



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Title	Kidger, Alan Noel (Ordinary Seaman)
Interviewer	Connell, Daniel
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Description	Alan Noel Kidger as an ordinary seaman, Merchant Navy, interviewed by Daniel Connell for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: Mr Alan Kidger for the War Memorial. Mr Kidger is a person who was in the Merchant Marine during the second world war.
Right. I am Daniel Connell and the date is, I think, 5th August 1989. End of identification.

Just going back to your childhood, could you tell me where you grew up?

In Sydney; Mosman in Sydney.

Could you describe your family, the family that you grew up in?

My father was a chemist. I was brought up by my grandpeople actually - my grandparents. My father was a chemist and we lived in Mosman in Sydney.

Right. You were fairly well-off or ...?

They were, yeah.

Right. And can I ask why you didn't grow up with your parents?

I was adopted.

So where did you go to school?

Mosman. I went to Shore, that's a public school in Sydney, and I also went to, in the last six to eight months or something of my schooling, I went to Mosman Public School.

And you left school when?

As soon as I could, when I was fourteen and four months I think. That was the legal age you could leave school in those days and that was about the time I left school because I wasn't very interested in it to be quite truthful.

What did you do then?

I worked in a couple of places in Sydney and ... in Pitt Street - in the bottom of Pitt Street - I was working in a place where they teach you learning about typewriters, you know?

How to repair them?

Yeah. And someone there suggested to me - they could see I wasn't very interested in it - and they said to me, 'Why don't you go up the shipping office and see about getting away to sea?'. They had a friend or a son or something or other, if I remember correctly, who was at sea at the time and this chap that I worked with, he said, 'Well, you might be more interested in that than what you're doing here now. Go up and see them', so I did.

Had you been interested in the sea before that?

No, no way. I didn't know anything about it.

Right. So you went up to the shipping office and what happened?

Ah ... well, at that time you had to be sixteen to go to sea. But, I'm not too sure how my father worked it, but I put my age up and I don't think they worried too much in those days because they were very short of seamen, you know, and I put my age up and I got away.

That makes a rumbling sound on the tape. And what company was that?

My first ship I was on was a ship called the *Matthew Flinders* belong to H C Sleigh.

And so you signed on. You obviously went into the office and they met you and some how or other you managed to get your age up. Um ... what happened? I mean, from there you went home? You got ready? What happened? Just describe getting away to sea.

I distinctly remember it. They rang up and they said, 'Well, there's a job for you on a ship called the *Matthew Flinders*. Be at the shipping office at whatever time it was'. I went in with my father into the shipping office which was, in those day, was at George Street North, under the Harbour Bridge there and anyway, I signed on this ship and he took me down to the ship and it was tied up at the Quay, Circular Quay in Sydney. And I'm not too sure if we sailed that day or the day after but it was not long after I got on board that we sailed.

(5.00) At some stage during this process did you have to join the union?

The Seamen's Union, if I remember correctly, you were given a certain time. I think till the end of your first trip or something in which to join. Naturally, obviously, you couldn't join once you got away from Sydney but when you came back to Sydney or into one of the, you know, the port you were paid off in, you were expected to join then which I would have done.

We'll come to that a bit more. So the normal sort of pattern, you know, taking that first ship as an example, what was it like? What sort of ship board life did a fifteen year old boy have on board?

Well, I had to ... live in a room with the bosun, a bloody room about, oh, I suppose, eight or ten foot by about six or eight foot; two of us in it, the bosun and myself. He used to have his meals in the room as well. I was expected to have my meals - we used to live in the midship section of the ship - I had my meals down aft with the crew. But my main job in those days was, well, at sea they called it 'doing the Peggying'. In the morning - that's cleaning the quarters out and all that, you know - in the morning, for instance, the average day you'd start at six o'clock in the morning. They come in, one of the watchkeepers with the four to eight watch, would come in and give you a shout at half past five. The bosun and myself would get up and make a cup of tea in the room and then he would go and do whatever he had to do and I would have to go down and clean the mess room up and get the quarters all ready for the breakfast. Do you want me to tell you what your duties were?

Mmm.

Yeah, well, I had to ... I had, say, from six o'clock till eight o'clock, in that time I'd have to clean the mess room up which would be in a bit of a mess because of the night watchers being in there. You know, they'd come in there, make themselves a cup of tea or whatever and they wouldn't bother cleaning anything up, they'd just leave it all there for the deck boy the next morning. And you used to ... I'd have to get it all nice and tidy. If I remember correctly, she had wooden decks in her and you had to get on your hands and knees and scrub the decks and that, all that, before breakfast. At about a quarter to eight you had to go along amidships to the galley and get the breakfast that was cooked - the bacon and eggs and all the rest of it - and it used to be in, well, we used to call them kits - trays, you know, trays with a bit of a side on 'em - and you'd have half a dozen of those and you had to carry them down aft and down to the mess room. It was all right when the weather was all right but when the weather was pretty rough it was a bit hairy especially if you dropped one of the trays and you had to go back and asks the cook to cook some more. He wouldn't be very happy. But, anyway, presuming you got it all down there intact, well then the crew would have their meal. And, of course, being at sea there was certain ones on watch, you know, certain ones that were working and so you would only have ... you might only have about half of the crew in there. When I say the crew I'm only talking about the sailors. The firemen used to look after themselves.

How many people are we talking about?

About twelve or fourteen. Then when they've had their breakfast and they're ... then you've got to clean up again. You take the empty kits back to the galley and you clean the ... then you've got to go and clean the quarters. It's the same thing again. Each room you've got to sweep it out and scrub it out. You've got to get on your hands and knees and scrub the decks because all the decks were wooden decks in those days. And they used to expect them to be nice and bright and shiny, you know. And while you're doing all this you had to be very careful that you were pretty quiet about it because you've got fellas who have been working on, say, the twelve till four watch who were, you know, had only got into bed at four o'clock in the morning and they didn't appreciate being woken up. So, you know, it was a bit of a ... you had to be very careful, that's all.

It was all right in port because everyone was out on deck, there was only you in the quarters, you know, to clean them up. But when you're at sea you sort of had to work around each person that was watchkeeping. She used to carry ... they'd have ... there'd be two on watch all the time and there'd probably be four off watch and there might be another five or six who are day workers, you see. Then, of course, you had to have everything ready for them when they came in off deck at smoko, at ten o'clock; you had to have the tea made and some bikkies on the table, that sort of stuff, you know. Then you had to clean up again after they went. You were virtually doing all the, as I say, they called it Peggying at sea; we'd call it housework or something I suppose.

