



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	Richard William 'Bill' Hughes as a Chief Steward, Merchant Navy, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45.

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TAPE 1, SIDE A

Identification: This is Side 1, Tape 1, of an interview recorded on 24th January 1990 about merchant seamen. It's an interview with Mr Bill Hughes and begins in five seconds from now.

Bill Hughes, where and when were you born?

Um, in a small village in England, East Coker in Somerset in the 26th of June 1917.

Tell us something about the circumstances of your family - your mother and father.

Well, my dad was from New South Wales - Sydney, New South Wales. He joined up in the forces at the outbreak of the first world war. In fact, I think he must have joined up the first day according to his regimental number. He joined the 6th Light Horse Division and was soon on his way to Egypt. He went through the Egypt campaign and from there to Gallipoli. Owing to the circumstances at the time, the men were sent without their horses because the situation was so acute. Er, on Gallipoli he was also with two of his brothers. Uh, I do have a newspaper clipping that states that he was `Missing - Believed Killed in Action'. Er, his brother was. Ah, he was amongst the second last group to leave Gallipoli in the early hours of the day they were evacuated and was taken to England where he recuperated at Salisbury Plains. Ah, whilst he was there he used to go down to a small village out of Yeovil called East Coker - that's where he met my mother - and eventually he, they were married. They were married in Weymouth in June 1916 and, having recovered from his ordeal in Gallipoli, he was then sent to the Western Front and served on the Somme. I was born in June 1917 and in ... I, I, naturally I don't remember the details of that, excepting that I've been to the cottage where I was born. He was back and forth to the Western Front until finally, about a month prior to the end of the war, he was shot in the head and, a very serious wound, which brought him back to England for recuperation. And then, in the latter part of 1918, my mother and father and I, we left England on a troop ship for Australia. That was the RMS *[Osterby?]* - one of the the P & O boats. We arrived in Australia in end of January in 1919 and I have no recollections of that but I do have some very early recollections of my early childhood - just brief flashes of them. We lived in a boarding house in Annandale in Sydney and various other places. I went to school in Leichhardt. Then we moved to Brighton-Le-Sands where my dad started a fruit shop and a run, and I had my schooling there. Eventually we went to Kogarah, Canterbury - where I also went to school. Ah, that was in the, right in the depression years, and things were pretty tough. My dad, by that time, had studied and became a civil engineer and was working with the various councils at the time. But with the depression as it was he was out of work and finally, in order to help feed the family, I arranged to leave school when I was thirteen and began work in a factory.

Just before we go on from there. Tell us a bit about your mother. Did all this have any apparent effect on her?

Ah yes. Mum was one of the Pommie war brides, as they was called at the time, and she was resented by her, her husband's family unfortunately, because they wanted him to marry an Australian girl. So she was a stranger out here on her own. Unfortunately, her mother died when she was very very young and her father deserted her and left her in the care of her

grandmother. So she was more or less an orphan to all extents and purposes. She was alone in the world when she was out here in Australia.

(5.00) But, she was a terrific person, very attractive woman, and she brought up not only myself - I had a brother and a sister were born in Australia after we arrived here - and she was a terrific person, and she died in 1983 in her eighty-eighth year. Unfortunately my dad, he died in December 1969 when he was sixty-six years of age and that, his early death was brought on by what he had suffered in the first world war.

How did he feel as a result of the service that he'd given, the wounds that he'd sustained and then to be out of work?

Well, I can recall in my early childhood that all the returned men, if they were in businesses of any type, they always had outside after their name `ex-AIF' and they were pretty well proud of it. My dad was too, and he never received any pension whatsoever for his disabilities at the time. And in fact, he was a very proud man and I don't think he even wanted it - he just wanted to make his own way. And, ah, if I'd a known, and of course if I was older possibly, I'd a done something about it, but I wasn't aware what was going on. In fact, I didn't even know that he had a silver plate in his head. This, I found it after his death, when my uncle told me. But he was a very proud man, and when this ... when the 1939 war started, I had come back from New Guinea on a ship and thinking that it would only last for a few weeks, I raced off to the recruitment office to try and join up in the army to go overseas. My dad came with me and volunteered with me. I was rejected on account of being in the merchant service. I was told I was in a reserved occupation and I would have to stay there. My dad was rejected on account of his age, so he immediately then turned around and joined up with the CCC.

Which stands for?

Ah, the Civil Construction Corps, and he finished most of the war working on the road from Alice Springs to Darwin. In fact he was in charge - being a civil engineer, he was in charge of part of that. In fact, amongst his papers I found a poem that was written by his men - `In praise of Bert Hughes'. So, in a way, he did his bit.

Was he embittered at all though?

No, I don't think he was embittered. In fact, he never talked about it. He never talked about his experiences. Er, it's only since his death that I have been able to piece together his record of the war from .... Unfortunately, my mother destroyed all papers revelant [sic] to his side of the family after his death and the Hughes ....

Was that because she was bitter about their lack of acceptance of her?

I think possibly it was. She never confided in me about the matter, but there was letters that I was hoping to get hold of - I knew she had them; I had had a brief glimpse of them one time - because it would have given me an opportunity to trace my relatives. For instance, I understand and believe that Billy Hughes, the wartime Prime Minister in the first world war, is related to my side of the family. I know that my grandfather - my father's father - and he were in business at one time in Redfern, but I have never been able to find a direct contact. I've read as much as I could about it. I know that they lived very close together and were

associated at that time, but no definite proof. And there are other branches of the Hughes family scattered throughout New South Wales. I know one branch at one time owned a string of hotels. I have another relative - uncle - who owned the Helensburgh coal mines at Helensburgh down near Bulli. In fact, he built the Helensburgh village for his workers. Dad never mixed with his family very much. He was with his own immediate family, but no, he was never bitter.

> Was he touched by the fact that his side of the family wouldn't accept your mother?

I think possibly he was. I think he was. Not all rejected her. Some of his brothers and sisters - he had about eight or nine altogether - they were friends right through, ah, up until the time she died.

> As a school boy, were you able to get to know your father well? You said he didn't talk about the war, but was he a close man? Did he keep himself to himself?

Yes. I never knew my father really and, of course, ah, I, starting work at thirteen in 1930 - August 1930 - I then more or less went my own way, as kids do at that age. Then in the middle '30s I made an attempt to go to sea. It was always in my blood - I don't know why - but I've since found out on my trips overseas tracing my family history, that quite a number of my relatives on both sides of the family had sea experiences.

(10.00) And I went away as assistant purser in the middle '30s to the islands and then from then on I didn't see a great deal of my family. When I did come back to port, it was only for a brief stay, and then I was off again. And right through the war years I was very seldom back here, and after the war, ah in the meanti.... After the Darwin raids I got married. I married a lass of Hobart, Tasmania, who originally I knew the family in New Guinea prior to the war. And unfortunately the marriage wasn't a success and when the war was over and I did come back to Australia in early '46, it was impossible to carry on so we separated. I came to the mainland and moved around various states, going back to Tasmania occasionally. In the meantime a son was born and he .... I left, finally I left Tasmania in 1953 and came to Melbourne and started a new life for myself. And I had no contact with my wife or my son. It was a pretty torrid sort of a separation and I thought it in his best interests that I just got out of his life, but trying to keep a contact with him, which I found was impossible. In 1956 I got, I remarried with my present wife and we have two daughters and we have lived here ever since.

> It sounds a little bit like the effect of the first world war started a process of fragmentation. In a way it seems you're almost haunted by a ghost of the father that you never quite found, and you're sort of searching more for the family and yourself
> and ...

Yes. Um, it's funny. When I was young I really didn't worry much about my family and associates and family trees and things like that, until after I was married and I had two daughters here, and I suppose my eldest daughter was about eight or nine at the time, and the youngest - Amanda - she was four years younger. They came to me one day and they said,

`Dad, who are we?' and I said, `What do you mean by that?' And she said, `Well, we have to do a family tree project at school and ...' she said, `I don't know who we are'. And it was a pretty good question because I, frankly, I didn't know myself. She said, `Can you give me some details of our family - your family?' And I sat down, and all I could think of ... I knew my father and my mother, and my brother and my sister. I knew that I had a ... the grandfather and a grandmother at one time because I remember visiting them when I was a kid. They lived in Redfern and he had a wooden leg. And so I put down `grandfather, wooden leg'. I didn't even know his name. I didn't even know my grandmother's name. And when I looked at it I thought, `This is a pretty poor effort to hand in as a family tree', and I still have it. I still have the copy that she took to school. And it began to prey on my mind and unfortunately my father died - I was in Melbourne when he died. He died on Christmas Eve in '69 and I had to, I couldn't get transport up there by rail, air or anything. I drove up just in time to, for the funeral. And it was a sad occasion, and that's when I started to realise I didn't know my father.

When you were thirteen, at that time when things began to get hard, if your father wasn't talking to you much, what did the tradition of the ANZACs and Gallipoli mean to you, because it was something that was raised often at school?

It was, but my father would never talk about it. He ... not that I asked him that many times. In fact, it didn't worry me at all in those days. I knew that I was born in England. I used to have dreams as a kid of one day going back to England. In fact, it always has been my object in life to go back to England. My mother couldn't talk about her life in England without crying - it used to upset her so much. And it was just one of those blank periods possibly in my life as far as that was concerned. But no, my dad was a very very reserved sort of a person.

You would have known he was a soldier...

Oh yes.

Did you have aspirations somehow or other to carry on that tradition as a young boy?

Well, as I said, when war broke out I couldn't get up to the recruiting depot at Belmore in Sydney quick enough to join up.

What were conditions like at the time when your father lost employment and there was not much work around. You had to leave school. What was ... was it bread and dripping? Was that ...?

It, you're right there. I used to take bread and beef dripping to school for my lunch. I always remember that, with salt on it. And at the time I enjoyed it - crisp, crunchy crusts on the bread and the beef dripping with salt - I enjoyed it but when you got it every day of the week, more or less, it was pretty tough.

(15.00) No, it was very very tough in those days. We were living on .... Ah, we weren't getting the dole, we were getting food coupons which entitled us to so much meat from the

butchers, so much groceries from the grocer and the greengrocer and so on. Ah, mum, my mother took in boarders. Although we only had a small house and people being evicted from their own homes, and there was always people wanting accommodation - knocking on your door. And finally we at one time we had a family of three - a mother and two grown up sons - plus another boarder jammed in our house, all sleeping on the back verandah in a row of beds.

What was the combined effect of all this? Did you feel poor at the time, or was it generally a happy period for you?

No, I didn't feel poor because it'd always been, I'd always been like that. All my life we were living in pretty poor circumstances. No, I didn't feel poor. I was fed reasonably well. We never starved. We were clothed - not a great variety. The house we had was rented. I remember when they were doing ... I suppose I was eleven or twelve in the bad years of the depression that we moved a number of times. I would come home from school and find a note on the door, `We have moved to such and such', and the address would be written on the thingo.

Was that a bit frightening?

It was, until I became .... We must have done that five or six times and then I found out my mother used to move if she could save a shilling a week in the rent. Men used to come round knocking on your door and offering you a rent. They would find out how much you were paying and they'd undercut that by even sixpence, and then they'd have a horse and cart and they would offer to move your possessions. Sometimes we only moved into the next street. But at my ... that time to me was a bit of a novelty because we would move into new house, and there was always the thrill of searching of the outhouses to see if there were any treasures hidden and things like that. No, it didn't strike me that we were poor, only it got down to things like my brother wanted to join the Cubs. I had been rejected because they couldn't afford the uniform for me to join the Cubs. Then he, with his mates in the Cubs, wanted to join so there was a family conference and finally, with some second hand clothing, they managed to get a uniform together for him and he became a member of the Cubs, and I couldn't be. And that sort of rankled me a little bit.

Why couldn't you be? There wasn't enough for ...?

(Laughing). That's when I started to realise we were pretty poor.

Just before you left school, what ideas did you have about what you were going to do with your life? Did you have any particular aspirations?

Yes, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do but I realised that unless I did something, I wouldn't get anywhere. I would always be in this circumstances. And it came to a point, I was thirteen years and two months old - I remember that - and I was at Canterbury High School and I had a teacher there by the name of Bates and he used to belt the hell out of me and one or two other kids. We were the slow ones of the class I suppose, in his eyes, and he used to jump questions at us and if we didn't answer promptly we got hauled out and we'd get a sixer across the hands, or across the back of the knees. And it become a bit of a ritual. I was always getting it, and finally I got that stage that I used to go to school knowing full well that I'd be copping some cane that day. On this particular occasion he - I always remember it

very vividly - he had a piece of gelignite. Course he said it was, and he lit it, and of course half the class scampered out and he said, `It can't do any damage. It'll only splutter and go out'. He was giving us some sort of a lecture on physics or something or other - I just forget the details at the time. But it scared hell out of me. I expected the whole classroom to go whoosh. And then, shortly after that he started asking me questions and I was in a bit of a dither, and I was hauled out and given a few cuts across the back of the knuckles. And going back to my desk, which was in the front row, I thought, `This is it. I've had it', and I picked up an inkwell out of the desk and I turned around and I threw it at the teacher - Bates - and I remember the ... after I did it I realised what I'd done and I knew, `This is gonna be ... I'm gonna cop it now'. And I made up to the aisle to the back of the classroom knowing that Bates would be after me and I ran into the arms of the class bully. And to me, like being a little fella, he was a huge giant of a lad. And I thought, `Oh, my God, I've done it now'. And he grabbed me, pushed me behind him and said, `Get round the back of the class and out the door and I'll hold Batesy'. And he did.

