





TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A

This is Ed Stokes with Ken Sutherland, corvettes, tape one, side one.

Well, it's good to have this background. We've got a good structure here. Could we just begin with your date and place of birth?

10 November 1917

Right. And I think ...

In Jamestown, South Australia.

I think you had a fairly nomadic childhood with your father as a banker.

That's quite true. Having been born in South Australia we lived in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, over the years.

And schooling, I think you finished and that was at Rockhampton?

At Rockhampton Grammar School, yes.

What did you do when you left school in '35?

I joined the Bank of New South Wales in Melbourne in '35 at their Melbourne office.

And I think you stayed there until the outbreak of the war.

Yes, until the war broke out in September – oh not quite. Correct that, I think I was moved to Geelong, at the bank in Geelong, just prior to the war. And when war broke out I was mobilised.

Just a few questions about those pre-war years, Ken. The general tradition of the Australians and the New Zealanders in the First War, the ANZACs, was that a very strong part of you boyhood or not?

I wouldn't say very strong but we were well aware of relations because one grows up with the – with the traditions of ANZAC Day; so consequently one had a very well developed patriotic feeling for the services.

That's interesting. One other question too, in the period leading up to '39, the late '30s. How conscious do you think you were, or perhaps friends, of the political developments in Europe – the rise to power of Hitler and so on?

No more conscious than what came through the media, of course. As a young fellow one, and particularly as I joined the RANR at that time, I was watching the movements in Europe very closely. But as I recall one didn't bring Japan into our thinking at those days.

That's interesting. I know their activities in China were very much underplayed.

Mm.

Another aspect that I think we should just mention is that you were a very keen radio ham which obviously affected your later work. What did you do?

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Well, because of my interest in radio, mainly in the technology of the radio and the developing receivers and transmitters of the day, when I joined the RANR, I joined as a telegraphist and that was in 1936.

I was going to ask you about that, the decision to join the RANR. What prompted that and why the Navy, not one of the other services?

(5.00) I was always very keen on the Navy. I used [to] do a lot of sailing and travelling round in small boats in my time in Queensland and other places and having a very keen – very keen on the Navy as such but one's boyhood memories always go back to the early days, when I was in Melbourne, when the main battle fleet visited Port Phillip Bay. And I can remember as a small boy going all over the *Renown*. I've forgotten what year it was but obviously these things influence one.

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Well I think in the Reserve you spent a couple of weeks each year in continuous training and a week during the week [sic] – through the years. What do you remember of the work that you did in the early years in the Reserve, Ken?

[Pause]

I think you moved on to becoming a paymaster sub-lieutenant in '38.

Yes, I think I was given the opportunity to become a paymaster sub-lieutenant, obviously because of my banking background and I studied hard the usual things for paymasters, like the Naval Discipline Act, et cetera and King's Regulations and was finally commissioned in '38. But my main interest at the time apart from earlier days of telegraphy and a paymaster was in shooting. I used to be a very keen rifle shot and used to be a member of the Port Melbourne team and go over to Williamstown Rifle Range every Saturday. It used to be a part of my sporting activities. I used to enjoy that a great deal and I've no doubt it did no good for my hearing very much but that only turned out to be one of the problems later in life.

Well, the declaration of war, September '39, do you actually have any recollection of the actual announcement by Menzies or not?

Apart from hearing it over the radio and I've heard it so many time since, I've no other recollections than that. I can't remember my own feelings except to say – except to think like many others said at the time, 'Well, at last we know where we are now and at least where we're going'.

The uncertainties obviously were, well, resolved quickly in a sense. You were mobilised and I think you first went to Port Melbourne as a cipher officer but from there you went on in March '40 to HMAS *Rushcutter* for an anti-submarine course. This I think had been something of a long-standing ambition.

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Well true. I wanted to ...

Was it the technical aspects of the ... [Break]

I felt I could serve as an executive officer. I was keen on seamanship and all the things involved and I saw in anti-submarine work something which was very akin to my past hobby

and skills of radio work and the electrical knowledge I had. Happily, I was accepted for one of the courses in *Rushcutter* by Captain Newcomb and his interviewing team in Melbourne.

I think you were saying that the course you did at *Rushcutter* was the first class after his original batch. I think of 66 pre-war trainees. We'll come the course in a moment but I think it was Harvey Newcomb – though himself sounds something of a character – and you were saying he had rather an interesting technique for selecting personnel.

Well, he was a charming man and had a way of interviewing. He had some delightful techniques of sorting out those who would be suitable for anti-submarine warfare, such as picking people for – to have, or those who are able to differentiate tone, which was essential in anti-submarine work.

(10.00) And I can always remember him in his – in what turned out to be a very solemn interviewing process of bringing out a – what I think he had homemade – zither-type instrument with two or three strings on it, on which he would – having turned you away from the instrument so you couldn't see it – he would hit with a hammer and ask you if two successive hits were the same tone, either one was higher or lower. And if you happened to be unable to differentiate, of course you weren't suitable for anti-submarine warfare. So I can always remember him doing this in this interviewing committee.

That's most interesting, Ken. You were saying, of course, before about hearing and quick reflexes being essential for anti-submarine work. Given your own work later which was obviously of great depth in – excuse the pun – in anti-submarine work, what would you in retrospect, say during your Atlantic period, have seen as the key qualities – beside hearing and reflexes – of a good anti-submarine officer?

Let me ... [Break]

In answer to that question, I don't think there's any difference between an anti-submarine officer, a torpedo officer – as they used to be – or a gunnery officer or, indeed, a navigation officer. They all had their own skills. One of the skills of anti-submarine work was on the technical side of equipment operation and maintenance and repair, particularly at sea but the same applied to torpedo officers and gunnery officers, in fact.

So they all had to be people who had an ability to understand equipment and so on?

Naturally, the training of an anti-submarine officer, half the training was on tactical warfare and the other half was technical.

Well, let's turn, perhaps in detail, to this first batch of training of three or four months at *Rushcutter*. Besides the obvious skills of seamanship, navigation and communication, what were the other main aspects of your training at *Rushcutter*?

Well, as I said before, half the time at *Rushcutter* would have been spent on the technical side of the asdic equipment, to become to know it.

In terms of the running and repairing of equipment.

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To come to know it in the greatest detail in terms of repair and maintenance at sea and to use it properly. The other half of the training at, as I said, was tactical.

And this was understanding ...

In the use of the equipment.

Right. The training that you did do at *Rushcutter*, how much of that was practical in, for example, going off on exercises to sea, to work out your tactics at sea? How much of it was more theoretical?

