and blue. During all the time I was on Lithgow I was on blue watch, and strangely enough most of my friends on blue watch came from Sydney. Somehow or other,

26:30 I don't know who organised it, or whether it was organised or whether it was just coincidence or whatever, but all the West Australians and South Australians seemed to be in Red Watch and the Victorians and Tasmanians seemed to be in White Watch. Something funny like that. I don't think it was organised though.

**When would Blue Watch take place?**

It

27:00 kept on changing all the time you see. The afternoon watch was from 12 o'clock to 4 and then the first dog watch and the second dog watch. So with 3 watches for instance in 24 hours, you always come back one two hour watch you see. Who did the afternoon watch does the morning watch

27:30 and so the watches keep coming backwards. So everyone had a reasonable share of the middle watch which is the one no one wants. But that's one in three watches. But if you replace an area of high...close to the action sort of thing, then you go into two watches and that's pretty tiring.

28:00 You've got to spend a lot of time...sometimes you're closed up for a long time and you're on a high degree of readiness. Then there's the time when there's no watches at all. You just sleep on the guns and that sort of thing. Well you don't sleep...sometimes you might fall asleep but you've got someone to tap you on the shoulder.

28:30 So that's a state of high readiness. But 3 watches is the normal day to day running and that applies to watch keeping on the bridge or in the engine room or whatever.

**Well by this time you're on the Lithgow your corvette is primarily doing coastal runs**

29:00 **and it's reasonably late in the war, I'm wondering how you felt about the state of the war and the purpose of your corvette at that time?**

Well it had got to the stage that you generally felt fairly confident. Those fellows who were on corvettes over in Singapore and there

29:30 for some months before I joined were having some harrowing times. And this applied to the fellows on the Maryborough for instance. They were up in Singapore and they went down to the Sunda Strait and they were patrolling back and forth across the Strait. Of course that was where the [HMAS] Perth was sunk

30:00 and the Japanese intruded there and they even went through the Sunda Strait and out into the Pacific Ocean chasing ships going to Australia. There were 3 Australian corvettes doing this patrol back and forth. And they escaped mainly because they weren't given any orders as to where to go. So the 3 captains got their heads together and said, "Well what are we going to do? There's not much future us staying here, so let's move south." and these

30:30 three ships escaped. Whereas the [HMAS] Yarra was escorting a ship down to Fremantle or somewhere and the Japanese chased her down. The cruisers went down after her and sunk her. Only a handful of men escaped because they got into the Carly floats and that submarine came up and picked them up and rescued them.

31:00 Those fellows who were in...they must have had a pretty nasty time those chaps. It must have been very worrying. You wouldn't know what your days were going to show. You were at the wrong end of the string.

**Was there a sense aboard the Lithgow that things were pretty much in control?**

Yes generally speaking. I think we were pretty confident

31:30 and things seemed to be going alright. I mean we were on the move north. The army was making progress in New Guinea and then the Americans were cleaning up the Japs in the Solomons. So generally the feeling was we were pretty confident things were going to be alright. The Lithgow I think was the first ship into Oro Bay around the top end. I wasn't on it then

32:00 but that was just before I joined her.

**So in your time aboard the Lithgow what was your primary function? Of the Lithgow...to escort and patrol?**

- 32:30 Oh, it was conveying ships from Brisbane to Gladstone. That was called the Milk Run. That was...I just couldn't say how long we were on that but probably about six months I think. But before that they were up in Darwin when the raids were on. It was the Lithgow and another one which sank this I63, the big Japanese submarine.
- 33:00 So they were taking convoys, where from I couldn't say. I just don't know...I would have to go back through my history books to find out just exactly what they were doing. But they were based in Darwin, those 3 corvettes. Then
- 33:30 they sent her back to Brisbane and I think she was refitted and I joined her shortly after that.
- You hear stories about 'patrolling the paddock' I think it's called...going up the coast and then coming back down. Is that how you saw it?**
- The milk run we called it.
- 34:00 It was a pretty quiet job. It was pretty routine and monotonous and it was interspersed with the business of training the American submariners too.
- Given that, what would you and your mates and those on board the ship do to pass the time away**
- 34:30 **when you weren't on watch?**
- Good question. Some of them spent their time carving. Some people did various rope and leather work. I took up a bit of leather work at one stage. I used to make sandals.
- 35:00 You were getting around in the tropics in shoes and socks and so on and it was a bit hot on the feet, tramping around on steel decks and then water and one thing and another, you ruin your shoes. So tried to make sandals for myself you see and then someone asked me to make him a pair, so I was called the Snob.
- 35:30 An old term in the Navy for a shoe maker was a Snob, or someone who worked leather or whatever. I remember one time we were coming into Brisbane and this friend of mine asked me to make him a pair of sandals and so I told him to get the leather when he went into Brisbane.
- 36:00 Anyway these boys went into a pub somewhere before they went and brought the leather. I was quartermaster at the time which meant you were at the top end of the gangway and you had a 45 strapped to your hip, and you salute the captain and blow the pipe whenever he comes on board. So you try and impress the captain and his wife and so forth.
- 36:30 Anyway I saw these characters coming back to the wharf and they had a whole bull's hide. The whole skin of a beast. I said, 'What the devil have you got there?' They said, "You said to get some leather." So I had enough to make sandals for the whole ship's crew.
- 37:00 So I was very much in demand. I was very sorry I took up that hobby. I still did a little bit of it on board the Maryborough later on and I'm still known as a Snob. It had nothing to do with my social status.
- 37:30 **Were there any sea shanties being sung or music...**
- Oh a lot of them but I wouldn't sing them here. You've probably heard of The Good Ship Venus haven't you? I had better not.
- It would be very hard to shock me though.**
- 38:00 **Do you want to give me a rendition?**
- \n[Verse follows]\n "There was once the Good Ship Venus\n By Christ you should have seen us\n The figure head was a whore in bed\n And the master a raging penis." \n
- And that was sung with great gusto after a few drinks. And it goes on to much more lewd verses. But I'm not going to go into that.
- 38:30 **Well how important was music on board ship?**
- Very important. At night before turn in, before pipe down, on the Lithgow they'd get out the fiddle and the drums and a couple of guitars and the trombone. Was it a trombone or a trumpet? I can't remember. So we had quite a good little orchestra.
- 39:00 Of course there were parodies on all sorts of current music and you can imagine what they were about. There was always someone who considered themselves a bit poetic.
- I'm wondering if you had any concerts on board?**
- Well as I say every night or pretty well every night we'd have...well not every night.
- 39:30 But quite often there would be one or two a week. The fellows would want to practice. One fellow came

on board with a banjo and he played well. Every spare moment he would be plinking away with this thing.

**I'm sure that the Venus song was one of many.**

40:00 **Are there any others where you can give us examples?**

I think I had better not.

**Well it's a chance to record them for historical purposes.**

Look I've forgotten them all. No I couldn't.

40:30 Then of course there were the old ones like The Kerry Moore. You've heard that one haven't you? Irish... some were Irish, English, Scottish. Various parodies on pieces of music.

## Tape 6

00:33 **Just before we get into more talk about the convoys Henry, I believe you have another song for us?**

This rather lascivious melody was ...I have heard it on the TV and so on but in the background when you don't really hear what's going on. But here it is:

01:00 \n[Verse follows]\n "Roll me over, roll me over\n

Roll me over in the clover\n Lay me down and do it again." \n

And there are 13 verses to that and I can't remember them all and that's the truth.

**I wonder how long would you sometimes be away from land? How long would you be just on the boat with the crew?**

01:30 How long would you be at sea in other words?

**Yes, without touching land?**

Well probably a couple of weeks. Not very long. The run from say Townsville from

02:00 Milne Bay, it depended on how fast the convoy was or something like that. It might be a week and a week back. There was nothing when you got to Milne Bay for instance. There might be a couple of weeks and then you turn around and go back again. Later on, on the Maryborough we were at sea for goodness knows how many weeks.

02:30 On the Maryborough and a New Zealand corvette I think it was, we were escorting two tugs and a floating dock which had come out from Iceland. I think it took the tugs half the way to get there. They wanted to get the dock to the Admiralty Islands where the Pacific Fleet was based at the time. And that...we were making 2 knots or 4 knots

03:00 where these two tugs were towing this confounded dock. So you were at sea for weeks with that confounded thing.

**I just wondered. You mentioned the singing and I guess the high spirits, how did you maintain that though when you were on the ship for weeks?**

You just did. There was no trouble about that.

03:30 It was just a relief from the boredom of whatever you were doing. It was all very jolly and a lot of ribaldry and fun. I remember we used to get up on the fo'c'sle with the band, this is particularly in the dog watches, the sun was going down and there was a nice breeze blowing and the band was playing. We'd be singing.

04:00 The captain would come out and he'd look over the bridge and have a big smile on his face watching what was going on and listening. Who was it who used to sing the ...Strip Polka...have you heard that? He used to always request that. I'm trying to think of it now.

\n[Verse follows]\n "Take it off, take it off\n Say the boys from the..." \n

Take it off was all you could hear.

04:30 Was it Gypsy Rose Lee who used to sing it? But it was a very popular song during the war. And everyone used to sing it and the captain used to love it.

05:00 When the strippers came in and this was the song. It was all the rage in the music halls and that sort of thing.

**Would you get to the point where you really didn't want to hear a particular song again?**

No. Never got tired of it. They would change things from time to time and some fellows would write up their own songs

05:30 and come up with their own lyrics to a piece of music which was quite amusing.

**Did you ever write any?**

No. That wasn't my forte.

**I wonder, what else could you do for relaxation?**

Well there was always a bit of gambling. Card playing and one thing and another, and we of course in the ASDIC

06:00 Division had a cubby hole right down in the ship where the ASDIC Dome was, so we used to go down there and would play Pontoon, 21 [card games]. No one knew about anything about it. A selected group of us would go down there and play Pontoon in the ASDIC room. No one knew. It was right in the bottom of the bowels of the ship.

06:30 So that was our form of gambling. But we did play tombola [a lottery] on the deck. That was approved as an official navy gambling game. They didn't play a lot of that. There was the usual things like chess and drafts

07:00 and crib. They were popular in the navy. Most of these fellows made up their own crib boards with match sticks and things. They were the main sort of table games or what have you. The rest of recreation was reading

07:30 and oh...other silly things like Battle Ships and so on. That probably originated in the navy that game. I'm trying to think. It's more than 50 years now. Hard to remember.

