TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is Ed Stokes, corvettes, Bill Norbury, tape one, side one.

Bill, could we just begin please with your date and place of birth?

19th August 1925 in Brisbane.

And I think, although being born there, you really grew up near Newcastle. Where was that?

In Merewether. Went back to my grandfather's - Merewether beach.

I think you were saying your father had been in the RN and later in the AIF at Gallipoli. Was he a British man who'd come to Australia?

Yes, he was in the Royal Navy thirteen years and then came to Australia and when the one broke out he joined the AIF and went ashore on Gallipoli.

As a young fellow, and later as a young man, were you particularly conscious, or not, of the tradition of the ANZACs?

Oh yes, in those days we were. We were brought up on it.

Do you remember attending annual ANZAC Day ceremonies?

Yes, I do, as a kid. Yes, my grandfather used to take me along.

You were saying, I think, that your father went off and, I think, spent a lot of time away from the family. You grew up with your mother and your grandfather in Newcastle. And I think you were about fifteen when you left school. What did you do then?

I got a job at the BHP as a clerical trainee, and I worked in the office in the laboratory.

Of course, I think this was after the actual outbreak of war. Is that correct?

Yes, shortly after.

Do you remember the outbreak of war? Do you remember Menzies' speech, and if you do, how did it affect the family?

I don't particularly remember it. The only thing I can remember about was the first night they blacked out Newcastle. I think everybody in Newcastle went up onto the hill and watched the lights go out.

> Do you remember that? Could you describe that any more - how it actually happened - how it looked?

It was just a city full of lights and then at a given time it was black.

> It must have been somewhat strange. The work at Newcastle, you were working as a clerical trainee, I think, in the laboratory. Was that recording scientific experiments and so on?

(5.00) Recording the results of daily tests and metals and all the plants. Everything that was made was tested every day in the test house in the laboratory. All the records had to be kept.

> Well, I think it was late '42 that you enlisted. What were the main reasons, besides actually, obviously, coming of age, the main reasons behind enlisting?

To be in it. In those days every young fella wanted to be in it - do his bit.

> Had your father's wartime service anything to do with it, or not?

Yes, that had a lot of influence on it, yes.

> When you say the main thing was just to be in it, do you mean in terms of going overseas, having adventures, or in a more direct patriotic sense in terms of defending the country?

Get in and do your patriotic duty and defend the country against the enemy.

> I think you had first tried to enlist in the army.

Tried to, but didn't get very far - too young. And found out actually, that I was too young. I tried to put my age back but it was unsuccessful.

> Did you try the army again later, or did you decide the navy was a better option?

Well, at seventeen I could get into the navy, and that was the first thing that was available. So I went for the navy at seventeen, rather than wait eighteen for the army. Pleased that I did.

> Yes, I don't think being a footslogger would be much joy. Your mother and your grandfather, how did they react to your decision to enlist at seventeen?

No opposition. They weren't happy but there was no opposition - otherwise I would have run away and joined up as 'Bill Smith'.

> And were there any other brothers and sisters in the family who enlisted also, or not?

Younger brother went into the permanent navy in April 1945, a month before the war with Germany finished.

> I think you first went to Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria, this is October '42. What do you remember of your training there? What was the first thing that you had to do?

The first thing you had to do was overcome your fear of the chief petty officer and his offsiders, and the strict discipline that was supposed to be on there, and the snares of the old salts that had been in the navy one or two or three or ten years - telling you you'll be sorry. Once you got over that you settled into the routine of drills and learning to behave according to the rules and regulations. And possibly learning not to be caught breaking them. A little bit of gunnery. A little bit of school work - navy tradition. A little bit of sailing, rowing.

> Basic seamanship.

Basic seamanship. All general training to become a specialist later on in whatever branch you went to.

> I'd imagine there was a fair emphasis on parade ground drill and so on. But that discipline, as a young man coming into the navy, how easy was it to fit into that, or was it quite difficult?

No, it was quite easy to fit into it. You knew what you had to do and you did it. You knew if you got caught not doing it you'd be in trouble, so if you wanted to do something that you weren't allowed to do you made sure you weren't caught.

> The living conditions at Flinders - things such as where you slept, food, and so on - how comfortable, or otherwise, was that?

Sleeping in a hammock - very comfortable. Food was excellent, and across the road was the canteen for the senior seamen, which we weren't allowed to go into, but quite often we found ourselves inside the door and having a spot of 'Murphy's White Flash', and that was very nice, too.

Getting used to sleeping in a hammock, was that a bit of an issue, or not?