(10.00) And the same again at lunchtime. You had the watch that was going on at midday. The watch that was going on at midday they had what they called a 'seven bell dinner'. That means at twenty past eleven they used to have their lunch. You used to have to make sure

they got a call at eleven o'clock, that gave them time to get up and have a shower or wash or whatever and they'd be in the mess room about twenty past eleven for what they call a 'seven bell dinner' and they'd have their lunch then. Then you'd have to clean that up because you got all the day workers coming in. And that's how it used to work.

And the same in the evenings and then at ... you'd work till about six o'clock by the time you finished tea and cleaned up after tea and then you'd ... well, there was nothing much to do on the ship then. See, there was only the bosun and myself in this poky little room, you know. I'd just go up there and get into bed and have a read sort of thing.

Why were you sharing a room with a bosun as opposed to the rest of the crew?

Well, that's the way it was in those days. The rooms down aft were four in a room and so you'd have ... you might have, just for argument's sake, you might have twelve on deck, so that would be three rooms of four each and then the deck boy and the bosun used to live on midships in a two-berth cabin amidship.

Did you work to the bosun? Was he responsible for organising you time?

Yeah, yeah ... he was your ... he was the ... onshore it is the same as a foreman in a factory; he was between the officers and the crew sort of thing. They'd tell the mate or the master would - the skipper - would tell him what they want done and it was his job to see that it got done.

So in a sense, you were near him so he could send you to run errands whenever it suited him?

Yeah, yeah; that's right, yeah.

And how did you get on with the bosun on that first trip?

Oh, all right. He was a pretty hard fellah, in fact, he gave me a belt over the ear one day for whistling - he was also very superstitious - and they used to ... I was whistling one day and he said to me, 'Stop whistling' and I said, 'Why?' and he said, 'Well, it brings bad weather'. Anyway, I must have forgot all about it and I started whistling again and he gave me a belt over the ear. I remember that very well - quite dreadful. But in those days it wasn't uncommon for a bosun of a ship to give the deck boy a bit of a clip over the ear but nowadays, of course, and even later than that, a few years after that, it was unheard of. You know, it was just a carry over from the sailing ships and, you know, in the old days when they used to think that was the right thing to do; it was the only way to teach the deck boy to fall into line and do what he was supposed to do.

Sounds like a fairly tough life for the deck boy.

It was, it was very hard, yes. Especially when you were in port. He'd go up the road and get blind drunk and come back and you're still in this poky little cabin with him - terrified of him, you know, especially if he was drunk - and this particular person was a bit of an obnoxious person when he was drunk and quite often, you know, I would go down aft and find

somewhere to even sleep on one of the ... on the deck in one of the rooms. Take a couple of blankets down there just to get away from him because I was frightened of him. Because I was only about fifteen at the time, you know, which is understandable I suppose.

So how long did that first voyage take?

Oh, we were away about eight weeks from Sydney. We went up to ... we loaded timber up in the Clarence River at South Grafton which shows the difference nowadays. You're flat out getting a trawler up there because it's silted up so much, you know. Of course, in those days they used to keep the dredges in the rivers and keep them dredged out. But we ... we went down to Melbourne I think with the timber and then across to Tassie and later there and back to Sydney.

What was the date that you'd signed on then?

February the 16th, 1942.

Right, well that one day after the fall of Singapore and just before Darwin's bombed. You've signed up in time for a fairly active life in terms of enemy action. When did you ... on that coast, what sort of precautions, you know, were taken on board that you, as a deck boy, were aware of?

Oh, well the ship was blacked-out all of the time. You know, at night-time you weren't allowed to have any lights on anywhere. They had ... that was one of my jobs with the bosun, after tea, before it got dark, we'd have to go around and make sure all the portholes were closed - sealed, you know - and a porthole has what they call a deadlight; it's an extra flap that comes down on the inside and you used to have to make sure they were all bolted so no light could get out. Everything had to be total darkness, you know, you were very aware of that especially if you went out on deck at night-time, if you had to for some reason or other, you couldn't take a torch with you or anything like that. You were fumbling round in the dark, falling over things. But I suppose that's the first thing that struck me is the ... the fact that everything had to be blacked-out.

(15.00) And what about lifeboat drill, things like that?

Oh yes. They'd have the lifeboat drill and they used to have the lifeboat swung out all the time ready to be lowered if you needed 'em. The ship also had what they call paravanes on it. Do you know what paravanes are?

Well, I do but if you could just explain it to the tape.

Oh it's a sort of a frame over the side, like an A-frame, that's bolted onto the ... or welded onto the side of the ship. A paravane looks like a torpedo and they used to, as soon as you cleared port, they had to put the paravanes out. The idea of the paravane was if there was a mine, if you came close to a mine, it would cut the wire off and the mine would come to the surface - that was the idea of them. But we had to make sure the paravanes were out all of the time and, as I say, the ship had to be blacked-out at all times. You used to ... the lifeboats were

always swung out ready to be lowered. This was on the, you know, on the Australian coast, this was anywhere I would presume.

How often would you do drill, like that drill?

About once a week; about once a week.

And things like life jackets, where would they be? You wouldn't be wearing them all of the time.

Oh no, no, you wouldn't because you wouldn't be able to do your work but you always had them at the foot of your bunk at night-time. In the day time it would be, well, it would be on your bunk because you wouldn't be in it, it would be sitting on your bunk. It wouldn't be stowed away in, you know, in a locker or anywhere like that, you always had to keep 'em pretty readily accessible. There was also a few extra ones up on the, you know, around the bridge sort of thing for people who were working up there in case anything happened.

There had been, even before the Japanese came into the war, there had been ships that had hit mines and things like that. What was the feeling? What was the talk about that sort of stuff? Was it something that you were thinking about?

It was always on your mind, you know. Like the ... 'cause being a deck boy you weren't brought into the conversation a lot in those days, you were expected to sit down and shut up; speak when you were spoken to and all that sort of thing. That was the attitude towards deck boys in those days. They weren't, what shall I say, brought into the conversation but used to listen to the ABs and that talking, you know, they'd be talking about something they heard on the radio or the skipper told them or some ship had been sunk or hit a mine or, you know, whatever. Actually there was, you know, there was quite a bit of ... what shall I say, action going on around the Australian coast in 1942. You know, like there was a ...