I don't remember and I haven't worked out the exact proportion of theoretical training as opposed to sea training but a large part of the training of the anti-submarine control officer was at sea and for that purpose the classes of officers that went through, usually in dozens or fifteens, were sent to sea for months, in ships that had the gear and were able to operate in tandem with submarines. The ship that I went off in was the *Moresby* at the time. And unfortunately, unfortunately for us, we didn't have the submarine to operate with, anyway. And had to rely on the school's own training equipment which was a simulation of the control – the asdic operation in a ship.

(15.00) Well, let's move on. After completing the course at *Rushcutter* you, I think, went to Britain, leaving in August '40 with twelve others. We might perhaps just move over the voyage to Britain unless there's anything you'd regard as particularly significant there.

No, nothing significant about that except it took a very long time but one had the pleasure of travelling in one of the civilian passenger ships which was not unpleasant but the young sub-lieutenants of the day used to do watches, which was a very wise idea, because it gave me a very valuable lesson in navigation as to how ships like the *Strathallan* navigated around and the navigation that was taught me there came into a great deal of use in later life.

Was there any, or what were the differences though between their style of navigation and how a naval ship would navigate?

Style would probably be it. It's exactly the same navigation but the Strathallan had a chart, a chart room and facilities there the size of the bridge of a ship, whereas in a ship you have a two by two to do your navigation.

Right. That's interesting. Did it also, at that time on a merchant ship, did it help you, do you think, in your later convoy work in understanding how a merchant navy master thinks, in a more general sense, about the whole business of operating a ship at sea?

I dare say it did. Unconsciously I would have known how a ship like a major passenger ship would operate and the type of person and the watch-keeping officers – how they operated and what sort of people they were. Yes I think unconsciously that would have sunk in.

Well, let's move on to Britain itself, Ken and just a brief sidelight – I think you at least passed through London. I'm not sure if you docked at London.

No. I remember the ship in which we were embarked arrived in Liverpool after a heavy night of bombing and it was – [Break] It was approaching winter. Liverpool was foggy and in fact the soot in the atmosphere was so thick it just fell everywhere. And it was partly the soot from the previous night's bomb raid. And ...

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How much did the general devastation of Britain – and of course this really was approaching the height of the Blitz and so on – how much did that affect you a person and how much did it affect your determination to succeed in your naval work?

Strathallan, when it arrived in – just a few days before it arrived we had the first bomb alerts and the *Strathallan* fortunately escaped from the raiders, the long-range bombing raiders – usually Focke-Wulfs – that used to come over the western approaches there in those days. A later ship, I think the *Empress of Britain*, was doing exactly the same thing as the *Strathallan* had done and caught a bomb and was ultimately destroyed. But Strathallan was escaped but the arrival in Liverpool, to see the devastation there; and the training up to London under wartime conditions of a blacked-out train; and arriving in London at about midnight in the middle of an air raid was quite an experience for a young sub-lieutenant. You know, almost like getting thrown in at the deep end.

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It must have been fairly horrific to live – I mean to arrive in an air raid. Do you remember the actual events?

Well, I remember the events very well but the things that stick in one's mind, having been to London many times since, is that on arrival there the streets were completely deserted except for the odd car running around with virtually no headlights and the stench of fires. Burning fires that have been put out leave a peculiar acrid stench that is always – I can always recognise again now. I'll never forget it. And we were finally put up at a place called the Victoria Club, which was a club used for Dominion students studying at London University.

(20.00) That's most interesting, Ken. Well, I do know that from there you went, in October, as anti-submarine control officer on the *Southern Gem* which was, I think, a converted whale-catcher and the subsequent November to another trawler the *Daneman* and this was working in the western approaches. Just talking about that period generally, perhaps referring to both ships, what was life like on ships – perhaps boats – such as that, that had been transferred from peacetime uses to wartime operations?

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Well it would be difficult to describe the life. If you can imagine the previous RN ship – HMA ship – that I had served in was the *Moresby* and we happened to have spent a lot of our time in Queensland in the Moreton Bay area and farther north and the ship, the *Moresby*, was a very run – well run pusser ship; discipline was first rate, everything in order. And the first ship that I went to in the RN was, as you said, a converted whale-catcher. It was wet. It was called a half-tide rock because it was never dry to begin with. It was a fairly well-powered ship, as its use would imply and it still smelt of whales and fish, which permeated everything in the ship including yourself, your clothes and everything else and the crew were mainly fishermen who had been transferred from RNR – well they were RNR probably but fishermen who became RNR – and they were marvellous sailors but that was about as far as it went. They knew as little about the navy as you could possibly imagine.

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Were they easy to work with in terms of training into their anti-submarine role and what about the – what was their general attitude to discipline? Did it mesh in with what you had to do or not?

General attitude to discipline I think was fairly lax but they meshed in. In terms of seamanship they didn't need any training. The technical people in the ship, those involved with anti-submarine gear and the gunnery were usually not – they're not the fishermen – they came from somewhere else. And in quite a number of cases, although not in my experience in

the first two ships I went into, Australian SD ratings were common in nearly every ship working in the western approaches in England.

I'd imagine the weather in the western approaches, perhaps not so much in mid-summer but at any other time of the year, must have been something to contend with in itself?

Oh, quite right. The weather was always the dominant feature of one's life. You were, in those sorts of ship you were continually wet, continually cold and for an Australian whose blood hadn't thickened up at that time, I felt the cold considerably. But ...

Could you get away from the wet down below in the messes? Could you dry out or was it..?

No, it was just the same. The messes were wet. In the case of *Southern Gem* they smelt of fish and I don't think – by the time you mixed up boiled cabbage and bully beef and fuel oil in that mixture, that was a pretty violent sort of mixture.

What about the actual work itself? The convoys you were escorting, how big were they? How far did you go with them?

(25.00) In those days in the *Southern Gem* they did – there was two sorts of convoys. Some of them we took across to the Atlan – Iceland area and dropped them and they went by themselves from there on. And they were convoys probably between 30 and may be 45 ships, usually slow going – about seven and a half knots, as much as you'd expect. And there was another convoy that used to creep in every now and again; we used to take from Liverpool up the Minches, round Cape Wrath and down to Edinburgh. And mid-winter that was as bad a trip that you'd ever get – constant gales, particularly around the north of Scotland,

Yes, I can imagine that. During most of these convoys, Ken, how often would you have contact – active contact – with submarines and often would you have been involved in engaging them with depth charges and so on?

As ever in anti-submarine work, there is always the detection of something on your asdic gear and in those days, as ever, when in doubt we always used to drop depth charges. Early in those days I don't recall submarines being in any great numbers in those close areas. The things that used to bother us most in 1940 was the air raids and they were usually fairly consistent and common, particularly around the east coast of England [sic], as you came south to Edinburgh.

Well, unless... Ken, you were just saying in conclusion about the changes between this work and what you'd known in Australia.