Not really, no - most comfortable.

What about leave while you were at Flinders? Did you get opportunities to get away, or not?

Your parents had signed your papers and given you permission to join the navy and go overseas if need be and get killed if it happened, but to go on leave at my age you had to get your mother's permission, or your parents' permission, to go on leave to Melbourne, even though she'd signed the papers for you to join the navy and go overseas. So before I could go on leave to Melbourne I had to get in touch with my mother and get a letter.

Could you do that, or was that difficult?

(10.00) Oh no. It was just a matter of writing home and getting the letter, and applying for leave and presenting the permission.

You say that with a trace of irony, or perhaps resentment.

No resentment, no. It's one of the things you had to do, but it's just one of those stupid things that you had to do.

The rules and regulations.

It's alright for you to get killed but you couldn't go off to Melbourne and get drunk unless your mother gave permission - or your guardian.

When you did go off on leave with your mates what were you generally into? What the main activities?

Quite often you were billeted through one of the agencies. Depending on the family you stayed with, virtually depended on what you did for your weekend. I had the fortune to be billeted at the place of a bookmaker's clerk a couple of times and used to go to the races. Another time a fellow was a keen golfer - and his wife, no children - and played a game of golf occasionally. Just depends on where you were. If you choose to stay in town at one of the YMCA places, well, you made your own entertainment. [Break in recording.]

I think you left Flinders as an Ordinary Seaman, Second Class, because of your age, and you went to *Rushcutter*. At *Rushcutter* you'd chosen to do - or you'd chosen to do an asdic course. What were the basic aspects of your asdic training?

You learnt how to operate the asdic set. Learnt how to translate from the sounds to your senior officers what you think you've found and where it was and how far away it was. You also learnt how to do preliminary maintenance on the set.

> So it was basically the maintenance, the running of the equipment and, obviously, using it.

Not so much the running of the equipment. There was four of us and a senior, higher, submarine detector - he was the maintenance man. But we did do a little bit of preliminary in *Rushcutter* to learn a little bit about it.

> Well, of course, the whole basis of asdic is listening to sounds that are reflecting back off objects underwater. How difficult was it to learn to differentiate the different sounds you heard? How different are they in fact the sounds from, say, fish or metal or rocks?

There is a difference. You get used to it, I guess, in time. I don't know how long but you could pick up the metal sound from the rock sound and the fish used to swish through it, whereas the metal and the rock would give you a solid rebound, the other would have a swish in it. And it was just a matter of time and experience.

> The distance that the sounds were reflecting back from, was that a matter of the time in from the outgoing to the incoming signal, or something else?

The distance. Your sound went out, I'm not sure, I think it might have been effective for about two and a half thousand yards. As it went out it bent according to the temperature of the waters. So you could basically go over something and miss it. It would have to be very minute. But that's what used to happen, the sound would bend depending on the temperature and you'd lose it at about two and a half thousand yards, I guess.

> The training that you did at *Rushcutter*, Bill. How much of it was theoretical bookwork, or working with equipment at the base? How much of it was sea-going training?

We went out overnight at the end of our course, or very near the end of our course, on an old cattle ship. That was the sea training.

> And you did asdic work on her?

No, we went to sea on her. I don't know that we did asdic work on her, but we just went to sea for a trip - overnight experience.

> I see, to get the basics of being at sea on a ship.

Yep.

Looking back on your training, if you had to rate it from good to adequate to poor, how would you have rated your training given what you later had to do?

Quite good.

I think you actually topped the school. Did you have to study very hard for that, or how did you do that?

Fluke - just a fluke.

And you were saying that you opted, after the course, to go to the N-class destroyers, these were the ships such as the *Nestor* and so on in the Mediterranean. Why did you wish that?

(15.00) That was where the action was, I guess, and they were the glamour ships of the day.

Did you in fact get that posting, or not?

No, I was posted to *Lismore* which at the time disappointed me, and I approached the commanding officer of the school about it and suggested that I'd be led to believe that the top of the WASA had pick of the ships. And he gave me some reason why I shouldn't go to the N-class and some reason why I should go where he put me and that was it. Thank goodness I got on to the corvettes, as it turned out.

Why?

Much better life, much better company because it's a smaller ship. You knew everybody very closely and your officers, in the main, were fellows that had been merchant navy sea-going or volunteers wartime period, the same as yourself.

So you were more closely involved in the day-to-day life of the ship?

Yes, and with the people.

Well, we'll come to that later. You did, I think, have a final leave and you went home. What was that leave like? And what were your thoughts of going overseas?

