

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Bryan Cleary - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/914>

### Tape 1

- 00:54 **To begin with Bryan, thank you very much for doing this from everyone involved in the Archive. We couldn't do it without your gracious acceptance of the offer to do this, so from everybody there, thank you very much for taking part. To begin with, we need a summary of your life, so I'll put you through some questions, but without any great detail can you tell me a little bit about your childhood and when you were born?**
- Certainly. My name is Bryan Louis Cleary in full. I was born on the 21st of June 1924 at a place called Wayville, which is a suburb of Adelaide in South Australia.
- 01:30 The first I can recall of a place to live was a suburb called Lockleys where my father was a baker, pastry cook, and ran a business there. I was always an adventurous child as I hesitate to say, but I used to wander off and get lost fairly often and be found miles away from home at various police stations
- 02:00 and the like, and during the Depression years, obviously my father ran into financial problems, but at that time we moved into the city and lived in the eastern part of Adelaide itself in a place called Angas Street. When I was old enough I went to primary school at Flinders Street in Adelaide.
- 02:30 Went through the whole of primary school there. For secondary school, and high schools were very short in those days, I went to Unley High School, stayed there until I got my Leaving Certificate. When I got my Leaving Certificate at the end of '39, I then went to, or during the holidays waiting for the results I took a job with a firm called
- 03:00 Harrison Ramsey. I think they were tea and coffee importers. I had a friend whose father was the accountant in the Shell Company and when my results came out and I'd passed my leaving certificate, he took me on at the Shell Company as a trainee. I stayed there until I joined the navy and I enrolled to enlist at the end of '41, and enlisted and
- 03:30 was mobilised in March 1942. I went to Flinders Naval Depot to the recruit school there; did the basic training. Whilst there, and remember this was just the start of the Japanese war, they decided to train some of us as officers. I went to the officers' training school, graduated from there in about November 1942. Came here to Sydney to Rushcutters
- 04:00 Bay then as a midshipman, went to the anti-submarine officers' training course at Rushcutters Bay, qualified there early in '43. From there I went to a ship called the [HMAS] Kybra but I was only there a few months before I was drafted to the e-Dutch submarine, which was commissioned to the Australian Navy as HMAS K9. K9
- 04:30 had all sorts of problems. She was an old boat and one tends to forget how old she really was, but in 1944 in the beginning we had a battery explosion on board and we decided not to run that boat anymore. The admiral was worried about our safety and the like. Anyway, then what to do with me and as I wasn't in fact a
- 05:00 trained submariner, my captain organised for me to go to England and do a proper submarine course. So I travelled to England via the States [United States of America] in the first part of '44. I arrived in UK [United Kingdom - Great Britain] just after D Day [June 6, 1944]. There was a hold-up, which I'll probably have to explain to you later.
- Yeah. You were held up in the United States or in Canada?**
- 05:30 Yes, yes. I went to a ship called HMS Western Isles, which was training escort groups up in the northern part of Scotland in the Hebrides there, and these ships were usually new commissioned ships put through their paces. They were very hard paces, but I was put on the staff there because I'd had some anti-submarine training.
- 06:00 And then I went to the next available submarine course, which was at Blythe in the north east of England. I qualified there as a submariner and was drafted to a new submarine called the HMS Varne. I

was fortunate. I passed out at the head of the course, which you'd expect me to do with having had some experience, and that was an operation boat at that

- 06:30 time. I only did one patrol in the Varne. I had other interesting adventures but I stayed in the Varne until I became the first lieutenant there. I was a sub-lieutenant still and in June '45 I was ordered to fly out to join a submarine squadron
- 07:00 in Fremantle. So I was put aboard air force transports and again a marvellous adventure flying from there to Colombo by the air force and then from Colombo non-stop to Fremantle in Qantas. Got to Fremantle to find that my submarine squadron had been replaced by another submarine squadron and my squadron had gone on to Manila Bay, to Manila
- 07:30 in the Philippines. So once more into aeroplanes, I went all around Australia, Kalgoorlie, Adelaide, only an overnight stop at Adelaide. I saw my family there fortunately, and then on to Melbourne overnight, Sydney two nights. Then flew to Brisbane and Townsville, overnight in Townsville. Townsville to Momote in New Guinea, New Guinea
- 08:00 through to Manus [Admiralty Islands] and then American aircraft from Manus to Samal in the south-eastern side of the Philippines. From there to, I had two nights there, and then onto Manila and then by boat to Subic Bay, where the depot ship was, and I got there just in time for VJ [Victory over Japan] Day pretty nearly. The captain of the [HMS] Maidstone, which
- 08:30 was the depot ship for the 8th Submarine Flotilla, he decided to dash off to Hong Kong before the Americans could go and relieve the place, but we got there and it was a bit strange, a depot ship with its submarines and a minesweeping squadron and there the British admiral ordered us to stop because there was danger going into Hong Kong. They thought we might
- 09:00 have suicide attacks by the Japanese. We had to wait for a couple of battleships and aircraft carriers and all that to arrive, so we went through as part of the big occupying fleet. After a couple of weeks in Hong Kong, I was transferred to the submarine [HMS] Supreme and went on Supreme to Subic Bay,
- 09:30 no, not Subic Bay, from Hong Kong to Ceylon to Trincomalee. Trincomalee I was taken out of the submarine because the captain submarines, that submarine squadron was the [HMS] Wolf, the depot ship, he had a signal to say I'd been repatriated to Australia.
- 10:00 I told him I wasn't too keen to do that at this stage and so he did the Nelsonian thing [turned a blind eye]. He didn't see the signal, tore it up and threw it in the waste paper basket, but Supreme had sailed by this time so I missed her. So I went back to England in the Wolf, that was an interesting passage, got back to England in December '45. After a few days there, I was transferred to
- 10:30 an English carrier, the [HMS] Ranee [British Ruler class aircraft carrier], which incidentally was the same ship that took me to America back in '44, and I came back to Australia in the Ranee to arrive just after New Year '46.

**What was your status at this time? Were you part of the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] the whole time or seconded to the RN [Royal Navy]?**

Yes, I was a sub-lieutenant RANVR [Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve] throughout all these adventures.

- 11:00 I went on leave in Adelaide, saw the family and all that sort of stuff. I also developed tropical ear [otitis externa] somewhere and they put me in a repat [repatriation] hospital in Adelaide there for a while, treated that, and while I was there in the hospital I got orders to go and join a ship called HMAS Air View. Well,
- 11:30 not having had too much time in Australia at that time, I didn't know what the heck the Air View was or where it was, and she was up in Brisbane and it was an air-sea rescue launch, 63-foot twin-haul Scott engines, tons of oomph [power], and from there I was told to sail to Thursday Island, which was a great adventure. I had a small crew of half a dozen or so and off we
- 12:00 set up the coast of Queensland to Thursday Island. We were supposed to do air-sea rescue duty up there only to find typical inter-service fashion, one service not talking to the other, the air base up at Cape York had closed down. There was only a care and maintenance party there. So there was no work for me. I was supposed to be up there in case ships coming back from Japan and so on didn't make it. So after spending I think six months
- 12:30 on that tour, I had to come all the way back down the coast again. That was again an enjoyable trip, peacetime you remember. Daydream Island was just opening up and so we stopped there for a couple of days and when I got back to Brisbane, I've forgotten whether we actually paid the Air View off at that stage. I think I did, and I got orders to go to the HMAS
- 13:00 Manoora, which was then engaged on trooping duties to Japan mostly. I was 12 months in the Manoora during which time we did several trooping runs to Japan, but more interestingly we did two runs to Java repatriating Dutch and Indonesian troops of the Dutch Army, and we

- 13:30 also did a run to India to Bombay where we were - this was at the time of the end of the British Raj and they thought people might be massacred there - and strangely enough the people we brought back, very few of them were English. They were nearly all middle Europeans who'd settled there or other people who wanted to get out of India for one reason or another.
- 14:00 And after Manoora, I then converted to the RAN interim navy as a lieutenant with two straight stripes instead of wavy stripes. I went to, I think it was HMAS Gladstone as executive officer.
- 14:30 I must've done six months or so there and then I was transferred to the RAN permanent navy and underwent some training courses including Rushcutter again, which I hadn't see for years and from there I went to the [HMSA] Quickmatch and [HMAS] Quiberon, which were
- 15:00 two ships tied up alongside here at Garden Island. They were both in immediate reserve, I think that was at a fortnight's notice for steam, and they didn't have full crew, they had one crew between the two. After being there for a while, I was there while the [HMAS] Tarakan blew up. Had some mates of mine so we fiddled around with that.
- 15:30 Then I was sent to join HMAS Tobruk, a brand new destroyer building at Cockatoo Island, and joined her for the commissioning. I spent some months working up Tobruk down at Jervis Bay and then I was given orders to proceed to the United Kingdom and do a long torpedo anti-submarine specialist course which I did.
- 16:00 The course lasted just over 15 months. I then went on the staff at HMS Vernon, which was the main torpedo anti-submarine base in Portsmouth. I was there during the coronation of the Queen [Queen Elizabeth II]; I was able to go to her famous coronation day drive through the city. I also
- 16:30 was second-in-command of the Vernon Battalion when she came down to Portsmouth and we marched past and had a parade at South Sea Common, and all those things, which was pretty good stuff. Then I went to an English corvette or frigate, [HMS] Dorchester Castle. I was the executive officer of the Dorchester Castle
- 17:00 for 12 months during which time the Spithead Review took place and unfortunately my ship was in dry dock in Devonport at that time, but I did get to the Spithead Review as a passenger in one of the sister ships. So I had a good look at that. After
- 17:30 Dorchester Castle, I was repatriated to Australia. I was married at this time and had my first son in England. We came back to Australia, I was given a job in Melbourne at the navy offices in the Directorate of Underwater Weapons and whilst
- 18:00 there, after about - we got back in '54, in '55, I think it was - '55 I got orders to join Tobruk again, which was then up in Singapore, because the ship's torpedo anti-submarine officer had been invalided out.
- 18:30 So I went up there and was both the squadron torpedo anti-submarine officer and the ship's anti-submarine officer. I spent 12 months in Tobruk, most of which was spent in the Far East [East Asia]. Came back south in Tobruk with orders to join the [HMAS] Melbourne, which had not been long in Australia, and so I joined her as the fleet torpedo anti-submarine officer. I had 12
- 19:00 months or so in her, during which time we did cruises around Australia and New Zealand and the Far East again, and after the Melbourne, after about 12 months there, I was posted to Navy Office again, this time on the Directorate of Training and Staff Requirements.
- 19:30 That would've been at the end of '57, '58, yes. During that time, Navy Office transferred to Canberra so I had to pack up the house and go to a house in Canberra. I was, New Year '58 it would have been,
- 20:00 selected for promotion to commander. Before I was promoted to commander, I was sent to England again to the Joint Service Staff College. From there, I went to command the destroyer Quickmatch. She was a fast frigate known as that then. I was there for two years and then I went to
- 20:30 Singapore on loan to the Royal Navy as a joint planning staff member in Singapore. Stayed with that outfit for two and a half years, then came back to Australia. I went to Navy Office Canberra as part of the Directorate of Naval Intelligence.
- 21:00 From there, we're talking now about 1965 I guess, I came, while I was in the Directorate of Naval Intelligence, I went to Honolulu for some tripartite or quadripartite intelligence discussions. I then went to
- 21:30 the torpedo anti-submarine school out here at South Head, where I was the officer in charge there. I went from there to Rushcutter as the captain, which was then the diving school, and from there I was posted to Darwin as the naval officer in charge and given an acting fourth stripe. I was confirmed in that rank while I was up in Darwin.
- 22:00 We're now up to '71. I came back from there to Canberra again to Navy Office to be Director of Naval Reserves and Cadets. From there, I went to the Balmoral Naval Depot, HMAS Penguin and from there I went to the apprentice training school out at Quakers

22:30 Hill as the captain, and from there I went to join HMAS Supply [logistic support ship] at the end of '75. Took Supply to America for their bicentenary, went to San Francisco and then up to Vancouver and then back to Australia. On leaving the

23:00 Supply, I was promoted to commodore and became chief of staff to the flag officer commanding the local area here, and on the 20th of June 1979 I retired, compulsory retirement then, and in my last few years I'd been reading law by remote control

23:30 if you like, correspondence, started with the Queensland University and then didn't do so good there. I was up in Darwin and then when I came to Sydney to live, I decided to transfer to the Barrister Admission Board here in Sydney and eventually qualified there at the end of

24:00 '79, beginning of '80. I was admitted to the Bar here in Sydney in 1980, I think it was, but I went straight then on a tour of Europe with my second wife and we were away for about six months,

24:30 and we came back to Sydney, started practising from chambers, Chalfont Chambers. I practised for about 10 years. During that time, I'd been invited to be a member of the Queen Elizabeth Trust for Young Australians. I stayed there until

25:00 they made me one of the vice-presidents for Sydney Legacy [Club]. I thought, "Well, it's going to lead to more work, I won't do both." So I resigned from the Queen Elizabeth Trust, became president of Sydney Legacy in '73-'74 and that's where I still am in a way. Did I say '73-'74?

25:30 **Must've been later than that.**

'93-'94, yeah, and for the last 10 years, I'm still with Legacy doing my chores from time to time, plus looking after a few widows. I'm a member of various associations, which keep me both entertained and busy from time to time, and that's just about got you up to today.

**Very comprehensively.**

26:00 **What about your family? You had some children?**

Yeah. I married the first time around in '49. First child was in England, a boy in 1953, back to Australia,

26:30 a girl in Melbourne in '56, I guess. Excuse me being a bit vague on their birthdays.

**That's alright. I'm sure they'll excuse you.**

And then the youngest was in 1960, a boy. We were in Canberra then and I was at sea

27:00 when he was born, in the Quickmatch.

**Grandchildren?**

Grandchildren a bit slow. The girl had, well she was fairly productive, she had seven, and then the eldest boy got into the act and he's now got three boys, the youngest being just

27:30 over 12 months old, and then the youngest son whilst up in Hamilton Island, he's had two daughters and the eldest is just four and the youngest there is three.

**That gives us a very comprehensive overview and we've got plenty of time left. So I think we will go back to the start and sort of go through this again and I will ask you some questions. I let you go there, but**

28:00 **you were doing a very good job. To start with, I want to get the scene of where you grew up. What was Adelaide or the area you grew up in like?**

Lockleys, as I say, were my first memories. Tram ran past the front of the shop at Lockleys, that I remember.

28:30 I had a very, very attendant mother if you like. She used to overdress me and look after me very, very well. This caused in fact some of the difficulties we had with the local police at Henley Beach, which is quite a way from Lockleys, but I finished up there one

29:00 day in the police station, but in those days I had fair curly hair apparently and she had me dressed in some sort of, I'm talking about being 18 months old or so. Anyway the panic at home, apparently they'd rung the police stations all around the place including Henley Beach, and no, they didn't have a little boy there, and

29:30 about a couple of hours later, "No, no little boy, we've still got that little girl still." That was me. So that was rescued. Also, I had a couple of other runaway adventures. One I think was around about the suburb where I was born. I don't know why I was there.

**How had you gotten all the way to Henley Beach?**

No idea. No idea whether I caught a tram or walked

30:00 or what I did. No idea.

**You were adventurous even at that age.**

Oh, absolutely, and this other adventure I had, I had a pet dog, Paddy, he was an Airedale [Terrier]. He was as big as I was. Anyway I used to apparently go walkabout along, we must've lived at Wayville I think for a while, and there was a train line that ran through there and I

30:30 went down the railway line with the dog and of course the train didn't run me over, it had to stop, and then when they tried to clear me off the line the dog wouldn't let them, and it was only my grandfather who'd been alerted that I was missing at home. He'd come visiting. He rode his bike along the side of the track there somewhere or other and found all this commotion going on and saved the day.

31:00 And I used to do other things like climb ladders. The painters were painting around the guttering or something or other and they'd go stop for a smoko [a break, eg, morning tea] or something and I'd be up the ladder on the roof and all these things and terrifying people around the place. Anyway, when we moved to Adelaide itself to this place in Angas Street, it was a huge place,

31:30 big house, shop front, bakery at the back, covered courtyard, stables at the side of that 'cause there was a lot of horse-drawn stuff in those days. That's where I lost the top of that finger, again being adventurous. I had some playmates in, I was then about four and a half, maybe five. I stuck that finger in a mincing machine that was going around

32:00 grinding up cake to make cakes. I forget what they used to call them. They came out as a sort of, what was ground up came out as the filling between two slabs of pastry or something. I can't remember their name now. Anyway the tip of my finger's in there somewhere. So my father who was working just the other

32:30 side, obviously because he'd set this machine going, he saw me, grabbed me and Sunday afternoon, took me to the local GP's [General Practitioner, doctor], which is on the corner of Angas Street. He wasn't home, so he ran along to the next doctor. He wasn't at home and finished up at the Adelaide Hospital with me, and he was hold me up here like this all the time in his arms,

33:00 and this finger spurting blood and it was going all around his neck and people passing by thinking, oh, look at that horrible man, he's chopped his boy's hand off and cut his own throat. Anyway they fixed this in the hospital by cauterising it. I don't think they do it these days, but which meant sticking it in an open Bunsen burner. I remember that. Anyway I soon forgot that.

**How long**

33:30 **did you live in the house with the bakery for?**

Four years I suppose. I was there when I started primary school, which was only down the road a bit. I didn't have to walk very far. Mother used to walk me there, I had to cross a tramline and Grenfell Street and that was probably the most dangerous bit for little kids to do.

34:00 My sister, she'd been born, she must've been born at Lockleys. Yeah, when we were at Lockleys she was born. I remember it was a Saturday afternoon because my father had taken me to the football and then we went visiting the hospital that evening. To finish off the finger story, one of the little

34:30 boys that was left behind found the end of my finger and then went along and knocked on the door. My mother was sleeping. I'm pretty sure she was pregnant and had a miscarriage as a result thereby, but his grotty little hand saying, "Here's Bryan's finger." She didn't know I'd even gone with my father at this stage. So she collapsed with shock. So there you go.

**How many siblings did**

35:00 **you have?**

Only one. She's three years younger than I am.

**What were your parents, how did they deal with your tearaway behaviour?**

I don't know. I think responsibly in terms of, you know, trying to educate me out of these things. My father was, could be quite stern at times. I used to

35:30 get threatened rather than more often used the razor strop [leather sharpening strap], which tended to be the favourite weapon, and I can remember the worst incident. I was a bit older then, It must've been the end of primary school sort of period and I must've been bad, but I can't remember what I did wrong, but after several threats to, apparently

36:00 over time, not to do things, eventually I could stand it no longer and when he came home from work my mother gave him a full report. So right, he went out the back and drove three nails through a plank of wood off a fruit box, showed me these and said, "Now, bend over", and gave me a couple of whacks across the backside with this and I felt every nail go in. Of course he used the flat side

36:30 and no nail penetrated through, but I felt every one of them and when I dropped my tweeds to see

where all the blood was coming out I was astonished that there was nothing coming out. He was that sort of disciplinarian, very good. Looking back in hindsight certainly I was never brutalised or anything of that sort. My mother was always attentive but she was a fairly stern disciplinarian.

- 37:00 If my sister started wailing for any reason at all, I was immediately at fault, even if it wasn't my fault. In fact, we had a neighbour used to stick her head over the fence and say, "He didn't do it, she did it. It was her fault." Yeah, it was all good fun.

**What do you remember about your father's business in the baking?**

Not much of the, when he was independent. He went bust in the Depression years,

- 37:30 this huge bakehouse and things, so we moved out to a smaller place only really across the road from the bakery. We lived there for a few years so most of the playing was in the street, but just before I finished primary school when I must've been in about grade six I was,

- 38:00 we moved out to Glenunga to a house out there. I'd forgotten to say that while we were in the city there, my father had two bad times. The first time he had peritonitis and nearly died and that was a worry for my mother. He came through that, but he was always a horse-mad

- 38:30 fellow. In fact, he joined the Light Horse [mounted infantry regiments] during World War I but he was only 15 at the time and got found out before the troopship sailed and he got discharged. Mad keen on horses. Anyway driving a buggy near the Victoria Park Racecourse and a truck came along and tipped him over and didn't stop.

- 39:00 He got catapulted out and hit a lamp post with his head, so he had a fractured skull and was on death row for ages, and I remember the fellow where he worked ran a catering firm in King William Street and he was very fond of my father, and he sent us up to his country house at Aldgate.

- 39:30 I remember going up there with my father and mother and sister, and he was there recuperating I suppose for three months. Then he went back to work.

**Did that, the financial strain on your family?**

I wouldn't know. Didn't affect me I don't think. Not that our demands were great in those days, being clothed and fed.

- 40:00 We were living in a good house at Glenunga, which was also owned by his employer. You see, after we'd gone to Glenunga I had to go back in the tram to primary school for the last year. So there would've been

- 40:30 tram fares and that's about all, and from there when I went to Unley High School I used to ride a bike from home all the way down to Unley and all the way back up again, but not a great lot of expense there I wouldn't have thought, trips to the movies and that sort of stuff. What else does a kid do? We were at that age group, 12 to 15,

- 41:00 we were fairly adventurous. School holidays were spent mostly getting into mischief, wandering around. There were open spaces, paddocks, old mines, go and investigate all these things.