Well, like all my colleagues at the time, we all enjoyed our own climate and particularly the last ship that we were in, in Australia and with all my colleagues – the whole 12 of us – when we went to the RN, all of us were sent to trawlers of some description, working in the most difficult, cold, wet, uncomfortable conditions and with continual – in a lot of cases – air raids and certainly continual work at sea. It was a transition, a difficult one, that I think did us all a lot of good to get us into the right atmosphere for the years that were to come in the RN.

Yes, well I know it was a long slog on that. You went in July '41 to HMS *Osprey* for a long course.

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The long course that you did at *Osprey* I think you were saying, Ken, you were both breaking new ground but also refining old skills. Did the new ground – was that mostly to do with new technology?

Yes, new technology that had been introduced since I was at *Rushcutter* and in other words, new asdic sets and future asdic sets were in development at Fairlie, the Royal Navy research establishment.

And I think you were also saying that at this long course there was quite a refining of the existing techniques and tactics of anti-submarine warfare.

Yes, by that time of course, we were learning by experience of the convoy system and the escorting system of how – what tactics to employ against submarines and the development of those tactics in the operations. And these, of course, was a large part of the long course learning process, in addition to which of course, a lot of time was set aside for operations with submarines at sea. And we did this from the *Nimrod* base down at the bottom of the Mull of Kintyre.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

This is Ed Stokes on corvettes; Ken Sutherland, tape one, side two

Yes, you were saying.

The course went down to *Nimrod* and went out with submarines for weeks and did sea exercises continually with the practical thing. And of course, this is the most valuable thing in an anti-submarine course.

You were saying that after that, I think this is October '41, you went to Her [sic] Majesty's Canadian ship *Avalon* and as with the – as the anti-submarine expert for the group.

Yes that's quite right. I was appointed to the Royal Canadian Navy for group anti-submarine duties in Canadian escort forces – that was the official appointment – and that took me straight to the escort forces operating from St. Johns, Newfoundland mainly. In those days the Canadian escort forces consisted of one or two Canadian destroyers and up to five or six Canadian corvettes, which the Canadians were producing in great numbers.

I think you were saying that during this period and this goes on to February '44, Ken, that you would move round from ship to ship as certain ships were being refitted and so on. I imagine you didn't have much leave through that period.

Well, over the next three years that's quite correct. Being the staff officer to the commander of the escort group, when our own flotilla leader was under repair or boiler clean or repairs and maintenance, dock work et cetera, he and I would go to a new ship and continue the lead – the leadership of the escort group. I might add at that time the Canadian groups were nearly always composed of one or two RN destroyers, possibly a Canadian destroyer and two or three RN corvettes and the balance Canadian corvettes. They deemed it necessary to mix up the ships in that sort of proportion.

And I think you were saying that a typical routine was to make a voyage out on one of the smaller ships, often in a training capacity and come back on the

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destroyer with your own group escort commander. How did that work out in practice?

It worked out very well in practice. It gave me the opportunity, because one of my responsibilities was the training of anti-submarine – of asdic personnel in their own ship and I could observe and train as to what they were doing and how they were doing it and how they should be doing it on the job. And quite frequently when emergencies arose – anti-submarine attacks and so on – I could observe and guide and offer some help to the captain and the AS crews, accordingly.

(5.00) And you were saying that the main or your main duties as the anti-submarine expert were advising on the general submarine situation, the placing of ships, attack and obviously dealing with attacks as they arose. What were the key changes during that period, if there were any and how your tactics evolved?

The tactics became formalised. They had to be taught with simple graphics. The various different types of tactics were given sorts of names like 'Raspberry' et cetera, which was their code name for bringing into operation on radio telephone and general simplification that everybody had a job to do on a specific operation because when the balloon goes up, as it were, you have some sinkings and torpedoes, there's no time to tell people what to do, you just bring in the operation which is already preordained and pre-practiced and to carry out the job. And then as time went on during the war, these operations in their various complexities became more and more common and were the basis of training and tactics at sea for anti-submarine groups.

You were saying before that the older officers than yourself often appeared that much older and I think you were referring to the general stress and strain of this Atlantic convoy work. How common were active engagements and what was the most likely form of active engagement?

In the early days the most, oh well, in common with submarine attack by torpedo was bombing attacks, particularly in the closer or in the immediate western approaches. Soon as you got out to the Atlantic all you had to deal with, in terms of air attack, was long-range reconnaissance aircraft but then as far as submarines were concerned we had the continual threat – by '42 at least – of multiple submarine attack. We used to call it 'pack attack'. There used to be up to three, four and five submarines or more concentrating on one submarine – on one escort, one convoy. And this might be over a matter of three or four days. And you can imagine that when you've had five or six or up to a dozen ships lost things get chaotic after about four days of continual harassment, where the escort really can't afford to leave the convoy and yet would dearly love to go off and chase submarines, or spend more time on organising searches. But it was frustrating in those days that we couldn't do it – not the regular groups. And that was the reason for the advent by '43, I think, of special strike forces. And they were well-equipped sloops as a rule, plus corvettes and destroyers, who were free to roam where the trouble spots lay and they were able to go after the submarines and track them down and spend any amount of time without having to worry about the convoy. And the convoy was left to the routine escorters such as we were.

That's most interesting, Ken. You were referring to one occasion on which, I think, your own ship did sink a submarine, a U-boat.

(10.00) I was serving in the US RCN destroyer *Assinaboine* at the time and it was midsummer, from memory – August – and it was usual in those days – usual at any time, at that time of the year, to find the Atlantic completely and utterly flat, no wind, patchy fogs,

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and as far as asdic was concerned a very difficult area because of temperature gradients in the water. And on this occasion we had depth-charged some likely contacts without success and we were escorting a convoy which came under attack and together with a corvette we hunted down a possible radar contact which turned out to be a submarine. And we caught the submarine on the surface and he, it appeared he couldn't dive – at least we didn't think so. He may have been damaged in earlier depth charge attacks but however he didn't. He decided to fight it out on the surface instead. And we entered into the classical position of chasing one another around. The submarine got inside our turning circle and we really couldn't depress the guns enough – the heavy guns which were four sevens at the time – to do any damage except to shoot the top of the conning tower off and we had a particularly skilful CO, Lieutenant Commander Stubbs, on the *Assinaboine* at the time who managed by good seamanship to do a quick figure of eight and come round and cut the submarine off and ram him, right amidships at about 12 knots or so. It did a fair amount of damage but sunk the submarine but not until the submarine had done a lot of damage to the *Assinaboine* because at short range – and inside our turning circle – gave us the full blast of his Oerlikons which riddled the bridge and the wheelhouse and ...

Were there any deaths?

