Australians at War Film Archive

Alick Hodgson (Sel) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **We'll make a start, Sel. Can you tell us a little bit about your life story? A general sort of overview if you don't mind.**

Born in 1922, good happy family, lived in Montague Road, West End. 244 Montague Road, West End.

01:00 Life was very good until 1931. My father died and we were left with nothing. He didn't believe in insurance, and he couldn't claim worker's compensation. He used to work a boiler in the Monteiff Pipe Company [?], cast iron pipes. So when he died, we were left more or less

01:30 destitute. We found out later that, I could work out why he didn't believe in insurance companies because we found out, he never told my mother anything about his previous life. Just that he came from Victoria, his mother came from the Isle of Man, and they were a no good lot, you wouldn't want to know them. So

02:00 it wasn't till we got into genealogy that we went investigating and the old goat had been married before. We had his marriage certificate, where he stated he was sort of 29 years old. So we took 29 from when they were married backwards and couldn't find his birth certificate. So we found it 11 years prior to that date.

02:30 So what he did, when he married his first wife, a woman by the name of Spozito down in Hastings in Melbourne, he was 29. When he married my mother in 1915, he was still 29. He just wiped 11 years out of his life. So when we discovered that, I could understand why he wasn't interested in insurance companies.

03:00 He might've had to produce birth certificates or some such thing.

Did he get a divorce from his first wife?

We haven't been able to find that out.

So you were saying he got a divorce from the first wife, or you don't know?

We've never been able to find out. But we did get, searching around, she married again to a chap called

03:30 Moochmore. And one of the Moochmore clan got onto us, to us, we actually got onto him. And he said, "Well, at last we've found out what happened to Alick." Because they'd been searching from the other end and they knew the woman Spozito had been married to this Alick Hodgson, but he just disappeared. I think he just walked out the back door and kept going and walked up to Queensland.

04:00 But a very good father, excellent. He just had this little, obviously a bad marriage and he walked away from it. So, to get back to the story, I used to come home from school and there'd be Mum sitting at the kitchen table weeping, you know, and this was six months after the death and all this business. So she got a job

04:30 for a Mrs Carter who had a, they had a place in the markets in Roma Street. And she was the ironing lady. So then she got a job in the Golden Casket office [Golden Casket Lottery], which was on the 7th floor or the 6th floor of the Public Curator Building, which is on the corner of Edward and Adelaide Streets, where the big sign is about the old school. There's a plaque

05:00 there. And she used to go to work at five in the morning until nine and at five in the evening until nine. So there was only my sister and I, and my sister's six and a half years older than I am. So we used to get our own meals and all the rest of it. From 244 Montague Road, we

05:30 moved to Kennigo Street in the Valley [Fortitude Valley]. 72, I think it is, Allawah Flats, it's still there. And we had a two room flat, a bedroom and a little kitchen. And I used to sleep on the couch in the kitchen and Mum and Myrtle used to sleep in the double bed. An interesting thing is, I got interested in

making model aeroplanes. And I think now, where did I make these model aeroplanes

06:00 in a two room flat? I can remember gliding them down onto Mum's bed to see how they'd glide and that. And I used to go to Victoria Park and fly them. So I went to CPS, that was Central Practicing School up on St Paul's Terrace there, Leichhardt Street. Then I went to Brisbane State High School. And from Kennigo Street, I used to walk down

06:30 Kennigo Street past the Exhibition Hotel then right along Barry Parade, down to the Customs House. And catch the tram at the Customs House because it was only a penny or something, if you went to the Customs House. And used to go to State High. So, passed scholarship at CPS, passed junior at State High, and I can remember Mum saying to me one day, "I can't afford to send you to school anymore, you've got to go out and get a job."

07:00 **And where would you go there?**

Well, I'd get a Dutton Park tram. A Dutton Park tram used to come from New Farm wharf. The West End tram came from New Farm Park and the Dutton Park tram came from New Farm wharf. And they followed the same line until they got to

07:30 Upper Melbourne Street, which is now the intersection at Boundary Street and Mollison Street. They renamed it Mollison Street after Amy Mollison. But the first woman to fly from, Amy Johnson, to fly from England to Australia, she married a bloke called Mollison, became Amy Mollison . She died in the estuary of the Thames during the war ferrying aeroplanes.

08:00 Anyway, the Dutton Park tram used to go up, I think it's Browning Street, then up into Vulture Street, then into the school. And you'd get off. Coming home, they used to have little matchbox trams, covered in the middle and a little platform on each end of the cabin. But the wheels were under the cabin. So, if you got on the end of the tram when you were

08:30 going over the old Victoria Bridge, it all started to like move up and down. The tram would start lifting off the tracks up the front. But the motorman used to get a bit upset. I wonder why?

Was there a rule that old people and pregnant ladies would sit inside and young men would stand on the end?

Yes, yes, yeah. In all the trams, all the women sat up the front, the men sat down the back.

09:00 Yeah, all the trams. Unwritten rule somehow or other, I don't know where it came from but, yeah, women always went up in the front cabin and that, and men went down the back. Maybe that was a smoke thing, that's right, they had a line on the ceiling, smoking to the rear of the line. That might've been what helped start it. So anyway, Mum said, "I can't send you to school anymore." I had a junior certificate.

09:30 So there was an ad in the paper for a message boy down at Charles Hope, down at Wandoo Street, the Valley. So down I went, got the job. Twelve [shillings] and six a week, which is $1.25. And I had a Malvern Star pushbike, company bike, and I used to deliver the invoices and the statements all around Brisbane. I got to know every street, everything in Brisbane. And from

10:00 there, you graduated to office boy. Oh, another little thing about message boy, you used to have to come in Monday morning early and do all the inkwells. Clean out all the inkwells and refill them. And every other morning, you cleaned the boss's shoes. He was to come to work, Harold Hope was his name, he was the brother of Charles Hope. And he used to

10:30 change his shoes, so the message boy would have to clean the shoes at seven o'clock to make them shiny. Never did me any harm. So I stayed there, I stayed there until I went away in the war. And I came, when I came back, I went back there and I had 34 years with Hopes all together.

So how old were you when you signed up, Sel?

11:00 I would've, Japs came into the war in 1941, December, didn't they? 'Day of Infamy', 7th of December, so I went down the naval depot in the February. So that would be February 42, it would've been just before my twentieth birthday. Birthday's on the 25th of Feb. Well I didn't get called up until the

11:30 July. Because I put myself down as a telegraphist. They waited until they had a group of people who wanted to be telegraphists, and then you went down to Flinders Naval Depot [HMAS Cerberus, Victoria] more or less as a class, so it took six months before they had enough to send a class. A group of about 12 of us went away together, we were all telegraphists. And

12:00 had the time at Flinders and then after the war, came back and went back to Hopes. And then I went to, they opened up down Eagle Farm near the Ford Motor Company on Links Avenue, down there we had motor body building, a big store, a mill, a car repair shop and a

12:30 spring making shop. Up in Wandoo Street, was the refrigeration [factory], they used to make Cold Flame refrigerators, and an engineering shop. I went down there as office manager in about 1949. When I say office manager, it was only a factory office. Time cards and time sheets and people, you know. There was no accounting, that was all done up in Wandoo

13:00 Street. And I stayed there till ACI [Australian Consolidated Industries] took over and ACI made changes and fiddled around, and some of the things I didn't like. Yeah, I'd just been, I was production planner, when ACI took over, I became production planner. Used to plan all the production for the Panelyte Factory, which was the same as Laminex. That is

13:30 why ACI took us over, they used to make Laminex and we used to make Panelyte. In the meantime, Lorraine and I moved to a flat at Taringa, where, no, Alan was, after the war we stayed with Lorraine's people at Thorrold Street, Wooloowin. But they just burnt down the school that Lorraine used to go

14:00 to. And then we got a flat at Taringa, and Susan was born there. Then we moved, I, during the, coming out of the navy you went to, you could put down who you wanted to see in regards to you future life. Education or housing, so one of the things I said, housing. And

14:30 they told me that CML [Colonial Mutual Life] were opening an esstate down at Virginia, so a chap in there was a bloke called De Jong. And I went and saw him, had a look at the site down Virginia, that was in what is now Prince Street, it used to be just a big open paddock, Goss's Farm. Anyway, we ended up buying a house down there through CML. And we stayed there for

15:00 16 years, and I was working down at Hopes at Eagle Farm. I used to ride a pushbike from, I went down Eagle Farm when we were in Taringa and I used to ride a pushbike from Beatrice Street, Taringa, which is just this side of the railway station, to Links Avenue, Eagle Farm. Every morning and every evening. I was fit. And

15:30 so when we moved to Prince Street I was still riding the bike. And we used to ride, you'd go down onto Nudgee Road, through the back blocks down to Nudgee Road, then when you got down near the wool stores, which is where the big roundabout is now to go down to the airport, the east west strip used to come up to the road there. So we used to go under the fence and we used to ride our bikes down the strip.

16:00 Down to where Eagle Farm railway station is, and that's, Links Avenue used to go down there. I got caught one night, I was riding home at nine o'clock along the strip. All of a sudden a pair of big lights came on, it was an aeroplane about to land. I scattered off that strip pretty quick. Of course in those days, you could do that. Now, you'd get shot.

16:30 So from, anyway, after 32 years at Hopes I went to Bretts in Newmarket Road, and they were making veneer at the time on the northern side of Newmarket Road, a big ply mill they had there. I was in charge of the veneer nut plant. Which they just bought out from Japan and briefed up, make them veneer for, then they

17:00 used to glue it together to make the plywood. So from there I went to Whitco out at Sherwood and that's where I stayed until I retired. Out making Sherwood, Whitco made locks and window fittings; you know those arms on casement windows, Whitco window fittings. And I retired there, from there. We

17:30 spent 1986 looking for somewhere to live and after about nine months we found this place. Here I am. Oh, in the meantime, we moved from Prince Street, in 1966, we went up to. Another little story, I discovered I'd never used my home loan from the war service. You had a grant of, I think it was three thousand dollars at the time, or thirty-five hundred or,

18:00 pounds, see, that was the year they changed from dollars to pounds, from pounds to dollars. Anyway, I'd never used it. So I said to Lorraine, the house at Prince Street was quite small and we had four kids. I said, "I'm going up to have a look at these houses they're building on the old archbishop," Archbishop Duhig had a big estate up there, and when we died,

18:30 he was the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, when he died they were selling it, subdividing it. So I went up there and there was a house overlooking and I thought, "Gee, this is all right." And the bloke told me what it was worth. It was fifteen thousand dollars, seven thousand five hundred pound. That's right, I had a loan for three thousand pound and

19:00 I had a house worth about four thousand. So I went back to Lorraine, I said, "Go and have a look at that place up there." The agent happened to be there when I was there in the morning, so he drove me home, so Lorraine went back and she came back and she said, "Yeah, that's all right, I could live there, can we afford that?" I said, "Well, let's see what we can do about it." So I ended up about a thousand pounds short. So I went to work and I thought

19:30 "How am I going to get this thousand pound?" So I took a day off and I walked up one side of Queen Street and back the other side and went into every financial place there, trying to get a second mortgage. So no luck, so in desperation, I went to Ray Hope, he was the son of Harold Hope whose shoes I used to clean. And Ray said, "Oh, I might

20:00 be able to do something for you." picks up the phone. Hangs up, and he said, "Go and see this bloke." The manager of the Bank of New South Wales on the corner of George and Queen Streets, who was a good mate of his. So up I went, you know wondering how I'm going to go, and he said, "Oh, yeah, you're the chap who wants a second mortgage, aren't you?" he presses a button, Bill comes in, he says, "Bill, take Mr

20:30 Hodgson, and see what he wants." I thought, "Hey, I'm going to get this." So he took Mr Hodgson and Mr Hodgson got a second mortgage for a thousand or whatever it was, and away we went. Bought this nice brick home in Benedict Street, Wavell Heights. Which was, you know, upstairs/downstairs, internal staircase, all brick, views to the bay from the side veranda, very good. And of course the kids were just that

21:00 age when they were having parties and all the rest of it and there was a big area under the house. And they played football, the boys played football for Northern Suburbs, and the girls played netball for Northern Suburbs and they went to Virginia School and Banyo School so, you know, in those days, everyone knew everyone.

A thousand pounds doesn't seem like a lot of money today, but I can imagine it was worth a lot

21:30 **in those days.**

Yes, when I went to see that De Jong character at CML, I remember him saying "What's your wage?" I said, "Nine pound." And he said, "Well the rent will be such and such, now that's less than a third of your salary so

22:00 it'll be all right, you'll be able to handle it." So that was 1949, I was on nine pound something. That's right, I was on about six pound at Wandoo Street and then they said, "We want you to go down to Eagle Farm." I got a rise, I think it was nine pound seven and six. So that was wages just after the war.

Can I bring you back, now, to the time

22:30 **you were an early teenager, was your family hit hard by the Depression?**

No really, not while Dad was alive. He had a job right up until 1931, well the Depression, from reading books, started about 1929. No, I can remember I always wore sandshoes to school, the old fashioned sandshoes. But after he died

23:00 and that, I went barefooted, and took bread and dripping for lunch. Yeah, that had never happened before. So, you know, we were hit hard by my father dying. And of course, being the Depression time, it wasn't easy for Mum to get a job. I think an uncle of mine had a lot to do with it, George Beardon. Aunty Beryl, that was, Aunty Beryl was Mum's

23:30 youngest sister. And it's only later years when I've thought about it, I thought "Yeah, I think Uncle George," he didn't have any kids, had something to do with Mum getting a job and all the rest of it. So, and I never got round to thanking him, because I didn't realise it. But, talking of the Depression, we lived, 244 Montague Road is

24:00 six houses down from Davies Park. And Davies Park, there were two ovals, there was the main oval which used to be a speedway, and Gallipoli was next to it. Gallipoli was the football oval and there were plenty of rugby league fights in those days. It was called Gallipoli. And over the fence was the South Brisbane Gas Company. They've still got a tower

24:30 there that had something to do with the manufacture of the gas. And there was a hoboes' camp along to fence, all men, I suppose 30, 40, 50, 60. And just built themselves whatever they could scrounge, tin huts. And they used to just live there, that was the hoboes' camp. There in Davies Park. And one

25:00 of them used to come along Montague Road, and he most likely got full on metho [methylated spirits], I don't think they'd be able to afford to drink anything else, and he used to come along cursing and swearing up along Montague Road. And all us kids used to scatter "Sharky's coming," so we used to all race inside. Because this Sharky was coming up the road, full on metho, yeah. Yep

25:30 but the hoboes' camp, it was there.

What was so terrible about Sharky?

Oh, just the noise and he used to frighten all of us kids, you know, cursing and swearing and rambling on. Poor old soul.

And the, sorry…?

Full of beer and bad manners.

And the council tolerated the hobo camp?

Oh, yeah, they must've because they were never

26:00 moved. I don't know when it was all cleaned up but, you know, I can remember. I'd almost say they were still there when I left. When I, in those days in West End, I cottoned on to my uncle who lived next door. He had five kids, Uncle George and Aunty Mary. And Uncle George had spent all his life in West End; he was born down near the Grey Street Bridge

26:30 there. And the whole family came from down Peel Street and, whatever the streets are called down there. Anyway, he did a lot of fishing in the river, and of course, he had a son, Rayner. He was about a

year younger than I, he and I and Uncle George, he used to take us all fishing. In those days you, perch fishing in the river.

27:00 They were a little fish a bit like a jew fish. They were about that long, the river used to be full of them, you'd get two hundred no trouble at all. Everybody used to go fishing for them. Sunday afternoon they used to go fishing in New Farm Park, all along the banks at Davies Park. Anyone and everyone.

What would you do with so many fish, would you try to sell them?

No, just used to clean them and eat them.

27:30 I suppose Uncle George, with five kids, kept him going for a week, I suppose, yeah.

Would've given you a break from bread and dripping.

I sort of only remember taking it to school once. I wouldn't say we lived on it. Now wonder I turned out fat.

So

It's not bad. Pepper and salt you've got to put on it.

28:00 Mother would salt it, you know, dripping and salt, two good healthy subjects.

Can you eat it now?

Oh, no thank you. I haven't even had salt for ten years.

Well can you tell us why you wanted to join the navy rather than the air force if you used to make model aeroplanes?

That is something that I've often pondered. I don't really know, but when I was at Hopes, I

28:30 met up with George Lester, and George was in the Sandgate Yacht Club. Which in those days sailed Linton Hope Raters, they were a sailing boat that was built for the Thames River in England. And there were only two clubs that, there was one at Sandgate and one at Bowen, up in North Queensland. And George used to be a member of the Sandgate Yacht Club, so somehow or other I palled up with him. Between us we bought an old

29:00 boat,

What kind of boat was it?

Oh, twenty foot long, decked, I've got photos up there, decked in, with a cockpit to take about five people. And we used to sail that off Sandgate every Saturday afternoon. The one we bought had been called The Wacko, and capsized between Peel Island and Cleveland somewhere and drowned five people.

29:30 But that didn't deter us. We called it Spitfire, you know, the Spitfire fighter plane in England. So I think that must be what made me join the navy. Now you're going to say why did I become a telegraphist, another good question. I used to listen to the short wave radio. On radios you had the local broadcast and then you had short wave, where you could

30:00 listen to Morse Code and all that stuff. And, I think I've still got a letter upstairs, I heard some Italian crowd broadcasting, and they said, "If you can hear this, write back to us." They used to do those types of things. So I wrote back and they wrote back to me so I think that's how I got interested in radio, in being a

30:30 telegraphist.

Did you build your own radio?

No.

So how did you get interested in short wave radio?

Nothing to do. No toys.

Would your friend have one or...

Couldn't afford toys.

Did you have a short wave radio?

Yeah, all radios had a, they just had a switch

31:00 was broadcast or short wave.

Can you tell us a little bit about that, because I'm a bit ignorant actually? Does short wave mean just, what does that mean as opposed to the regular radio?

Well, the waves go through the air like that and some of them you've got more waves per something or other.

Oh, okay, okay.

The waves are shorter, and they can transmit further.

Right.

See, the

31:30 ordinary radio you listen to, like up here we can't, well, I don't know lately, but we've had trouble getting 4BC [radio station call sign] from Brisbane, couldn't get it. But short wave goes all the way around the world, you know.

I see. So you were mucking around on that one night and came across some Italians talking. And did you know Morse Code then, though?

No, I used to hear it, you know. No.

So

32:00 **how did you answer them?**

Wrote a letter. Letters, you remember, those old fashioned, snail mail. But this is more interesting, in those days, after Kennigo Street, we went to live in MacIntyre Street, Wooloowin. And round about that time,

32:30 that's right, I was building model aeroplanes, so it must've been Kennigo Street where it started, and I used to go down the Valley to the little bookshop, book exchange, just opposite the hole in the wall. You don't know where the hole in the wall is, do you? And I used to get a book called Flying Aces. And in it, they had "Join the Flying Aces Club,"

33:00 so away I went, sent the thing away. I get back from Flying Aces, I get a badge and everything, but I also got a letter from a girl in Oregon. They had sent my letter on to the, oh, Wabaska or something, pen pals club. And they forwarded it onto Caroline Griffith, who lived in Klamath Falls, Oregon. So we corresponded,

33:30 and corresponded and talked and then the war came and I went away in the war, and that was the end of that. Still had all the letters, they just never got thrown out. So, about three years ago, I said I wonder if I can find Caroline, on the internet. I know she'd be married, and I know her name would be Jones, I know she might be dead. Anyway, after six months, I found her. And we

34:00 write to each other now. She's 80 or something. She was only 18 the last time knew her. And also, I do a lot of corresponding on the internet with the chap who, through whom I found her, Ralph.

A good thing.

The things you can do.

So when you joined up

34:30 **as a telegraphist, was the course fairly intensive, learning Morse Code and**

Yeah, nine months, it was.

Where did you go then, once you joined up did, you said they had to wait for a whole band of men?

Yeah. Onto the train on South Brisbane station, which we always called Kyogle station, because when the train line was first bought in, it came up through Kyogle, we always referred to the station at South Brisbane, the interstate part of it, as

35:00 Kyogle Station. South Brisbane station was the local one. Anyway,

That's interesting. I was just wondering how long did it take from the moment you enlisted till you going to the station?

I put my name down to enlist in the February, but we didn't get called up until the July. And I went away on my sister's birthday, the 15th of July.

35:30 But we marched from the depot, HMAS Moreton used to be down there at that, right on the corner, where the expressway is, on the corner of the river, beside the Gardens. Right at the end of Alice Street, you went down the slope to the river, and there was a big fig tree there and HMAS Moreton was there. So we marched from there to South Brisbane station, boarded the train, and changed trains in Sydney

36:00 and we went down to Melbourne, Flinders Naval Depot. God forsaken place it is too. And did a nine month's telegrapher's course.

Can you tell us why you joined up, I guess it would've been the top of '42; did the Japanese coming into the war make a difference for you?

Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, well, you know, if you read the stories, they were just

36:30 taking everything before them and there was no stopping them. They were just winning everything. And I suppose patriotism, that's all you could call it I suppose. I just joined up. A lot didn't. Some, like I had a good mate who didn't, and they'd apply through their firm to get,

37:00 what did they call it, protected industries. Industries that could manufacture things for the war were protected industries. So you could get yourself classified as working for, in a protected industry, and not volunteer. Well a lot of them went, second jobs, worked down the wharves, earning good money for the Yanks and all the rest of it.

37:30 So when you came back after the war, those good mates were never quite the same. They just sort of hadn't fronted up, yeah.

They wouldn't have understood everything that you'd been through, so maybe there was a gap there in understanding.

Yeah.

Was there a general fear at that point in Australia?

Oh yeah,

When the Japanese came

38:00 **into the war?**

Oh, the, you know, the Brisbane Line [imaginary Australian defensive position/line] was real. They were going to let the Japs invade as far as Brisbane, just keep falling back until it was, you know, all of our powers concentrated south of Brisbane. That was

What do you know about that? Can you tell me a bit about the Brisbane Line?

No, not really. But

38:30 it was real, it existed, and that was what was going to happen. What I can tell you, when I joined the HMAS Australia it was after the Coral Sea battle. Hobart had been torpedoed, the Perth had been sunk, Sydney had been sunk, Canberra had been sunk. And they were all the cruisers. Australia was the only one left. And I joined her in Sydney after, she came back from the Coral

39:00 Sea and went to Sydney, I joined her down there. And we went up to Palm Island, and we had the destroyer HMAS Arunta with us, and we weren't allowed north of Palm Island, because we were the only ships left. You know, we were the only navy fighting ships left. And they were fighting in Milne Bay at the time, the army was fighting at Milne Bay, and we weren't allowed north of Palm Island.

39:30 So, oh no, it was real touch and go stuff. The Japs could've just come down and taken the place, if they'd have known.

So is that why you signed up, because of the Japanese fear?

Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, and three chaps from Hopes before, I signed up from Hopes, but before that, three of them out of the office had signed up. Ces

40:00 Hawkins, Norm Saunders and Jack someone or other. And they were in the 8th Divvy [Division] that had gone to Malaya. And of course, they all got captured, you know, that's what was happening, so people you'd work with were prisoners of war in Jap hands in Malaya. And there was nothing worse than being a Jap prisoner of war, not good.

How did your mum take you signing up?

I think I just went home and

40:30 told her. I don't ever remember asking her.

She must've been proud of you.

Oh yeah, I was the apple of her eye, by why wouldn't I be, I'm a lovely chap.

Tape 2

00:30 **Sitting back there, there was just a couple of questions I had, that came up about the pre-war stuff, but then after that I'd like to go into, I guess, all the training that you did before you**

embarked.

Hang on a minute; I'm having a bit of trouble with you.

I'll raise my volume, that's okay. So you mentioned your dad died when you were about ten. Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like for you, losing your father at such a young age?

01:00 Yeah, he came home from work sick on the Monday. And he went to bed and it was raining, it was the flood of 1931, like the '74 flood, there was another flood back then. And they couldn't get him to the general hospital because of the flood, because at Bowen Park there,

01:30 when the road comes down from Gregory Terrace, it used to go right down and cross the railway line. And they've built a bridge over it now, and the train goes underneath, into the Exhibition. But there used to be swinging arm boom gates there, and of course, all that was underwater. So you couldn't get to the hospital, with the result he died the next Monday. He lasted a week.

02:00 I can remember being on the back landing and one of my sister's friends consoling me and that's about, you know, roughly all I can remember. We didn't go to the funeral, they buried him in the family plot out Toowong, but we went up to this Aunty Beryl and Uncle George who lived at Highgate Hill. Myrtle and I were up there for the afternoon while the funeral was on. But, you know, at that age

02:30 you adapted. As I said I think I cottoned, looking back now, I cottoned onto the uncle next door as a father figure. And I did the same when I went down the Valley, the chap who owned the flats in Kennigo Street, Pop Beckwood, I cottoned onto him. And he and I used to, he had a spot on, I think it's where the motorcar

03:00 went over the cliff in the paper this morning, that cliff face at Bowen Terrace, where the Storey Bridge comes in. We used to catch mud crabs; we used to get down there with big poles, with lines on and a big hunk of meat. Climb down the cliff face and toss them in, wind them up and got big mud crabs hanging on. We had a big net that was about twelve foot long on a pole,

03:30 we used to double joint it so we could open it up. Lovely mud crabs there.

It would've been.

But they're all gone now.

Did you have to help your mum out around the house lot or with work and stuff when your father was gone?

Oh yeah, I can remember scything the back yard, I must've been ten years old using a scythe. You know, the back yard, the lawn

04:00 had got out of hand sort of business, and it was too long to mow. With a lot of paspalum grass or something at the time. I can remember being there with the scythe and the sharpening stones on it; I ran my thumb along the blade of the scythe and just cut into this finger. Scything the back yard, I must've been that high.

Might've been taller than you.

Oh yeah,

04:30 but, you know, there was nothing outstanding about it, everyone was the same. Everyone was doing it and we weren't any exceptions.

It must've been hard for, I guess, what became a single mother, your mum became a single mother

Yeah, you don't realise it, but looking back now. Now,

05:00 this is a little incident of my mother, how mothers work. I was on the internet the other day a month or so ago, and I'd read somewhere about, was it, ATSIC [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] or someone or other. Was listing all the monies that were around the world that were owed to people. Get on the internet and claim it. So I did, and I'm looking down the list and there's Hodgson,

05:30 VP, 46 dollars. I thought, "Well, my mother's Violet Priscilla, there wouldn't be too many VP Hodgsons." It was an AMP [insurance company]. So I wrote to the AMP, young lady rang me up, discussed a few things he said, "I think it is your mother," I said, "Well there wouldn't be too many VP Hodgsons around." So she sent over the legal thing,

06:00 sure enough it was Mum. So I asked AMP to give me a run down on what it, you know, as much as they knew about it. It appears, when we were in Macintyre Street, which would've been 1940, she took out a whole of life policy, the chap used to come to the doors in those days, and put threepence and sixpence a week you could have a policy. She took out this whole of life policy for 45 years

06:30 to mature, and then after Macintyre Street, we moved to Robertson Street, The [Fortitude] Valley. So

she'd obviously forgotten it or the chap didn't call or something, it had just been left to lapse, and you know, AMP sent me a cheque for 45 dollars. $45.20. Now that was Mum trying to do something for herself and us kids,

07:00 but she never let on about it or anything, you know. Unbelievable isn't it?

That's incredible.

My kids are waiting for me to die, so they can inherit this. But it's handy, because as soon as they get out of line, I say, "You're out of the will." That pulls them into line real quick.

Just wondering, Sel, did you follow any news of the or what did you

07:30 **know about the news of the build up of tensions in Europe and just pre-World War II?**

Oh yeah, I can remember the blitz in London and reading about it, you know. All that. How terrible it all was and, there was one, there was a bloke that used to come on the air, I think it was 4BH [radio station] at six thirty every Sunday night, and he was Doctor Goddard. And he used to warn us about

08:00 the Yellow Peril from the north, Japan. And everyone used to listen to Dr Goddard, Sunday night, and I've no idea what happened to him, I've never heard anything about him since. Whether he was a commo [communist] red rag or something and they got rid of him. But what he was saying was dead set true, and it all happened.

Can you recollect any of the broadcasts, I mean, what sort of things he'd say?

No, not really, but

08:30 he was just, he was, kept on warning all of Australia about the Japs and their ideas. All the rest of it.

And do you remember what you were doing when war broke out?

I was at Kennigo Street in the Valley, my sister had just been married, and they got a flat, her and her husband got a flat in the same block of flats,

09:00 upstairs at the back, we were downstairs at the front. And I was up there, listening to their radio, when Churchill [actually Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain] made his speech and said, you know, "We are now at war with Germany," in, when was it, September '39 or something or other. Everything happens in September, you know.

Apparently so.

Japan signing the surrender, that was around about September, me

09:30 coming on air, September. All the important things in the world are September. 11th of September over in New York.

So what did you think when you heard that news on the radio?

What, we were at war?

Yeah.

Oh, you know. See, we'd also been bought up with the Great War, the First World War. Well, you know, you had uncles and that that'd been in it,

10:00 you had neighbours had been in it, and you had people been in it, and you looked at books all about it. So it was, you know, "Oh, here we go again." sort of business. See the gap was only, what twenty years, wasn't it?

What did you know about the First World War, with all those things around?

Oh, knew all about it, everything that's around today, was around then. The photos and the history and the gas. I had an uncle I didn't

10:30 know him, he died before I was born, but he'd been there. Went through the war and came home and got killed with a horse and cart out at Holland Park. After being, after years in the trenches in France.

But did you ever consider signing up before the Japanese entered the war?

No. I can't ever relate,

11:00 it was way over there, twelve thousand mile away. Took you six weeks to get there in a ship if I remember right. No, even though the, you know, what, 6th Division had been formed, the 7th Division had been formed and the 8th Division went Malaya, but the other two divisions were over there and that. Oh no, you know, maybe you pondered it and it was when the Japs came in and it

11:30 got serious in this part of the world, it was all you needed to push you over the brink.

But did you consider yourself a British subject at that stage, or was it purely for Australia?

Oh no, no, no, British subject. No, we all believed in king and country and all the rest of it.

12:00 I still don't mind the Union Jack on our flag. Part of our heritage. It's only the, I've got to be careful what I say here, that don't want it.

We actually want your opinion, so it's okay. Please tell us.

No, there's a good anonymous poem about the Australian flag.

Can you tell us?

Being proud about the Union Jack up in the corner.

12:30 Which I'm about to put up out there, I've got the flagpole. Yeah.

Do you know the poem at all Sel?

No, but I think it's floating around upstairs somewhere. Quite good. Keep all those things.

Sel, if I can take you to your

13:00 **first nine months of training after you enlisted. Can you actually just talk us through, in detail, what it was that they taught you and the process of training you, inducting you into the navy and then**

Well, the first thing, you were in civilian clothes, and you got out the train in a big drill hall. The train went right into Flinders Naval Depot, which is HMAS Cerberus and you got out the train and in civilian

13:30 clothes, you marched up a road to the wooden huts where you were going to be bedded down, you know. And there were all the sailors, all these blokes in uniform along the road, said, "You'll be sorry." That was the war cry "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry." So you did, we did drill first of all. You did parade ground drill, marching, turning and all this

14:00 business for about a month or so, and then you started at the signal school, which is a building down yonder and you went down and every day you went to the signal school. Where you learned Morse code, they had benches with Morse code keys on it, and you did the mechanics of the wireless. And all the rest

14:30 of it, went on and on and on for nine months.

Can you tell us what the rest of it was, so we can get a clear idea of how they trained you up?

No, you, not really, you just practice Morse code. You had a teacher, who was an ex-school teacher teaching you the theory of wireless, how and why it worked and all the rest of it, which

15:00 I was never very good at. I was all right on the Morse code. You did sentry duty of a night around the rotten place. You had to go down the gunners, the gunnery officer's place, pick up a rifle and a bayonet, no bullets, and then two of you walk

15:30 around the signal school for four hours, I suppose. Yeah, be four hour shifts. Challenge anyone who came along and all the rest of it, stand in corners and have a smoke on the sly. Officers used to come around trying to catch you not being on the job. But we were a long way from Japan down there, I couldn't imagine

16:00 meeting any Japs. Cold, frozen taps, terrible place that Flinders Naval Depot.

Would've been cold coming from here.

We used to go on leave, oh, about every second weekend I think, and you used to go up to Melbourne. My sister had married a John Arbuckle, whose people lived in Cubit Street,

16:30 Richmond, Melbourne. He'd actually played football for Richmond, Aussie Rules. And of course, that was were I had to go when I came up on leave, so down I went, and I slept on, you know how the houses are right up on the footpath, those old style houses, little veranda, and it's right on the footpath. I slept on a bed on the veranda, nine blankets one night, couldn't move for the weight of the

17:00 blankets. Nine. So eventually, I graduate to sleeping in Navy House up in Melbourne proper.

What sort of things did you get up to on leave?

Mostly drink beer. No, they used to have, I think it was called a dugout, Myers [department store],

17:30 down the basement in Myers, and the girls, the Myers girls, I suppose they were, used to volunteer to work and you could go down there and have a coffee and a meal and talk to these females and so on and so on. They had the same things up around Brisbane and that, doing stuff to the poor lonely sailors. When I was there, the

18:00 Marines from Guadalcanal came in, they'd been fighting and that and captured Guadalcanal when the army took over and came into Melbourne. And they were lovely blokes. They were all tall, well built and smart in the American uniforms and that, but they were quite impressive. But you know, they were the pick in the Marine Corps.

18:30 in those days, you had to be an Arnie Schwarzenegger [film actor] to get in.

And how did the Australian soldiers feel about them?

Down there it was all right, it wasn't too good up in Brisbane.

The Battle of Brisbane.

The Battle of Brisbane was dead set real.

Can you tell us about it, or what you know of it?

I don't think I was here, I think I came home on leave soon afterwards. But

19:00 the Americans had a canteen on the corner of Creek and Adelaide Streets, where Eagers had their car showroom, Holden motor cars and that there. In those days, Chevs [Chevrolet car] and the like. They had a big canteen there. I think some of the Australian soldiers wanted to get in to buy stockings for the girls or something or other and, but the Yanks wouldn't have anything to do with it, and they had a big

19:30 brawl. At one stage, the Australians broke into the Grand Central Hotel, round about where the Wintergarden is there, in Queen Street and rolled all the kegs down the street, kegs of beer. I remember coming home on leave and the patrols that were going down the streets, like a group of about twelve soldiers, AIF [Australian Imperial Force], fully booted with tin hats, rifles,

20:00 bayonets, and they used to march around the streets as a patrol, you know, led by an officer, a sergeant or something. I can still see them coming down Edward Street, opposite where Rose is, where the Shingle Inn is, that used to be a pie store there. A pie store.

They kept the peace?

20:30 **They kept the peace after that, the patrols?**

Oh yeah, I think so. The Negroes, they weren't allowed across the Victoria Bridge, they were made to stay in South Brisbane.

By the Americans or Australians?

Americans, yeah. No, Negroes were all segregated in those days. And I think, I didn't see it, but I heard it,

21:00 it's hearsay, but I think it's right. One Negro came across the bridge and the white MPs [military police] shot him at the corner of George and Queen Street. Just shot him, didn't muck around. Of course, you know, Negroes didn't come to light until Martin Luther King [African American civil rights leader], did they, that's how it was.

Did you see any of that down in Melbourne?

I don't think I would've seen

21:30 a Negro in Melbourne. I don't think Melbourne knew there was a war on, that's my opinion.

Why? What gave you that opinion?

They were just so remote for it, and they didn't have any respect for servicemen I don't think. You know, you could get pushed out of a queue, anything. But then again, I suppose we were only trainee naval ratings from

22:00 that Flinders Naval depot down the road, sort of business, so. But Sydney was different all together, real navy town. Real good navy town, you could do no wrong. Never paid for a tram ride in Sydney, conductors used to just ignore you, they wouldn't ask you for a fare.

That's amazing, I've never actually heard of the difference

22:30 **between treatment in Melbourne versus Sydney.**

Yeah, and Brisbane was a real garrison town. Dead set garrison town, Brisbane.

So how would a navy fellow fare up in Brisbane then?

All right. Yeah.

But I guess, just back to Melbourne, and what other kinds of things would you experience, I guess from the locals, that

23:00 **gave you the, you know, the impression that..**

Yeah, weren't very friendly or anything. I don't think they knew there was a war on; they just went about their business. See in Sydney, Jake and I who was getting around together, I don't know, we ended up in the back blocks of Sydney, I don't know, we must've been chasing a couple of women or

23:30 something or other. Anyway, we had to get back to Sydney, so we were on this station, a goods train was going through. I said to Jake "Come on, we'll hop onto this if it slows down." so we're running along the platform trying to get pace up to hop on. And we missed it anyway, so some bloke come up to us and he said, you know, "You better not do that, come home with me." So he took us home, bedded us down for the night,

24:00 woke us up at six o'clock in the morning, gave us breakfast and put us on a train back to Sydney. So we got back on board ship without being in trouble. Wouldn't have the faintest idea what his name was. That's how Sydney was. Heather [interviewer] likes the sound of that. See when I, after I finished

24:30 the initial training, I was drafted to HMAS Assault which was at Port Stephens, around about Newcastle and I'd only been there a week and this Jake and I, got drafted back to Flinders. And when we got to Flinders we did a course, FOO, Forward Operation Operator

25:00 and we used to go with a lieutenant or something or other up in the front line, and spot the fall of shots and we used to have to work the radio with the lieutenant who called back the fall of shots, you know, 'up 300 yards, down 300 yards'. I can remember aircraft flying over with drogues [targets] strung out behind them and machine guns firing at the drogues and all that. So we stayed, we did that,

25:30 must've done a few months of that, and that's when we both got a draft to the HMAS Australia. Well, one of our action stations on the HMAS Australia. I can see now, it's because of that course, used to be up on the bridge, working the aircraft that were, spotting the fall of shot and the like.

26:00 **Can you tell us about, before meeting, hooking up with Jake, I guess, did you knew him initially in training?**

He was one of the twelve who went away. He's got a bit of history up at Buderim. There's a street up there, Jackman Street, which is named after his father or something or other, he was from Buderim.

26:30 And I went, I still knew him after the war when we lived at Taringa, he was out there somewhere, he and his wife visited us a couple of times. And I went to a HMAS cruisers association at Kedron Wavel, two year ago. They bought a bloke up to me and they said, "Hey, you know this bloke?" I looked at him and I said, "Never seen him before in my life."

27:00 "It's Jake." God blimey. So we had a bit of a chat, and Lorraine was with me. So he said to her afterwards, I got, you know how you're flitting around, you're talking to someone else and that, he said, "I always felt safe when I was with Sel," he said, "I used to stay with him. I always felt safe." Now I was 20, he was

27:30 17, 18. It's just another father figure thing again. He was no more safer with me than he was with anyone else, it was just you looked for someone to latch onto to feel secure. That's how insecure everyone is.

Two years is a huge gap when you're 18. Two or three years is a huge gap when you're 17, 18.

Yeah I suppose so, I suppose I was a bit more mature or something than he was.

28:00 He said to Lorraine, "I always felt safe when I was with Sel."

Can you tell us about, I guess just adapting to the discipline and navy life in your initial training days?

I never had any trouble. No, I never had any trouble. I always thought the, you know, you were in charge of a leading hand, or a petty officer was in

28:30 charge of your particular group and he drilled you and the rest of it, but they were quite good. You'd do drilling and fiddle around for hours and that, then they march you out to the west gate and at the west gate you could just stand around and have a smoke, you know, and they'd have a smoke. No, there was never much problem. And the sentry duty, that all got you into, it's quite good, in fact,

29:00 **In what way?**

The way it was done was really excellent. There was very few who came up disgruntled. Very, very few. Somehow the navy handles that side of it very well. How to take stupid civilians and make them into sailors.

Was there ever any mischief on the base that either that

29:30 **you were involved with or that you saw, fellows not**

Ships, not boats. You row boats.

No, no, on the base, I meant, in training.

Oh, the base? Sorry.

Yes, no, no, I'd never call it a boat.

No, not that I know of, no. No, I don't remember any incidents of any, any occasion.

30:00 **With all those young fellows getting into the navy?**

Yes. We went up Melbourne to let off steam, I suppose. No, well disciplined.

What would other fellows do to let off steam in Melbourne?

Oh, all you did was get drunk, chase women, never caught any but that doesn't matter.

Was this the start of an illustrious career of having a girl in every port?

No,

30:30 I had a girl in the home port. Yeah. I met Lorraine about February '42, when I went down the naval depot, I met Lorraine just after that. And something happened that doesn't happen anymore, it's a thing called love. Love has gone out the window, you never hear it mentioned, do you?

31:00 So you fall in love and you say, "Well, that's it." you manage to behave yourself. Not these days.

Oh, it still happens from time to time. You mentioned that you liked the work that you were doing in Morse, or that you were pretty good at it. But just wondering

31:30 **if you could still, I guess, tell us what the Morse code would be on your name or can you still do Morse?**

I what?

Can you still do Morse code?

Oh, when I hear it, yeah, I can, you know, I'm a lot slower all of a sudden. While I think about what that is, the next word, the next letter's gone. But yeah, you pick it up straight away, like riding a pushbike.

Would you be able to tell us your name in Morse code?

32:00 Yeah.

How would it go?

What do you want, Selwyn?

Yeah.

Dit dit dit, dit, dit da dit dit, dit da da, da dit da da, da dit.

Pretty good.

How about that. That was S E L W Y N.

They trained you well.

Yeah, no, the navy was quite a

32:30 good life. Real, you know, cliquey, stick up for each other, type of thing. And the American Navy was the same, it's a very good.

Did you, what did you know about the American Navy?

Oh well we were part of the American 7th Fleet when the action got going, after

33:00 the Palm Island days and that. From Palm Island the, when the fighting stopped in Milne Bay, we all went up to Milne Bay. We made a trip down to Brisbane from Palm Island. We came down to Brissy [Brisbane] and we picked, when we left Brisbane, down the bay, the HMAS Shropshire was down the bay. She'd just come up from Sydney, with the HMAS Warramunga. The HMAS Arunta was with us. So we went to Milne Bay. Well then when we got

33:30 into Milne Bay, we were joined by the, three American six inch cruisers, the USS Nashville, the USS Boise and the USS Phoenix. And the USS Phoenix was the cruiser sunk, the Argentinean cruiser [Battleship General Belgrano] sunk in the Falklands War. We got a heap of American destroyers, about twelve of them and we became Taskforce 74 of the 7th Fleet.

34:00 And from there on right through, we were with the Americans. They used to come aboard with concert parties, all this sort of thing. Great mob. Immaculate, the ships were clean, and very good.

The navy's got a pretty good reputation for its, I guess, hygiene and cleanliness. Can you talk to us about how they

34:30 **inducted you in that or what they instilled in you in terms of...?**

Well, the navy's run by the petty officers, and the leading hands are under them, and they aspire to being petty officers. And they just make sure everything's done properly. And you don't stand any rubbish from one of your own mates or something.

35:00 You know, you're very smartly, "Hey, you're doing the wrong thing." type of business. All disciplining I guess. Very good. All these young blokes these days need four years in the navy. Although I don't know about today's navy, it's a worry.

And can you tell us how they

35:30 **would discipline you in training with things they were sort of teaching you if they weren't sort of done right and how would they actually hand out discipline?**

Severe penalties.

Such as?

I went off on the watchkeeper's deck, B deck after a morning watch and I hadn't got into the rig of the day.

36:00 Of course, the commander looked over the compass platform and there I was. I was in blue jeans instead of being in khaki shorts. So next thing, his messenger comes down, says, "The commander wants to see you up on the bridge." So up I go. And I got a fortnight of reporting to the regulating petty officer, who's the policeman on board, and I had to go round, trying to catch other people out of the rig of the day, for a fortnight.

36:30 I didn't catch anyone. So I got let off light. Oh no, there was a cell on board, and Able Seaman Jones used to always be in the cell because he didn't like the navy and wanted to get out. And he just, every time you went to action stations they have to let you out of the cells. So he'd go up the mast or something, you know,

37:00 hide himself away and all this business. They did eventually let him out, I heard. All the trouble that he was worth. He was, as soon as action stations, he dropped off, you know, they'd pipe over the loud speakers, "Able Seaman Jones, report to the master of arms." or something or other. He'd be missing. Oh, character.

And what was his normal

37:30 **station?**

I don't know, he was an AB, I don't know, Able Seaman.

So he wasn't supposed to be up the mast pole.

No. Oh no, I don't know, it always just started at Flinders Naval Depot, it was very subtly done. It happened without you knowing it was happening. It started when you, you know, in the drilling, at the months of

38:00 marching around the parade ground. That type of thing.

Did they inspect quarters and things like that, I mean, can you tell us a bit about that?

The what?

Would you have inspections of your quarters and things like that?

Oh yeah, nine o'clock every night, the commander did the rounds. Followed by his bosun with a whistle, wasn't a bugle. I think it was a whistle.

38:30 Bosun with a whistle came round and wherever you were you just stood to attention, and he inspected the mess, went through the whole ship, nine o'clock every night. Anything out of order or, you know, sculleries that weren't clean and all that business, you'd get on report. Quite good. I never minded it.

39:00 And I don't really know anyone who did.

Tape 3

00:30 **Sel, when you were talking to Chris about your training course, you talked about learning Morse code. Was there another technique you had to learn to be a telegraphist?**

Well, you had to learn to send and you had to learn to receive.

Which were you better at?

Receiving. Because we didn't get much practice sending, because when you went to see and that it was radio silence. So you never, I would say in my naval years I never ever sent a

01:00 message. No, they broadcast from Belconnen in Canberra, from Guam in the Pacific and from Oahu in Honolulu. And those three stations just broadcast continually, 24 hours a day non-stop. And if they had important messages they repeated them, and you just sat there

01:30 on the ship and you just read Morse code for your watch. You did four hours of just taking down Morse code. They just, one message came, one after the other. Of course, you maintained silence at sea so you didn't give your position away to submarines and the like.