Looking forward to going overseas very much. Mother was very upset about the thought of losing little boy. Gave me strict instructions not to get a tattoo.

And what other happenings went on during that leave?

Oh, just the normal - surf, pub.

Was there any apprehension about going into a war area, or not?

No.

Well, I think you went by British liner, the *Majura*, Melbourne to Colombo with some other *Lismore* replacements. The voyage to Colombo, of course, was your first real period at sea. What do you remember of that?

I remember how flat the sea was. I remember how nice the food was. I remember what a mess we made of the cabin the night before we hit Colombo when we got on to the Corio .

When you got on to the Corio?

C-O-R Ten, Corio whisky, Australian made - rubbish.

Oh right, yes. So you had a bit of a session.

Yeah, the night before we hit Colombo we certainly did.

Well, Colombo, Bill, I think you were at an RN depot. What do you remember of that period in Colombo?

The period in Colombo was a period of sightseeing, where you could. Being followed all around the streets by the natives begging or offering their sister to you for a few rupees. Trying the various Ceylonese cooking in the different shops.

Did you enjoy Colombo?

It was an experience. And the depot was an experience. First taste of Royal Navy type discipline, Royal Navy living conditions, and Royal Navy seamen.

How different was the Royal Navy style of doing things to the RAN style?

Royal Navy probably in those days many, many more of them had gone into the navy because there was no jobs at home. And they were underpaid and downtrodden, I suppose would be the word.

How did they react to you Aussies, with your better pay and your generally freer attitude to life, perhaps?

Probably the same way as the Australian soldier reacted to the American soldier out here in Australia when they had .... But we got on alright with them in the depot.

> Well, I think you went from Colombo, after a couple of weeks, to Bombay by French liner. I think you had a rather better time in Bombay, again staying at RN barracks.

Yes, the skipper of the ship would like to hear you calling it a liner. Bombay was a much more enjoyable stay than Colombo because we were able to meet people from the Australian Association, the Australian Society, and they took us into some very, very nice places reserved for higher businessmen.

> What sort of things did you do with these Australians?

(20.00) We went to their private home or flat and had dinner. On occasion we went out to the Lord Willingdin Club with the brother of Tubby Clayton, founder of Toc H. His brother was an Australian and he was the president up there. The Willingdin Club was a magnificent setup. Probably equal to what the Palm Meadows up here on the coast is today only fifty years before it.

> And I think you managed to get in a fair deal of swimming in some pleasant places.

Yes, I was lucky enough to be able to get into Colombo Swimming Club, and Back Bay and Beach Kandy at Bombay - having played a little bit of water polo with the Royal Navy teams.

> Well, I think it was about August '43 that the *Lismore*, somewhat late, turned up and this was after her period in the Mediterranean, the sinking of the *Yoma*, and various crew replacements came on in Bombay, including yourself. And then I think you steamed to Colombo where other replacements came on. Do you remember the name of the CO when you joined up?

On the ship - Lance Lever.

> Tell us about him. I gather he was generally regarded as a fairly popular kind of a skipper.

He was a jimmy before he became skipper, and as the executive officer, apparently, the captain at the time interfered with him a bit more than a captain should interfere with the jimmy. So Lever apparently decided that he would not interfere with the jimmy's running of the ship, and he didn't do so to any great extent. But he was a very fair man to all the ship's company and respected by all.

What were the qualities that sailors, such as yourself, looked for first in a commanding officer? Were they qualities to do with his seamanship, or to do with his management of men?

I don't know that in my age we looked for anything. We found what was there and gauged it then. It's only these last few years of theoreticians and academians [sic] that go for all this making up of what people should or should not be. We just took 'em as they came and then judged them on their performance.

But when you judged them, what did you judge?

Well, his seamanship, his ability to handle the troops, and his attitude towards them and his compassion for them.

Well, just going on to some aspects of the *Lismore*, et cetera - the *Lismore*, the ship, in joining up. She was your first ship in terms of a ship you belonged to. How do you remember her as a ship? Did she fit your image of a fighting ship?

Not by any stretch of the imagination, when I first saw it, no. A tiny little 690-ton thing. But it was there to do what it was supposed to do and when the occasion arose it, and its ship's company did.

They were, of course, quite small ships. What were the living spaces like - the mess decks? And also what was your working space like, where you did your asdic work?