(20.00)I remember camping out of the school and heading back home, down past Hutton's bacon factory across the footbridge at Cooks River. I remember sitting on the bridge at Cooks River, and I thought I'd wait there until my brother came home from school, and we'd go home together and maybe it would all pass over. I don't think I should tell you this but I will. While I was sitting there a kid came along from out street and we regarded him as a little bit of a sissy. His name was Colin Croft. He had red hair and glasses and was always well dressed, and his mother used to send him to elocution lessons. And I don't know why, but something - I don't know whether he said or I said - but I finished up I threw him in the river, off the bridge. It was only up to his knees in water but I tossed him in the river. Whether I was venting my anger or what I don't know, but I did it. The same Colin Croft became very famous and appeared in TV plays and goodness knows what. He's now living in England. I don't know whether he'd remember that incident. He has been out in Australia and one time I was tempted to contact him but I thought I better not. That was my frame of mind at the time. Anyway, when my brother came along I went home .... Am I getting too long on this?

No, no, go on.

Ah, my brother came home and finally my mother wanted to know what were the marks on the back - they were pretty bad marks on the back of my leg - and I told her what I'd done, and I said I wouldn't go back to school again. Well, the upshot was I was .... My mother went up to the school and Bates said that he wouldn't have me back in the class and he'd report me to the Education Department, which he did. Finally, I had to go to the Education Department in the city and there was a conference there and it was suggested that if I apologised I would be allowed back in the school. Otherwise, I would be expelled. And I thought, `This is my out'. So I refused to apologise, so I was more or less expelled from school, with the provision that I .... They said, `What are you going to do?' and I said, `I'll get a job' well which was at that time, a pretty big statement because there was no work available. Ah, they allowed me to leave school prior to being fourteen, providing that I went to night school. So I immediately enrolled with Campsie night school and I went up there four nights a week. Now then I was very fortunate. Through a friend who was the costing accountant at Taubmans paints at Marrickville, I got a job as a messenger boy and at 26/6 a week. It was a tremendous wage because married men was then lucky to get a pound a week for part-time work. Well I got 26/6 a week - I always remember that - and I stayed there. I then started to think of bettering

myself. I went to the Harris Street Tech. in Ultimo, Sydney and I did various courses trying to find the one I wanted. I did business principles and bookkeeping one year and found it wasn't to my liking. I even did two years at industrial chemistry because my brother was working in the lab. at Taubmans then and I thought I could get in there. He was doing the same course and I thought the two of us together we might be able to get somewhere. And then I was moved to the advertising department and I took up commercial art and that I seemed to be doing quite alright at but then in 1956 [sic] - I'd been at Taubmans since August 1930 - in '56 I decided that this wasn't my life and then I got the idea, the notion, of going to sea.

Sorry, you said '56?

Sorry, '36, '36. I joined in 1930, 1936 and then after a bit of a scramble I managed to get a position with Burns, Philp and Company, and I went to sea as an assistant purser.

What was the ship?

The old *Morinda*. An old steamer about 8 or 900 tonnes. We used to run out to Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island one trip, and the next trip we'd go the same places, then we'd head north to the New Hebrides up to Vila and we'd do all the trip round Vila, taking about three weeks.

(25.00) How old were you at this stage?

Ah, then I was about sixteen and a half.

It sounds very exotic. Were you excited?

Yes. At first I wasn't because I wasn't allowed to wear a uniform. I wasn't even on the ship's papers - I was on a supernumerary. I used to sign up for a shilling a month. The company made up the rest of my wages. They were, they really .... Original intentions were for me to go to the Solomon Islands for two years to a place called Tulagi, and they put me on the *Morinda* for a little experience and also until the position became available for me which they knew was coming up at Tulagi. So I didn't have a uniform, which I felt I was a bit out of it, because, you know, they come for a white uniform on this grubby old steamer - coal-burning steamer the islands - and we carried about ninety passengers, but I was in civvies. So that took some of the glamour away from it, but the glamour was there by I was going to strange places, particularly on Lord Howe Island where some of the descendants of the mutiny of the *Bounty* are living and on Norfolk Island itself, where the main group of them are living and they have a language all of their own which is a mixture of old English and Melanesian - Polynesian rather - a most attractive language, and they used to travel. We used to take a group of them with us up to the New Hebrides to work the ship. Yes, it was very exotic.

What were the accommodation facilities and so on for you?

On the ship?

Mm.

I had a small cabin to myself up in the poop deck on the starboard side up aft. Very small, but to me it was luxury because I wasn't sharing a booth with my brother on a back lane of a house in Sydney. And also, I had saloon service. Naturally, being a junior officer on the ship, I sat with the passengers. The only disadvantage there I felt then, I didn't have a uniform on and I used to be questioned about it each trip as to why I didn't have a uniform. But I had ways of getting around that. Yes, it was a completely different lifestyle to what I'd been living.

So you would have had good food then?

Oh yes, yes. That was another bonus, naturally, and a great variety too because .... When I look back on it was possibly very plain fare, but to me as a kid, it was really something to be sitting at a table being waited on and having a choice of what I was going to eat, instead of having food placed in front of me and told to eat it.

What were your relations like with the crew? How did crew respond to a young person joining the ship then?

Quite good, quite good. I had some good friends on the ship and had a lot of fun in a way. Only a small crew. They were all whites, all Europeans, Australians. No, it was a .... I had a very happy time. In fact, I recall coming back to Sydney after three or four trips and I was told then to get ready to .... I was taken off the ship and I was told to get ready to go to the Solomons, and I was given instructions how to go to a dentist and get my teeth fixed up to make certain that everything was okay there. I had to get a medical and a few other things. And I then didn't think the idea of going to the islands was such a great idea. I didn't feel like being stuck at some little hole for two years without a break, and I kept on pleading with my boss - Boss Barker, as I called him - to go back to sea again, and he said, `No. That's where you're down for. That's where you're signed on and that's where you'll go'.

It would have been an office job of some sort would it?

Yes, it was in charge of the store at, in Makambo in Tulagi, one of the little islands, the island of Makambo. And possibly, in retrospect, I was glad I didn't go there because I would have been there when the Japs invaded it and of course most of the staff were killed by the Japanese, and that's where the big battle of Guadalcanal took place in that area. And I would have been right in the thick of it, so possible it was a stroke of fortune that I didn't go there. The reason why I didn't go was I was called up to the office one day and I was told that I wouldn't be going to Tulagi and I asked my boss, I said, `Why?'. He said, `Well, we're sending somebody else'. Well, the somebody else turned out to be the son of our chief engineer of the company, who had been assistant purser on a ship and been playing up a little and he, for punishment, he was sent to Makambo. And that's when I learnt that Makambo was a punishment place for the company. Anybody that played up on staff, they sent them out there to cool them down.

Was this gentleman there when the Japanese arrived?

I don't know. I don't know. Ah, shortly after that, or possibly a few days after that, I was called to the office from where I was working down the wharves, in the office of the wharf

office, and I was told to, I would be joining the *Malaita* as assistant purser and I would be entitled to wear a uniform and I was a fully fledged assistant purser.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

START TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is Side 2 of Tape 1 of the interview with Bill Hughes about merchant seamen, recorded on the 24th January 1990 and begins in five seconds from now.

So, what was this uniform that you'd aspired to for so long?

Well, that was a regulation merchant marine uniform - blues for the colder climates and whites for the tropic zone - and I was entitled to wear shoulder epaulettes with a one single gold stripe on it, with a white background. And, a much newer ship, the *[Melita?]* was a motor vessel - 5 or 6000, oh, between 3 and 4000 tonnes and we carried about 150 passengers, and our trip used to take us up as far as, opposite to Townsville and then through the reef out through to Solomon Islands and, of course, the first port of call there was Makambo. I always remember when I, the first time I saw Makambo, and I realised that was the place I was supposed to go to and I was glad I hadn't been sent there. I saw this chappie that took my place bitching and growling about being stuck in the `hell' as he called it. From there, we used to travel up, right up through the Solomons to the Bougainville, Kieta and Araw and those places, through the Buka Passage and into Rabaul, and from Rabaul up to Kavieng in New Ireland and then we'd trace our steps back and, to Makambo, then back across to Brisbane and back to Sydney.

At these sort of ports of call, did you have time ashore?

Ah yes, being on the purser's staff, we had to assist and entertain the passengers. Um, amongst them we'd get our own little group together and we'd be in charge of a party to take them for picnics and sightseeing and the various islands we came to. We used to load copra. We'd discharge cargo to these places and reload copra, and sometimes we'd have an hour or two, sometimes we'd have a full day and sometimes we'd stay overnight. And, if we stayed overnight, sometimes the plantation people would come on board and have dinner with us and next .... It was quite, a very interesting time and of course, when you look back, was well before the war and the natives there were fairly primitive. Er, there were still headhunters in those days. But if I may transgress for a moment, I can recall I was on the *Morinda* one time and we were up in the New Hebrides when a, we took on board some patrol officers who were going with a team of native police. There'd been a killing on one of the islands of Santo, and they were going up to catch the fellows that had done this killing. And they caught them and they were brought back on the *Morinda* - in fact, they were, the two of them were chained with leg irons and hand irons to the rail just outside my cabin, and also put in my charge, and on the manifest was a butter box. In those days we used to get butter in pound blocks and this was a Norco butter box about fixteen-sixteen inches square. Inside this was the victim's head. They had killed him for some tribal reason or other, and eaten part of his body, and the head had been decorated and the brains taken out and had been covered in various coloured ochres and stuff and the brain cavity had been filled up with hair - ah, fern rather - and painted, and they had his eyes taken out and they had cowrie shells in for his eyes. Well, that was to be the exhibit A. We took 'em back to Vila and they were tried ....

How would they sleep if they were chained outside your cabin?

They just .... They didn't sleep, and the smell of them .... I used to go out and thump them every now and again to shut them up because they used to howl all night long. I couldn't get any sleep and there were times where I threw a bucket of water over, I remember one time, to shut them up. Ah, they weren't savage. To me, they were just pitiful human beings, but I got fed up with the damn noise of them.

(5.00) Anyway, they were tried in Vila. I went to the court, to the trial. They were sentenced to death. They were hung, and the head was on the table, exhibit A, and I remember one of the native witnesses asked the judge could he have the head. He wanted it because it belonged to his uncle or something. So the judge didn't want it and he told him he could take it. Ah, outside the court house, the native offered me the head for a couple of sticks of tobacco and on an impulse I bought it, and I have a, I can show you a photograph of it. I've got it here and I took it back to the ship - very proud of my trophy. I don't know what the hell I was going to do with it, and I took a photograph of it, which I have in my albums there. When I got to Sydney I got trouble with the Customs. They want to know what the devil I was doing with a human head, and on the spur of the moment, I said I was gonna give it to the museum. And that's where it is, and as far as I know, a few years ago I went to the museum in Harris Street, Ultimo, in the anthropological section there and the head was still in that case with a little card saying it was donated by one William Hughes.

> If part of your duties were to entertain passengers, were you briefed about was your relations might or might not be with young members of the opposite sex?

Yeah, that was pretty clearly read out. Ah, it wasn't abided by all the time, as you can appreciate. I won't go into all those details, but on some of the passenger ships that I eventually went on - you've seen the `Love Boat' I suppose, the film - well, in a small way, that's what it was like on the ships I was on when I was on the cruise ships. But, you had to, a certain amount of decorum. We were warned and naturally, being a young fellow in a uniform, the female, the opposite sex, used to give us a bit of a curry at times. They all wanted an officer for a friend on the ship. Yeah, it was a bit awkward at times.

> What would happen, theoretically then, if you were found to have been indiscreet or ...?

Ah, well you were always threatened with the sack. I was never sacked.

> What about below decks crew? The people who were the coal trimmers and the firemen and so on. What were they like on these sort of boats?

Ah, in the main, good fellows. They - prewar - they were all permanent seamen, and some of them - particularly with the company I was with, Burns and Philp - they'd been with the company for years, and they just signed on and signed on after each voyage. Ah, the same crew, we'd have the same crew all the time, so we didn't have new faces. And the voyages would be from ten days to three weeks, so they would just sign off at the shipping office as the.... Being on the pursing staff I would be there to pay them off, and while one chap was paying them off and then signing his discharge, I would be at the next counter signing him on again. And we knew them all by name and they were damn nice fellows. On the steam ships with the coal burners, we had a different type of chappie to what we had on the motor vessels

with the diesel engines. They were a different type entirely, but all the same ilk. Um, in the main, damn good fellows, stewards. It was a very pleasant life.

