



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Ed Stokes, corvettes, Frank Heazlewood, tape one, side one.

Frank, would be just begin please with your date and place of birth?

Yes Ed, I was born in Warrnambool in July 1920. I went to school there, Christian Brothers' College, until the age of thirteen, when I developed a rather acute case of pneumonia and they packed me up from school and sent me up to the Mallee where the weather was drier - or the climate was drier - and I never went back to school.

I see, that's interesting. And after you got over that bout of pneumonia, what did you do in the Mallee?

I stayed with a distant relative and he worked for the Country Roads Board and to a young fellow's great delight, he used to drive a traction engine - a sort of a steam roller I think we called 'em.

And so that led to what, work along the Mallee?

I was there for six months and by the time I came back from that I was then thirteen and a half and convinced my parents that it was far too late to go back to school.

Well you were saying, I know, that you worked in woollen mill for some time, was that in Warrnambool or ...?

Yes, that was in Warrnambool. At the age of about fourteen I got a few little jobs such as paper delivery and, as most schoolboys do, and I worked for a short while in a grocer's store there, who used have a spirit licence and they used bottle their own whiskey, I remember, from great vats there. And I remember once testing this corking machine with a spud and I must have left a pellet in the corking machine and so the next bottle of whiskey that they bottled and then went to proceed to press the cork into that, the first thing that shot into the bottle was this spud. I think I got the sack, or at least .... (laughs).

The ups and downs of youth. You were saying Frank, that you joined the navy in April '38. Why the navy, why not one of the other services and why any of the services at all?

Well in 1938, we were just emerging from the Depression years and things were fairly humdrum in a town like Warrnambool, although I had a lot of nice mates at school, and I'd gone to work in a woollen mill and we'd been there for about three years odd and my eldest

brother could see - he was working at the woollen mill also - and he said, 'If you can get out of this, you should do'. And a young friend of mine, Ron Dodds, met up with me one day and he had a book there, a lovely coloured book, *How to Join the Royal Australian Navy* and reading through that, we thought this would be a great idea and so we got ourselves to Melbourne by hitchhiking on some transport or other and did the preliminary interviews with the navy people down at Port Melbourne.

What was it that captured you most in the booklet about the navy?

Well, its own description of how, if you were accepted - it was not easy to get into the services those days. The educational standards and physical and dentally and optically and all that type of thing were quite high and I didn't give myself very much chance really, because I'd only had a fairly basic education, and so had my mate. But anyway, at least we got through the preliminaries down at Port Melbourne.

(5.00) And had there been anything in those booklets that had really captured your imagination about the navy or not?

Yes, I thought, 'What a wonderful thing it would be to go to sea and visit these foreign ports and that sort of thing', and I was foolish enough to think that if I do get into the navy, I'll bet that I'll have the cleanest cabin on the ship.

(Laughs) Well we'll come to that in a minute. The general tradition of the ANZACs, of their feats in the first war and so on, had that been anything to do with your decision or not?

Well, I'd had uncles in the first world war, but they were all army men and no, I don't think I had any military aspirations. But the navy sounded a romantic sort of a thing to do, rather than go .... No, I never ever considered the army. But perhaps if my mate had shown up with this book, *How to Join the Army*, perhaps I might have investigated that. But the navy, no, did seem to me to fill exactly what I was looking for.

Well I can certainly remember that, as I was saying myself, the romance of it all. Well, let's get down to the realities. April '38 you did join up and I think you went as a stoker, third class to Flinders Naval Depot ....

Yes, that's right.

... your very initial training, your induction into the navy, what do you remember of that?

I remember being sent down from Port Melbourne with about three or four other young lads of about the same age, three budding stokers and the other one was a bandsman, and we were

met at the train in the evening at Crib Point, outside Flinders, by a petty officer who marched us down into the depot itself. And the other young lads that had joined previously are there to greet you with all sorts of funny remarks such as, 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here', and 'You'll be sorry', were (laughs) mainly were what was to be heard.