**We'll just stop there. We'll talk a bit about that mischief.**

## Tape 2

- 00:32 **What did your father tell you of the First World War?**

Not a great deal because he never got away. He was a bit embarrassed I think. We used to go regularly to Anzac Day marches through Adelaide, always as spectators. I do recall him being chiacked [taunted], if that was the word of those days, by a couple of old soldiers who'd just marched

- 01:00 and were walking down the street, and they'd say, "Good Day, Len," Len was the name that he usually went by, and he'd pretend that either he didn't know them or they'd say, "Come on in for a drink," or something and, "Oh, you know I don't drink." "Go on," they'd say, "come in for a drink." 'Cause he was only 15 when he was in, so whether he drank then

- 01:30 or not I doubt. He might've, who'd know.

**After the war, how much social stigma was attached to those who didn't go to the First World War? Can you recall anything about that from your father?**

No, not from my father, no. He never, I don't know whether he felt any sadness about not going. I'm sure he did, but I don't think he felt any guilt about not going.

- 02:00 They were actually riding down all pomp and circumstance down to the wharf at Outer Harbour as the 3rd Light Horse I think it was. He, as a bugler, would be riding close to the colonel leading the group, or whoever it was leading the group, and he got bowled out literally on the wharf side by, he was an orphan
- 02:30 and he was living and brought up in Jamestown, South Australia, although he was born in Melbourne, and he ran away from home to join the army and I think that when they eventually found out where he was, it was them that gave his game away and had him withdrawn, the guardians, but he never went back to the guardians. I never met them,
- 03:00 didn't even know their name in fact. He never spoke about them. He spoke about his childhood in Jamestown from time to time but I never bothered to check up on that part of his life. I didn't think it was any concern of mine. I'm sorry now in some ways that I haven't done so. I could easily, you know, research his military thing. I did
- 03:30 have his discharge certificate and I don't know what's happened to that. It might've got lost in my own marital circumstances. I just don't know what happened to it, but he was honourably discharged, so he had no fears about that sort of thing. I think he missed the camaraderie and his reaction to these fellows on Anzac Day
- 04:00 suggested that.

**How big a deal was Anzac Day to you?**

Huge, huge. To see, I'm talking now in the early '30s when I'd go with my parents, to see these Light Horsemen going along and other fellows marching. A big thing, big thing.

**04:30 What did you know of the First World War as you were growing up?**

Quite a fair bit. Gallipoli stuff was not taught in school so much, but conversation gave me a fair idea of what it was. When I was old enough to actually read anything I used to read lots, although my main interest, believe it or not, as a

- 05:00 child of about 10 onwards, was at sea. I was resolved to go to sea even at the age of 12. My father, that's one thing I did know, he was a horrible sailor. He'd get sick in a rowing boat on Lake Torrens, that was his description, and he couldn't see any sense in people joining navies and the like, and so he opposed my joining the navy.
- 05:30 It was my mother who agreed, not him, and he went along with it because she agreed. She was English born and I suppose there was a bit more salt in her veins than there was in his. He'd been brought up as a country boy.

**How did your mum and dad get together?**

That I don't know. As they mostly

- 06:00 did in those days, I think at dances and that sort of thing. That was about the only sort of entertainment I imagine, going to concerts and going to balls and things.

**What was your, how did your mother come to be born in England in Adelaide?**

She wasn't born in Adelaide. My mother was born in New Jersey and that caused great problems with trying to know her

- 06:30 birth date because we always celebrated on the 26th of February but of course it was the 25th of February in the USA, and so there was always that confusion, so other than that, nothing. She went back to England after her father decided to get out of America. When I say decided to get out, I don't know whether it was just pressure to go home or not
- 07:00 from my grandmother, but they went back to England for a few years. She had a few years being brought up in, not Lancashire, I've forgotten the name of the county now. However, it doesn't matter. Then they decided to come out to South Africa and my
- 07:30 grandmother got to Cape Town and saw all these black people on the jetty and said she wasn't getting off there and they went on to Australia and got off in Adelaide. That's how they settled down there. My grandfather had two boys and three girls. The last girl was born in Adelaide, but the others had all been born in England except my mother
- 08:00 who was born in America, and they were always supportive of me. I was the senior grandchild, used to go and stay with them regularly if my mother was ill or indisposed for any reason at all. I'd finish up at my grandmother's place down at Semaphore, which suited me because it was down near the sea and near the ships.
- 08:30 I could go off to Port Adelaide or Outer Harbour and I used to play among the sand hills when I'd go out with my grandfather. He was a line inspector for the power company in Adelaide, Adelaide Electrical Company, or whatever, and part of that used to take him over the sand hills from the

09:00 powerhouse through to the city grid, and that was great fun. I used to play foreign legions up and down the sand hills, around the old fort at Fort Largs. I was a real Beau Geste [story of the French Foreign Legion] type of fellow.

**What did you daydream of in regard to the sea?**

Oh, I was hooked on books like, not

09:30 the World War I books, but more on the Nelsonian times. I could see myself up the mast and down the... all over the place. It just seemed to me like a good man's life, go to sea, do something. I didn't care if it was navy, which I'd have preferred, or merchant navy, which might've been commercially

10:00 a better choice, but there was no way I could go to the naval college at the age of 12. My father was dead set against that, so I didn't make any entry bids then at all.

**What celebrations did you take part in as a kid?**

Birthdays.

10:30 Of course, as being the senior grandchild, and the others came, many of them came after I joined the navy, and I hardly ever knew them very much. So there were the birthday parties and family celebrations. One of my aunties, my mother's youngest sister born in Adelaide, she wasn't that much older than I was.

11:00 So she and I were always very close. When I say not much older, probably five years or so difference like. In World War II she married a bloke who went into the army and whenever I got leave we would often start off in the pub and that sort of thing, this soldier and I. In later years' celebrations,

11:30 in younger stages, mostly family events. My grandparents were very keen to have parties. They used to come to our house at Glenunga, I'd remember, for lunch parties and they'd stay until late in the evening. There was always music or singing, guitar playing, no, not guitars, banjo playing in those days.

**How musical were you?**

Not

12:00 at all. I was sent to learn the piano and I didn't like the teacher very much. He used to rap me across the fingers with a pencil or ruler or whatever it was and I got fed up with that, and usually practice was always interfering with my football practice. I was a very keen sportsman.

**What do you think of corporal punishment?**

I'm all for it. Corporal punishment's

12:30 I think the wrong word. Corporal punishment is the sort of thing you'd use to describe lashes that they used to get in the Nelsonian navy, but domestic punishment, I think every kid deserves a few whacks across the backside every now and then. I certainly never suffered from it, as a result of it. Didn't even feel animosity. I can remember at school

13:00 getting six of the best [six strokes of the cane] on numerous occasions, but the thing is it was so well controlled. No teacher had the license to beat you up. If you misbehaved and the teacher couldn't handle it verbally or with keeping you in or making you do extra work, off to the headmaster, and he of course had the privilege and had to get excited about this. I remember at high

13:30 school, I had to go and see the headmaster. I had a report and I got a long lecture from him and he talked about his war experiences. He was a World War I veteran, and I thought this is getting good, I'm getting out of (UNCLEAR), I'm just getting a verbal. Then after all this very pleasant exchange of words, "Hold out your hand", whack, whack, whack.

14:00 He was a pretty good caner I can tell you, but I didn't resent it. I earned it.

**Did you participate in Empire Day celebrations?**

We did, I think, at primary school, but no private family celebrations and that. So it was a holiday too, which was good, nothing particular but

14:30 knew what it was all about, supported, we were definitely King and Country people in those days.

**How would you describe yourself as an adolescent?**

Ah, responsive and responsible. The adventurous streak was much more disciplined as a teenager.

15:00 It was all part of calculated visits. It wasn't random going off and destroying other people's property and all that sort of stuff. No, I think we had that freedom of space that the modern kid doesn't seem to get around the cities anyway, and don't forget Adelaide was a village compared with places like Sydney.

15:30 No, I would not describe myself as being anything other than a good citizen at that age.



**How gregarious were you?**

Not at all. Not at all. You're making me gregarious.

**Would you describe yourself as a bit of a loner?**

No, always had some sort of companion. Used to

16:00 wag it [play truant] from school occasionally, primary school, not secondary school. We used to go for adventures on our bikes, but this was, what we were dodging was not so much the school lessons but was the half afternoon a week when we used to go off and do woodwork, which was at a different centre from the school, and occasionally we would overshoot [bypass] the woodwork

16:30 place and just keep on riding, but I soon learnt that the fellow that I used to do these adventures with, he was going to be a loser in the long run so I dropped him. He did turn out to be a loser too.

**What happened to him?**

I'm not sure what actually happened to him, but certainly I never heard of him joining the services or anything else. I just don't know what happened to him, he just dropped out

17:00 altogether.

**What fiction books were you reading around that time?**

The authors I've forgotten, but I'd read almost anything, but for the navy or the seagoing books I can remember Midshipman Easy, Captains Courageous, all that sort of stuff. Other books, I would've read cowboy

17:30 stories, not so much on the crime stuff I can remember, mostly books on travel. Geography was one of my interests. I was always keen to know, I think I could tell you every capital city in the world and name all the countries without making too many mistakes,

18:00 more than you could do these days.

**How about the Antarctic expeditions, any source of inspiration there?**

Not inspiration, but interest, yes, because you could only get there by sea. I read of course Ashley Cherry Goddard's - I think that was his name - Worst Journey in the World, which was in two volumes.

18:30 We had to study it in school actually. I used to think that Scott was a marvellous fellow for doing what he did, but he was a damn fool for doing it. I did think that this Antarctic exploration was too much too early. Probably alright now.

**Did you ever get down that way on ships?**

19:00 No, no.

**What were your steps you took going towards to join the navy? Can you take us through those as you grew up?**

Yes. When the war started, that's the

19:30 European war started, I resolved if it was still on when I was of age that I'd join the navy and just fortunate that the navy took people in younger than the army and the air force did. So they'd take you in at 17 and a half, and so the moment I was 17 and a half I signed up and,

20:00 as I say, I got called up in March. I got impatient I suppose that I couldn't join up before 17 and a half. When the Japanese were looking as though they might be a bit difficult, I joined the army cadets. I didn't even know that they were running cadets, but someone told me about this

20:30 place. They were engineers in Adelaide, they had a training depot somewhere out on the railway line to, I've forgotten the name of the suburb, Hilton I think, no, no. Anyway I went down there one day and they signed me up and I got an army uniform and boots and all that sort of stuff, but it was a pretty useless

21:00 organization, I can tell you. I used to turn up there for parades and the sergeant was a lazy bloke. I think he was dodging the war as a member of the CMF [Citizen Military Forces - the militia in those days] and they hadn't been called into action in those days, but they were after the Japanese came in. Anyhow, I was glad to return all that kit when the navy decided to take an interest and

21:30 recruit me. But I was determined to go to the war, there was no doubt about that, however I went.

**What particular reason inspired?**

I don't know, families and country. I think that's what it's all about. If you didn't go to war, the war would come to you, and you'd be caught short and your family would be put at peril and I thought that was pretty

22:00 sick.

**If you could put figures on it, you know, percentage-wise, how much nationalism was involved, how much adventure was involved in that decision, how much desire to leave Adelaide, see the world?**

That's a difficult proportion. I would've said that patriotism was 70 percent,

22:30 5 percent probably social pressures, 5 to 10 percent maybe from the thought of adventure,

23:00 travel overseas was probably worth another 5 or 10 percent. That's got us up to 100 percent.

**More or less 100 percent. That's very good. (UNCLEAR) we go on, any sort of interest in girls at this stage before you joined up or serious relationships in your life?**

No serious relationships.

23:30 Always the hope for a serious relationship. We were very, when I say we I think we all were, very circumspect towards girls. I know my father always stressed on me, and I think other fathers did too on other kids, always treat girls as you'd expect your sister to be treated, and that seemed

24:00 to be the model, and there was no way you'd go and kiss your sister so it kept you out of mischief I think going out with other girls, but there was always the will I think to seek perhaps a kiss but to go further than that, not on your nelly [no way], no.

24:30 I can remember at the winter of '39, I went to Mount Buffalo with a school end of term ski party. Well that was a great adventure, of course, an Adelaide kid going to Melbourne and then Melbourne by train up to Porepunkah and off to Mount Buffalo, and various schools had their parties

25:00 there, and I remember there was a girl from a local private school, which was only around the corner from where I lived in Glenunga, and I thought she was a good sort and we'd had a couple of very public, never private, no petting parties or any of that sort of thing, but maybe a dance or something or other or an adventure out on the snow during the normal

25:30 skiing lesson. Anyway, I tried writing to her when we got back to Adelaide. Of course, in those days censorship of letters apparently was pretty high in these girls' schools. Anyway I got a letter returned by a form teacher or something or other. So I dropped any thought of that. I thought, "Good try but bad luck."

26:00 **Did you join up alone or were there some other mates that were with you?**

No, I joined up alone. They wanted to recruit me. Recruiting staffs in those days were very, very bad. All they were interested in was trying to fill numbers. There was no shortage in recruiting seamen, and so presumably to fill their numbers I was offered, I could be

26:30 either a cook or a stoker. I didn't want to be either of those, but I had an uncle who was in the navy and had been called up. He was, I don't know where he was serving at that time. He said, "Oh, don't worry, I'll fix that," and sure enough he fixed it and I was signed up as a

27:00 seaman. So that was good family influence I thought, but yes, God help me if I'd ever gone off to sea as a cook, the mind boggles, but having joined as a seaman of course, that was the right decision. I went as you know all the way through as a seaman.

27:30 **How do you recall your first encounters with navy discipline and induction into the service?**

Oh, we were very amenable. We didn't necessarily like it but we knew this was part of the regime and you had to live with it whether we wanted to or not. There were some things that seemed to be quite odd, but they all became sensible once you got to sea many years later. Like

28:00 simple things, common-sense things were the go, and it was surprising how many kids didn't have much common sense. I was lucky I guess, I think I got most of my common sense from my mother and that's what I think was able to lay the foundation of my career, common sense,

28:30 and you take commonsense to discipline as well. If they say, "Don't overstay your leave", you didn't overstay your leave. Some people did and they suffered whatever the penalties were at that time. But one of the peculiar things about the navy as I understand it with the army and the air force, the captain of the establishment or ship is required to read

29:00 the articles of war out to his crew, read them. Not put them up on the notice board or anything else because the navy, when I joined it was still based on the fact that not everyone could read and write, and I was surprised how many people could read or write. Not too many of them, but there were the occasional ones presumably they came from outback somewhere or other, and the Naval Discipline

29:30 Act under which we served during World War II was an Imperial Act passed in 1856. The Australian Commonwealth Parliament had made one or two adjustments to that Act.

**Crossed out United Kingdom and put Australia?**

No, no, nothing like that. They wouldn't have dared to do it to an

- 30:00 Imperial Act in those days, but what they did do is, they, say, used to allow the birching of boys, the Imperial Act, that part was not to apply to Australia.

**What was the birching of boys?**

Drop your tweeds [pants] and with a birch, which was really a bunch of straws,

- 30:30 you know, like the end of a witch's broom made up, and you got flogged with it on the backside. This was done for boys because the grown ups could be flogged, but flogging was also not carried out in my time anyway, but the reading of this Act especially when you're young, say a 17 year old, having the captain stand up and only read a few selected
- 31:00 sections of the act on each occasion I think, usually on Sundays at divisions when everyone had to fall in, in their best suits and get inspected and then go to church, and these sections started off, 'Every person subject to this Act who shall in the face of the enemy desert his post or sleep upon his post shall suffer death or such other punishment as here and after mentioned'. You think, "Christ!" excuse
- 31:30 that word, "Death", and you can imagine a good orator reading out this, 'shall suffer death or such other punishment as here and after mentioned'. Scare the daylights out of you.

**As a ship or a boat's captain, did you ever have to do that?**

Oh yes. I used to read the Naval Discipline Act until such time as the Act was superseded, which was fairly

- 32:00 late in my life.

**Can you recite for us a few of your favourite passages?**

Well, I just did. Anyone sleeping on his watch, that one was a favourite one, but it had the 'sweep all' article in them - the words I can't quite remember, I've got a copy of the Act up there - but 'Every person subject to the Act who shall commit any offence for which punishment is not here before

- 32:30 prescribed shall suffer such punishment as here and after mentioned'. Oh, you know, in other words that was liberty to prosecute you for anything that annoyed the captain, in a way.

**How prescriptive is it in terms of your entire waking or entire life when you're in the navy?**

Well, I was a good boy, wasn't I? The bad boys, I think they

- 33:00 used to enjoy breaking the rules to see how far they could get away with it, but it usually caught up with them in the end.

**Is it like the bible, does it lay down like Ten Commandments and that?**

Virtually, yeah. Later on, I'll let you have a look and you'll be terrified yourself just reading them.

- 33:30 **Any particular individuals you first bumped into, the people who influenced you during your training?**

All of the instructors were really very good and capable at their job. They were usually chief petty officers, many of them dating back to World War I who were not necessarily fit for sea duty by World War II but were

- 34:00 still able to do these training jobs. They were good, a term that was used to describe those fellows was 'good sea daddies', and I can remember the first divisional officer I had, Lieutenant Collins. He was always known as 'Pusser' [supply officer, pronounced 'pus-a', from 'Purser'] Collins because he was a straight-striper [permanent navy, identified by straight stripes on his uniform] whereas we were all reservists [wavy stripes] and we didn't know at that stage
- 34:30 that in fact he'd left the naval college fairly early in the piece and invalided out, and he'd come back for the war and really he didn't know much more about it than we did, except that he'd been trained properly at the naval college as a kid, but the Purser came from the fact that he had straight stripes and therefore was a real pukka [genuine] officer as opposed to a make-you-learn officer.
- 35:00 Remember him? I always remember his first lecture was trying to cut out the use of foul language and he used to use the analogy of, "Now, you wouldn't write home to your mother saying F this, S that or anything of the sort", and everyone would say, "No, no, I wouldn't do that," and go outside and swear like troopers probably. Swearing was pretty heavy
- 35:30 in those young days. I don't know that I engaged in it a lot, but it's astonishing how some people could not speak more than five words without including some sort of obscene word with it. You know the type yourself. They're still doing it today.

### **What did you know of the Royal**

- 36:00 **Australian Navy and what did they teach you about the traditions of the Royal Australian Navy at that time?**
- Not much about the Royal Australian Navy. They tended to group the Royal Navies, the Royal Navy plus the Australian, New Zealand, Canadian was all sort of one brotherhood and we were all interchangeable. I could go and serve in an English ship and an Englishman
- 36:30 could come and serve in our ships and so on without any real adjustment. So from that aspect, it was a good thing because you had this almost if you like international camaraderie between the 'royal', people that wore the 'royal' title. Foreign navies then became interesting because they were not Royal Navies, like the Dutch Navy,
- 37:00 although they were a Royal Dutch Navy but not our 'royal'. We met some of the survivors of Java while I was down there, and they were quite amenable fellows but they were different to us and their discipline, even the way they saluted was different, you see, and these small things do make a difference to your own outlook.
- 37:30 We were more interested in, you know, why they wear their clothes one way. Why we had three lines down our collars, some of these people only had two lines or no lines or whatever. It was all interesting stuff, comparing your uniform with that of a foreigner.
- To what extent was the training based, as Australia was preparing to go to war, in the navy based on First World War understanding of warfare or naval warfare?**
- I
- 38:00 should think all the specialisations were affected. The gunnery people had learned no doubt quite a lot since Jutland [Battle of Jutland off Denmark, World War I] and they were flogging their trade [selling their capabilities]. The anti-submarine people, which was a brand new specialisation cause they didn't have these people in the sonar sets, or ASDIC sets [submarine detection device - from Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] as we knew them back in World War I.
- 38:30 So that was a lesson of World War I, which caused that branch to be. Communications, they were another branch of seamen. They did their thing as radio improved, light signals.
- What did you know of submarines?**
- Nothing. Nothing when I joined.
- 39:00 **Any idea that this was a rather unusual thing to do?**
- Didn't have any feeling one way or another. You see, Australia last had submarines at that stage in the '30s, mid-30s, and they gave them up as a move in the Depression. They were expensive to run, had these two big O-class submarines, and I guess my feelings about
- 39:30 naval service was based entirely on what we had at that time, which was no submarines.
- Any particular ship that had a reputation that everyone wanted to join at that time?**
- I think the cruiser [HMAS] Sydney obviously had a big reputation at that time, with Collins [Captain, later Vice-Admiral Sir John Collins, RAN] on board had sunk the Bartolomeo Colleone [Italian light cruiser] and performed well in
- 40:00 the Mediterranean. The six-inch gun cruisers were probably a better choice than the eight-inch gun cruisers because they were getting more of the battleship stiff discipline and all that sort of stuff, and as my own experience didn't send me to cruisers, thank goodness, but I hardened in those views that the eight-inch gun cruisers [HMAS] Australia and [HMAS] Canberra
- 40:30 were stuffy affairs compared with the lighter cruisers and small ships was the way to go, gave you a certain independence. But being a reservist, that was the other thing, it didn't necessarily mean that you were likely to go to any of the big ships at all. You were more likely to get sent to converted ferryboats for that matter.
- 41:00 **We'll just stop there.**

## **Tape 3**

- 00:32 **How long were you at Flinders for?**
- In total eight months, nine, nine.
- During that time...**

No, sorry, sorry, seven months.