Our operating theatre for asdic was up on the top of the open bridge. There was only three corvettes had the open bridge. And our hut was about four by four and five foot high, if you're lucky. And you sat in that on a little stool against one wall and in front of you was a mounted compass and that's where you sat for one hour and you pinned away. The sleeping quarters - you got on board and you positioned your hammock where there was room after the crew had been changed over. Those that went ashore, the senior ones took their place and you went up the sharp end where all the mugs went. And then as you became a little bit senior you left your hammock in the bin and you kicked somebody off the seats at mess tables against the bulkhead, and that's where you stood - that's where you slept. I didn't sleep in a hammock for two years.

In your mess life there was obviously a clear pecking order from the most junior, upwards. As a young fellow joining the ship, you took what was left, did you?

(25.00) By way of room to sling your hammock, yes. No, not at the mess table, it was pretty even there. Of course there was a senior bloke and there was a couple of would-be seniors, but generally speaking, very good.

> The other features of the ship, how do you remember them in terms of the physical structure of the ship - the number of decks and the ease of getting about the ship and so on?

Well, you only went from one - come out of the mess deck, into the waist, and went up a set of stairs onto the boat deck, and that was it, and then another one up to the bridge. It was no problem.

> The corvettes do, or certainly have been given the name, of being very lively at sea - rolling and pitching and so on. Do you think that's fair or has that aspect of them been exaggerated?

I think any ship'll go in a big sea. But we had some experiences in high seas - roll over. Don't know what our greatest roll was, might have been thirty-five degrees. I have no idea.

> Yes, well those figures, of course, can vary a lot. What about seasickness? Was that a problem for you when you went to sea?

I was very fortunate. I only ever got seasick once, and that was when I had too much to eat one breakfast morning when everybody else was sick. My very good mate, my 'opo', he used to get sick every time he went to sea. The ocean could be as flat as this floor and he'd get sick. But in all the years he was there with me, he never missed a shift - never missed any of his work.

> I think I've heard about this fellow. He used to go on watch with a bucket.

That's right. And I emptied the bucket many a time.

> Do you think the navy made adequate provision for men who did have just a hereditary problem of constant seasickness?

I don't know what provision they could have made, because until you're out there nobody knew that you had this problem.

> But would it have been better for a man such as this, do you think, to have been posted to a shore posting?

Well, he wouldn't want it. He wasn't prepared to take that. He put up with it. Never missed a trick. Some of them might have taken postings ashore, but there wasn't much provision the navy could make for it because, as I say, they wouldn't know who was going to be seasick until you got there.

> Yes, of course. The heat, you spent a lot of time in tropical waters, how adequately was the ship cooled? And on particularly hot nights what did you do to sleep?

You slept in your underpants and you sweated if need be. You put up with the heat. You got used to it. You slept in the mess deck under the pipes that were lagged with asbestos, which is the big scream today, and that was it. Hot, very hot, but when we came back to Fremantle, probably early December, we were in our full uniforms because it was only about eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit, which was cold to us.

> The relationships on board the corvette, the *Lismore*, amongst the men and the officers. How relaxed, or formal, were things? Once you got to sea did things loosen up a bit, or not?

Not to the extent that you were on first names, or anything like this, basis. The officers had to do their duty and see that things were done, and the troops accepted that. But it was, in the main, reasonably relaxed.

> And the general morale of the crew when you joined, and during the period in the Indian Ocean, how do you remember that?

It was always very good, the morale on board the ship, very good. I don't remember a downturn. There was a bit of a problem before I got on and then there was another bit of an anti the Navy Board aspect in Melbourne, December '44, when the skipper was supposed to take the ship north without leave for the troops and he jacked up on that.

> We might perhaps come to talk about that later. Bill, the period, late '43 when you joined the ship to November '44, you were mainly on general escort work in the Indian Ocean, I think - Calcutta, the Maldives, Diego Garcia - these are just some of the ports you called at. What were the general routines at sea? Could you describe a typical day at sea during that period?

Well, typical day at sea, if you're on morning watch you'd come off at eight o'clock, and then you'd go back on watch at midday. Now in that period after you had your breakfast, you might have to go and do work, as they called, *pas de* ship for a couple of hours. And then you'd go twelve till four, and then you'd have your two hours' off in the dogwatch and be back six to eight ...

> I think you yourself during those morning periods were working as a writer, I suppose a secretary for the executive officer. What sort of work did that involve?

Well that involved clerical duties and regards to Admiralty rules and regulations as per the good books, which had to be amended from time to time, and these various signals

that used to instruct the navy on how to operate. I'd have to keep those manuals up to date.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

> Identification: This is Ed Stokes, corvettes, William Norbury, tape one, side two.
>
> You were saying you were doing these general duties for the executive officer. Did you have to, or were you involved at all in censoring letters?