Particularly ... I mean, I was coming to ... I was just going to touch on a couple of other things first but I was coming to the week, for example, the end of May early June when the subs were attacking Sydney. There were a whole lot of ships attacked and a number sunk up and down the coast during that week, ten days or so. Just before we come to that, after your first voyage, I mean, did you feel you'd made the right career choice?

Well, I ... it was a very rough trip that I had. Well, I suppose if I did the same trip now I wouldn't see it as being so rough, you know, but it was pretty rough and putting up with this drunken bosun every time we got into port and I wasn't over impressed. When we got back to Sydney I left the ship and they ... the shipping master didn't do anything to make me stay because, I don't know why, if he realised my age or whatever, I just can't remember exactly now, but I do know in those days you were expected to stay at sea especially the deck boys and ordinary seamen to finish your time. But anyway, I left the ship and I was determined I wasn't going to go to sea again. I wasn't very impressed with it at all. But ... then I got a job ashore for about five or six months but then I went back to sea again.

So during that period that I just described before, you were on shore at that stage by the sound of it, when the submarines attacked Sydney?

Yeah, I was in Sydney then, yeah, for a couple of months after that then I went back to sea again.

Right, well when you went back presumably this time you had to join the union?

I would have been in, yes. Yeah, yeah ... in fact, I remember now, I was. I joined a ship called the *Tambua* belonging to CSR and I do know for a fact I was in the Seamen's Union then.

And was that a significant thing? Did you go to meetings or what happened?

Yeah, well, in those days they used to have - in fact, I think they still do - they had a stop-work meeting at the end of each month, the last Tuesday of every month. When I call it a stop-work meeting it doesn't mean that they were having a meeting preparing to stop work. That's just the name that they had given it.

(20.00) You were given time off from the ship, you were given nine to midday on the last Tuesday of every month if the ship was in port of course and you could go and attend the stop-work meeting and the stop-work meeting was just to keep you familiar with everything that was going on around the coast and, you know, trying to better you conditions and all that sort of thing.

Right. Well, what were the issues that were being discussed? You mentioned conditions, was there concern, for example, about the dangers caused by enemy action? Did that come into it at all?

Yeah, that would have been discussed about the, you know, what you're supposed to do and what you're not supposed to do. They used to have people there who would advise you and they'd get people there who had been on ships that had been sunk to tell their story so as you could, you know, it might help you if the same sort of thing happened to you.

Were they also agitating for say more pay because of the danger and things like that?

Yeah, yeah. That was coming into it. We used to get ... if you were in a war zone, you used to get I think it was thirty-three and a third per cent above your wages.

Was the Australian coast classified as war zone?

North of Townsville. The funny part about it down here wasn't classed as a war zone, if I remember correctly, and yet there was more going on down here - when I say down here, along the New South Wales coast - than there was up in the northern waters. But, because thirty ... when I first started going to sea I was on a pound a month. Thirty-three per cent of a pound isn't a lot of money (laughs). But an ordinary seaman was on about eight pound a

month, I think a bosun was on about twenty-four pound a month or something like that. It was around about that mark.

> So for that pound a month what did you get to supplement it? You obviously got your food and somewhere to sleep during the trip and somewhere to sleep during port maybe and anything else?

No, nothing else. You used to have to supply all your own clothes and you didn't ... you weren't issued with industrial clothing like you are nowadays. No, that was it.

> Own bedding?

They'd supply the linen, yeah. And, in fact, that's not long come in. Before that you had to supply your own. You had to carry your own sheets and blankets and things around with you but when I first started in 1942 the shipping company supplied the sheets and blankets and all that sort of stuff. They used to supply ... well, they didn't give you crockery, they gave you a tin plate, you know, an enamel plate. Each man had his own. They used to give you a tin ... a tin ... an enamel plate, a knife, a fork and a spoon and in the mess room, say, there was twelve, fourteen on deck, well you'd have twelve or fourteen little lockers that you kept your knife and your fork and your own gear in. And they also used to give you one tin of condensed milk and that had to last you for a week or ten days or something or other.

> It sounds like a fairly austere life.

Yeah, yeah, it was a bit.

> Did the union also get involved often - I don't know how you describe it - but it wouldn't be so much an industrial question but but more a - some people would call it a management question, for example, discussing whether or not the convoy system should be in use or whether, you know, some sort of tactic like that? Did they discuss those sorts of issues as well as pay and conditions?

No, no ... they ... I don't recall the seamen ever being consulted about how the convoy should be formed or if you should be in convoy or not. Quite often you'd leave port, you'd be in convoy, but because you were so slow they'd just leave you and just take off and you'd be choofing along behind there and smoke bellowing out all over the place and the convoy's gone miles and miles and miles away because they were a faster ships, you know. They just leave you to find your own way.

> Did that cause ... did the more experienced hands or perhaps even the less experienced hands ... (somebody calls in background) yes, this dangerous situation you were working in, was it damaging for morale? Did it affect attitudes?

No, I don't recall anyone being overly worried about it to be quite truthful. They weren't getting around with long faces and prophets of doom feeling that they were going to get sunk each trip they went out and all that sort of thing. No, everyone just went around their jobs in the normal manner.

(25.00) But quite a few people would have known men who had been sunk or would have been sunk themselves. There were quite a few killed on the coast.

Six hundred odd. Yeah, oh yes, yeah.

Six hundred merchant marine people were killed on the Australian coast?

Yep.

That's a lot.

Yeah.

Did you in 1942, did you see any evidence of enemy action?

Not while I was on that ... I ... not while I was on that ship I never saw anything outside, you know. But when you were in port you'd often see them bringing something in that had been badly damaged, you know. Because a lot of ships were hit but didn't sink and you'd see them coming in, into port. But, actually outside, I didn't see too much at all.

So people when they saw these ships being brought in, that didn't ... I mean, what sort of conversation would go on when this would happen?

Oh, they didn't seem to worry about it too much. They'd just say, you know, 'Bad luck, she got hit' sort of thing, 'Hope there wasn't too many killed' and all that but that would be about the end of it.

What sort of relationship did you have with the officers? You've mentioned the bosun, but the officers themselves.