**How much of a chance would you have to swim?**

To swim? Oh yes. Yes we did swim.

08:00 Not much on the Lithgow but on the Maryborough we did and we had our own water polo team. I was in the water polo team. Not because I was a particularly good swimmer. But we always had one man with a rifle keeping an eye out for sharks and that sort of thing. Not that there were many sharks but

08:30 someone told us there had been an English sailor off one of the English ships taken by a shark and we believed it. Anyway this day we were busy playing against one of the other ships. I was at the goal and suddenly the signal went out that there was a shark and everyone swam as fast as they could go to the ladder.

09:00 The rope ladder, the captain's ladder over the side. And by the time I got there that was fully occupied so I kept on swimming up to the Jacob's Ladder which was one that was hanging off the boom which is swung out and to which the whaler or motor boat is tied to. The motor boat was away taking the captain to somewhere or other. Anyway there was this ladder dangling

09:30 so I swam over to it as fast as I could go and suddenly remembered I could still climb a rope which I hadn't done for a year or two, and I went straight up this rope and I when I got to the top the shackle onto the boom had been well and truly greased and of course I went down and my hands were well oiled and lubricated and just fell into the water. And of course they were all cheering me from the deck.

10:00 I felt like a regular mullet. So I had to swim to the Jacob's Ladder and go up that. I was the last out of the water.

**And no sighting of the shark?**

No...well the guy fired a shot into the water but I think that was only to scare me I'm sure.

**10:30 It sounds like a lot of fun at times?**

Oh yes, a lot of fun.

**I wonder just on the work side of things, on the actual convoys. Can you tell me a bit about the convoys to New Guinea that you were involved in?**

Well, at that time

11:00 I had started training as an ASDIC operator. That was the watch keeping and that was my particular job. At night, you couldn't have any lights. You couldn't give your position away.

11:30 The portholes were all closed. We call them scuttles. They were all closed up and secured. A steel casting closes over it and they lock with a latch. And then we had black out curtains from the companionways to the decks so there would be no light emitted from there.

- 12:00 You couldn't strike a match to light a cigarette or light a pipe or something. If you wanted to have a smoke you had to keep it covered. Smoking cigarettes of course there could be a glow, so you could smoke a pipe if you had your hand over the top of the pipe. So at night in your stand down hour at watch or something like that
- 12:30 you might get behind the funnel...if the night was cool you could get behind the funnel because it was nice and warm there with your mate and have a yarn about various things. One little friend of mine, he was a farm boy from Mackay. He would wax very sentimental about various times. He would say, "Robbie it's wonderful when you're ploughing
- 13:00 particularly at night because somehow or other you can smell the earth and it's a wonderful thing to smell." He would be talking about home and that sort of thing. It was very nostalgic. I can remember these conversations so vividly. There we were cowering behind the funnel trying to keep warm and he would start to talk about things on the farm.
- 13:30 It was very very nice. So in convoy...then you would be up in the ASDIC Hut or wherever it was or the lookout, and you would have time to have a few stories to tell to one another. It was very congenial. Although it was actually boring work at many times, there was something
- 14:00 about it. Human beings make things bearable. Anyway...

### **Just on the story telling. What stories would you tell people?**

Experiences that you had had in life, places you had visited and so on and so forth.

- 14:30 Mostly a lot about parties and things like that. Where you had been and who you knew and what you had done. One fellow who was a stoker and I used to talk to him. He had some magnificent experiences. Mainly
- 15:00 because my brother had been on the initial cruise of the ship the [HMS] Bellona which was a Burns Philp ship which travelled around New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and the Admiralties and so on. I found after...the Bellona was taken over by the Royal Navy and became the flag ship for Mount Batten's combined operations.
- 15:30 But this stoker had joined her when she had been taken over by the Royal Navy and it left Sydney...it had been stripped down in Sydney and sent into the South Atlantic trying to find the Graf Spee. Now she was a motor ship and fairly fast and they were trying to track where the heck this Graf Spee had got to, and where the Graf Spee had supply ships,
- 16:00 oil tankers to keep it in action. So they were going backwards and forwards across from...near Oper-azo[?] and places like that, and across to Africa and so on, criss-crossing and so on trying to find this darn thing until eventually they did. The Bellona didn't find it, but she was tracked down and caught in a battle.
- 16:30 He had travelled from Sydney...he joined the navy and trained in Victoria, gone up to Sydney and then he had been sent up to Canada, to British Colombia, Vancouver. Then he crossed Canada by train and he went
- 17:00 to St John's in Newfoundland, then he went down the East Coast of America and every time he got somewhere near the Bellona she had left. He eventually picked her up two days from Rio. A most extraordinary thing that they should send an ordinary stoker that distance. They must have been very short of stokers. So they sent him that distance. And he was on the ship for I don't know how many years going backwards
- 17:30 and forwards to North Africa and England, down to India and Bombay and all over the places. He had been to some very interesting places. It was fascinating. All this was done in wartime. His stories weren't fabricated because he knew so much about that ship.
- 18:00 And I often ask people afterwards but no one seemed to recall it. I don't know if Burns Philp kept any records. I don't know. But it was a fascinating story. And so you get some people like that. Another fellow on the Lithgow I remember him being in the North Sea convoys and they had a very rough time going up to North Russia and up to Murmansk and Archangel and back to
- 18:30 Scotland and so on. They had it very rough up there. The German ships came out and they caught many in the convoys there. They just sailed down through the middle of them just sinking ships as they went. They didn't have enough escorts or they didn't have escorts of sufficient size to knock the Germans over. The ships they did have they weren't capable
- 19:00 of standing up to these things. So they had some pretty hair raising stories to tell. I remember talking to the old ship's chief stoker and he had been sunk 3 times in the First World War. His descriptions of what came out of were hair raising. But there he was
- 19:30 back into it again. Not that he did much. He said the only time he went into the boiler room was to hang up his washing.

### **How did you react to hearing those stories?**

As a boy they were wonderful stories. I suppose some of them were embellished a bit but so what.

20:00 **Especially the stories of sinking and of wartime, hearing some of them did you just want to get off that ship?**

No I don't think so. I don't know...I always had a feeling of safety. Once I got used to it and was in the swim of it I didn't think about it. If they came along

20:30 ...well I don't know. But you just didn't think about it. You were young and stupid probably.

**You mentioned that the stories might be a bit embellished. Do you remember any of the tales that were just a bit too outrageous?**

No not really. I think that would take a while to think those ones up.

21:00 I'm still remembering things that happened in the past. There's still so much that I didn't put in that book over there. Your memory fades and sometimes something brings back a fleeting thought. But to ask me try bring up an embellished story,

21:30 no I would have to sit down and think serious about that.

**I was just wondering if there was something you remembered hearing that was just so outrageous.**

No, I can't.

**That's OK. I was wondering about the ribaldry on the ship. How accessible was alcohol?**

On the Lithgow we had none. None at all.

22:00 It was only later on in the war that we got a ration. On the Maryborough we were going in and out of Seattle Harbour there for a bit and we got a ration of American beer. I think we were getting two cans each a night which was pretty good but it was American beer and it was dreadful. We did get one bottle of Australian beer a week.

22:30 And that was all the alcohol we had. And that was not exactly regulation but we managed to get it.

**You hear stories in every service of some people some how smuggling alcohol?**

Oh yes they were doing that. A lot of people were smuggling alcohol. I knew particular fellas on the motor boats and that sort of thing smuggling

23:00 cases of whisky and that sort of thing. Where they got it...they would take it up to the islands with them. Normally a bottle of Scotch whisky would be about \$5.00 back in those days, and they'd be selling it for \$25 and \$35 American up in the islands to the Americans and that sort of thing. A friend of mine in the navy was doing that I know.

23:30 He told me about it and he had quite a trade. There were a lot of people in the air force doing it because they were transporting the grog in the planes. There was no doubt about that.

**I wonder if there was some smuggled on board just for general consumption?**

Oh yes but ....not amongst the...there may have been a bit but not a great deal. The wardroom always had a supply of liquor.

24:00 They weren't supposed to drink at sea. It was supposed to be drunk in harbour but they didn't obey that rule. I remember when the wardroom got awfully drunk one night and ...this was after a certain event. We had to stay outside the reef and steer around in circles until someone got sufficiently sober to be able to read the stars

24:30 to get through the reef.

**How do you respond to that as a crew? What do you think of that?**

We thought it was a bit of a joke. Someone got upset about it, a bit jealous perhaps.

**Going back to the convoy work, to New Guinea, what was in the convoys that you were escorting?**

Well firstly there were troops then there was food

25:00 and then there were tanks and trucks, bulldozers and whatever was needed to further the campaign in New Guinea...rifles, field artillery and so on had to be transported.

**Would you have any part in helping to import, load or unload?**

No.

25:30 We were purely escorting. The loading would be done by the engineers themselves or whatever and the

troops themselves. So we didn't have any part in that.

**Can you tell me...you've talked a bit about going up the coast... I guess the difference between**

26:00 **going to New Guinea and the path you would take and I guess the dangers in the waters you were...**

I guess one of the dangers were the reefs and that sort of thing. But once you were outside the reef you took normal precautions and there were no worries until you got into the New Guinea waters but that was all fairly well charted.

26:30 The Torres Strait area wasn't well charted but the other New Guinea waters were fairly well charted because the corvettes were doing the charting. Some of the corvettes were turned into survey ships. Commander Rune who was quite a famous survey captain charted all those reefs around New Guinea and so on in Fremantle I think it was. They

27:00 had a very good knowledge of the waters up there. They had to do it almost under the Japanese's noses. Pretty hazardous sort of work they had to do.

**Can you describe for me Milne Bay?**

Well it was all foggy and tropical rain storms and what not while we were there. I remember very steep mountains on the north side.

27:30 My memory now after 50 years is pretty hazy I can tell you. But I can remember it being rather pretty coming up towards there...Samurai, the island at the mouth of Milne Bay. It was a beautiful tropical island where I am told...I remember hearing the story on the bridge.

28:00 There was a missionary school there and the missionary was a Welsh Methodist missionary and he spoke with a particularly strong Welsh accent. Very perfect English with a Welsh accent.