Oh that happened, yeah. That happened occasionally.

> It often seems, just talking to people, a rather vexed issue in that a lot of the information that was censored out really was fairly trivial and by the time the enemy've got their hands on it - if they did - it wouldn't have been a lot of use. Was there any ill-feeling on the ship about censoring of letters and, in particular, that it involved other people reading often quite personal information being sent to wives or girlfriends?

Not that I can say. The ship's company were issued with what was known as a privileged envelope, which you were allowed to write things that were personal in, and you're sort of taken on trust that you wouldn't go mentioning that you're sailing into Bombay or what have you, but we were given the privilege of those envelopes, which weren't censored. I never struck any bad feeling on board the ship about censoring.

> Were there any other duties that were involved in being the writer to the executive officer?

Yes. When you were in port, making sure you got offshore to do his jobs and making sure you got it back in time to go ashore with the liberty men - not getting back in time to do any part of the ship work.

> The watchkeeping of the asdic men at sea, and you were one of them of course, were you on duty every watch or only at certain periods?

Well, you had two watchers and you worked four hours on and four hours off. And each day was split up in the dogwatches. Instead of the 4.00 pm till 8.00 pm being one watch of four hours it was two watches of two hours. So that every second day you worked the same hours and the next day was different. But on your four hours' on you did one hour operating the set and then one hour as boatswain's mate, and then one hour operating the set and one hour as boatswain's mate. That was your four on. And then you went off for your four hours or whatever the case may be.

And in the one hour periods when you were off the asdic work - I assume this was because it was too difficult to concentrate for longer than that. Is that correct?

Yes, that's right - considered to be.

And was it realistic? Could you concentrate for an hour, or could you have concentrated for longer?

I don't think you could have concentrated for an hour. Sometimes you might doze off in your hour.

What did you do in the one hour off?

Boatswain's mate. General runner around the ship for the boatswain who was more or less the senior seaman on board.

And what sort of things did that involve?

Nothing manual, but messages here there and everywhere, and orders relayed from the bridge to somewhere else.

So, in a sense I suppose you were his offsider.

A runner.

The convoys that you're involved in doing this Indian Ocean work, Bill, what would you remember of them generally in terms of size and number of ships and, perhaps also, their speed?

Speed was a pretty constant ten knots, which was about as much as we could do. Size varied two to twenty. I never saw much of them because when I was not asdicing, I was down below deck, breakfasting, or jimmy's writering, or .... Never saw a great deal of the convoy.

(5.00) Did the men discuss the convoys they were on and how large they were, where you were going and so on, once the news came out, or not?

I doubt it very much. The thing you discussed is what you did when you were last in port and what you were going to do when you were in the next port you came to. You're going to buy a bottle of Arak to take home for your old man, or you're going to go and buy a pair of sandals for your girlfriend, or something like that. Discussions on the convoy itself were not very often, no.

> During the period in the Indian Ocean, were there any active contacts made by the *Lismore* with submarines, that you recall?

Yes, I could not tell you how many but there were some. I think on one occasion we dropped all our depth charges that we had.

> That situation when you dropped all your depth charges, do you remember how the contact began, and then perhaps how it developed?

Well, they all begin in the same way. You pick up an echo and you report it as such and such a bearing and such and such a distance, then you give your opinion as to what it might be. And the AS officer comes aboard, up on the bridge, and if he agrees, and then you decide it's a sub, your skipper comes into the business and he takes the ship into attack and you try and get it.

> When you were going into attack that time and you dropped these depth charges, obviously you felt there was an enemy submarine, what was the mood aboard the ship? Was there a real sense of tension, of incipient attack, or not?

Not a sense of tension, a sense of eagerness to get something done. Everybody was keen to get into the action, whether it was a plane or sub. Try and shoot the bastard down, or blow the bastard up.

> Did you have any feeling - I mean anti-submarine warfare - any feeling for the men in the submarines, that they were very similar to you but down there below in amongst all the blackness of the sea?

Not really, no. They were there to do a job, and they were there to blast you if they could, and you were there to protect the ships that were in your convoy and you had to stop them from sending them to kingdom come. So you had to do unto them quicker than what they could do unto you.

> Sure. You were saying before about depth charges blowing off and the noise in the asdic operator's equipment. How severe was that?

Comes back in through the headphones that you're wearing, and it is really bad - nearly blasts your ears off.

> And would there be any warning when the charges were about to go so you could get the earphones off, or not?