Talking with some people who'd been on coastal vessels, it seems that many of the below decks people drank quite a bit. Was drink a problem?

No, not really. For a start, the wages in those days .... Well, for instance, I was, as assistant purser, I was getting er sixteen pounds a month and keep. Ah, yes, six... sixteen ... four pounds a week I was getting, but then we were working seven days a week and we worked twenty-four hours a day if necessary. There was no set time so we well and truly earnt our money. The married men wouldn't have got much more than that. Ah, there wasn't a great variation of the wages and they had allotments - they had families to keep. And beer was the main drink in those days, and we could buy a bottle of beer duty free for ninepence a bottle. And most of the fellows that I know of, er, their drinking was limited. Sometimes they would go without a daily beer. They might have certain days of the week they go and get a bottle. They couldn't afford to be drunk, because if they were they would be sacked anyway.

(10.00) Where were you then when it first started to become apparent that war looked like it might break out?

Ah, I was on the *Bulolo* then. Ah, after the *Malaita* we received a new vessel - the *Bulolo*. She was the pride of our fleet, 6500 tonnes going two and a half ... 250 passengers. And we were to do six week cruises throughout the Pacific. She came out, I joined her 1938, and I discovered that whilst a new vessel, she was already had been built with a forthcoming war in mind. For instance, on our main promenade deck, we had brass inlets into the decking itself which could be lifted out and would reveal gun mounts. Little things like that. Ah, Captain Campbell, I used to work very closely with him. I was from the office - I was then second purser - and he, he was there for the building of the ship and told me - and I got from other people, other sources - that in the event of a war the *Bulolo* would immediately be taken over as an AMC - armed merchant cruiser - and she were to be fitted with 6-inch guns. That was way back in '38. Now, I did eight voyages on the *Bulolo* till the last one in September '39 and we were in Port Moresby when we received news that war had been declared, and the first act of war - if you can call it - that I saw was the civilian arrest of one of our passengers, a Dr Mueller, a German. He was on board with his wife and daughter, Dr Mueller.

How was he regarded just before this?

Um, oh, as another passenger, but apparently they were aware of his identity and it turned out that he was a very high official in the Nazi party, which didn't mean a thing to me in those days. And I remember when he was approached on deck. I was there and he was, the captain put him under arrest, and he was confined to his cabin. His wife and daughter were allowed to, to continue their meals in the dining room, but I think his wife decided to, elected to eat with him in his cabin, but he was confined to his cabin.

How did he react? Was he indignant or ...?

At first yes. But apparently the captain took him to his cabin and I think he had sufficient evidence there to prove that he was what he was alleged to be and from then there was numerous records of submarines being seen in the vicinity. And there was a vessel - German

vessel - that used to come down from Hong Kong called the *Friderun* and a .... Then we went from Port Moresby to Samarai and then we went straight up to Lae and Finschhafen and to Alexishafen, up near Wewak on the north-west coast of New Guinea, and we then interned all the Lutheran mission priests at Alexishafen - the whole shebang of them.

How many were there?

Oh, twenty-odd, and ...

Did the arresting party carry arms?

No. They, it was all done very quietly. They were told that they were going to be interned and they all came, trooped down to the ship. They had built a big cathedral there. I knew a lot of them because we used to take their copra down and they sent all their bags down. But the day that, the time when they came on board ship, they were all escorted down to the dock and checked by name onto a list, and they were wearing - they had given away their habits - and they were wearing in the main leather pants and shirts and a little hat with a feather in it, and a Nazi armband. And they came on board ship and then all their native .... They had a big, they had factories in there - copra factories - and they were pretty, in a big way, they had their own plane, they had their own *Stella Maria* - the steam yacht - and they had extensive plantations and they employed quite a number of natives. And also they had a large number of natives that belonged to their church, and all these natives came down on, on the dock, to see them off, and most of them wore a Nazi armband and gave a 'Heil Hitler' salute as the ship pulled out, in answer to the Lutheran priests. That was the first time I can recall seeing the Nazi emblem, and it didn't mean a thing to me at that time. It didn't mean, ah, to any of us. It was just some fancy thing they had on.

(15.00) How were the Lutherans then kept on board?

Oh, they were, well they couldn't go anywhere. They were allowed the freedom of the ship more or less. Mueller wasn't. He was kept to his cabin, 'cause they weren't allowed contact with him. When each port we came to they weren't allowed to go ashore. We collected a few more as we went around, because as you appreciate, bef... and before the first world war it was a German possession and there were still a number of Germans scattered throughout the islands. There was a big German club in Rabaul and we went to various islands and plantations and gathered up the German nationals - those in Rabaul - and ....

Did any attempt to resist or hide or ...?

No, no. They thought the war would be over in a few weeks. In fact, I can recall my .... I had two bus boys that I used to work my labour line on the ship when I was down in cargo - one was named Sack-sack and the other was called Fish-fish. I can recall Sack-sack and Fish-fish coming up to my office door and telling me that `There are plenty Germany come and kill all you masters'. (Laughs). I didn't take any notice of it at the time, but that was the general feeling amongst the natives that the Germans would come back and kill all the masters - the Australians - up there and they would get back, back in power again. They had been promised. So there was an undercurrent or an undermovement in those days apparently, with the Germans had been telling the natives this.

Incidentally, what were your duties as second purser?

Ah, the general running of the ship from the looking after the passengers, running the ship's accounts. Ah, we didn't have to worry about the food supplies - that was done through the steward, the chief steward and others - but we did all the cargo. We'd have to prepare all the manifests for each port. We'd have to check all the cargo out and all the cargo in, deal with all the ullages and damages and pillages and so forth. Er, pay the crew wages, um, look after the passengers' needs and wants as far as their well-being on the ship, ah, money matters and so forth. It was a general routine. We did all the, all the office procedure on the ship. Er, we worked in relation with the captain and the officers, the engineering department and the stewards department.

Would that mean that as you'd move in and out of port, you'd really have a great deal to do? You'd be pretty busy?

Oh God yes. We'd .... On the *Bulolo*, from the time we left Sydney for the seven days to Port Moresby, I'd be locked in my cabin with my assistant and we'd be typing out manifests. For every article on the ship of cargo, we had to type it onto manifests, so that we could hand it to the Customs in Port Moresby. That was one set, and there was seven copies of it. And to do this, I had to take a crash course in typing - touch typing - and we would work from .... We had our own accommodation up on the top deck near the swimming pool, but we used to close the blind so we couldn't see the pool so we wouldn't be distracted, and we used to work from 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning and we'd go through all day, getting the manifests finished. We'd break for meals. We might take a brief break at the happy hour, mingle with the passengers before dinner, go and have a drink or two in the cocktail bar. Then after the dinner my job at night time was to prepare the ship's newspaper and that would mean typing that up and preparing the stencils and cutting it and running off the copies and distributing around so that every passenger received a copy of the paper the next morning. Um, sometimes I might, we might be just about coming into the Basilisk Passage in Port Moresby when we finished up the last form.

If you're involved in entertainment with the passengers, what about Christmas and New Year's? Would you have to keep a close watch on the extent to which you allowed yourself to imbibe?

Yes, like, it was automatic. I wasn't a drinker really. I had a social drink. None of us were drinkers. I can't recall, the time I was on the passenger ships, of any officer being under the influence of drink. Maybe they were in their cabins, I don't know, but I can't recall. Certainly not in public. We didn't have the money for a start. I was busily trying to get a bit of a bank account together. I didn't .... I was looking ahead a little in those days. No, that was no problem.

(20.00) It was cheap enough, the drink, but in the main I think we drank lolly water. You couldn't drink in the daytime. Goodness, if you had a couple of beers in the daytime, you'd want to sleep. Well, you couldn't sleep, you were working. We'd go down to the bar before lunch and sometimes we might have a small glass of beer, but in the main we might have a lemonade. No, drink was no problem.

Did you ever have trouble with passengers at all, in any of these cruises, who got overly excited or carried away, or just obnoxious or whatever?

Very seldom. Very seldom. I've often reflected back upon it. Ah, it would appear at times that they'd been hand picked. Occasionally we'd have one, but he was soon put in line by the rest of the passengers.

So having been up north, and then getting back to Australia, was it then that you sought to join up? That is, when you'd heard that war had broken out.

Well, I was on the *Bulolo*, as I said, at the time and when we came back we knew war was on then. But the general feeling was that the war would be over in a few weeks. I couldn't get ashore quick enough to get up to join up. I wanted .... It was a way, I thought, of getting to England - which had been my life long ambition - to get back to England to where I was born. I didn't know what I was going to do there, but I just wanted to go there. It was just that little thing inside me, like a time clock. Ah, but that didn't .... In fact, I tried several times in the early stages of the war to .... I even .... When the *Bulolo* was taken over, ah, the company then leased an English cargo tramp steamer, the *[Thornley-Bank?]* from the Bank line, to take supplies up to .... Of course they had lost the *Bulolo* and one or two other of their ships had been taken over, so they needed extra vessels. So they leased the *Thornley-Bank* and I was put on as purser/chief steward. That's when I first became a, in this, directly concerned with stewarding, and we took a cargo to Moresby, Thursday Island and Darwin and we also had cargo for Singapore. And that was in late '39.

When you first sought to join up, how long before you were advised that no, you wouldn't be accepted, because you were in the merchant navy?

That day, that minute. I didn't get past the writing out an application form. Soon as I told him what my occupation was, I was shown the door quick smart, and told not to come back.

So how many voyages were you to make before you were involved in some activity that had to do with war?

Well, the *Bulolo* for a start with the internment of passengers. That was on the, I would say, the passenger's side. Ah, on the *Thornley-Bank*, I was on the *Thornley-Bank* and we got held up with the strikes in Darwin with the wharfies. It took us some eight weeks to get out cargo out and by that time ...

What were the issues at the time that they were striking over?

Oh, you'd have to be in Darwin to appreciate that. The wharfies would strike at the drop of a hat. If it was too hot in the water bucket, they had to go up to the pub and have a beer, so they'd just walk off the ship. And they were notorious for it in those days, and we had a pretty tough time trying to get .... At one stage the hospital didn't have any lactogen for the babies and we tried to smuggle a couple of cases out and the wharfies caught us, and they put a black ban on the whole ship. We couldn't move anything and the kiddies were starving at the hospital. It was ... they were a pretty bunch. They got their just deserves later on, as I'll tell you. But in December '39, ah, the, I was told ... I received a telegram to leave the *Thornley-Bank* and join the *[Morelia?]* who was on a Singapore run. She was bringing back a load of

Singaporeans who were getting out of Singapore just as the Japs were coming in, and I came back as super cargo on the *Morelia* to Sydney and as soon as I got there I was told that I was to take over the *Tulagi* as purser/chief steward. We had a Chinese crew and then we were then on the .... We used to go from Sydney, north through Cairns to Port Moresby, across to Darwin, discharge cargo, run empty from Darwin through to Samarai, through the Samarai Straits up to Rabaul, and then we'd start loading timber around the islands around New Britain, and back to Sydney. Well, it was then when the Japs came into New Guinea, that's when I started to get involved in action. We experienced a few air raids in .... We got chased out of Port - out of Rabaul. We were up there the time the Germans had three, the *Friderun* and the *Raider*. She was in those waters when we were up there. We saw the floatplane from the *Friderun*.

(25.00) This is another story which is quite involved, but she landed over 600 passengers - prisoners-of-war on - on Scilly Island, north of Rabaul. And there was three Japanese boats there with her - this was before the Japs come into the war. So we were more or less in the war in those days, but my first real action was when, in February '42, when we were in Darwin on the *Tulagi* and we were commandeered by the authorities for a secret mission, we weren't told what it was ...

> Just before we go on with that mission. Was this the first time you'd had Chinese aboard a ship you were working in?

Ah, yes.

> What were the conditions like for the Chinese crews, compared with the sort of conditions available to Australian seamen? Did they differ much?

Yes. Vastly different. They were treated differently too. For a start, their wages were five pounds a month, Australian. We used to pick 'em up in Hong Kong, from the godown at Hong Kong, and they would be signed on for a two-year contract, and they got paid five pounds a month. Some of that was allocated back to their families in Hong Kong, and of course at that time, the Hong Kong dollar was something like fourteen to the Australian pound, and for fourteen Hong Kong dollars a family could live reasonably well for a week or so. We had about thirty Chinese on the *Tulagi*.

> How were they accommodated?

About eight to a cabin, down below water line, down aft, down near the tail shaft. They were all in a little group down there. She was only a small vessel, three and a half thousand tonnes, purely built for cargo. We carried twelve passengers. We had accomm... six state rooms for the passengers. A very close knit ship she was and we had a good Chinese crew. They performed pretty well when the chips were down.

> What about food and so on? Did they have different food? Make their own provisions?