**Seven. During that time what were you following in terms of the war?**

We weren't told much in those days.

01:00 The papers didn't have too much unless it was an approved victory, which there weren't too many of particularly at that time. [General Douglas] MacArthur hadn't arrived to take over the running of the Australian government and press. Ourselves, we had to, most of the,

01:30 go down and man the trenches at Crib Point before dawn every day in case the Japanese landed and the progress of the war was practically unknown. We heard the disasters of course. If we lost some ship, you couldn't keep quiet or anything of that sort.

**How real did the threat of a**

02:00 **Japanese invasion feel at that time?**

Well, as I say, if you had to go and man the trenches every morning at a place like Western Port in Victoria, which is a long way south, I'm sure they weren't doing it just to annoy us. They were really expecting that sort of thing. We used to have air raid sirens and all that sort of stuff and occasionally they'd go off,

02:30 sometimes for a drill, sometimes for doubt, and if you went on leave to the beaches up in New South Wales, this is when I came to New South Wales late in '42, you'd find Bondi Beach covered in barbed wire and stuff, all there to keep the invaders out.

**I guess all those precautions were being taken, but when you went down to look out at Crib Point for example, how**

03:00 **seriously was that taken by the people having to do this job?**

Us?

**Mmm.**

We took it seriously otherwise we wouldn't be doing it. We were sent there, nasty time of day, had to march there and back. Oh no, it was no fun and not regarded as fun.

**Do you remember the midget submarine attacks and where you were?**

We heard about those.

03:30 Of course that was in the middle, nearly the middle of the year. That shocked us to think they'd come that far south, yeah, really shocked us, but other than that didn't know anything of the strategy or the tactics used. I don't think the navy itself knew exactly how many submarines were involved

04:00 at that time, and even now I think there's some debate as to, or there's not really left any debate now, but whether there were three midgets [submarines] or four midgets originally set out to do this.

**During your time at Flinders what opportunity did you get to go to sea?**

When I was at the officer training school, we went out for a week

04:30 in a ship called HMAS Bingara and that was really the only, and that was just as well, it was good training. We just sailed from Western Port around to Port Philip Bay and back again. Why I say it was a good experience, things that happen on the decks of ships, limb threatening if not life threatening that we learnt to avoid very

05:00 easily. One of the biggest lessons, of course, make sure where your feet are going. Never put them inside the coil of a rope because when the rope runs out your leg's gone. That in fact in later life happened in a ship that I was in. Young kid got his leg caught in the bite of a - a bite's only a loop - and tug pulled the line and took off his

05:30 leg at the ankle, nasty. Well we learnt all those things in a few days at sea.

**Were there any other fundamental lessons that you learnt during that week that you still recall?**

Yes, manning a sea boat and lowering it and raising it at sea. That also is a thing that had to become a daily part of life for blokes that did go to sea in

06:00 ships and had to row the damn thing. There were no motorboats of any reliability in those days, and doing rescues at sea was always done by a pulling boat.

**How did you take to the sea?**

Well. I might've been seasick first day out but never again afterwards.

06:30 Dodging seasickness, of course, is always a bit of an art form, I think. You've got to mentally adjust to it. Some people get sick at the thought of going to sea. Fortunately I wasn't one of those.

**Amongst the new officer trainees going to sea on the Bingara, were there many that got seasick? What was that situation?**

Yes, yeah, there'd be, if the

07:00 weather was bad, they'd be completely immobilised because they just didn't have the right balance of mind or stomach to cope with it.

**What did the navy have in place to deal with seasickness?**

Nothing much, other than to keep your mind on the job. "Here's a bucket." You don't get leave to go and be sick.

07:30 I did know of a couple of people who were eventually classified as chronic cases who eventually got discharged medically unfit, and seasickness is not an easy thing to disguise I don't think, or to reproduce, so there was that side of things.

**You were selected for officer training. Can you tell us a little bit about that**

08:00 **decision and how you were notified?**

I don't know how it was made. We were all recruits due to pass out and go off to join ships like all the rest of us, the training class. I think one of the main requirements for selection at that age, that stage, and of course I've got no idea what they read into your training history at that time,

08:30 but the educational qualification would've been the first requirement, the Leaving Certificate. I think they were prepared to take the risk, but there were some who had only the Intermediate Certificate and they were also selected. A lot of my friends from Adelaide, and they became friends after we went to sea because we used to go home on leave in the same train, believe

09:00 it or not, a lot of them came from the wine countries, which was a handy thing to know, but a lot of them didn't make the passing-out [graduation] of officer training school. So I was lucky from that point of view that I did.

**Let me stop for a second. What was the mix of backgrounds in that area?**

09:30 Well, for the basic recruit course, every walk of life. I'd had nothing to do with boys from other states really at that stage. Not even when I went skiing did I have anything to do with Victorians and I got a shock to find the Victorian Police wore a different uniform to the South Australian Police, all that sort of stuff, but I was very quick to learn that there was a huge linguistic

10:00 difference between people from each state, and it still goes on to a limited degree, but it was much more pronounced in those days. I could tell a New South Welshman very easily, but there were boys from farming backgrounds, mining backgrounds. They were not all boys at my age either, some of them were recruits at

10:30 24, 25. So a mixed group.

**What things did you learn in that period that perhaps weren't related to the navy?**

The ability to live together en masse. Don't forget we all swung hammocks in those days, no bunks, which meant you had to rig your hammock up at night and not before a certain

11:00 time, and you had to get them down and stowed away before a certain time the next morning. There were some people who would deliberately go out of their way to bump the bottoms of hammocks where people were asleep. That was a bit annoying but you got used to just living together and that was a huge lesson. Fortunately, when you were at the recruit school, you

11:30 got no access to the wet canteens [service bars serving alcoholic drinks]. They keep you off any grog [alcoholic drink], which is just as well. I don't think it would've mattered much to the young fry [young men] like myself, but for the 20 year olds it probably would've made a, they'd come back full at night. It would've been awful.

**What were your first introductions to drinking culture?**

12:00 I was reluctant to take it on. I remarked earlier I was a very keen sportsperson. Aussie Rules [Australian Rules Football] was my game and I didn't know then that most of the, all the teams go out on a pretty wild party at that time. I don't think I started drinking,

12:30 I certainly had a beer or two when I was 18. I didn't really start drinking until I went to the K9 I think.

**What about smoking?**

Smoking, I didn't smoke when I joined the navy. Started smoking soon afterwards, just the thing to do, and smoking in those days

13:00 was highly visible and no one turned their noses up at smokers. Even non-smoking managers of oil companies and so on would always have a silver cigarette box on their desk to offer their guests. So there was no objection by the non-smokers to the smokers.

**We'll come to this again later on. Just before we move on from recruit training,**

13:30 **you mentioned the linguistic differences. Are there any phrases that still stand out in your mind that you as a South Australian didn't understand?**

We understood, but the South Australians themselves of course are well known with their dancing and 'dahncing' and that sort of thing. I was conscious of that, so that anyone that didn't say 'dahnce' was a foreigner. I can always remember the New

14:00 South Wales kids who had funny ways of pronouncing their 'o w' words. They seemed to put an extra 'w', "We'll go to a 'showa'," and you still hear it occasionally from the odd people here, "Goa," you know, when they're shouting out at a football match, this

14:30 'w' on the end. All very strange. I've forgotten most of the things, but there are many, many words, which some of the people that I learnt were probably Catholic Sydneysiders use it, go to the 'filums' [films]. That sort of thing.

**That's interesting because there are a lot of linguistic differences today, but I'm wondering**

15:00 **they might've changed since then. How did that change when you went into the officer training? What was the mix of people like there?**

Well, as I say, nearly all the Adelaide boys went in because most of us had certainly got beyond Intermediate [Certificate] stage and I think that was the guiding factor in those days. Yes,

15:30 those kids that didn't have the Intermediate, I don't think they were selected at all. I can hardly remember those who would've been in my recruit class who didn't go.

**How important were class differences in the Australian Navy of those days?**

Well, there was only one class difference, you were an officer or you were not.

16:00 And there were many people of better classes in the non-officer ranks than there were in the officer ranks. See, in our case, it was an accident of the times. The Naval Board suddenly realised that, with the advent of the Japanese attacks, the need for many, many more ships, mostly small ships, commandeered ships, built

16:30 patrol craft, that there was going to be a huge demand for the officer corps as well as the seamen. I think that was the motivating force for the officer training.

**How different was that to the basic recruit training you had already?**

I can't remember really. It was all the same learning curve as far as I was

17:00 concerned. Just more advanced stuff than what we learnt and probably things like navigation and so on were, the rudimentary business of navigating a ship would've been taught at the officer training school and the Naval Discipline Act no doubt. Yes, it's hard to know.

17:30 We were probably taught to be a little more independent, and I won't say self-centred, but obviously the officer, especially in a small ship, would have to be pretty resilient and trust his own instincts a lot. So I guess they taught us that, one way or the other.

**What happened at the end of that course?**

18:00 One of the peculiar things, which I didn't understand at the time, we were all RANR, Royal Australian Naval Reserve people, which was the same category that all of the people from way back in compulsory training days were RANR. When we graduated as midshipmen or sub-lieutenants

18:30 from the officer training school, some went to the RANR and some went to the RANVR. I never quite understood the difference in that. I was one that went RANVR because I'd already been pre-selected to come up here to the AS [Anti-submarine] training school and they were mostly RANVR people that were being trained there because for some reason or other

19:00 it was easier to ship RANVR people off to England to serve in the Royal Navy than it was to send RANR people. You can't understand that. I still can't, so there you go.

**What does the V stand for?**

Volunteer.

**But the reserves were volunteers except for the conscript days.**

Yes, except for the conscript days, and I think that was the only grounds they had

19:30 for having sailors. Most of the VR [Volunteer Reserve] people were officers. There were a few VR sailors but nearly all of them were officers, but the sailors were RANR.

**Was there any gentle discrimination between the regular navy and the reserves?**

I think so, yeah. The reserves, particularly with the younger officers in the permanent navy, some of the senior officers too I think, they regarded just the reserves

20:00 as holidaymakers, not professionals. 'Wavy navy' was a popular appellation for officers because they wore their wavy stripes.

**What personal examples of that did you encounter?**

None, really.

20:30 See, we never really met officers higher than lieutenant's rank. Anyone higher than that was getting closer to God, and captains and admirals, goodness me, never know what. The fellow that ran the naval depot down at Flinders was a four-stripe captain and he had a commander,

21:00 but they didn't concern themselves with young recruits.

**What was going on in Sydney when you arrived?**

Still the aftermath of the midgets' attack. The 'Hollywood fleet' was, which was the name that people gave to the Naval Auxiliary Patrol Craft who were on duty

21:30 that night and did such a good job, they'd expanded their duties and gone to more ports. No, and at Rushcutter we were heavily involved in learning how to operate ASDIC sets and the tactics that had come from nearby. Radar was just coming into being, so we had to do a crash radar course as well because that came under the general umbrella of

22:00 the anti-submarine.

**Do you want to take a quick break?**

Do you remember what the question was?

**We were talking about Rushcutter, that you were learning about ASDIC sets and radar.**

And radar, and tactics. That was a full time interest.

22:30 You asked me earlier about girls. I was starting to get interested in girls and my time at Rushcutter happened to coincide with the first entry of the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service and I remember a young WRAN there that I used to take her out once or twice. All very respectable, mind you, and don't forget it was an officer-sailor

23:00 relationship.

**What was your reputation in a young officer sailor uniform around Sydney?**

Who knows. We wore red patches, whereas the permanent navy wore white patches, the merchantmen wore blue patches. I got a bit of a reputation, I suppose, when I was in the K9, but up until then I was just

23:30 like any other jockey learning his job.

**What was your uniform?**

The full officer's uniform but instead of having stripes we wore collar patches. So, you know, the usual double-breasted suits,

24:00 blue. Whilst here I changed from white shorts to khaki shorts. They decided about then that khaki was going to be the more practical colour for seamen out in Australia and in the tropics. So I was here when that change took place. We did have long

24:30 white suits with a single row of buttons down the middle with shoulder boards, but there was nothing on the shoulder boards. No stripes. So that was about the only difference.

**Where would you go if you were taking a young lady out in Sydney at the time?**

Oh, probably the movies or to a private party or

25:00 to a ball perhaps. There were plenty of balls going on, war bond rallies and so on. When I was in K9 particularly, I was a much more liberated citizen then and the whole crew, when I say the whole crew, the officers would all go off. I remember the great Artie Shaw [American clarinettist and band leader] and his band came out here in '43

25:30 for the American forces and they had a ball up in the top floor of David Jones, which used to be a



ballroom up there, in their Elizabeth Street store. Artie Shaw and his whole band were in the navy and they'd come out especially to entertain the US troops,

26:00 but for some reason or other we all got invited. So we all went along to that, and it always used to amuse me that here were these American senior officers with a blonde on one arm and a bottle of champagne under the other. We went along there with a great haversack full of, well not a haversack, but it was a bag full of booze.

26:30 We eventually finished up with all the Yanks coming over to our table trying to help us drink it, all good fun.

**In 1942 when you first arrived in Sydney, how prominent were the Americans?**

They were increasing, increasing rapidly at that stage. A lot of headquarters-type people, remember that MacArthur had his headquarters here in Sydney for a while, all the communication staffs and

27:00 everything else. He had a huge staff.

**What was the relationship like on land between the various different Australian services and the American servicemen?**

I think we kept our own counsel. We had very little need to talk to Americans. We had one American that had a great need to come and talk to us and he bugged us for a

27:30 bit, but he was not a bad fellow. He was a lieutenant. He was trying to convince us that we ought to go for a new device called a bathythermograph, which we thought was excellent for surface ships but didn't see how we could use it in a submarine, but they did, had, I don't think they had developed a submarine type bathythermograph then. They did

28:00 come in later, an invaluable piece of equipment, but one they thought of, not us.

**Who was the particular American that was bugging you about this?**

I've forgotten his name, but he was a US naval lieutenant and presumably it was his job, bathythermographs, and we were really what he thought would be best for his particular

28:30 deal, and because submarines very much depend upon temperature gradients and this bathythermograph showed you what these gradients were and at the time surface ships were using them to try and found out the gradients to try and improve their attack technology, and know whether a submarine had gone below

29:00 a layer or not, and of course the submarine conversely if it knew where the layers were, would want to use those layers. That was the rough relevance of the bathythermograph.

**We'll talk a lot more about that in a moment, but before you joined the K9, you spent a brief period on the Kybra?**

She was the ship that was attached to the anti-submarine school here as the training, sea training

29:30 ship, and she used to take ships teams and training classes to sea to practise that stuff, but the trouble is there were no targets in terms of real submarines. There were a few static targets that they tried to rig up, which were never highly successful, and it wasn't until the K9 came into the picture that she had a

30:00 reasonable target. So this is how I came to go to the K9 really, while I was in Kybra, and the crew of the K9, the officer crew, had just come to Sydney and we decided to give them a welcoming cocktail party on board, and so they came on board and while they were on board, there was only three of them, the captain was a lieutenant

30:30 ex-merchant navy, the first lieutenant was a lieutenant ex-merchant navy and their third hand was a sub-lieutenant RN. He and I got to talking quite a lot, and he was talking about the submarine and how badly they needed a fourth officer and I'd by then had enough beer to say, "I

31:00 wouldn't mind that job, see what it's like." The next morning I was peer-headed [head hunted]. He'd spoken to his captain and his captain said, "Good, we'll grab him," and there I was, gone. So I joined K9 as a midshipman.

**Completely by accident, almost?**

Well yes, design, I suppose would be the nicest thing to say.

**Can you explain the situation through**

31:30 **which the K9 came to Australia and Australia's plans at the time for a submarine fleet?**

Right from '39 onwards from the war, Rushcutter badly needed a submarine, a tame submarine they could use for a target to train these people. They had a great reputation for the people they did train. You know,

- 32:00 about 30 percent of the AS staff in the Battle of the Atlantic were Australian trained. They had a huge reputation and all done without a live submarine target. So when the Dutch Navy came here after the fall of Java, what happened there, the submarine squadron that they had in Surabaya, half were
- 32:30 sent to Colombo to Trincomalee to join up with a British depot ship there and the remainder were told to, after completing their patrols trying to catch Japanese people, to beat it down to Fremantle. Well, K9 was one of the older submarines there. K9, K12 both came down to Fremantle.
- 33:00 I've forgotten whether K8 was, I think she was immobilised in Surabaya. When they got to Fremantle after much consideration, the K12 was kept with the American squadron
- 33:30 and K9 was sailed around to Sydney to fulfil this role of training vessel. The Dutch in the meantime of course were trying to build up their own submarine force into a modern submarine fleet and some of the British submarines that were building at the time were handed over to the Dutch and so they needed their own trained crews to man these new British
- 34:00 boats. So the K9 came here, was in Sydney at the time of the midget attack, and in fact K9 was lying alongside the [HMAS] Kuttatubul when the Kuttatubul went up. That same explosion that sank the Kuttatubul also affected the K9. She got blown out of the water, her hatches got twisted and that sort of thing,
- 34:30 and she still had a Dutch crew. So she went into dry dock to be repaired. The crew were taken out and they went off to wherever to man other Dutch submarines and the Dutch Navy offered it to Australia provided the Australians
- 35:00 could arrange to man it because the Dutch crew wouldn't be available. The Naval Board asked the Admiralty, and the Admiralty sent out these three officers plus I think about half a dozen, maybe more, sailors who qualified modern submariners and the numbers were to be made up by Australian submariners and by that I
- 35:30 mean old permanent navy people who'd served in either the Oxley and the Otway, and there were quite a number of those, or one block, the coxswain even served as far back as the J-boats immediately after World War I, and so they got this crew together and after the ship came out of dry dock there she
- 36:00 was available for training operations. That's how we acquired it anyway.

**How did you train without such an aid on the Kybra? What sort of training exercises did you do?**

Just routine pinging at sea, working the set, getting used to the noise it made going through the water because at Rushcutter on the synthetic teachers all you had was recordings of this sort of

- 36:30 stuff and synthetic submarine blips. Quite different at sea where you had in those days, like now, plenty of whale life going up and down the coast. They make good targets at times, and many have been killed as genuine U-boats. I think that was the main thing. As I say there
- 37:00 were a couple of static targets and they were experimenting with towed targets, but they never were very satisfactory.

**Can you explain just briefly how the ASDIC set worked?**

Well, the basic principle is that a generated electrical current is passed to an oscillator, we used to call it in those days, but

- 37:30 later called a transducer, and in those days the British and therefore ourselves used quartz-face transducers and with the right electrical impulse, the quartz would generate its own noise at a fixed frequency. The whole
- 38:00 thing would vibrate and send out a sound wave and that sound wave would go out for maybe two and a half thousand yards and anything in it's path would go out in V shape, would reflect the target, would reflect back into the transducer, which would pick up that sound because it caused a slight vibration, and
- 38:30 you'd measure the range of the thing, which virtually was half the time that it took from the first pulse to the received echo, and that virtually was what happened. You used to run this V shape fan around through a cycle going through the bows, although you could train it anywhere you liked, but as a routine would go from 80 degrees on the
- 39:00 portside to 80 degrees on the starboard side, and if you detected anything in one of these sweeps then you concentrated on cutting backwards and forwards and trying to work out the direction the target was moving, whether it was left or right, and whether it was coming towards you or going away, and if it was coming towards you the pitch would come up higher. If it was going away, the pitch would drop lower and that's
- 39:30 how it worked.

**That's excellent, an excellent description. Can you describe what kind of sounds you were listening for?**

Well, a hard metallic ping, like a solid thing. If it was mushy, it was probably a shoal of fish or some other thing. You want me to make the noise, don't you?

**You don't have to with your rib, but a hard metallic ping.**

You've probably seen it in the Cruel Sea [film about World War II convoy escort and anti-submarine warfare in the North Atlantic, based on the novel by Nicholas Monsarrat]

40:00 and that sort of stuff, but the out-going sound, and each ship would be on a different frequency so they didn't interfere with each other's set, and that was one of the techniques, getting the ships stationed on the screen so you didn't interfere with each other.

**Was the size of an object reflected in the sound that it made?**

Oh yeah, yeah, and whether it was head on or side on. Virtually it was go, "ping, ping, ping, ping,"

40:30 that sort of noise.

## Tape 4

00:32 **Yes, can you tell us about commissioning the K9 with the Australian Navy?**

Well, she commissioned in June I think it was, 1943. I joined her just shortly after she commissioned and there we had this

01:00 part RN, part RAN crew and the four of us in the wardroom. We were all accommodated ashore at Potts Point in the Admiral's Mess, which was the old Bushell house, which was known as 'Kismet'. It wasn't HMAS Kuttabul in those days, and the sailors, they lived, I'm not quite sure where they lived.

01:30 Those that lived on board and those that didn't live on board, I think a lot of them were married in Sydney, the old RAN ones, and the RN ones, they found their accommodation where they could, I think. So there was very little shore accommodation in the navy in those days and people used to get paid allowances to go. Of course that was another great factor, which didn't persuade me

02:00 to go, but I was delighted to get there and find out. My pay almost doubled. My pay as a midshipman, (UNCLEAR) ship, I think was something like 12 and six a day, and after submarine service I got three bob a day submarine pay and three bob a day hard living allowance,

02:30 so there's another six bob straight away. Made me richer than dreams of avarice for a young midshipman, and of course when I was a sub-lieutenant it went up as well because I got promoted there after six months. Captain had me promoted to acting sub-lieutenant. It didn't matter to me, the pay was the same and I could wear a stripe.