There were three, I think, three deaths – guns' crew mainly, four sevens guns' crew, regrettably. And we had a very bad fire. We had an extremely dangerous fire which we managed to get out anyway.

And the submarine's crew – did they escape?

About half the submarine's crew escaped – we picked them up later. I can remember them when we went alongside. We lowered the boat and it went around and gathered them in. But they gave the 'Heil Hitler' in the water, in spite of the freezing cold and in spite of the shock they'd had; they were still 'Heil Hitlering'.

Well, moving on a little bit, Ken, in February '44 you went again ...

Just as a matter of record, that submarine was U210.

Right.

On 6 August 1942.

Well I know you did in February '44 go back to *Osprey* as an instructor for D-Day preparations, where I think amongst other people you instructed Prince Philip. We might though move on back to Australia. April '44, I think you were posted back to *Rushcutter*, is that correct?

Yes, correct. I was posted back to Rushcutter for instructional purposes as Tactical Staff Officer on the staff of the school. My job, specifically, was to instruct the second long course that was then planned to go through the school.

When you came back to Australia, the Australia you came back to in mid '44, how had it changed, do you think, from the Australia you left four years before?

Well coming straight back to *Rushcutter* it hadn't changed at all, I don't think. There hadn't been – it – Australians obviously hadn't gone through the traumas of four years of war to which I was accustomed in England. And it so happened that with the censorship as it existed

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in those days, I knew surprisingly little of what went on in Australia in terms of the Darwin bombing and the general state of affairs in the country. In fact, I only knew about the mini-sub entering into the harbour through the confidential reports that were circulated around the western approaches in UK.

(15.00) That's quite remarkable. The course that you did run at *Rushcutter* – did it vary in any significant degree from the courses that you'd done yourself at *Osprey* or not?

No, it didn't. The long course in *Rushcutter* was based mainly on the long course in *Osprey*. Half of it was tactical and operational asdics in all its up-to-date context and the other half was technical, which was still the same. In the operational side, a large part of that or a large slice of that was operation with submarines at sea because as you'd appreciate, that's most important.

Well, let's move on to the *Lismore* itself, Ken, that's been very good to get that material down to set your experience on the *Lismore* in context. I think you were appointed to the *Lismore* on 3 August '45.

Correct, yes.

When you arrived at your first command, what were the skills, what were the qualities do you think that you'd absorbed in the past years that carried over to this new situation?

Oh of course it's too [wide?].

The corvettes of course had been designed as minesweeping vessels. I don't think you had had much experience at minesweeping yourself. Did that strike you as odd at the time or not?

Yes, I guess it did because the only thing I knew about minesweeping was a little bit of theoretical work that I'd done doing a torpedo course at *Flinders* in 1940, so it certainly was a surprise. But on the other hand it's a skill that I could – mainly involving seamanship and navigation which I'm pretty certain that I would have been able to cope with anyway.

And during your period in the Atlantic, the general skills of seamanship in terms of day-to-day running of a ship, navigation and so on, had you been fairly closely involved in that or had you – had that been pushed to one side by the anti-submarine work?

No, it certainly hadn't been pushed to one side because in those four years serving in the RAN, although I was a staff officer to the escort commander et cetera or as an ASCO in the early days, the shortage of personnel meant that an executive officer always had to be a watch-keeping officer and it was only rarely that I was in a position where I wasn't watch-keeping as well as doing all the other work.

You were saying, I think before, that by this stage you'd become, I think, what was called a 'qualified officer' and that put on a par with permanent list men. Did that affect your appointment to the *Lismore* at all or not?

I really wouldn't know but I would imagine that any qualification that you had, qualified officer in particular, certainly would have some influence.

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You'd been in the Navy obviously some time, you were I think 29, was it a special feeling to be given the command of a ship? Was it different in kind to being one of a number of officers on a ship?

Well it certainly has. It certainly is a special feeling and a great honour to be in complete command of a ship. One of the overall feelings one has is total and complete responsibility. No longer had you a captain to whom you either sought advice or what not, you were it. And at the great age of 29 it was a little off-putting to be called the 'old man' but things were – this you can only say in retrospect because the average age of the crew was, oh I guess 22, 23, so 29 probably was a bit advanced.

(20.00) You were making some interesting points before, comparing Australians sailors as you knew them on the *Lismore* with the men you'd known on the ships in the Atlantic – British and Canadian sailors. What were the key differences as you saw it?

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Well dealing not so much with the Canadian sailors but dealing with the RN sailor, it was my general impression that he is slightly lower educational standard, very high IQ and particularly when I mention the *Hotspur* for instance, it was a Cockney ship, London-based Cockney ship and of course, was full of Cockneys and for a quicker-witted crew, you wouldn't find one. They were the sort of a ship that – it is that sort of ship that could find a concert party complete in everything inside five minutes and have no trouble in running a concert.

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That's an interesting comparison.

But as far as the Australian sailor was concerned, if you have – make comparisons, I always felt that his standard of education was quite high compared with the RN standard. But one had to remember that a lot of sailors that found themselves in the navy during the war were a large number of fishermen who had limited education in the formal sense but were extremely fine seamen and you couldn't wish for a better bunch of people, if you were in a tight spot and you needed some seamanship.

You were making an interesting point too about swimming and how it appeared to differ between the countries.

Well, to my amazement a lot of the RN ships' companies couldn't swim and this even applied to professional ex-fishermen and how they particularly handle that sort of situation I'd never know.

Well, Ken, let's turn to the first main task of the *Lismore* after you took over command and this was – of course, you took over command, I think in Melbourne after the refit and first cross-over to Fremantle where you were given what was obviously a very taxing towing operation. How did it all begin?

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Well, I think it all began when the Australian Iron and Steel – a subsidiary of BHP, I think – asked the Navy if they could help in getting two of their large barges up to Yampi Sound because the AIS up there were just starting to mine Cockatoo Island and they needed barges on which to build some gantry cranes and establish a jetty so that the iron ore carriers could come along Cockatoo and accept iron ore directly out of the mine into the hold of the ship and take it back to Whyalla. And it all started there. And I think Commodore Pope, who was

then NOIC Fremantle, naturally would pick a minesweeper, being the best sort of vessel to cope with this sort of thing and that's how *Lismore* got the job.

Well, I know that it was really quite fraught with difficulty and problems. What were the main – what were the general problems that you faced and what were the specific problems that developed during the actual journey?

Well ...

For example ...

The problem was the size and the shape of the pontoons and what they were – they were barges; they were rectangular barges with no semblance of any sea-going vessel. They had slightly flared leading edges, you might say, that's about all. But they were each about 60 tons dead weight and they each – one of them carried about 102 tons of fabricated steel and about 30 tons of gelignite or something and the other carried about 60 or 70 tons. I've forgotten the exact figures. But the problem was the fact that the barges were so completely unhandy, completely inert, unstable, at that loading they rested very low in the water. Even radar was difficult to pick them up when you knew where they were.