Yes. Ah, victualling - when I was victualling I had to provide for food for them so they could cook Chinese style. We had European meals, although occasionally, as chief steward, I would put on Chinese dishes for the officers and passengers. Occasionally, if any Chinese

celebration, if we were able to and we were in, say, New Guinea waters, the old man Captain Thompson, he would arrange for us to slip into some little quiet bay and drop the anchor. I think possibly in the log would be written `Attending to a slight engine malfunction' or something, and we'd spend a few hours there while we enjoyed a Chinese banquet. And they used to really turn it on. The whole Chinese crew would just look after us and give us a great meal. I used to arrange for a certain amount of liquor to be issued from my stocks - I controlled the bar stocks on the ship. We used to put it down to `Entertaining' and we'd have a great old feast. We'd have a few drinks, but not ... on the drinking side, naturally, there was a limitation. The old man saw to that. Ah, nobody was allowed to get under the influence or anything like that, but they were great occasions, and that was the sort of the spirit we had on the ship.

> What were relations like between the officers and the Chinese crew? What was the nature of command? I gather with Australian seamen, things were done in a fairly polite way. The same relationship with the Chinese?

Well, there was still .... you must remember, in those days, the white man was master. Like, I had my own personal boy - Shei - who looked after me on the ship.

> How old was he?

Shei would have been about sixteen, round about sixteen, and he was my valet. He would lay my uniforms out of a morning. Although, on the *Tulagi* I had a small flat, if you can call it that. It was up aft on the poop deck, aft of funnel and I had my office and my sleeping cabin, and a connecting bathroom. So I was self-contained. The only other one that had that was the old man, not even the chief engineer. I was a little unit of my own and Shei used to look after me, and he would bring me up iced drinks - iced coffee and things like that - in the daytime. He would clean my cabin out and look after my washing and things like that. It was very much a master and servant relationship, and that was with the crew, although with the ship's carpen... chippie and the bosun they were old hands - had been to sea all their lives. There was no ordering about. They knew their job, they did it automatically. Down the line were the greasers and wipers and the ABs ...
END TAPE 1 SIDE B.

START TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: This is Tape 2, Side 1, of the interview with Bill Hughes in the merchant seamen interviews, recorded 24th January 1990, and begins in five seconds from now.

Aboard the *Tulagi* you said you were sent off on some secret mission. How did that emerge?

It was about the 12th February when things were getting tough. We had ... over the radio we were getting very bad news from what was happening overseas. Pearl Harbour had gone.

This is 1942?

Ah, this was 1942. Pearl Harbour was gone, the Japs were into Rabaul. Ah, I had personal problems there because my to-be father-in-law had a large property. He was in partnership with Sir Walter Carpenter up there in the timber and he had thirteen Europeans, and the Japs had got in there and killed all his Europeans - beheaded them. He was lucky. He was in Port Moresby at the time so he was safe. And we had all these things happening and everywhere was gloom. The news was bad. We had reconnaissance lights over Darwin and then on the 12th we received - I received - advice. Was called up to the old man's cabin and he said that we were going on a mission which he couldn't divulge, but I was to be prepared to take on board quite a number of personnel.

Sorry. Where was the young lady then, who was to become your fiancee, if the father had properties up in ...?

She was back in Tasmania. He sent his wife and daughter back to Tasmania, and ....

You said you were told you were going to take aboard quite a large number of personnel.

I started to get things organised from my end on the ship. We started to take on cargo of guns and food, and also boxes and boxes of Modess and, of course, all sorts of wild speculation as to where we were going and what we're going to do; we're taking women or what. We couldn't work it out. There was no women troops in Darwin, so they had a bit of a mystery. There was, seemed to be dozens of boxes of those and other things, and then on the 15th - I think it was the 15th, I've got it written in the record there. We, there was three other ships, the *Portmar, Mauna Loa* and the *Meigs* - three American ships - they were getting the same treatment. And then they, we were at the dock - wharf- in Darwin, and we loaded over 300 American troops. And the other ships came in during the day and they loaded and we went out on the anchorage and then that night we left Darwin.

Were the Americans in pretty crowded conditions then?

Well, on the *Tulagi* yes. I had 'em all down the 'tween decks. They were really crowded because she wasn't a very big ship and I just cleaned all the 'tween decks out, had the crew hose it down, and they just slept on the wooden deck. There was 325 I think, the exact number.

No air conditioning presumably?

Oh no, no, no. And ....

Well, what did you think of the Americans? Had you had anything to do with Americans before?

Not, not a great deal, because they were just coming into the war. These were all lads fresh from the States. They had just arrived on their large transports. See, at that time, ah, a week previously there was over seventy ships in Darwin - huge - the place was full of ships, and there was troops everywhere. We saw Flying Fortresses for the first time. We thought they were gigantic planes. We saw fighter, fighters and fighter bombers flying around. Prior to that, the only planes we saw in Darwin was the, was the daily Qantas flying boat coming down from Hong Kong or flying down from Sydney. And Doctor [Thatten?] - the flying doctor - flying around in his Puss Moth, and one or two Dragon Rapides. You know, they were just nothing, but now the skies were full of planes and there was, everywhere was crowded. It was a very exciting time in a way, exhilarating, but also a worrying time because we didn't know what was going to happen but we knew the Japs were about. So we, we left Darwin - the four ships in a convoy - with a *Houston* - the cruiser *Houston* - with us and the *Peary* - the destroyer *Peary* - that MacArthur got out of the Philippines on. Well, he got out on a torpedo boat and joined up with the *Peary* and that brought him down, together with a lot of gold bullion, and then we had the *Swan* and *Warrego* - two Australian sloops, and then we set off.

(5.00) And it was then on the 15th, from memory, that we were told our destination was Timor, and we were going up to rescue or give aid and supplies to the Australian troops that was there, and the Japs had already landed, and there was quite a bit of fighting going on. And we had no ammunition, no guns on our ship, no arms at all, nothing. The only arm we had was the old man's revolver.

Was that a bit disquieting?

Oh yes it was, although we was promised we'd get plenty of air cover. Ah, we were a bit concerned about it. On the first day out a plane, in the after lunch, a plane flew right through the convoy. We all waved at it - we thought it was our escort. Turned out we saw the rising sun - it was a Japanese reconnaissance bomber. That frightened the hell out of us. The next day, the 17th, early in the morning, we got, we saw the first lot of bombers, and then for the next three hours we were bombed. There's various reports how many were there. At one time I counted over forty. I could see over forty bombers criss-crossing above us and they were trying to get us, the convoy. They were attacking us and the *Houston*, she just kept on firing anti-aircraft. The sky was black with her shells she was firing.

What class was that? A destroyer or ...?

No, a large cruiser, American cruiser. And she just tore around and around and around the convoy keeping us together, wouldn't let us - our tendency was to split (laughs). We were the flagship of the convoy and they took directions from us. And the corvettes and the *Peary*, they kept us in a little close knit formation which wasn't too good, because every now and

again we'd get a stick of bombs and, you know, the water'd be coming over the decks and we'd see spray and we'd smell the fumes from the cordite. We had yellow muck all around the sides of the ship. It was pretty scary there for a while I tell you. Um, my old captain was magnificent. He had been operated on that morning for piles - old Tommy Thompson. I always remember this. Is it alright if ...?

Yes, yes.

And he, the doctor - the American doctor - on board had operated on him and he was laying up in his bunk groaning and howling. I went up to see him, and all he had on was a blue terry towelling shirt - I always remember this - and he had a fat belly, and that's when I saw some of these Modess being used. They were packed up like a nappy, and he was going crook a treat. And when the bombs dropped and the next thing I saw him running up onto the bridge deck with just his little shirt on and his nappy and little McManus, the mate, he ran up onto monkey island with a pair of binoculars and I could see him from my advantage position down aft. He was spread-eagled on his back.

Monkey island's the lookout is it?

Yeah, that's up on top of the bridge deck. And he's up there spread-eagled and every time he'd saw - you could see the bombs dropping from the planes - he'd yell out `Bombs away' and then we'd alter course, and then the other ships would alter course with us. And sometimes the formations were criss-crossing and was difficult for him to tell. There'd be a delay with the dropping of the stick of bombs and course they'd either miss us or get very close. That was very disquietening. But I went up on the bridge - the old man had pressed the alarm and I often went up there. And he said - (laughs) I won't use the swear words, but he said `I'm fighting the so-and-so Japs with one hand', and he had his hand on the ship's telegraph, and he said, `and holding my backside in with the other hand', and he had his left hand holding onto his bandages. Ah, and he was in pain too. He was a great fellow. And this went on for about three hours and then they went away and the *Houston* was out of sight at that time. She was trying to draw them away all the time. She came back, steamed around us and then she herded us very close all that afternoon.

Did it make sense to be so close, or would it have been better to have been a bit scattered, do you think?

Well, as it turned out it saved us, because that was the idea. They were trying to separate us and then they'd have pecked us off. But keeping us .... It was either, if we'd have gone we'd all gone together. I think that was the routine, and of course the escort, they were racing around us like terriers, but their anti-aircraft fire wasn't very effective because it kept them up, but didn't hit it. Wasn't high enough to hit them.

(10.00)The only danger the Japanese had was the *Houston*. And she had one hit, her aft turret was out of action so they concentrated on her. Sometimes, she would disappear in smoke and flame and water. She got one direct hit. Um, but we got out of it alright. We had, I think there was only two casualties I think in the four ships in one of the American ships. We had a bit of shrapnel damage. And then that night we had a quiet night and then on the 18th, during the night was decided we would go back to Darwin and then we steamed all day back to Darwin. We never saw anything. There was a couple of alarms of enemy planes in the area,

but the *Houston* went tearing off a couple of times and we saw explosions in the sky. We got back into Darwin on the night of the 18th, ah, just on dusk, and immediately there was urgent signals sent ashore by Aldis lamp to get the troops off, because we knew the Japs were in the area and we wanted to get the troops off the ship.

> It must have been pretty terrible for the troops during this period, all to be below decks with the concussion of loads of bombers dropping close by and so on. Was there any attempt to get out, or panic?

Ah, there could have been down below decks, but they, they weren't allowed on deck the whole time of the action. They had armed guards at the top of the gangway at each hatch cover. They had just a couple of pieces of the hatch cover laid aside to allow air to get down, but they had armed guards stationed at each of the openings to prevent any troops coming on deck. They were kept down there. And we could hear. And they just .... Looking back, I can't recall hearing any yells or things like that. There was a bit of swearing went on: `Let us get up at the so-an-so's. We'll fight 'em'. Things like that. Lot of muffled yelling went on. I think that was to relieve the tension. Ah, but they weren't allowed on deck and for good reasons too, because with the, with the near misses, there was a lot of shrapnel about, and I didn't realise it at the time. I know, one occasion I was called up to the bridge. The old man was telling me what to do with the ship's papers - I had to have them in a lead weighted bag - and on the, when I left the bridge, I had come down off the bridge deck and I was on the next level. I was just about to take off the companionway to get onto the main deck when a stick landed near us and the force from the explosion just blew me, just blew me straight out. I just went straight out and I landed on my backside on the deck below. I must have fell about ten feet. Ah, ...

> Were you hurt?

Yes, well that's why I've got all this problem now. I've got, spondylosis set in eventually and I have ....

> That's a spinal condition is it?

Yes, I've got it in the neck and I've got very restricted movement. I can't raise this arm properly. That at the time, it hurt, and the necessity to preserve myself made me move, and I reckon belted off to my quarters where I had steel round me and I felt a lot safer. Yes, the troops. We allowed them out in batches on the second day. They weren't allowed out that night, only in groups, so many at a time. And all the next day getting back to Darwin they were only allowed out in small groups so they could get 'em down below in case action came along. Then coming back to Darwin the authorities virtually did not believe that we'd been in action. They said, `Well, we ...' would not let anybody off the ship. Wouldn't even allow the captains to go ashore. And there was a lot of heated exchanges with the lamps and they just .... We told 'em but frankly I don't believe they believed that we had been in action. We'd seen the Japs. I'm sure of it, because the next morning, ah, we were told that we would be allowed to come alongside the wharf to take our troops off mid-morning. The Chinese came to me and they said they wanted to go ashore and they wanted a sub, a draw. And I said, `Alright'. I saw the old man and he said, `Yes'. He said, `Give them money, but whether they get ashore or not at this stage ...' he said, `we'll just keep them quiet. We'll give them money, but whether they get ashore I don't know'.