**What did your colleagues**

03:00 **say to you when you told them you were going off the join submarine squadron?**

I don't think I told anyone that. I had no need to. All the people I trained with, they'd all gone off elsewhere to various places they'd been posted after finishing the course at Rushcutter. I was the only one that went to the Kybra. I don't know why I was sent there,

03:30 whether I was a bad boy or a good boy.

**What sort of reputations do submarines have in the navy?**

As far as I was aware, I was quite ignorant of the whole reputation. I wasn't aware of any reputation at that time except they were fighting the war over in Europe and fairly convincingly.

**Any personal sort of feeling about the fact that you'd be under**

04:00 **the water and not floating on top of it?**

No. When I went there, I wondered what it was going to be like, but if all these other people did it I couldn't see any reason why I shouldn't be able to do it too, but it was, the first I ever did was a bit strained. We went out to Rose Bay to do a test dive. Captain

04:30 wasn't going to sea unless he'd done this and we went to Rose Bay. We had the Kybra standing by in attendance. We were connected at the end of a long grass line. A grass rope is a rope that floats on the surface but as the submarine goes down, hauling grass of course, obviously, it goes down but the surface bit still floats.

05:00 So it's like leaving a towel behind. Anyway, we couldn't get the submarine to dive. We filled all the tanks

that we could and even had all the crew mustered up forward [pronounced 'forrard'] to try and put weight on the bows to push it down. She wouldn't go down at all so we eventually had to give up and come back to port, and they found out that during the dockyard

- 05:30 refit at Cockatoo, the submarine was equipped with a thing called a drop keel, which was virtually lead inside another metal casing, and it was called a drop keel because it was attached to the bottom of the submarine with screws that in an emergency if you'd gone down and couldn't come up, you'd drop the drop keel and hope to
- 06:00 be a bit lighter and get up that way. Well, they'd forgotten to put the drop keel back on and we couldn't get down. So they put it back on and off we went to repeat the run in Rose Bay. This time we went down alright, but Rose Bay being fairly shallow, we only had to just prove a principle that she'd go down and tested all the water tightness except the conning
- 06:30 tower was still above water but the hull was underneath, and that was alright, watertight. So I thought all this was a big joke same as everyone else did, but then when we went to sea to do our first operation out there, we dived and the water poured through the conning tower hatch, came belting down inside. I thought this was a bit
- 07:00 strange. I didn't like the look of this but we kept on going down and as soon as we got far enough below the surface the sea pressure jammed the conning tower hatch so it was watertight once again, but what had happened was that the hatch had been distorted during this torpedo attack from the Japanese midgets, and so once we got used to this business that the first part of the dive would get a bit wet, the first lieutenant used to carry an umbrella because he was
- 07:30 stationed at the bottom of the conning tower hatch watching the trimming instruments. I can remember a young Australian engineer sailor who was also new to submarines standing alongside me. He went a very peculiar shade of green when all this water came in, I can tell you. I won't mention his name. I just have, but I won't mention it again.

**She sounds like she was a quirky boat.**

- 08:00 Oh she was, she was old, 1921. When you've got to think that the first operational submarine in the navy went to sea in 1900, in the Royal Navy, 1900, now, we're talking about the late '40s or mid '40s, sorry, mid '40s, we're talking about a whole service that's only 40 years
- 08:30 old and K9 was built in the first half of that 40 years. She was an old boat, no doubt about it, and the Dutch knew she'd reached the end of her life. We bent her a bit in the Japanese midget attack, which didn't make her any more seaworthy, but I'll just give you the history of the accidents that befell her while I was
- 09:00 on board. We had two high-pressure air explosions. The second one, the first one shocked me and the sub-lieutenant a bit, but we got used to that. What happened was the metal into these high-pressure air bottles, which are stationed all around the side of the submarine, and the part we were using,
- 09:30 they were all connected to pipelines. The pipelines were made of manganese bronze. Now, the manganese bronze wears apparently and crystallises and is not as strong as say the more modern boats with the steel piping, and what had happened is the air in the bottle had blown out and
- 10:00 fractured the manganese bronze thing which then whipped around the space like a big snake. So we were lucky we didn't get decapitated. The sub-lieutenant and I were just sitting down enjoying a glass of beer or whatever we were doing alongside at Garden Island. So we fixed that one up and then still went to sea again and had another one of those HP [high pressure] explosions
- 10:30 a month or two later, but we could live with those because we could soon shut off the system with a bit of slick drill. But eventually, while the boat was just being manoeuvred out from Garden Island, it was changing births in fact, and just moving, it was backing out from the birth at Garden Island, the forward battery
- 11:00 exploded and that of course wrecked the inside of the boat. Fortunately everyone except the radio operator were up on the upper deck. There was not the full crew on board; it was only part of the crew. Everyone was up on the upper deck. The sub-lieutenant was driving the boat and I wasn't on board. I was in my bunk ashore at Kuttabul, at Potts
- 11:30 Point, and after that she just became a write-off. After the Board of Inquiry into it, the admiral wrote to the navy that he was reluctant to send the sailors to sea in this thing under such a grave risk as they were constantly experiencing. So that was
- 12:00 the sort of start and finish of the thing. What had caused the battery explosion was that in a submarine you've got these huge batteries, they're 2.2-volt batteries. Now you say that's only little batteries, but these are huge great things about ten times the size of a car battery, and you'd have a battery bank of 110 of these cells,
- 12:30 which gave you your 240 volts or 220 volts, and then another battery in another compartment the same size. So they'd be connected in parallel whereas the cells were connected in series to build up the

voltage. To charge them had a diesel generator pushing the charge into the battery when they

13:00 were flat, and each cell had an exhaust pipe to allow the hydrogen gas to come off. Well, the Dutch boats had the old original single-cell ventilation. Each battery had a pipe, which joined up with the others. Now, the other submarine services and the Dutch

13:30 realised that this was dangerous because it was a dead easy cause for a battery explosion. You've got all this hydrogen gas trapped around the top of a battery. Sparks are likely at any time in this operation. It's all being fed away into a central exhaust pipe which you can imagine one spark and, "Bang!" and that's what happened. The modern submarine, well, what was modern then, not now,

14:00 they had mass ventilation rather than single cell. They'd just make sure the flooring over the top of the batteries was gas type and then just suck the air off the whole lot and out, and that made it much safe. So that was the start and the finish of the K9.

**She was a Dutch boat. Can you describe what was inside**

14:30 **and how the writing was or what language it was all in?**

Fortunately in a submarine, it seemed complicated to a 'land lubber' [non-sailor], but once you got used to the bits of equipment, a lot of piping everywhere, once you realised which valves were which, which carried air, which carried

15:00 water and high pressure water, high pressure air and low pressure air, all those things. You soon got used to all that sort of stuff and it wasn't too bad to cope with it, but there were some funny things because the Dutch crews, and the 'K' stood for colonial, and they were designed to operate in the Far

15:30 East, in the Dutch East Indies. The home-based Dutch submarines had an 'O' number, so that was the original thing. The Dutch had built some modern K boats, not the same class as the K9, which were quite efficient submarines, but the K9,

16:00 as I said, she was very old, certainly due for retirement when she got retired and only trying to keep in commission during the war as a necessary training vessel.

16:30 Sorry.

**Can you describe some of the Dutch writing inside?**

That's what it started off. Well, she was designed for colonial service and most of the crew would've been Indonesian sailors with a few Dutch sailors over the top of them I guess. But this meant for the class distinction of the toilets,

17:00 were quite peculiar when I found later British standards. They had a toilet on the upper deck and in harbour they used to have a little canvas screen around it. Well, that was pretty primitive. The crew members had to go squat on this toilet down in the after end of the boat on the upper deck to

17:30 use in harbour. Below decks, the toilet was situated down aft between the propeller shafts. Well that was alright, that was similar to a more modern submarine for use when you dived. I can't remember how they operated. I suspect they

18:00 had holding tanks. I can't really remember that now. A more modern British boat you had compressed air injection system in the toilet. It was always a barrel of fun for people that couldn't use it properly. You'd get a blow back, you'd know all about it. But I can't really recall how the Dutch ones worked.

18:30 We had Dutch torpedoes on board, the tubes were loaded, and we had spare torpedoes that we used to maintain as though they were British boats. They were smaller diameter torpedoes than the ones I got used to having in other submarines. The captain was always very keen that we should

19:00 be in a position to attack anything that came our way. Thank God they didn't, I suppose, and he even brought out from England with him some attack disks which would fit over the compass and they had the strange name of 'Is-was' [system for correctly aiming off a torpedo (literal meaning)]. This was

19:30 some numerical system on which you could base your attack, dimensions on what the direction and speed was, and what it is between observations and get a point on which to aim off your torpedoes. I never understood how the hell it worked and I still don't know how that sort of system worked because I went to more modern

20:00 torpedo attack systems in my time.

**Can you take us through the boat, describing it say from stern to mast?**

Pretty well a standard submarine layout. Up forward there would be the forward torpedo space, a couple of tubes. I think we had four tubes and four reloads.

20:30 The crew used to live up there when we were at sea. There was always space in the forward torpedo

space. We didn't swing hammocks in those days; you just made your bunk where you could find it. Used to work the hot bunk system [two crew interchanging for each bunk] of course in submarines. It'd only be half the bunks for the crew really

21:00 and that's part of the reason why they had to live ashore when we were in harbour. Worked the hot bunk system for those on watch, didn't need a bunk. Those that were off watch did, and they'd swap over. Then the next compartment after that would've been battery space.

21:30 That had no other, no, there was another space before the battery space which contained the galley, the petty officers' mess and that sort of thing. Then came the forward battery space, number 1 battery space. Then there'd be the control room and then there was another battery space

22:00 after that, and then the engine room and motor rooms after that. So that's how it virtually ran and that basic scheme was the same in most submarines really.

**And when the Dutch handed it over was there a Dutch officer that stayed with the ship?**

We had a Dutch warrant officer who stayed with the ship as the liaison bloke. He was meant to do the

22:30 interpretations and point out the peculiarities of the Dutch torpedoes that we had.

**What translations were required?**

He spoke English. Those that were of vital importance we put a brass tally up there with English words to replace the Dutch, but by and large most of the Dutch

23:00 words were virtually self evident. When you come to think of it what you need mostly, providing you know what systems they're on, you only need to know up, down, left or right or port or starboard, and those words were pretty natural and if people saying

23:30 left or right, you could see which was left and which was right. I can't remember the actual word. I can remember 'arkla' [phonetic] meant something or other, but other than that I can't remember.

**And how deep did you take her?**

We only took her down to about 90 feet I guess. Can't remember going any deeper. We were doing most of our operations off the east coast here

24:00 and not far offshore anyway, so we wouldn't have to go very deep and all we'd need to do is make sure our conning tower was below the keel depth of the ships that were trying to track us and we very rarely got to advanced stages of exercises where we'd do anything evasive with the training ships. What we'd do is dive and go along

24:30 a fairly steady course. For the elementary training, you'd tail grass rope with buff. These are just floats on the back end so that if the surface ship lost contact and the instructor would direct her again by the buffs to regain contact. That was mostly how it ran all the time.

25:00 We just didn't care as long as we just stayed on, kept depth and direction. That was fine and we'd just go on and on and on, and the ships would thunder backwards and forwards attacking us.

**Were there any particular noises that K9 made that gave you cause for concern when she was down at depth?**

No, I don't think so, no. That water trick was the only one that was fun and as soon as you got to periscope depth that was alright.

25:30 No, I can't recall any problems there. We did go down to Jervis Bay at one stage. I suspect that might've taken us a bit deeper when we were exercising. It was obviously a fairly simple exercise because we went down there with the Kybra. She was the

26:00 attack ship. The only problem we got into at any stage was at the entrance to Broken Bay off Barrenjoey [Head] there. There'd obviously been rains inland somewhere or other so a freshwater stream was coming out. That's what I was talking about

26:30 earlier about temperature gradients and salinity gradients as well. When we hit this fresher, we sank immediately 'cause we were up to then trimmed on a salt water basis, but to hit fresh water we suddenly became much heavier than we had been and went down, but it was a nice sandy bottom there so we bounced off quite happily.

27:00 **How are you navigating the boat?**

Me personally?

**Well, how did the K9...**

Ah, well...

### **under water?**

Under water all you can really do is navigate by dead reckoning. You've got to come up to periscope depth every now and then if you're on the shore to have a quick look at the shoreline to make sure you're not being washed in or out on the tide. See, you can't

27:30 tell what that is in a submarine unless you have a reference point, and that's how most ships navigate.

### **How were you adapting to life as a submariner?**

After that first trim dive, I was going great guns and that's why the captain was prepared to recommend that I should go off to UK.

28:00 We did have the great fortune of while I was in the K9 there was a fellow who was a British naval liaison officer with the American submarine force in Honolulu. He came out to Australia partly to see the K9, see if we were being treated properly,

28:30 and also he did some war bond rallies because he was a highly decorated hero, VC [Victoria Cross] and two DSOs [Distinguished Service Order] and God knows what. He got all this in a submarine called the Torbay [British T class] Anyway, Commander Anthony C. C. Miers, he came out to the K9 and I didn't know it at the time but I soon learned that he

29:00 had quite a reputation with young officers. I don't mean in a sexual sense either, but he was a big boy and he was a pugilist, he'd been Far East boxing champion and God knows what else, and the RN sub-lieutenant and I shared a room at 'Kismet' and after he'd been to a war

29:30 bond rally, this commander fellow with his VC and all that sort of stuff resplendent on his chest came thundering in our door to our room. I thought, "God, what the hell's this fellow up to?" He said, "Come on, you young fellows." We were sort of still shaking in

30:00 our tracks, virtually. He said, "If I was to break into any good officer's cabin like this, they'd beat the hell out of me. Come on." So we had a good three-way scuffle then, which he seemed to enjoy. I must've landed a few good punches because he then virtually disappeared into the wild blue yonder back to Honolulu I suppose.

30:30 But he never forgot me. I'd not taken too much notice of it, but he was the reason why I got to Fremantle flying out from England to join this depot ship, was his submarine squadron, was his by then, so that when I got to Fremantle, the three or four

31:00 other fellows that had flown out with me as submarine replacements, they were kept by the submarine depot ship that was in Fremantle, the Adamant, and captain of submarines there said, "And you, Cleary, you've got to go and join, Commander Miers demands your presence." He says, "You've had long enough in Australia," and the funny thing is when I eventually got to the Maidstone up in

31:30 Subic Bay, he'd been landed sick. He was flown out of there on an emergency medical evacuation. I don't know where he went to so our paths didn't cross at all, so that was that, but he was responsible for getting me there otherwise I could've been happy in Fremantle manning a submarine there.

### **What can you tell us of the crew of the K9? Any particular personalities that stand out?**

Yes,

32:00 they were a great bunch. The RN chief engineer, if you like, he was an engineering artificer was Taffy Williams, I remember his name. He was a good fellow. The torpedo gunner's mate strangely enough, although he'd come straight from the UK with the RN crew, was an Australian,

32:30 Gus Fisher. He got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] in some British submarine. A couple of seamen, Baxter I remember. He was an RN sailor. I've forgotten what his mate's name was. He was a real Cockney, Baxter, couldn't swim and there he is serving his time in submarines and I thought that was a very peculiar thing.

33:00 The Australian sailors; Petty Officer Tindall was a stoker petty officer. I remember him well; he was a kindly sort of fellow. Ray Green was the fellow that went green when we dived when the water came in. He was a new boy. Fellow called Churchill was the

33:30 ASDIC operator or sonar operator. I still see him from time to time, Anzac Day and the like. Who else? They're the ones I can remember mostly, but good crew all around I thought. The RN people and the Australian people mixed well.

34:00 The great thing about submarine crews is that every man tries to do the next man's job. You can imagine the great specialisation with engineers, torpedomen, signalmen and what have you, but rather than just dwell on their own specialisation they all tried to meld in a cohesive whole as a submarine crew which I

34:30 always thought was admirable. Enjoyed that very much.

**How did you get on with the Dutch warrant officer?**

Well, he never came to sea with us as far as I recall. He spent most of the time living up in the [Kings] Cross area. So he seemed to be enjoying life. Jan, I remember that was his Christian name. It's not surprising I suppose for

35:00 a Dutchman.

**Jan, yeah. Was she a happy boat?**

Oh yeah, oh yes, definitely so. Happier than any surface ship I'd ever been near, then or since.

**Did you have any pet names for K9?**

Oh yes, obviously, 'dog's pee' and 'canine pee' and all this sort of stuff.

35:30 They were commonly tossed around. She was a dog of a submarine, who knows? (UNCLEAR) you could make of K9 ['canine'].

**What did the stokers call her?**

I don't know that they called her anything different to we, probably called her a bitch, I don't know.

**Was there particular, sort of when she did peculiar things,**

36:00 **would the crew sort of comment on her performance in certain ways?**

Oh no. No, no, no. They were all trained men to respond to emergencies and they'd do whatever was necessary to be done to correct that particular vagary.

**What was your particular personal fear on a submarine?**

36:30 Generally speak or K9?

**On K9, but I'll ask you the more general too.**

On K9 I don't think I had any fear. I just didn't try to forecast any potential problems. I thought, "Well, all these blokes around me, if we do develop a cough [problem] I'll have to set the example

37:00 and I'll see what I can do", but no, I didn't have nightmares of saying, "What if you we go out and don't come up?" and all that sort of stuff. Never had that problem, and that same attitude probably prevailed when I went further into the submarine system. I can't ever remember being afraid, having any special

37:30 fears at all. I can remember one or two nasty incidents, but they were all dealt with as incidents at the time and they never left me with any scars or mental worries at all, but then again it just shows I was probably dopey at that stage.

**What was your favourite part on K9?**

My favourite part?

**Yeah.**

Just as learning the ropes.

38:00 See, as a midshipman, no previous submarine training, the captain set me certain tasks. I had a sketchbook where I had to go and trace various pipe systems throughout the boat. It was his way of teaching me where the high-pressure air system...he'd inspect it every week, high-pressure air system; he'd point out if I'd forgotten a valve

38:30 at such and such a point or wherever.

**What was your favourite moment in the voyage?**

In K9? Favourite moment. I don't think there were any particular favourite moments while we were at sea. It was when we were ashore that most of our stuff or alongside at Garden Island. I can remember

39:00 we were very popular with the dockyard people for some reason or other, probably because our wardroom was always open to them. There was a well-known old bosun, he was the 'bosun of the yard' was his title. He actually had a house on Garden Island. He was a plump man, had a bit of trouble fitting down the conning tower hatches, but when he got down there he was

39:30 always reluctant to leave, and he'd always come down at stand-easy time, which was around about 10.30 in the morning. We got used to old Bungy Williams coming down and we always had a jug of milk and a bottle of rum sitting on the wardroom table when he arrived. No questions asked or anything else, he'd help himself, but he had a reputation as a drinker,

40:00 and he was good fun. He never caused anyone - caused his wife trouble I think - but never caused us. I always remember one night when I must've been the duty boy down there, the dockyard police came down to see if I'd seen Bungy, the first lieutenant of the yard. No, I hadn't seen him that night and so



- they searched the island for him. They eventually found him; he was fast asleep in his own cabbage patch up outside, his garden outside the cottage on the island. He hadn't quite made it home. Where he'd been, I don't know, but that was the sort of bloke he was. So that gave a young man some excitement, I suppose. I remember I got sent for by the admiral for a ticking off and my captain wouldn't let me go to see him. He said, "I'll go." The reason for this was that
- 40:30 the wardroom officers weren't allowed to pay cash for their drinks or anything else. It had to be entered up in the wine book as we called it, and normally in a ship the captain inspects the wine book every month. The admiral for some reason chose to inspect our wine book every month taking the place of
- 41:00 the captain or the senior officer of the flotilla or whatever, and in those days a midshipman was allowed a wine bill. I think it was 15 shillings a month. He wasn't allowed to drink spirits, he could only drink beer or wine. In those days wine
- 41:30 was only...
- 42:00

## Tape 5

- 00:34 **By your own admission, you didn't know very much about submarines when you joined the crew of the K9.**
- Right.
- What things surprised you about how things worked on a submarine?**
- How simple it was, that surprised me. Weapons management, of course, I didn't have too much experience of that in the K9
- 01:00 so I was yet to learn that, but yes, I was surprised how simple the whole thing is because after all it's just a big sealed-off piece of drainage pipe with a few tanks in and you can fill them up or pump them out and that's it, the basic principle.
- What about life on board a submarine? What things were unusual about that?**
- Well, K9 wasn't really a good example of living aboard a submarine.
- 01:30 The submarines generally at that stage you'd say hygiene was one of the real things. K9 we weren't too bad because we were ashore quite a lot, but later on out on patrols out for three or four weeks, no showers in the smaller boats, which meant we used to do an armpit
- 02:00 and crotch every Saturday evening and that was it. So by the time we got back to the depot ship, people always stood up wind of us. We were not a very pleasant smell, and that was one feature of long life on board. The other one was spending all your daylight hours dived with minimum activity and then surfacing
- 02:30 after dark and when you open up the hatch all the air inside condenses. It's mostly carbon dioxide and not too much oxygen left. You get a great mist for about five minutes and then that clears and then the atmosphere becomes normal again. Then you can smoke. Usually you had the hot meal of the day at that
- 03:00 time while you were on the surface. What else is there to know? And working the hot bunk system, one out, one in.
- We'll certainly go over the more extended periods of time you spent on submarines later on. How long did you spend at any one time on the K9?**
- I would think that
- 03:30 trip down to Jarvis Bay would've been maybe three days. That's about all. That would be about the longest run.
- While operating out of Rushcutter with the Kybra how long were periods of...**
- We were based at Garden Island and Kybra was always at a buoy just off this unit actually, because there were no births for big ships at Rushcutter. When I was in
- 04:00 Kybra, we went out and did some convoy escort work as well as the AS training. We escorted the torpedo tanker back into Sydney. Had fun doing that.
- What operational differences were there though about the way a crew operated on board a submarine as opposed to a ship?**
- 04:30 You're really talking post-K9, at a later period. Well, the method of watch keeping for a start was unique

to submarines. This hot bunk system, and then off watch there were a few domestic chores to do as opposed to being on watch. For officers, a lot of that time was spent off watch in deciphering signals that had been received

05:00 in code, censoring crew letters. If they were going out, some crew members always wanted to take the mickey out of [tease] the young officers censoring their mail and would seriously write some fairly filthy things in there just for the hell of it, because we didn't censor those things. It was only

05:30 censorship in terms of a warlike situation. Yes, and the routine of, virtually of sleeping by day and being awake in the dark hours of the night is quite a change from the surface ship, general attitudes. Hard to say what other differences

06:00 there are. There's no 'get fell in' [parade] sort of approach in the submarine. Everyone went to their places of duty without any fuss.