**Could you go ashore in Milne Bay?**

No we didn't go ashore and I wasn't particularly fussed about going ashore.

28:30 All you could do was wander around in the mud.

**I wonder if you could tell me about Port Moresby?**

Port Moresby...yes we used to go and tie up at the wharf there and...Port Moresby was a bit like a country town, a small country town. We used to...

29:00 we would take a convoy into the harbour and when we went into the harbour there was a wreck on the Basilic[?]....the Basilic Reef[?] outside Port Moresby. A ship had wrecked there back in the previous century. We used to take a few port shots of that with our guns, artillery practice. Then we'd go into the harbour and tie up to the wharf

29:30 just to oil up or something like that or whatever, and then generally take off. Although a couple of times there were air raids on. A couple of Japs came over. I remember tying up alongside an American destroyer. Of course the

30:00 Americans had a habit of slapping themselves up when something like this happened. Everyone you heard was talking about what they were going to do to the yella bastards! Oh the other thing that was funny...I remember this in Port Moresby. We were coming along side and I was fairly good with the heaving line. This is a piece of lead shot, a lump of lead like a cricket ball

30:30 and that's tied onto a rope. Then you throw it over onto the other ship and you tie your own lines onto that. So I remember I threw this over. I remember there was this coloured gentleman sitting up on this gun you see. It was an American destroyer. And I said, "Get hold of this will you?" He said "Hey boy, I'm the gate slammer on this here death machine."

31:00 In other words he was the gentleman who closed the breech on that piece of naval artillery. So that was his job. He didn't do anything else. That was the difference between their navy and our navy.

**Did you get much of a chance to interact with the Americans at other times?**

Yes we often

31:30 had a naval officer on the bridge with us when we were exercising with the Fulton Submarines. I remember the first night I had been put on the wheel. They had to introduce me to the ship's steering system very rapidly and a couple of days after I joined the ship...you said you had been to sea and have steered...so you know how the thing runs away

32:00 back and forth and I was getting into trouble with this. I was working over time as the compass was ticking over and so on. Anyway this American officer said, "Say captain, are we steering a zig zag."

32:30 I felt horribly ashamed of myself. You've done that have you?

**What were the other difference between the Americans and ....I mean, their attitudes?**

I think they thought we were a strange mob.

33:00 And we had a very different outlook on life to them. I think they thought we were hillbillies. Well we probably were.

**I wonder what the difference between...you mentioned there were a lot of World War One navy people...or at least the captain...**

A lot of Australian officers did time with the British Navy in training.

33:30 It wasn't so much that. A lot of naval personnel were axed during the Depression and so they went... they had to go somewhere and with their training in the navy, they joined the East Asiatic Shipping line or something. There were all these things around, India and Singapore

34:00 and where ever British colonies happened to be. They had little shipping lines and they became officers on these ships and got jobs like that. Now when the Japanese came down and cleaned the lot out, they had to go somewhere and a lot came down to Australia and they got appointed...they had navy qualifications. They got snapped up. Whereas with the

34:30 Americans, they didn't. A Mississippi Riverboat captain, the American navy pounced on him, gave him 3 weeks training and sent him out to the South Pacific and, "Here's a Liberty ship which you can be captain of and it's waiting for you now in San Francisco Bay." So these poor devils suddenly found themselves captain of a cargo ship

35:00 taking it to Or-stralia and then to New Guinea. So this is what happened I think when we had a complete hospital convoy that went aground on the Bougainville Reef. It was 7 out of 9 ships and we had to rescue the personnel off them.

**Can you tell me about that rescue operation?**

Well we were coming back from Milne Bay and we got this message

35:30 about these hospital ships being aground on the Bougainville Reef. We were fairly shallow draft so we could get in alongside and we had to remove the personnel before these ships broke up. They had a history of breaking their backs these things. They were built on their sides and they were turned over. They would turn them over and fit them out.

36:00 Well they were welded and at that stage welding hadn't got to the proficiency that it has today. So they would get into trouble in very rough seas and some of them would break their backs and end up in two...or so it was said. Anyway they were very concerned and so we three corvettes went in alongside. But there was a sea running and as the sea was running, how

36:30 were we going to get these troops off this ship. So we tied up to them and we had enough slack on the ropes so we could rise and fall with the current...the troughs and peaks of the waves. And when our fo'c'sle would get level with their deck, the

37:00 lower deck on this American ship, we would say jump and the American soldier would have to jump. As he would jump we would grab him by the arms and throw him on our deck. First of all they had to throw their pack. So they threw their pack down and we would get that. We lost one pack but then someone picked it up with a boat hook farther down. We took off 450 American soldiers.

37:30 There were two...my mate and I would grab each one, and further up the fo'c'sle would be another two sailors, and then I think on the boat deck there were another two fellow there. And it was the same procedure, jump grab and throw him on the deck.

38:00 As I say we ended up taking off 450 and in the meantime we had smashed the whaler. She had acted as a fender. As the waves would wash us against the side of this Liberty ship it was just being crunched up. So that was no trouble. Anyway we took off

38:30 and this hospital must have been from Georgia or Florida or that part of the United States. The commanding officer was a southern gentleman and he got up on the bridge on the loud speaker and he said to the captain, "Call up Cairns and bring out the PT[motor torpedo] boats!"

39:00 The Americans had a squadron of PT boats and they were in Cairns at the time. John Kennedy was in that lot...or something like that. So this crowd were based at Cairns and they came out from Cairns. He said "Get those coloured troops off this ship

39:30 onto those PT boats and send them back." That sort of raised our eyebrows. That was segregation and racial discrimination of the last order. They could fight but they weren't good enough to be on the same ship together. Anyway that's only by the by.

40:00 They went back and the officers and our officers went down and they were hospitably entertained with

much liquor and so forth. We had of our officers who wasn't so keen on seeking the gin as the others were and he was on the bridge. But he

40:30 wasn't capable of navigating by the stars through a very green passage into Cairns. So we proceeded to go in circles outside the reef. Then dawn came and everyone sobered up. But I remember talking to these poor fellows and they were as sick as a dog.

41:00 And the 360 who remained on board, they were all as sick as dogs. We could commiserate with the poor blighters. But they brought their food and they didn't want it so we had an awful lot of spam and canned peaches and one thing and another.

## Tape 7

00:35 **Henry you were describing that rescue of the American Liberty ship. I understand you did receive some thanks?**

' Oh yes. It was Admiral Teague[?], or Vice Admiral Teague[?] I can't remember which who wrote a very nice letter to the Navy Office in Canberra

01:00 expressing his thanks and for the seamanship of the Australians who rescued these men. That was something that was often discussed.

01:30 It didn't go unrecognised. I rang the American Embassy once to see if they knew anything about it, but it was outside their field. But I have no doubt navy records would have a record of this event anyway.

02:00 **And how important was it to receive that respect and recognition?**

Well you didn't often get recognition from the Americans, but this was one time when we did. The Americans tended to think they were fighting the whole war on their own, and other people didn't get the recognition they thought they deserved.

02:30 For instance the defeat of the Japanese in Milne Bay and the defeat on the Kokoda Trail. It was the Australians who did the lion's share of all that and they were never recognised by the Americans. They had some troops in the Buna and Gona area and so on, but how many I don't know. I think that part of the action the Australians started the

03:00 initial defeat of the Japanese...that's of my recollection of history. But anyway that's another matter.

**Well it is interesting because you do hear stories of when America did enter into the war, they came with better machinery, better ships, I'm wondering if you were aware of that kind of...**

Well yes they certainly had it. There's

03:30 no question of that. They had masses of equipment. They lacked nothing and we had to make do with what we had. The American ships had everything. As someone said, you would hear a bugle playing on an American ship and that would be to call the crew to have their bananas and ice cream at one o'clock or something. Whereas we had a

04:00 cup of tea. But that's being a bit unkind.

**Well you've mentioned that the Lithgow was doing a very important convoy job, doing trips and supplies up to New Guinea. I'm wondering you've mentioned one or two times when you felt under threat,**

04:30 **but on the whole how would you describe those convoy escorts?**

Oh very quiet. Generally very quiet. Generally what we were doing was pretty monotonous in those days. The war was well under way.

05:00 When you consider that when I joined the navy the war had taken a turn for the better. And so it was getting better and better as time went on.

**I'm also wondering if you were aware of any other corvettes doing similar kind of runs?**

No because...well we would

05:30 probably meet some friends occasionally on the other corvettes. Fellows you trained with or something like that. But they were doing the same sort of thing that we were doing. Some of our friends, I was corresponding with...people I had trained with on other ships. But there was nothing terribly exciting happening to them at that time.

06:00 **So I'm wondering if generally most of the time the Lithgow was escorting by itself or was it travelling with any others?**