No, you couldn't take your earphones off. You still had to try and keep that submarine contact. And you were going at or over the sub. And as you go over the sub you've got to turn your oscillator around and try and keep the sub, as you're passing over it, which is

when the depth charges are being dropped and blowing up so you've got the sub and the depth charges. You can't take your earphones off, no.

> That must have been very difficult. It was about this time that the *Lismore* went for its refit in South Africa. I think you escorted to Durban a British destroyer that had been damaged in ramming a submarine. What do you recall of that?

I understand that it was going to ram the submarine and it broke radio silence to tell the naval headquarters in Colombo, probably, what it was going to do and was ordered not to, and as it turned off it was too close and it grazed alongside the sub and it hydroplaned, or whatever you like to call it. Hydroplane is rip the ship open at the waterline from about midships to stern. That was the Japanese submarine that had sunk a couple of troopship carriers - one was the *Khedive Ismail*, as I remember - probably about a four and a half thousand ton Jap submarine.

> I know after leaving the destroyer at Durban you went on to Port Elizabeth and I think you encountered exceptionally rough conditions.

Terribly rough.

> What do you remember of that? How bad was it?

I remember I had breakfast - salmon fishcakes, or fishcakes - had two. Went up for an hour and came down and half the ship's company, at least, was sick. The water was sloppin' in the waist and oil drums were knocked over and oil was spillin' around.

(10.00) So I had some more fishcakes and went up to take over from my mate who unfortunately was that crook that he forgot to take the bucket with him, and I sat there for an hour with the bucket alongside me. And then when he came up I took the bucket down and emptied it over the side and as I did I emptied myself. And then I took the bucket back to him.

> The seas, Bill, how big were they? Were they actually breaking swells, or just very steep rolling swells?

Well, you'd go into them if you had the choice, rather than have them beam on, because beam on they had the chance of turning you right over. You'd go head on and you'd sort of climb slowly up the first one and as it got under you and your centre of gravity went to the forward, your ship would go down and the next wave would come straight over the top of you - right over the bridge. Tremendous seas. We struck them lots of places but that's probably as heavy. Off Warrnambool in December of '44 when we were coming home it was bad, too.

> Was there any feeling that the ship was in a precarious situation? That she was not able to cope?

No, not in those days. You used to find that anybody that could would be up in the wheelhouse cheering on the next one. You'd have a wheelhouse full of silly sailors.

> I have had somebody say that on that particular occasion men were kitting up and really standing round on deck because they thought she might founder.

Could be. I didn't notice.

> Let's go on to Port Elizabeth where you had the refit. Leaving aside the work itself, which of course dragged on for a long time. How were you treated? What did you do durng those few months in Port Elizabeth?

We were treated royally after they came to know that we were Australians. We were billeted here, and billeted there, in different places along the coast and out in the country. And we were taken to Johannesburg and billeted up there, fortnight's leave, two watchers *pas de* ship each time. Taken to beautiful dining rooms and hotel dances and really good.

> There was a swimming incident that I think you wished to mention.

Yes. The town hall had a beautiful big fountain and water garden in front of it - across the road from it. So somebody about my size went for a swim one night, halfway through the dance in the town hall. And it became the fashion, everybody over the next week jumped in. And there was a poem, which you've probably got a copy of in one of the newsletters, or the book, HMAS *Lismore*, but my friend, Spud Murphy, was over there a few years ago and he sent me a photo of the town hall in PE. And he said, 'This is the last you'll see of it. It's no longer there. It's made way for freeways.'

> Those sorts of shenanigans at that time - and I assume the person who jumped in the pool first was yourself - was this just youthful hi-jinks?

That's all, yeah. Not like the fellow that was on sentry duty walking along the wharf with his rifle over his shoulder, and went to sleep, and walked into the water - fell off the wharf. That was a funny one, that was.

> The refit, once it was finished, and it was a very slow one, you went to Durban and there the ship was dry-docked, and then you went up to Aden. Following that there was this work in the Persian Gulf - patrolling the mouth of the Gulf. What do you remember of that period - a week or so patrolling the Gulf?

What a God forsaken country it was. Boredom - oh, we had a little bit of a break, we went ashore a couple of times, fishing. I'm not sure how far up the Gulf we went. I have it in mind we were around Basra or Bahrain, but I'm not sure.

I think you were anchored by day and patrolling at night. During the day, did you feel the heat extreme, or not?

It was getting a bit warm up there, yes - about 140 in the water bag.

(15.00) Bill, the other Indian Ocean voyages that you made, what other general recollections are there of the period going through to late '44 before you came back to Australia?