(25.00) Besides those problems inherent in the craft themselves, what were the potential difficulties in terms of the tides, the currents, the season of the year that you were heading into?

Well, the difficulty there was all potential, of course. It was October and the beginning of the monsoon season off the west coast and we all know how destructive the monsoon could be off that coast. But getting back to the barges for a moment, one has to learn from experience and I don't think anybody would know before having that experience exactly how to tow two barges – one would be bad enough but two seemed to me, when I was halfway through this job, was almost the end because they were ungovernable. You couldn't steer them. They went any way they liked for no apparent reason and the equipment had to be very, very sturdy indeed and you knew – never knew exactly how strong they ultimately had to be because until you tested it out, nor did you know how fast or slow you had to go until you tested it out. And the interesting thing about it was that in the first 24 hours I learnt most of those exercises which was pretty expensive but nevertheless, we started off at about five and a half knots and with the gear, which was specially prepared, chain bridles, flexible steel wire ropes et cetera between the ship and the first barge and between the first and second barge and we thought that was OK. So having set off at a modest pace in a modest sea, we found everything was wrong with it and all our troubles came at once and we lost the barge – number two barge – by the break between the tow. And it was a very long and tedious business of trying to establish and get the two barges tied up together again and under tow. But in the doing, it was easier said than done. The gear was extremely heavy, as I've mentioned. You're dealing with four-inch FSWRs and they take an enormous amount of manpower to handle and I must confess that had it not been for a well-trained crew accustomed to handling ...

Cables and so on.

Cables, well cables for minesweeping, it would have been impossible. But they were an ideal crew; they worked marvellously well and managed to manhandle all these unhandy towing cables and wires.

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You were saying I think, that you had some remarkable boat work done by your crew in the *Lismore's* whaler and so on.

Well, that's right. In order to handle all these problems that we had with the two barges we had to lower a boat for the for the next 15 days, daily, to go and tender the tow to ensure that it was running properly and it wasn't wearing and chafing and to attend to the navigation lights. But I should have mentioned that in the first 24 hours when the tow broke we had to go back to Fremantle and that wasn't before I'd lost an anchor. And of course I'd used the anchor on the full cable to be able to veer back, having connected the first pontoon with the ship, having to veer astern to the second pontoon which had anchored itself by its own towrope. And I found that never – that didn't work obviously but nevertheless I had – I got so much cable out that my anchor cable, which had been reversed in the dockyard at Fremantle in the refit. In other words the worn area and stretched area of the cable had been put inboard and the better end of the cable had been put on the anchor. Well when the anchor was fully laid out – anchor chain was fully laid out – the anchor chain was ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

This is Ed Stokes, corvettes, Ken Sutherland, tape two, side one.

You were saying about losing the anchor.

Well, one doesn't lose an anchor at sea. I mean that's a calamity and in this case I had to cut the anchor at the inboard end, [abandon?] it and go back to Fremantle, having joined the two pontoons up by this time. And going back to tell my story to Commodore Pope, who I hear ultimately gave the dockyard a bit of a – [pause]

Dressing down.

Yes, dressing down of sorts, about doing – about the way they handled the anchor cable. And at the same time we found that we took 30 tons out of the number one barge which made it float a little bit freer and a little bit more seaworthy.

Well, I know you did finally reach your destination but it was obviously a very taxing time. Perhaps not the best ...

That's to say the least. And the other taxing time, having learnt so much in that first 24 hours of how to handle these two ungovernable things and what speed to go, I think we proceeded up to Yampi at about four knots or four and a half knots. It took a long time but it was worth it and we were very, very lucky in not running into bad weather. But the only thing that happened in between was that I had to refuel at Onslow and to my consternation, having taken the trouble to organise somebody to take over the tow while I went in and refuelled, it didn't happen. There was no organisation, so I just had to anchor the two pontoons out in the roads, go in and refuel, which at Onslow is not a sort of a gentle operation. You have to go into a spring jetty which has a four or five knot cross tide on it, so you can only go in at low water – dead water. Well, having done that it then had to go through the same old business that we had to in the Fremantle roads of recovering the tow again and manhandling the bridles and the tow chains, which by this time had been increased. However, getting to Yampi Sound we got the barges up there and Australian Iron and Steel were able to start off on their construction work and I can always remember telling me – one of the BHP representatives, who we carried as a passenger on board ship – that BHP hoped to get iron ore

which was near pure haematite out of Yampi or Cockatoo Island and delivered to Whyalla at two and six a ton.

Well, just moving on to some general thoughts about the *Lismore* as it was during the whole period of your command. People talk a lot about the general level of comfort in corvettes and their ability to roll and pitch and so on. You'd obviously experienced similar ships. How do you remember that; how comfortable or otherwise were they?

Well, happily by my time, the crew had been cut from about 120, 110 or thereabouts down to 80-odd and that left a lot more room on the mess decks, so the mess decks were more comfortable.

(5.00) Now in general comparison, you know it's always said that the Australian AMSs rolled on dew. I wouldn't have thought that is a fair comment because having spent time in [unintelligible] corvettes and in other trawlers and, indeed, anything that went to sea like destroyers in the Atlantic, I said we came across nothing that was anything worse than the *Lismore*. The *Lismore* was quite OK. I think when she's ballasted properly, carrying enough water and fuel, it's perfectly good and perfectly comparable with any corvette and frigate that I've ever been in.

When you took over, of course this is moving on towards the end period of the war, what was the general morale of the crew and how experienced were they as a crew?

The crew, the general morale I'd say was fairly good. There'd be a few qualifications to that as the year went on purely because a lot of the crew were then – this would be 1946 – and a lot of crew were adding up their points for demobilisation and they were wanting to get home and I think discipline would slip every now and again but really nothing to worry about. What was your other question?

Well, I think you've already answered that about the general morale of the crew but also how capable were they as a crew in terms of experience and training?

Well, I always used to feel very fortunate in that respect because the crew I considered very capable indeed and that was only demonstrated time and time again by their skill with handling tows, with handling all the jobs we had to do of repairing and towing and escorting small vessels and so on that got into trouble in various ways. And I found the crew excellent, excellent seamen and professional.

After you took over the command of the *Lismore*, Ken, was – and this of course was after the refit – was there a period on intense training and working up or was it more a matter of just putting to sea and getting on with it?