- Generally with a couple of other corvettes. That's what the ships were built for, as
- 06:30 auxiliary mine sweepers. They didn't do any mine sweeping until towards the end of the war. The ones who went to the Mediterranean did a lot of mine sweeping for the landings and so on. But I didn't do any mine sweeping until the end of the war. It was just straight forward convoy escort and anti submarine work.
- 07:00 **Well perhaps you could now take me to the time that you left the Lithgow and tell me how that came about?**
- Well I wanted to go a bit further into submarine detection so they said as soon as they could get a replacement for me I could go down to Rushcutters Bay and go to the school there,
- 07:30 which I did. It was quite interesting because we studied electrical theory and sound theory and all that sort of thing, and then tactics and what have you....defence and attack on simulators and so on.
- 08:00 Then we were appointed to other ships after a while. And I was appointed to this trawler up in the Torres Strait because at that stage the British...the Royal Navy had sent out the [HMS] Challenger from Portsmouth as a survey ship to update all the charts in the Torres Strait area because
- 08:30 I understand the idea was that the British Pacific Fleet was starting to form up because the naval war was coming to an end in the North Atlantic and the Germans...they had landed in France and they were well under way of knocking Germany out. So this area had to be surveyed so the fleets could get through
- 09:00 as quickly as possible to Singapore and Malaya to the British interests there. So we were assisting the Challenger in her survey work. When we weren't doing that we were going out on the reef to these listening stations, and observation stations and
- 09:30 signal stations, and we had to supply them with food and petrol and diesel and whatever it was for their generators and so on. And then bring some of the troops back and give them a rest. They would go out ...these fellows would be on some of these islands and islets for up to 6 weeks, and by 6 weeks they would go
- 10:00 a bit nutty sitting out their on their own so they'd give them a rest for a fortnight on Thursday Island. Then they'd go to another island. If you have a look at the map...I'll show you a map later on, of the Cape York Peninsula and the surrounding islands...these fellows were...
- 10:30 we used to look after them and when we weren't doing that we were assisting the Challenger marking the various parts of the reef and areas that hadn't been surveyed up to date. Now we had a crew of about 8. That's right 6 ratings and 2 officers on this trawler. Then Challenger thanks very much dumped 12 of their men on us
- 11:00 to help us. So it was getting awfully crowded. This was an old trawler which had been given a Swiss heavy machine gun for protection. And they had fitted one of the primitive ASDIC sets to it and we would
- 11:30 go out and because we were a trawler we had a gadget for lifting the nets onto this trawler. So that derrick affair was used to lift the dam buoys which was a buoy on a stick marking where they had taken a sounding. We would have to pick that up and take it to the next spot and drop it. So we had this extra half dozen or
- 12:00 so English sailors on board and we had to feed them and look after them and one thing and another. And that was the survey work. And in addition to that we had a visit. One of the interesting things that happened up there. We had a signal one day that we had better
- 12:30 proceed to meet the Australian Army lugger so and so...whatever it's name was...upon which Sir Thomas Blamey and his aide de camp are going up to the Murray Islands to do some fishing. So we escorted General Blamey up to the Murray Islands which
- 13:00 was his favourite spot for fishing while the Australian troops were fighting their way through the jungles and God know what else.
- And was this late '44?**
- Yes. Well anyway we did just that.
- 13:30 But we thought well this is lovely.
- I can't imagine what you must have been feeling?**
- It wasn't late '44. It was early in '44. I can't remember now what the date was. But we managed to get some bananas up there and things like that while we were up there. We had some Torres Strait Islander fellows with us, and one gentleman,
- 14:00 one of these Torres Strait Island fellows we took with us was named Arky. Now I've often wondered if he

was the same Arky who was the politically sensitive gentleman of recent years...a Torres Strait Islander leader...or whether it's a common name. He was a very fine character. And

14:30 I remember well, we were finding our way through to the Murray Islands and I was on the wheel this night and I didn't know where I was going exactly. I was told to steer a certain course which I was doing and I said to Arky, "Do you know it?" And he said he knew it well. I said, "Well while the captain's down there just tell me where I've got to head." He said, "Well see that star up there,

15:00 follow that down and then down to that next star, and a little bit to the right of that." And I said, "Yes I've got the compass on that." And he said, "Go through there." And we went through there and there was a reef over there and a reef over there, not 35 yards away, but those fellows were born in canoes and luggers and so on. They were magnificent seamen. No book learning at all but they knew where those things were.

15:30 Now that was Arky. Anyway he got up into the Murray Islands and he came back with a big bunch of bananas for me. That was very nice. So that was just a by the by. I didn't spend long up there. I got sick of that. I did my very best...the food was dreadful.

16:00 They used to bring a ship loaded with...the Gorgan was the ship that used to go from Thursday Island to Darwin and back. And it would come over with some frozen beef. It was in a block about a foot square. It was as tough as old book. I got a hammer out of the engine room to belt the meat up.

16:30 Anyway getting back to the story. I was deviating. I told the captain that this was no good to me, this meat and whoever was cooking it. I knew who it was. So I said, "How about giving me a go?" and he said, "Yes you have a go." And he said he would write to the Navy Office and see if you can get an extra sixpence a day. So they made me cook.

17:00 There was no cook. When you only had 6 men and 2 officers the navy can't afford a cook. So I was appointed officially cook on the [HMAS] John Hardy. So I used to belt this beef and I stewed it and I managed to get curry from the army store. I used to go up and do the requisitions from food from the army stores on

17:30 Thursday Island and I managed to get some curry and a few other things. So I tried to make the stuff palatable by turning it into stews and a few other things. Eventually I got sick of that and I said I would like to get more practice on the ASDIC System. He said "Why do you want to do that?" And I said I was getting a bit sick of this.

18:00 And he said, "Well we've got to put up with it, why can't you?" So I started to develop various habits and eventually the way I was turning the food out they decided to send me away. So I got a draft to Rushcutters and I did another course and stepped up one and went onto the Maryborough.

18:30 **So I'm wondering after the Lithgow, before the John Hardy and then again after the John Hardy, whether you got time to have leave back in Sydney?**

Oh yes. Certainly I got a few days in Sydney each time. I think you get a fortnight a year or something.

19:00 Anyway that's the story of the Torres Strait. But the Challenger had a lot of new chums on board. Boys from London and some of them had never been to sea until they got on this thing.

**After telling**

19:30 **us that story about escorting Blamey, what did you think of...**

Not much. And no more than any other Australian soldier. I don't know but the stories used to drift back about what he had to say about these poor kids who had to fight their way back

20:00 on the Kokoda Trail and what Blamey said to them when they arrived back. I had no sympathy for this gentleman. But all this was hearsay.

**How did you react? You've just described some interesting stories of your Torres Strait activity, and it didn't**

20:30 **last for a long time, but I'm wondering how you reacted from going from a corvette down to a very very small trawler?**

I suppose that was in the back of my mind too. Although no, I didn't like it at all. I can't say I liked it. It was a holiday. Put it that way if you like. It was good fishing.

21:00 But that wasn't...it wasn't very productive.

**You've just described it as a holiday. I'm wondering if you did turn into that bronzed...**

Oh sure. You felt you were being a beach comber. Although I was doing some sort of course...at the Tech [Technical] College. I can't remember what it was now but I was doing something to amuse myself.

21:30 No, I felt it was a complete waste of time. Even the British gave the thing away anyway. They weren't going to bring battle ships and carriers through the Torres Strait. You could see the thing was futile.

22:00 But that didn't worry other people.

**I'm also wondering at this point of time how you were managing to keep abreast of what was going on in the war?**

Well you couldn't. You got a weekly newspaper up there. It was The Salt which was the army newspaper. It think it was printed in Port Moresby or Thursday Island or whatever.

22:30 But what you could hear on the radio was another matter. But it was just soul destroying. We were very happy to sit the war out in a place like that.

**I'm also wondering. The war was obviously still going on while you were doing the Torres Strait activities, how vulnerable did you feel in a small trawler?**

23:00 The Japanese were around the other side of New Guinea so they couldn't get at you. No matter what you had it was useless anyway. We came quite expert at knowing what certain types of pearl shells were.

23:30 Swimming on the coral beaches and all that sort of thing. We were told to take a 44 gallon drum of petrol to observation station number so and so. We would be given 2 days to get to it and 2 days to get back and we would go hell for leather for 1 day and spend 2 days fishing at the end.

24:00 But even that gets soporific....is that the word? So I just had to get out of that. I wasn't very keen on our captain either.

**Well I can imagine with just 8 crew you'd need to be getting on very well.**

24:30 Yes.

**Well then, how did you come to leave the John Hardy?**

I made a request for a draft to Rushcutters to the ASDIC School for further training. And of course at that stage ships were starting to come back from the Middle East.

25:00 Like the Maryborough. These other corvettes had come back and a lot of fellows were being moved up and promoted and God knows what not, so there was room for some other ASDIC staff on these other ones. So I just happened to arrive at the right time. So they sent me, after I finished at Rushcutters on the second course, they sent me to Adelaide and told me to pick

25:30 up the Maryborough. So I went on the Maryborough as care and maintenance for 3 weeks while the last bits of paint were being put on her and so on. They gave me a watch on the ship and gave me a rifle and a bayonet and a couple of us stood watch over the ship for a fortnight

26:00 on the slipway. The crew came back and we sailed around to Melbourne. The direction finding gear was faulty so they sent us up to Sydney and we went into Cockatoo Dock for a fortnight to get this fixed up.

26:30 So I was going home every night from Cockatoo Dock....for a fortnight. And then we sailed again up north. We went to Brisbane and then on up to Milne Bay and up to Manus Island where we linked up with the rest of the 21st Mine Sweeping Flotilla. Then we were sent back to Milne Bay to pick up our floating dock

27:00 and we took that to Manus Island in a fortnight or whatever. Just before we left Manus we got a message on ticker tape. And I had this piece of ticker tape. "To all units, Japan has surrendered. Take all necessary war time precautions

27:30 ....sail Wespac or something." There was an American admiral in charge of that. So the next thing we had was a signal from Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, of the British Pacific Fleet..."Load ships with provisions and proceed forthwith to show the flag in Hong Kong."

28:00 I omitted something. Oh yes. Before this had happened...before this floating dock affair, we had been supposed to go to Enewetak which is up north of the Equator and we were going to go and sweep for mines outside

28:30 Kobe in Japan for a landing of troops there. They had to land in Japan. So we loaded up with ammunition and food and stuff and we were going back to our anchorage. The captain left the bridge to go and see a man about a dog, and crunch, we ran aground. Well there was a big howdy do about that.

29:00 The captain was court martialled and we were of course officially a British ship because we were part of the 21st Mine Sweeping Flotilla for the British Pacific Fleet. So he was under command of the British Admiral and he was court martialled according to naval law.

29:30 We went alongside this thing, the [HMS] Tyme which was a repair ship, and we had to follow all their rules and regulations. We had to do whatever they did or whatever. So when it came four o'clock and we were allowed to knock off. So we got the band up and we said, "We'll stick on a party." So we made whoopee and

30:00 we sang all the most lascivious songs you could think of at the top of our voices and we drank our American beer. We looked up on the other deck and you could see all these grinning teeth learning over the side and thoroughly enjoying the music and what have you and singing with us.

30:30 Our idea was to show them that we were a happy ship and they were an unhappy ship which of course they were. There's nothing worse than being on a repair ship. And we were having a great time and we thought our captain was a great fella. So he got off with a severe reprimand.

**And what was the theory about why...**

Why had he left the bridge at precisely that time?