Then after you took the message down, who did you give it to?

Passed it through a little pigeonhole to the

02:00 coders, because it was all in code. It was, the first two groups were the same as the last two groups. A group is five letters, X Y T L B, something like that. And they were the letters that break the code and then the message started. And you just passed them through to the coders

02:30 and the coders decoded them and passed them to the officers that were, you know, wanting to know the information.

And where did the decoders sit on the ship?

Beside, adjacent to the wireless office.

So it wasn't your job to work out what all those letters meant?

No.

It was your job to take it down?

It just, they start off with 'NR' and a number and finish with

03:00 'AR'. Da da da da dit, they start off with, da dit da da dit. Then they go, give a number and then they'd give all the addressee, each addressee was separated by an oblique stroke, you know, a forward slash they call it now. Then they came to the end of the addresses which were all four letter words, like N E R K. N E R K was 'all ships at sea' and then they told

03:30 you how many letters, how many groups, G R 12. Then they'd go da dit da dit and then they'd shoot it off into the group, the 12, 5 letter [groups].

Would each day be the same?

Yes. Just sit there, headphones stuck on your head, and as soon as they finished one you ripped it off and gave it to the leading hand, and you

04:00 were into the next one. Non-stop. One operator would be reading Belconnen, Bells, as we used to call it, and one would be reading Guam and one would be reading Oahu there in Honolulu.

So there'd be three of you on at once?

Yeah, at least three.

I would like to talk to you more about that in a minute. Can you tell us, the first operation was, you were on the HMAS Australia,

04:30 **is that correct? What did you know about that ship before you got on it?**

Oh, nothing really, you knew it had been in the Coral Sea and that, in the battle there, and when HMAS Canberra had been sunk. You know, just the luck of the draw, you could've been drawn to a corvette, anything.

Now had you met Lorraine, your

05:00 **future wife before you went off on your first op?**

Yeah.

So how were you feeling about having to leave this lovely girl you'd met?

Not very good. The living treasure.

How did you meet her, by the way?

Roller skating at the Blue Moon Skating Rink over the other side of Victoria Bridge, on the right hand

side.

I had seen her many years ago. When I lived in Macintyre Street, Wooloowin, she

05:30 used to live in Thorrold Street. And I'd seen her get off the train, and I'd seen her a couple of times on Brunswick station. And I say I was attracted to her, but being a shy retiring lad, and I was because my mother and sister fought like Kilkenny cats [ferociously] so I was always frightened of women. I have a funny story I can tell you too. So I wouldn't talk to a girl. So

06:00 anyway, in my sailing days, I took up roller skating. We went ballroom dancing and roller skating a mate and I, and we gave the ballroom dancing away, we decided to stick with the roller skating. And she was there one night, so somehow or other, I managed to ask her for a skate. So I don't know how I did it. So we skated together,

06:30 that was on the Friday night. And on the Saturday morning we lived in Robertson Street, The Valley, and I said to my sister, "You going down the Valley this morning?" she said, "Yeah." I said, "I'm coming with you. I met a girl last night, She works at the Cash and Carry down the Valley." So down I went, I put my head in the doorway and Lorraine shot out, through a turnstile going that way, she went that way.

07:00 And I thought, that impressed me. For some girl, to come along and talk to me, she'd go out through an in turnstile. That's pretty good. So we never looked back from there on.

I thought you meant, she shot out the back of the shop so that…

No, she come out to meet me.

And were you a good skater?

Oh, just

07:30 ordinary, yeah.

So that's what you used to do on dates, is go roller skating and…

Yeah, and movies.

Movies.

And the Regent Milk Bar. And have College straight ups.

What are they?

Oh, ice cream, milk, jelly, ice cream, custard, jelly, ice cream, in a long glass.

It's amazing your arteries haven't clogged.

They were still, they were delicious. Well, they did

08:00 at once, I had a cholesterol of nine point four.

So you'd met Lorraine and that's when you found out you'd be heading off on the HMAS Australia. How was she about that?

Oh, I suppose not happy but part of life. You're in the navy, it was going to happen. You know, and there was a war, if someone didn't do it,

08:30 all her kids would have slit eyes, wouldn't they?

You weren't engaged though then, were you, when you…

We never got engaged. I used to come home on leave and I came home this time, it must've been Christmas time and I said, things were hotting up a little bit, I said, "We better get married next leave." "Yeah, righto." So away I went

09:00 and I didn't come back for nine months. So when I came back, I came back on the USS Calamaris into Brisbane, at Manus Island up in the Admiralties [islands], and I just walked in one Saturday morning, walked up home, to Robertson Street, saw Mum, went out, then went and got, saw Lorraine. I said, "Righto, are we still getting married?" she said, "Yep." So we got married on the Tuesday. Some people

09:30 want to know why the urgency of us getting married.

I can guess.

I'd been away for nine months, she couldn't possibly be pregnant.

How did you deal with the, we were talking about this before, how did you deal with the absence of women on the ship?

10:00 We were always, there was something, you'd wake up at night and some bloke would be handling you, something like that, you know. And I don't know, you just handled it, you didn't do anything about it,

there were no women. You didn't drop the soap in the mess deck, in the bathroom so that was pretty dangerous practice, that idea. But,

10:30 no, but oh, women on board, I can't imagine it. There'd be that many fights and bits of favouritism and blokes trying to win on them or not win on them and that'd be terrible. No wonder they end up with cases where, it's got to happen. You can't stop them when they get together.

Do you think there was a, I don't know, because I haven't been

11:00 **in your situation, but was there a kind of pack mentality that went on with men all in the same area together that couldn't be tolerated by women, if women were there, you wouldn't behave that way. Do you know what I mean? Was there that kind of…**

Well, I'll be real crude; one of the entertainment jokey things was the heads,

11:30 which are the toilets, just flowed out into the sea, down a pipe in the waterline, see. And of course, the excreta would float out. So you'd be on B deck, see and someone would say, "Oh, look at that, I'm in love with him, who is it?" and race off down the heads to see who it was. So you wouldn't want women around in that situation, would you?

12:00 No, it wouldn't work.

Did any women come on board the Australia?

Not that I can recollect. I think there were occasions when, in Sydney or somewhere, there'd be a party on the quarter deck. Lorraine was never on board.

12:30 No.

So do you think, let's say, learning to survive in a male dominated environment changed you a little bit in that you were socially different when you came home on leave? Do you think you acted differently or you found it difficult to melt into society?

No, I don't think I did, I don't think I had any troubles. But I've always

13:00 been a bit of a loner or whether it developed from my father dying at a young age and I tacked onto the uncle next door and then when I went down the Valley, I tacked onto Pop Beckley and things like that, you know, looking back on it. And, as I said, Mum and Myrtle used to fight a fair bit. You know, I think Myrtle was, she was six years older than me so

13:30 when I was nine, she was 15 and getting interested in boys and all the rest of it. And they used to really have brawls, pulling hair and all this, and I was a nine, ten, eleven year old boy, you know. Women, oh no, not for me. So, when I started working at Hopes, we used to go up the local shop of a lunchtime, and there was a girl up there,

14:00 who I'd heard that the PMG [Post Master General's] boys were having a bit of time with. And I thought "Geeze, I must do something about this," so I latched onto Daphne, I used to take her to the pictures. Meet her inside, threepence to get in, meet her inside, then walk her home down to Chester Street down the Valley. Catch the tram down, the Bulimba ferry tram, get off at Chester Street. So this night, never kissed her,

14:30 this night I said, "Oh, got to kiss Daphne tonight." So instead of going down Chester Street, I walked her down Wandoo Street, and Wandoo Street was where Chas Hope, where I used to work. And we got under the street light half way down and I'm thinking, "Down the next corner." And out of the blue came mother, and she whacked into Daphne something shocking.

15:00 And then she got, turned on me and told me what a dirty bastard I was etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Well, I went up Wandoo Street onto a tram that quick. I thought, you know, "This is women; this is my sister and Mum all over again." (UNCLEAR) So I was quite retarded as far as women were. Actually speaking, her mother had an ounce of sense,

15:30 I was the best thing in the world for her daughter to be going out with. I hadn't even kissed her.

What would she, why would she lay into you and Daphne, you hadn't done anything?

Oh, just Daphne shouldn't be going out with boys or something.

I have to ask you this, because I'm curious. Did you latch onto Daphne because you'd heard that she was a bit of a dollar, you know, like…

Yes.

Oh.

Yeah.

16:00 I was going to have a sexual experience with her; I was going to kiss her.

At least you're honest. I though maybe you latched onto her to protect her from the other boys that were trying to go for her.

No, oh no.

Fair enough.

Oh, Jesus.

What was I thinking?

Have a real sexual experience; I was going to kiss her.

16:30 Like I have a hands-on experience every Friday, with my physiotherapist over the road.

So your mother was fairly strict as far as all that goes, then?

Oh, yeah, it was the way of life. Boys and girls didn't get together. I only had one mate that was looking after his girlfriend. No,

17:00 all the girls were virgins when they got married.

And a lot of the men too, I hear.

Oh yes, yeah, that's be right.

So when you went on, when you left Lorraine,

Nothing strange about it.

No.

And it's not hard to handle.

No. It seems like a different era, though.

Oh yeah, but that's what's wrong today,

17:30 see, as I said before, you never hear the word love. It's hop into bed these days, it's lust I suppose. And after they've hopped into bed, after nine months or something or other they suddenly think. "Oh, what am I doing here?"

Were you brought up with any particular religious beliefs?

Church of England. Used to go to Sunday School.

18:00 Terrible. Yeah.

Did that see you through some hard times, later in the war, having some kind of religious belief?

No, I think I lost it. I think I lost it back there. You know, your religion's in your heart, how you treat other people and all the rest of it.

18:30 There's no God up there. Mars is up there, straight out there, every night.

So tell us about your first…

That's what all the trouble in the world is now. That's a religious war, this terrorism; it's just a religious war. Those terrorists don't want to change, they want their, you know, we've moved on beyond that. Where it's free, you can have religion or you don't want religion

19:00 etcetera, etcetera, but they're trying to avoid going to that stage, and they're trying to convert us all back to looking after Mohammed and Allah and whoever.

Did Lorraine come from a particular religious background?

No, she's Church of England too, just ordinary. No.

Because I'd heard in those days, in the '40s and '50s, people were still changing

19:30 **religions when they got married.**

Oh yes, yeah. Yeah, a lot of men changed to Roman Catholic. There was, Archbishop Duhig was in charge of the Roman Catholic Church, and there was a bloke in Melbourne also, Mannix I think, and, you know, religion was the be all and end all for them. But they had all these

20:00 Catholics going to church and all the rest of it. Where the rest of us, the other fifty per cent were Church of England and you went if you wanted to, or you didn't go. And, you know, it was kept up, it's ridiculous. And Archbishop Duhig died and I reckon from that day on, it all just disintegrated. Now, nobody cares what religion anybody is or anything. It's a good way to be. Go to

20:30 church if you want to, and then when you get into all this paedophile business that's coming out, like. I'd say that we all knew it was happening. But you could never put your finger on anything. There was that Holy Cross place at Wooloowin big, galvanised fence all the way around it. You know, and the story was that all the pregnant Catholic girls were there

21:00 working in the laundries and all this business. And the stories that are coming out now, it's all proving true. It's no good. Silly.

So can you tell us about your first operation on the HMAS Australia, you left, did you leave from Melbourne?

No, Milne Bay.

21:30 **So how did you get onto the ship?**

We, well I joined the ship in Brisbane, and we went up to Palm Island, and we came back to Brisbane and picked up the HMAS Shropshire and the HMAS Warramunga and we went up to Milne Bay.

Now what do you mean, Sel, by picked up?

We joined them.

So you were in a convoy now?

Yeah, the four ships together. And we went to Milne Bay, and there we were joined by the three American cruisers and about twelve

22:00 destroyers, and we became Taskforce 74 of the 7th American Fleet. The Americans had the 3rd Fleet, 5th Fleet and the 7th Fleet. And we did a bombardment; we were the bombardment group for landings.

Well, first of all, what did you think of the Boise and the Phoenix in comparison to the Australia and the Shropshire?

Oh, they were more modern ships.

22:30 I never went aboard any of them, I could've. I just never elected to go, that's all. But, oh no, they had, you know, they were good ships.

And where were the 12 destroyers from?

America. And our first operation was Cape Gloucester, on Boxing Day. December the 26th, what would it be, 19

42?

23:00 43.

43.

Yeah. 43.

And when you say the bombardment…

Yeah, we used to go, like we left Milne Bay, say at six o'clock in the evening, steamed all night, to Cape Gloucester, we'd be off Cape Gloucester and we'd bombard where the troops were going to land. You know, destroy as many gun positions and Jap troops, etcetera, etcetera, as we could.

23:30 And then at, we'd do that about, oh, on the crack of dawn, I suppose, we'd start to bombard, and then about nine o'clock, the troops would go ashore, out of troop ships, in those little barges with the flat front. They'd go and actually land and do the hand-to-hand fighting stuff. Well, that was the pattern all the way through, we did

24:00 oh, we did about 12 of them all together. Cape Gloucester, Biak, Numfoor, Sansapor, Hollandia.

What did you know about what the Aussies were going through on Milne Bay, and the Americans?

Yeah, we used to get reports on board. I can remember, blokes that did go ashore, I never went ashore in New Guinea.

24:30 I never, I used to thing, oh hot, rotten, stinking place, always raining, you know, I'm better off on board the ship. I used to just stay on board, but blokes would go ashore and I can remember them coming back with propaganda leaflets that they'd put up no the notice board. You know, "While you Aussies are up here fighting us," say the Japs, "This is what the Americans are doing to your wife there back home." And of course, there'd be flash dressed

25:00 Yanks, with Australian girls in various positions and you know, we'd be up the top fighting Japs. All this sort of propaganda, you know.

Well, who would've put that around, the Japs?

The Japs would've printed them, and they'd be in leaflets, still in captured positions, after the soldiers captured them, you know. And these sailors who's gone ashore had come across them somewhere along the line and

25:30 bring them back on board. Oh yeah, they used to have them, they were pretty crude. Trying to get through your mind that you should've been fighting the Americans, not the Japanese. Sheer waste of time, anyway, they thought it was good, that was their mentality.

How did you get on with the Americans?

Good. Love them. Took one sailor home.

26:00 There's a lot of Australians I wouldn't take home. No, they were very good. Nice blokes, do anything for us. They thought very highly of the HMAS Shropshire and the Aussie [HMAS Australia] and the destroyers.

What was your rank, as a telegraphist, in the navy?

Well you started off; you were an ODCB, which was an ordinary seaman, communications branch.

26:30 Then you became a telegraphist. And then you became a TO, a trained operator. Then you became a WT3, wireless telegraphist 3. And that had two standards, a lower standard and a higher standard. You could pass the lower standard on board ship, but you couldn't pass the higher standard on board ship, you had to go to a depot and do

27:00 another course. And you couldn't become a petty officer until you'd passed the higher standard. Well that was where I ended up; I ended up a WT3, lower standard, a leading hand, lower standard. But I couldn't have gone, and the petty officer was the same, there was a lower standard and a higher standard and he couldn't become a chief petty officer unless he did the higher standard exam.

Do you

27:30 **regret that you didn't go and do that course?**

Ran out of war. Ran out of war.

Well then, that brings me to another question, Sel, you were obviously very good at receiving these messages, and you'd learnt to shorthand type, how come you didn't continue doing that when you got out of the navy? You worked for Hopes but you didn't want to do

28:00 **things with your fingers?**

That's quite interesting, because it was security. You'll find all the people my age, who went through the Depression, security became paramount. So I went back to Charles Hope and just stayed there because it was a secure job. You got paid every Friday. To branch out and do

28:30 something else was, you know, it might go all wrong. Now I can see plenty of people in the papers these days that did do that and succeeded. But there's a lot like me who didn't do it, with the result, you know, you're underachieved, really, you could've done more with your life. But security. See, Lorraine just went up to Townsville

29:00 and I said to her, to her granddaughter's thirtieth birthday. And I said to her, "Have you got any money?" She said, "Oh yeah, I've got some." Well I knew she hadn't drawn any out of the bank, because we do it together, every Wednesday we go and get what we want and that, and I keep it on the computer up here too. She said, "Yeah, I saved up two hundred dollars."

29:30 I said, "What do you mean you've saved it up?" Now that's the mentality, that's how you are. She'd saved up two hundred dollars; she could've gone to the bank and drawn five hundred dollars out. It's just, you do it, I haven't got any money now, something came up this morning, I said to Lorraine, "I need some money in the piggy tin over there, 50 cent pieces, that'll do."

30:00 Yeah,

I've heard that before, actually.

Before you spend something you think about it, and you just can't get out of the habit.

I knew somebody who used to buy cans and cans of plums on sale. Because they'd lived through the Depression, so I've heard those...

Yeah, it stays with you. Not a bad thing to have, because you don't waste money. I came out the day, my deferred pay, I think it was 183 pound.

Could you

30:30 **have stayed in the navy?**

Oh yeah.

As a telegraphist though?

Yeah.

Why wouldn't have that been secure?

Oh, no, I'd had enough by then. I used to lay up on B deck and try and, all I can remember laying there, there was a big coil of rope, and I used to drape myself over it, and I'm laying there thinking, "This bloody war will never end. We're at ….." you know,

31:00 Biak or somewhere or other, and Japan's miles away yet, all the landings we've got to go through before; it'll take ten bloody years." And then some smart bloke dropped an atom bomb. I could've kissed him.

Can you tell us, when you first arrived at Milne Bay, did you hear a lot of, I mean, obviously you were there for the bombing. Well, you went to Gloucester,

31:30 Cape Gloucester.

Cape Gloucester.

That's down the bottom of Great Britain.

But did you hear a lot of fighting going on, on the land?

No, it was all quietened down then. The Australians had sort of won Milne Bay.

So what were you sent there for, then, to…

That was our base. We operated out of Milne Bay. We went and did the bombardment at Cape Gloucester, then we came back to Milne Bay. Then we left Milne Bay and went to, wherever

32:00 we went next, Biak or somewhere or other and came back to Milne Bay. And eventually, we went to Seeadler Harbour on Manus Island, and the Admiralty Islands, up in the Bismarck Sea and bombarded and everything there and the troops went ashore and captured that. Then we moved our base up to Manus Island. Then as we progressed into the Philippines, we moved our base into Subic Bay,

32:30 outside of Manila. That's where you used to return to all the time after operations. You know, the Yanks would move everything into the place, floating dry-docks and all the rest of it. They're wizards to work with, they don't muck around.

Can you tell us about Cape Gloucester? What was it like

33:00 **on the ship, during the bombardment?**

Well, you went to action stations, and our action station was the wireless office. Unless I was wanted on the bridge for the fall of shot business that I mentioned before.

Now that FOO course, was that part of your training in Melbourne?

Yeah, but I went back to do it after Jake and I had been up at HMAS Assault, we'd been drafted to

33:30 Assault. Somehow or other we got selected to do this course, and we'd been drafted back to Flinders Naval depot for about three months. And then because we'd done that, we got drafted to the Australia, see, there were aircraft that were plotting the fall of shot and things like that.

Did you spend more time in the wireless room or…

Wireless room.

34:00 I can only remember being on the bridge about three times.

Sorry for interrupting Sel, can you tell us how did it, you said you went to action stations once you started the bombardment?

Yeah, well, we both got closed up to action stations, you know, before the bombardment started, some hours before, as soon as you got into enemy waters, where you could be torpedoed or some such thing. And the whole ship was sealed up, all the doors

34:30 and bulkheads were locked. You were in the wireless office, which was in compartment with bulkheads going through the ship and the door's locked. And there's generally a sailor on each bulkhead. If you had to go anywhere and had to pass through, he'd unlock it and lock it after you, you know. Well, you just stayed there, you did your four hours watch and then once you finished you just went and sat on the floor

35:00 outside or some such thing. Just out of the way, until your watch came round again. I was trying to remember how we ate, I can't remember. See, you were served down in the mess deck. We had day

men, what were day men. There were watch keepers and day men and the day men went up to the galley and bought them down and dished them out, and then

35:30 washed up the plates and everything afterwards and that. Blokes who, you know, weren't really good operators or something generally got that job. You didn't think any less of them or anything, there was nothing like that. And I can't remember, if the ship was all closed up for action stations, I don't think we could've got back down the mess deck. But I can't remember being served meals at action stations.

36:00 At one stage, we were at action stations for about three weeks, continually. When we bombarded off Hollandia. We bombarded Hollandia, we went to sea, and we patrolled off Hollandia for, I think it was three weeks. It was really to try and entice the Jap fleet to come down. They must've, you know, got on the grapevine that the Japs were going to counterattack or something.

36:30 But it never transpired.

Whereabouts is the wireless room on the ship?

Well, the deck you can see where you scrub the deck type of thing, that's the upper deck. There's another deck below it, which is the main deck. Now everything's on the main deck. You'd think the main deck would be the top deck, but it's not. The upper deck, the main deck and the lower deck.

37:00 And everything's on the main deck. And the wireless office is situated; I can show you on the photo in that, under the Pom Poms. The Pom Poms are the guns aft the three funnels on either side. They're multiple barrel things that went like that. I think there's about eight barrels, and every barrel throws a shell, they're Pom Poms. And they were directly above us. And

37:30 that's where the office was.

It would've been very noisy then.

Very noisy.

How did you concentrate?

I don't know, just did it.

And can you tell us what the wireless room actually looked like?

Passageway outside, there's a passageway on each side of the ship, on the

38:00 main deck, went fore and aft. And people just didn't wander round, you went, I might have this wrong, but you went forward on the port side and aft on the starboard side. It was one way traffic, the whole ship was like it, so in emergencies people weren't running into each other. You went forward or you went that way. Everyone was going in the same direction.

38:30 This is how well the navy's organised, unbelievable. And you came in, you came into the room which was in the middle, a passageway down there, you came in and the coding office was just there. There were transmitters there, and you went around the transmitters there and the wireless office was there, and the coding office there, passageway like that.

39:00 A bench where you sat at the bench, a wireless set in front of you, room for a pad, earphones on. The leading hand would sit in here, I think you passed the messages to him or if you were busy, he most likely got up and got them. And then he passed them through the pigeon hole to the coding office.

39:30 Seemed to be as big as this, but it wouldn't have been.

How many, maximum, in the room?

Six, something like that. Four or five operators and a leading hand.

The leading hand was the person in charge of the room.

Yeah. That's where I ended up, leading hand.

I'd like to talk to you more about that

I'm

40:00 having an argument with Canberra at the moment.

Are you, why's that?

Well, they put out certificates or something on the air, and I'm listed as telegraphist. I said, "I was a leading hand telegraphist." They said, "Well, that's what's written on the cards here." So I got hold of all my discharge papers and photographed all the little bits where I'd passed exams and that, and I've sent it down there. So I said, "Now here's the reason. But if you

40:30 don't want to make me a leading hand, so be it."