No, well, it mainly [was] the latter. In wartime, of course, after a refit you nearly always went to sea and did some pretty thorough working-up exercises. That was standard practice with all ships but here was an occasion – VJ-Day had just passed – the commodore had just thought of a job – sorry, I'll rephrase that. The commodore had given us a job that needed to be done then; there was no time for working up and all we did, I think from memory, was having done our first towing job to Yampi, we carried out exercises – minesweeping exercises – ourselves, in the normal course and also some depth charge runs as well.

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Just turning back to the crew again, and perhaps making a comparison with your experience on Canadian and British ships, was there a difference on Australian ships in terms of relations between officers and the men? And was there also a difference between larger ships such as destroyers and smaller ships such as corvettes in that regard – in terms I guess of the degree of formality or informality in you day-to-day dealings?

Well, I guess, yes. There is a difference. In the Australian ship I think there is a little bit more – there is not a relaxation of discipline, it is still there, in my experience but there is a more egalitarian atmosphere I think, in an Australian ship. In an RN ship, no such atmosphere. It was a very, very much a divided hierarchy in the RN ship, there's no doubt.

(10.00) And do you think the Australian approach aided the – was it [of] benefit to the actual operations of the ship and what you had to do or not, or did it make no difference?

I don't know; I don't think it did any harm, put it that way. And provided the discipline was maintained and training and skills and efficiency was maintained, I think if anything, it did something for it.

Well, having arrived in Darwin you were to spend quite some time in and around Darwin in the islands in the general mopping-up operations, I suppose, before coming to the south. If we look at that period and look first, perhaps, at the seamanship involved, were there any particular challenges or not?

Cut. [Break]

Looking at the work in and around the islands north of Australia, Ken, what was the quality of the charts that you had to navigate with in terms of accuracy?

Oh, the charts were Admiralty charts and I had no problems with accuracy and quality. I think the only things that were, and you would expect them to be so, lack of lighting, navigational aids and the like, which would only be, well one would expect that to be the case, because in the transition from Japanese occupied islands of which they were all then back to civilian administration obviously there hadn't been time to do anything about navigation facilities.

Sure. Did you face any particular weather problems or tidal or current problems in those waters or not?

Well, throughout the whole of those waters and particularly in the northern part of Australia, the weather and tide are very much a part of your life at sea and one has to be very, very careful with the tides and the very strong currents that apply in northern Australia, Torres Strait and even the Darwin area – or particularly the Darwin area also – and around all the islands like Flores and Sumbawa, Sumba and so on. One had some pilot's instructions on them all but it – they weren't all that good and one had to be cautious and learn quickly from experience.

I think you were saying there were a few anchorages – I think perhaps Dili was one of them – that were somewhat taxing to enter and leave.

Well, yes Dili harbour, from memory, was not an easy one by any means. There was only about – a very limited anchorage there to begin with and the entrance and exits to it were

fairly tight and they were unlit and I can remember that – or the only reason why I remember is that Brigadier Dykes, who was the commander of Ten Force, was my passenger at the time and I had taken him to Dili to confer with his Dutch opposite number and they finished their conference at midnight and Brigadier Dykes decided to leave then. Well, there was no lighting at all in Dili harbour and one of the local boats kindly sent a whaler with some ship's company and put a light – a temporary light – on the key buoy on the outside channel; so we got out without running ashore or anything.

Was that an isolated instance or was there perhaps a general problem of also naval units such as your own working through and with the army, who didn't necessarily understand the practicalities of seamanship and so on?

Well I wouldn't expect them to understand, no.

I didn't, incidentally, mean that in a judgmental sense but just practically did it create difficulties for you in that you were meshing two very different kinds of operations?

Well the army were very co-operative. They were quite – obviously we didn't have accommodation for the army, for example and there were preferred parts of the deck which were good army accommodation and they used to think it was a very good thing that at least they could wash and clean and eat in a civilised fashion, which the army people appreciated.

(15.00) That's an interesting point, just the bedding down of people. I know you often – we'll come to it in a moment – were carrying quite large numbers of well, both Australians, Dutch administrative and army personnel and Japanese POWs. How many people could you fit comfortably on the *Lismore* without conditions being too difficult?

Well, I don't know whether we were ever taxed for numbers. It was always a problem, bedding people down in bad weather but given a bit of weather you could carry 150, 180, 200 people aboard a corvette without any trouble and I only say that from experience of my earlier days in the Atlantic. Frequently we used to pick up survivors from sunken convoys and we would have eighty and ninety, 100, 150 without any problems and that was under severe conditions of bad weather and freezing to boot. So you know, travelling around the tropics, provided you didn't have a monsoon to contend with, you had no problem in accommodating large numbers of troops or prisoners of war or whoever and they all bedded down, as I say, on the deck.

Well, turning to the actual work involved, which as you've said, it was a kind of constant to-ing and fro-ing between Darwin and various other islands with the Japanese being brought out, the Dutch going in; in the background the Free Indonesia Movement and so on, what would you regard as the main achievement of the *Lismore* during that period? Could you differentiate the different kinds of things you were doing or did they all blend in, in that you were moving interrelated groups of people around the place?

I don't think there was any great differentiation to any of the jobs we were doing. They were what we used to call 'surveillance work', which is very bread and butter things really. It's going from A to B to C. The important thing was to leave and arrive on time, to be reliable, to get there and to return and to do the job properly. It's what the Navy seems to do in its lifetime. I even remember in – back in the Atlantic again we used to call that 'the milk run'. Well it was 99 per cent graft and boredom and routine under awful conditions and every now

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and again it used to blow up. Well, it was probably the blow up that kept everybody going but generally the navy work is routine.

Yes, that's – well I'm sure in many ways, the case. In terms of dealing with the different groups of people, were there and difficulties there or challenges, for example in dealing with the Japanese POWs or for that matter with the Dutch who might have had their own agenda that they might in some way have affected what you were doing?

I don't think they affected what I was doing. They probably affected the surveillance – the Army surveillance people that I was carrying aboard. They were the ones who had to talk and negotiate with the local Japanese – prisoners of war; the local sultan and all his supporters and the people and the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration and the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, all of which were involved in these operations. Going back to the Navy, I just happened to be the carrier, you know, I took all these people here, there and took them home again. Provided I did my job and didn't lose anybody that was it.

Through all this were you, yourself, able to come to any assessment in your own mind of the likely future of the islands?

Well, that's an interesting question because in some of the islands, particularly Flores for example, where there was a strong Roman Catholic missionary population, they were pro-Dutch, anti-Japanese and quite happy to see and welcome the NICA back again, which was quite the opposite to my observation when I went ashore at a place like Sumbawa, where the local people, I think, preferred the Japanese to the Dutch. They wanted the Dutch and the Japanese out and they wanted to set up their own Free Indonesia Movement and this was done by way of English signs prepared especially for our benefit.