**How much communication is there onboard a submarine between members of the crew?**

Constant, but while diving, noise is kept to a minimum and unnecessary conversation, certainly no singing and dancing and that sort of stuff.

06:30 You can have just an ordinary conversation as we're having now, but that's about it. So there was that limitation. I think I explained also that not only was the toilet system pretty primitive, but to go to the toilet in the modern submarine with an air blow-out system, what basically happened

07:00 is you had two valves on the toilet itself. There was a valve at the bottom shall we say that went out to the sea and there was a valve at the top where you could blow the stuff out, and so it needed a lid so that it didn't blow back. Of course, you couldn't blow out from the...

07:30 with the top one shut and the bottom one shut. You had to open the bottom one before you could blow from the top. Play a joke on perhaps a visiting soldier or something or other, if he asked to go to the toilet you'd say, "Oh yes, make sure you work the valve." You'd only tell him about the upper one you see. Of course it would all blow back, so not a very nice joke. But

08:00 that was all very well in principle, but of course you couldn't use the toilet when you were out on patrol. You didn't want to leave a trail of toilet paper and stuff on the surface when there's no other indication a submarine's in the area. So there were pretty controlled circumstances whenever you did any of those things. Recognition signals, which we had in the K9 as well, they're things called smoke candles

08:30 and you could put those into an underwater signalling gun. It was virtually the same principle, you would undo a valve at the top, fire the candle, the candle would go up to the surface and then burst into smoke. You could have white smoke ones and red smoke ones. You'd have a green thing that fired a grenade and a few green stars would go up in the sky. That

09:00 was to represent you'd fire torpedoes in practice at a certain ship. So that was handy, and always of course there was the Davis escape apparatus, which was different to the surface ship. If for some reason or other you got stuck on the bottom, you had to come up by Davis escape equipment, there was always a buoy you could release which would show where

09:30 you are. That's in the more modern type, but otherwise you just went into a watertight compartment. Again, it's just the top hatch, bottom hatch principle. Open the top hatch with the bottom hatch shut and the compartment flooded, pressure equalised, out you go. To stop you going to the surface too quickly and therefore skewering your innards, you had a skirt that you could hold out

10:00 and the water resisting against that as you were rising, you got this skirt that just held you out at a nice slow pace. What more can I tell you?

**What dangers were you told about in terms of decompression?**

Not surfacing too quickly. That was the main essential. Never dwell too long

10:30 on the shortcoming of the system itself. There's a breathing apparatus, you really didn't have to breathe at all when you were coming to the surface because your lungs were expanding all the time. It was only when you were in the watertight compartment, flooded, you needed to be breathing at all, pure oxygen, and when you got to the surface you'd probably have a suck

11:00 before you took it out of your mouth and just floated around without it. So that was about all I think.

**Was this something that you practised, the Davis escape?**

Yes, well in the K9 because there was no escape tower to practice in as there was in the UK, and mind you that was only a 33-foot tank, which is OK for oxygen breathing anyway. Here we just had to do it in a swimming pool.

11:30 In fact, we used to use the old Tattersall's Club in town. They let us use their swimming pool, which was rather good. Wouldn't let us use their bar though.

## **What other dangers were particular to working in a submarine?**

Known dangers when firing torpedoes again is the double hatch principle.

- 12:00 You open the watertight bow door having first flooded up the torpedo tube. The rear door is shut and you get the compressed air and push the torpedo out. Sometimes the torpedo wouldn't go out maybe. It didn't happen to me. The other thing is to make sure the bow door was
- 12:30 shut because sometimes, you know, these systems can go awry. It could be open or part open when it should be shut. They had the little vent in the rear door, which was called the 'Thetis tube' after the submarine Thetis [British T class, sunk on maiden voyage, 1939] that went down for this reason. You had to push a reamer through that hole
- 13:00 to make sure it was clear. Then if the bow door was still open, water would stream through, so it shut off, and do whatever had to happen next. Maybe you'd never shut that door again until you got back to port, but if it came out clear you knew the tube was dry, you could open the rear door and load another torpedo in or haul back the one that was already there for maintenance.
- 13:30 So that was another little special submarine trick. Other than that, I never served in a submarine with a snort tube [snort induction mast], which was the British name for snorkel, but the engineering staff had to be pretty sharp because when you dived you went onto electrical power, or the moment of
- 14:00 diving you went onto electrical power. When you surfaced, you would want to go the other way and so there was a question of shutting off exhaust valves, opening exhaust valves, depending on which way you were going, and that could be dicey [chancy] if you weren't smart about doing it, and it was really like throwing the clutch in a car in a way, coming off the main motors
- 14:30 going onto a diesel drive. You had to isolate one from the other.

## **You've gone through a few of the crew members on the K9, but could you tell us a little bit about the main different roles the crew had on board that ship? There were engineers...?**

- 15:00 Well, basically the driving team would be seated in the conning tower. The forward hydroplane control, the after hydroplane control were side by side on the port-hand side of the control room and the helmsman would be facing forward just in front of them,
- 15:30 and they would be working the hydroplanes with a depth gauge before each of them, separate depth gauges, and the first lieutenant or the officer of the watch would be standing behind them directing them to keep the boat at whatever angle they'd ordered. If it was zero angle they'd call it 'zero bubble', and so an ordinary chronometer was graduated
- 16:00 in degrees around and so they kept the bubble where required. Behind the officer of the watch, he was adjacent to the periscope well. There were two periscope wells on the older boats. One was the search periscope and the other was the attack periscope. The difference being that the search periscope had more powerful lenses
- 16:30 and including sun visors and all that sort of stuff, because you'd be looking up in the sky for aeroplanes, and that was a fairly large head, and the attack periscope had a very small head so it didn't make too much of a plume going through the water, but that of course limited the amount of magnification and so on you could get.
- 17:00 And so there were the two periscopes and behind the officer of the watch would be standing the engineering staff controlling the high-pressure and low-pressure air channels. The ballast tanks run from forward to aft through the boat. Usually the forward one and the after one are free flood and
- 17:30 each tank's got the same principle, top valve and a bottom valve. Now the top valve's called a 'vent' and the bottom valve is called a 'kingston'. The two forward, the forward tank and the after tank had no kingstons. They were free flooding, as they say, but all the others had the two valves, and those valve controls were where the high-pressure
- 18:00 air panel was so that the engineer on watch was able to open the kingstons to flood the boat, open the vents as well, or to surface, leave the kingstons open, shut the vents and then put the compressed air into those tanks. Now it's quite easy to see that
- 18:30 there can be some tricks in that trade. You must have the kingstons open most of the time, and that's what usually happened. You'd get to sea and then you'd open the kingston and then you can dive as quickly as possible just by opening the vents and driving the boat forward on the motors or engines. Besides that major
- 19:00 up or down trim, they also had trimming tanks, and they were tanks that were connected not with kingstons and vents but by pipes for air, pipes which would vent back into the boat so there was breathing air, valuable breathing air, while the water flooded in. Now the idea, you'd have virtually a simple system, you'd have a trimming tank
- 19:30 forward, a trimming tank aft, and you could fill those to change the angle of the boat, one in the middle

where you could do minor adjustments to depth. There was also a Q valve or Q tank, which is a quick flooding trim tank, and the idea was if you wanted to go deep in a hurry

20:00 you flooded the Q and that gave you the weight quickly to go down. Now, so the engineer did all of this work, played it like a harp, if you like.

**How did the engineer operate these different valves? What was in front of him for controlling them?**

Well, they were all stacked vertically, tanks, you know, one to six or whatever, and he'd just flap open the valves. So they

20:30 were lever-valved. Some valves were screw valves but most of the quick-acting ones were lever valves, finely tuned. Then, going aft in the control room, you'd probably find there was a cubicle for the ASDIC operator or sonar operator. They were never actively pinging in a submarine, they just listen, listen, listen, usually was a hydrophone.

21:00 They had the capability of pinging and these days there's an underwater voice telephone that you can use, and there'd be a radio shack and sometimes a radar. The radar mast would be a separate mast again, separate from the periscopes. You'd only use that if you were at periscope depth.

21:30 Then after that, oh, there'd be sailors' messes in various spots forward and other than the torpedo space and perhaps one aft for the stokers.

**What would be in a sailors' mess?**

Just a few bunks and pretty primitive things, a table to eat at and in amongst

22:00 that there'd be a small galley where there'd be a cook making whatever he's making that evening. In the UK we used to eat well for a submarine. When you think that, you know, for the civilian population there was meat rationing and everything else, we used to eat pretty well for the first few weeks with fresh good meat, good quality meat,

22:30 and then you'd get into the tinned stuff later on.

**Were these messes personalised in any way by the different fellows that used them?**

Not really, no. You're thinking of pin-up girls and the like. There would've been one or two of those things around. Most of the sailors used to keep those personal. We used to have a daily newspaper. What was it called?

23:00 It was produced by the Daily Mirror in London and they always had their page 3 pin-up girls. You know, the equivalent to what we would have said were Tivoli girls in various, always with an invitation, "Do come and call on us when in London." I did once. A very rewarding experience. The paper was called Good Morning, undated, so there was no,

23:30 but always had plenty of stories for people to read, simple stuff, a bit of artwork, bit of humour. So that sort of maintained the contact with the outside world as far as the sailors concerned.

**The rest of the complement of the crew, what were they engaged in? You mentioned stokers?**

Yeah, electricians of course to drive the electric motors and all the other electrical

24:00 systems in the boat. Torpedomen, specialist seamen, coxswain who was the senior sailor on board and he ran the crew, ran the rum ration, all that sort of stuff. A couple of other petty

24:30 officers. There was a second coxswain; he was always on the fore planes at diving stations. One of his major duties was, as the day wore on while you dived, he'd spread the trays of lithium hydroxide throughout the boat, and that's a CO<sub>2</sub> [carbon dioxide] absorbent chemical, just to try and

25:00 purify the air. It did a little, but 19 hours dived is a long, long day, let me tell you.

**How did he spread that throughout the boat?**

In little trays out of canisters.

**Did it have a particular smell, this lithium hydroxide?**

No, no. No, it was pretty dormant sort of stuff.

**Any other**

25:30 **particular positions that you haven't mentioned yet?**

Sonar operators, telegraphists, there'd be a visual signalman as well that worked from the bridge, and we'd have a guns crew, a couple of sailors especially trained in gunnery.

**What armoury did the submarines have?**

Well, it varied depending on the size, but take the U and V class, which had

- 26:00 four tubes forward with reloads. Some of the earlier ones had two tubes aft as well, or perhaps two more mounted in the bows but outside the pressure hull, and we had a three-inch gun. The next class up were the S class. They would've had four tubes forward and perhaps two aft
- 26:30 and a four-inch gun, and the T class would've had six tubes forward, maybe two on the surface as well, and a couple aft and a four-inch gun in a shield turret-like thing. So that was the different, the main classes that we had at that time.

**The description you just gave us of the various parts of the boat, would that hold for both, say the K9**

- 27:00 **was an older Dutch sub, and the later Royal Navy ones you served on?**

Yeah, I was talking mainly of the Royal Navy ones, yeah.

**And was there any other particular idiosyncrasies perhaps that any of these particular boats had that was different from all the others?**

Oh yes. The UV class, they were very small boats, only 350 tons surfaced,

- 27:30 500 submerged. The S class was 750 tons so they were bigger, and the T class were 1,000 tons, so bigger again, so there was a big size differential. The propulsion in the UV was electric motor of diesel, sorry, diesel electric. The electric motors were there all
- 28:00 the time and when you're on the surface you plug the diesel in, which didn't drive the propeller shafts but generated the electricity to push them around. The S and T classes, you had to unclutch the things, unclutch the engines to get the electric motors going around. They were separate. So there was that difference. They had a direct diesel drive. Other than
- 28:30 that, no real basic difference other than the difference size itself makes.

**How much noise do these different things generate while you're working in a submarine?**

Well, you try and keep the propellers nicely polished (UNCLEAR) so they make just the normal noise. You probably don't go fast enough to cavitate.

- 29:00 **To?**

Cavitate, that's beat air bubbles out of the sea, and that's very noisy indeed, and that's what most of the American nuclear boats of the first generation, they were all as noisy as hell because they used to cavitate. Other noises, any engineering work that required

- 29:30 hammers or heavy wrenches and so on is actively discouraged unless it was absolutely essential, and then you'd try and wait your time to do it, even if it meant going further off the shoreline or something like that. I explained to you about the toilet business. You didn't do that and you didn't practice with the torpedo tubes either
- 30:00 because they were designed so that the air pressure pushing the torpedo out, the air itself didn't reach the bow cap. Was timed and then a vent would open and the air, the water would rush in behind the torpedo and the air would go out through this vent, so that kept the noise down a bit.
- 30:30 Took great cautions to not have anything in the casing, which is outside the pressure hull. It'll get loose and start flapping around. I mean, that's sudden death if you've suddenly got something rolling around up there, and as far as possible you used to leave your shorelines ashore, whereas most ships, you've seen them sail, they haul in their lines and stow them away. We'd do the
- 31:00 opposite. We'd let go from inboard because we'd be coming back there to get them, but anchor chains used to have to bind them in fact with twine to the various things to stop them rattling. In other parts of the hold, you had to make sure that the hatches and so on were all properly shut and so on.
- 31:30 Anything to prevent noise.

**Were there any particular problems that the boats you served on had in any area?**

Problems, other than lithium hydroxide being spread around regularly? One of the more painful duties I had in the Varne when we were on patrol off the Norwegian coast,

- 32:00 we'd been painted for some unknown reason with a sky blue and white camouflage, all zigzaggy all over the conning tower and hull, and of course on a moonlit night it'd light you up like a searchlight. Why we were ever camouflaged in that paint I'll never know. It's not as though we were up in the Antarctic,
- 32:30 or the Arctic in mid-winter. This was getting close to spring, and anyway we did have full moon while we were out there on patrol, and one of my duties with one seaman was to get up onto the upper deck while we were up on the surface at night time, as soon as we

33:00 surfaced, with a bucket load of brown goo and spray all this stuff with a stirrup pump to try and cover it up so it didn't reflect, and when we dived the goo would get washed off. So the next night you had to do the same thing again. Well that was, tended to be a bit worrying because if perchance anything was sighted you knew the submarine wouldn't

33:30 wait to dive. It would without you and you'd be left there with your bucket and your stirrup pump. Fortunately that didn't happen to me, but it was not the happiest little experience I wouldn't have said.

**Any technical problems with the submarines themselves apart from the camouflage?**

Not the one I was in, not the one I was in. I explained to you, oh, it wasn't recorded, was it?

34:00 The earlier bit about taking the submarine to sea, that happened because we had only one anchor chain and one anchor in the V class, and the anchor chain was secured to a buoy and we were quite content to let out a fair bit of anchor chain when this gale blew up, and it was really a mad, mad gale in Wales where we were.

34:30 This trawler, which was a navy trawler, which dragged its anchor chain and came across our bow and pinched our cable against the stem and cut it like a cheese knife, and there we are drifting with no means of tying up again, or I couldn't get her tied up again with the few sailors I had aboard, to get the wire rope out, get to the buoy,

35:00 reeve it around, do all those things without any sort of boat assistance, and in any case with this gale blowing I wasn't by any means sure that the wire would keep us there. So I tried manoeuvring up and down, back and forth. Eventually decided by next day I'd probably be too exhausted and making big errors of judgement,

35:30 I'd go to sea, so off to sea I went in St Brides Bay, and not far out to sea there was action going on. You could see star shells bursting and the escorts were cleaning up submarines and vice versa. Fortunately none of them knew that I was around. That's always a submariner's worry, that if people don't know or expect you to be in a certain place,

36:00 they'll attack a submarine no matter what. The weather was really too rough to allow any inshore patrols or air patrols around our way so we were lucky there, and then we rode out this storm all night and then first light we came back into harbour. There waiting in the boat was all the rest of the crew so they leapt aboard and took over from

36:30 where we left off. Manoeuvred the submarine, got her secured to the buoy, but the gale was blowing out by that stage and that was that.

**Who was on board the ship when this incident occurred?**

I was the only officer. Fortunately, the coxswain was on board I remember,

37:00 and there would've been a third of the ship's company, so that was it, so there were a couple of stokers, a couple of signalmen, or a signalman at least, but very few.

**What was the reaction?**

See, our total crew was 35. Allowing for say five, what you would describe as day men, not watchkeepers,

37:30 that would leave about 10 in my watch.

**What was the reaction of the captain and the other officers when you came back in?**

The captain, I think he was worried about his submarine and so he damn well should have been. Never said anything to me at any stage. He should have reported it, you know, in writing to Flag Officer Submarines or to the captain of the flotilla.

38:00 Whether he did or not, I don't know. No idea. The first lieutenant happily clapped me on the back and said, "Go to the hotel and catch up with your sleep," which I did, and there was no mention ever made of it again. I've tried to find out since if I could get a copy of the boat's log for that period but I haven't been able to do that.

38:30 I still don't know. Strangely enough the captain that I had at that time was one of the top and up and coming young RN officers. He had his 24th birthday in patrol off Norway. 24 mind you. He was in command at the age of 23.

39:00 He's already had a Distinguished Service Cross and he later became Flag Officer Submarines with a knighthood and everything else, and his father before him had been a World War I submariner of great note. So it ran in his family.

**What was his name?**

Ewan Rakes, R A K E S.

**And what was the boat that you were on**

39:30 **there?**

Varne, V A R N E.

## Tape 6

00:31 **Can you introduce us to the HMS Varne?**

You don't want to do the trip to England first?

**We will. It's up to you, however you feel comfortable.**

I'd like to get the trip to England out of the way.

**OK.**

Sorry about that.

**No, that's alright. No problem.**

When the K9 destroyed itself as such,

01:00 and I got this trip.

**Where does she rest now by the way?**

She's up in, I've forgotten the name of the bay, a virtual wreck. She's been covered by sand for years and she only re-emerged from the sand a couple of years ago. Up there about the coastline level with Bulahdelah, up around that way. She broke adrift being towed up there and ran aground

01:30 and was never recovered so, but every now and then she gets buried under the sand and swept into this beach, and every now and then the sand goes away and exposes her.

**Have you ever seen her since?**

No. I didn't go up for the big...they've got a memorial up there and all that sort of stuff these days. That was the State Heritage mob did that. I was invited to go.

**When the explosion happened was anyone injured or killed?**

No. No, fortunately. Everyone was up

02:00 on the upper deck except the telegraphist and how the hell he got up there uninjured, I don't know. People say he came up the voice pipe, but that's an unlikely story. He appeared on deck quick as a flash, I can tell you. Anyway.

**How did the Dutch take the fact that (UNCLEAR)...?**

I don't know. They didn't want the submarine back. They took it back, they had to virtually, but they decided to convert it to a fuel lighter

02:30 and that's why they were towing her up the coast. They were going to take her to New Guinea as a fuel lighter but she never got there. We were asked to man the K12, which the Americans were trying to get rid of out of Fremantle. They thought K12 was an embarrassment and my captain was ordered to go over there and check the K12 out. He got down to Melbourne and demanded

03:00 to see the Chief of Navy down there and read him the riot act [warned him] and said there was no way he was going to take his crew off to man the K12, so that's how I went to England.

**Any particular reason why he dug his heels in that way?**

Yes, it was only going to be a repeat performance of how bad the K9 was.

**Yet you said she was a happy ship, happy boat?**

Oh yeah, but the crew is one thing, the boat itself is another.

03:30 The crew, I think, were remarkably good considering all the problems that they had. I ought to read out to you what the admiral said in his letter saying he wasn't going to send her to sea again, best to get rid of her.

**Have you got that letter?**

Well, I've got a printed copy.