In those days the ... you didn't have much to do with them at all apart from ... you see, on a ship you've got the skipper then you've got the mate, the chief officer. Now he is the one who deals with the crew. The second mate doesn't deal with them at all and the third mate doesn't deal with them at all. They just look after their own jobs, you know, like, the charts and navigating and all that sort of thing. They have no direct contact with the crew. Of course they'd say g'day to you if you're out on deck sort of thing but that's about all. But the mate was the only one who you had any real contact with. Of course the old man in those days, he was the Almighty. If you wanted to talk to him you'd have to ask the mate to, you know, make an appointment for you sort of thing. He was way up there. And that's the way you used to look at him, you know, like a kid of sixteen, the old man of the ship he was God.

What was the attraction of this life as opposed to working in that typewriter company?

Oh I don't know if I ever compared the two. I think I gradually got to like the sea better. I would never have ... well, I never ever did ... I never ever did give it away after that first few

months I had ashore. But, no, it's just one of those things that grows on you I guess, you know. It's just sort of life that, you know, that you like.

Were you having contact with your family while you were doing this?

Yeah, yeah. When I was in Sydney I used to go home and my mother died the day the war ended and my visits home used to get a little bit less frequent and ... but by that time it was nearly the end of the war.

Well, going back to 1942, how long were on that Australian coast working up and down there?

I was on the Australian coast and up in New Guinea and over in Fiji and that all through the war, well, like the last three years - '42 to '45.

When did you first go north to New Guinea?

I joined an American ship called the *Colorado* in Newcastle and we went up to New Guinea on that one and in those days the Americans had a lot of ships out here of their own and, of course, they commandeered a lot, especially the smaller ones and they formed what they used to called the American Small Ships. And they were all running round the New Guinea coast, you know, from port to port but the one I was on was running backwards and forwards between Australian and New Guinea taking all the supplies and that backwards and forwards.

Where to in New Guinea?

Milne Bay and, oh well, several ports up there, you know. Port Moresby, Milne Bay and ... but mainly that area. We sort of seemed to finish up back in Milne Bay for some reason or other. There was ... and of course in those days there was thousands and thousands of Yanks in Milne Bay. In fact, we were there when they ... they invaded Bougainville, you know. They all left from Milne Bay. We were there at that time, 25000 left there in one night.

What were the Americans like to work for?

Very good; very good. They were - compared with Australian ships - they were unbelievable, you know, the meals you used to get were very good; they used to issue you with clothing and all this sort of stuff; the money was good. That is why a lot of Australians used to go to the Americans ships, you know.

So, when you went up there, you went up there as, what, still a deck boy?

No, I was ordinary seaman by then. You used to have to do twelve months deck boy and two years ordinary seaman. By that time I was ordinary seaman and I was lucky to get a job as ordinary seaman on this particular ship.

I will just change the tape over.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

Identification: Side two, tape one. The interview with Alan Kidger. End of identification.

I do remember on that particular ship, that *Colorado*, where everywhere you went, of course, you were in convoy in those days and we left Townsville to go to Milne Bay. And there was eleven ... there was thirteen ships in the convoy and we ran up on a reef and ....

Just your ship?

No, all of them (laughs). The whole lot all bar two. I was just getting ready to go on watch at midnight, it was about ten to twelve, quarter to twelve or something, and I was in the bathroom hav ng a wash and the next thing I know we're aground and I look out and there was troop ships in the convoy and everyone's blowing hooters and lights coming on everywhere, although they were supposed to have all been blacked-out - there were lights coming on. They were all lowering their lifeboats and everyone crowding into lifeboats and all this sort of stuff, you know. But I don't know where they thought they would have gone because we were out in the middle of the Coral Sea, you know. But ...

How far out were you from, say, the Queensland coast?

A couple of hundred miles off the coast out in the middle of the Coral Sea. And anyway, of course the ... what we were terrified of was the Japs coming over because this was in 1943 and there was still a few of 'em around in those days, you know, and of course you were a sitting duck sitting up on the top of a reef. But we were there for about two days before we got off but some of them were a bit longer than that. One of them never got off at all: one of them, the wreck of it's still on there to this day I guess.

That wasn't a very proud moment in shipping history. I mean, was it an unknown reef or ...

No, no, no. It was well chartered. I don't know how they finished up on there, you know. Like in those days, as I say, in those days you were an AB or a deck boy or an ordinary seaman, and you weren't told anything. It was an error of navigation on somebody's part and they all just played follow the leader and went up there. And, of course, in those days there was a commodore ship, you see. One ship was the commodore and what he did, what he said went and I suppose he told them to change course, 'We're going to go on such and such a course', and the set got them and just drifted them, you know, drifted them over a bit and, well, away they went, up on this reef.

What were the comments? I mean, just the sort of conversation that was going on amongst the crew?

Well, this particular ship I was on ...

Actually if we could just wait for that. So I was asking about the conversation?

Well, on that the particular ship that I was on, the ... there was only myself and one other Australian on it. All the rest of the crew - there were about fifty-odd crew ... oh, no, there wouldn't have been that many. There would have been forty-two, forty-three crew on it - and we were the only Australians on it, but the thing that amazed us mostly was the fact that the Yanks, they used to exploit each other. We were running backwards and forwards to New Guinea and they would buy - you couldn't get grog in New Guinea, in fact it was hard to get it in Australia but the Yanks always seemed to get it - but in Townsville they'd buy all this wine for about, I don't know, say a pound a bottle and sell it up in New Guinea to their countrymen for about ten pounds a bottle, you know. And they had a quite a lucrative little trade going, a lot of them. And anyway, on this particular night that we went aground, they all got stuck into the wine that they had on board. I'll never forget it; it was called [Cordwell's?] wine. I didn't drink in those days, you know, and in fact I had a sip of that stuff and it was vile. Anyway I couldn't ....

They didn't want to leave it on board when they had to abandon ship?

Well that was the idea. They thought that we might have to abandon ship and they weren't going to leave any booze laying around - they were going to drink it. So they all got rolling drunk. And as I say, on an Australian ship or a British ship they'd never have tolerated that, that would have been taboo.

(5.00) It doesn't seem like a good time to get drunk.