Recollections was a visit to the Seychelles with little harbour-defence motor launches we took in. And one blew up, caught fire, and there was a bit of danger there - a couple of the boys and one of the officers were involved in that.

The ports that you visited, and there were many of course - Colombo, Calcutta, Bombay, Aden, the Maldives and so on - which stands out in your mind as the most memorable?

Calcutta, I think, from the point of view of the abject poverty and starvation that we struck in the population. The crops were ripe and in the Bengal Valley, we were led to believe, people were not available to go and work and they were lined up at soup kitchens in a queue. And if you got a bit crook you dropped out of the queue and sat alongside the tin fence round the Kidapur docks, and sat next to the bloke that was dead, and you died. That was a shockin' thing to see.

Of course, that was one side of life on the sub-continent. I suppose another was the very rich culture and religion of Hinduism, Bhuddism, and various other religions. Were you very aware of that as visiting sailors, or not, do you think?

Rich culture. I never ever got rapt in it as being rich culture. A culture - I'm afraid half of what they went through in my book was just stupidity. I can remember - getting away from that, talking about other ports - I can remember the Maldives. You went down and you went in the harbour and in front of you, through the entrance, was a hulk of a tanker that had been hit but it was still there and it was still a tanker, and that Maldives was a shockin' place. And today they're got it advertised as one of the tourist resorts of the world. You wouldn't go there for two bob, as far as I'm concerned.

It's a very beautiful place, isn't it?

Oh, it would be now that they've done it up - done something to it. The nicest places I saw, were the Seychelles.

> But, I mean, there wasn't an awareness in India of the history of India and the sub-continent and so on?

What you did see in India was the press putting out paperback pornographic comics and novels, indicating that the white man was degenerate and they were supplying him with all this crap. That did disgust me.

> Yes, well, I guess the troops - the British troops - who went out to India weren't exactly the best of British society. Well, let's perhaps leave that. The voyage back to Australia in November '44, what do you remember of that?

Not a great deal. There was four of us came home - four corvettes - and we were looking forward to nice white Australian girls and pulled into Fremantle. The *Toowoomba* stayed there and the other three ships came on to Melbourne. We found it was only about eighty-four degrees fahrenheit in Fremantle and we were in our full blue uniforms. It was too cold for us by the time we'd spent up in the tropics. And then the first girl you see opened her mouth and said, 'Ow are ya, luv?', and you felt like getting back on board the ship and going back to Colombo. That was about the trip home.

> Well, you had Christmas in Melbourne, and I think when you went up to Sydney there was this rather vexed issue about leave. And I think Commander Lever really stuck his neck out on behalf of the crew.

Yes. I think that started off in Melbourne, and he wouldn't take the ship to sea without they got leave. And after a few days of hiccoughing with the Naval Board they told him to go to Sydney and there'd be leave. And as I understand it, we got to Sydney and he was shipped out to Madang.

> So the leave came at the cost of his command?

(20.00) Well, that was his punishment for disobeying the Naval Board, I guess.

> Was there a definite connection there, or was that just the crew's assumption?

It was one of those scuttlebut rumours that are generally pretty right.

> Well moving on, January '45 you had a new CO in Lieutenant Thomson. And with him you went up to Manus Islands and the Admiralties, and from there up to Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. What do you recall of those voyages, and what were you doing?

Convoying up I guess and getting in practice minesweeping, which we were going to do up in the Philippines. Going ashore at Manus and seeing the extent of the massive American Navy shore canteen. And going up into the Lingayen, into the Philippines, and getting mumps aboard the ship, and being confined to the ship.

> That must have been quite severe, I'd imagine, especially when - well, both the possible side effects and also men wanting to get ashore.

Yeah, well, I think it was ten days confined to ship and then halfway through that period another breakout of mumps. And we had applied to the skipper for permission to take the cutter ashore onto this little isolated strip of beach and have a swim but he denied us. So we weren't real happy about all of that.

> Yes, and I understand there was some upset because some officers, who were under the same conditions, did get away to other ships.

Yes, were able to go off to other ships.

> Well, we might pass over that. The American supply ships in the area, you were saying, Bill, were extremely well equipped. What do you remember of their facilities and what you could enjoy of them?

On board the supply ships, the gigantic size of their mess canteen and the variety of stuff that you're there. It was just like a big corner drug store in Los Angeles, I suppose - sixteen different varieties of soda drinks, and a couple of different varieties of ice creams, and ....

> Were Australian crews made welcome?

Yeah, we were, yeah. But we were never able to go on board and hook into the meals with 'em, or anything like that. We just went over on invitation to see a movie occasionally at night. And on one occasion they took us down and showed us what they had. We never were fortunate enough to try it.