(20.00) Do you remember what some of those signs said or, I mean, the theme, the gist of their message?

No, I can't to tell you the truth. I ... The very fact that they were done in English indicated that the message was particularly for us. And I think, I'll have to stretch my memory but I think they were sort of free Indonesia movements and so on.

The ferrying to and fro of Japanese – both regular POWs and I know in a few instances, senior officers destined for war crimes' trials – did that impinge at all on the attitudes of your crew or not? Was there a reaction against them as the pre-enemy that once was?

I don't think the sailors reacted, not outwardly and certainly not violently in any way. When we carried Japanese prisoners of war, both navy and army, they got civil treatment and in fact, I can always remember the Number One, Bill Alderton-Smith, who was a first-rate Number One, he always used to rub his hands when he got Japanese prisoners of war on board, particularly the navy ones, because he used to use them as working parties for chipping and painting. And I don't think *Lismore* looked so well for many a long day to have all this masses of free labour.

And were the Japanese [happy] to have something to do to take their minds off other things or was that – did they baulk against it?

No, the Japanese were quite co-operative and they seemed to be quite keen and enjoyed doing what they were doing, particularly for the sailors. I think there was a certain empathy between even the Japanese sailor and the Australian sailor.

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Well, just turning to the island people that you met but I'm not referring to any particular political movement, the general reception that you received through the islands, was it generally good or did it in some instances verge on antipathy, if not hostility?

I'll tackle the last one first. There was no hostility that I can remember, not to my observation. Sometimes there was antipathy, particularly those islands, as I say, like Sumbawa where there was a strong FIM movement, but always civil. And it was interesting in the ones like Flores, they went to the trouble of organising a reception committee and a reception party – they sung and they danced and all the children of the local school would get out and perform and so on and this was more the case than not and it was ... [Break]

You were saying, Ken.

Well, I think they received us quite genuinely with a lot of goodwill.

Were there many open social contacts between your officers and men and the local people or were you in port for such short times that that didn't develop?

Well, no great developments in that area. We were in port for such short times but on the other hand, we always try and used to organise a soccer match and this was done on several occasions and we even had return matches. From memory *Lismore* won the last one, two-one and I've forgotten who won the first one.

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And were there any other general contacts at a personal level or at a cultural level that stand out in your mind?

[Sigh]

I know you had – there was some entertainment by one of the local sultans of yourself, at least.

(25.00) Yes. Well, the local sultan would invite the officer in charge of the surveillance party and myself – invariably invite us to lunch. The exact conversation – cultural or otherwise – I really can't remember but all I'm left with is on one occasion, it was the second day of luncheon that I declined from having my lunch and the sultan – I asked to be excused from having his main dishes because the previous day at lunch it upset me, so and I didn't want to cause offence by refusing his food but at least he had a sense of humour and when I left that day – left the palace – I – he handed a carved Malay statue of a peasant standing with his hand across his tummy, obviously with stomach ache.

I think that's just behind us now, isn't it? Oh, that's a lovely memory. Just turning to you men again, I'd imagine there must have been some frustrations when the war was over and there were thoughts of home and so on. What ways were you able to provide outlets for energy and to develop things that took their mind a little off the tedium of this to-ing and fro-ing?

Well, we used to try and make the most of every opportunity for sport and swimming. The sport, as I mentioned before, was football matches in the islands, at Koepang and in Darwin. And when it got to Darwin they used to use the local swimming pool as well. There's not much else, not just time, not much time left for anything much other, many other things, really.

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Do you, just thinking of the crew as they were, do you remember many men being involved in shipboard hobbies and so on?

Strangely enough, no I don't. I can't recall any hobbies being indulged in. Maybe they were but I must admit I can't remember ever having seen it.

Would that at all have been a pattern incidentally of the time in the Atlantic or were you simply so hard-pressed then that that sort of thing was right out of court?

Well, it probably wasn't out of court but I think the answer is yes, we were so hard-pressed that nobody had time for even shipboard hobbies. The weather was such that, in those ships where we worked watch in watch – it was frequently watch in watch – we hadn't arrived at the luxury of three watches; one spent every possible moment to catch up on sleep and even that didn't happen, sometimes.

Sure. Well, just before we turn to the voyage south on the *Lismore*, Ken, is there anything else of this period in the islands and around Darwin that you think significant to record? [Break] I think there is one highlight of this time that you were recalling, Ken.

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Well, if you can call it a highlight amongst a very routine passage to and from the islands. I had to return to Koepang to top up with fuel and for some reason the – of which is a very long story, we had to divert because of – to satisfy the surveillance party's need and I had to take fuel from the *Quiberon* at sea. Now, this may have perplexed some of our people – in fact I think it did for most of the crew – because they hadn't done this before. Fuelling at sea was a common practice for me because I'd fuelled for years, refuelled at sea. And on this occasion when *Quiberon* said 'Well, I'll pass over 'X' tons of fuel for you, come alongside. Pass me over the necessary gear et cetera and I'll – we'll toss across a jackstay and so on.' I said, 'O.K., we'll do that'. And we came alongside and I can remember the coxswain nearly had kittens because he had to stay on course within about fifty feet of the *Quiberon*, sailing at about ten knots.

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END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

This is Ed Stokes, Corvettes, Ken Sutherland, tape two, side two.

Yes, you were coming alongside.

Well, we came alongside to *Quiberon* and sailed at about eight, ten knots – I've forgotten what the speed was now – passed over the jackstays and got all the gear ready. *Quiberon* sent over the fuel hose and so we transferred the fuel – all very routine. But I know aboard our ship that this hadn't been done before and – or not very much anyway – and the coxswain for one was having – I think he must have been having kittens because he had to steer a steady course within such a close distance of a destroyer for so long that the strain was almost too much. But however it went off very well. We completed the job, got the fuel necessary, unhooked and away we went. And I think our coxswain was a pretty proud fella after that day.

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He could steer a true, straight course.

Needless to say I was very relieved too, because I'd never done this with *Lismore* before either.

Turning on to the end of the period on the *Lismore*, Ken, after you finished your work in the islands – February, March '46 this is – you took various tows getting down to Newcastle. What stands out in your mind of that trip down the east coast?

Well, we were towing – we were escorting a GPV – Oh no look, I should back track. Going into Thursday Island, I was towing a GPV then and, as we were talking earlier, there was a very strong flood tide going in of about seven knots and this GPV. I already reined in the tow-line as close as safety – as close as I could get safely, knowing very well that I couldn't handle a long tow-line with a strong tide in case I had to get round navigation marks and buoys and what not, which we duly did but then we came across a middle ground buoy and the time was necessary for me to turn to port rather rapidly. The towing [sic] vessel had no power of course, no steering either and I realised what might happen. The GPV might go downstream from the buoy and my tow-wire – which happened to be a minesweeping wire – would cut the buoy right off its socks so I took the million to one chance and put on full speed just for five or ten seconds, just enough to tauten the rope – tauten the minesweeping wire – to such a degree that it flattened, went over the top of the buoy and fell back again. The GPV being of lesser draught went round the middle buoy and I continued the tow on into the harbour.