31:00 I think it was a call of nature. What was he to do? Well he could have peed on the bridge but you don't do that in the navy. I don't know what it was, but anyway he had left the bridge. But the other theory amongst us when we talk it over on Anzac Days, was here was he, he was a naval officer at one stage. He had entered the Naval College in 1915, and then he did this and that and so forth, and

31:30 then he was axed when the Depression came and then he got various jobs. And one of the jobs he got was in charge of a bad boys' home in Gosford. It was a public service job and he was a naval officer and would have been just the man to hold discipline over these boys. Then the war broke out and the navy said, "Oh we want you."

32:00 So back he went into the navy. Now our feelings about it was, he knew the war was within an ace of being finished and why should he take a ship up there with all these young boys and send them to certain death outside Kobe which is the Japanese naval base. All he had to do was have a little accident. Maybe. History may even tell you,

32:30 but it never came out. But that's what we thought. To save us going up there with a load of ammunition to fight the Japs off Japan.

**So which waters were you in when you ran aground?**

Admiralty Islands in Seedler Harbour. These are only sailors talking over a few beers and looking back on it.

33:00 And we often think that here was this mob of 18 year to 20 year olders going up to do that for what good purpose? No, maybe. A commanding officer should never take things upon his own shoulders but what did he have to lose? I don't know. Anyway

33:30 that was then. So after that was over they said, "Well you go down and pick up the dock." Give him a lousy job and we had to escort this floating dock up to Manus Island, which we did. Then the war came to an end. We went down to pick up the thing from Milne Bay and then up to the Admiralties and left it there and they said,

34:00 "All right load up and take your ship up to Hong Kong." There was a convoy of 21 ships, the British Pacific Fleet supply ships, ammunition, food, supplies and goodness knows what not. Ok, we did this...

**Before we talk about that can you tell me, when you ran aground, what damage was there?**

I think we damaged the ASDIC Dome.

34:30 There were a few dents on the plates underneath and so forth. I don't think there was any serious damage and they managed to fix everything up with a fellow with a welding torch and a fellow with a diver's suit on.

**I'm also wondering, like in your reflections, looking back...like I'm just wondering how did the ship run aground so quickly when the skipper just briefly left the bridge?**

35:00 Well there was this...on the south side of Seedler Harbour, on the Manus Island side is a little village called Lorengau. Outside Lorengau is a little island called Rara Island where we used to go ashore and play cricket sometimes or soccer or whatever and drink beer.

35:30 And then our anchorage was to the east of Rara you see. Anyway somewhere along the line some had plotted a course to go around the south side of Rara and they didn't realise that the tide must have been out or something like that. A different tide or something. I don't know.

36:00 It was just enough to get us stuck there. Probably if the tide had been a foot higher or something, or a metre higher we would have sailed straight across it. But we hit it and she wouldn't budge. But it was a short cut across. Instead of going around the other side of Rara we went through...

36:30 but I don't know the facts. I wasn't there at the time. But I can remember the bump. I remember the skipper came rushing back up the deck onto the bridge and there we were. So they called up another corvette which came with cooee of us and we got a rope and they tried to pull us off. But

37:00 she wouldn't budge. Then they brought over a tug which also couldn't pull us off because the tide had ran out further. We were sitting up a bit higher up. Anyway they said that a diesel electric tug would be

in the harbour tomorrow and that can pull you off. It could pull your bollards off your deck.

37:30 I can remember this bloke addressing the skipper in such language. So the next day this thing turned up...I'll show you the photographs of this later. But anyway they waited for the tide and they gave us a tug and pulled us off. In the meantime, the British Admiral in charge at the time wanted to know what the Maryborough was doing.

**I can't help but think it sounds a little bit like a comedy of errors?**

38:00 It was indeed. And of course these Pommies sitting up on this damn Tyme thinking we were the greatest mob of gigs [gig - a demerit given in the military] ever. But we showed them a thing or two. Anyway...

**I'm just wondering in that sort of naval code, how does it rate to run aground?**

Oh dreadful. Just dreadful. That's why

38:30 we thought...why would an elderly naval officer let it happen to him? I don't think he cared. I don't think he could care less. Well as I say, the war was coming to an end and so it did within 3 weeks or something after that.

**I am interested to**

39:00 **gain an understanding of what you sailors might have thought would have happened to you if you had not in fact run aground and continued on?**

Up to Japan? Well we were detailed to go to Enewetak and from there up to Japan and I think it was to the main naval base and we had to sweep the approaches to it. Now obviously the main

39:30 naval artillery and so on would have potted us off like nobody's business. I don't know. They probably could have softened them up, but that was the risk you were taking. You didn't what was going to happen. And I don't think he cared. This might have been an easy way out. That's what some of the other sailors onboard thought too.

40:00 No one dared ask him because that was ...you wouldn't ask those questions.

**I'm wondering also while you're having a beer and talking about the possibilities of what and why...was there any talk about whether he just didn't want to face action?**

I don't think the action would have worried him particularly. I don't think. I think he thought more of his men

40:30 because he was a terrific guy. He had the respect of every man jack of that ship. Whatever he said was always right. The way he pulled that ship alongside perfectly. He was a magnificent officer. But he was one of a group of people, of officers of that school who might have been just too independent. I know there was another group...there were two other officers I know of who had a bit to say about the way the navy was treated. I forget his name now, but he was at Milne Bay with his ship and someone said, "The admiral's coming up from Port Melbourne for the weekend so we had better talk to the Americans and get some of the goodies that they've got." And he said a rude word to that.

## Tape 8

00:32 **Henry I was wondering if you could start for us...telling us a bit more about the floating dock you had to escort. I was wondering if you could describe a bit more about it?**

Well it was...I don't know what I could say other than, a floating dock is a ship which can submerge itself.

01:00 Open doors at the front and float a ship inside itself and then pump the water out so it rises to the surface...the bottom of the dock rises to the surface and the water drains out of the dock and the ship can be repaired in this floating capsule sort of thing. Anyway we were told and I guess it's true that this dock had been used in the North Atlantic

01:30 and the war in the North Atlantic had been finished because Germany was finished and they thought they'd make use of it, so they spent umpteen months bring this thing down from Iceland down across the Indian Ocean and up to where we met it at Milne Bay.

02:00 We and at that stage a New Zealand corvette escorted it and is two tugs to the Admiralty Islands. And of course it seemed to be going backwards just as much as it was going forwards because of these two tugs. We were making about 2 or 3 knots I think, so it was a long tedious business particularly with the currents and the tides.

02:30 These tugs were having a job and a half towing this thing up through the islands to Manus. And when we got to Manus we had a few days recreation and they decided that we should go to Enewetak in the north part of the Pacific Ocean.

- 03:00 Enewetak was one of the first islands took back from the Japs and it was used as a base and we would be there and the rest of the 21st Mine Sweeping Flotilla would be told to carry out certain mine sweeping duties. Now I can't tell you much about the dock other than what I've told you.
- 03:30 **I have a question. You mentioned the tugs that were pulling the dock, how did they fair in the water that you were going through. I imagine there would have been some large seas?**
- Well they were pretty big tugs, diesel electric tugs and they were very powerful. Other than that I can't tell you much about them except that to tow a floating dock which is a very big container, half way around the world is quite a feat.
- 04:00 **I wonder, was it different to another convoy?**
- Yes very different. Different in so much as you couldn't make much progress. You were travelling very slowly, less than half speed.
- 04:30 Corvettes weren't very fast and if they're making 17 knots they're at top speed. As I say I think we were making 4 knots at best escorting this fellow. I think it probably wasn't necessary to escort it anyway because that part of the Pacific had been cleared of Japanese of all sorts.
- 05:00 All the fighting was going on at Iwojima or places like that. I think the Philippines had almost been cleared at that stage. So the whole thing was a bit of a farce in our opinion.
- How can you feel the speed of a ship? How can you tell how fast it's going?**
- Well,
- 05:30 well we knew what speed we were doing. We put a log over the side and we could measure our speed if we had to. We knew what speed we would normally do from our revolutions...the revolution counters on the engines. But I know...all I know it was a very very slow tedious trip.
- 06:00 **Probably making a bad comparison but in a car when you are travelling at a slower speed you can see how slowly the scenery goes by. I wonder how you do that in a ship?**
- Well by the wake you're making. You can tell by the waves you're cutting that you're at a certain speed. You get used to seeing that. But if you're travelling at 2 or 3 knots
- 06:30 you're hardly making a bow wave. In a calm sea as it was at that time up there it was rather tedious.
- Can you tell me now about the mine sweeping flotilla and Hong Kong?**
- That's interesting yes. Well. We proceeded to Hong Kong. There was a number of corvettes which were to meet up in Hong
- 07:00 Kong on ...the 21st Mine Sweeping Flotilla. I can't remember how many there were in this convoy or how many escort ships there were but certainly the New Zealand corvette was there and others. Now, of the 21 ships which were loaded with meat and grain and provisions,
- 07:30 and all the sort of things the fleet would need. Rations providing sustenance in Hong Kong. So we went across from the Admiralties and we went across to Morotai and then turned north up through the Philippines and then across to Hong Kong. Outside
- 08:00 Hong Kong ...we had already...the Americans had provided Japanese charts which had been captured and we knew where the Japanese mine fields were. So that was no worry, we knew all about that. But we didn't know where the Americans had dropped the mines. Because they seeded their mine fields from aeroplanes
- 08:30 the Catalinas and so on. I'm not sure what aircraft they had. If the map said there was a mine there it could have been a mile away or ten miles. It would depend on how accurate the pilot was with his navigation. Amongst the 21 ships we had one ship called the Empire Ambler[?] which was loaded with ammunition and
- 09:00 she was like a floating atomic bomb. A fellow I met later on who was a friend he was the engineer officer on that ship and when they gaily sailed up and went straight through into Hong Kong, we found out when we got into Hong Kong that we had gone straight through a mine field.
- 09:30 Now we took 21 ships through that mine field without accident which we thought was quite something. That was...I don't think it was a Japanese mine field. I don't think it was because we had these captured charts. Whether it was American or what I don't know. I think it must have been Japanese but I don't know why they would have had it. They had no reason
- 10:00 to protect Hong Kong. There were better places to put their mines than that. But anyway, we were sent out later on after we got into Hong Kong. We were the first ship in the harbour, the first ship in the Tycoon Docks and we hadn't been a shore for a couple of weeks, so some of us went for a walk and we walked around the sheds at the Tycoon Docks and we found all these rifles and ammunition