No, no way. But another experience similar to that in Brisbane. We came back to Brisbane and of course in those days the ports were full. When I say full, there was lots and lots of ships in every berth that was available would be occupied by some sort of a ship. We got into Brisbane, it was at Newstead wharves, and we had to tie up outside of another ship. And it was about seven o'clock at night by the time we had tied up and everything and everyone's getting ready to go ashore. We'd been up in New Guinea for a few months - everyone's wanting to get ashore and have a bit of fun sort of thing - and the American MPs came down and they stood on the gangway and they said that no-one was allowed ashore. I can't remember the particular reason now but no-one was allowed ashore until, you know, the ship had been cleared by them, by the American authorities till probably the next day. Anyway, so they always seemed to have booze on board and a lot of 'em started ... the Americans, well, on that particular ship they were very keen on playing cards - there was always a game of cards going somewhere - so a few of them just settled down and started playing cards and a few of them proceeded to get drunk. And one of them was one of the engineers who was very adamant that he was going to go ashore: that no-one was going to stop him. Anyway, he kept going up to the MPs on the gangway and they'd pull their little old guns out and they'd say, 'You're not going ashore and that's all - if you try we'll shoot you'. And so anyway, the drunker he was getting the more determined he was that he was going to go ashore. So I remember, I was in playing cards in one of the mess rooms and this guy came in - and by this time it's about midnight and he's pretty full - and he said, 'I'm going to blow the ship up'. And, of course, no-one took much notice of him and anyway about ten minutes, fifteen minutes later he came in again and he said, 'I've shut down the valves' and 'You'd better get

ashore because she'll go up in about ten minutes' and staggered off out of the mess room and of course we all started looking at each other thinking, 'I wonder if he's fair dinkum', hoping he wasn't.

Anyway, someone said, 'I'd better go down and have a look down the engine room' and so they went down the engine room and sure enough he'd shut down all the safety valves on the ship and if'd been about another ten minutes she would have gone up.

Is this on the boilers?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Fortunately, it didn't happen but they carted him ashore very unceremoniously and we never saw him again, that fellah. He would have finished up in the stockade. They used to have what they called stockades out here then, you know, for the servicemen who played up.

But, I mean, you were a merchant marine, you weren't servicemen. Why were you being looked after by MPs, and why was he?

They never ... well, this is what was bugging them because they wouldn't explain to them why we couldn't go ashore. They just said, 'Well, you're not going and that's all there is to it till tomorrow'. And I don't think I ever did find out exactly why they wouldn't let us ashore.

What sort of relationship do you normally have with naval people?

Very good, very good. You mean merchant seamen and naval seamen? All right, yeah, they used to get on all right.

What about naval officers, do you have contact with them?

No, no ... they lived in a world of their own. They wouldn't even have contact with their own people.

So you were saying before that Milne Bay was a bit of a base. What, you'd go back and from Milne Bay or you'd just call in at Milne Bay, what would happen?

We were running between Townsville and Milne Bay - a few trips. Well, I wasn't actually in Milne Bay but a but Jap cruiser came in there one night. Milne Bay is an enormous big bay; it's like Sydney Harbour. And a Jap naval ship, a cruiser, came in and sank a couple of the ships alongside of the wharves there, you know.

Were you there?

No, I wasn't actually there at that particular night but that's what they did. The *Manunda* was in there at the time but she was a hospital ship - that was another ship I was on later on - but they never attacked her but they sank a few of the ships along and shelled the shore installations and then just turned around and went for their life.

When you were there was there ... did the Japanese fly over or attack in any other way?

Yeah, they often ... they used to fly over a lot, the reconnaissance plans and that, you know, but occasionally they'd let drop one or two but they'd ... you know, we used to go ashore to the movies and every now and then the sirens would go and everyone would head for the bush and all that sort of thing. The last place you would go would be back to your own ship because that's what they were after, you know, was the ships. So you'd just stay ashore until it was all over and emerge out of the bush and wander off back to the ship again.

(10.00) What sort of base was Milne Bay?

I beg your pardon?

Could you describe Milne Bay at that time?

It's a beautiful, beautiful big harbour but apart from ... there was a place called Gili Gili, that was a bit of a village, but we never went anywhere near there. Where we were was just a few makeshift wharves and thousands and thousands and thousands of troops. That's the only part I saw of it. There was no township there or anything like that. I think there might have been at this place they used to call Gili Gili but we never ever got there.

And what did you do when you were there, I mean, at this stage what were your duties? You said you were a seaman, an ordinary seaman.

Well, I was ordinary seaman there. Well, we used to just keep watch and watch all the time. You'd do ... there always had to be somebody on board the ship, you know, in case anything happened. Like they wanted to let her go and get away from the wharf quickly. And, well, just the normal duties, you know, painting and keeping her clean and all that sort of stuff. Those sort of duties never seem to alter much on a ship irrespective of whether, you know, the war was on or not. Your quarters always had to nice and clean and you ... there was always something to be painted and cleaned up and that.

So you went ashore just for films and the like?

Yeah, yeah ... there's nothing else there. There's nothing to go ... the only reason you went ashore was to get off the ship for a while, you know. There was nothing there: there was no shops or towns or girls or anything like that.

The way the Americans organised their ships how did it seem? Was it different from the Australian examples that you'd got used to?

Yeah. The Australians were very much like the British. Everything had to be spot-on, you know. With the Americans during the war, and maybe it was the better way, that anything went sort of thing and they had to ... if there was a job to be done then you had to get it done, you know, and that was all there was to it. But on the ships themselves they liked plenty of work but they fed you well and paid you well which they didn't do on British ships. They used to ... they liked plenty of work and they didn't like to pay you or give you any conditions,

you know. I remember one particular ship I was on was the *Tambua*, we were going up north once again, and she never even had a fridge in her for the crew. There was fridges in midships for the officers but none for the crew, you know. And of course in those days you had to ... they used to say, 'Well, we couldn't get them', you know, 'The army's got them all' and all this sort of stuff. But I do remember on that particular ship we said, 'Oh well' - well, I didn't have much to say in those days because I was only a deck boy, but delegates apparently said to them, 'Well, this ship stays here until we do get a fridge. We're going up north', you know, and there was one there within about four or five hours there's one on the ship. But that's what they used to try and put over you all the time to keep ... you know, the conditions were appalling on the Australian coast when I first started going to sea - the living conditions I'm talking about.

But the Australian seaman got a lot of conditions through the war, you know, because they just used to threaten that they wouldn't sail or something like that and a lot of people didn't like them for that. You know, they reckoned they were using ... but if it hadn't have been for that, well, they'd probably still be way behind the eight ball.

Do you remember any other industrial disputes during the war?