Generally encouraging comments.

Yes.

The initial training of course, no doubt, emphasised discipline a lot.

Yes.

That general parade ground bashing aspect of naval training, how difficult was that to get into and how much do you think it did carry over and was important for later shipboard life?

That initial few weeks I would say, of the parade ground bashing is essential and completely important in that you're aware immediately of the very severe discipline that the navy has over you and providing you don't wish to buck that sort of a system and are happy to go along with it, it's very comfortable.

Sure. The other training that you did at Flinders, what engineering training did you do there, Frank?

Yes, after about eight weeks on the parade ground where you learnt to march and salute and sling a rifle, you then graduate from what was called B Block, the sort of rookies as it later became to be known, into A Block which you were then sorted out. Even though we were stokers right from the start, you were a mixture of all sorts of things on the parade ground. But at the end of that eight weeks, then you were sorted out into your various schools, such as engineering, signals communications, or cookery, or whatever your particular chosen branch was.

Just a moment. [Break in recording]. Did you yourself choose to go into engineering, Frank, or was it put onto you?

No, actually I chose communications branch along with my mate but whilst he passed that eyesight test, I did not and they said not to be concerned about that because one hundred per cent eyesight was required and mine was only slightly below that. And the next thing then they recommended was the engineering branch, the seaman's or the cookery. From that I chose the engineering.

What basic training did you do at Flinders before you first went to sea?

Well, you were shown boilers. In Flinders Naval Depot they do have boilers for their own hot water systems and so forth, and the young stokers are given that sort of practical training on that, but mainly is done in school where it's theory and they have a ....

(10.00) In the engineering school, they have small models of various parts of ships and machinery and as you progress through, you are taken step by step through the various departments of your own branch. Like essentially stokers are boiler attendants so that you do some boiler attending and then of course, you also control refrigeration plants and so forth but that's later at sea.

Right, well we'll come to that when we get to sea. You were saying, I think, Frank, that you were originally drafted to HMAS *Canberra* at the time of Munich - September '38 - how conscious were you as a young fellow in the navy, how conscious were your mates of the political developments that had been happening, occurring in Europe for some time?

Yes, well I think these war clouds were rather ominous for quite a while around that period because Chamberlain, I think it was, who'd gone to Germany and came back with the message that there was going to be peace in our time and that sort of thing. But it was a very uneasy peace and I think we all knew that sooner or later there would be a war.

Was it much talked about, or not?

I don't think so. It seemed to be 'over there', a distance sort of a thing.

Sure. Frank, instead of going to the *Canberra*, you went to HMAS *Vampire*, I think she was something of an older style of ship, you might say?

She was indeed. It was an old V&W built for service in the first world war - largely by women I understand. The women - lots of women dockyard maties in the docks that built her. Yes, but by this time of course, it was late '38 and she was in a rather a dilapidated sort of a condition and nothing at all like the ships that we'd been learning about, which we were led to believe were immaculate and clean and so forth. But these had been in moth balls, so to speak - or rarely used anyway in recent years - and of course living conditions on board were absolutely deplorable. We lived down a hole, say thirty-five or forty stokers in the forward part of the ship that opened out into a room not much larger than the average lounge room in a reasonable sized cottage. And forty-odd of us lived down there and we were divided into two messes down there and with a couple of mess tables and you sit along these and your hammocks and all your gear - your sleeping gear were hammocks in those days - which you

tied to the deck head to sleep in and you slept on tables and under them and on locker tops and all that sort of thing.

So it really was very much a makeshift life.

Yes.

What about the working conditions down below in the boiler room?

They were shocking too because the naval architects and the Admiralty itself I suppose, didn't spend much time worrying the comfort of sailors, more about the ship itself. Not much was understood I think, that unless the crew were happy and comfortable that they could be very good. It didn't seem to impinge on their efficiency, as we now realise that it does.