- 10:30 and all this stuff, so being typical Australians we decided we would have some. So everyone who stepped ashore with us took back their own machine gun or whatever it was, and bundles of ammunition. The captain said, "That's handy. We're going to be a mine destruction ship tomorrow." They said that we could go out and sweep up that mine field,
- 11:00 and so we went out there, the whole flotilla, the 9 ships or whatever it was and the ships went ahead of us, in line ahead, cutting the mine cables and we went up and down the line with all our machine guns shooting these mines and we were sinking them
- 11:30 until it was cleared. But during the process of during this it was quite exciting because the captain decided we were wasting too much ammunition because the bullets were just bouncing off these mines and not putting holes in them. And a lot of us not being expert marksmen, he decided...he said he would have to get closer to the next one,
- 12:00 so the next one popped up and we must have been about...as far as I could estimate, about 35 metres away from it, and he said "Right fire", and so we were all banging off at this thing. And the gentlemen there, he's in those photographs opened up fire with an Oerlikon which is a Swiss weapon designed in Switzerland and instead of putting a hole in the mine it hit one of the horns
- 12:30 and the thing gave an almighty blast and this thing went off. The chap who was lying down...we were lying down on the deck, he had one look at his machine gun and tossed it over the side in the excitement of the moment.
- 13:00 One fella got a few steel splinters which cut him over the ears and that was the only casualty we had. But it was quite interesting. But an awful noise. So anyway that was our first introduction to mine sweeping. So the captain said, "Well I think we'll keep our distance from the things after all."
- 13:30 So anyway that was the first experience we had with mine sweeping. Then we proceeded to sweep all around Hong Kong, all the islands around Hong Kong and from there we moved up to Swat-ow which is the next town up. I don't know what it's called now, but it's a different name. Probably sounds the same but is spelt a different way.
- 14:00 We swept the mines outside that. When we finished that we went up to Amoy. Amoy is where they have an island called Coo-lang-seal[?] which is an old colonial settlement with old Victorian houses on it. There was a convent and a couple of churches and there were French people there.
- 14:30 Did I say Amoy? No, they were Spanish people. Missionaries who had been part of the Spanish connection through the Philippines. So they must have...the Spanish order must have gone through the Philippines and the next stop was Amoy. Anyway that was a place of contention.
- 15:00 When Formosa...when the Taiwanese started shooting at the Chinese...there was a bit of scrapping going on there, but that particular island was where the cross fire was taking place. Anyway from there we went back to Swat-ow...this was all part of the business of showing the flag.
- 15:30 The British are back...although we were Australians and we made sure they knew we were Australians.
- I wonder Henry, I just want to go back to the mine sweeping, I guess the shooting at the mines, was that the standard way of getting rid of them?**
- Yes
- 16:00 if you put a hole in the mine then it sinks to the bottom. It gets rusty and fills full of water and the explosive decays and that's the end of it. There are hundreds of them of course, or there were hundreds of them. You had no chance of grabbing the darn things and picking them up. They were too dangerous to handle. So the simplest thing to do was just cut them from their mooring
- 16:30 and put a whole in them and let them sink. Or shooting at them there's always the chance you may hit one of the horns and ignite the explosive inside and then it will blow up. But that's the simplest way. You can see in those photographs there, the mine sweeping is done with
- 17:00 two kites and a paravane. The paravane is like a torpedo and as the ship proceeds forward it tows the thing forward and the rudder pulls it out and its running at about 45 degrees to the direction that the ship's travelling at. Then you attach to that cable which takes the cable down to a certain depth
- 17:30 of water...above sea bed and then you take it across to another kite which is attached nearer the ship with a cable that is almost horizontal. Now on that cable you attach teeth cutters. As the ship proceeds, the chain which holds the cable which holds the
- 18:00 mine to the seabed is cut. This thing hits the cable at 10 or 15 knots and of course it cuts it and it pops up to the surface. Well each ship in that line abreast is covering the ship astern of it slightly. So you've got ships strung out at a 45 degree angle virtually to
- 18:30 their direction of traverse. And so these mines are popping up and the mine destruction ship is travelling up and down the line sinking the mines as you go along. Now you have to evacuate all the below decks. You unload all...you only use the ammunition that you have on the upper deck. So you had

to jettison all the ammunition below decks, magazines and so on.

19:00 And you close all the water tight doors and proceed up and down. It requires a neat bit of navigation to make sure you clear where you know they are. You use your ASDIC sets which will give you a ping ping ping off the mines so you know where they are and that's how the process works.

19:30 But the tricky bits is when you reverse traverse and reverse direction and go back the other way and all that sort of thing. Unfortunately we made it very difficult for some Chinese junks who were fishing up there and we cut their lines to their nets and one thing and another. But we couldn't speak Chinese.

20:00 They were a little bit upset the poor junk masters.

**You mentioned the mine that exploded quite close to the ship, how many accidents were there given that...**

Well not often. You kept a reasonable distance. Quite a few went off pop but you were a fair distance away from them. This was when we were expending too much ammunition too fast,

20:30 so our Tycoon Dock ammunition was being used up too quickly for the captain.

**How many shots did you have to get on the mine?**

Well there was quite a lot. If you can imagine, a couple of dozen machine guns were shooting at the darn things. There were bullets ricocheting off these things.

21:00 They weren't affecting us and they were affecting anyone because it was a pretty wide ocean. But it was just too expensive for the captain.

**How far apart were the mines laid?**

I couldn't answer that. It's hard to say. Probably 50 to 100 yards.

21:30 I just couldn't answer that.

**I just wondered roughly how close together they were coming up to the surface?**

I just couldn't say. We had a couple of accidents that's true. They were magnet mines...no, not magnetic

22:00 there were 3 types. The ordinary mine which is a contact mine. Then there was the magnetic mine but that was covered by the delousing equipment on the ships. And then there was one mine which was activated by sound. Now it used to come up when a ship passed over it. But the corvettes were just short enough

22:30 to get over the mine and be gone before the mechanism was going. But twice or 3 times, I can't remember what it was, but the first thing when we were sweeping around Hong Kong, one of our ships...one of these things blew up near to its stern, and it drenched the stern of the ship in water.

23:00 I can't remember what that was, the [HMAS] Ararat I think. Then the [HMAS] Ballarat activated one outside Swat-ow and put her steering gear out of action. So it was quite lively. But there were no casualties. It

23:30 had its moments.

**What were the most dangerous of the 3 mines?**

I think the most dangerous was the latter type, the American mine...because you didn't know where it was for a start. The aircraft navigators couldn't pin point it on the map. That was always a worry. But fortunately

24:00 the length of the corvettes was just sufficiently long to pass over before the darn thing came up. Anyway we received all sorts of commendations from the admiral up there. We were rather proud of ourselves when we left Hong Kong. It was a better place after we left.

24:30 **I'm fascinated by this mine sweeping. With the magnetic type of mine were you clearing them as well?**

Yes. It's such a long time ago. See the magnetic mines generally sat on the bottom, and if a ship passed over and it was not degaussed,

25:00 it would rise to the surface and hit that ship. Whereas degaussing our ships seemed to take care of that from what I remember of it anyway. I can't remember what they looked like. These mines that I remember were just a big ball. A huge

25:30 ball and it had these glass prongs coming out of them full of nitro or whatever it was and if you hit that, that activated the main charge inside the thing.

**With those mines how much damage could one mine do to a ship?**

Sink it.

26:00 It had a big lump of explosive in it. There's no doubt about that. Kitchener was sunk on the ship going to North Russia in the First World War. It think it was a cruiser and it hit a mine or something at night.

**You mentioned that your flotilla had passed through a mine field on route without knowing it...**

26:30 I just don't know the full story, but we heard later that we had been through a small mine field. It might have been a small one or it might have been very widely spaced, but it was indicated on later charts that there had been mines there.

27:00 But it made a few people...the hair on the back of their necks stand up.

**Just looking at the mine fields that you were clearing how would you have rated your chances of getting through them if you didn't know they were there?**

I suppose ...I couldn't say how we would rate it, but the mines were there you could hear them on the ASDIC,

27:30 so you knew they were there and you knew where they were. We took care of one another because each ship was covering another ship all the time. When you approached them you would take a couple of runs up and down the field and then you'd come back and the leading ship would cut up the first mine, then you'd know where it was.

**How long would the process take, the cutting up and**

28:00 **then the ultimate hopefully sinking?**

That would be only a matter of ten minutes, depending on the current and that sort of thing and which way you were travelling. As you followed the line of the sweepers these things were popping up. It didn't take long.

**How many mines would there be in a typical mine field?**

28:30 I just couldn't say. We didn't get around to counting them. I suppose there would be a 100 or more. They were laid in a certain pattern. Of course they couldn't afford to scatter them around willy nilly. They would find out where the traffic lane was and set them up in that traffic lane.

29:00 See there were ships sunk in the Bass Strait with mine which the Germans had laid. How many had they laid, but they were swept up by Australian corvettes early in the war. I didn't

29:30 show enough interest in how many we got. My interest in it was because I used to navigate as yeoman and I was in the chart room at the time and I had these Japanese charts and the navigating officer and the ASDIC

30:00 officer and the captain were planning how they would approach these things. And of course the Flotilla Commander, Commander Reed was in charge of the whole operation. We were second ship. We were working under his instructions anyway. But it was interesting but

30:30 it was hard work for those working the gear. They were handling these cables with really rough ...and of course the rougher the cables are the more...as the mine cable raced down the mine sweeping cable, it was tearing

31:00 daylights out of it and the cutters would finally snap the cable and the mine would float to the surface. But instead of a rope twisting around clockwise, it was twisted around anti clockwise for some reason or other. I don't know the reason for this but

31:30 it was rougher on the men.

**So you were looking at the charts of the fields, how accurate were they compared to the actual laying?**

That I couldn't tell you. It was marked that this area was supposed to contain mines, and so we would approach it very carefully and we would be hours before we were actually traversing before we came up to the first line of mines.

32:00 **Can you describe the chart?**

It was just like any other naval chart except it was in Japanese.

**And it was literally a map with a spot marked?**

Yes, where these mines were...as far as I can remember.