No, I don't to be quite truthful. The people who were, in those days, notorious for industrial disputes would be either painters and dockers or the wharfies and they never seem to have any problems at all. I think it was probably the same thing again, that they ... would probably say to the shipowner, 'Well we want such and such' or 'We want so and so', you know, 'And if we don't get it we'll be stopping work' and of course they'd give them anything to get the ships away then ... they'd do anything. 'Cause, admittedly, it might be industrial blackmail, I suppose it was. In today's jargon you'd call it industrial blackmail, wouldn't you?

Yes ... or just bargaining. Were you involved very much at this latter stage? I mean, you describe the procedure before, how the union would meet. Did you every get involved in the meetings later on, during the war?

No, but it always went on. Even after the war they still had their stop-work meetings and they still do to this day. At the last Tuesday of every month they have a meeting and they get their heads together sort of thing, you know, which seamen used to look forward to mainly because of the social part of it. Find out what was going on on the other ships and, you know, that sort of stuff.

(15.00) What about the way in which the crew was organised?. You described that rather obnoxious relationship with the bosun, was that sort of thing likely to happen in an American ship?

No. No, no, they ... well, the ... they didn't carry deck boys on those ships for a start and I don't remember any ... there was no animosity of any description, you know, amongst the crew. They all used to get on pretty well together; in fact, they used to get on pretty well on most of the ships. Occasionally you'd strike one of the older ones who got a bit obnoxious like that particular person I first had to ... met. But, I found, later on on ships I was on, you know, when I was so young because as I say I was only fifteen when I started going to sea, but there always seemed to be somebody there who used to sort of protect you. Like, for instance,

if you went ashore you'd never be able to go in a pub or anything like that. If you went up the road with the ABs, you'd stay outside of the pub - they'd never tolerate you being inside of a pub.

Why was that?

Well, you weren't old enough for a start and they used to ... they just wouldn't let you drink, you know. I suppose we might even call it the fatherly thing but they'd make sure the young blokes were looked after even though they used to make 'em, you know, work pretty hard on the ships and all that sort of thing and you were expected to be their flunky a lot, but if you went ashore and got into any trouble or anything like that, they'd be the first ones there to help you. You know, it was good that comradeship was there.

So there was a sense of comradeship. I mean, sometimes when I've heard people talk about shipboard life I've had the feeling that they were actually rather divided societies with small groups who really didn't have much to do with each other or when they did they tended to be in conflict?

Yeah, well, that used to apply on what we call the home boats - the Pommy ships - and even the Australian ships. Like, for instance, you go back to the *Matthew Flinders*, you had about twelve or fourteen on deck and you also had about twelve or fourteen firemen. Well, they lived in different quarters to what you did. In fact, well, on that particular ship you all lived down aft but they used to live one side and you used to live the other side - the firemen I'm talking about and the sailors - and you very seldom had any thing to do with each other. Even when they went ashore, the firemen would be up one end of the bar and the sailors would be up the other.

Then another ship I was on was called the *Koomilya*, the sailors lived fore'ed and the firemen lived aft. And ... going further back to that, the big Pommy ships, the ships like the *Port Caroline*, they used to carry about thirty or forty down below and they would live aft and the sailors fore'ed and they were always fighting, you know - I mean real fights. And they'd get ashore or even when they were in port, you know, come back full of booze and want to go up and get stuck into the sailors. They were a bad lot, you know, very bad.

What were they fighting about? Why the fights?

They fight over anything (laughs). They just didn't like each other sort of thing, you know. And then, of course, you had ... the ship was completely divided, especially those Pommy ships, you'd have the officers, they were in their little part of the ship; you had the sailors and the firemen and none would have anything to do with the other. Like the sailors wouldn't have anything to do with the officers apart from, you know, the normal daily work and the firemen and the sailors would be fighting amongst themselves all the time. And, you know, I mean really bad blues sometimes.

But in those days the worst used to seemed to be what they used to call the Liverpool Irishmen, oh, they were a real bad lot and they just seemed to enjoy, you know, ... I suppose today we'd call them louts or ... that's what they were. They go ashore and get drunk or bring some booze back and get drunk and all they wanted to do is have a fight. So they wouldn't

fight amongst themselves, they'd go up and want to pick on the sailors you see. There'd only be about ten or twelve of us and there'd be about twenty or thirty of them.

> I mean, in terms of looking for causes for this, the rather barbaric living conditions they were living in, do you think it sort of bred that sort of lifestyle or ...

Yes, yes, definitely. Later on when the ships got better conditions on them, when you had decent room to yourself, you know, and they brought in single berth cabins on ships and you had a nice room to yourself and you might even have carpet on the floor and all this sort of stuff and you kept your own room nice and neat and tidy - there was no deck boy to look after you, you know - and also the ships became oil burners and they did away with ninety per cent of the firemen instead of carrying about thirty on board, they'd have about four and then things got a lot better. But before, when I first started going to sea they, you know, used to have the big crews in the ships because they were coal burners you'd have twelve or fourteen men in each watch and there's three watches so they had to have a lot of people down below and there was a lot of bad eggs amongst them. Well let's face it, half of 'em were the bloody ... all the riffraff from around Liverpool and Belfast and these sort of places.

(20.00) But on the American ships there was none of that ... there was none of that. They all got on very well. Even the officers and the crowd used to mix very well. You'd be down having a game of poker at night-time and the chief officer would be on the other side of the table sort of thing, you know. But you'd never see that in British or Australian ships.

> When did you get onto British ships?

Oh, I was only in a couple of them. I didn't like them, they were ... for obvious reasons. But I used to stay with the Australian ships and mainly because of the ... well, getting home. I was married very early and mainly so that you could get home and also you were getting just a wee bit more money than you'd get on the Pommy ships.

> So, in the midst of all this, perhaps if I could ask you: How did you meet your wife-to-be?

Oh, we grew up together; we went to school together, Mosman Public School. But I didn't tell you while I was there that ... one part of it during the war I was in the *Manunda* which was a hospital ship and in those days you used to have to go to the pick up and the chief officer of the ship would come up and he'd say to the union representative, 'I want a deck boy or an ordinary seaman or three ABs' or whatever it was for whatever ship it was and you used to have to line up if there was about ten or fifteen of you in there. You had to line up and he'd walk down the line and pick out the one he wanted, you see, the one he thought looked the best. The chief officer.

> The chief officer would?