Yes, that's an interesting point and I think - was this a coal-fired ship?

No it wasn't. It was an oil-fired ship. Very powerful ships, they were destroyers. They were - the bit that made them powerful was there was no room allocated for the crew - or very little - but the ship was all guts so to speak, boilers and engines and very powerful ones at that. And of course, they carried gunnery and torpedoes which - everything to make up the warship but the crew didn't seem to matter very much.

When we were talking before, you were saying that you were a sad, sorry, and oft times seasick lad. What are your first memories of actually being at sea on the *Vampire* and was seasickness a real issue, or just occasionally?

Yes, it was a real issue because there're horrible odours that come from out of these boiler rooms and engine rooms, it's all loaded with oily sort of steam. Even though in the boiler rooms you're under force drug and there's plenty of that, there's still these awful oily, greasy smells and destroyers are notoriously bad sea ships by their nature. And unless you're an exceptionally good seaman most of us got seasick to one degree or other and I was, you know, not in the top half (laughs).

(15.00) Was much consideration or help given to men who were by nature prone to be seasick or was it just something that you had to battle out on your own?

Oh no, you battle it out on your own. You just get on with it, seasick or not. I can often remember trying to clean cones - that is, with a poker, poking at carbon that collects on these flame rings with a poker and being violently sick at the same time and you're lurching about trying to hang on to greasy plates and the like and of course, you may not have had any food for twenty-four hours or so, because you can't eat it. And seasickness is a very real and horrible (laughs) ...

I know the feeling reasonably well, I'm sure not as well as you. Well obviously the *Vampire* didn't quite live up to the romantic expectations you had?

No, not at all.

But I think - you went on leave I think in Christmas '38, went on leave, and after that, January '39, you were posted to the *Swan*. I think this was a different story.

Well altogether different because when I joined the *Swan*, she was a relatively new ship and bright and shiny clean. Of course at the time I didn't stop to think what cleaned them, but it was really the sailors and that was which I was one then. But it was more like what I was expecting of the navy and the other was a real horror.

Was there a difference in morale between the two ships because of the physical conditions?

Yes, I think there was. Generally speaking the boys on the *Swan* were very much happier. They were living under far better conditions and what one would expect from the navy but the *Vampire* was none of that.

You met up I think, with some classmates of yours from Flinders and then I think you went off on what really was rather a wonderful cruise. I mean, people would pay a lot for it now to simply get that. What do you remember of that voyage, that first voyage overseas?

When I first went on board the *Swan*, there was a couple of my old classmates from Flinders Naval Depot - Frank George and Ray Flynn - and they proudly showed me over this new ship and then we were overjoyed to know that we were about to embark on our first foreign cruise. The job was to take Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin to Singapore and we went via Port Moresby which was our first foreign port. And of course, we sailors, brand new lads, went ashore to investigate all the wonders of this Port Moresby. And after that to Darwin, and I think Surabaya, Batavia and Singapore, all of those were wonderful to us.

Which of those ports stand out in your memory most, Frank?

I think it was Batavia. It was there, I remember going ashore there with some of the boys and I had my first drink of beer. I was then just eighteen and a few months and I remember drinking some beer ashore and eating peanuts and I thought, well that's how the big boys do it and we shared this bottle of Anchor Pilsener beer and of course had a good look at the local girls that were floating around. But that's as far as we got in those days.

(Laughs). Right, sort of fairly innocent stuff. You stayed aboard the sloop I think until the outbreak of war in September '39 and you were posted to HMAS *Australia* I think you said, the day war was declared.

Yes.

What do you remember of the declaration of war? Where were you and how did it strike you?

Well we were not long back from the Singapore cruise and when all these jostlings were going on in Europe and England and it seems that war was imminent and drastic preparations were being made then in Sydney to have ships ammunitioned and loaded with food and ammunition and torpedoes and all the like, all that was about to be required, or so it seemed.