> They certainly lived well, didn't they. Well, the period in Manus - going back to Manus and then back down to Australia. Do you remember that escort work - the convoy work? Any details there?

We came into Oro Bay in New Guinea. We were in there overnight. That was our only time in New Guinea, thank goodness. Somewhere along the line, I think a New Zealand cruiser was hit and we might have escorted that down from the Philippines. And then we came around to Brisbane, and I don't particularly recall whether we were on our own or convoying, or what we were doing. But we took a submarine down the coast and then we took some New Zealand sailors home to Auckland. So that was probably what we were doing when we left - *Lady*[?] was hit and the damaged ship down and the troops down

and the submarine from Brisbane to Sydney. We had a funny experience on the way down. Very slow of course, escorting the sub on the surface, and one of our budding junior officers asked the skipper could he take the sight and make a fix on our position. 'Yes, go for your life'. So he got his sextant and he took his readings on the sun and the lighthouse and this position and that cliff and so on. And we must have been round about off Ballina, or somewhere like that, and he came out of the chart room and the skipper said, 'Where are we?'. And he said, 'According to me in the main street of Kyogle'.

Yes, I'd imagine that sort of thing went on quite a lot with sextant training. After the voyage to New Zealand, Lieutenant Ken Sutherland took over and the ship proceeded over to Fremantle for its refit. I think it was while you were at Fremantle that the war ended. Is that correct?

Yes. The night before we got into Fremantle the message came over that Hirohito was prepared to accept unconditional surrender. And then within about thirty-six hours that what's had happened, and it was finished, over, done, and we were there for our refit which lasted, say, ten weeks.

(25.00) What were your thoughts when news came through that the war was over, Bill?

You bloody beauty!

And were there any other thoughts? Any of what had happened or ...?

No. The first thought was how do we get out of this? When do we get out of this?

Had you enjoyed your time in the navy?

Oh yes, indeed. I think everybody did on my ship - ninety-five per cent of them.

And there was no desire to stay on in the navy?

No, not in those days, no.

What, in that you didn't have an active wartime role, or that you had other things you wished to do?

I wanted to go back and be a chemical engineer. The option was there, I suppose. A lot of people stayed on in the permanent navy and went up through the ranks and became officers. Several friends of mine around this area here have become commanders.

The crew, I think, was a skeleton crew in Perth, and some men had already been left in the east. What happened in your case? When did you leave the ship?

It wasn't a skeleton crew. The full crew went to Perth - or Fremantle - for the refit and then, as is normal, the fellows that live in the nearby states - Western Australia, South Australia - got leave, and the rest of us stayed on board. And when the refit was finished the ship went north up to the Celebes and those places. Took part in the surrendering activities. But I was sent home for discharge.

I see. And you took the train across to Sydney.

Yes.

That's a long, long way, isn't it?

I think it was about five days across to Adelaide in those days - five nights.

No doubt a fairly rugged journey. When you arrived in Sydney were you discharged immediately or after some time?

I got home and had a bit of leave, and back into Sydney, waiting for my number to come up on the list. And I suppose, six weeks in *Rushcutter* I was discharged there.

Just before we end, Bill, are there any last thoughts that you feel you'd like to put down on this tape - this record of your time in the wartime navy?

I think it was a marvellous experience. I think anybody that was in the navy - in particular, I can't speak of the other forces - would not have missed it. And the companionship on board the ship still exists today, fifty years later. Next Tuesday, in Melbourne, is the reunion luncheon for the fiftieth anniversary of the commissioning of the *Lismore*, and we'll have about twenty sailors there who served on the *Lismore* at different times, just like as if we've never been away.

Yes, I know there is that very strong bond of comradeship. Is there anything else you wish to put on, or not?

I could tell you a little bit more about Lance Lever and myself. Lance came to Newcastle and he was a pilot on the pilot steamer, the *Birubi*, which used to bring the ships into Newcastle harbour. And I went to rugby union with him a couple of times and he had ulcers by then and couldn't drink a beer, which would be a great blow to him. And strangely enough the skipper that followed him, Thomson, was also a pilot on the *Birubi* at the same time.

That's a strange coincidence.

And his wife, Lever's wife, forty years after that is the patroness of our HMAS *Lismore* Association.

That must be really lovely. Well, Bill, on behalf of the War Memorial for taking the time to make this tape, thanks very much.

Thank you very much, Ed.

END OF INTERVIEW

(This is the missing bit at the end of tape one and the beginning of tape two).