That's a lovely manoeuvre. I can see it all happening.

Well, it was a bit of a hair-raising manoeuvre because I could see it happening long before I took this notion and there's nothing I could do about it.

(5.00) I don't imagine this is the kind of manoeuvre that you read about in the text books.

It certainly isn't.

Well, going on from Thursday Island coming down the south coast – the east coast, is there anything that stands out in your mind of that voyage or not?

Well, it was another – once again the only thing, apart from the routine navigating down through the reef, was towing once again. And this was another vessel originally started as an escort but the vessel broke down and started to take water. And all we could do, send them over a portable pump and to pump like mad because we couldn't do otherwise and just tell them to get on with it and pump like mad and hope they'll stay afloat in the next twenty-four hours, which they did. I mean these are little minor episodes; I suppose they relieve the tedium of hundreds and hundreds of miles of dull towing.

Yes, I can imagine that. Well of course, there was later the visit to Byron Bay for the citizens of Lismore and so on to see their ship. And then I think you went up to Brisbane and that I think's where you left the *Lismore*.

Yes, the people of Lismore made us very welcome there and it was sad that the ship had to leave Byron Bay because of bad weather but nevertheless the ship's company in two watches went down to Lismore and were grandly entertained.

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We had a couple more episodes of search and rescue whilst in Brisbane. I remember being sent out one day to find a ship which had broken down. It turned out to be twenty miles south of where she thought she was. But another incident about this same time was – there was a wreck being towed by another corvette and the wreck had sunk in the shipping lanes, so they needed someone to go out and find the wreck and blast it and make sure that there was nothing sticking up high enough to interfere with shipping and I got that job. So, I mean that was another item of, you might say, excitement to relieve the boredom.

And was that a matter of locating the wreck with using sonar?

It was a matter of locating the wreck using sonar and echo-sounding, which we did and we plotted the wreck. We buoyed it and brought in a team of demolition experts, who planted some charges on top of the wreck. We fired those from *Lismore*. Didn't quite demolish the wreck so we finished it off with depth charges.

I was wondering whether your depth charges came into play there.

Oh yes, at last we had some practical depth charging to do.

Well, at the end of all this, Ken, you'd had this obviously exceptionally busy and difficult time in the Atlantic and then this interlude almost, by comparison it must have seemed, at the end of the war. But looking back on it all when you left the navy, how did the war – your war experience – seem to you? What had been the gains, what had been the losses for you as a person?

Oh, that's a pretty wide philosophical question. Bearing in mind I was only 29 at the end of the war and I realise that I was 22 to start, I often think that I aged ten or twenty years, faster than the passage of time. One had to. One accepted the responsibility as a matter of course and grew to handle it. When I think of it now, it's easy to think in retrospect that my son now is the same age as my Captain (D) was when I was at sea, it makes me wonder, you know. Even he was experienced 'nd all as he was, he was a relatively young man but the war – I wouldn't put it as picturesquely as the 'ravages of war' – but it had aged him to about fifteen or twenty years, I'm sure.

(10.00) That's most interesting. And I know there was some thought of a permanent career in the Navy but I think you opted otherwise. What were the issues there?

Well, frankly after seven years of constant travel and constant movement I was rather keen to set up house with my wife and establish a family, particularly in view of the fact that my pre-war lifetime had been on the constant move. I had this obsession, I think, of wanting to stay put for a change. So with that in mind I had the additional thoughts – and having taken a lot of advice from my RAN colleagues, I didn't think the RAN and its post-war activities and developments would offer the opportunities which I thought I might find in civil life. So to cut a long story short, I think I opted for return to civil life.

Well just finally Ken, is there any issue that you'd like to raise or anything that you'd like to put in conclusion about this record of your war experience that you feel hasn't been covered? I think there is one thing you'd like to say, Ken.

Well, in – you can only say these things with the benefit of retrospect and that's when one looks at your career in the Navy and bearing in mind that it – my career continued in the Reserve until I was retired at forty-five. One has the privilege of meeting so many friends and making so many lifelong friends that it leaves you with one of the great benefits ...

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Was that a ...?

... of the service itself.

Was that a function, do you think, of war and people being bonded by the intensity of wartime experience or just a function of shipboard life and that ships in themselves bond people?

Well obviously those two cases are – it is so. It is rather interesting in my particular case, although I have bonds and links in *Lismore* which I keep up today, most of my colleagues in anti-submarine warfare, several hundred of them, all went to different ships in the RN and consequently we can't keep up those contacts. But we have formed an association in Australia of all the anti-submarine warfare people, which is based here in Sydney and we have been meeting as an association for the last forty-five years. And all those fellows are exactly the same as me; we all went to individual ships in the RN; we all have that common bond of experience; we all did much the same things; we all served in the Atlantic; we served in the Mediterranean; we served in a variety of RN ships – mainly destroyers as it turned out. A lot of them obtained their commands in the RN. So we have that common bond amongst us. We even ended up with the same problems of deafness. It's surprising how many of my colleagues are – suffer from hearing problems. And it's quite amusing to go to one of our functions these days – everybody shouts at everybody else. (That's of the record.)

(15.00) Ken, I realise, of course, that you never actually worked in a gun crew but for example on the bridge of a destroyer you must have been very close to guns being fired and so on, What protective equipment did you have or dod you have none?

Well, strange as it may sound, the answer was nil and incredible to think that we didn't take precautions. Now the regulations, for all I know, may have laid it down that we should have put something in our ears but nobody ever did. In my case where my ears were so important to me, I would want to pick up earphones and listen in action stations and therefore couldn't wear ear pads or ear plugs like a gun's crew. But very little thought – we gave very little thought – and I dare say it's half our own fault – to protecting our ears. There's no doubt about it that one doesn't realise the risks you take with heavy gunfire. And it's not only gunfire from big guns, it's the small guns too. If – did I mention to you in pre-war and in post-war days I used to represent the Navy at Williamstown Rifle Range, because I was very keen on rifle fire and rifle shooting and machine-gun shooting, you see. And when you do a lot of this, all day, shooting live ammunition, without ear pads you must obviously be at risk. And we never thought of ear pads.

That's remarkable but perhaps I guess a product of the times and the general lack of education on these issues. Ken, on behalf of the War Memorial for making this tape and in particular for your time, thank you very much.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B

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