32:30 **Was there a particular formation for the way the Japanese laid their mines?**

Well it looked like they had laid it out on a grid pattern. It appeared to be quite regular but you couldn't tell that when you were sweeping whether they were. I

33:00 suppose they had to be laid to a regular pattern because they had a certain number to lay and to do it properly and do it accurately they would have to do it in some pattern. But how they worked that out I don't know. All we knew that this area with these little crosses all over it had certain boundaries and we approached those boundaries very gingerly.

33:30 We worked backwards and forwards until eventually we started to cut them up.

**Without the help of the charts and the anti submarine detection gear that you were using to find them, what could you see of the mine field?**

Nothing. Just open sea. All you could hear was this ping ping ping when

34:00 the hydrophone was on them and then you would find out where they were and you could measure the distance away from them. So if your cable and your paravane was stretched out to 45 degrees,

34:30 and you knew that distance, you could run along and cut the mines on the outer edge and then...that would be the first ship and then having cleared that, then the next ship which would be slightly astern of that one would be covered sufficiently by its paravane and its cables, it could dodge the mine

35:00 as they came down. Now depending on the current which would tell you which way the mines were going to float, you could avoid them. And if the ships were sufficiently far apart and in a 45 degree line,

35:30 they could quite easily steer around them and the mine destruction ship which was following along behind would make sure they were all sunk.

**You mentioned the current and how the mine would float, what sort of seas were you working in?**

It was not very rough. I'll say that. A bit of a swell

36:00 but not much as far as I can remember. It was reasonably calm. It wasn't the kind of weather where you were going to be seasick.

**I just wondered with the nature of the work and the seas were rough...**

Then you wouldn't carry it out, no. I can't remember the details of that now.

36:30 **Just to move along a little bit, or actually to go back, you mentioned getting into Hong Kong harbour, can you tell me a bit about Hong Kong and what you saw there?**

The first thing I noticed coming into the harbour was the smell. When I say smells, it was probably rice cooking or something but you could have been in Camden Street Sydney.

37:00 It was a completely hungry world, it was most exciting. There were sampans and junks and all these fascinating looking skips and Chinese vessels and this huge city.

37:30 Not like it is today. The maximum buildings were about 8 stories. A most attractive sort of landscape. A very picturesque sort of place it was. But a world of its own. Totally different to anything we had experienced before.

**What did you do on leave that you had in Hong Kong?**

38:00 Mostly shopping and buying goodies and so on and all the things that you do when you're in port. Trying some Chinese food and even despite the fact that it was the war and there was some shortages of food, there were still some cafés and so on,

38:30 and some enterprising people had cafés open who were experienced in Chinese food. We had families who would come along and offer to do all our washing and cleaning, scrubbing the decks and clean the ship just for the scraps off the table.

39:00 So we had a very good deal with one family who did that. For the length of time that we were there that fitted them out with a new sampan because they had sold it off to someone. They might have bought pigs or something. So they did quite well out of us, and when we left they came on board and fired off crackers

39:30 to protect us on the way back to Australia.

**There must have been a pretty amazing image of poverty I guess?**

Oh yes. One of the sad things, not so much on the Maryborough but other flotillas, we had to go down to Hainan, an island off the south coast of China,

40:00 and there were Australian prisoners of war there. These fellows were dying of beri beri and that sort of thing. With our convoy was the Jerusalem, a hospital ship, and these men were transferred to Australian

corvettes and taken over to the Jerusalem and cared for there. They were fed and given medication

40:30 and all the necessary things and then they were taken back eventually to Morotai and then home to hospitals in Australia. There were some very sad cases. I wasn't in that myself but others on the ship had been. On the lighter side of things we struck some pirates. There were groups of pirates and some of them were Japanese soldiers who had deserted in the end but still wanted to fight, and they were on the junks which were in the various waters around the Hong Kong area. When we were anchored at night where ever we were...we would form a ring of ships and keep an anchor watch, and there were always fellows detailed with rifles with orders that if anyone came around they were to open fire on them because there had been attacks on...not necessarily naval vessels but various ships around there.

## Tape 9

00:33 **Henry you were just about to tell a bit of a story about the pirates?**

Yes. When the war had ended...I think there were already existing pirates in the area and that part between there and Vietnam and so on

01:00 had already been a source of piratic operations. When the war ended some of the Japanese soldiers who weren't prepared to go back to Japan...it was a disgrace to go back since they had been defeated. Some of them linked up with these pirates and carried on.

01:30 So the British Navy decided they were going to put an end to this, so the Australian corvettes when they had finished their mine sweeping duties were allocated areas to be cleaned out of pirates. So we would go on these pirate patrols trying to find them.

02:00 On the Maryborough we didn't find any but some of the other ships did and they chased these junks. The junks were motor powered. I remember talking to some of the other fellows in the other corvettes that had been involved and had chased these pirates down around the islands. They said that the Japanese and some Chinese

02:30 had got ashore and they had to bail them up, and they had to go and chase them up through these islands and dispose of them, which was not to their liking. But it was a necessary thing and they were under instruction to clean the pirates out. If you were a pirate then you could be shot on sight, and I'm sure that's what they did.

03:00 It was a bit...what shall I say, a bit romantic, going back to the days 100 years ago. But from time to time you hear about these piratic incidents with people getting out of Vietnam and southern China and so on

03:30 and these ships are captured by these pirates and they strip them of their money and valuables and one thing and another. It happened to a lot of these boat people who're been caught in these pirate nets. Anyway the navy did its best to dispose of them at that stage in the beginning of 1946. How successful they were I don't know because we didn't

04:00 stay around to find out. But it was a bit of a joke as far as we were concerned.

**I'm wondering given that it might have been a bit of a laugh, at the same time what type of danger were you in?**

You weren't in much. Although they were armed, there was no question about that, but we didn't get close enough to do anything. We would

04:30 turn up in a navy vessel and they were in a wooden junk, so they weren't going to hang around while we had a pot shot at them. We could really deal with them swiftly. So that's why if they were cornered they would desert ship and go for their lives...get away in an outboard motor boat or something. We weren't interested in being a landing party.

05:00 **Well you've just mentioned that by now it's 1946 and essentially you had peace keeping duties. I'm wondering...I understand the Maryborough also had a band on board ship?**

Yes that's right. When we were sweeping the area around Swat-ow,

05:30 I wasn't with...a couple of my ship mates there, they were walking up one of the streets in Swat-ow looking to have something to eat and they heard music coming out of this place. Anyway it was jazz or something. They were both

06:00 musicians and players of instruments and so they went in to find out what was going on. There was a Filipino band which had been brought across from Manila which is just opposite Swat-ow and installed in this Japanese officers' club to play for the amusement of the Japanese officers

06:30 during their recreation. They had some instruments that attracted Barry particularly. There was a fine

set of drums that he was interested in because he played the drums. So they let him use their instruments and one gentleman

- 07:00 we had...one gentleman on the ship was a trombonist from a Melbourne jazz band which was at the time the leading jazz band in Australia. He was a very fine trombonist and I hear his name occasionally. And of course
- 07:30 they struck up a conversation with these Filipinos and they said would they like to come along tonight and put on a concert. So we had 3 of our men I think it was playing in this band and they joined this band and became very friendly. And it was a great success because our musicians could play boogie woogie and boogie woogie had not reached South China at that stage.
- 08:00 It was in Australia at that late stage of the war because of the American forces and our fellows had picked it up and knew something about it, and this concert was a tremendous success. So we were credited with introducing boogie woogie from the HMAS Maryborough into South China....the Boogie Woogie Beat.
- 08:30 Anyway there we are. So friendly were the Filipinos that I think Barry was offered a set of drums, and whenever there was something on we'd go along to this place and they had taxi dancing there.
- 09:00 You'd dance...you got a ticket and you could dance with a Chinese lass for 25 cents or whatever it was. This was quite a popular thing to do, provided you bought her a drink and whatever. So anyway in the meantime the captain and the officers had done
- 09:30 the right thing by the local Chinese commander and he had let someone know in Chungking which was capital at that stage...that there were these very hospitable Australians there and so a number of Chinese officers came down to visit and say howdy do and shake hands with the captain of the Maryborough who was showing the flag in Swat-ow.
- 10:00 And so they were invited out to dinner at the various Chinese restaurants which was very nice. So the captain had to respond but it was getting a bit expensive for him because these visitors kept coming down. So he said, "The best thing we can do is organise a ball on the ship...get it over and done with and that will be the last expense we'll have. But if this keeps on I'll be broke."
- 10:30 And so we scrubbed down the fo'c'sle and we found the awning and rigged up the awning and put the awning over the fo'c'sle. We got our band set up there and we invited the Filipinos to come down and we set them up in amongst the anchor cables and one thing and another. We had a bandstand there.
- 11:00 The important Chinese people brought their wives and so on. The ship invited all the ladies from the local honky tonk who put on their best finery. And we organised the food from the best Chinese restaurant in town and we had
- 11:30 a grand ball...although you couldn't talk to your partners because they couldn't speak English and they only spoke Chinese. The mess decks were laid out beautifully with loads of food on the table, and much Chinese wine and there were an awful lot of drunks around. So that was the parting shot when we left Swat-ow. So that was a great night.
- 12:00 It's recorded in the history of the Maryborough.

**Well it sounds quite magnificent and an interesting gesture.**

Yes it was a great success. Except the following morning there were an awful lot of sore heads I can tell you. The Chinese wine is very powerful stuff. And strangely enough someone

- 12:30 fell in the drink and had to be fished out and he was pulled out by the legs. He had been in the water for too long and he was half drowned. He fell off the one of the gangways on the pontoons that the ship was tied up to. Anyway he was rescued. The captain and the officers...we only had our sick berth attendant,
- 13:00 but there was a medical officer in town who was an Austrian, but of course we were at peace with Austria at that stage and so Doctor Smithoff or whatever his name was came and attended to our half drowned half drunk fellow. He fixed him
- 13:30 up, and it was a great relief later on that morning, when we blew the siren and waved goodbye to the doctor and Swat-ow and proceeded down to Hong Kong and then to Australia.

**It's interested to hear about this because by this time the peace keeping in Japan...BCOF [British and Commonwealth Occupation Forces] was being put into plan and implemented.**

- 14:00 **I'm wondering from what you're describing, it sounds like the Maryborough was not only involved in mine sweeping but also some ambassadorial role?**

Yes it was. The details are in the history of the Maryborough.