(15.00) So about twenty past nine I was up in my office and I had all the Chinese lined up there and I was preparing to give them some money - something like a pound each I think it was - and there was a lot of yabber went on outside on the deck and I looked out and I saw these planes coming from the south. And they were all laughing and joking, saying `American plane he come. American plane he come' and then I saw these, looked to me like leaflets dropping off them. And I said, `Hell, they're dropping bloody leaflets, just like the Yanks, advertising their presence' and seconds later, I saw the wharf go, the donkey engine on the corner of the wharf and the *Neptune* [sic] were hit. The *Zealandia* hit, the *Manunda* hit and then there was all hell broke loose. And for the next couple of hours it wasn't very pleasant. We were dive-bombed and machine-gunned and, er, - I forgot to add on - the day coming .... When we got into Darwin, when they wouldn't let us go ashore, we had a meeting on, council of war on board ship with the American CO, and he said, `Haven't you got any goddamned guns on this ship?' And we said, `No, we haven't'. And he said, `Well, we'll get some out of the hole'. Well we got down into the cargo, we managed to find four 50-calibre machine-guns and we had field guns, and then we couldn't find any ammunition. Then we, I looked at the manifest and all the ammunition was about in other ships. So we searched through. He said, `I know there's some here'. Anyway, we found four boxes of 50-calibre ammunition - there's 500 rounds in each. So we lugged the guns up onto deck. We put two amidships - one port and one starboard - and then the other two I put 'em outside my quarters - I had one on the port side and one on the starboard side. And we had two gunners to each gun, and the four boxes of ammunition, the two was given one another - the guns in the midship - and the other two was placed in my quarters overnight. And the first thing in the morning we loaded the guns and that was going on when I was paying the crew. And from then on it was pretty hectic because the crew scattered. Well then the scene within minutes, we were attacked, a plane came, dive-bombed ... (phone rings). The dive-bomber, he dropped a bomb under our counter and then opened fire on us and, ah, I - well, I can't remember much of that. All, I just went straight down. When the explosion blew me from out my office door, I went straight down the companionway and I landed in the scuppers on the main deck. And I can remember thinking ... the Chinese used to come up out of their quarters and they used to urinate in the
scuppers ....

What are the scuppers?

Well that's the gutter on the deck where the run-off goes on. And I used to always having rows with them for urinating because the smell used to - in the tropics - used to waft up to my office. And I remember landing in the scuppers, face down, alongside of Georgie Morrison, the third engineer, (laughing) and we were both complaining (laughing) of the smell, something like we were pigs in a trough. But, I tell you what, it was the sweetest thing in the world at that precise moment being there. And then we heard the plane go away, and I got up and my back injury then was pretty painful. I can recall at the time I had trouble climbing up. When I got up I found that two of the gunners were dead and two wounded.

These were American gunners?

Yes, American gunners, yes. And my, practically the bullets had gone straight through my doorway and most of my office was wrecked. The typewriter was gone, the lamp was gone, the desk was shattered and I had a crate of Gibbe, er [Libbey?], glassware had been given to

me by the, from the troop ship the *President Grant*. Beautiful Libbey glassware - about ten dozen glasses, assorted glasses - and I had it in my cabinet in a carton, and the bullets had smashed it. I think I've got about six pieces in my bar left out of that and a magnificent teapot they gave me that's got a chip out of it.

(20.00) Ah, that made me mad, I think more than anything, and then I come out and I saw the fellows. They were pretty well badly shot up. I found two were dead and the other two wounded. One fellow had a bullet .... By that time we were out of ammunition and they were just pointing the guns to scare the Jap pilots off, just by action, you know. They had no bullets left, they had fired them all off and the bullet had gone down his arm while he was holding the grips and took it right open. And Georgie Morrison came up and helped me with them, with the two wounded - we couldn't do much for the dead chaps - and he said, `We better get 'em up, up to the medics'. So we dragged them down the companionway and one chap kept on complaining that ... he said, he said, `my balls are gone' and there was a hole, just a neat hole in his pants in his crutch, but no blood, no nothing. And I said, `you're alright mate' and between the two of us we dragged them through the alleyway past the engine-room and past the open deck, and I got 'em into one of the passenger cabins forward. Ah, there was people running everywhere. It was just pandemonium and you can appreciate. And I tried to get hold of a medic and they were busy because down below decks the machine-guns, the fifty-... from the planes had pierced the sides of the ship, and there was quite a few casualties apparently down down below decks with the troops down there. And we had quite a bit of damage around the funnel and the boats and bridge deck. In other words, it was a bit of a mess. And I got these two chaps into one of the passenger cabins and I went looking for a medic and he just gave me a bundle of Modess pads. He said, `Look, whatever, just use those until I can get round to them'.

The fellow who thought he had lost his vital parts, had he in fact been hit?

Yes. When I pulled his pants down, the bullet had gone clean through and he'd lost one of them. But I didn't know at the time. It just .... The bullet had hit him alright, so I just gave him a couple of pads and then the medic raced around and gave them both morphine. And then I heard the anchor coming up and then we set off across the harbour and we were attacked all the way across. They were just, you know, smoke and flames and noise, until we got across to near the leopard station on the other side of Darwin harbour. And we were taking in water apparently. The old man said, `We'll abandon ship', and so he dropped the pick and the order was given to abandon ship. Well that's when it became a bit risky because, by that time we could still see the odd plane diving on the shipping in the harbour and the town itself, and there was smoke we could see where the aerodrome was. We could just see pillars of smoke, we could see smoke over the city, the harbour was full of sinking and burning ships. It was, from .... We had a tremendous vantage point where we were. And then, we had life belts for all the crew 'cause a lot of them couldn't swim.

You'd unloaded the American troops ...?

They was jumping over the side ...

They were still aboard as this took place?

Oh yes, yeah, they were still on board ship. We had to get 'em off. And we had a few rafts. We got rafts over the side, we got the boats over - they were a bit damaged. We issued them all with .... They all had life jackets - that was one thing they did have - and they were tying each other to each other with long lengths of rope. Then we were, we got them over the side and they started to swim. We were possibly, at that stage, oh a couple of hundred feet off the beach - this mangrove swamp.

Was the sea calm?

Oh yes, it was in the harbour and it was an out and about weather day. And we were frightened of another wave of bombers coming back and seeing the evacuation and all the bodies in the water and, you know, it would have been hell. So we got them away alright, and this is how your mind works. I'm still the chief steward, I'm still the purser, and we, we'd even been pulling out .... The hatch cover 'd gone over the side, we had men paddling on hatch covers (laughs). We had mattresses and pillows out of the cabins and then I saw a couple of the Chinese crew with one of my rubber mattresses ready to tear off with it, and I blew my lolly (laughs). Company property. That's how your mind works, and I tried to take it off them, and I had a tug-o-war. And yet, everybody else was using them, but this was company, and this was company personnel. (Laughing) `You can't use this'. That's, you know, it was on my, on my agenda of ship stores.

Did they succeed in getting it?

Yes. I realised how stupid I was and I started to laugh afterwards. But that's, you know, how you get. Um, finally we got 'em all away and then I went up and the old man was still up on the bridge, and he was suffering. And John Rowe, John Rowe, chief engineer, John Rowe - I'm pretty certain his name was Rowe - he had bad legs and ....

Was the captain still just wearing something very loose, because of his condition?

Yes.

Terrible. It would be like a nightmare for him, wouldn't it?

Yes. He had no .... He went and got a pair of pants and, pair of shorts on, and I said, `Well we better get you ashore Sir'. He said, `No'. He said, `I'm the last to leave the ship'. I said, `You can't be last to leave the bloody ship'. So I made a raft with a four-gallon drum and a couple of hatch covers, and there was Georgie Morrison, third engineer, and the second wireless operator and myself, the chief engineer and the captain, and we made this raft up and got them down the gangway and put them on, and then I got Sparks to paddle 'em. He had a piece of wood, flat timber, and he went paddling off, he paddled off. And the old man said, `I'm supposed to be the last to leave the ship', and I said, `Well we're gonna go now'.

(25.00) So as soon as he, as soon as they paddled round the bow of the ship Georgie Morrison and I went up the companionway and made a search of the ship to make certain there was nobody left on board. And just as well we did because we went down to the cabin and I found these two wounded chappies with the medics working on them. And so we made

another raft with bits and pieces we could find - ship was just about stripped by that time - so we made another ....

Was it perceptibly sinking at this stage?

Ah, no she wasn't. She was down in the water but I think we were pretty close to the bottom at that stage. The tide was going out as we found out later. We just wanted to get away. It was being a target, that was our main worry. We weren't worried about sinking because we knew we'd hit the bottom sooner or later. And so I got another raft made and we got these two wounded fellows down and with the medics, and we sent those off, so that just left George Morrison and myself on the ship. And then we went up to my quarters and we used my sheets and curtains and we wrapped the two bodies up and put them into my office. Ah, nothing else we could do, and already the blowflies were coming, you know. It was amazing, buzzing around. And George and I, we went - I always remember this - the, I went out on the deck outside my sleeping cabin and George said, `Here goes' and he dived off. And he was a fat, round fellow and he made a hell of a bloody splash when his belly hit the water, and he come up gasping. I said, `Oh, to hell with that', so I decided I'd leap from the ship onto the rope fall of the boat davit and slide down that, and I couldn't get a grip and I burnt - I found out later - I burnt
my right into the bone both hands. There were strips of flesh hanging off - slid the whole way down. And ....

How long was the drop?

Oh, I suppose about thirty feet, round about that. And we hit, got in the water. We had life jackets on and then the tide got us and the tide then took us out and we went nearly out to the boom defence of the mouth of the harbour.

Was that alarming? Were you worried about sharks by the way?

I was. Sharks because ... and crocodiles because there's a lot of crocs in Darwin harbour, and George and I - course we had white ... I had a pair of white shorts on and I had something like this on also ....

T-shirt.

Yes. And my back was .... The bomb blasts, when I got hit on the ship, I got blown off the back, all my .... I had blood on my hands, arms was all bleeding and my back I didn't know. I felt very stiff with that. With the salt water, you know, it wasn't very pleasant. George and I were in the water for quite some time. We weren't, a couple of hours later before we got ashore, and then the tide turned and brought us back in again right near the *Tulagi* and then we, we got into the mud and that was the worst part. We were in mud above our knees trying to get ashore and we managed to get through this - hell of a ... - and we didn't know where they were. Luckily the tide kept on coming in and was running up through rivulets in through the mangroves and we could see the marks of the keels of the boats, and finally we got into the mangroves and the next minute we saw all these scarecrows up in the mangroves, all the soldiers and the crew. Everybody perched up in these mangroves out of the water. We were there for a couple of days before we got rescued.

Well, how did you fare? It got dark. What, what happened as it got dark?

Well, we just stayed there. We couldn't do anything. We could hear the crocodiles hawking around in the mud and of course bodies were being washed in too. Ah, we buried a couple before the tide come, as much as we could, but we just dug holes with our hands and buried the bodies and from, you know, seamen off ships. But the crocodiles came in and they were hooking them out in the night and the next day it wasn't very pleasant.

Did anybody effectively take charge of the people who were in the group?

Yes. Yes, the colonel - American colonel in charge of the troops - took the other troops, and of course our captain, you know, we looked after. Well, we went under his command. But we did not know .... Then we found we were on an island in the middle. We weren't on the mainland, so we couldn't get off the damn thing. Water all around us. At low tide we had a search and found where we were. So then the next night we just had to stay up in the mangroves and then in the, late at night - don't know what time it was, my clock had stopped, watch - ah, we heard a cooee.

This is your second night there is it?

Mm.

What were you doing for supplies?

Nothing. We had nothing.

Water?

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

START TAPE 2, SIDE B.

Identification: This is Side 2, Tape 2, of the interview with Bill Hughes about merchant seamen, recorded 24th January 1990 and resumes in five seconds.

You were saying you heard a cooee?

Yes, and then we heard a small motor. And then everybody kept quiet because we thought it could have been Japs, because they speak English too. And we were all quiet and then in through the mangroves with the moonlight we could, we saw this lone little boat - was only about, a dinghy - with a little motor on the back and this chappie had a RAF uniform on - it appeared to be. And then, of course, then we, a bit of excitement because he thought we were Japs at first and he told us later he got a hell of a scare. We were relieved to find it was just one fella on his own, and when he saw how many of us there were - and it turned out that he had been doing that off his own bat. He was looking, searching the harbour looking for possible survivors and he had already found a couple of fellas floating in the harbour - alive - and then come in here and find there's hundreds of fellows stuck in the mangroves ... because nobody worried about us. Nobody knew what was going on in Darwin. They didn't know we were missing or anything.

Had he not done that, what do you suppose may have happened?

Well, we would have stayed there until somebody had ... I don't know. Could've been happened at any time, or we might have been there for days. Eventually we would have been found I suppose. He then took the colonel - was only room for a couple in the boat - I think he took the colonel and another officer and they set off right across Darwin harbour, in this damn little stupid thing. And early hours of the morning we could hear boats coming and then finally a couple of pinnaces came towing barges and they got in and then, course the tide was going out again, and a bit of a hassle getting 'em on, and moving 'em all the time so that they wouldn't become on the bottom. And finally we all got on board and we got towed across to Darwin. We arrived in the early hours of the morning into Darwin itself.

You would have been caked with mud and pretty uncomfortable by this time I'd imagine.