Tape 4

00:30 **Just curious, Sel, before you headed up into the islands, what did you know about the Japanese? What had you been told?**

Only what Dr Goddard had told us on Sunday night on 4BH. Oh, not much really. Well, you knew about China,

01:00 when they went through China, Nanking, the Rape of Nanking and all that business. So you knew that they weren't a very nice crowd. But the war in China had been going since about 1936. Roughly speaking.

And on the way up, or after you enlisted in the navy, did you, were you brought up to speed as to what the Japanese

01:30 **had done at Singapore and I guess other places**

Oh yeah, we knew all about that, yeah. Bayoneting nurses and all this stuff. So we didn't think much of them.

What was the general feeling, with the crew, towards the Japanese?

Hated them. We knew there were, you know,

02:00 Australians in prisoner of war camps in Singapore and that, we'd talk about it. You know, you talk about all sorts of things, so that was one of the conversations; you always had in the back of your mind that one day we might be able to rescue those blokes.

Do you think that was part of the wish of crew on board to actually carry out an op like that?

Oh yeah,

02:30 yeah. You know, do whatever we have to do to fit in with the war plan and do your job, so one day you'd be able to pull them all out. And it worked out. Although you didn't think it ever would, me laying on B Deck thinking " I wonder when this bloody war will ever end?" So I made a pact with myself, when it was all over,

03:00 and I got back into civil life, I was going to get right back in the groove and I was never ever going to get out.

Why was that, Sel? What was it about what you were doing that you, gave you such a strong desire?

Well I was sick and tired of, you know, never knowing where you were tomorrow, or what was going on, whether you were dead or alive. Get right back in that rut. That's why I went back to Hopes, I think, and stayed there another 20 years.

03:30 Can't beat being in a rut, it's real good. Like a tram, you just go to the terminus, come back and go to the other terminus. Nothing worries you.

I guess, you've inspired me to ask the question, what sort of things aboard the ship that you were on did truly worry you at times, in that first

04:00 **part of your campaign life?**

Oh, I don't know. I suppose you didn't want to be torpedoed or something, but you didn't get around thinking about it or anything like that. You went on an operation, you just hope everything went all right and you came out the other end all right. Which, like you did, until you got into the

04:30 Philippines.

I wanted to talk to you more about that in detail later on, but...

You haven't got enough time; you're going home at half past five, aren't you?

I've got all afternoon. You mentioned that you didn't go ashore when you first got to New Guinea, that you stayed on the ship a lot. What would you actually do in your down time, what would you actually do with your down time?

05:00 Read, write letters home, discuss things. Like, we discussed Communism, there was a couple of red rags [Communists] on board and I remember reading, there's a book about the Zion, the something or other of Zion. There's a book that floats around, I've seen it mentioned in the papers a couple of times. When it was on board so we used to read that and talk about it

05:30 and no,

Can you tell me about the red raggers you had on board?

Oh, well a lot of them were, you know, thought Communism and Socialism was a good thing. As was discussed in those days, and all the rest of it, you'd talk about it, they'd be for it and you'd dream up things against it.

06:00 You know, it won't work because people are always aspiring to be better than the other bloke so we all can't be equal. Sooner or later someone gets a bit better than the other bloke or someone wants more, and then the whole thing falls down, all this sort of business. Bluey Hehir I think, H-E-H-I-R, was one of the commo ring leaders. No animosity or anything, just talk. You talked about

06:30 anything. Anything, get your mind or something out of a letter.

How often would you write home?

Oh I wrote about twice a week. Lorraine wrote about every day. You had to number your letters, because when you got a batch of them from Lorraine, you had to read them in sequence otherwise you wouldn't know what

07:00 she was talking about. And you always put little things on the back of them, like T Y E O, no, 4 Y E O, for your eyes only. S W A L K, swalk, sealed with a loving kiss. Oh, there were hundreds of them, people used to dream up.

07:30 **What were some of your other favourites?**

No, forgot, I was trying to think of something. I don't know, they're the only two I can remember.

That's pretty good.

Sealed with a loving kiss [SWALK] is pretty well known.

My first girlfriend used to write letters to me with that on the back. What sort of things would Lorraine actually write to you about every day?

Oh, what was, you know, her life. Only said

08:00 to her the other day, "I think you had a tougher time than we did." She said, "Yeah, I think so, because we never knew where you were." You know, we used to just say goodbye and get on a ship and sail out of Sydney Heads and wouldn't know where we were going. And of course we weren't allowed to put anything in letters; it was cut out if we did.

Did you ever try and get around it by sort of trying to write anything in…

No.

08:30 A lot of blokes did, they had codes that they left behind.

So what would you write home about?

Love. Oh, a lot of, you know, I miss you, I love you. So it was a bit restrictive, you couldn't, you know, it was awkward really.

09:00 **In what way?**

Well, being careful not to put anything in letters that would be censored. Like one, we were in, I think it's up the top of the Halmahera Islands, and they went ashore and blokes brought back WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [fowls] and a monkey. So some bloke wrote home to his mother or wife, "We've got quite a menagerie on

09:30 board. One monkey, two WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, two hundred pigs and a thousand galahs." Pigs being the officers and galahs being the crew. Yeah, he got censored, I think, for that, he got spoken to. One monkey, two WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, three hundred pigs and a thousand galahs, very good.

10:00 **Just for the record, Sel, because as an Archive, we're wanting to get information for future generations who won't know anything about what went on or what anything was like, you mentioned an upper deck and a main deck and a lower deck on board the HMAS Australia, can you actually, I was wondering if you could actually just walk us through,**

10:30 **deck by deck. To put us on board the HMAS Australia and just sort of describe what it would look like going up that plank and…**

Well, when you went on board you went on, the gangplank was up on to the quarterdeck and there was always an officer on watch and a bugler. And there'd be a couple of others there too, you always saluted. And then you, our

11:00 mess deck was on the lower deck, right up forward near the A turret, you know the two front turrets are A and B and the two back ones are X and Y. And we were on the lower deck which as I said was down to the main deck and down to the lower deck, right up in the bows beside the, I think it might've even been in front of the gun turret,

11:30 the gun turret might have come down like that, because it went right down. And all the other mess decks were down there, there was the stokers' mess deck, opposite us was the torpedo men's mess deck. They were electricians, the torpedo men. And the signalmen were with us, ours was communications. There was a little canteen, it

12:00 was upper deck, I think, it would've been in the main deck right up in the bow. A civvy [civilian] used to run it, his name's in a book up there. Zammit, Z-A-double M-I-T, Alan I think it was, Alan Zammit. He was a civilian, he wasn't in the navy. Used to run the canteen. I don't know how that worked, they must've let it out or something or other.

12:30 The cells were right up in the bows; they might've been under the canteen or beside it. Along the side, I think on the main deck were the petty officer's messes, PO's and artificers who were the engineers and that. Because down aft was all the officers'

13:00 boardroom and the like. And right down, there was a wireless, I never went down there. Right down the stern about, on the lower deck, there was another wireless office. I don't know why, I don't know what was there, but that would be where the golden rivet would be.

The golden rivet?

Yeah, don't you know that, the golden rivet? How many sailors have you interviewed?

13:30 **A few.**

They've never told you about the golden rivet.

No. It looks like it's up to you.

Well, every warship, the last rivet put in every warship is a golden one. And it's way down low in the, what they call the tiller flat, right down at the end. And you've got to bend right over to look at it. So some old sea dog will take you down and show you

14:00 the golden rivet where you've got to bend down to look at it. And you can work it out from there. So when someone asks you to see the golden rivet, say, "No thanks, I don't want to." Oh, yeah, the golden rivet. I don't know, what's wrong with all these old, maybe they didn't want to, because they've been down looking at it.

Maybe they've been down and

Yeah.

14:30 That'd be it.

A bit like dropping soap in the shower.

That's right; don't drop the soap in the stokers' bloody bathroom.

Same thing, yeah, the stokers, they're the ones. There was a murder on the HMAS Australia.

What was that about?

Not in my time, but before I joined the ship somewhere along the line. Two blokes were having it off and a third bloke wanted to be cut in on the act, and they didn't want him to be cut in on the act

15:00 so they decided one night to threw him overboard. So, I'm only, this is hearsay, but joining the ship. Tossed him overboard, but he grabbed the guardrail and he's hanging outside the ship, hanging onto the guardrail. So they're trying to cut him off at the wrists and screams and carrying on and the yeoman of the signallers looked over from the bridge and saw what was going on and they were arrested. And the bloke died. I had heard he died from lack of

15:30 blood, really. And they were tried on the ship and that Farncomb was the captain of the time, he became an Admiral, Fearless Frank [Captain 'Fearless Frank' Farncomb] and he sentenced them to be hung from the yardarm. But there was a, what they call a rookie lieutenant on board. People who came out of civilian life and joined up as, like a lawyer

16:00 or a doctor, they got a wavy stripe [officer's stripe] and they were rookies. And he got them a trial in Melbourne, a civilian trial. And they got life in Pentridge [Jail]. I think it's true, I don't know about the details that I gave you but I think the story's true.

Well, things happen everywhere really. Were there any fellows who got into relationships in your

16:30 **time that you saw?**

No, not that I know of. No. As I said before, you'd be sleeping on the deck and someone would interfere with you or something, you'd wake up, "Hey!" you know, and the shadow would scamper off into the darkness. Yeah. Oh yeah, it happened. No it was,

17:00 that would've been frowned upon and that.

If that's going to go on, at least you want to know about in advance probably.

You didn't bother doing anything about it. I think they generally had names for them, the Phantom, or something or other. Phantom Wanker or someone it would be, I forget.

17:30 But it happened. I just shake my head when they tell me there's women on warships these days. I think, "My God, I'm glad there was no women with us."

Sorry Sel, I kind of took you off track a little bit but you were describing the HMAS Australia.

The ship.

Yeah, just the ship for us.

The HMAS Australia, oh yeah,

18:00 there was a galley, where the meals were all dished out in to trays. And these day men brought them down to the mess decks. And I don't know whether they served them out or we helped ourselves, but anyway, we sat on a table and ate there. But on the HMAS Shropshire, when she came out from England, she'd had a cafeteria

18:30 installed. The Americans all had cafeterias, just the same as going into Woolworths cafeteria or Coles or something. You took a tray and you moved along and went blonk, blonk, blonk. Much better, much more civilised. So there was no food down on the mess decks, it was just Jake in the cafeteria. I came back from Manus Island that trip I came back to get married,

19:00 and I came back on an American supply ship, the USS Calamaris. And they asked us, there was about 12 of us coming home, they asked us would we mind serving, would we mind working in the kitchen. No, we were happy to do something, so we were on the big washing machine, dishwasher, but it was a big long one. You fed the trays and spoons and forks in that end and they

19:30 all came out that end, you know, it was about 10 foot long. Big stainless steel, quite good.

Oh, like a serious dishwasher.

Big dishwasher. She'd been a banana ship on the Havana, New York run and the [US] navy requisitioned it, you know.

That's amazing.

It was luxury. After being on the Aussie.

20:00 **But if I could just take you back to the Aussie for a moment, what about, I just need you to clarify something for me. You had your galleys where you would get served up and eat, but you also had separate mess decks for crew as well, so you would grab your food in the galley and eat on the mess deck or…**

No, they took the, the day men went and got the food from the galley and took it down the mess deck.

Right, oh, okay.

Like if you were having stew, it would be in a big stainless steel container, and they took it down, and plates and all were down on the mess deck.

And how does the canteen work in with the galley and mess deck?

It was just like a little shop where you bought cigarettes. And gophers [lime drink], I think they were called, a lime drink

21:00 that they used to pull out of a tube, if I remember right, gophers, G-O-P-H-E-R-S, I think that's what it was. "You want a gopher, come on." (UNCLEAR) the little canteen, it was only a little thing. Cigarettes sixpence a packet. American, always good American cigarettes, Lucky Strike and Camel and

21:30 sixpence a packet.

I think that would've been…

I stand in Woolworths now and I watch someone beside me buy a carton and this and that and they hand over a hundred dollars. I shake my head.

Take an extra breath, don't you.

I used to get a pound, two dollars, that I used to get on payday.

22:00 What were we on, we were on six and nine [six shillings nine pence] a day or some such thing. And I think when I got to leading hand I went up to eight [shillings] and threepence. And out of that I used to get a pound, might've been every fortnight, I don't know. The rest used to go home to Lorraine.

And what about alcohol on the ship?

We, when the, our supply ship was the Merkur, it was an

22:30 ex-passenger ship that had been on the Sydney, Brisbane, Singapore run. M-E-R-K-U-R, I think, the [MV] Merkur. And she was our supply ship and she used to keep going between our little fleet and Sydney. And when she came alongside to give us supplies, she would give us beer. And we would get, I think it was two bottles

23:00 every day issued to us, until it ran out. I had one in a locker once, I'd saved up and I opened the door of the locker, the ship rolled, she went bang on the steel floor. As you can see, I've never forgot it, lost a bottle of beer. It used to be, I think it was Resch's Dinner Ale [Australian beer], if I remember right.

23:30 And that was it. Bit like fresh eggs, when they ran out, there was no more. But we ate well. Food was good.

What, can you describe the menu for us? What sort of things would they serve you up?

Fruit cake. I think we used to get fruit cake every Sunday afternoon, with cheese. That I knew

24:00 about, must be the Welsh blood. Cheese and fruit cake. I say it to people and they look at me in amazement. But it's lovely, cheese and fruit cake. Yeah, I think Sunday afternoon. But oh, stews and the like. I had seven boiled eggs for breakfast one morning. Cholesterol again, more cholesterol.

24:30 A lot of blokes didn't like them, you know, boiled eggs can smell even though they're fresh, they used to think they were rotten. But cooking on my own with my sister and I while Mum was at work, I knew plenty about eggs. Anyway I had seven.

25:00 No, the food was very good. I think we did better food wise than the army, you know, because of the circumstances, all ships had a galley and a cook. Was quite good. And our captain's rounds, as I said every night at nine o'clock, well, he used to inspect the galleys too, so everything was spick and span and up to date.

25:30 **In the role that you were in, how much of the ship, I guess, did you become really familiar with or…**

I never went, something I thought of, I never went down to seamen's mess decks, or stokers' mess decks. There was no reason, I could've. If you knew someone you could just go down and see them, but, see, you did four hours on watch and then you had eight hours off.

26:00 And most of that eight hours, that you weren't washing clothes or bathing or something, was spent up on B Deck. That was were the B turret was, the little deck, that was the watchkeeper's deck, you could go up there and lay around as long as you were in rig of the day. And we used to just sit around and talk. But it was hot, too, see. There was no enticement to be down in the decks. There was a blower system,

26:30 running through the ship, and it had little vents about that big that were adjustable, you could turn. Like if you slept below decks, you always tried to sleep under a blower, with a blower blowing on you. But, you know, you're on the equator. I can't understand people going to Bali and that for holidays, bloody hot, terrible. Somewhere better to go than that. It's also humid, like

27:00 Milne Bay, raining all the time, showers come over and stinking humid, must be a hundred per cent humidity, stinking hot, get up in the fresh air. I used to sleep on the upper deck. A lot of other blokes did too, in the torpedo space in the middle of the ship. Take your stretcher up there at five o'clock and claim a place and

27:30 put it out, put your blanket on it and that's where you sleep for the night. Good. A shower of rain would come over. Good.

Did you worry about it?

Sometimes, you'd get up, and struggle down the way, other times you wouldn't. Because plenty of showers came over.

How many fellows would fit in the torpedo

28:00 **pit?**

Oh 30, 40, 50.

That was obviously acceptable to…

Yeah.

those higher above.

If you, see being a watchkeeper, you always had to let them know where you were sleeping. Because one of the coders, one of the junior coders, used to have to come up

28:30 and wake you up for you to go on watch. So, say, you were going on watch at midnight, it was midnight till four a.m. and then four a.m. till eight a.m. So if you were going on watch from midnight till four a.m. they had to know where to find you, so you had to let them know. But you ended up sleeping in the same spot all the time, once you found a spot you liked. Just had to watch out for the Phantom, that's all.

29:00 **Was there anything that you could do to kind of, I guess, ward him off to get good night's sleep, or you just had to take pot luck.**

Pot luck. You either got lucky or you didn't.

You kind of half answered me now, but I wanted to ask you about your regular sleeping quarters, I

29:30 **guess, where they were on the ship and what they looked like.**

Well down below there were rails, you hung hammocks, didn't you, that's right, we slept in hammocks. But they wrap around you, with the result, you know, real hot. At Flinders Naval Depot we slept in hammocks all the time. You get up of a morning and you untie your hammock and lash it up together, and there was a bin in the corner, you put them in there.

30:00 It was your name and all that stamped on it. That got done when you were in Flinders. I've still got my little wooden stamp I was given to stamp my clothes with.

And was that how it would work on the ship as well?

Yeah, they were built so you could sling hammocks. But it was too hot so, I don't know where we acquired our stretchers from, those little low ones with

30:30 three eight iron struts that fitted in. There was four of them. I don't know where we got them from, must've had to buy them somewhere. Some enterprising sailor would have got them on board.

And so where would you store them during the day? Considering you had this, I mean, you had to throw your hammocks away?

Don't know, can't remember.

Righto.

31:00 But they fold up pretty small, don't they? Yeah, I don't know where, most likely put them in the hammock bin, I suppose. Don't know. Don't think they would've fitted in our lockers, we all had lockers.

So where were your sleeping quarters in relation to mess decks and things like that?

On the mess deck.

It was on the mess deck.

Yeah, you could sling the hammocks on the mess deck, you know. It was all

31:30 right if you could get a hammock under a blower, but, yeah, you know, there was only so many blowers. No, it was better to get a stretcher and go up on the main deck, on the upper deck. But at battle stations, action stations, you had to sleep at your action station. So we used to just sleep in the passageway outside the wireless office.

32:00 The decks were bloody hot. They used to just throw a blanket on the steel deck and sleep on the blanket as insulation from the steel deck. But it was still pretty hot.

Hot during the day or hot at night because of the action?

Hot at night. And you know, the internal workings on the ship made it hot. There'd be, you know,

32:30 turbines going and everything else driving propellers and all the rest of it all generated heat.

So Sel, can you describe the layout of the upper deck for us?

It started off with anchor cables up in the bow, then there was, I suppose there was a water, a V shaped thing, for a wave to come over, to take the water.

33:00 Then you came up against, see the A turret, then you came to A turret, which was a big round thing. Went down through the ship to the gunnery, where they fed the shells and all came up and the turret turned at two guns sticking out. Then you came to a bulkhead, now, I think there were toilets

33:30 on both sides, they were the heads right up there. And above that was B Deck, where the B turret was. And proceeding further along, there was four inch gun deck, four inch guns and a life boat and I think four inch guns again. Then you came to the torpedo space which was right across the ship. It did have torpedo tubes there, and they used to fire torpedoes

34:00 over the side. But on the Aussie they had been taken out and it was just an open space. Stretched right across the ship. And then you came down to the port and starboard sides, aft, and it went on to the

quarterdeck. And in between there was still more like buildings, but I don't know what was down

34:30 there, really, officers. They used the quarterdeck like we used B Deck. And we didn't go down there.

Now you spent quite a bit of time floating between the Australia and the Shropshire so,

35:00 **and they were, knowing, almost identical ships.**

Yeah.

But were there any differences that you kind of picked up on?

Well the Shropshire was more modern because it had the canteen, the cafeteria, it had been modernised. Other than that there wasn't much difference. They were both county class, oh, the Shroppie [HMAS Shropshire] had a four inch

35:30 gun deck. The guns, the four inch guns were up on a deck level with B Deck. You can see it in photos. And they had it covered in torpedoes with the result it went right down over the torpedo space. And their torpedo space was covered in. So when you slept down there on the Shroppie you didn't get wet. And the Australia had an admiral's

36:00 walk which used to come down off the bridge and then it went right along to the stern of the ship, along the funnels, to the aft control position. It was the admiral's walk, well when he left the bridge, he'd walk along there so that he didn't have to come down on the deck and sailors having to salute him and all the rest of it all the time. He was able to just go aft without interfering with any silly sailors.

36:30 All the, on the Shroppie he used to walk along the four inch gun deck. That's how you can always tell them, that's where they tell you ships are the Australia and I look at them and say "That's not the Australia, that's the Canberra." Because Canberra had a four inch gun deck too.

37:00 **Now, if I can just take you back to your wireless room and the operators you had in there but you also had a leading hand. Tell us what the leading hand's duties were during operations.**

He used to take the signals and

37:30 pass them through. But also keeping the sets tuned into the station and like as daylight receded and night-time came, the frequencies, you had to change frequencies. Because some frequencies were no good in the night-time and some were no good in the daytime. You had to go to a different frequency which meant he'd tune the set ready for you and then get on the right frequency and have it going,

38:00 and so that when you finish this message on this you just pick up those headphones and put them on and carry on without missing a message, you know. That was the main thing just seeing everything was running along smoothly. And sometimes signals in those days would fade all this business, and you'd be on the, one hand on the knob, you know, chasing the frequency trying to keep, so while you were taking the messages.

38:30 **Can you actually describe the wireless in front of you; that you'd be operating? What, how it looked like just describe for us?**

Originally, when I first went on the Aussie, the transmitter was a great big thing. It was copper bars, valves about that size, you know, like light bulbs, great big valves,

39:00 and it was in a cage, and I said in my 'Navy Daze' [Alick's written version of his time in RANR] I'm glad they kept it in a cage because someone pushed a button, if someone pushed the Morse code key, everything used to light up and flash and spark. You could transmit around the world with it, but it was a real fair dinkum English heavy duty set, you know, built to withstand gunfire and everything. Well then when we started operating with the Yanks,

39:30 the transmitter we got on board was two feet square, six foot high and had trays in it which were all the different workings. You could pull a tray out and fix valves or something or other and push it back it. Which were the modern stuff. I think the sets, the receiving sets, the old

40:00 receiving sets used to be just like old wireless sets from the 1920s when it first started. You know, panels with knobs, big round knobs like that on it that you turned. You turned the back one to get near where you wanted to go and then the front one was a Vernier, I think, the Vernier scale where you, gave you the fine-tuning. A few dials and that. Well then the later ones,

40:30 I think they were pretty well like microwave ovens, more like that. More compact, better. Yeah, so, but now you mentioned it, I really don't remember.

Oh, I've got an amazing picture of the original receiver tower.

Oh, the transmitter, yeah.

Transmitter, that's incredible.

41:00 She was a beauty. It was a monster.

Tape 5

00:30 **Sel, this may sound like a stupid question, but, you know when you…**

Can I give you a stupid answer?

You can. Feel free. When you shoot a rifle there's a recoil, when you're on a ship in the wireless room, was there a lot of recoil on the ship when they were bombing?

When they were firing the eight inch guns.

Oh, firing.