**Can you paraphrase it for us?**

Not really, no, other than to say he wasn't going to risk the lives of his crew, but risked them every day in

- 04:00 taking this submarine to sea. That's enough of that. Anyway, that's what got me on the way to England and I was ordered to go in HMS Ranee, which I found was a Woolworth carrier [i.e., ferrying aircraft not operational], was engaged in freighting aircraft from the United States out to India for use in the Burma theatre, and
- 04:30 I joined her in Melbourne and set sail. Because she was, the job she was doing, she didn't have her own active flying squadrons or anything like that. She was purely a plain carrier. She went to the United States and Canada by going deep around the bottom of New Zealand across the
- 05:00 South Pacific and then up the coast, dodging Honolulu and all that sort of stuff, and then going up the California coast until we got to the Juan de Fuca Strait, which separates the United States from Canada or Vancouver Island, and put into the port of Esquimalt there.
- 05:30 From there, the Ranee offloaded us before she sailed down to Seattle to pick up more aeroplanes, and we were booked to go on Canadian Pacific Railway across Canada to Halifax [Nova Scotia, east coast of Canada], and get a ship from Halifax. There were about half a dozen of us from Australia in this batch. We
- 06:00 got down to the ferry to take us from Vancouver Island to catch the train and there was a Canadian Naval Patrol [naval police] with orders to stop any naval people travelling on this ferry. We argued a bit with him, but no, there was no way they were going to let us board. So we went back to the hotel we were staying in. Next
- 06:30 morning, we demanded to see the commodore, Canadian Navy commodore in charge of Esquimalt, and went and complained bitterly about how we'd been prevented, you know, we upright Australian sailors prevented by Canadians from travelling in their train.

**Why had they prevented you, do you know?**

Because the patrol had orders to stop any navy people boarding because I think they were looking for a deserter. Now, it would be one seaman or something or other. Instead of that, they

- 07:00 messed up my career, probably kept me from a fate worse than death. In fact, I can reflect that my war career is really a record through no fault of my own of me dodging the war. That'll become more obvious later, because we arrived in Canada before D Day. If we'd gone over in the railway and caught a ship, the other side, no doubt, in
- 07:30 the emergencies over there, to fill in time waiting for a submarine course, you're likely to get sent off to the Normandy beaches or wherever. Who knows what would've happened. As it was, the Canadian commodore put us into a first-class hotel, said stay there until we were sent for. So we were there about five days
- 08:00 and then another RN Woolworths carrier came into Esquimalt and we were told to take passage in her and she was going around to the east coast of America via the Panama Canal. So we sailed in her down to San Francisco, had a couple of days there, then took off for the Panama, through the Panama Canal.

**Wouldn't it have been easier to wait for a**

- 08:30 **train across?**

Well, that's the thing. We didn't know at the time but obviously the Canadian railways were bought out with forces going to D Day. The Canadians had a large participating role. I would say the whole railway had been commandeered for troop transports and we missed our one and only opportunity where we had priority to go. So we went from Panama up there through the

- 09:00 Caribbean. Don't remember any of that.

**Can you describe the Panama Canal for us?**

That was a great experience, yeah. It was a great experience because we'd never seen the like of it before, this huge canal and large ship going in and being dragged through the locks by mules [tractors], mechanical mules of course, not the real ones, and going in these steps

- 09:30 up to the lakes, and sailing across the lakes as though it was mid-ocean and then out the other side going down, down, down in the locks.

**Was there any particular need to camouflage the boat or to hide your identity to people who might be (UNCLEAR)?**

No, no, no, wide open, wide open. What was there to hide?

**Well (UNCLEAR) status of Panama was...**

Well the Canal Zone in those days was American run and



10:00 controlled and they had lots of troops doing all the protection necessary. The Canal Zone was originally part of the state of Panama, our country of Panama, and they've now got it back after all these years, but at that time the Canal Zone, like the Suez Canal Zone, was not controlled by the country that really owned it. Anyway, we got to

10:30 Virginia, Norfolk, Virginia, a big navy yard there.

**How long was that journey by the way?**

Must've been three weeks. Then we stay in a hotel in Norfolk, Virginia. It was the first experience I'd ever had of segregation of races. The poor black people weren't allowed on the bus. I did the gentlemanly thing at a bus stop and beckoned an old

11:00 black lady to get aboard the bus ahead of me and some nice black gentleman said, "No, no, no, can't do that. You've got to go in that door, we go in this door." So I was glad to get out of Virginia and went by rail to New York. We were in New York for a couple of days and got a trip strangely enough in a ship called the Arawa, which

11:30 had previously been a Commonwealth Bay line ship, which had been sold. I think it was at Esperance Bay when it was one of our ships. Anyway, she was the Arawa. Then we sailed in convoy across to Liverpool, got out at Liverpool, went down to London where I eventually reported to Australia House and then to the admiralty manning people

12:00 who directed me to, and appointed me to do the next available submarine course, which didn't start until I think it was August. By then it was July, and D Day was underway for a month. I went up to a place called Tobermory. I'd never been there before in my life, by train

12:30 through Glasgow all the way up to the outer islands, and Tobermory is on the Isle of Mull, Macquarie's [Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales 1809-21] birthplace. I went to the ship Western Isles, and because I'd qualified as an anti-submarine control officer I was made part of the entourage that went around to these brand new ships with brand new crews to assess their training standards and what have you.

13:00 **How long had it taken you from Australia to get to the UK?**

I left in March, no, April I would've left, April, and I didn't arrive, three months. So you can see why I say I was kept out of the war through no fault of my own.

**What did you see of the war when you crossed the Atlantic?**

In the convoy? We had an uneventful passage across.

13:30 The U-boats had probably all been withdrawn into the Channel [English Channel] area to attack the troops at that stage. Anyway, up in Tobermory we were training these escort forces and then after I'd been there for about six weeks it was time to go to Blythe to join the submarine squadron there and go to the training school there. Came out of there in

14:00 November as I say.

**You did some escort duties in the Hebrides at that time, up in the Western Isles, on HMS Western Isles.**

No, not escort duty so much as training escorts just in various aspects of warfare generally, anti-submarine warfare, their gunnery, everything they could practice, their landing parties, boarding parties, concentrated training.

14:30 Had a couple of tame submarines up there to give them a live target.

**You said that when you joined the navy it was largely a patriotic duty. How frustrating was it for you to be kept on these long-term movements across the world and training exercises?**

I was pretty mad about not getting across Canada. I would've been in England a couple of months earlier, but

15:00 then again I would've gone on a much earlier submarine course if I hadn't been eaten up in the Channel somewhere or other, and who knows where I would've gone if I'd gone to an earlier submarine course? It certainly wouldn't have been to the Varne.

**Did you have any colleagues that went onto earlier submarine courses than you?**

Yeah. Not people that I knew. There were Australians. They were mostly sub-lieutenants who'd done their courses in England

15:30 and then stayed on by applying for a submarine course. I knew three of those blokes eventually.

**What were the losses like of allied submarines at that time or before you arrived?**

At that time, they weren't bad in the North Sea. The Mediterranean show was over. Our submarines

were kept out of the Channel

16:00 because it was full of German submarines, didn't want to get mixed up with that. Most of our submarines that were operating in UK waters were operating in the North Sea while I was there, although we didn't do any good but then we had a young inexperienced captain. Those with more experienced captains like lieutenant commanders, which means they'd been practically the whole

16:30 war in submarines, they did a great job sinking German U-boats [Unterseeboot, German submarine] and that sort of stuff.

**At the time you not necessarily volunteered to be on submarines, where, how, what would be your preferred way of going to war? On a surface ship or a submarine?**

Depends how old I was, what rank I was. I'm quite happy with the way I went, if it'd only gone the way

17:00 I wanted. Wasn't my fault that I didn't go there. The story that comes after this is even worse.

**Alright. Just on the Blythe submarine course, what was the form of that course? Can you tell us what they took you through?**

Lectures, ranging everything from doctor's lecture. I can remember him telling us what to do if sailors -

17:30 we carried no doctors you see - if sailors got a distended tummy [stomach], you'd plunge a thing like knitting needle into their gut and let the gas out. Oh, good primitive medicine it was. I did stitch up a sailor in the Varne. It was the second coxswain while he was spreading out these lithium hydroxide trays, probably why I remember him so well. The

18:00 periscope well was just behind where he'd put it down. The periscope well had about a four-inch lip around the edge to stop water or anything going down the periscope tube. Anyway, he took a step back from the tray, his leg went down the hole because the periscope was up. That rim caught him in the groin

18:30 between his testicles and his leg and left a nasty gash there and he was bleeding. So I was the ship's doctor and so I had to try to stitch him up. With the coxswain's help we managed this. The anaesthetic from the petty officer was a couple of tots of rum.

19:00 I think it was five stitches we put in there, fairly widely spaced, but his left testicle was showing so it was fairly urgent, and the follow up to that was after we got back to port and all went on leave, post patrol, he chose to get married and he sent a telegram during his honeymoon saying, "It works", because he was being ribbed that it was probably guaranteed not to

19:30 work after I'd had a go at it. So that was one of the more enlightening experiences being a submariner. But going back to Blythe, they were the sorts of tricks that they used to try to teach us we never thought we'd have to use, like stitch a bloke up or do things like that, inject morphine, of course, which is dead easy.

**What about dealing with**

20:00 **people who are on the boat, who become unhinged perhaps from a depth-charge attack?**

I don't know. I never really went through a worthwhile depth-charge attack. The only depth charges thrown at us were warning depth charges thrown by British destroyers. We were on the surface and this flotilla of destroyers, which the captain knew were going to come through but the rest of us didn't, he'd had

20:30 a signal saying they were in the vicinity. I was standing through at about 30 knots going south into Heligoland Bight to do a sweep around there looking for German surface forces. We were on the surface. The first we knew is a star shell bursting overhead, so we immediately went into an emergency dive and then as they were going past they just vaguely chucked a few depth charges in our direction in case we were a German,

21:00 because we were out of position. And they were the only things that really I ever got onto, because there was not too much German surface activity or even air activity around Stavanger at that time.

**What was the, I was getting back at Blythe and in your training, was there any procedures for dealing with people who lost it on a boat?**

Not really, no. The

21:30 navy never really had too much trouble dealing with any sort of psychopaths or any of that sort. We had a marvellous stretcher called the Neil Robertson stretcher, which was designed especially to transfer sailors from one ship to another, say a hospital ship, in storms at sea, and the Neil Robertson stretcher was virtually a ribbed caned device about the size of

22:00 your screen behind me, which wrapped around the body, arms inside or outside depending on the need, and around the legs. The little bit in the middle was left free, but the stiff back and sort of grommet at the head end. You'd put a hook in that and winch him over the

- 22:30 side and the receiving people could hold the thing, un-winch, unhook him and this was to get rid of injured people, but it was absolutely handy to get rid of unhinged people. Not that we ever had to use it in the submarine that I was in, but I have heard of the Neil Robertson stretcher being used for that. I put an airman into one after the war
- 23:00 when I was in Air View who got paralytically drunk and he was a bad drinker. All the rest of the crew could recover from a few boozes but he went berserk. So for the safety of the boat and himself, I did him up in a Neil Robertson stretcher for 48 hours or so, 24 hours. That was the nearest I've ever got to using a Neil Robertson stretcher.
- 23:30 But no, I didn't have that experience in the submarine. The only disciplinary problem that I can remember was a sailor that played up a bit. We went to a port in the Shetland Islands en route to get to the Norwegian coast and we'd wait there until
- 24:00 we had safe passage or a safe route across the North Sea and we'd go at night time. So we were there for four or five days before going on patrol and this seaman, Leading Seaman Baker, if I remember, he was my gunnery yeoman of all people, a bloke, a gun layer who was supposed to be controlling and sighting the gun if we had to fire it. He played up in the
- 24:30 sailors' canteen, which was full of resident Norwegian sailors. They had a patrol boat squadron or a torpedo boat squadron; they used to nip across the North Sea to Norway, do all sorts of magical things. This sailor when he got booze got on top of the table and did something and dropped his tweeds [trousers] and all that sort of thing and this disgusted the Norwegian sailors who demanded that something be done about him. Anyway, captain
- 25:00 sentenced him to 14 days detention for this misconduct so he had to get landed and go. That was the only time that I can ever remember of a bad disciplinary problem and I don't think that disciplinary problem warranted the punishment it got except the Norwegians were upset. That took me off the main story.

#### **Still on Blythe and the training, bringing you into HMS Varne?**

Blythe was

- 25:30 a remarkable little spot because they had a synthetic submarine trainer [simulator] there. It represented the inside of the control room, the hydrophone, hydroplane side and was on a sort of rocking platform and you could take your places off the watch and try and trim the boat up fore
- 26:00 planes and down and after planes and getting the boat level, and the instructor used to be able to feed various mishaps into the system. So you'd suddenly find yourself nose down going straight for the bottom or something or other, and you had to correct these things, blow tanks.

#### **What things could you do if your hydroplanes got stuck and you were in a dive?**

Well, you'd try and blow first of all the forward tanks to try

- 26:30 and lift your nose and then blow everything, try and surface. It happens so quickly that you can't bother to experiment.

#### **How can you use the crew to change the trim of the boat?**

You don't, just use the helmsman, the planesman and the engineer with blowing controls in the tanks.

#### **Maybe I've seen too many submarine movies, but is there a case where you go crash dive, all the crew has to go**

- 27:00 **to the front of the boat or things like that to change the...?**

Well, we did that trying to do our test dive in Rose Bay, you'll remember. Oh yeah, there are occasions, because usually after the accidents happen if the boat kept going down bow first you get to the stage where you stop and if you could keep that condition still, just the bow would be on the ground and the stern would be up, and you might want to send the crew

- 27:30 aft to help level her off. If you went down stern first, maybe you'd want to do it the other way around. So there are those Hollywood situations [as shown in American movies].

#### **In the boats of the time was there a way of measuring, sort of not using the sonar, to actually look at your physical surroundings or obstacles?**

No, no, we had echo sounders as well as sonar

- 28:00 but you wouldn't use an echo sounder unless it was a safe operation to do. In an emergency, you'd have to obviously if you were going to save yourself, but no, you wouldn't use an echo sounder in hostile waters by any means because they're noisy.

#### **How much noise can be picked up?**

Anything, dropping a spanner can be heard,

28:30 clunk, travel for five miles underwater. Water's a great conductor of sound, great conductor. What you can hear in the atmosphere, you'll hear at five times the distance underwater. If you get into a sound channel you can go hundreds of miles.

**What's a sound channel?**

Remember I was talking about bathythermographs and water layering? You sometimes

29:00 get water of certain temperature and thing, and then a gap, and then water of another higher temperature and a gap still there. That gap becomes a sound channel. Sound can't get out of that channel, can't go up because there's too big a difference between its constitution and the constitution of the water either side.

**Tactically, how do you use that? How did you use it**

29:30 **at the time?**

I didn't really have any need to use that.

**In theory, how does it work?**

Well, sound still takes the same time to travel, but what you didn't know was where the sound originated. If you got, say, the throb of a merchant ship propellers through a sound channel, the merchant

30:00 ship might be 50 miles away. If it's not in a sound channel, it's only perhaps 10 miles away and you wouldn't know until you'd perhaps done bearing checks. Obviously, the ship 50 miles away is going to change bearing much more slowly than the ship 10 miles away. They change bearing fairly quickly and you'd be able to sort out one's a long way away and ones much nearer.

**How do you use those for evasion, those**

30:30 **thermal climes?**

You wouldn't do it so much for evasion, more for attack. You tend to steer towards those things. Well, you wouldn't want to go pursuing a ship 50 miles away.

**How do you use those thermo climes, those differences in temperature tactically in a submarine?**

Well, if you found a sound channel with sound coming through it and it's close sound,

31:00 you'd stay at that depth until you got much nearer and then you'd have to come up and try and pick him up either visually or through a different sound channel. You might get a propeller beat up top whereas down in the sound channel you're getting some other sort of noise. Might've been a, who knows, any sort of noise might've been generated, might've

31:30 been an echo sounder that he was using.

**How do you use them to hide or escape detection?**

The sound channels? Or no,

**Just the thermo climes, the...**

just the thermo climes. Just get out of the layer in which the ship is. If you're opposing another submarine then it's a real game of hide and seek because you don't know what depth he's going to be at and he doesn't know what depth you're going to be at and each trying to dodge the other,

32:00 or perhaps attack the other. But with a surface ship, the submarine's tactical use of that thermo clime is to get below it, and his sonar beam won't penetrate down. It will just bounce off above the thermo clime. That would be the tactical use. You don't really want to know all this stuff?

**It is very interesting.**

You've got a scientific

32:30 bent, that's your problem.

**(UNCLEAR) move on to HMS Varne (UNCLEAR).**

We've covered a fair bit of that, this trip down to Fishguard [in Wales] where I found myself taking command to my great joy.

**This was on?**

The Varne.

**The Varne, yes.**

Yeah. That was around about,

- 33:00 probably it was about January 1945, yeah, more likely to be about January '45 than before. We'd been sent down there to do secret trials with the air force Sunderlands [flying boat], which were based at Milford Haven and had some boffins [scientists] on board who fixed us up with
- 33:30 this special gear. I never really knew how it worked. The boffins kept it all to themselves, we in the submarine were merely a taxi. But basically what they were doing is they'd always been impressed with the German 'wolf pack' tactics attacking the convoys in the Atlantic, and these boffins came up with an idea to use a similar sort of thing for British submarines, and the idea is that the Sunderlands
- 34:00 would detect whatever the target was to be for our submarine and our submarine could then home in on the aeroplane's locating signal. We had some sort of transponder system that meant that we didn't have to make a noise, that this transponder
- 34:30 box would somehow interpret the signals coming from the aeroplane, be translated somehow on board, and we never saw that side because it was the boffins' work, and we'd get a course in speed out of this to go and close the distance, because obviously we couldn't transmit anything because that would be giving away the show right from the start. So how the aeroplane
- 35:00 knew anyone was responding I don't know, but we were doing these trials, of course, much too late in the war to ever have been used. Whether they had satisfactory trials I know not, but it took a month of our valuable sea life.

**Were you able to receive these things under the water or were you on the surface?**

No, with an aerial like a periscope. We didn't have to be on

- 35:30 the surface, no. So it had that advantage I guess.

**The Varne, just on also replenishing oxygen, was there any other method of replenishing the oxygen except coming to the surface? Could you get it from a snorkel?**

No, no. No, we had no snorkel. The only thing you do

- 36:00 is surface and expel the bad air and take in the new.

**What other, you went on one major patrol in the Varne; can you take us through that patrol?**

Achieved nothing. We left the Clyde where our depot ship was, sailed up through the Hebrides, around through Pentland Firth between the Orkneys and Scotland,

- 36:30 up to the Shetlands to a port called Lerwick, waited there for a few days until our submarine went on patrol, went down safe channels, so-called safe channels was a stretch of water demarcated by longitude and latitude at various turning points
- 37:00 of a certain width. Then the surface fleets were inclined to put on another few miles either side of that width to make sure that the submarine was safer, and the air force was supposed to add a bit more, but the air force navigators were pretty terrible at times. Many's the time they attacked some of our submarines going on patrol that way, through the so-called safety zone.
- 37:30 Anyway we went through our zone down to the Norwegian port of Stavanger, which was about the southern most port on the North Sea side of the Norwegian peninsula, and there we patrolled up and down, observed the lighthouse going on and off every now and then.
- 38:00 The lighthouses weren't burning all the time. They'd just switch them on when they were expecting some ships to use them, but they never produced anything for us. We were always delighted to see the lighthouse on because it got so close at times you could even see the German sentries outside the lighthouse. We had a couple of
- 38:30 alarms. I sighted one night a flash of light way down in the, still daylight, down to the south of us. Nothing was in sight there; nothing could be heard down there. I'd obviously caught an odd variation of the lights or something or other. Anyway, eventually much later after dark,
- 39:00 this Swedish ship all illuminated, lights galore, was repatriating prisoners of war back to Europe, so it was under hospital ship guise. So what I had seen had been this ship and I must've just been lucky and got this glimpse at the time I just happened to be looking south. They probably switched on their lighting
- 39:30 for testing much earlier in the day, 'cause we used to test navigation lights at about 4 o'clock or something in the afternoon in case they had to be fixed. And then the Prince Eugene was reported to have come out of its base in the Kiel Canal and was heading up, and we thought it was coming up the Norwegian coast so we were looking forward to that arriving. She went
- 40:00 into Oslo Fiord instead, so we didn't get that one either, but they were about the only things, and then

of course the war was over, VE [Victory in Europe] Day as soon as we got back. Then there were submarines popping up all around the place surrendering.

## Tape 7

### 00:37 **Where was the submarine based in the UK?**

With the 3rd Submarine Flotilla and the depot ship, [HMS] Forth, was anchored in a place in the Clyde Estuary called Holy Loch, which is a largish

01:00 bay on the north side of that Clyde. That was the base. There were over a dozen submarines attached there because that was the operational flotilla and had all sorts of accommodation ships birthed there. I never slept in

01:30 the Forth at all. We were allocated into one of the side ships. I was in a thing called the Alrawda, which was an old British India Line ship, still had the Goanese crew [from Goa in India] on board and all that sort of stuff, snow on the decks. But a couple of bays further down the Clyde there was the, at Dunoon, there was the 7th Flotilla and their depot ship, which was

02:00 the Cyclops, but she was the training flotilla. She provided submarines for targets at Tobermory and all that sort of stuff.