Yes, it wasn't, yeah. We didn't like each other's company. (Laughs). And we came into the boom defence and then there was trucks there, waiting for the Americans, but there was nothing for us, nobody, nothing. So then, we all got together, the crew of the *Tulagi* and we walked from the boom defence, up the path, up the cliff, past the post office and that's when we first saw the damage that had been done. The post office was one of those that got a direct hit, and there was quite a number killed, and the bodies were still there. We could smell them as we went past. That's when it started to hit home. And we went down to the corner of the main street, Jolly's store, Bank of New South Wales and the Union, er Commonwealth Bank and Union Bank and Jolly's store, and we just stood. There was nobody about, was just coming dawn or daylight, and one or two odd army trucks went past and vehicles and we asked, you know, could we get a lift or something, but nobody was interested in us. And we must have been there for an hour or so before a ....

Had you been able to find some drink or any food at all by this time?

No. Well, there was, I think we got some water out of a tank out of the Union Bank out of, and the garden. We all had a drink there. There was no food. Well, we were all bewildered. We didn't know, you know, we weren't home. (Laughs). That was out in the harbour. And finally, there was air raid fellows racing around, wardens, and we told them who and what we were and then a couple of trucks came along and we were put onto one of them. Then we were taken out to the old abandoned hospital at Myilly Point, and that's where we found all the other survivors. And there was hundreds off the sunken ships out there, and we was put in this hospital, and we were allocated a room. There was no furniture, was a just bare, empty shell of a building and we were allocated a room for our crew in there. We just sat down and we all fell asleep, I think. We were that damn tired.

Chinese crew with you? You all there?

Yes, everybody. All bunked in together. And we were there for quite, for the rest of our stay in Darwin until we eventually we patched the *Tulagi* up and got out.

(5.00) How long was that?

Oh, a couple of weeks before that happened. In the meantime, there was constant raids and there was quite a lot of things went on there. I've written it all in my account.

What sort of things.?

Well, for a start, we were, either the first or second day we were told to assemble out in the grounds, which we did, and there was a utility there - an army utility - with an Australian major on board, and he proceeded to tell us that there was a war on, as if we didn't know. And he said we would .... There was no food, food would be rationed, we'd just have to take pot luck, there was no chance of us getting out of Darwin. Ah, we would not be allowed out of the hospital grounds, there would be armed guards to prevent us from leaving, because amongst the seamen there was Indians, there was Filipinos, there was Chinese, there was Europeans and at that stage, they didn't know who was the enemy and who wasn't. So they just put the whole lot of us in there, and we were more or less prisoners-of-war at that time, if you want to give it a term. Food was, ah, Heinz beans and tomato sauce - I can remember that - and slabs of bread, no plates. I think it was either spoon or a fork we had. I was using one of those flat Craven A fifties empty tins, you know. Cigarettes, a flat Craven A cigarette tin for a plate, and some fellas didn't even have that. And then they had these big bowls cooked over an open fire with all the tins just opened up and thrown in and that was our meal. That's all we had each meal. And this chappie continued to tell us what, what we had to do. We would be required to earn our food, we would be issued with identification cards and work cards, we had to dig so, such a length of air raid shelter - slit trenches - before we could get food. We had to dig it, get the card signed, and then when we had the card signed we could go to the food and we'd get food for a meal. Without that you couldn't get food. They had advice, the Japs would drop leaflets that they were going to land parachute troops in Darwin and they were going to just take over the whole place. They couldn't give us weapons. We had to stay in the grounds, but if Japanese parachute troops landed within the grounds - this is him telling us - we had to hide, not to reveal ourselves, until the Jap hit the ground and then we were to rush out and with a stone, a stick or anything at all, knock him out, grab his rifle, kill him and then we'd be armed. That's the only way you got a gun. That's

what the chappie's telling us. Well, we're all standing around looking at each other dumbfounded, and this fella all in a bright uniform standing up there. He might have been down in the Adelaide River when Darwin was raided - he certainly wasn't in the mess we were in (laughing), and here's us all filthy dirty and the next minute somebody threw a stone at the truck. And then another stone, another stone. The last we saw of him was crouched down the back of the truck urging the driver to get the hell out of the place. We never saw him again. The guards, they stayed for a couple of days and they disappeared, and we just then made ourselves into groups. We had to organise medical supplies. We, the captains of the various ships got together and we allocated a person from each crew to go into Darwin to get the necessary medical supplies, and I went on behalf of our ship. And, er, so each day I used to get into Darwin. I'd get a lift on a truck, although I managed to purloin a home-made bicycle. You had to lay down and pedal like this on it, and I was able to ride into Darwin on that on a couple of days until that got pinched. Somebody else purloined it off me.

What sort of state was Darwin in at this time?

Deserted. It was deserted, and going in there - we were a couple of miles out of the actual city - to see the wreckage of the houses and what the Japs didn't do, the troops did. The troops were just looting the places. There were trucks taking whole furniture loads of, loads full of furniture away from the houses.

Did you see them doing this?

I saw that, mm, I saw that. I saw other things too, and ....

What do you mean by that, `saw other things'?

Well, officers were in it as well. And I'll tell you something later on which annoyed me very much. But I saw the looting and ....

(10.00) Well tell us what it was that annoyed you, just in case it slips your mind.

Well, after, when we finally got the *Tulagi* prepared for sea, I went to naval headquarters to try and get some volunteer crew to help us get the ship away. I only wanted a few ABs, and I was acting on behalf of the captain, because the captain was in the hospital then being attended for his problems. And I saw a certain naval officer and he said, `Which way do you intend getting back down south?' And I said, `Oh, naturally we'll go across to Thursday Island'. He said, `Well, couldn't you go down via Perth?' I said, `Why?' He said, `Well, it might be safer for you and ...' he said, `if you go that way', he said, `I might be able to help you out with a few ratings. But,' he said, `I'd like you to take a few personal belongings for me'. Well, I'd agree to anything at that stage to get the ABs, so I said, `Well, I'll have to confer with the captain' but I went back and I saw the captain. He said, `Tell him anything. Just get some men'. And I only wanted six, and I went back and I said, `Yes, we'll agree to that'. And then he said, `I'll give you six men' he said, `they're, they're ...' - I think he used the term `bomb happy'. He said, `... but they can work alright'. He said, `I want to get rid of them anyway' and I had .... In the meantime, I had two officers off the British *[Motress?]* - the British tanker. I had the chief engineer off the *Zealandia*. I had six or seven officers of sunken ships that volunteered to come back because all our Chinese crew at that time had deserted us. They refused to come back and some of our own officers - three or four of them

- would not come back with us. So we made up a crew and I think there was sixteen of us brought the ship back.

> How did you know the ship would be seaworthy, or could be rendered seaworthy?

Well, we used to go out, three or four of us, with the same fellow - this air force fellow. He had a bigger boat by this time, and he was still going around and we used to go out with him, and at low tide, for a start, all the broom handles on the ship we cut into plugs. And at low tide, we'd go out there and wherever we saw water coming out of the ship, we'd knock in a plug. So she was like a ship with a couple of days growth of beard on her when we finished. We plugged up all the holes but the water was still in the ship. The chief engineer said we can do that and he said, `I can pump it out with the ship's engines'.

> Well what was the basis on which you supposed that method would in fact work, that the plugs wouldn't just come out or would still leak around it anyway?

Well, we jammed it in sufficiently hard that they couldn't come out. They just pretty well fitted very nicely and in some cases we had to use plates and bolts and things like that, but in the main that was quite effective. At least we thought it was. Anything to get the damn ship away. We'd try anything. Then we found out that the Australian troops at a searchlight battery and an anti-aircraft battery were coming aboard and looting the ship. By this time, the bodies had been taken away - the American bodies - so then we used to sleep on the ship, two of us each night, to prevent the looters from coming on. And even then a couple of times we had to fight 'em off.

> What do you mean, `fight them off'?

Well, we had to physically fight them off the gangway. They used to come out in a bit of a dinghy they had, a raft they had made, and try to get on board ship, and we used to have to fight them off. Now they knew there's only the two of us - sometimes we had three or four - but we physically had to get 'em off the ship. Before that happened, they'd already taken most of my belongings ...

> Did they try and talk you into it? Say, `Come on, look, you know, what's the point?'

Yeah. Oh well, there's a lot of talk. They wanted grog and that, and I had that well and truly locked away - what was left of it - a lot had gone. They'd taken my day store, but down my main store room .... No, we had things on the ship that, anyway, was ours, not, not theirs. That was the basis of it. But the looting was shocking that went on in Darwin.

> Would they attempt to justify themselves on the basis of `Well look, it's better us than the Japanese'?

Yeah. Oh there's all sorts of talk went on, but we weren't having any of it. We just said, `No, no way known' and we fought 'em off. Um, it's hard to believe it went on anyway.

Was there any attempt around Darwin to try and control it? Did you see any evidence of that at all?

No, no, no, none whatsoever. It was condoned. There was nothing, nothing done. Outside of their tents, all the army barracks, and then where they were allotted, there was sitting outside their tents they'd be in armchairs taken, looted from the houses, out in the open. There was radio sets they'd taken up. There was no power. Just having a radio set between them. Taken anything. No, it was complete anarchy in Darwin at that time.

So you got your able-bodied seamen from this ...?

We got 'em from this chappie yes, and when we got the ship alongside, the army came down and next minute this officer-in-charge came to me and said, `I'm commandeering all your stores'. I said, `Why?' He said, `Well we need them. We'll take all your fresh stores. We need them more than you do. You're going back to civilisation. We'll give you army rations sufficient for you to get to the first port of call on the east coast of Cairns'.

(15.00) And I argued with him, I saw the old man, the old man came down, he argued with him. He said, `Look, there's the order. We're taking them'. So the old man said to me, he said, `Well tally everything they take ...', which I did. The freezer stores were still okay, ah lucklily, although the engine had been idle in our freezer, but they were still alright. And they took all those, they cleaned out all my dairy products, all my bacon and eggs, butter and things like that. Ah, they went down and they rooted through the dry stores. They took practically everything that we were required and then they gave us boxes of bully beef and all, just army supplies. In fact, as he was leaving, he said, `It'd be only wasting it leaving it on board, because you'll be sunk as soon as you get outside'. He said, `You won't make it'. That was the attitude. Then the, a naval ute arrived with the personal belongings of this officer - and I'm not going to mention his name. And there was at least four sets of golf clubs in it, in his group alone, and other stuff that came down from other officers. And I knew these fellows, I knew how they went up to Darwin. I used to go to their mess and drink with them. And I saw stuff that we took out of Darwin that certainly wasn't what they took up there. It was loot, loot.

And were they annoyed that you weren't going via Perth then?

Well they didn't know till we got out. When we got outside we made up our own mind. We went east.

What did they say?

Well they didn't know.

Mm. Well, once they found out that you were away?

Well that didn't matter, and I reported it to the naval authorities too, what I had on board. Now I don't know what happened after that. But that's what was going on in Darwin.

So you don't know if there was an inquiry or anything was done about your report?

[Answer inaudible].

I gather you later presented the army with a bill for the goods they had commandeered?

Yes. When I got to Sydney I .... Course when I got down to Sydney I got into hot water from my company. I didn't have any papers for the trip, cargo. You know, it was a bloody mess and I can remember going up to the office and I was dressed in a pair of khaki shorts, ah, a brown pullover, I had a beard, ah, I had sandshoes on. I was in a bloody mess. And going up to Burns Philp Shipping Office, you know, everybody looked at me, `Who's that scarecrow coming in?' And the chief customs officer said, company officer said, `Where's all the ship's papers?' I said, `I haven't got any'. And the other chappie chimed in. He said, `God damn it Hughes' he said, `we were in the war just like you. The only difference is you've had a few bombs dropped on you'. And that's the exact words what he said to me. And of course I did my lolly then and the old Hughes temper came up and a little bit of language flew. I, I really did my lolly in the office. And the chappie said, `I think you better go home. You're unsettled (laughing) upset'.

How was the trip down? Did the boat, in fact, leak? Or the ship leak, rather?

Oh, there was a little bit of water ran. We developed a list .... Ah, when we, we got across .... We had a couple of attacks from Jap planes going across, but not nothing serious. They skimmed around us and we heard a bit of fire, but there was nothing actually directed at us. They kept their distance from us, a bit wary of us. They, we got through to ....

This is because you seemed to have guns on board was it?

Yeah, well they didn't know what we were, because we was about the only ship that had gone across there in quite some time, you know, a couple of weeks.

You had no ammunition presumably?

Well we had no guns anyway. They had taken the calibre guns. The American gunners had taken everything away from us. No, they just scouted around us. Whether they were just an observation plane. Ah, we got into the reef and came down to Cairns and that's when we started to feel we were being recognised again. The authorities came down, the Salvation Army came down, the Seamen's Mission came down. We were given - I forget, I've got it written there the money they gave us - we were taken up to the local variety store and were given sufficient money to buy a pair of socks, underpants, a singlet, pair of shorts, a shirt, er, a pair of sandshoes, tooth..., a Gillette razor - five shilling razor - packet of blades, toothbrush and toothpaste, a cake of soap and I think a washer - could have been a towel. Each of us was allowed to do that. Well, we felt like bloody [inaudible] walking round the store, everybody picking these things up. We had a couple of days there and then we ...