Yeah, yeah. He was the guy who used to come and pick the crew up.

> What was the role of the union rep in that situation?

Oh, he was there to see to see that the fellow was in the union. When the chief officer would say, 'Right, you. I'll have you', then you had to pull your union book out of your pocket and show it to the union rep to show him that you were a financial member of the Seamen's Union. Then you'd go over to the shipping office and sign on and the chief officer, or sometimes the second mate used to do it, he'd say, 'Right, be down on board by one o'clock' whatever it was and, you know, with your gear. So you'd have to race home and get your gear. Sometimes you'd ask them where the ship was going but they wouldn't tell you, you know. So, 'Well, how long am I going to be away? I want to tell my wife' or some .... They say, 'Oh, I don't know' even if they had ... well, they probably didn't even know themselves because in those days you used to ... your orders were getting changed everywhere you went, you know. They might think, 'Oh well, we're going to take a load of general up to Townsville and then come back' then you get to Townsville and say, 'Oh we're going up to Milne Bay' or 'Go round to Darwin' or something like that, you know. You might be away one month, you might be away six months, you wouldn't know.

But with the *Manunda* they wanted two deck boys: one for the *Centaur* and one for the *Manunda* and there was another chap and myself there, we were the only two there. So we thought, 'Oh well, we've got it made here. We've got no-one to compete with' so he said to me, 'Which one do you want?' and I said, 'Oh well I'll have the ...' No, I said to him, sorry, I said to him, 'Which one do you want' and he said, 'Well, I've just come out of the *Manunda*. I'll go in the *Centaur* and you take the *Manunda*'. So the chap came in and said, 'I want a deck boy for the *Manunda*', well that was me and he said, 'I want another one for the *Centaur*' - you know, another officer came in - so this other chap took the *Centaur* and she sailed that night and she got sunk the next day and he went with it.

Do you remember hearing the news? Was it publicised much at the time?

Yes, yes, yeah. Oh yes, headlines everywhere: this hospital ship being sunk. But I joined the *Manunda* and we lay ... we also left the wharf at Darling Harbour to go up to New Guinea again and we got down in what they call [Athol Bight?] where the zoo is and they ... she anchored down there for the day and, of course, on the ship rumours are flying around all over the place 'Why aren't we going? Why aren't we going?' and that's when we heard about the *Centaur* had been sunk and they were supposed to have said - the Japs are supposed to have said - I don't know whether it's true or not that if the *Manunda* poked her head outside they'd sink her too you see. So anyway, we stay alongside ... we went back alongside of the wharf in Sydney, in Darling Harbour, and we were there for about four or five days and MacArthur who was the head of the American forces in those days, in fact he was the head of everything, he sent down orders that the *Manunda* was to be changed to what they called an AMC - an armed merchant cruiser - and no longer to be a hospital ship you see. So we ... they brought down hundreds and hundreds of gallons of paint - grey paint - and we had to ... it was our job to paint her grey. Paint off the red crosses off her and all that sort of thing. And while we were doing this they were putting guns all over her. They made what they call an AMC - an armed merchant cruiser - out of her.

We had to go to gunnery school at Woolloomooloo to learn how to fire Oerlikans and out to Long Bay near the gaol there and learn how - the rifle range there somewhere - and learn how to fire machine-guns and all this stuff. All this took about a couple of months. And then we

went out of Sydney Heads and we fired them all off and made sure everyone knew what they were doing. They'd taken all the hospital staff off her by this time, you know. Back alongside the wharf and we stayed there for about another week or something and then they came down and they said that MacArthur had no right, or no legal right, under the Geneva Convention, you know, to change her from a hospital ship to a AMC, that she's got to go back to a hospital ship. So then we had to turn around and paint her white again and take all the guns off. It all took about three months you know. But ...

What did you think of that as an example of wartime experience?

Oh, we thought it was a bit of a joke really. But, you know, it was a perfectly good hospital ship just laying in Sydney Harbour there for about three - when she was really needed up around, you know, in the north and especially in New Guinea. But ... that's what the Yanks are like: if they wanted something done they did it whether, you know, whether anyone agreed with them or not.

How long were you with the Americans?

Oh, about seven months I think I was on that *Colorado*, that ship called the *Colorado*, then I left her. What did I do then? Then I joined another one called the *Tambua*, so I was in her twice running over Fiji during the war, you know.

The Fiji route, what was that ... could you tell me about that route, what that was like?

Oh, that was like a holiday compared with the rest on the Australian coast because it was ... although there was thousands of Americans over there during the war, I think it was something like 35000 Americans in Suva when we were there, but it was pretty much like a peacetime run because you were only taking food stuff and general cargo over there, you know, and coal. But you weren't carrying ammunition or anything like that.

One ship I was on we had ... we were running around to a place called Derby around in West Australia, you know, and she was full of forty-four gallon drums of high octane petrol and the Japs were in Borneo there and they used to send reconnaissance planes down there to Derby and that's a terrible place Derby, there's a thirty foot rise and fall in the tide and when the tide goes out the ship's sitting on the bottom. So you've got no chance of getting away if there's a raid, you know. Anyway, they used to come over every now and then but fortunately while I was there they never did bomb it but they did a couple of times I believe. I don't think it was anything very heavy, it was around about the time of Darwin - just after wasn't it?

So you were mainly round the Australian coast, up in New Guinea, across to Fiji. In terms of getti g ashore, was there - outside of Australia - were there any ports where you'd get ashore and see some of the conditions there?

Well, nowhere in New Guinea; I never went ashore anywhere up there. And Fiji was all right, you used to go ashore there okay.

And what did you find in Fiji? Ashore, what would you do?

Well, just roam around. Buy souvenirs to bring home the same as any other tourist does nowadays I guess.

Were you subjected to the MPs when you were doing that?

No, they never used to worry us because we were always in civilian clothes, you know. But the MPs never used to bother us. There'd be naval police around the wharves and that sort of thing, you know, you were expected if you were off one ship you were expected when you came back to go straight back to that ship. You couldn't go roaming around going on board other ships or anything like that.

Was there a feeling of - how would you describe it - of patriotism or anything like that amongst the sailors? A feeling of heightened sense of, you know, we've got to do our bit for the war effort, was that a feeling?

Amongst the seamen? Yeah, yeah, I would say so, yeah. You know, like, it was more or less a standard joke, if you want, on board a ship anyone started whingeing about something, there'd always be somebody else that'd say, 'Well, there's a war on you know'.