They tell me that when those sort of ships fire a full broadside,

01:00 that's all the guns firing together, which, there's eight of them, the ship moves three feet. The whole ship moves three feet in the water. I don't know. I don't ever remember any sensation of feeling it move or anything, but you wouldn't really because you'd go with it. You know, if this building went three feet that way. So, it seems logical that the ship would recoil.

01:30 **Can you tell us about the 12 operations that you did out of Milne Bay, how long altogether were those operations?**

Each one of them was really only a couple of days. You steamed to wherever you were going then you got there at four o'clock

02:00 in the morning and you bombarded and then troops went ashore, and you went back to Milne Bay or Manus Island, wherever you were stationed. But at Hollandia, we went to sea and patrolled off Hollandia for about three weeks I think it was, and that's where I swore I'd never eat salmon again. Because we were at action stations all the time and we got served salmon and salmon and salmon. Lovely red salmon,

02:30 but you get a bit sick of salmon after weeks and weeks and weeks of salmon. So it just depended. See, I think, yeah, I think that was the operation, we were supposed to, we patrolled off Hollandia three weeks, and they were trying to entice the Jap fleet to come out, and the American 5th Fleet had gone back to Espiritu Santo in the Hebrides

03:00 and we were to fight a retiring action towards the Hebrides to allow the American 5th Fleet to come out and finish the Japs off. But the Japs never fronted up. So it didn't happen, thank goodness. I wasn't real interested in fighting a retiring retreating action or something or other. That was the story. We used to get told what was going

03:30 on before an operation, I've got, you know, photos up there of Captain Dechaineux [captain of HMAS Australia], with a big map pointing out to us what the operation was, where we were going and all the rest of it. We weren't kept in the dark.

Now this captain was the same one from the very start while, when you were on the Australia.

No.

But when you went to Hollandia, that was a different…

Yeah, we had lots of different captains. Three or four of

04:00 them, they kept rotating them around. Dechaineux was the one who got killed at Leyte. His son went on to be an admiral [a commodore in the1990s] or something.

Did he get killed by the kamikaze?

I think they've named a submarine after him or something. [RAN Collins Class 1990s]

So after those 12 operations, where did you come into then,

04:30 **what happened next?**

Well, we went along New Guinea, and then we went to Morotai, I think it is, somewhere in the Halmaheras, still doing, that's all we did, and then we went up into the Philippines. Did Leyte and did Lingayen Gulf [Lingayen Gulf is an extension of the South China Sea on Luzon in the Philippines] and then war came to an end, or we'd have gone onto Japan.

05:00 So we used to just go back to base and, while you were, you know, while you were in harbour, you did exercises. They might go out and do gunnery exercises and they'd have fire drills and plane crash exercises and we, you know, you just didn't sit around. So there was always something going on, some exercise or something. Right from Palm

05:30 Island days, they used to drive you mad but that's what ended up saving the ship. The crew was so well trained at repairing things and fixing things quick and lively.

So when did you change ships, when did you go from the Australia to the Shropshire?

Well, the Aussie was coming back to Sydney and admiral, the flag as it's called, would transfer

06:00 to Shropshire. So I and a few other people would go with him to the Shropshire.

What do you mean by the flag, sorry, I'm not used to that terminology.

Well the admiral, they fly his pennant, you know, which is a cross of St George with red dots in the thing, depending on his rank, whether he's a commodore or an admiral so he's got a dot or two dots on that. Well, the ship that he is

06:30 on flies that flag, so the flag changes which means the man himself goes to that ship. And then when the Australia would come back and the Shropshire would go to Sydney, we'd go back to the Australia.

Did you get a choice?

So you know, you never went on leave. You were always up there. That's how I came home on the Calamaris

07:00 and that's how I missed Leyte [gulf]. When this, I keep saying I, but there was about 12 of us, like the admiral. See, the admiral on board a ship creates extra work for the ship's company. Cooks, serving, you know, mess deck operators, communications. So cooks go, signalmen go,

07:30 wireless operators go, about, roughly about eight altogether. So we'd been switching ships and hadn't had any leave where all the crews of both ships had had leave. So they decided to send us on leave. And they put us ashore on Manus Island to await transport down to Australia. So we stayed about three weeks on Manus and then we,

08:00 transport came by way of the USS Calamaris that I mentioned. And tied up at Hamilton Wharf and I walked in, I said, "Here I am, let's get married." And it was while I was, we must've come back from our honeymoon, we went down to Redcliffe by bus and train to the Pier Flats and Redcliffe. We went,

08:30 Lorraine's Aunty Holly lived out at Camp Hill, they'd put on a wedding do [celebration] for us, I think. All the mothers and sisters and wives all bucked in and produced stuff that, see you couldn't get anything. Anyway, they put on a do for us and we were out there afterwards and it came over the air that Australia had been damaged at Leyte. The captain had been killed, blah, blah, blah.

09:00 Well, there's a real good chance I would've been on the bridge if I'd have been on the ship. So a bloke called Laurie Sleep, who was the bugler, went, at action stations, he was on the compass platform as the captain's messenger. If the captain wanted to verbally send a message to someone, he'd tell Laurie and Laurie would go and give the message. So Laurie had a bit of time on his hands up there on the bridge and

09:30 I had time on my hand if we weren't working there. So we got to know each other, sitting there talking. And after the war, when I went to live at Virginia, having a beer at the hotel at Nundah and Laurie's there, Laurie lived in Nundah, see. We got talking and he was still getting bits of aluminium shrapnel out of his back from when the plane struck that killed the captain and that,

10:00 Laurie just crouched down and he, little minute bits of aluminium had gone into his back. And they were growing out, his back was all pock marked like bad pimples or something, you know. So I could've been right beside him.

Yes, yes.

But I wasn't I was on honeymoon. That was a lot better than being on the compass platform of Australia at Leyte Gulf.

I bet.

10:30 **So am I right to assume then that your allegiance, let's say, is to the captain, not so much to the ship, the eight crew you were talking about, communications, cook, wireless operators what have you, they go where the captain goes.**

The admiral.

The admiral goes.

Yeah. I didn't even see him, I had no contact with him, I just went and supplemented the crew.

11:00 That was one of the things I was a bit dirty about, because if you're admiral's retinue, as it was called, when the ship did go to Sydney with the admiral on board, he used to go ashore sort of business and to Balmoral Depot and had nothing to do, you know, but we became part of ship's company. We reverted to ship's company and port and starboard watch and you had work to do and you went on leave for three weeks and then came back

11:30 for three weeks. I reckon we should've still been admiral's retinue and had six weeks off.

That didn't happen.

Didn't happen. It was only my opinion.

I wonder, is that the standard today, the…

I wouldn't know. I don't know.

going with the admiral, those people?

I should imagine.

Can you tell about the three weeks at Manus, was it Manus Island you were on?

Yeah.

Before coming back to Australia, what did you do then?

12:00 Oh, you know, they had huts on board and we were allocated a hut and sat around and did nothing and went and had meals, went and had a shower. It was an American transit camp, but there was really nothing to do. You just laid around and wish a ship would arrive that was going to Australia so you could take off.

How did you know about the, was it the Calamone?

The Calamaris.

12:30 **Calamaris, how did you know the Calamaris?**

Oh, we would've been called over to some office somewhere and someone would've told us, "Be prepared to leave tomorrow, you're going on the USS Calamaris to Brisbane." We'd have said, "Whacko, let's go."

Let me ask you then, you said Lorraine's female relatives helped out with all the food because of the rationing and what have you, was she able to get a wedding dress?

Borrowed my

13:00 sister's.

Your sister's.

Everything, everyone donated something. Yeah. My sister's wedding dress.

And can you tell us the day of your wedding, what happed?

Quite exciting really, I got home on the Saturday. I might have the days wrong but

13:30 we went down to the Holy Trinity church in the Valley, and saw the rector about getting married. And righto, it was Tuesday. Reverend Watkins I think it was, in the Holy Trinity in the Valley, do you know where it is, just near the police station?

No, I'm not familiar with it.

And so we arranged that. Then we went down to Redcliffe to look for somewhere to holiday, to honeymoon.

14:00 And we got hold of the Pier Flats, which was right opposite where the pier is right at Redcliffe, not, down from Suttons Beach. I think it's Queens Beach on the left hand side, if I remember rightly. So that was all organised, so come the wedding day, and they couldn't get ribbons for bouquets. So I went in the Valley

14:30 and I got an Ascot taxi. I also had to pick Snow Andrew, the best man up. Anyway, I had a few things to do and I got a taxi, and this bloke, his name was King, he ended up being a bit of a big shot in the cab. He said, "Oh, my wife would have ribbons." So he drove me round Brisbane to wherever he lived. I was with him

15:00 about three or four hours, do anything. He drove round, got his wife's ribbons or something, then we took them out to Woolloowin to Lorraine, you know, all this business, picked up the best man. I spent hours with this bloke, driving round. I don't think he charged me, I don't remember paying him. But people were like that, like I said about Sydney, great navy town.

15:30 **Do you remember his name, the taxi driver's name?**

King.

King. And did you keep in touch with him at all or…?

No.

We've had a lot of stories of people being compassionate and kind to servicemen during the war, that's another nice one.

Yeah. Like the bloke on Sydney that bedded us down for the night, put us on the train the next morning. Wouldn't even know his name.

16:00 **So you gave Lorraine the ribbons and then you carted off again did you?**

Yeah, well, you're not allowed to see brides or something.

And then what happened?

Wandered down to the church at three o'clock and did all the right things. Kissed the bride and rellies [relatives] were there. Oh that's right, Lorraine's cousin, Esme, she was sick

16:30 in the Mater [Hospital] I think it was. She had kidney problems as a child, and she was sick in the Mater. And on the way to Camp Hill, we pulled in at the Mater and gave Esme Lorraine's bouquet. Then went to Camp Hill where we, everyone had a very good time, till about nine o'clock

17:00 or so and then her uncle Jack and Phyllis drove us to Central station and we caught the train down to Sandgate and then on hopped on the Hornibrook Highway [Brisbane] bus, it was a coordinated service. And that's what they still run. And went across to Pier Flats at Redcliffe.

It's a busy day for you.

Yeah, it was, it was, yeah.

17:30 **What was some of the nice food there, for your wedding reception that was hard to get?**

Now you're stretching me. Wouldn't have the faintest idea, that's why we need Lorraine, she'd tell you. I know her Aunty Holly where we went used to make lovely scones with sultanas in them.

Yum. Maybe you had some of those college drinks or whatever you were talking

College straight ups.

College straight ups.

18:00 No, no, another little thing, that's right it was on the, it must've been on the Saturday or the Monday. Her mother said to me, "Listen, you can't marry Lorraine without getting engaged." She said, "You've got to go down the Valley and buy a ring." So down to, used to be McWhirters, Myers on the corner there, on the, down I went. And I think I paid 28 pounds for a diamond

18:30 ring and I gave it to Lorraine at the wedding breakfast. After we were married. I produced her engagement ring and gave it to her.

Did she like it?

Oh yeah, oh, you know, she was rapt, just wasn't expecting it. Yeah. So I don't know how you get engaged after you've been married, but there it is.

It was wartime. And how did Lorraine get on with your sister?

All right, like, as well as anybody can get on

19:00 with my sister. Like when I got Mum's inheritance of $46 I rang Myrtle up and I said, Myrtle what had happened, and I said, "You're not getting any of it." I said, "Not even the price of a carton of beer."

Not today.

No.

So after your honeymoon, what happened then, you'd missed out on…

Yeah, I had to go back to, we had to report to HMAS Moreton

19:30 down at the Domain, and until we could get transport to the Australia. And Australia had been damaged at Leyte and she'd gone to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides to be repaired. So I used to go down to Morton spend the day there, come home, go down to Morton spend the day, come home. So anyway they told us that the next day, there was a plane, a

20:00 not a sea plane, a flying boat out of Brisbane, going to Espiritu. So said your fond farewells and all the rest of it, and went into Moreton, away we went in the back of a truck down to Bulimba, and the flying boat base used to be at Bulimba there. The big flying boats used to land in the Brisbane River down the Hamilton Reach. And out we went to this, a Mariner

20:30 flying boat, it was, had rudders on the tails that slanted in. I found out afterwards that they called flying bombs, because they'd blow up with the petrol tank or something or other. But luckily they didn't tell you that at the time. So out we went on this thing, and he belts her down to Hamilton Reach and it

doesn't take off. So he goes back to Kangaroo Point, the point opposite Breakfast Creek,

21:00 Bulimba Point, and he says, "Listen, you better come back tomorrow, there's something wrong with the engine." So we all went back to Moreton depot and all went home again, after we'd said fond farewells, walked back in again. Said, "Oh, we're home for the night, we're going off again tomorrow." So it all happened tomorrow, we went through it again and went down and she took off and we found Noumea, I don't know how he found it but I think he fluked it, because when we hit Noumea we

21:30 had to do a right hand turn and fly down the coast. Or when we hit New Caledonia, to find Noumea, you see, he followed the coastline down. And the next, we stayed over night at Noumea and the next day, we went up to Espiritu Santo and joined the Aussie which was being repaired.

That was being, that New Hebrides Espiritu, that was governed by the Americans then, is that right?

Yeah, big American base.

And so you

22:00 **joined the Aussie?**

Yeah, then we went back to, when she was all fixed up, we went back to Manus Island where the Shropshire and the rest of the, our 7th Fleet were. And rejoined the 7th Fleet.

Can you tell us about the damage to the Australia, was it a very significant amount of damage?

Yeah, the whole, the, oh, whatever they're called, control tower behind the bridge and that,

22:30 the [kamikaze] plane hit there and exploded down on the compass platform which is the open top of the bridge where the captain and officers and all are, the were steering wheel and all that is down below, he gives instructions down to there. And it broke the funnel, I've got newspaper clippings up there, smashed the funnel, wiped out the guns crew on the four inch guns.

23:00 I forget how many were killed, 23 or something or other. Yeah quite, plenty of damage.

If 23 men died in Leyte, and you could've been there it must've been a sadness for you rejoining the Australia perhaps.

Oh yeah.

23:30 See that's where Laurie Sleep got all the shrapnel in his back and that. I, they'd have been taken off; I don't, not being there, I think she stopped at Manus Island on the way across from Leyte. Stopped at Manus and all the sick were taken, all the wounded were taken off at Manus and bought back to Australia.

When you say...

The Manoora was the hospital ship,

24:00 wasn't it, the Manunda, the Manunda I think. The Manoora was a transport, sister ship to the Manunda, it used to be on the coast run, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane. She was the hospital ship. I don't remember much about it. I remember being at Espiritu walking up on board again, you know.

24:30 Glad I was on my honeymoon when it happened.

And were the Americans good mechanics?

Oh, they were unbelievable. No mucking around, they didn't bother with red tape, just got on and did it. I know we liked the way they operated. And they just treated us as Americans.

And when you arrived at Espiritu Santo, was it long until you got back on the Australia and went to sea?

25:00 No, it wouldn't have been. See I'd been going up and down to Moreton for about three weeks so it was, I suppose, four weeks after it had all happened. So we wouldn't have spent long in Espiritu.

Gee, that's a quick turnaround, isn't it, four weeks? So tell us where did you go first, then, on the Australia after it had been damaged?

25:30 Back to Manus Island and rejoined all the ships of Taskforce 74. And then the next episode was Lingayen [Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippines].

Just before we go there, you were talking about a plane hitting the decks, you're talking about a kamikaze plane, is that correct?

I think Australia was the first ship hit with a kamikaze

26:00 and that was at Leyte.

That must've been a real shock for the crew, not used to...

Yeah. You know, we'd done exercises and that regarding planes hitting ships and that, but it wasn't sort of thought that they would intentionally fly into a ship. It was a plane hitting a ship that had been shot down or some such thing like that. Damage control crews,

26:30 they did a marvellous job.

What would happen, in the case of a kamikaze pilot smashing into the ship, would you, would it be often that they'd find their bodies?

Yeah, we had one on, after Lingayen, we had one up on the deck with all the dead crew. They were all wrapped in the hammocks up on the fo'c'sle and there was a Jap pilot there with them.

27:00 We buried them all at sea off Manila somewhere. 80 odd, I think.

Now, we were just going there, so after Manus Island, you were back in the 74. You went to Lorndale, sorry was it called, Lindale.

Leyte?

Leyte.

Yeah.

No, sorry, after you joined the Australia after it had been damaged, you went back to

27:30 **Manus Island, joined the 74, and then where did,**

The next op was Lingayen Gulf.

Lingayen Gulf, okay.

Yeah, well you had to go right through Surigao Straits , now while Australia was in Espiritu Santo, that's when the battle that the Shropshire was involved in and Surigao Straits happened. When the Jap fleet came out

28:00 and they were going to attack the landing at Leyte. One came down through the San Bernando passage, one came down through the ocean, the other lot came through the Surigao Straits . And I think it was the big battleship Yamaha that got sunk or damaged, sunk I think, in Surigao Straights. The Shropshire was heavily involved in it. That happened while

28:30 Australia was being repaired at Espiritu Santo. So when we went back to Manus Island and joined up with Shropshire and the others, like that Jap fleet had been practically wiped out, there was practically no Jap fleet left. So we had to go through Surigao Straights, into the South China Sea and right up to the top, the Philippine Islands, up past Manila, because they were going to land in Lingayen.

29:00 They were already at Leyte to go up to Manila and they landed at Lingayen to come down to Manila, in a pincher movements or something they call it in army talk. So that was when it got exciting for me.

I was going to say, it certainly hotted up a lot in that time.

Yeah.

Do you remember what you were thinking or feeling, going up the Straits there?

Scared.

29:30 Because we didn't know what the Japs had or what they didn't have. So it was a big fleet, I've got the accurate figures up there, you know, there were four battleships, 12 cruisers, 20 aircraft carriers, 50 destroyers. It stretched for about 40

30:00 mile at sea, the whole fleet. It was, you know, you'd never see it again, because those days are gone.

Where was the Australia in a convoy?

Oh, we were a screen, I think the battleships were in the middle and the aircraft carriers were around them and then we were around them. I know we had an aircraft carrier right alongside of us. We were

30:30 towards the rear, I think. Well that's when we were attacked off Manila, I think they, the kamikaze hit, I think it was Manila Bay, it was the one alongside us. Yeah, I think she got hit before we got hit. Because I went up on deck and

31:00 when this carrier got damaged, they lost control and she was just going round in a circle and the whole fleet when round with her, to hold her in position. And I remember going up on deck about eight o'clock at night, and we'd left her by then, she was back burning on the horizon, and just as we were looking, the, someone put a torpedo in her.

Sel, how long were you at sea,

31:30 **after Manus Island, until you got hit by the kamikaze pilot?**

Two or three days.

Can you walk us through what happened?

Well as I said, we were all at sea, I'm a little bit confused here, because I remember being up, went up on B

32:00 Deck and we were watching this carrier burning and while we were watching it the, I found out later, the destroyers sank it with a torpedo, our own, the American destroyers. And all the petrol and everything just went up in the air like a big mushroom cloud. And it floated in the air, burning, and there's a big ball of fire sitting up in the air and of course it lit up the whole area and you could see the aircraft carrier sitting on the

32:30 water underneath it with the petrol and all this come out. Very spectacular. By then they'd taken all, got all the crew off and everything. But the time we got hit, which might have been the night after, I think, five aircraft came in low, and I think it was the Shropshire who had very good radar. She'd just been refitted

33:00 in England, as I said, and her radar was superior even to what the Americans had at that stage. And they used to use Shropshire as a radar ship. And she could control her eight inch guns with the radar to fire at planes coming in low with high explosive shells so that the plane and the shell arrived in the same place at the same time. And I think that's

33:30 what she did, this is what, you know, was said on board, this is how I know. And they fired and three of the planes rolled straight into the water from the, only left two. So they came on and they took the carrier alongside of us, they went over the top of us, and one of them hit the carrier right at the base of the bridge. And when his mate saw that happen, he did a loop on the turn

34:00 and came back on top of us. He just went back and hit Australia, well that was the first time we got hit, in the, after Leyte, in the Lingayen campaign. And then got hit for the next, every day for the next four days. Five times all together. That's how I became a hero. Very scared hero. No VCs.

34:30 Yeah.

Did you actually, since you were down in the wireless room you wouldn't actually see the plane hit.

No.

Did you feel them?

Well, you heard the guns and you could tell, first of all the four inch guns would fire, that meant the plane was way out there. Then the Pom Poms would open fire, that meant the plane was a lot closer. Then the Oerlikons [20mm cannon] would open up, so

35:00 that would mean it's about to arrive inboard. And you were able to hear the different guns. And then they'd, everything would got dead quite and they'd switch off the air ducting I was telling you about, where you slept under, they'd switch that off because that would only suck fumes down, flames down into the ship. So that would stop and of course, it was just an eerie silence then, and then they'd announce, something,

35:30 a plane had landed on such and such gun crews or some such place and, you know, that the, what were the rescue crowd. Anyway, that they were needed. We were kept informed.

How could it happen that the Americans torpedoed one of the other ships

36:00 **in the convoy, obviously it was an accident.**

No, no, no, they sunk it.

They sunk the carrier?

Yeah, they sunk their own carrier. After they'd done all they could.

Oh, now I understand, I'm sorry, I was a bit confused.

Oh yeah,

They sunk it because it was no good to them anymore.

That's right, yeah. And you couldn't leave it floating around for, you wouldn't know where it would end up or anything else. So they just sink them. Destroyers put a torpedo

36:30 into it. Quite a common occurrence, I think

Do you think that attracted the Japanese pilot to where you were or were they already...

Oh well they knew where we were because we were sailing up the coast. Like a cruise ship and like when you've got all those ships covering about 40 mile of ocean, see they'd have know when we went through Surigao Straits , which is only narrow straits. You know, they had coast watchers and all the rest of it, just like we did.

37:00 **That first hit, Sel, were there many men wounded?**

So many were killed and…

How many were killed?

Oh yeah.

How many?

23 or some such figure. The, they took over the, it might have been the chief petty officers' mess deck as a hospital.

37:30 And, you know, sailors were detailed to look after other sailors. Mostly put grease on them, I think, on the burns.

I don't think they do that today.

I don't think so; they put them under the tap now, don't they?

Did you think that, did you have any idea about the philosophy or, I'm not sure what the word is, but the reasons, the motives

38:00 **behind the Japanese doing this. Did you know much about it at the time?**

I've got a newspaper up there that could tell you all about it.

What did you though, did you know about, did you think, "They're crazy, what are they doing this for?"

Yeah, we used to call them zombies. We christened them zombies. Kamikaze wasn't a word in those days, outside of Japan. The divine wind or something it is in Japan. But we just called them zombies, living dead.

38:30 Oh yeah, we thought they were mad. I don't think they ever sunk a ship; they only did a lot of damage. But this paper I've got upstairs says it was a pretty useless exercise.

It seemed to be because, you know, the destroyers were so big, and the planes, I'm not sure, but were quite light, weren't they?

Oh yes, yeah. They could

39:00 only do damage where they hit and that. And bits and pieces of metal flying around everywhere.

I wonder why they kept doing it?