(20.00) How was your back problem at this time?

Yep, wasn't too good. I had written to my fiancee from Darwin, but I couldn't ... I had all my fingers bandaged up and I couldn't address the envelope so I got a nurse to address the

envelope, and I got the letter away, and when I got to Darwin I phoned her and she had received the letter. And I remember her saying, `Are you disfigured in any way?' and I said, `Why, why do you ask?' She said, `Well, that's not your handwriting on the envelope, and I can hardly read the scrawl in the letter'. And I said, `Oh well, I've got a bit of a problem with my fingers'. She wanted to know what it was, and anyway, that's when I should have backed out of the marriage because I realised then that I had been disfigured in any way, she wouldn't have gone through with it. That's another matter. Anyway, that was .... When I, when I got home - and of course my mother still didn't know - and I just got, er, the company got me a taxi and sent me home, and that was the first my mother knew that I was alive, because she had been told I was missing, reported dead - because I walked in the door. And that gave her a bit of a start.

Did the captain also take charge of the vessel down again?

Yes, yes.

Had he started to recover by then, or was he still in a bad way?

Well, yes, he was more or less able to get around okay. It was only the suctures [sic] that, you know, from the operation where he had his piles cut out. He was still sore, but chirpy, old Tommy Thompson - great old fella. He was an old New Guineaite - had a plantation in New Guinea. In fact, at Tol, near where the massacre took place where they murdered all those Australians. Well, he had, down the Channel there he had a plantation. Terrific fellow. Ah, so we, that was it. I got home and I'll never forget it. My mother said. `I've got a nice little treat for you'. Of course, wartime conditions, she said, `I'll make a nice little supper for you'. And guess what it was? Bloody Heinz beans and tomato sauce. (Laughing). Yeah.

How long before you went to sea again?

Ah, I got a couple of weeks leave. I flew down to Hobart. I was married. I was on my honeymoon only two days when I received a telegram at the hotel requesting me to get my body back to Sydney immediately. I was wanted. That went over like a lead balloon with my new wife. Er, it was hard to get air transport. They had fixed all that up. I flew out of Hobart, arrived in Sydney, raced down to the ship expecting it to be ready to go and I was, we were held up then for nearly a fortnight. She was not quite ready. They had raced her into dry dock, patched up - welded - all the holes, got her out and they were still working on the super structure alongside while she was being loaded, and the result was I was there chewing my fingernails for possibly a fortnight before we actually sailed again. We went straight back to Darwin.

What was your state of health like? I mean, were you in fact checked out and somebody said, `Yes, you're okay. You're 100 per cent. You can go back to work'?

No. No. I h d ... I went to the doctor when we arrived and he just ran over me. He said, `Oh, you're alright. You're healthy'. I told him about my back. He said, `Oh well, you know, falling on your backside like that. It'll hurt for a while. That'll go away'.

What about your hands? Did that ...?

Oh they had more or less healed up. The, they had the scabs and that on them, but I, you know, they was coming good. When you're healthy, it doesn't take long. My back had healed up. It, my back mainly was where the bomb blast, it's grit, like pieces of paint from the bulkheads were just like little needles and my back ... it had gone through my shirt even. That was the main thing, back of my neck and my arms and my legs. Er, nothing serious, but painful at the time. But I, no, I was, as far as I was concerned I was okay, but I did have this problem of - and I've had it ever since - I find it difficult to sit down for a long time. I find myself standing up watching the TV, so I do it unconsciously now. My back aches and I just get up and stand to relieve it. Um, and of course with the spondylosis set in, it's affected all my back and my neck and I've got restricted movement here. This right shoulder a few years ago started to give me trouble. I had trouble lifting that, and through that I had a fall out the back here. I dislocated this and this is completely shattered now, the cuff, and I can't raise this arm at all, and that's all, comes back to .... I can handle anything down here but I can't raise it.

(25.00)I can't swim. I had to sell my boat 'cause I couldn't .... I got caught out there one day and I found I couldn't pull the anchor up. I had to cut the anchor rope. Er, and I had to get rid of my car and get power steering because I found it difficult - all these little things. But, when I look at other fellows, I'm lucky, I'm lucky.

How many more trips then did you make after your return to service?

Ah, from memory I went right through '42 running back to Darwin and all the whole time she was raided. We were raided every time we went up there. And then ...

Casualties? Or ...

Ah, not on the ships. It was mainly hit in the shore. Then - I'm talking from memory now, as far as dates are concerned - then I, I started to feel it after twelve months. I needed some leave - I hadn't had any leave for quite some time. I took some leave, I went down to see my wife in Tasmania and then when I came back, I was given another ship - the *Mangola* - and she was an old first world war steamer. I did one trip on her and I came back. I think I did another couple on the *Tulagi* and then the company .... My health started to go a little bit then, and they brought me ashore and I was sent up to Brisbane and I was put in charge of American Small Ships there. And from Brisbane I went up to Townsville and I took charge of it up there, and I was responsible for, er, sending all the men and provisions and small craft through to New Guinea. Er, Burns Philp had the contract under the American forces to do all the supply and I was in charge of the Townsville depot. I was there for about six months and then I got fed up with the shore-going and seeing everybody else going north, and I asked to be relieved to go back to sea duties, which was refused. We had quite a hullabaloo over this one and I resigned, and I was told that if I resigned that I'd be arrested for leaving my job. So I went to the manpower and I had a court case which I won. I got a release from the company and I came back to Sydney ....

What was the case? I mean what was ...?

Ah, they were preventing me from following my normal occupation, which was seaman, and the manpower were fed up with the management up there - chap by the name of Swan - and

they gave me every facility and I won my case, and the day after I left sixteen other people resigned from the company in Townsville and they joined the forces. He was keeping them up there. And I came back to Sydney and unfortunately I saw the .... I went to the company, I attended a board meeting, I told them exactly what my situation was, why I wanted to go back to sea, and one of the directors was a bit terse about it and they said, `Well, you'll never get on another ship as far as we're concerned'. Well they blacklisted me, blackballed me with the shipping companies in Sydney. Ah ....

Did you in fact try and were knocked back?

Oh yes. I went to every shipping company, and of course the person ....

What would they say to you?

Well they just said there was no vacancy, and most of the time it wasn't because there's not too many jobs for purser/chief stewards - only one on a ship - where ABs there's a dozen. And then I heard that the *Guba*, the Catalina flying boat which Archbold of the Standard Oil Company had had in New Guinea - I knew it, I'd flown in it in New Guinea - had been taken over by the authorities and they were going to organise an air service from Australia to the east coast of America via the *Guba*. And Taylor was to be the pilot, the fellow that flew with Kingsford Smith. And I applied for the job. They wanted a purser and I applied, and I got the job as purser. And, in fact I was, I even had the contract signed. When the chappie was interviewing me was called away to the phone, when he came back he just picked up the contract and tore it up. I said, `What's that for?' He said, `I'm sorry, we can't employ you'. And one thing led to another and he took me outside. He said, `Look, I don't, it's embarrassing for me', he said, `but I have received instructions that you are not employable'. And I said, `From Bridge Street?'. He said, `Yes'. I said, `Okay'. I went round to Bridge Street and interviewed Jimmy Burns, the head of the company, and I told him what I thought of him and his company and everything else - got some satisfaction out of that telling them.

How did he react to this?

Ah, I think he was sympathetic in a way. It wasn't actually his doings. It was fellas down the line, but by this time I said, `I'd never work here under any circumstances', and I went round to Dalgety's and I couldn't have gone at a better time. The fellow welcomed me with open arms. He said, `I want a purser. I want a chief steward. I've got a tanker here', and I said, `Well, I'll tell you now ...' and I told him the story. He said, `I don't give a fig about Burns-Philp'. He said, `Do you want to join us?'. I said, `Yes'. He says, `You're on'. And that's how I joined the tanker, the *British Princess*. And then I, on her, I went back to New Guinea and of course of my knowledge up there, Captain Jeffreys, it was great for him. And while I was in Port Moresby, I re-established contacts with some Americans that I knew from my Townsville times and I was asked would I be prepared to give, go to their briefings and give them information on targets in New Guinea, particularly Rabaul. And with the permission of the captain I did that ....

END TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: This is Tape 3, Side 1, of an interview with Bill Hughes about merchant seamen, recorded 24th January 1990, begins in five seconds from now.

You were briefing, or helping brief Americans about targets.

Yes, and I agreed to do this on condition that I went on the bombing mission, which I did, and I joined the bombing mission of seventy-four Liberator bombers and we attacked Rabaul. The main target was Rabaul and with the secondary target was my father-in-law's property.

You were flying out of Darwin?

No. This was out of Port Moresby.

Oh, sorry.

Jackson's Field. And we flew up St George's Channel and when we got over Rabaul we really copped it there. The anti-aircraft fire and the Zeros, they gave us a bit of a battering, and the split us up. We were all over, scattered all over the place, so then we left there and flew round the coast and down on my father-in-law's property ...

From what height?

Ah, we went in round about 13,000 I think over Rabaul. I'm not quite - we were lower when we got over Mandrese. Then we continued on .... There's only seven of us left by that time.

Out of how many?

Seventy-four, but they had all scattered. We didn't know where. And the seven of us, we flew down to Cape Gloucester and we bombed a Japanese air strip there and one of our planes near us got hit, and he .... We made it to the mainland, and we saw him going down. And another plane was damaged, and by the time we got back to Jackson's Field - I was belly gunner incidentally - I knew a, no instructions. They just put me down in the bottom turret and they said, `Fire these'. I've got photographs.

Did you fire them?

Only in a burst of anger over Rabaul, because it was that damn high up and I was watching the side gunners. When they were firing up the tacking Zeros, I could more or less follow their line of fire knowing that the plane would go underneath us, and I was trying to anticipate. But by the time I saw the damn plane he was gone. But I got a couple of bursts in. I shot Rabaul up anyway. (Laughs) Put a few rounds into it. I didn't realise how foolhardy it was until we were over Rabaul and they were firing at us from the ground and I could see the, like a little spiral smoke coming up, slowly. And all of a sudden, bang, it'd burst underneath us, or I'd look out the side - fortunately I could see it - then I realised they were shooting at us. Then I realised, then I saw a few holes in the fuselage and then I thought, `What the hell am I doing here?' You know, these were things that .... So, when we got back over Jackson's Field

we were told to stay up, and a couple of the planes crash-landed. That wasn't ... because I'd didn't know how much we'd been damaged. And finally we got down and we was debriefed.

Incidentally, had it given you satisfaction to help bomb your father-in-law's property?

Yeah, 'cause we weren't exactly friends at that time. But I didn't do it for that reason. During the briefing they had this large photograph on the wall and they said, `Look, do you know this place?' and I said, `Yes, that's Mandrese harbour'. They said, `Well we've got a problem. There seems to be a [rasp?] or something being taking it from this point here across to that point. We don't know what they are'. And I said, `Well I know what it is. That's timber'. And I said, `That's the Mandrese River'. I said, `Do you see that spill of silt?' - you couldn't see the river for the trees - I said, `Well up underneath there about an eighth of a mile', I said, `there's a small township. There's two or three houses and a mill, and the timber is cut there'. I said, `What they are doing, they are cutting timer. What they are going to use I don't know'. And they said, `How do you know this?' I said, `It's my father-in-law's property'. They said, `Have you got any objection if we bomb it?' I said, `Hell no, be my guest' and that's how it came about. And as it turned out later on, after the war when we found out all the tunnels in Rabaul, well they were using the timber from his timber mill to shore up the tunnels in Rabaul.

Did you find out if the air strike had been effective?

Oh yes, yes. It was effective alright. He couldn't .... After the war he went back to, as under contract to the ANGAU - the government up there - to assess the timber left that could be used again. He couldn't go back to his leases because of the heavy fighting that took place and of course all the trees were full of shrapnel and bullets, so you couldn't mill them. You know, you could put a mine detector over it but you'd go mad.

(5.00) So he spent six months up there and .... I visited his place, I saw the damage. I never told him that I was responsible for it. He's dead now. I told his grandson - my son - just recently, which is another story. Ah, so I got some satisfaction out of it that we'd prevented the Japs from using that source for timber. We didn't know what they were using it for, but we knew they was using it for something because they was cutting the timber. But he lost all his European staff - there were thirteen I think it was they beheaded - when they went in and overran the place.

I gather you later then went on American ships, ah, to the Philippines and ...?