### **How often were you at Holy Loch?**

Quite often. Between going to Fishguard, before and after that we were at Holy Loch. When we went on patrol we

02:30 started from Holy Loch and went up to the Shetlands and came back the same way. It was VE Day when we got back, so these small submarines like the V and the U class were obviously no longer going to maintain their operational status there. Those that came out to Australia had

03:00 already come out here apparently. I didn't know that. So we got transferred to the training squadron then, and from there, because my first lieutenant had been sent off to the German U-boats to be the sort of captor of one,

03:30 I became the acting first lieutenant of the Varne, which was a great privilege, still a sub-lieutenant. We went to Tobermory as part of the training flotilla and to take part in some of these escort training exercises and it was from there, so I was there in June, June '45,

04:00 when I got orders to proceed by air to Australia.

### **To join the Maidstone?**

To join the Maidstone, and thereby hangs a long, long tale of journeying.

### **I imagine how frustrating that must've been, but just going back to your job aboard the Varne for a little while, what were you doing down in Fishguard?**

My personal job?

### **What was the submarine in Fishguard for, firstly?**

04:30 Well, Fishguard was, expedition was entirely required by this scientific experiment. That was the whole purpose of us going to Fishguard, and Fishguard was chosen because it was near the Sunderland Flying Boat Base in Milford Haven. That's the only reason we were there.

### **What was it like down in the South Irish Sea?**

Going down there was very, very rough.

05:00 After all, it was in mid-winter when we were going down. We rolled the submarine while I was on watch on one occasion, struck by a beam sea [side on] and pushed over to around about 50 degrees, I'd reckon. I thought we were never coming up because we were literally hanging on to stay onto the conning tower, but she uprighted herself. Never went over that far again,

05:30 but unbeknown to us the submarine was never expected to go quite that far. (UNCLEAR) I think it was a wave that helped push us back up again, but we spilled a lot of the battery acid which went into the bottom of the tanks, and the tanks were all lined with stuff called rosbomite, which was a sort of bitumastic type thing [protective coating from water penetration, made from coal tars],

06:00 fairly thick, but there were little porous holes in this bitumastic covering and the acid got down and started to eat out the bottom of the tank, which is not very nice for a submarine to suddenly get acid holes in. After we'd done the Fishguard assignment and we came back we began to realise that, because we know how much we lost because the crew goes around topping up with distilled water,

06:30 not acid, and so when we got back we were directed to go back into dry dock in a little town called Ardrossan, which is also on the Clyde side, but on the south side in Ayrshire, where they opened us up, took the batteries out of the tanks and resealed all the tanks after neutralising them with soda

07:00 and that sort of stuff. Then when they put the batteries back together, then we went on patrol.

**What was it like inside the submarine when it started to roll like that?**

Well, I don't know, I was on top.

**On top?**

Yeah, I was hanging on like grim death. Once it started to get over to that far, you're practically lying down in bed, or it seems that way.

07:30 So no, it was scary but, you know, it's a quirk of nature, not the submarine's fault.

**You were on watch on top of the conning tower?**

Yeah, yeah.

**What is your job when you're on watch?**

Navigating the boat, keeping to the direct ordered course and speed, making sure you don't collide with anything else. Don't forget, I shouldn't say don't forget, you didn't know, but whenever

08:00 our submarines moved around British coastal waters they were escorted by a surface ship. We had a destroyer keeping watch on us called the [HMS] Shikari and her job was to fight off anyone that wanted to interfere with us. Fortunately that never happened, but it was handy having her around knowing that if there was any catastrophe she'd be

08:30 there to help, and Shikari was virtually permanently attached to the submarine flotilla because it was also the Shikari which escorted us where necessary up the Western Isles, but one of the reasons why the Clyde was so safe for submarines was that going, if you were being deployed into the North Sea, you go up inside this

09:00 nest of islands on the surface and you wouldn't expect U-boats to get into this inner channel going up the coast.

**What was it like up in the North Sea?**

Alright. The weather was not bad, you know, seasonal, by then it's April.

09:30 Quite reasonable weather by then, spring coming up, occasional high winds, just like weather here in many ways. Winter there can be a different kettle of fish.

**During that patrol how long would you be on the surface for in any one time and how long would you spend under water?**

On average we were 18 to 20 hours dived,

10:00 which left only four to six on the surface in any one night.

**What hours would you generally choose to surface?**

You'd try to get up there just before it gets too dark because you'd want to start taking star sights to try and fix your position if there were no shore measuring points.

10:30 The same when diving, you'd try to stay up there until dawn was sufficiently up to enable you to see the horizon. The important thing about star sights in the old sextant days, you had to see the star and the horizon at any one time, and if it was too dark to see the horizon

11:00 then you couldn't take a sight, and even then your sight was likely to be a bit in error because the darker it gets the less well-defined the horizon becomes.

**Whose job was it to take the star sights?**

Well, we had four officers in V class, captain, first lieutenant, third hand and a fourth hand. The fourth hand was usually the navigator.

11:30 The third hand, which was me, I was the gunnery torpedo officer, and that's how it worked. So there again, you know, everyone had to know everyone else's job.

**What other jobs needed to be done in those hours when the boat was on the surface?**

Always you needed someone to be deciphering incoming signals.

12:00 When on the surface nearly everyone was awake because they'd have all been woken up to surface and they were all going to be woken up to dive, and it was such a short time, it was the main meal of the

day. I suppose eating and freshening up were the major activities other than being on watch, and being on watch would be up top in the conning tower, bridge.

12:30 **At this time the engines would start up?**

Yes, as soon as you surfaced.

**Can you take us through the rest of the day on a patrol, or the night, as it was, how your watches worked and what you did on a day-to-day routine?**

We used to do two-hourly watches, or two-hour watches, and so you were doing two [hours] on, four off,

13:00 and you could say this covers the whole crew, the two hours on duty and when dived for the officer of the watch that meant keeping the boat at its ordained depth, which meant adjusting the trim, working water into the tanks to keep that trim as required, supervising the

13:30 listening watch in the ASDIC room and, if at periscope depth, regularly make sweeps but you couldn't keep the periscope up for long. It was usually a case of up periscope, take a quick run around the horizon at full magnification, down periscope,

14:00 then come up and do it in segments with a very fine look at maybe it might be a tip of a mast that you could see or whatever. Again, only leaving the periscope up for a few seconds, then down periscope, up periscope, down periscope. So that took the officer of the watch's main activities at periscope depth. But deeper than that was much more relaxed.

14:30 **What special duties did you have as torpedo and gunnery officer?**

Supervising the maintenance of the torpedoes, loading and unloading torpedoes, supervising that. In an attack situation, working the torpedo calculator to work out the firing angle and that sort of stuff, and that's just near the

15:00 captain on the periscope so that you can tell him what his firing angle is to be against whatever target you were lining up.

**Can you describe a bit more about this calculator?**

Basically I suppose you could say it contained dials like a fruit machine. It would be the own ship dial

15:30 which would show your course. You'd feed the speed in on another dial and then there'd be the target ship heading and target ship speed. Now, the heading was estimated by estimating its angle on the bows seen through the periscope. The captain would say, "40 degrees

16:00 on her starboard bow." Now, you know what angle his periscope is pointing at, so this vessel, you're 40 degrees on his starboard bow, means you're looking there. From that you've got his course, and then time between, you've also got his range from the periscope and that of course helps with the plot. There's also a plot running

16:30 at the same time and basically it's solving the speed-range triangle, the third line of the triangle being the torpedo speed. Torpedoes in a submarine were fast, 45 knots, usually fired at fairly short range, and you'd fire not one torpedo but

17:00 a salvo of four, all angled slightly differently so that if you made a mistake with his speed and the earlier torpedo might have gone astern of him, maybe this one would catch him, or maybe you're odds on for all four to hit him. So, and that's roughly what the calculator did.

**What instances on board the Varne did you fire torpedoes?**

Only in training, only in training exercises,

17:30 yeah.

**What other maintenance did the guns need while on patrol?**

Not much. The gun used to be coated with non-floating grease. What made it non-floating I don't know, but they were special 'non-floaters', as we used to call it, and you'd grease all the working parts of the gun with this so that when you dived,

18:00 the grease would be protecting the metal, you could come straight up and bang, shoot the gun straight off and that was always fun because the gun's crew, when surfacing for gun action, the order would go out, "Stand by, diving stations, stand by for gun action". The gun's crew would all muster around a special exit

18:30 hatch, two of them actually, just forward of the conning tower and just behind the gun, and then the captain ordered surface. The gunnery officer was the first up, not the captain. He was usually the first up the conning tower, but on this occasion the gunnery officer would be first up closely followed by the captain.



19:00 The boat's still rising at this stage and is likely to be a foot or two above the conning tower when the hatch opens, so you'd get hit in the face with a great sheaf of water and get in there. In the meantime, the crew are pouring through the gun hatches. You've gone up there before them because their hatches are lower. They're pouring through their own, manning their gun. You've stabilised yourself up in the conning tower, sighted the target

19:30 and start shouting down to the gun's crew the range, angle, sight and all this sort of stuff, and then when the engaged signal is given, open fire, "bang, bang, bang", usually at short range, the shorter the better from submarine gunnery, because it wasn't the most precise gunnery in the world.

**How much manoeuvrability did that gun have?**

Normal arcs of

20:00 training and elevation. They're no good as anti-aircraft guns, just ship guns, but the gunnery rules are very simple. If you're lined up on the target, if your first round went over, it didn't matter where it went over, it was no good guessing where it went over, you gave the order down 1,000 yards, which might've meant the next shot goes about 200 yards in front of

20:30 you, and then you go up 400 yards and then you start hitting him. So, you know, it was real bow-and-arrow stuff really.

**How vulnerable was a submarine while on the surface?**

You wouldn't want anyone shooting back at you because if that started happening, you'd probably dive and go back to doing a torpedo attack. The only reason you'd use your gun was use it on targets

21:00 not worthy of a torpedo, or not capable of a torpedo. In the Mediterranean, I believe that trains were always a good target because they ran along the coast of Italy and a submarine would surface and blast the railway.

**That was the gun drill, what about the torpedo drill? What happened?**

That was fairly straightforward because the torpedoes are kept ready for firing at all stages

21:30 unless they're drawn back for maintenance, and you wouldn't do that in a front-line position. Just open bow cap doors and they're ready to fire.

**What orders were given in that instance?**

"Open bow caps, fire one, fire two, fire three, fire four." It was that simple.

**What role is the captain and the**

22:00 **first hand or second?**

Well, he's doing all the periscope work. He's ordering the attack; he's estimating the ship's course and speed, the target's course and speed. He decides when he's going to fire his torpedoes and at what spreading he wants to accomplish, because you're still moving through the water. You're not pointing at the target, you're pointing ahead of the target,

22:30 and he's controlling speed and depth and everything else.

**All the rules and precautions we talked about before in terms of keeping the submarine quiet, what happens to those in terms of action stations?**

Well, up until the time you fire torpedoes, things are still fairly quiet. They've got to be quiet; you don't want to alert the enemy. Sometimes you can fire torpedoes I guess

23:00 and not hit the target, and a dozy enemy mightn't have noticed the torpedo tracks, so even then you don't want to make a noise. But if the torpedoes have gone out and gone "bang," it doesn't matter much what noise you make.

**What other drills did you practice while on patrol?**

I can't remember any other drills. I

23:30 mentioned this business of spray-painting the white painted sections of the submarine.

**How did that job fall to you as the third officer?**

It was just routine duties that a third hand does. I didn't go through the stage of being the fourth hand presumably because of the K9 experience.

24:00 See, in my passing out course, I passed out at the top of the course, so I went to an operational squadron or flotilla to be allocated a boat and the rest of the course went to the training flotilla and were allocated

24:30 submarines from there. So I suppose I had a streamlined run in many ways.

**We were talking about the system of watch; it was two hours on and four hours off. What would you do generally in the changeover period and the time you had off?**

Well, it would only take about 10 minutes to transfer a watch

25:00 and then with the four hours off, I'd be looking for my pit [bunk, bed]. Maybe a little refreshment if there was a snack available or it was lunchtime or whatever, but the main activity off watch other than to go and check your own department, make sure that the torpedoes were in fact

25:30 ready for firing, that sort of stuff, deciphering signals was the main thing. I didn't explain to you that what happened is that whereas most naval radio stations are broadcasting just ordinary high frequency sound to various ships around the world, submarine radio stations are low frequency so

26:00 that they do penetrate the water but they don't penetrate very far. So we used to have schedules on which to listen out for signals. Let's say it was on the hour every hour. It didn't necessarily have to be that. It could be 20 past the hour, but whatever the schedule was, you'd have to come to periscope depth,

26:30 put up a radio aerial. Later on, they had a buoy system. They could have a trailing aerial and a buoy up on the surface and then you'd haul the buoy back again. But put up the aerial and train the submarine roughly in the direction of the radio station. The radio station in England

27:00 was at Rugby, so you know, a little place like England, you'd know where Rugby roughly was. I don't know whether you've ever seen one of these low frequency radio stations. They've got these huge great masts, they occupy acres and acres of land, and I don't know how they're connected up there. I think they've got wire aerials between them and

27:30 they make a noise. Anyway, so you listen in on the submarine traffic. You take down the opening address of all the messages to make sure you haven't missed one, and there's a numbered sequence for your particular submarine, and when your own call sign happens to pop up, you copy that signal out in full

28:00 and then it's got to be deciphered. Well, that was a duty when coming off watch, deciphering, and the codes change every day, so you had to be up to changing the code to decipher these things.

**What was your call sign on board the Varne?**

I don't know.

**Did that change?**

Probably not, probably not.

**What sort of**

28:30 **methods did they use to encode messages?**

Cipher machines, rotating wheel ciphers with daily settings. You'd line them up in the deciphering machine and then work it like a typewriter. Type in this garbled stuff and English would come out. Sometimes you had to decipher

29:00 using books - that was very boring - and the same to transmit a signal, not that we ever transmitted any signals, but, if you wanted to, you had to firstly encode and then encrypt. The code's merely a simple

29:30 word substitution business really, but encryption involves scrambling the letters and coming all over the place.

**What sort of information would the messages you received contain?**

Intelligence on enemy ship movements, anything of that nature. They didn't tell you that King George had had a baby or anything of that sort.

30:00 It was strictly useful intelligence, maybe of a storm coming up, anything like that.

**During that time away on patrol, did you have any news of any sort apart from operational procedure?**

30:30 Yes, if the traffic was light, a sailor might get news that a son was born or something of that sort. Yes, that used to come through occasionally, not often.

**You mentioned the captain's 24th birthday.**

Yeah, we didn't get happy birthday messages.

**Was there any sort of celebration of any sort of low-key sort?**

Yes.

31:00 He shocked me a bit. He wanted a sherry all around in the mess. I wasn't too keen, I always, the whole of my career I didn't approve of drinking at sea and didn't have drinking at sea, but on this occasion I was invited to drink a sherry or else, I suppose.

31:30 **What was the system of rum ration on board a submarine in the Royal Navy?**

Well, in submarine we broke all the rules, all the rules. We had to collect the rum ration for the sailors at sea because there was no system of accumulating rum rations. You couldn't go away to sea on patrol and catch up on the rum

32:00 when you got back as it were. We used to discourage the sailors from drinking their rum ration, which meant therefore that one turned a blind eye to them keeping bottles of rum, because they'd build it up after a patrol, a tot a day, and they'd have a bottle of rum at the end of the patrol, which they'd then have to try and smuggle

32:30 ashore without getting caught. They were very adept at it, I think. I can't remember any getting caught. I can't remember knowing anyone taking it ashore, but sure as hell did go. There's no doubt of that.

**Who were they smuggling it past?**

Dockyard police, those sort of people. I suppose the customs

33:00 people are always floating around the place. But I think it was a system that worked and the sailors were happy they weren't really being deprived of anything. The system with the rum ration, if you didn't drink your rum ration, you didn't collect your rum ration, you then got paid threepence a day. If you drank your rum ration, you didn't get your threepence.

33:30 **Any other celebrations apart from this one with the sherry on the captain's birthday?**

No. VE Day, we were actually alongside the depot ship by then; that was a fairly wild night I think. I'd grown a beard while we'd been on this patrol. Told my mother and father I'd grown a beard, and

34:00 it got shaved off, didn't it, in the wardroom celebrations that night. They sat on me to hold me down on deck, gave me a beer lather and then shaved off half my beard. So, they didn't do a very good job shaving it off but that wrecked my beard so when I arrived out in Australia a month later,

34:30 there I was with no beard to show my parents. They were expecting to find this bearded mariner come in, really a boy.

**Just a couple more questions about patrol. At the end of your day, there was a hot bunk system; we haven't spoken about that a lot. How did that work?**

Well, there's no end to the day.

**The end of your deciphering, the time you had in your four hours to sleep, what happened?**

35:00 I went to bed because there'd be a vacant bed, always. One bloke on watch, two blokes off watch so, you know, you only needed two bunks.

**The other thing I wanted to ask you about this system of watches and being on patrol is fairly tense, I**

35:30 **imagine. How did you deal with the tension?**

Don't remember any tension. If it wasn't a routine change of watches then you probably would've been at diving stations and the whole boat alerted, so that was all just part of the drill, no tension.

**Was it a happy boat?**

Yeah, I think so. I never understood the captain very much, but

36:00 that made no difference. You don't expect to. I don't know what I didn't like so much about him. He tried hard. He wasn't a good communicator, I didn't think. Didn't communicate with confidence, but then again, as I say, a 23 year old in charge of a submarine is incredible.

**How old were you at the time?**

20. I was an old fellow.

36:30 **Who was the elder statesman on board?**

The first lieutenant I think was older than the captain. He probably was somewhere around the ripe old age of 25, 26 even. He was a reservist, had been a seaman in the navy, volunteer reserve, went to an officer

37:00 training school in England and then became a submariner. So he was really the next officer that is.

**Were there any traditions or superstitions practised in the Royal Navy in your time in submarines that you recall?**

What sort of superstitions? They used to fly the Jolly Roger if they had a successful patrol,

37:30 but only if they had a successful patrol, and then they'd fly that coming in alongside the depot ship. I remember we had, the signalman had to make up a Nazi German naval ensign which the captain wanted to fly should it become necessary

38:00 as a *rusé de guerre* [stratagem of war]. We never actually flew it. He made quite a good job of it though, the old swastika. What else can I tell you?

**I think we are pretty much up to date on the Varne. We'll talk about coming home in a moment, but how did it differ, the crew you had over there to the one you had in Australia in a less**

38:30 **operational sense on the K9?**

A much more active crew, all trained to do the job. Well the K9's crew were well trained, not all were modern, but from my own personal viewpoint, I was now one of the brotherhood really. I was trained. I think I was a competent,

39:00 I must've been, I never had any reports to say contrary. Never had any reports that say good either. I don't know why I missed out. I must apply for some of those reports sometime. But the fact that the captain was prepared to have me as his first lieutenant says something. I don't know what quite, but there was I as first lieutenant while we were up in Tobermory. We had a

39:30 system, which I didn't explain to you earlier, of the officers used to get a driving licence. All officers in the navy get watch-keeping certificates to say they're capable in all respects of keeping a watch at sea, but in submarines particularly the junior officers were given driving licences because submarines alongside depot ships are moving constantly. They've got to move away from the depot ship to let another one get

40:00 closer to the ship to get some repairs done or stores or whatever, and quite often when there are movements going on, the officer of the day had got to take the submarine quite some distance away from the depot ship whilst things go on, and then he gets called up alongside maybe an hour later. And to get a driving licence, you've got to have an independent

40:30 submarine commanding officer standing on the bridge all the time while you're making these decisions about which way you'll go and all the rest of it, and I had some very notable commanding officers riding with me, and I remember one day I had two of them. I think they'd made a mistake, both had been asked to go to the same submarine. Anyway, they both appeared

41:00 on board and I can remember them both looking at each other and one of them saying, "I think he deserves it, don't you?" And the other one said, "Yeah." So I got my so-called driving licence and that enabled me to drive a submarine around the harbour without supervision and that's why I felt competent going to sea at Fishguard.