Not long out the trees. Oh, that's the way they think. You know, these silly Arabs that are running round, flying into bloody

39:30 Twin Towers [Sep 11 2001 Twin Towers New York] because there's 12 virgins up in heaven then. I don't know if Mr Atta [one of the terrorists responsible for 9/11] or whatever his name is ever caught up with the virgins after hitting the bloody twin towers.

Tape 6

00:30 **Okay, Sel, before lunch we were talking about the kamikaze attacks on the Australia. I just wanted to know, what you had heard about the previous attacks, what you knew of kamikazes before you went into that kind of action.**

Well, nothing. Until it happened at Leyte.

Yeah.

It had never happened before. And like, I think Australia at Leyte was

01:00 the first ship hit, well then when I joined Australia at Espiritu, you know, the boys on board told me what had happened an all the rest of it. But round about the time we were at Lingayen, the American 5th Fleet was being attacked in Okinawa. Well that's the same thing, and by then the BPF [British Pacific Fleet] had come out, the British Pacific Fleet, they'd come out here, and I think it was welcome to the Pacific.

01:30 They got attacked also.

So what did you and the other fellows make of these kind of attacks, I mean, what did you think?

Oh, just they were mad, you know, why would anyone fly their lives, give away their lives just flying planes straight into ships. It was pretty terrifying but mad, I don't think any of us would've

02:00 done it. And, you know, they weren't achieving a great deal by doing it.

So I guess did you know what to expect, I guess, going into Lingayen?

Oh yes, you know we

02:30 thought that it could happen again, and as soon as planes start to come over, well, it was going to happen again.

Can you describe for us, Sel what, I mean, you were in the wireless room, but can you actually kind of describe what those attacks were like from your perspective, what you sort of saw and felt?

03:00 Well, you'd hear the, as I said before, you'd hear the guns, the four inch guns would fire then the shorter range guns would fire then the shorter range guns would fire. So you knew something was pretty close. And then of course when all the air ducting and everything stopped, the guns would stop firing and the air would go off, you knew that you'd been hit, it was just a matter of waiting for them to announce where, type of thing.

03:30 But my worst occasion that stuck in my mind, well, there were two things, the smell of burnt flesh, the whole ship, right through the ship. All the while I was on it, for the rest of that time, you could, the smell of burnt flesh, terrible. And I came out of a doorway at one stage

04:00 and there was a bloke hanging onto the guardrail and he was all on fire. He'd been covered in petrol, it was burning and his tin hat was on because his tin hat wasn't burning. And I thought that was very strange. I can remember thinking almost funny, "Oh, look at him, all on fire and his tin hat's not burning," type of thing, you know. So tell me how my mind works to think that was funny. Shocking isn't it?

It's a

04:30 **shocking situation so…**

Yeah, I don't even know his name. But that whole gun crew had been wiped out, you know, and the rescue crowd just, while I happened to be there, just turned the hose on him and they put him out. But he'd have died, he wouldn't have lived.

So he was hanging onto the guardrail, so what

05:00 **happened to him once they put that hose on him?**

Don't know, I can't recollect that at all. I can just see him standing there to this day, hanging on. Whether he was going to jump over to get away from it or something, I don't know. Of course, there were other people there and the rescue crew and that were there,

05:30 I just sort of, I walked straight into him, came out through a doorway, you know. Yeah.

So what did the smell of burning flesh sort of actually smell like, can you describe it?

Burnt flesh.

Can you describe it, does it, can you…

Oh, not really. Acridy type of smell, you know, I still had whiffs for years after, now and then just

06:00 something will float by your nose, you know, "Oh, burnt flesh," not really burnt flesh but it just reminds you.

And what did you see of the gun crew, the gun positions that had been wiped out and the damage sort of thing, or…

Oh, I think that was the only time, when I saw this particular chap, that was about the

06:30 only time I was on the upper deck. And, well, you even didn't go up, because you were at action stations, you were confined to the wireless area, so you didn't go out gawking [staring] at the damaged or anything like that. You stayed at your station and did what you had to do. I don't know why I was, I must've been, I might've been going up on the bridge or something or other the time

07:00 I did step out. But I was told, I didn't actually see it, but when you go down the ladders from one deck to the other, there's a big manhole, oh, it would be four foot by two foot or something and it battened

down, you know, with those big wing nuts. And in the middle of it, at action stations, there's a little round hole that your body just goes through, turn sideways and drop down through

07:30 it onto the ladder. And on the main deck, that's the one, one down, they found a four inch shell, well a four inch shell stood about that long, four inches round, down on that deck. Which means that one of the gun, one of the ammunition carriers, carting shells to the gun, must've had it and he went down through that manhole, this is only about that round, carrying a four inch shell,

08:00 and left it on the deck. Almost impossible to believe that it could be done. But, I didn't see the shell, it might've been someone telling lies, I don't know, but I believe it. I was at the wireless bench and this went on, the noise is, guns were firing and all the rest and I look at the bloke beside me, he'd gone in under the table.

08:30 He'd gone in under the bench. Like it wasn't going to help him one little bit if the plane come through the bulkhead in front of us. But it made him feel a little more secure, I suppose.

How did you, I mean, what did you think and feel about the prospect of being hit by a plane day after day, considering you were in a fairly vulnerable, potential targets there.

09:00 Yeah, you know, you were fighting, you knew, a plane landed on you, you were going to die sort of business. It was the plane, we got hit about midday, with one of them, and I must've come off watch at 12 o'clock, because I went to the upper deck to get some fresh air. See, these attacks were always made at dawn and dusk, so midday is a pretty good time. So in the port waist of the ship,

09:30 there was a group of us standing there, and all of a sudden all the guns started firing. So there was only one doorway, and about 20 of us all went for the one doorway, you see. And someone said, "Don't panic, one at a time!" and the commander was there with us, he'd come down for a bit of air, see, and he said, "Bugger the panic, every man for himself!" and he went swoosh through the door.

10:00 And we all followed him. We thought it was great, we agreed with him. Don't be last through that doorway, a plane might get you. That was the one that slid along the side, if I remember right.

Slid along the side?

Of the ship. His wing hit the guy ropes to the mast and spun him around onto the funnels.

10:30 One dropped a bomb, it went through the side. That was hairy. One of them, before he hit us, dropped a bomb, which turned out to be a shell from Singapore, from the British guns in Singapore, and it exploded right on the waterline, exploded in a store room because the ship went, oh, you know, you felt the whack and the shudder and you knew you'd been hit and all of a sudden the ship's tilting.

11:00 Oh, and I thought, "Where's the nearest hatchway out of here? Where's the nearest way out, up top." And I was planning all that, waiting to see what happened, and all of a sudden she come back again. The damage control filled an opposite compartment with water and levelled the ship off again, you know. But that was hairy, we were

11:30 sinking. I was swimming ashore; I wasn't going to be trapped down below. Down under the bridge, right down, there's a transmitter room on those ships, and it's a big plotting table, similar to a billiard table. And all the information is fed into that table and then sent back to the guns for bearing, elevation and

12:00 all the rest of it so they can hit something 20 mile away, you know. Wind direction and all the rest of it, it's all fed into this table. The bandsmen run that, that's their action stations, and, you know, as you go down the decks the things are locked after you and it must've been four decks down and I was only down there twice, they have a wireless down there. That's enough for me, anyway. That was in Palm Island days when

12:30 I was down there; I wasn't down there in any action. And after it was all over, one of the bandsmen went on leave in Tasmania and they told me he died in Tasmania, just from the shock of it, being so far down, just the trauma. Died on leave. We were wrecks, still am, I

13:00 can feel myself agitated a little bit.

My apologies.

No, that's all right. No, it's one of the reasons I'm doing this.

Well, can you tell us...

Should I tell you the story after it?

Well that's, could you?

When I came out the navy, I was pretty tough on my eldest child, a boy. And

13:30 it went on, Lorraine used to have to intervene at times. I was never a woman basher but I didn't mind giving him a bit of a whack. And this went on, and of course he grew up, grew out of it, I got better, I was all right for the next three kids. But I also had a great fear of driving, going on trips. We used to go

on quite a few

14:00 trips, as you do, Sydney, Melbourne. And the night before, I used to get really upset, smashes, visualise having a smash. Well as soon as I got in my car and left, I was all right. But, oh, geeze I'd get upset the night before. Of course, you go to the doctor and the doctor says, "Yeah, work, stressed out at work." "Yeah righto." so you take Serapax pills [sleeping pills] and

14:30 that'll fix it all up. Of course it doesn't fix it up, and when I retired in 87, I said, "Oh well, that's the end of that." they said, "You won't be able to give up Serapax, it's addictive." I said, "You just watch me." So I just threw the Serapax away and that's the end of the Serapax. Next thing I know, this complaint hadn't gone away at all. I thought, "Well it can't be work," and I

15:00 was never sure it was work because I never had a job I couldn't handle. I never got way up the scale where, you know, you're making decisions, I've watched blokes do it. They get out of their area and they can't handle it, I was never in that position. So playing golf one day down here at Mount Coolum, about, oh, 92 [1992] or somewhere, and he said, "You were on the Aussie, weren't you?" I said, "Yeah." he said, "Did you have any repercussions from the

15:30 kamikaze attacks?" "No, that was all 50 year ago." I get home and I thought, "Gee I wonder. I wonder if it's got anything to do with this driving business." having crashes. And I went down to Coolum RSL [Returned and Services League] and I saw the advocate down there and he said, "You might have PTSD [Post traumatic stress disorder]." I said, "What's that?" "Post traumatic stress disorder." I said, "Oh yeah?"

16:00 so from him I had to go to Greg Beak, the doctor up here. And I got to Beakie and he started to ask me, he said, "Oh yeah." he said. And then he asked me about after the war, I couldn't talk to him. Like I just told you I was a bit heavy handed, I couldn't say anything I was just, it was unbelievable. You imagine me not

16:30 talking, hey, I've talked for five hours. And got another three to go and I'll do it standing on my ear. So I thought, "Oh, this is no good," so I got out of bed and I wrote it down. And I went back to see him, I said, "Here, I can't say it but I can write it." And he read it through so the next thing, I'm with a psychologist up at Noosa and next thing I've got PTSD and I'm getting a pension for it, and all the rest of it.

17:00 That was, what, 40years later, 50 years later.

Incredible isn't it?

Yeah, that's what it left me with.

And were there ever any times that you were reminded or thought it could've been related to that in hindsight? Ever any dreams

17:30 **or...**

Oh, yeah, I've always been a dreamer, but that's just, you know, you think that's just ordinary, you think everyone has them. Lorraine says I used to gnash my teeth, early on, grind my teeth of a night. And I see somewhere in something I was reading, that's one of the symptoms. But, yeah, I had no idea until this bloke playing golf just happened to say to me, real casual like.

18:00 Because I've gone on from there, I'm sitting there one night, watching TV, this is only two, about two years ago. And the show we were watching finished and a medical show came on. And the bloke started to talk about depression. And I'm sitting there, we weren't, you know, it wasn't what we were going to watch, it was just came on. I thought, "Hey, he's talking about me." Everything he said went click, click.

18:30 And he got talking about your brain and, I forget what it's called, some fluid in the brain that goes back to when we were hunters and gatherers when we did a lot of exercise and now that we live the life that we live, the brain stops making this fluid and you become depressed. So went back to Beakie and he said, "Yeah, you'd have depression." And I thought "Greg, me, depressed?"

19:00 He said, "Yep." So he gave me a disc to bring home, a tape, and Lorraine and I sat and watched the tape, and taken it from there, and that's one of the reasons I did what I'm doing now. I said to him, "Does it help to talk about these things?" He said, "Some people it does and some people it doesn't." Now I just followed my inclination, I feel that, like, I'm not

19:30 embarrassed or anything about telling you this because I really think that's what that wants to do, might help to get it out. Oh, you know, I was having suicidal thoughts and just keeping it all to myself and all the rest of it and the bloke on the TV starting to, I couldn't believe it. I hope I had enough brains to do something about it.

I think you've been

20:00 **pretty brave, actually.**

Oh no, if you're sensible about these things. No good turning your back on them, look them right in the eye.

Very true.

I think it's called Invictor [actually Invictus], "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."

Can I just, if you don't mind, take you back to the some of the dreams that you mentioned that you had that you thought everybody did,

20:30 I still have them.

What sort of things would you dream about?

I was trying to think of one I had the other night, it was absolutely ridiculous. No, no, you can't remember them next morning. But there was one very funny one I said to Lorraine, "Geeze, I was glad when I woke up." Terrible predicament, it was something around here, something or other.

So does…

You didn't know

21:00 I was a nutcase, did you?

Get that a lot in our job. Just kidding. Did you share your story with your eldest, does he know?

Who?

Your eldest son, the one who you gave a hard time, the one who copped a bit of…

Oh, he'd know, yeah, he'd know now, yeah. Fortunately I, as he grew older and

21:30 I grew out of it. But I suppose, you know, it only lasted five or six years while he was growing up and just being a cheeky boy. I could remember, see, we've got a boy, a girl, a girl, a boy. When I got to the last boy, Mark, he was born in what, Alan was born in 46, Mark was born in 52,

22:00 so I was six years older, I was round about 30 I suppose. And I can remember saying to myself, "You're being a better son to Mark than what you've been to Alan." A better father to Mark that what I was to Al.

And what do you think it was in Alan that I guess…

Oh, you know, navy discipline and then I

22:30 suppose the PTSD had something to do with it. You try and make your kids better than what you are. So they won't do all the silly things you did, and really it's not the way to go. You've got to guide them, not try and force them.

Going back to, I guess, the time where it was all happening,

23:00 **were there fellows who found it hard to take in the day?**

What, the bloke who went under the bench.

Yeah, like him.

Yeah, you know, he was on the verge of breaking down sort of business.

What did you see of other fellows who perhaps didn't…

That's about all I can remember. Looking around, this bloke had gone under the bench. If a plane comes through that

23:30 bulkhead, being under there's not going to help. You used to just sit there, you know, frozen. Of course, you had no idea where the plane was going to hit the ship, but all the guns firing we knew we were going to be hit, but you didn't know where. Could've come through the bulkhead right in front of you for all you knew, the engine of an aeroplane. But it didn't, I'm here, 81 year old.

Doing well.

24:00 Got all the sheilas [angels] up there in love with me.

You wouldn't want to…

It's only a matter of staying a while with Heather [interviewer] and she'll fall.

That's right.

She might explain to me that 1881 problem I've got.

I just find it amazing to, I mean, I can't even imagine what it, I mean to experience one or two of those attacks, but to actually have it day after day, five days,

24:30 **it must've really put people on edge.**

Well, yeah, it's a bit, as soon as that aeroplane hit the Twin Towers [September 11, New York], you watch it on TV, I just went straight back to the Aussie. Exactly the same thing, aeroplane flying into a building, or a plane flying into a ship. Day after day for five days. You know how you felt when you saw the plane hit the towers. Just on a bigger scale, but exactly the same thing,

25:00 identical.

What did you think when you saw that, the planes hitting the twin towers?

I was right back on the Aussie, bang, in a flash. Just the same. And of course, one of the vets, I got married in the October, and this is all happening in the next January. So when we left Lingayen, there was

25:30 the Australia, the Louisville, and the Columbia, they were American cruisers that had been hit. And we had to take the empty transport that had bought the troops up, see we went into Lingayen three days before the troops landed, so we were then bombarding for three days. And that was when all of this was going on. Once the troops went ashore, it all sort of calmed down because airfields were captured and etcetera, etcetera.

26:00 So we had to take the empty troop ship back to Leyte. And you know, if you look at a map of the Philippines, you've got to come all the way past Manila in the South China Sea and got through Surigao Straits and into Leyte. Well, I thought this is going to be a lovely ride, here's Australia with a big hole in its side. The hole was about, oh, 12 feet, what's that, four metres by four metres.

26:30 And you could see it, it was right on the, just above the waterline. Water had gone in and everything, because that's why the ship listed. So they couldn't fire the eight inch guns off the front because of the bulkheads were all, you know, being stressed by the water. So I thought, "Oh, that's going to be a lovely ride back to Leyte." It'd take something like, I don't know, three days or something. Anyway away we went, right down past Manila,

27:00 all Jap territory. Hadn't been a ship in the South China Seas for five years, you know. And we got an air raid in Surigao Straits, an alarm, and nothing came of it. And we got back to Leyte. Well then in Leyte they laid the ship on its side put a list on it and the Yanks came out and inspected the hole, bought a big barge alongside and welded on a big plate, steel plate, to cover the hole.

27:30 And they righted the ship again. And then the powers that be decided that the admiral had to go back to the Shropshire, up in Lingayen. So who do you think got picked for admiral's retinue? Dear Selwyn. Just married, four months, just come through Lingayen, got out of it, like leaving the trenches, "You've got to go back."

28:00 "Oh no!" So I protested loudly, I reckoned I was being victimised. So saw the warrant officer, he said, "You've got to go," so I said, "I want to see the signal officer." and the signal officer was the admiral's off-sider. So I saw him, he said, "You've got to go." he said, "You can see the admiral if you want to." I thought that'd be a waste of time seeing the admiral. So I thought, "I've got to turn this to my

28:30 advantage." I said, "No, let us keep the complaints about the communication branch in the communication branch, I won't go to the admiral." So I went. We boarded the Arunta, we were transferred to the Arunta and the Arunta took us back up to the Lingayen Gulf where we joined the Shropshire. And I wasn't very happy. Most unhappy. And

29:00 after a little while, they bought some American prisoners of war on board that had been captured at Bataan. Well, they were walking skeletons. You've seen photos of them I think, haven't you. Just skeletons with skin draped over you. That's all they are. Just a frame. I thought, "Geeze, those blokes are worse off than I am." And I think that saved me from going round the twist, I found

29:30 someone worse than I was. And I spent the last 12 months on the Shroppie. We used to work out of Subic Bay [Philippines] then. We went back down to Borneo, bombarded at Borneo, and that was a pretty silly operation too. It was only because the Australian generals wanted, you know, to get in the act. So they

30:00 did a landing in Borneo, which had been bypassed. You had to go backwards to go to Borneo. There was no need to bombard there and of course, blokes got killed. I think Sergeant French, VC [Victoria Cross], got killed there, I think, he won a VC in New Guinea or something.

So you went through the ranks on board the ships, you felt it was a bit of an unnecessary campaign.

Borneo?

Yeah.

Yeah, Balikpapan,

30:30 and Tarakan. Of course, you know, they'd bypassed heaps of other places, and then the Japs

surrendered and all those places gave up. MacArthur [General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in the South-West Pacific], I'm an admirer, I don't know where Australia would've been without him. You'd have had slit

31:00 eyes, as I told you before. He used Americans, he favoured Americans, which you can understand, I think. And I suppose also he didn't have to deal with Australian generals while he was using Americans, he only had to deal with his own mob. And, you know, the Australians would want this and want that and he'd have to try to be a

31:30 diplomat as well. So they wanted, you know, the Aussies to sort of be in the act. So he most likely said, "Yeah righto, go and land in Borneo." or something like that. I reckon that's what happened.

What would you say, amongst yourselves, about that sort of stuff at the time?

32:00 Well, yeah, that was, we discussed all these things. That's what I said before, we used to talk, all these things got discussed. You'd sit around, a group of blokes together

Would you have to keep that kind of talk shy of your commanding officers or...?

Well, you never associated with them. I wouldn't have spoken to six officers

32:30 in the whole time I was on board ship. You worked with petty officers and chief petty officers. They were the ones who ran the navy.

Can I just take you back to the Australia for a moment, I just wanted to ask you to describe, I guess,

33:00 **the burial ritual of casualties in attacks like that.**

Yeah, when I said we left with the Columbia and the Louisville and these transports, we had all these bodies on the fo'c'sle, and they were all sewn up in the hammocks. Sewed them up in the hammock. That's what the psychiatrist said to me, when I was telling him, he said, "Did you sew them up?" I said, "No, I didn't sew them up." I'd have been a bigger wreck than I am

33:30 if I'd have sewn them up. They sew them up and they, I think they put a weight in it. And that included Japanese pilot that I said. They had a church service and they're on a, like a plank, and they just tip the plank up and slide down over the side into the water. Don't have to dig a hole, and they sink. 84 or something off Manila.

34:00 **And what would happen to their possessions?**

Bundled up and sent home to Mum. I should imagine. I don't think Mum got any, or Lorraine. Lorraine didn't get any of mine.

Probably a good reason for that.

Yeah, wild old days.

34:30 That's what I think, you know when it's all over you just put it out of your mind. I'm glad that's behind me.

How did all that business, I guess, affect morale on the ship, generally speaking?

All right, no problems. See I'd

35:00 say morale was a word that wasn't even used then. It was, you know, part of being in the navy. Ships had blown up before, ships had been torpedoed before, blokes had floated around in the Atlantic Ocean for weeks before they were rescued. Always find someone worse off than you, like those prisoners of war.

Did

35:30 **you mix with any of those fellows, I guess, or get to talk to them? What happened to them, those POWs?**

No, I never spoke to them, I saw them but I don't even know why they came on board. I think there was four of them, from memory. But they'd been bought on board, that would've been when we were back in Subic Bay. We also bombarded Corregidor, at the entrance to Manila. It was still in Jap hands.

36:00 So we had a ringside seat at that. That was when I was on the Shroppie, after it had all quietened down and the troops were coming from Leyte up and from Lingayen down into Manila and we were at sea, and we bombarded Corregidor. I don't know who, what happened first, but the bombers flew over and dropped bombs and we were just standing out at sea, you know, it was all happening in front of us. You could watch it happen after we finished

36:30 bombarding. Paratroopers coming down, dropped paratroopers. Caught in trees some of them, you could see. Great stuff.

It’s not what you want to happen going in is it?

Then someone dropped an atom bomb, that fixed the whole thing up.

Do you remember hearing that news?

37:00 I think I took the message. It came over in, I’d like to know if this has been confirmed, it came over in plain language [not encrypted]. Which made it very, “Hey, what’s happening here,” all of a sudden we’re getting a signal in plain language after four years of getting them in, as I said, five letter code, you know, four letter code. And it was something to do with the dropping of the

37:30 bomb or Japan surrendering or other. I didn’t have enough brains to keep a copy. Would’ve been handy, wouldn’t it. Yeah, I’ve just got it in my mind that I took the message, whatever it was. It would be on record what was transmitted and that, somewhere around.

Do you remember what you thought?

“Thank God that’s over.” Couldn’t believe it, because it came out of the blue. You know, the next, we were in the

38:00 Philippines and the other 3rd and 5th Fleets were in Okinawa, so the next stop was Japan; we were all going to be involved in that. And they had a thousand more kamikaze pilots ready to go, so that was going to be a bit of a blood bath. That’s what we were looking forward to. And that was going to take, you know, the operation wouldn’t have started for about six months. So we

38:30 didn’t have much of a future. Me laying on the deck thinking this bloody war with never end. I can see us being up here for five more years. And all of a sudden, bingo, it’s over. So the ships all packed up and headed for Japan, pronto.