Ah yes. On the *British Princess* we finished up from New Guinea, we went to Peru in South America to load aviation spirit, which we took up to Salvador and that's another story - a bit lengthy - but there was a revolution going on there. We got caught up in it and shots were fired by one of our naval gunners at the native soldiers and we were put under arrest - the whole ship. I was elected to go up into the interior to get the British Consul who lived about thirty miles in the interior to intervene in the whole thing. That's all in the story I got - it's a bit lengthy - but I was involved in that and the result was, ah, getting back to the ship I had to do an all night trip by canoe down this river, about thirty-odd miles to get back to the ship and then the next day the Consul came down and they cleared all the authorities. They flew

people down from New, from Washington, to clear the air, 'cause we had offended the neutral country by firing shots in it. It was a bit of an incident. From there we went to Panama ...

Why were the shots fired?

Ah, little Titch, one of the naval gunners, was beaten up by these soldiers. They had tried to take a bottle of liquor off him he had. He took umbrage at it and there was a fight developed on the wharf. We got him on board the ship and we thought that was the end of it. The next thing we know we hear Lewis gun fire and we saw Titch up on the port side aft firing along the wharf with this Lewis gun, and native troops running everywhere.

Did he hit anybody?

No, he didn't hit anybody but scared the hell out of a lot of them. Well, the result was that we had a night of terror really, because they had a lot of horse drawn world war field pieces which they brought on the surrounding hills to the jetty and they had them all lined up trained on us. They had machine-gun posts all along the wharf and they had troops everywhere and we had to finally .... The old man - we were full of aviation spirit, God, one spark and we'd a gone up. So we had to finally have a council of war with the officer in charge and I've tell him that if one bullet was fired by them at the ship, not only would we go, but they would go, the port would go and everything else would go, and finally they relented and they moved away a bit. But we were not allowed off the ship until it was cleared up by the diplomats. It was a bit of a dicey affair. Anyway, from there we went to Panama, ah, then up to Galveston, Texas, where we went into .... We were there for six weeks where we were, fully overhauled and made seaworthy again. She was in a bit of a mess the old ship. And then we went and joined a convoy off New Orleans and then went down to Florida - Florida Keys - and then from there we went to, on the ship, a trip across to England, but we got picked up with the U-boats. They gave us a bit of a battering, in convoy, and finally it was abandoned and we fled into New York and we were there. When we got ....

Was your ship hit at all?

We weren't hit but the depth charges did more damage than actual hit because it was loosening our rivets.

Were you leaking?

Yes, and we were leaking oil, our cargo, which was bad because, you know, they could just follow us in a convoy so they took us into there. The, one of our company ships had been sunk in the action and the crew had been rescued and they were in New York, and the old man came to me. He said, `Well look. Do you necessarily want to go to England now?' and I said, `Well, yes and no'. I said, `Why?' He said, `Well your opposite number from the other ship is ashore and he wants to get home for Christmas, and would you be prepared to vacate your berth for him?' I said, `Yes'. He said, `You can come on the next ship or stay in New York. You're still employed by the company'. Well I finished up in New York from February till June. I left there on D-day, the 6th of June.

(10.00) Were you paid through that period?

Yes, yes. I was put onto what they call the shore pool. I had a lot of time to myself, but the American authorities got hold of me. I had been written up in the Galveston papers on account of my flying with the American air force, and they - I've got the cuttings here - and it got around that this Australian merchant bloke was friendly with Americans and I was taken up to naval headquarters and I was briefed on several occasions about New Guinea waters because - it's funny, although they're allies, there wasn't that association between the forces. The Australians kept to themselves what they had - knowledge - and the Americans kept to themselves. And of course, in New Guinea they were both strangers, and they would not share anything. Even when I went to the, to go out to fly with this mission, I had to be disguised as American officer and I drove the jeep with the major - my friend - alongside of me, er, doing all the talking. I had to be smuggled from Port Moresby out to Jackson's field and vice versa to come back again - out of bounds to any Australian. So I gave them quite a lot of information. I even went down to the Pentagon in Washington for briefings down there. It was down there that I renewed my acquaintance with Air Marshal Williams - Dicky Williams - I had known him in New Guinea previously. In fact, when he saw me, he said, `What the hell are you doing Hughes?' He said, `Where's your Australia tabs on your shoulders?' I said, `We don't wear them in the merchant service'. He said, `God man', he said, `they'll think you're a Pom here'. He said, `They don't like the Poms because, you know, you burnt the White House down'. So he said, `Well come into my office and I'll fix you up'. So I did and his secretary gave me some shoulder pads which I still have - about a dozen khaki - and blue ones - air force - which I have. She stitched one lot on my uniform straight away and .... So they then said to me what I intended doing. I said, `Well I want to get back to Australia. I'm sick and tired of sitting on my tail here. I can't get a ship across the Atlantic because I might and I might not. I just want to get back into action again'. And they said, `Well when you get back to Australia, if you're interested, would you be, like to join us?' I said, `What capacity?' He said, `Well we'll look after that'. So I managed to get on a, the *Rimutaka* - New Zealand shipping company ship - and I got the permission of the authorities to leave New York and I came back as a passenger on the *Rimutaka*. And we left on D-day, or 6th of June '44, and the first night out we were attacked by U-boats and that was pretty scary. We had a pretty bad time. We finished up in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for about a week until they could get sufficient strength of escorts to get us into Panama. It was the last ditch stand by the Americans, er, German U-boats. Ah, when they attacked us they didn't have any torp... well, they must have let all their torpedoes off because they come to the surface and they went through the convoy on the surface shooting at us with the surface guns, because they were desperate at that time. Ah, so any way, eventually I arrived back in Melbourne, went down and I saw my wife briefly, and then I contacted the American authorities in Sydney and they invited me to come up, which I did, and after discussions they did not have a position available for me at that time, but they wanted me to join them. So they suggested that if I was prepared to join as an AB in order to get me up to the front line, would I take it? Which I did. So they flew me from Sydney to Port Moresby. Port Moresby, I was taken by a plane over to Cape Anad... or Buna - Dobodura airstrip - and I went to headquarters camp in Buna at Cape Endaiadere and I was there for several months working on headquarters matters relating to New Guinea and so forth. And then the instructions the invasion of the Philippines came along and then an order came through that no Australians were allowed to go north with the Americans - it was to be an all-American affair. Well, my chief, Major [Kedenneff?], came to me and he said, `I've looked at your papers Bill', he said, `On your papers you state you are British', he said, `You were born in England'. And I said, `That's right', I said, `although I've lived in Australia all my life'. He said, `Well, it says nothing in the orders about the British, or English, so ...' he said, `Do you want to go?' I said,

`Of course I want to go'. He said, `Okay. I'll cut your orders but ...' he said, `I know nothing about it and you're on your own'. So he cut me orders and I packed my bag and he gave me a jeep. Well, in fact, he drove me out to Dobodura air strip and left me there. And there I sat for three days, four days and three nights. Every plane that came through - 'cause everybody was wanting to get north - and I'd get on a plane. And then, I only had lieutenant's ratings at that time and a captain would come along and I would get my arse off the plane. And finally, I had a couple of bottles of Scotch which I got off a mate of mine on one of the ships at Oro Bay, which I was treasuring - it was better than money, liquor - so I gave this RTO chappie a couple of drinks of my Scotch and I'm on a plane. And from there I flew up to, up to over the Dutch border - as we knew it then - beyond Wewak.

(15.00)I had an overnight stop there and then I was invited to join a .... I couldn't get out of there and I opened my bottle of Scotch again and I gave a couple of pilots that were spending overnight stop at this transit camp - they were on a bombing mission - they used to fly over, bomb, load up and go back and bomb again. And they said, `Well we're not going to Leyte, but ...' he said, `we're going near there. You can come with us'. He said, `We've only got to drop a few bombs on the way up'. I said, `Well that'll do me' I said, `but can I get from the camp where you're going?'. He said, `No, a bit hard'. So I elected then, I flew to Biak. I got on a plane to Biak and after nearly a week there, and with a little bit more Scotch, I managed to get on a plane for Leyte. But I was shanghaied. I was put on as loadmaster on this cargo plane, jammed in at the last minute, locked in with my bag and I finished up in Peleliu in the Peleliu group in the middle of the battle up there. And there I spent five days, unwanted. They nearly sent me back in the plane but I showed my papers and finally .... The novelty of having an Australian - they'd never seen an Australian a lot of them - they allowed me into their camp and I spent five days there while the .... There was mopping up operations still going on, killing the last of the Japs that was still in the caves, and then a plane coming through from the States with a load of VIPs on board - first time out of the States - they got me onto that and I arrived in Leyte, at an airfield in Leyte. And finally I got in to tackle over in Leyte and there I met an old American major friend of mine, who I shared a house with in Townsville when I was there, and he got me on a small ship which was, we used to run around the coast and up the inlets and take supplies to the forward lines and bring back the wounded to the hospital ships. I did that for about a month. And then a troop ship came in and, he knew it was coming, he said, `I'll get you on that'. Well, when it arrived in, the transportation agent who was to go on leave didn't want to go at that time, so I elected to go on as a deck yeoman working in the office until he left, and then I took over his position, which was equivalent to our, my purser. And then I was on the *[Octorero?]* - she was a big ship - couple of thousand souls altogether, with crew and troops and everywhere. Ah, then we went up for the, into the base of Manila - we were in the second wave. We took troops in there. They were still bombing Corregidor when we went into them - into Manila harbour. Ah, we brought out wounded. From there, we came back down to Biak and collected more wounded. Then went to Honolulu; from Honolulu we went to the States; ah, States we came back to Honolulu and then we were loaded up with troops and we joined a large convoy - and this was round about July '45 and we now know where we were. We didn't at the time but we were off the coast of Japan when they dropped the atomic bomb on the 6th of August. And when we got that message over the air, we didn't know what it was. It was just was an extra big bomb. And they sent us back to Honolulu - we got there four days after VP day when everybody was full and worn out and we missed the celebrations.

Did you celebrate on board ship?

No. Dry ships, American. No celebrations. And then when we got back to Honolulu, nobody wanted to celebrate. (Laughs). So then from there, we went from there to the Marshall Islands, the Bikini Atoll where they made the first atomic peacetime drops, and we took .... All the ships were being diverted there. All brand new ships full of cargo had been put in there to be blown up later on, which we didn't know at the time, and we put caretaker crews on them. And from there we went to Manila, and that's when I signed off. They wanted me to stay with the Filipino Government and go on the China run with it - *Octorera* - she was given to the Filipino Government the ship, and I said, `No, I'm gonna go back home'. So I had trouble doing that. They said, `Well, you'll have to go back to California. From California, then we'll send you back to Australia', and I found out that could be anything up to six months. So I said, `Well, I'll find my own way', so I went to the Australian authorities and I volunteered to do anything at all to get back. So I finished up I flew back in a Catalina flying boat in charge of sixteen prisoners-of-war.

From where?

Ah, Japan - Australians.

Well what sort of condition were they in?

Pretty bad. Sick. Bad. And the plane was loaded up with steaks, bread, butter, and they had one little - you can imagine the Catalina flying boat - one little hot plate about that size. Sixteen prisoners-of-war - or passengers - and the crew, crew of three and myself. Well I cooked, I was five or six days getting back. We used to fly all day and stop overnight on an island. Well I used to start cooking in the morning, and by the time I'd finished the sixteen prisoners and the crew, it was time to start over again. And that was possibly the most rewarding part of the war for me. (Voice emotional at this stage).

(20.00) It was affecting, seeing these fellows?

Even now. (Voice still emotional). Skin and bone.

How long did the journey take to get back?

Um, I think five days.

And when you got back?

Ah, excuse me. [Inaudible] mean to do it. When we, um, arrived over Sydney, over the harbour bridge, to see the look in their faces - crying - I was too, like I am now.

And that then was the end of your war was it?

Yeah. When we landed at Rose Bay, the families were there - most of them that were from Sydney. A couple had been brought in from Adelaide I think. And to see them fellows being greeted by their families who, they didn't know if they were still alive, you know, in most cases, and I took my farewell off them, (voice still shaky) and that was the finish of me. That was the war over. I went into headquarters Americans and I signed off officially and the rest

is private now. I went back to Tasmania. Unfortunately my marriage was shot by that time and I joined Ansetts [sic] as public relations officer and I've worked in Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia, and to cut a long story short, my marriage busted up in finally 1953. I left Tasmania for good. I left a son over there, four or five years of age. Through the circumstances I decided it best that I kept away from them and all the years that, you know, have been a bit of a .... I've got a new family and they've always wanted to know about their brother they'd never seen. And then May the year before last, I got a phone call here on the 27th of May about four o'clock in the afternoon, and I'm sitting in my desk writing all the details I had obtained about the person I believed to be my son, and I was intending to go over to face him. And the phone rang and the chappie was asking, a voice asked for `Looking for Mr Bill Hughes, a gentleman in his seventies'. And I said, `Why? Who are you, may I ask?' and he said, `Well, my name is Colin [McMullin?] and ...' he said, `it's my dad'. And I said, `Well, you've found him'. That's it. And since then it's been great. We have back and forth and every couple of months I get over there, he gets over here. I've just, yesterday, I sent his son back. And so I've got a new life.

END TAPE 3, SIDE A. END OF INTERVIEW.