**I was actually wondering**

41:30 **that, how much training you had to do that.**

## Tape 8

00:32 **Can you, after VE Day, were you repatriated to Australia or came back to Australia?**

Not quite. It was then that I went to the 7th Flotilla and was sent to Tobermory in the Varne with me as the first lieutenant and again up in Tobermory, the captain, because it was peacetime in the UK, had his wife up to Tobermory for a holiday. I don't suppose he'd seen much of her during the war years,

01:00 and I was left again virtually in command of the submarine in harbour. So I used to do these harbour manoeuvres, try my hand out at that in fairly isolated anchorage. I had to really apply the tricks of the trade in manoeuvring the submarine

01:30 in heavy weather and so on to get alongside the ship without bruising it or yourself. So I learned a bit doing that. Then I got these orders to go to Australia when I turned 21. I remember it was my birthday and I had a shore in Tobermory, had a pretty wild night there in the company

02:00 of some Wrens [WRNS: Women's Royal Naval Service], Wrens officers and so on, one of whom was engaged to a New Zealand fellow that I knew. Anyway, then I set off down to London, by rail all the way, Australia House, and then off to this air force station - I've forgotten where it was, but it was somewhere in the home

02:30 counties - got put aboard a York aircraft, which is a converted Lancaster [Avro Lancaster bomber], flew

from there to Malta where we landed. They had a bubonic plague on there at the time so the health authorities insisted on putting anti-flea bugs into our socks and all the rest of it up to your knees. Apparently that was the only

03:00 precaution against the plague. We didn't stay overnight there but flew off to Cairo and then spent the night near the pyramids somewhere or other, under canvas. Next morning, flew from there to Shu'aiba [near Basra, southern Iraq] in what is now Iraq and Shu'aiba being down the river from Baghdad somewhere. I didn't see any civilisation while I was

03:30 there. From there to Calcutta, no, from there to Karachi, overnight in Karachi, again under canvas. Next day Karachi to Colombo, and there was a wait of a couple of days in Colombo. It was in the same York the whole way. The York only had passenger benches, the same ones you see in these films with

04:00 parachutists, and all sitting along the side, and in the middle between the two sides of the aeroplane were piles and piles of postal bags. This was mail and stuff for the troops in Burma and if you wanted to have a quiet sleep you'd sleep on top of the mail bags with cake tins poking into your ribs and God knows what else. Anyway, we had a couple of days in Colombo where we were put up at

04:30 a rather famous hotel whose name I forget, was a beachside hotel.

### **Galle Face?**

Galle Face, yeah, the Galle Face. There were about six of us on this flight, all submariners, and then we got orders that we were to fly on to Fremantle by Qantas

05:00 in a converted Liberator bomber, which Qantas was running at that time. It was a non-stop flight from Colombo to Fremantle, took about 19 hours I think in the air, and then, as I say, we got to Fremantle where we found not the Maidstone and the 8th Submarine Flotilla, but the Adamant and the 4th Submarine Flotilla I think it was. Doesn't matter what

05:30 number that was. The other fellows all joined that flotilla and I was told, "Commander Miers wants you in Subic Bay, Cleary, go." So who organised the priorities of all this air flight and stuff I've got no idea because the flight from Colombo to Fremantle, you can imagine, all the polities [politicians] were wanting to be on it and...

### **It's an extraordinarily long flight.**

Some politicians, senior officers

06:00 and God knows what else, and here's a mere sub-lieutenant RNVR getting the priority. However, same applied all around Australia.

### **How do you fill in a 19-hour flight in a noisy Liberator?**

Can't remember, slept most of the way I think. Perhaps read a magazine or so. We got uniformed Qantas stewards. I remember we were in what was the after cabin and the wing roots in the Liberator came right through the middle of the aircraft

06:30 and I remember the poor flight attendant had to climb up over the thing and trying to do it in a dignified fashion while carrying a tray of coffee or whatever. Was quite fun to watch. That probably kept me awake for a while.

### **After Subic Bay, you went off to Hong Kong, is that right?**

Yeah, well let me get to there first. I did all this around Australia. There were two nights in Sydney because there was a submarine,

07:00 RN submarine based here by then, just a few training submarines based and working with Rushcutter, I believe. I didn't have time to go and see any of them, but anyway I finished up in Manila and had a night living in an accommodation ship. I didn't like the Americans at all (UNCLEAR). In Samal, going back one flight, there was a huge mess of

07:30 US Navy airmen and stuff and a huge officers' mess and I was dressed in whites then, as the RN did, white shorts and shirt and stuff, and I went to the bar to get a drink and the next thing I know I got a bloody great big kick up the backside. So I whirled around and there's a US Navy commander had done this. He was boozed [drunk] of course.

08:00 He was, I suspect, an Irish American because he was in the Seabees [CBs: Construction Battalion], you know, they were building the air station and I think he was there for that reason. Anyway, sitting right in the corner there were four US Air Force people and the pilot, who was a major I think, came over and rescued me. He could see that

08:30 something was likely to happen and escorted me over to their table and I spent the rest of the time with them, went out to their aircraft. They'd landed on this place as a badly shot up aeroplane. The navy had just pushed them right up into the scrub and got on with the navy's business and let these poor blokes rot. Anyway, I went to their aeroplane with them and had a few sherbets [drinks] there and

- 09:00 then next morning I shipped out of there in another aeroplane, but that gets me back to Manila where I spent the night in the cavity thing, in an accommodation hulk. Again, I wasn't terribly impressed with the Americans who put me into just an ordinary open mess deck full of American sailors, most of them Negro, no rank at all, which I didn't think was very kind treatment to an allied officer.
- 09:30 Anyway, I got a boat from there to Subic Bay, joined the Maidstone, only there for a couple of days and we were up anchor and off to Hong Kong. Get to Hong Kong, can't enter harbour because there was a submarine and its flotilla and it's escorting minesweepers, but no real protection in a submarine depot ship, they've only got a few guns and so on. We had to wait anchored off Hong Kong
- 10:00 for the arrival of a fleet, which came up from Manus because the rest of the British Pacific Fleet were going to Tokyo, and so we went in with the main fleet of cruisers and aircraft carriers and God knows what. While in Hong Kong, I must've been there for the best part of a week, I did a thorough look around the dockyard
- 10:30 while I was there, which was very illuminating, the way the Japanese had been running the place. I got to the front gate and there was a great crowd of Chinese outside who I took to be the workers that used to work at the dockyard under the bridge, they'd all come to sign on again. Amongst these, there was a little white boy
- 11:00 aged about 10 or 12, so I had the marines on the gate open up and got the boy inside and decided he needed a meal, took him back to the depot ship, sat him down in the officers' mess and fed him and then didn't find out much about him, nor was I asking too much about him
- 11:30 except where he lived and why he was by himself. He was living in a nunnery with his sister, who I don't think was a nun, but this led me to think that he was probably Jewish, probably from Shanghai originally, and I don't know where his parents were and he didn't know. Anyway, I escorted him back to the nunnery and rang the bell and the nun came to the door
- 12:00 and yes, she recognised the boy straightaway and took him in. I discharged my duty, I never saw or heard of him again. I don't know what happened to him. I should've said that the first day we got to Hong Kong, Commander Submarines who'd taken Commander Miers' place had the duty to go down to the Stanley Prison,
- 12:30 which was a British, not a British, a Japanese internment camp and that's where all the British civilians and so on from Hong Kong, including the deputy-governor's or lieutenant-governor's family and he had been, and I was to be his driver, this commander, to go down and
- 13:00 liberate the Stanley Prison mob. I said, "Yes," I could drive, but I'd never driven in my life in fact. So after making a few aborted attempts to drive this jeep, he took over the driving and I sat as the passenger and we went down to the Stanley Camp and the Japanese were still sentries down there, but the
- 13:30 lieutenant-governor had already moved up to the main part of Hong Kong and was in command of the situation of taking over from the Japanese. There was a big Japanese headquarters on Hong Kong including a huge monument on the top of the peak at Hong Kong, which the prisoners of war had to build. It got knocked down soon afterwards
- 14:00 and the peak reverted to its normal style, but in Stanley Camp I met the lieutenant-governor's wife and two daughters. The two daughters, aged I'd say 17 and 15, very straightforward girls. I was asking them about
- 14:30 the life they had to lead. They told related stories like how they'd stopped menstruating. You know, telling some strange fellow, this struck me as very odd from a couple of proper English girls. Anyway, they told me this was one of the side effects of malnutrition and what have you. So we were pleased to find they were in reasonable health and
- 15:00 that civil aid would come to them sooner rather than later. There was nothing we could do and so we went back to the ship. Then I was given a navy motor pinnace to go and do a cruise around the northeastern part of Hong Kong
- 15:30 Harbour up towards the Pearl River to find out if there were any activities up there that we should know about. I went aboard a couple of Japanese motorised junks and hauled their flags down. There was not a soul on board any of them. Both junks were crammed full of medical stores all neatly shelved down in the hold.
- 16:00 They were obviously Red Cross stores and I don't think they were meant for the use of the prisoners of war or anything. I think the Japanese were using this as a mobile pharmacy, if you like. It's quite astonishing to see the stuff they did have there. Went into a Japanese camp way around the coast there. There was only one officer and about a dozen soldiers
- 16:30 there. They enjoyed it because we landed from the water side. These soldiers pouring out of their barracks getting formed up into a line and presenting a guard of honour, virtually.

**How long after the surrender of Japan was this?**

24 hours, 48 hours.

- 17:00 It would've been about 48 hours after the surrender in Hong Kong, not the surrender of the Japanese from when the emperor announced it.

**How long after that?**

Don't remember that. This was sort of Day 3 after the British Fleet went into Hong Kong. We were only waiting anchored off for about two days, so I suppose it would be,

- 17:30 and we took two days to get from Subic Bay, so about a week I'd say since the Japanese told the troops to lay down their arms.

**OK.**

So I looked at this Japanese lot, made sure they didn't have any ammunition for their rifles, confiscated the officer's pistol,

- 18:00 left him with his sword. He protested bitterly about me depriving him of his pistol, and I think he was afraid of being lynched [summarily killed] by the Chinese mob. Well, I thought, "Well, that's not my responsibility. If he gets lynched, he must've done something to deserve it." So then I left them, went back to the submarine depot ship. There were a few bodies floating in the harbour

- 18:30 at that time. Then I was transferred to the submarine [HMS] Supreme to sail back to England via Trincomalee. Got to Trincomalee, there I was hauled out of the submarine with the intention of being repatriated to Australia, told the captain of the flotilla, a ship, the Wolf,

- 19:00 that I wanted to go back to UK. So he did the Nelsonian thing, blind eye, didn't know about the signal repatriating me. I sailed back to UK in the Wolf.

**Why did you not want to return to Australia now the war was over?**

Well, I thought I might try for a job

- 19:30 in England with the Shell Company, thought I might go to a tanker there. I didn't know that they were going to offer permanent commissions after the war. I thought if I was going to get demobilised, I might as well get demobilised there.

**Why though? You're from Australia.**

Oh well, I had no real strings in Australia other than my family.

- 20:00 They were all understanding.

**How did you feel now the war was over with Japan?**

A bit bitter that I'd not played any real strong part in the whole show. I felt deprived over that. I didn't know anything about the demobilisation system as such and, as it turned out, I didn't have enough

- 20:30 demobilising points to get out anyway.

**Can you describe how the system worked? It seems like you were almost a free agent to do what you will within this large naval machine.**

I wouldn't have said that. They had to get sort of senior approval for all these things. Anyway, I came back to England. The Flag Officer Submarines personally thanked me, and I thought that was a great thing.

**What was the**

- 21:00 **boat you sailed back on, the HMS Wolf?**

Yes, she was a submarine depot ship. She was a converted Canadian Pacific liner.

**Were you ever to return to sail on subs [submarines] again after that point?**

No.

**After that trip down to Trincomalee?**

No. So...

**What did you miss of submarines compared to surface ships?**

I wanted to be the captain of one, didn't I?

- 21:30 **What adjustments need to be made if you returned like you did, transition from surface ships to being in submarines?**

Well, I didn't know I was going to be transferred to surface ships and I don't think anyone else did.

**Nevertheless, you eventually did. Can you tell us of any difficulties you had in making that transition?**

No, none, none. I was always of an independent frame of mind with a bit of common sense, as I

22:00 said earlier. I had a watch-keeping certificate. I was confident that I could keep a watch at sea. I'd kept watch in the Wolf going back to England. She was a large, you know, 15,000-ton ship or 20,000-ton ship.

**Just one thing on submarines that I was always curious, I mean, in a submarine you can dive under the weather and in a surface ship you have to ride it out. Do you do that on submarines if it's bad enough?**

Oh yes. Oh yeah, but you'd be surprised in a really bad storm you could be in

22:30 at 100 feet and still rocking and rolling from the storm up above from some of the waves that build up on the surface. It can still affect you down below.

**Where did you do that?**

I would've said in the North Sea and perhaps a bit out in the Atlantic. Yeah, you had to get right down below to

23:00 dodge it. Coming back in the Supreme from Hong Kong was fun too, you know, with this business of washing yourself and so on, in peacetime we had a ball. We used to go around and we'd watch a rain cloud come over and we'd make a bee line [go straight for], we'd pipe [call for] all the hands on deck and they'd all come up naked and a bar of soap and we'd stand under the cloud and the rain pelted

23:30 down, wash themselves. The rain cloud would move on, the rain would stop and they'd be half soaped and they'd have to go around looking for another one. That was fun, with the freedom of peacetime.

**What other, on the sub, what other freedoms does it bring in terms of operational requirements?**

On all ships in the navy at that stage, people started polishing up the bright work again.

24:00 They'd all been blackened during the war so it wouldn't reflect the sun and all that sort of stuff. People started to get back into a ceremonial navy rather than an active operational navy. But anyway, when I got back to England I was very proud of the fact that Admiral Submarines personally shook my hand when I finished my submarine career.

24:30 You know, I didn't have much chance to meet admirals, very few young officers did, and then to come back in the Ranee, that was quite a good trip. There were 11 Australians in the Ranee coming back. I know it was 11 because we had the best deck hockey team in the ship. Played everyone

25:00 and never got beaten. We just seemed to gel together. We had some excellent people on board. Tony Synott [later Admiral Sir Anthony Synott] was coming back from doing a long gunnery course as a lieutenant. He later became chief of defence force as a full admiral and knighted and all the rest of it. A couple of war heroes who'd been rendering bombs safe

25:30 and got George Medals and all that sort of stuff, George Cross in one case, Hugh Syme who was from the Syme family of the Age newspaper.

**At the time, did you consider now the war had finished the rationale and the reasons why you joined up have gone? What did you consider of your future in the navy or possibility as a civilian?**

26:00 I'd have gone back to the Shell Company eventually, but when I got back to Australia, I found I didn't have enough points for instant demobilisation and that I was appointed to this HMAS Air View business, which I joined in Brisbane, took up to Thursday Island and back again. That got rid of 1946. There was still a lot of interesting work going on getting the world back on an even keel, particularly in the East Indies

26:30 and so on, and then going to the Manoora and going trooping to Japan.

**What did you see of Japan at that time?**

We always birthed in Kure, which was a major Japanese port, a naval port. You'd see Japanese battleships laid up there in ruins and so on. It was all interesting going around to

27:00 Hiroshima and checking out the bomb damage there.

**Can you describe what you saw there?**

Well, it was absolutely devastating to see, you know, virtually a plain of rubble with, I remember one building standing up and I don't know why that building was still standing, but all around it was just rubble. I was shown the picture of a shadow on the bridge,



27:30 which had been burned into the concrete, on the bridge structure by some fellow who was vaporised. Yes, it was quite a sight. I sometimes get confused between then and when I went back later, when I went

28:00 up there in Tobruk in '55, we birthed at Kure, and again when I went around Kure then, there was a naval, a hospital that housed all these injured people and so I sometimes confuse the two.

28:30 I don't think I saw any of the injured people the first time around.

**Looking back on submarines, how had the role of the submarine changed over the course of the Second World War, from the start of the Second World War when you first got involved in subs to when it finished?**

Well, nowadays of course, with missile-firing submarines, it's a whole new ball game. They're into the strategic, whereas we were

29:00 very tactical and local, these modern ones now can devastate a country.

**After the K9 experience, where was Australia standing at the end of the Second World War in regard to submarines and her need for submarines?**

Hadn't decided, yeah, hadn't decided to take any submarines. British submarines were coming out to visit from time to time. That was one of my joys in '48. There was a British submarine

29:30 called HMS Affray came to Sydney and it was here for about two months, and I was at Rushcutter at the time and the captain of Rushcutter was kind enough to appoint me as liaison officer for this submarine's visit. So I spent most of my time for two months down in this English submarine. All care and no responsibility of course, but I had a great time, go to sea with her on

30:00 some of these AS training cruises and the like.

**What makes a submariner different to a surface ship seaman?**

Closer conduct, closer contact and absolutely reliant upon other fellows, more so than in a surface ship

30:30 where the chain of relationships is much longer. And I think that made the difference, the thought that in an emergency and if necessary you could do the other man's job or part of the job that needed to be done in those circumstances.

**I'm thinking in personality?**

Hard to say in personality because I

31:00 can recall people with widely different personalities.

**Temperament?**

Temperament, yes. You had the silent ones, the garrulous ones, the mean ones, the generous ones. The same as any other community, but there was something else behind them. Maybe we're all like that and we need to live together to get this sort of feel.

**What makes it unique though to go out essentially,**

31:30 **I think, what was your description of a submarine, a pressurised pipe or something? And there's, you know, it's a very unique community, one very few people get to see or understand. Have you any cause to reflect on that bond and what makes a submarine crew work together?**

Well, that I can't answer, but what did shock me at

32:00 times after the war, the number of notable British submarine aces, you could call them, lieutenant-commanders who never got promoted in the peacetime navy, were given desk jobs around the place. There are several who I've met like that, chaps who I'd have expected to have gone a long way or left the navy,

32:30 but who didn't leave the navy and were just passed over lieutenant-commanders doing menial jobs virtually. Now why? Great submarine commanders.

**Is it the nature of submarine warfare that you are a silent hunter or something? Is that what makes it somewhat different to perhaps other forms of the navy?**

Some people. I was rude enough to ask Commander Miers

33:00 how he got his VC and his medals and so on, and he said, "Son, it's all how well you write your patrol report." And there's truth in that statement. You know, you can sell yourself without being excessive, but being skilful about it. He claimed that he was skilful about it.

**Was he being understated or cynical?**

Well, I don't know.

- 33:30 He made rear admiral. I think that was a courtesy for his Victoria Cross as much as anything, but never went any further. He wasn't given ever what you'd call a notable job in running the navy, not even made Flag Officer Submarines. So who can say, and there are other fellows like Ewan Rakes who was
- 34:00 one of the quiet achievers in my view. I didn't think he showed a lot of personality. He went to the top, but only to the top of the submarine service, not to the rest of the admiralty organization. Hard to say. There are the successes of people that you don't expect to succeed, and there are failures of people you'd swear would succeed, so I don't know the answer to that.

#### **Looking back on**

- 34:30 **the war that you participated in, and especially the submarine warfare that you saw and trained for, how do you feel about that now, World War II and the subs?**

I'd do it again if that's what you're asking me.

#### **Well, broadly. I was wondering have you pause for reflection?**

I don't know what I'd do in this modern world. I just have no idea of what I would do in this modern world,

- 35:00 and what age am I? That's got to be relevant in some ways. I guess if I was a whipper-snapper [youngster] as I was in World War II, I'd do many a rash thing. I don't know.

#### **How do you feel about war generally (UNCLEAR) World War II?**

I thought it was absolutely essential at that time to fight it, not let Hitler have

- 35:30 his own way. Mussolini was an expensive joke, but he shouldn't have been allowed to carry on the way he did, although the Italians mostly loved him, and of course the dreaded Japanese, I don't know when they went off the rails because they were our allies in World War I. They
- 36:00 really fancied themselves as a fleet based on Royal Navy principles and brothers in arms, you'd have thought, and they went off on their own tack, co-prosperity spheres [Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, created by Japan in 1942 to consolidate it's Asian conquests] and so on.

#### **How do you feel about the role of the submarine in modern warfare? How has it changed?**

- 36:30 Dear me, like you, I've got no more idea about that than you have after seeing the Red October [The Hunt for Red October, American film based on the novel by Tom Clancy] I mean, the material excellence that exists in modern submarines I think rates a modern submarine as bigger and
- 37:00 better than the aircraft carrier or battleship. But I wouldn't go to the extent of saying a modern submarine can dominate the world.

#### **A submarine now can be one of the largest nuclear states in the world apparently.**

Oh yeah, but I don't know. Nothing's

- 37:30 undetectable, it all depends on what warfare's always depended upon, offence and defence, and which one's coming up first. It tends to flow in changes either way. The Blitzkrieg [rapid all-out offensive action, as in German blitzkrieg opening World War II, literally 'lightning war'], of course, is the best way to win a war because it's one-sided and the other lot surrender, and that could well happen with modern submarine warfare.

- 38:00 **We're nearly at the end of this tape and we'll wrap it up with a couple of general questions. How do you feel about the future? Was the war won and many subsequent wars since, given the lack of peace I guess, how do you feel about the future for Australia?**

I think Australia's got a very

- 38:30 difficult task ahead of it, keeping its own nose clean as it were. I don't necessarily agree that forming strong coalitions really save you in the long run from anything. I'd much sooner see Australia with a high degree of self-reliance in world affairs. There's no doubt that Indonesia
- 39:00 is going to always be a major source of trouble for us, particularly for as long as this Muslim imperialism, if you like, exists. I don't know how we're going to get over that. All of our past in recent years has been virtually on a conflict of religions, even to
- 39:30 the domestic troubles in Yugoslavia and Ireland. There's always something nasty at the root of it all. Afghanistan was all religious, and the troubles in the Gulf are all religious. Where does it end? What sort of problems are our youth of today going to have to face up to in 20 years time? I can't
- 40:00 forecast it and nor can you, I guess.

**On that subject, the Archive will be here for 50 or 100 years and somebody will be looking at**

**this.**

God help them.

**Is there any message you'd like to say, project into the future?**

Into the future, like a note in a bottle under the building?

**Yes, if you'd like, yeah.**

"Nice knowing you. Thanks." No, I've got no messages.

**Thanks Bryan, it's**

40:30 **been a pleasure talking to you.**

We're done?

**Yeah, I think you're done.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**