Tape 7

00:30 **Sel, something that got brought up before was the Australian prisoners of war from the Japanese camps. Was there ever a plan aboard your ship to try to save those prisoners?**

No, no, we never got to that stage. No. We used to just talk about them amongst ourselves, you know, because you knew them. I’d worked with three of them,

01:00 and other blokes had worked with blokes, and other blokes had brothers who were in it and all this type of thing.

What about drinking and socialising with your navy mates, was that a big part of your life in the service? Did you become a drinker in the navy or did you drink before?

No, the navy taught me to drink, I suppose, no, I didn’t have before. Taught me to smoke.

01:30 But the bloke who ended up my best man, this Snow Andrews from Brisbane, we were at Kings Cross one night. And we’re walking down from the Cross, we’re coming down King Street, is it leads down from the Cross?

William Street?

Towards Hyde Park, the main drag. Doesn’t matter anyway,

02:00 we’re coming down there and of course, we’d been drinking. Some woman has had an accident and the policeman was talking to her, so we decided that she wasn’t to blame at all. We didn’t see the accident but they didn’t know we hadn’t seen it. So we wandered over and started to explain to the copper that it wasn’t her fault. And the copper’s saying “Go away, go away.” see. No, we wouldn’t go

02:30 away, this woman wasn’t to blame. So in the end she was crying and she was, I can remember her saying, “Everything was all right until these sailors come along.” I think she’s still in Long Bay [Jail]. We did her a real good deal. It was all right until these sailors come along.

You wonder what it was about.

03:00 We didn’t even see the accident. Dreadful behaviour.

We’ve heard a few stories over the past few weeks about the navy fellows going into the [King’s] Cross, and were you part of that scene of going to the bars where the navy would frequent?

Oh yeah, when you went ashore, you came ashore at Circular Quay there, and straight opposite there was two hotels,

03:30 Plasto’s and the Ship Inn. And you sort of got into the habit, you went to one or the other, this crowd

went to Plasto's and this crowd went to Ship Inn. And what I used to like, you'd be here for a beer and the girl would be way down there and you tell her what you wanted and would slide it along the bar and it would stop right in front of you. Oh, they were very good. The bar was wet with beer, you know, and she'd slide them

04:00 along. She could stop them right in front of you, all the time.

So were you allowed to drink on the ship?

No, only when the, as I said, when the Merkur [MV Mekur, supply ship] came alongside. You'd get two bottles of beer a day for a few days, then it would all be gone and that would be it. They don't have rum issue usually, not like the Royal Navy did. They didn't

04:30 splice the mainbrace, I think it was called, wasn't it, splice the mainbrace [the name for a daily issue of rum]? Go and answer it. Get back to it yourself.

Sel, did you, beside your best man, did you have any other close mates in the navy, did you make them in the navy for life?

Oh yeah. Roy Taylor, he was a, his people had the café at Nundah, the Castle Café

05:00 used to be opposite the picture show, right in the middle of Nundah. And when I went to Central Practicing School, CPS up there at the Terrace, we had a football team and we won the premiership. Six stone seven division 1936 I think it would be. Everyone on that team bar two joined the navy.

05:30 One joined the air force and the other one I don't know what happened to him. Yeah, all in the navy. Now Doug Blamey who was a second row forward in that team, he was a cook on the Shropshire. So, you know. when I went on the Shroppie, there's Doug Blamey. Yeah. We got to navy meetings at Christmas time, I don't, I'm not into navy meetings and that.

06:00 They all want to talk about the old times and I don't want to talk about the old times. I'm more interested in today and tomorrow. And anyway, Doug's always there, so we've more or less been together all of our lives, since about 1936. And Roy Taylor, he's president of the cruiser's association, Snow Andrew, my best man. This Jake who

06:30 they introduced me to, I haven't seen for 30 years. Yeah, you never, it's a real comradeship thing.

Did you get to see much of them when you came back to Australia and started up your Sydney life?

Yeah, yeah.

And how did Lorraine take it, was she a bit left out?

No, she was part of it. She actually joined the navy.

07:00 You don't have to raise your eyebrows.

Did she? When did she join the navy?

In 1946. You didn't know they had women in the navy then, did you?

I didn't think they went out on destroyers but they worked in clerical…

They were WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service].

WRANs, that's it.

She joined the navy, the men's navy. After Japan and everything, the war finished, we

07:30 went to Japan, we had three months in Japan on the Shroppie and then we came down and we stopped at Wewak and we picked up umpteen [many] soldiers who'd been at Wewak for 18 months or three years or some such ridiculous time. And we brought them back to Sydney and that's when I've got the photo of the Shropshire coming into Sydney, but the photo says is Australia. So when I got married, I used to come home on, I used to always try and get the first

08:00 leave, see, there was, everything's divided into two, there was port and starboard. Port leave went first, starboard leave went second. So I'd get the first leave and come up to Brisbane, I'd go back, I'd find a flat and then Lorraine, somehow or other, I don't know how she wangled it, used to come down. And we'd stay in the flat until we sailed out of Sydney, and her and a couple of other wives used to go down to Woolloomooloo and wave goodbye to us off the cliff

08:30 face there somewhere. So, on this occasion, the war was over and we were all going to be demobbed [demobilised]. Well they had a points system, for years of service and for this and that, so you accumulated points and the highest number of points were sent out first. Shropshire was going to do a tour down to Melbourne, a victory cruise round Australia. So she wasn't going to Brisbane, so they decided

09:00 to send all the Brisbane ratings up to HMAS Moreton and this all happened like that. So I got a flat at the Cross, Lorraine was on her way down, I'd been on leave and gone back and all of a sudden, the day Lorraine was leaving, I got drafted back to Moreton, in this Brisbane ratings back to Moreton. So I was going to be leaving that night, Lorraine was going to be arriving that afternoon.

09:30 So she was going to be stranded in Sydney. So I went to the regulating petty officer and told him my woes and he said, "Go and see the RTO, the railway transport officer up at Central station, Sydney." So I went up there and I told him my tale of woe, and he said, "Oh," he said, "Have you got any clothes that will fit your wife?" I said, "Yep, I've got," we used to all have

10:00 blue dungarees, blue denim shirts and denim pants like the, we had American gear all the time. Because they used to supply. And I said, "Yeah, I've got some dungarees and that." and he said, "Well dress her in them, and I'll book her through with you." So she came back to Brisbane, she arrived in Sydney, she dressed up in these dungarees, went on board the troop train as a sailor, in the same compartment

10:30 as I and ten other blokes, made 12 of us all together, and she came back to Brisbane. I never slept a wink all night.

I bet. She would've made a very pretty sailor.

So there you are.

So she didn't really join the navy, you were just pulling my leg.

Yeah. No, she didn't sign any papers,

11:00 but that's how, see, that's how Sydney was, great town. Yeah, he booked her through as a sailor; she came back to Brisbane with all the rest of us.

Did she get any sleep?

I suppose so, I don't know. We had two seats, six people, six people would you get any sleep? Not much. We were, always good to come over that

11:30 border, you came out of the McPherson Ranges on the train and you started to wind down into Eight Mile Plains and all that area. Great feeling that, the air was different straight away.

That must've made, for you and Lorraine, some happy memories. That particular incident.

Well, you know, that wouldn't have happened to anyone else, I don't think.

Did you take a photo of her?

No,

12:00 wouldn't have a camera, wouldn't have been able to get a film for, if we did have a camera.

Why were you being issued American clothing?

Well, because we operated with the Americans. The clothing that came on board was American clothing. Oh, they looked after us; they treated us as one of their own.

And what was the uniform that they wore,

12:30 **that you wore?**

Just the dungarees, blue jeans. Before blue jeans were invented out here, I wore them. I had about four pair when I left the navy, I wore them for years. Blue jeans, a white belt and a paler blue shirt. I think they still wear the same thing today, you know, working outfits like,

13:00 that's what we used to get. We used to get American underwear, American boxer shorts and that.

Sel, I just want to go back a little bit to the constant bombing, well, kamikaze bombing of the Australia. Now, you said that it was five days in a row, is that correct? Five days in a row.

13:30 **Did you manage to sleep during that time?**

Yeah, well, like, in that time, I suppose we got hit five times but there would have only been a raid not much more than five times. It wasn't like bombers flying over you all the time. All of a sudden at dusk or dawn would come a plane. Now the admiral is supposed to have told

14:00 the authorities that unless they gave him more air cover, he would take the ships out of Lingayen. See, the air cover had to come from Leyte which is way down the bottom end, so they sort of improved that, and they used to come and, but by the time they got to us, they were so far away, they could only stay for about an hour and they had to go back to Leyte

14:30 to refuel, see. So they used to fly up every dawn and dusk and give us protection. So we weren't being continually bombarded, there'd just be a raid, bang, a couple of ships would get hit then it would be all

over for another six hours, eight hours, maybe before it would happen again. So it wasn't, you know, an ongoing

15:00 thing.

I wonder why the Japanese were like clockwork, in so far as the kamikazes. Do you have any idea why they did dusk and dawn?

Oh, well, they're the most vulnerable time. See, you always went to action stations at dusk and dawn unless you were in a secure harbour, like when we were in Milne Bay and that, but if you were at sea, you closed up to action stations every dusk

15:30 and dawn.

Why?

Oh, you're vulnerable to submarines and the like.

But why at that time of the day?

Oh, because they can see you but you can't see them, as the sun's rising and the sun's setting. It gives them better visibility. So all warships went to action stations, say, from six till seven in the morning and from five to half past six at night or something, some time

16:00 like that. You always closed up, and the ship was all sealed up in case there was a torpedo hit. The water, you know, that came into the ship wouldn't go right through the ship, it would be confined to a space.

So what were the feelings on board the ship when, during these five days of, was there an expectation that the Australia would sink?

Oh yeah, it was on the cards, and as I said,

16:30 when we got hit in the side with a bomb and we listed and that, it could easy have happened. We could've easy got hit again straight away. You know, they just came out of the blue, you had no idea, you didn't know what was going to happen in the next hour at any stage of it.

Were the gunners the most vulnerable of the crew members?

Oh, yeah, well they were exposed on the upper deck, see.

And did they

17:00 **have any lucky actually bringing down one of the planes before it got to you?**

Oh yeah, yeah. I think, yeah one of them was shot down. Yeah, I'm sure some of them, they disintegrated but the motor sort of kept on coming, they didn't disintegrate until they were just there, things like that.

17:30 But we didn't have any anti-aircraft guns operating by the end of the business; they'd all been wiped out on the upper deck. The Yanks gave, put a destroyer just off our stern and she used to give us cover with her guns. It's in that little book, the name of the destroyer and all.

18:00 She was just sitting on our stern.

So the 83 or 84 men that lost their lives during that five day stretch, were they all buried in one single go after the five day event?

On our way back to Leyte.

Can you tell us about the...

Being about, they called it D Day or S Day or something or other when they troops went ashore.

18:30 See, we went into Lingayen, say, on D minus three, and then D minus two, D minus one and then D Day the troops went ashore. Well then on D plus, I think we left the night of D Day. The transports were empty and we took them all back, well it would've taken us the next day, I suppose, we buried them at sea.

19:00 **Can you tell us about the procedure of doing that, I mean, you mentioned before that the bodies were put on a plank and the plank would kind of drop over. But was there a whole kind of navy farewell or, were there hymns sung?**

Oh yeah, yeah.

Was that the first time you'd been to a funeral at sea?

Yeah.

Can you tell us about the day, the whole day?

Oh, it would just be what you call clear lower deck, all the,

those people not on watch, not watch keeping would assemble. And you know, there was a minister on board. I think there was a Catholic priest and an Anglican priest. And they'd each read a service, just like happens when you go to a cremation or burial. And there'd be hymns sung and

they'd be slipped over board. The navy hymn, "For those in peril on the sea."

I don't know it.

Don't you know it?

Can you sing a few bars of it, do you remember it?

\n[Verse follows]\n"They'll hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.\n Trinity of love and power, my brethren shield in danger hour,\n from rock and tempest fire and foe,\n

protect them where so whenst they go\n and ever let cloud hymns of praise, or something.\n

I've got it upstairs, yeah, for those in peril on the sea.' It's called the Militia or something, M-E-L-I-T-A, Melita Oh yeah.

How, when were you, if that was your first funeral,

when were you taught that particular hymn?

Oh every, we went to the quarterdeck for church every Sunday.

Oh.

Oh yeah, we had church every Sunday on the quarterdeck.

Coming from a land lubber, did you had seats to sit on or did you sit on the deck? Was it sort of made out like a little church or did the reverend or

minister just...

See, why can't I remember these things?

I don't know. Would the chap just come out and sort of address you all?

Yeah, just, same as a church service only it was in the open air on the quarterdeck. The stern of the ship. Yeah, I think we all stood up. I don't think they'd have supplied chairs, would they?

Thinking of myself.

No, like, I think it would've been restricted to harbour, when I think of it. I don't think we did it at sea. Because, you know, assembling a lot of blokes all in one spot at sea isn't a real good idea. And if you're hit with a torpedo or something at that particular time, all those things are thought of, you know, it's all very well done.

So if you were in a safe harbour, you'd have church.

Yeah.

And was it compulsory to go if you weren't working?

I think so. Catholics used to go to their service, and not being a Catholic, I can't tell you. Yeah, I think they went somewhere else and the priest took them. We went to the Church of England service on the quarterdeck.

Were there more Church of England men than there were Catholics? So the day that the 83, four men were buried, how was the, I mean, were the men emotional on that day because of everything that went on?

Oh yeah, yeah. There'd have been tears.

Very sad.

Now, did you lose any mates over those five days?

No, no. I don't think I knew anyone, or really knew them. Like, there were a thousand people on board the ship so, you know, the communication branch, signalmen and telegraphists more or less stayed together. Even the torpedo men

that were on the other side of the ship on our same mess deck, you didn't know them. You know them all by sight, you recognise them ashore, you'd know one or two of them, for some particular reason you'd met up with them. But overall, I ran into, I went to an RSL meeting at Maroochy [Maroochydore, QLD], a couple of months back and I was a new member so I had to stand up and say who I was and what

24:30 I'd done and some such thing, and after it's all over, some old bloke said, "I'd like to meet that bloke who was on the Australia." so I met him afterwards, I went over, I made myself known. He was a torpedo man from the other, from the same mess deck, as I said, over there, you know. I'd never met him before. We were on the same ship at the same time. Yeah.

You stuck together.

25:00 But, you know, I knew Doug Blamey, well Doug was a cook. I knew him and I remember going down to the bakehouse a couple of times, at night. Sitting down, having a yarn to him. Les Bowman was a stoker, I knew from, he used to work for TAA [Trans Australia Airlines] down at Eagle Farm [airport]. And I never went down to his mess deck or that, but you'd see him up on B Deck.

25:30 Like I said, you stayed up on deck mostly for the fresh air. And it was less hot.

So what did you do in the five days, being bombarded by kamikaze pilots, were you still doing your four on, four off shifts?

Oh yeah, yeah. When I was off you just stayed outside.

26:00 As I said, I went out on deck to get some fresh air and a plane nearly bloody got me, so that was the end of that, I didn't go back there. I wanted to be a live coward; I didn't really want to be a dead hero. I thought being a live coward was much better.

Can you tell us when you saw the plane coming towards you, how far away was it?

Oh, I don't know, two or three hundred yards, I suppose.

26:30 **Sorry, I need. Sel can you tell us about the one and two degrees action stations?**

Yeah, there was second degree of readiness and first degree. What I remember, second degree would be, those bulkheads, I spoke about would always be open, but there would be someone there, stationed there ready to close them if you went to first degree.

27:00 It was that type of thing. You'd be able to move around the ship in the vicinity of your action station. But at first degree of readiness, just, you'd be there, full stop and the doors would all be shut and that type of thing. Once again, good navy stuff, good ideas. If the country was run to navy rules, it'd be a lot better country.

27:30 **So it wasn't like the army then, when they'd say "What can you do?" and then they'd make him a cook. "Oh yeah, I can draw." "Oh, well, you'll be cooking."**

Yeah, I can draw.

Sorry.

You should've interviewed my mate who was on the Kokoda Trail; I used to play golf with. One little incident,

28:00 had nothing to do with the navy, but it's worth recording. He told me about, they were on the Trail this day and they came across this group of Japs bathing in the water. And there were 12 Australians, he was one of 12. This one particular Jap was bending down with his backside stuck up in the air, see. And they had a, like a free shot. They didn't have,

28:30 each have a particular target they could fire. Eleven of them fired at this Jap's backside. He said the Jap just exploded, he said bits of him went everywhere. Eleven .303 bullets, bang. Now you should've got him to tell you some tales, I'm sorry he's dead.

That's unfortunate.

Yeah. (UNCLEAR) describe it.

29:00 He went to Ashido Jap heaven or whatever it is real quick.

Can you tell us what happened after the five days, what happened with the Australia, where did you go in to get fixed?

Well, we went to Leyte,

29:30 we went back with the empty troop ships down to Leyte, and that's when they tilted the ship, listed it over on it's side and welded a big plate on. I went back to join the Shropshire and the Australia when via Manus to Sydney. And then got fixed up temporarily in Sydney and then went on to England, and they had all the trip round the world. But most of the crew that had been on her

30:00 up in the Philippines were taken off her. I have heard that it cost 25 pound to book yourself onto the Australia then for the trip to England. A lot of the original crew. In fact I've got a bit of paper up there, where Mr Maher [Edmund Maher (CP)], I think was a minister of the navy at the time, you know, he was being criticised.

30:30 **So when you went on Shropshire, the ship came in, the ship left Melbourne, wasn't it, when you went back to go on the Shropshire? Did you get on at Manus, Manus Island?**

When I went back to the Shroppie? No, I went back from Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

Okay, and then were did you go?

31:00 Joined the Shropshire, I think we went down, back down to Balikpapan then and bombarded there.

Can you tell us about that? How did that work, the army would tell the ship, admiral, "We want some coverage," or…

Well, that was all planned in a headquarters in Guam or somewhere or other. Nothing sort of just

31:30 happened, it was all planned, it was all worked out at naval headquarters and army headquarters and the Pentagon, wherever it was then. And, you know, these signals that were reading were telling ships what was going to happen, and where to go and what to do and it was all conveyed in that manner. So we went back down there and bombarded.

32:00 Blew up the oil wells, big fire, tremendous fire, and then the troops went ashore and I think we went back to Subic Bay.

And you said, blew up the Japanese oil wells?

Well, they were the Dutch, Dutch New Guinea oil. Which the Japs had taken over because they'd occupied Borneo.

32:30 **That would've been pretty spectacular?**

It was. Big column of smoke.

Which gun hit it?

Eight inch, eight inch guns.

And did you watch it?

Oh, I saw it, you know, you went up on deck afterward sort of business and there was a big column of smoke going. It wasn't like being in a festival hall where you sat in a seat and watched what went on, you were down in your wireless

33:00 office at action stations. See you were, all these things you were at action stations, and you were, and my action station was in the wireless office, for example. Once I was on the bridge, at that forward observation business with a radio. And we were on the frequency, the aircraft off the Nashville,

33:30 they had float planes that used to come in over the stern, they had a crane that picked them up and put them on the stern. Biak or somewhere, anyway, this float plane had gone out observing the fall of shot, and all of a sudden he comes on the air and in his American drawl he says, oh, whatever the saying was, red alert or something or other, but he said, "I've just been

34:00 jumped by a Zero." you know, "Can you get me back in board straight away?" You know, you had visions of this plane coming back with a Zero on his tail. And the bloke on the Nashville said, "Is there much blood?" As much to say, you know, "If you're bleeding you're not coming back on board. We don't want blood on our ship." If you're bleeding stay away. "Is there much blood?"

34:30 Terrible isn't it, bloke's being shot at by a Zero. Is there much blood?

So you wouldn't have seen much of Dutch New Guinea from where you were because you didn't row ashore when the other blokes…

Went on shore leave?

Went on leave.

No, I never risked it. I only ever went ashore in Manila. I went ashore in Brisbane, Manila, Tokyo. Why go ashore in New Guinea? Shocking place.

But you hadn't been to Manila yet, had you, when you were there?

No, when, after Lingayen, as I said, they were coming up from Leyte and down from Lingayen, and they captured Manila, we bombarded Corregidor. We went into,

35:30 we must've been in Subic Bay which is just north, another bay just north of Manila. We might've been in Manila Harbour because we could, there was a run ashore in Manila. And they put up on the noticeboard to be careful because the VD percentage in the population was ninety-four per cent Venereal Disease.

36:00 So, you know, they were just warning everyone to be careful. As the bloke in Flinders Naval Depot, when you were a recruit you went to a lecture on VD, and as the bloke down there said at the time,

"You'll look pretty silly, going hand in hand with your wife up to the VD clinic. So be careful what you do."

36:30 Like if you catch VD, you'll go and you'll give it to your wife and you'll to go hand in hand to the VD clinic, and you'll feel pretty stupid. Yeah, ninety-four per cent, whether they were scaring us off or not, I don't know, but…

Did a lot of the men that you knew go into Manila to brothels?

Oh yeah, plenty of them.

That was quite normal then.

Oh yeah.

Normal navy life.

Well it was normal in everyone's life. There was like a brothel down Albert Street in Brisbane and one round the corner in

37:00 Margaret Street. Big tin fence in Margaret Street and the girls used to sit outside on the footpath in cane chairs. And the one down Albert Street was a big doorway that you'd open and you'd just sit inside. It was a bit of a tourist attraction in fact. When we lived at Virginia, friends over the back moved in at the same time and he'd come up from Sydney. He was working for

37:30 Louis Berger the paint dealer. And I remember taking him down to show him our brothels in Albert Street and Margaret Street, went for a drive round. And during the war, the Yanks used to line up in big long lines. And one of the blokes who just died, the bloke who gave me the flagpole, he was one of the young kids who used to go and stand in the line and then sell the position to a Yank soldier.

38:00 **Really? In Brisbane?**

Yeah. They used to be lined up, big long queue. Brisbane was a wild town.

You didn't tell me about your duties as a leading man.

Well, instead of being an operator, I sat in the chair and tuned in the sets when they were drifting off frequencies and that,

38:30 and passed the signals through the hole into the other, into the [de]coders.

Is that slightly more stressful?

No, lovely, I wasn't reading bloody Morse code, was I? Yeah, oh no, definitely management material, me. Better than being a worker.

So you worked your way up into that position though.

Yeah, when I, I half expected my protest about being victimised had

39:00 something to do with it. And because I ended up saying "Oh, I'll go, I don't want to see the admiral, I'll keep the whinges in the communication branch, keep them within the communication branch, not let them become, got outside." I'd no sooner joined the Shroppie than they said, "Right, you can go for a WT3 exam." Which I did and it was extremely simple,

39:30 and I passed it, and that's where I became a WT3 lower standard. Which was a leading hand rate. And I went up to eight [shillings] and threepence a day, from six [shillings] and nine or whatever it was.

And where was Lorraine during this time?

Sitting at home, crying. Worrying about her boy up at, yeah, she was at home.