And they'd mean it, it would be ...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So even though conditions were getting better people were also very conscious of not asking for too much?

That's right. Yeah, yeah ... yeah, you know, they sort of adopted the attitude, 'Well, these things will come better'. Like when it was obvious the war was starting to wind down well things will get better as soon as it's finished and just cop it sweet until such time as it does finish and that's more or less what happened. We got a few conditions during the war that we normally wouldn't have got if it hadn't have been for the war like, for instance, going into the tropics, a fridge in the mess room to put your butter in and those sort of things.

But after the war they ... we, you know ....

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

Identification: Second tape of the interview with Alan Kidger. First side of the second tape.

Wartime, now, did you find that you were getting new raw crews being brought into it; people wouldn't have normally been involved in peacetime?

On merchant ships?

Mmm.

No, not really, no.

So, what about old ships being brought back into service?

Oh yeah. There was lots of those but the seamen themselves were just guys who happened to be going to sea when the war broke out and they didn't leave and actually there might have been some that came back to sea during the war, in fact there was. Especially I suppose some of them might have eligible to go into other services and they probably thought, 'Oh well, I'm better off going to sea which I know rather than go into the navy' or into the army where they wouldn't want to go. So they came back on the merchant ships.

A lot of people would say it was safer to go under the navy than the merchant marines?

(Laughs) yeah, it could have been. With the system there, the pick-up that I was telling you about, you know, the chief officer of the ship used to come up and he might want a couple of ABs for a certain ship and there was also a chap from the manpower at the pick up all the time. And if he ... he used to be there watching the things pretty closely and if he saw a chap wasn't volunteering for a ship, you know, well he'd go along and say to them, 'Well, listen. You've been here for a week now and I haven't seen you stand for any jobs. You'd better get one next week or otherwise you go into the army'. Or they used to put them into that Civil Construction Corps, you know. So they'd very smartly get themselves back to sea. But, of course, in those days, during the war, it was pretty hard to get seamen, you know, because they were, as I say, a few of them left I suppose; a lot of them left and there was a lot more ships brought into service so they needed more seamen.

Did that mean that there were a lot more, say, people who were being officers who wouldn't have been officers?

No, no, because the ... to become an officer you had to pass the Board of Trade certificates and that would happen on American ships, it happens on Greek ships and everywhere today. If a person was a pretty good hand on the ship they'd say, 'Right, you're the third mate' but it doesn't happen of British or Australian ships, you must pass those certificates ... exams before you can sail in that capacity.

Did the experience of the war, did it affect you politically, affect your attitude to society - Australian society?

No, no, not at all; not at all.

I mean, during that time were you very interested in politics?

No ... no. It was a bit hard not to be to be quite truthful because on the Australian waterfront everywhere you went there was ... you were amongst wharfies and seamen and painters and dockers and all these people who, of course, were all very much Laborites and it was very hard to grow up and not be a Laborite. But ....

You didn't want to?

I've never been particularly interested in politics or being involved in it actively. Like being ... I didn't want to be delegates on ships and all that sort of stuff because I wasn't interested in it, especially the political part of it. I don't ... you know, as I say, I just wasn't interested in that.

The end of the war, what were you doing?

I was still on the ships: I stayed on them many years after the war.

And whereabouts were you at the end of the war?

Oh, at the end of the war I was on a ship called the [*Mullumbimby*?]. It was a very good little job and it suited me because it used to get home to Sydney fairly often - we were just running between Sydney and Tassie. You know, you were away for about three weeks and home for about a week which was about the best you could get.

(5.00) During this time you mentioned that you were married. When were you married?

How do you mean, when was I married? I was married when I was about twenty-one I think. I'd just turned twenty-one when I got married.

So that was after the war?

Ah, yeah. Just after, yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, a couple of years after.

So, at the end of the war, did it bring a feeling of relief or ....

Yeah, the relief came on the ships, you could notice it. Like a big sigh of relief where you could walk around out on deck at night-time and that when you were at sea without worrying about having all the lights out and all that sort of stuff. That was beautiful because it was something that I was never used to. But ... you didn't have to worry about putting paravanes over the side or having the lifeboats slung out over the side or carrying life jackets around with you wherever you went. You didn't have to worry, you know, it was just like a big weight off your shoulders actually.

And you stayed in the ships and looking back on it now did the war really change significantly your life or you think that you would have gone along the same sort of way in which you did even if there hadn't been the war?

Yes, I think so. I think I would have ... I don't think it changed my life much, in fact, I'm sure it didn't. There just happened to be a war on when I went to sea sort of thing. Well, actually, you know, when you're fifteen you think, 'Oh well, all I want to do is go and have a look and see what the war's like and see what it's all about' until you got there, it was a little bit different (laughs) and you're wishing you were back in Sydney. But the ... I do remember that. You know, all I wanted do was get away to sea.

How was it different from what you expected?

It was a harder life; it was very hard, you know. When I say hard, the whole life was very hard in those days in comparison to going to sea nowadays.

Do you think the merchant marine and the merchant mariners were properly recognised after the war?

No, no, no ... from what I heard about it, you know, the ones I had the sympathy for, I mean, on the Australian coast here, as I said, there was 600-and-something killed on the Australian coast during the war and when the war finished, well, everything just sort of went back to normal and no-one seemed to worry too much about it but the ones that I did have a bit of sympathy for was the British merchant seamen. There was 35000 British merchant seamen killed during the war and, you know, they got nothing. When I say they got nothing: they got no recognition at all, did they? No-one said, 'Thank you very much'. As far as the attitude towards them was concerned was that: 'Oh well, that was your job, you're supposed to be there' and just ... the people in London got a bad time too, you know.

The British merchant seamen were always very much oppressed even up to several years after the war. But that was their system. Like the Australian system was a little bit different to theirs. It was the same in lots of ways but it was ... we were never - what shall I say - oppressed like they were - the seamen I'm talking about. On the Australian ships if you didn't like a ship you just got out of it. It didn't matter, as long as you were on the Australian coast you just got out of it and went up and pick-up and got another ship sort of thing. But on the British ships you couldn't do that you see. They'd leave home - England - and they'd might be away for anything up to two and a half years if they were on a tramp and so they didn't have much choice. They couldn't get off down the west coast of Africa or somewhere and go home but we could. That's where we were lucky I guess.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A