- 14:30 It was all part of the business of showing the flag and the British were interested in showing that Britain was back again in Hong Kong and the power of Britain was being set up as it had been before the war and so on. And Hong Kong was the third most

- 15:00 important port in the world in the '30s, and they were interested in restoring trade. Hong Kong was a great trading base and it continues to be and still is. Even since the Chinese takeover, there's still a tremendous amount of business activity
- 15:30 with organisation such as the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank which is very important in financial organisations. They had to set up and begin functioning again after the war. People like Jardine Matheson, warehouse people and so on. Of course they were all taken over subsequently, but nevertheless the British government was interested in
- 16:00 restoring all that activity. The old saying, 'Oil for the lamps of China.' Give each Chinese a pint of oil and it's big business. The Americans weren't that much interested because they were more interested in Japan. After all China was being run by Chiang Kai Shek at that stage until
- 16:30 he was defeated.

**I'm wondering what happened to you and the Maryborough. I assume you came back to Sydney. When were you discharged?**

I was discharged five days before I walked into Sydney University. On the Friday I went up to...I had an interview with Professor Hook

- 17:00 and on the Monday I attended the first lecture of orientation week. We were still in uniform. We didn't have any clothes. We had an allowance to get a blue suit which I wasn't going to wear.

**What was that process of discharge and repatriation was like for you?**

- 17:30 Right. I didn't get a chance to really...to get involved in...what will I say? It all happened so quickly. I was into studies before I had a chance to worry about whether I was a
- 18:00 psychopath or not. And as I say it was swift. I will admit I had taken away with me when I decided I would pursue the profession of architecture...I had taken a few books on building construction and design away with me. That was one of the things I used to read. So I was preparing myself at that stage.
- 18:30 I was very very worried that I wouldn't be back in time. That was what worried me. I might have had to sit back and wait another year and I didn't fancy that. I was interested at that stage in doing something creative, doing something not monotonous. I thought the most exciting thing I could possibly do was construction of some sort. I didn't think I
- 19:00 was good enough at mathematics to be an engineer so I thought I would take the next best thing. I was interested in some forms of art and that sort of thing, drawing and so forth. A lot of my time had been spent in the chart room. I was plotting the position of mines and wrecks and plotting the position of undiscovered rocks,
- 19:30 and making the corrections to the charts that we had. I had a free hand in that and had a job as navigator's yeoman. Lettering up all these positions of the various nasties.

**Now looking back with many**

- 20:00 **years of hindsight and reflection, what did you learn during your service time that you took with you into your civilian life?**

Getting on with people. Mostly I've got along well with tradesmen, contractors and so forth. Very few have I had any nasties with. I

- 20:30 could speak their language. I built a few buildings for myself and I think I knew how to handle the subcontractors, the brickies and other tradesmen. I could speak their language. I suppose I've been reasonably successful at

- 21:00 dealing with men.

**And how do you think your time in the navy changed you?**

I suppose my...I think I learnt, really learnt to talk the language of the average guy. I could speak two languages.

- 21:30 And I've noticed this amongst some people who are successful. Not that I've been a great success, but I think you've got to have the common touch at the right time. You can see this...it's interesting. You listen to politicians and they're talking to this person or that person and so forth. You can see they're switching their language.

- 22:00 You can sort of read what they're going to say next.

**You've just mentioned that you threw yourself into university studies in architecture,**

- 22:30 **what did you miss about the navy?**

Oh, nothing very much. I don't think...I think we all...in the 70s, students studying architecture...50 to 65 of them were ex-servicemen.

23:00 So we had a common language between the lot of us. You had the feeling that the other students hadn't seen much of the world. We had a breadth of education that they didn't have. Probably we could have made better use of it.

23:30 **Given that, did you get an opportunity to speak about your war time experience?**

We didn't. No, we talked amongst ourselves but not outside because we didn't want to appear to other people that we were putting it on.

24:00 That's the way I felt about it. And there was probably a certain amount of resentment against ex-servicemen anyway because they were being considered to be being spoon fed. We had 3 pounds 10 a week, where the other boys had...their parents might have given them a pound a week or something

24:30 to exist on. We could go to the University of Sydney and have steak pie and two vegetables whereas they had sandwiches. Others that were married and with kids, they had to live on 4 pounds 10 a week. They had a bit of a struggle because they had to pay rent for a cottage or a flat if you could get one.

25:00 But we were fairly well off I think at that stage. And I understand...when I see students these days I often try and compare how they're getting on today with their living allowances and comparing it with ours.

25:30 I suppose they...it's hard to say how much the value of currency has changed. It's hard to work out how they're going. Dunno.

**You've spoken with such great passion today about your navy experience and about being at sea, and a love of ships,**

26:00 **why then choose to move away completely from the sea?**

Well the thing that always worried me was the defence of Australia and thing that particularly worried me in this atomic age...five bombs and you wipe Australia out don't you?

26:30 And if by remaining in a rural district and so on, if you're promoting activity which I always tried to do, and encourage people to think about the development of a country, you might help to avoid that...the destruction of the capital cities and the states.

27:00 You might be doing something useful, and I think a lot of people at the time did think about that. From that group in the university of fellows who did what I did, some went to Grafton and a couple went to Goulburn and a couple Wagga. Some went to Albury and some went to

27:30 Dubbo. I went to Parkes. Other went down the south coast and so on and we'd meet occasionally at the Architects Convention and we'd say what are you doing and we'd talk it over and so on. We sort of felt we were doing a little bit of pioneering again. I think we might not have changed things much, but I think in

28:00 our own little area we did something. We contributed in some way to developing the place.

**I'm also wondering whether the stories and the experiences in the navy contribute to some of your strongest life memories?**

28:30 Oh yes. I suppose the few hours I spent talking to you here have and recalling these things, they're certainly indelibly impressed on my memory. And for all...I think

29:00 I'm jolly glad I did it. I'm glad that the opportunity was presented to me to do it. That's all I can say about that.

**Well you did contribute to Australia winning the war...**

I guess, in some small way yes.

29:30 **And what about for peace do you think?**

I'm pretty worried about the way things are happening at the moment. The thing that worries me is that we're maybe having our legs pulled, for what reason I don't know.

30:00 I think...some guy reckons he's leading the world down the right path and that might not be my opinion. Is he being a new Richard the Lion Heart in his own way of thinking?

30:30 I don't know. Are we facing another Saladin or something like that...a group of people who are trying to organise a new Saladin out of it to do something to lift the Muslim community throughout the world to another

- 31:00 level or something? I don't know. That's another matter. We just don't get enough of the true story. I can't say why the attitude of the French or Germans and so on is different to ours.
- 31:30 I would be very suspicious of the French anyway. I think they're doing strange things. There's something wrong with their moral code when they can let all these old people die.
- 32:00 They seem to be a very pragmatic people, but then they have a problem because they have a very large Muslim population don't they, and then it's just the ditch into North Africa which worries them. So you can't rely on them to be doing the honest thing, any more than you can rely on the Americans to be doing the honest thing.
- 32:30 But I suppose they're not any step backwards, by the Americans, in their opinion, putting themselves at grave risk.

**Why do you think it is important to reflect and remember?**

- 33:00 I think it's important that we somehow or other make the world a better place for the 60 or 70 or 80 years that we live on it. You know, make it a better place. And since the war I feel that because of some of the things I've done, it is a better place, in a very very small way.
- 33:30 It's like...like a Chinese said, "One pebble rolling down a stream being pushed by the water down the stream...it's only got to deviate 2 or 3 millimetres to generate a change, a big change in the long run over many years. If it moves the current a
- 34:00 fraction of a degree in that stream, it has a tremendous influence." Now you go out into the street and kick a pebble over or something like that, it's the cause and effect isn't it? No matter how small it has an effect. Just because you walk down the street or you live there or you reside somewhere.
- 34:30 The fact that you have resided in a country district or something, you must have had an effect for the better I hope.

**Looking back then, I wondering if there was a proudest moment for you from your war time experience?**

I do

- 35:00 feel sometimes...I suppose the proudest moment is not so much the wartime but perhaps the march on Anzac Day. There are people who come out and give you cheers as you go passed and it's very heart warming.

**What do you think about on that day?**

- 35:30 I suppose some people have taken the time to recognise that we tried to do something. It's not a case of being vainglorious or anything like that. Some people in their hearts felt that we did do something worthwhile. How's that?

- 36:00 **There's just a couple of questions I've got left if I can squeeze them in. I'm wondering if you ever got a tattoo?**

No. I think my mother said that to me, "Don't ever come back with a tattoo." and I said, "OK Mum."

- 36:30 **Never tempted?**

Never tempted.

**Well we are coming to the end of our session today, I'm wondering if there's anything you would like to say or if you feel like there is something we may have missed?**

- 37:00 I didn't tell you anything about the Americans when we were in Swat-ow. And I realise I overlooked this. When we pulled into Swat-ow, we went ashore there and the first thing was we bumped into some American soldiers. And they had been in China,
- 37:30 they had come across from India and they had gradually worked their way...training Chinese troops with American weapons and they had come down from the mountains and found themselves in Swat-ow. The first thing they said to us was, "Hey you guys, where are you from?" We said, "Australia." And they said,
- 38:00 "God damn I'm glad you none of those god damn Limeys." They had been there and they were speaking Chinese half the time.
- 38:30 They had almost been swallowed up by the whatever and a lot of them had their Chinese girlfriends with them. They followed as camp followers. And I didn't like them much. They had no respect for these people and that
- 39:00 was the thing I've always felt about Americans. They have little respect for the rest of the world. And

that's the thing that worries me about the present day. How's that?

**I'm also just wondering...**

- 39:30 That might be a bit rough treatment of the Americans because I'm sure there's some nice fellas amongst them, but that's the one thing I've noticed. They're so sure their culture is the best and but I'm not so sure it is. And
- 40:00 I think the Australian way of life is wonderful. I don't think there's many other countries in this world that can show us anything better. You go up to Scandinavia which is a nice egalitarian sort of society, and I think they think they're a bit superior too, and they're very satisfied that they think they have all the answers, and they haven't.
- 40:30 I think we can admit our weaknesses and there's very few countries in the world who can do that.