40:00 She used to do a lot of voluntary work. Her girlfriend, had joined the WRANs, another little episode, and Val got posted to Belconnen. And we used to read, that was the transmitting station at Canberra. And Val used to be sending the signals and I used to be reading them. You know, on board the ship. And they often knew where the

40:30 Australia and that was. But not that I divulged it, she never told Lorraine anything. Like, one of these trips back to Sydney where I said Lorraine used to come down, we were, Val got in touch with us and she heard Lorraine was coming down to Sydney so she came in for the weekend, from Belconnen, from Canberra to Sydney. And she stayed with us. Well we only had one bed,

41:00 double bed, Lorraine and I were in it. So where did Val sleep, in the bed with us. Lorraine slept in the middle. My luck, you know, story of my life. So I ran into Val 30 years later in the butcher shop at Wavell Heights. She'd just come down from Lae, that's right, she'd been up in Lae with her husband. "Oh, hello Val."

41:30 "Do you two know each other?" the butcher said. "Yeah" I said, "Val, remember when we slept together in that double bed?" Poor old Val, every time I saw her I used to say, "Remember when we slept

together in that double bed?" I never told them Lorraine was in the middle.

Tape 8

00:30 Right, so more lies to be told.

Yes. Just wondering Sel, if in any of the operations where you were bombarding bays inland whether you would cop any flak from anyone at shore or planes or...

No. There were planes, now and then there was an air alert. But by then the Japs didn't have that much up there, I don't think. We had one exercise,

01:00 I don't know where we were, but they picked up some Jap destroyers escorting barges, I think it was off Biak, into, they were reinforcements for Biak. And we, they picked them up on the radar and we did a midnight chase after them,

01:30 everything going flat out heading west, they were heading back and we, I never caught them, we were stopped and turned round, you know, we'd gone too far. One night I remember them, sitting on the wireless at the Australia and everything was shaking, and she was doing about 32 knots, you know. And they'd have caught them if, the Arunta and the Warramunga were very fast.

02:00 And, but they were down behind and they had to come right up through all the ships. If they'd have been up the front, they were down the rear, there might have been a chance. And talking of fast ships, the, one ship that was out there all the time was the HMS Ariadne [British fast minelayer], a British mine laying cruiser. And she used to race into harbours and spew out mines and then race out again.

02:30 It could do about 45 knots or something. It was something to see, getting along at high speed. You know, it would be about 60 mile an hour or something. A ship ploughing along at that. She was with us all the time, the Ariadne, it was the only Royal Navy ship that was there. Until the, you know, the war in Germany finished and towards the end of the war the BPF [British Pacific Fleet] came out and, but they wanted to take over but we wouldn't

03:00 let them.

That was my next question which was, I mean you worked a lot with the Americans.

Yeah.

But what was your impression of the Royal Navy and its crews?

Weren't impressed at all.

Why was that?

Dirty, never bathed, they still don't, Poms still don't bath, I think do they?

03:30 You know, no, we weren't impressed at all with the Royal Navy.

Was it just that they smelt?

Well, we wouldn't have ever associated, we most likely didn't know if they smelt, because I certainly never ever spoke to one. But, you know, they had ideas of going back in to Singapore and Hong Kong and taking over and this is what they wanted to capture and let us get back to where we were

04:00 before the Japs had it. So the Americans had fought their way from Guam all the way across the Pacific and they were going to go into Tokyo. They weren't going to waste time going into Singapore and Hong Kong. And the Yanks didn't want to let go, and they didn't let go, and rightly so. That's where we wanted to go, into Tokyo. Get it over and done with.

04:30 **Are there any particular operations, I guess, that stand out in your memory, apart from...**

Lingayen?

Lingayen, that stand out as particularly hairy or that left an impression?

No, they were all much of a muchness, you went off and, I suppose you, you know, took about a week all up, by the time you travelled there and bombarded and then travelled back.

05:00 One of them, we picked up a mine; I think I was on the Shroppie at the time. They used to stream paravanes, which were, they looked something like a torpedo, they had jaws on them. And you drag them through the water and the chain of the mine will go in the jaws and the jaws will cut the chain. And the mine will bob to the surface and then it's exploded by gunfire.

05:30 We picked one up, a mine, the paravanes picked up a mine going into on of the places to bombard, and of course they couldn't, the mine didn't release, didn't cut the chain, it was just dragging it along.

Under normal circumstances, you know, they'd have stopped the ship and done something or other and got the mine up to the surface, but because we were creeping into an enemy harbour, we couldn't do it. Couldn't explode the mine; let everyone know we're coming.

06:00 So she just carried on dragging the mine, you could look over the side and see the fluorescent water with the mine, yeah. Eventually got rid of it somehow or other, I went down the wireless office, but I did go up and have a look. This silly looking mine being dragged along. Little things like that.

06:30 **Can you tell us, I guess, what your impressions of, I guess, well, you didn't go ashore a lot but, I guess, your impressions of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force – the army] and the fellows on the, troops on the beach that you were actually covering, troop fire and how**

Oh, you know, heroes, all of them. I'd rather be on the ship than do what they were doing. You know, you've seen it on TV, going ashore

07:00 into enemy fire and all of a sudden you just catch out the corner of your eye, one of them will fall over on the scene, he's dead. He's been hit by a bullet. Oh yeah.

So during that time there was a bit of healthy respect between navy and AIF?

Yeah, yeah. Because, you know, the, like Tobruk, for example when the navy supplied them, running

07:30 destroyers every night into Tobruk to bring supplies and, that was the, called the V and W's. The B class destroyers, the Vendetta and Voyager and them and then the Waterhen. They were all named V or a W in their name. The V and Ws. Scrap iron flotilla, I think they are, aren't they? Oh no, no, when we, at the end of the war when we picked up those

08:00 soldiers from Wewak, they'd been stuck in New Guinea for some length of time, 18 months or some ridiculous thing. Well, you know, we'd been down to Sydney and had leave and gone back up, maybe twice, three times in that. The ships used to come back to Sydney about every six months. They had to get their bottoms scrapped and that where all the barnacles and everything were, got on them. Just

08:30 laying in harbours for a week or a fortnight or some such time. Soon pick up barnacles and that, and of course it slows your speed down. And you thing are being developed all the time, like the new wireless sets I spoke about, new radar. So you used to go back to Sydney and half the ship went on three weeks leave and the other half went on three weeks leave, so that was six weeks. And I suppose there was a week or more that

09:00 you were all on board together. So you'd be down there for about two months. And a lot of the work wasn't completed, especially in the wireless office though, and the leading hands. And you'd have on board someone who was good with a wireless set, someone who was good with wiring or something. One bloke was good at going up the mast and fixing aerials.

09:30 Not for me, thanks. And we used to finish the work off, you know, after we left Sydney. What hadn't been done. Because, in the likes of Sydney, where the unions were running the business, you had a steel bulkhead, and on this side you had timber, like three ply or something. The wireless office was like this.

10:00 The carpenter used to drill through the timber, the wood, and then you had to get an engineer from the other union to drill through the steel before you could put a wire through. Seen it happen. And we were at war, fighting a war. That's why we used to like the Yanks, see they wouldn't have mucked around, they just drilled a bloody whole, bang, through.

10:30 Yeah, a lot of that went on, during the war. Crazy.

Did you catch much of a short end through the wharfies' strike [wharf labourers]?

Yeah, the wharfies' strikes and that, we didn't approve of them. Naturally. Because we were sort of on the other end of it, we could see the, how wrong and all that was.

Sel, I was just wondering if you could take us through, heading to Japan, now

11:00 **and I guess just starting with when you first heard the news that you were heading to Japan.**

Well the first thing I seem to remember, that photo that I've got up there of the Jap envoys arriving in Manila seeking peace terms. It must've been organised behind the scenes, diplomatically, you know. But the next thing we know, the word's gone round that Jap envoys have come down to Manila seeking peace terms.

11:30 Well, we just got underway immediately, who gave the orders or not, and we were off to Japan. Everyone wanted to be the first ship into Japan. I think we stopped at Okinawa on the way, and that's when I got the photo and that of the hospital ship. So into Japan and we anchored off Yokohama. And within

12:00 days they had the surrender ceremony, and we were given leave to go ashore, like day leave, warned to be very careful, they didn't know how the Jap people would take us. But they just bowed and scraped, you know, they'd been under the thumb type of business, this was how they were taught to be. Because we were the conquering heroes, they accepted the fact we were conquering heroes.

12:30 I remember trying to get on a train, and it still happens to this day, they used to have pushers. That many people trying to get on the train they use pushers to push the people in so the doors can shut. This was no good to us, so we just stood back and shouted and everyone stopped and stood still and we just walked on. Well, we'd won the war, hadn't we, we were entitled to something.

13:00 Yeah, so, like we were there for three months, from the, before, there was no occupation force or anything when we were there.

So tell us what you saw and what you did for those three months.

Went around the streets, rubble. I remember safes, money safes, you know, that big, that square, that high. They were in all the rubble, because, you know,

13:30 the bombs and everything collapsed and they just still stood there. They were up buildings; they must've just fallen down. Yeah, and oh, really burnt out, Tokyo, they hit it with incendiary bombs, because it was paper and bamboo type of city and buildings and that. They gave it heaps. But they never touched the wharf area. Like, you know, in Brisbane, down Eagle Street where all the wharves used to be. Over the road,

14:00 all bombed out, but that little area untouched because they were going to need the wharves one day. They did some good bombing on it. I and two others, we were won a trip to Nikko, a place called Nikko, the 5th Army rest centre up there it was, and that was the place where the Emperor used to go. One of his holiday resorts. And we went up there and they had a hotel up,

14:30 you know, motel hotel up there. And there was all temples, a great heap of temples up there, and stables, and all sorts of things. There's a sacred bridge, an arched bridge. Sacred bridge. So I went up there, must've been there about a week. Cable car up the mountain. So my name came out a

15:00 hat, lucky draw. Lucky Sel. We had little Japanese girls running round looking after us. No, I didn't. I took the word, took the question right out of his mouth.

I wanted to ask whether it was a, I guess, what your reaction to the local Japanese

15:30 **was, given what you might have been expecting. And did you know what to expect at all, when you first went ashore?**

No, we did have, like I, they told us to be careful and we were. Didn't get into trouble. And of course, you could take anything ashore too, there was no military police,

16:00 there was no nothing, it was just open slather till it started to get organised. And towards the end of it there was military police and they used to search you when you came ashore that you weren't bringing anything ashore. Because, well, I know one bloke, that's right, we opened a radio station in the embassy in Tokyo. So there was Belconnen, Canberra, there was Shropshire down the bay and there was the embassy in Tokyo,

16:30 three way communication. And this is where that Val Ireland, mate of Lorraine's, she used to be sending the signals that I'd be getting, you know. When we compared notes after the war, and that. And this particular leading telegraphist got a draft to the Tokyo embassy. So, you've seen a kit bag, they're about that round, stand about that high with a drawstring in the top, put all your gear in.

17:00 He put a, he got a 70 pound bag of sugar and put in it. And put it on his shoulder, you know, went ashore with his kit bag. Into Tokyo. I don't know what he'd have got for that 70 pound bag of sugar, but they hadn't seen sugar for years. He'd have bought Tokyo, I reckon, [that fellow] O'Brien, Pat O'Brien.

Was there much, before the MPs arrived, was there much scrounging on part

17:30 **of the Australians, in terms of collecting souvenirs and things like that?**

Yeah, I seem to remember some wireless sets coming on board from Yokohama, and of course, they were all in Japanese, all the figures on the dials and that were Japanese, so it was pretty useless, you couldn't do anything with it. That's about all I remember. Some blokes took some rude photos, but let's not go into that.

You've

18:00 **opened it up, you have to tell us now.**

Well,

Don't have to say any names.

No, I don't know any names, but Japanese women, slanty eyes, they're built that way, not that way.

Can you tell me what you mean?

Do you get what I mean?

No. You have to tell me what you mean.

Just use your imagination. Don't you listen?

18:30 So one bloke got a photo of, got a Jap girl to a lay on her back and put her knees behind her ears and hold a placard with her head over the top but grinning like a mullet, "It isn't true," and he took a photo. So there you are.

That would've fetched a few bob.

Yeah, everyone on the ship had a look at it, "It isn't true."

19:00 That's why women shouldn't be in the navy. Shocking, isn't it. I wish I'd have got one.

I'm sure every fellow in the navy…

It would have been a real good centrepiece to hang up there on the wall. It isn't true. There's a little sequel to it. This mate of mine who just died, at golf, he told his wife about it. Going that way, see. She'd

19:30 always thought for years it was true. She had no reason to disbelieve it. So, she's watching skaters one night, ice skaters, there's a Japanese sheila there and all of a sudden she turned to him, Jack, she said, "Jack, that's not right." "What are you talking about?" "What you told me about those Japs." Years after, she woke up watching some Japanese skaters or something. Poor old Maureen.

20:00 She believed it all her life. Yeah. Sorry Heather. Rude and crude.

It's all part of the story.

It's like the motto, isn't it? Never leave your mates behind. You've heard of the Birkenhead drill haven't you, women and children first. So there's another drill, never leave your mates behind. Navy motto.

Yeah, I was about to say,

20:30 **sounds like a, something the Phantom would come up with.**

Never leave your mates behind. Those bloody stokers, they're the trouble.

Was there a bit of brothel activity?

A bit of?

Were there brothels in Japan, in those early days when you first arrived or a bit of fraternising?

21:00 When we went to Nikko there must've been one. It was off limits to us. It was American, well Americans would've set one up. This was (UNCLEAR) as I said, I've got a photo there and it was the 5th Army rest centre. So they'd have set up some sex shops somewhere or other for sure. But how I know it was off limits, I don't know, I might have enquired.

21:30 I might've only got thrown out. Don't think so but, I had Lorraine at home, I was a sweet young lad, I was frightened of those women.

What did you, I guess, think of the damage that the fire bombs and things like that, I mean, how extensive was it?

Very, the whole of Tokyo. Although I remember being in an emporium, you know, like

22:00 Myers, or McWhirters as I always go to say. So they must've been some building left standing. But, oh, whole acres, like Edward Street, Queen Street, Albert Street, Adelaide Street, a whole block on the ground.

And how were the local Japanese dealing with it on a day to day basis?

I don't know, don't care.

Well, no, just in terms of their own set up and what were you observing, what did you observe of how they were existing on a day to day basis?

No idea. Didn't well, you couldn't talk the language for a start; you had no idea what they were saying. But no,

Were they living in shells of buildings or…

Don't know.

23:00 Nikko was all right, I think we went into a house in Nikko where dad and mum and a couple of daughters or someone were sitting at you know, low tables that they had. Well we had them in the hotel and that. Because Nikko hadn't been bombed or anything. No, I don't know how they were surviving. How did they survive in Britain in the Battle of Britain?

23:30 **(UNCLEAR) as much.**

And I must admit I didn't care. Continually getting stories about prisoners of war and being released and they were telling their stories.

What sort of news did you actually get at that time?

Oh, we used to, that was one of the things we used to do in our spare time, you were asking me before.

24:00 One of the stations in America used to broadcast plain language, the news, and it was all broadcast on, see all their broadcasts were in tape, it wasn't hand sent; it was tape sent so they could speed it up or slow it down. It used to come through, I think, at about 40 words a minute. So we used to practice reading it, and that was what we practiced on. And of course, we got the news

24:30 in the process of practising on this plain language, it was the news. Well the Calamaris issued a little paper on board, which I've got a copy of up there.

And how, I guess, how,

There was news, yeah, news was coming through all the time, through radio. No TV.

25:00 **And I guess how much detail would be told through those kind of news services?**

Oh, the same as whatever came over the radio. Yeah, we, more or less knew what was going on all the time.

Wer there any incidents that you can recall, of, I guess, fellows taking out

25:30 **their frustration or anger toward the Japanese on land or anything like that?**

No. No, I don't know of any incidents whatsoever.

It must've been a very strange place to be at the end of the war.

Oh, yes, it was, it was, like the people, we'd been warned to be wary of them and they were obviously wary of us.

26:00 Because they'd most likely told that we'd eat them or something or other. The way their hierarchy carried on. So they were, you know, just looked at the ground and that. You didn't have eye contact or anything like that with them. A lot of them were in uniform too, a lot of the men, they were dressed in soldiers' uniforms.

I wanted to ask you, whether you had any contact with Japanese soldiers.

No.

26:30 Didn't want to, had no desire to talk to them, mix with them or anything. They didn't drop enough bombs. I read, you know, when I read something about condemning the atom bomb dropped on Japan, I think, "You don't know how far off the track you are, mate. If you'd have been sitting in

27:00 Subic Bay in Manila you'd have been real happy to see it drop after three or four years."

So what was the main aim of your time there, in those first few months before, I guess, occupation forces arrived, I mean those three months that you were there?

I had only one desire, to get back to Australia.

27:30 You just put up with it, you know, you went ashore and had a look around and hoping the day would arrive, and eventually, towards New Year, it did arrive.

And why did it take so, I mean, why did it take three months to arrive?

I don't know. Of course, you know, everyone was, all the blokes up top were all gung ho [foolhardy] aren't they. The navy's their

28:00 life, they don't have wives at home. The navy's their life and to get in Japan, and MacArthur to get set up and all the rest of it, great stuff to them. I was only a little cog, I wanted to come back to Australia and get back in the groove and never get out of it again. Couldn't happen quick enough.

So for a lot of the fellows there,

28:30 **it was a very strange holiday.**

Yeah. Yep.

And I guess, just of the surrender ceremony itself, I mean, when you were in Tokyo Bay, did you see anything of

29:00 No, the USS Missouri, the ship that it all took place on, you know, was over there. And, you know, our commodore and captain had gone over to the ship etcetera, etcetera and all that sort of business, we

knew it was going on. And there was a big flyover of Super Fortresses [B 29], you know, they put on a display to let the Jap people know that we had plenty of air force and everything else.

29:30 So they rattled their sabres and went home and signed the surrender. But no, I wasn't fortunate enough to be, we did get an envelope, there is one in Canberra too, and they stamped it, the letters we sent home got stamped with a special stamp about the surrender. Over the stamp, you know, the rubber stamp, the post office put on. The Japanese

30:00 surrender Tokyo Bay, or something or other. My son-in-law's got it; he's got a stamp collection so I gave it to him. But when I was in Canberra at the museum I saw one down there. Wouldn't be that many of them, like there was only Shroppie, I think Arunta and Warramunga would've been there, and a couple of frigates, the Gascoyne or something or other. So, you know, there might've been five

30:30 thousand Australian sailors in there. That would've been about all.

What did you know of the Australian POWs that were in Japan then?

Never, no, I never knew about them being in, they were in Nagasaki, I think, weren't they, in coal mines or something or other. I picked that up, you know, later in the war.

31:00 **Was there, what did, at the surrender ceremony, I mean, was there much of a celebration on board?**

Not that I know remember. Don't think so. Drinks were most likely on the Missouri.

Maybe that's why you can't remember.

No, no, no.

31:30 No, it was all pretty an ordinary affair unless you were at the signing itself. We just carried on, another day in our lives, let's get home.

And have to be present. So can you tell

I wouldn't have thought I'd be sitting here 60 odd years later or something.

Can you tell us Les, Sel, when you heard the news that you were going to head back home?

32:00 **Do you remember that?**

Not particularly, no. No. Got no idea when I first heard that. I'd have been too elated. I think

32:30 we, I had a trip back to Sydney after joining the Shroppie, she wouldn't have been away for 12 months non-stop. Must've come back at somewhere, yeah, we did, because the Hobart, I think at Tarakan [Borneo], I don't think we were at Tarakan, the Hobart had been repaired, see, she'd been torpedoed in the Coral

33:00 Sea, the Coral Sea battle. And she was in Cockatoo dock in Sydney being fixed for about two years, and she came up and relieved us, that's right, yeah. And we went down to Sydney. So I would've come up to Brisbane and Lorraine would've gone back. That would've been roughly in July 45, then we went back to

33:30 Subic Bay and then in the August/September it all happened.

What was it like setting foot back on Australian soil knowing that...

Great. Marvellous. As I said, that photo that they said was taken (UNCLEAR) Australia, I was in the heads and we

34:00 were coming into the wharf at Sydney and I, there were people down on the wharf and of course, they'd never been allowed on wharves and that up till then. Oh, I've got to have a look at this, and all the soldiers are on B Deck, they'd all been horribly seasick coming across the Coral Sea, and I stepped out onto the upper deck and made look like an AB seaman, as though it was a mooring party, or I had a job to do, you know.

34:30 And there was about three of us just standing there watching the ship come into the wharf. Oh, this is great, this'll do us. Yep. And that's when someone took a photo and the three blokes standing in the photo, I could be one of them. But it was the Shropshire, not the Australia. By then, Australia was over in England, you know, being repaired.

35:00 That's just about my life story, you know.

I've got a few more questions. Was Lorraine there to welcome you back?

No, she was at, she'd have been in Brisbane. No. I would've come on leave and then gone back and got a flat or something at Kings Cross,

35:30 then she would've been on her way down when I got drafted back to Moreton. I don't think I was there very long. That was almost straight away after I come off leave. I think that was the leave we went down

to Palm Beach. Her friends had a little hut down there, and we went down there. And it rained and the big cement

36:00 water tank burst, one night, bang. I thought I'd been shot.

So what was it like seeing Lorraine again after…

Marvellous. Unbelievable. Oh, it's like the bloke who came home from the Middle East, this AIF bloke. "What's the first thing

36:30 you're going to do when you get home?" "I'm going to look after my wife," they said, "No, no, no, no, we don't want to know about that. Well, let's put it this way, what's the second thing you're going to do?" "Take my pack off." That was a common joke. Corny isn't it?

Probably a bit of truth to it, though.

37:00 **After your navy experiences, Sel, just wondering, do you have much of a desire to go back onto ships and things?**

I've had chances to go out there fishing. I've said, "No thanks, I've done my sea time." No desire to go out there anymore.

37:30 I had enough of it, cured me, just get back home and get in the groove and don't get out of it. That's what I did. Didn't go to meetings, didn't, naval association,

38:00 they're always at me to go to meetings.

And what about Anzac Day?

Never went to any Anzac Day parades or anything. And my daughter, who lives at Buderim, is, she's worse than I am, she's in everything. She should be mayoress of bloody Buderim, girl guides, school tuck shops, you name it, Sue gets into it. So she goes to the Anzac Day

38:30 meetings up in Buderim. Eventually she talked me into going. So for the last few years, we've just gone up to Buderim. And I stand there and watch all those old blokes march, they're bloody old, you know. Marching by and got all their medals on. Good luck to them.

So what would you have to say to any young fellows who wanted to

39:00 **join the army now and go to war if they came up and asked you for a bit of advice?**

Oh yeah, good life, wouldn't do them any harm. Like, the navy would be terrific now, with women in it. That's be just fabulous. And the army. Oh no, it's all right. Character building, I suppose,

39:30 didn't do me any harm.

If you had your time again, would you go for it?

Oh, under the circumstances, yeah, under the same circumstances I'd do it. You know, if some foreign country's just about to land in Darwin, someone's got to do it. You'd do it. Yep.

INTERVIEW ENDS