How did you feel yourself Frank, when you heard that war had been declared?

(20.00) I remember I was writing home to my parents and every few minutes there was this new news would come blaring across the wireless that although the war had not actually started, that in a matter of hours it would be and then we became conscious of the fact that we wouldn't be able to contact our folks as readily as we would want to because we were sort of under some form already of censorship.

Strange, and this is the 16th of January 1991.

Yes.

We don't improve much do we?

No, no, we do not.

Frank, when you had joined the navy had there been any understanding as a young fellow, had anybody put it to you that in a sense the whole point of a navy is to fight wars. That what you've been trained for is to do this business of killing in defence of your country. Had that been thought through, or was the navy a kind of romantic adventure?

I think the latter. I think that's how it was. It was a romantic adventure. I don't think, even though the storm clouds were always there - war clouds perhaps - but no, I don't think that we wasted many thoughts on that. It was more the romantic side.

I think you were saying Frank, that the mood on the *Australia*, or at least at the command level of the *Australia* was fairly strong for the war.

Yes. I don't really know what you mean from that ....

You were talking about the ship's commander and the captain being very ....

Oh, pro-war. Oh yes, they would, I'm sure, dearly have loved to engage the entire German Navy because that was the basis of all their training for the honour and glory of fighting for your country.

You were telling an interesting anecdote about the *Australia* steaming out of Melbourne harbour - out of Port Phillip?

Yes. We were tied up in Port Phillip there at one stage, very early in the war - very, very early in the war - and apparently some message came through that the *Graf Spee* or one of those German pocket battleships was thought to be in the south-west corner of Australia operating in that area, and we had immediate recalls and the ship's complement were gathered up from everywhere and a crash recall, and the ship left in a mighty hurry. I remember her going down the bay at Port Phillip and already doing thirty knots and that of course in a calm water like that bay was at that day, sent out a fabulous bow wave and goes crashing ashore in those more or less confined waters and all these pleasure craft, thousands of them would have been, lots of lots of that number suffered damage and it would have cost the navy millions. But of course, because it was a war thing all that was excused and if we could keep the enemy at bay, well it didn't matter what the cost was.

It must be very exhilarating I'd imagine being on a cruiser such the *Australia*, let alone at full speed. What was it like down below in the engine room?

Things there were .... See, up to this time I'd only been used to very small craft like the sloops and destroyers and things were very different down there. It was as though that you were going from a small township into a great city or something - that might be close to some sort of an analogy - but the scale of things changed enormously. That's about all I could say about it.

What about the discipline as you came to know it on a big ship as the *Australia*, how different was it from the other ships you'd been on or particularly the *Lismore*?

Yes, well of course when I went to the *Australia*, which was the day the war began, the discipline formerly - prior to that in the navy was very strict of course. But now, we were immediately on a wartime footing and a lot of that sort of spit and polish part of the discipline was forgotten because we now had a war on our hands and that was of primary consideration.

And that was true on a big ship such as the *Australia* too was it?

Yes, yes, and that was the case there as well, yes.

> I was going to ask in fact about other differences between your prewar and wartime ships, the *Australia* being the first of them, things such as general security, the effort in doing tasks, the general mood of the ship. Did that change significantly once war was declared or only when you were in enemy zones?

(25.00) No, I think that having gone on board this great ship, which it was to me, you felt that you really had something to fight with and you were a worthwhile unit of a fighting force. It gave you a good sort of a feeling that, yes, at least I can do something here whereas, with the smaller ships, of course, they all have their place and their job. Destroyers of course are an essential part, but ....

> You were saying of the time on the *Australia*, Frank, that you were involved initially in exercising in some minesweeping I think in Bass Strait, gunnery torpedo practice and so on. How did that kind of working up of a ship's crew affect you in the engine department?

Oh yes, we all sort of - we were facing an entirely new set of circumstances and it was new for us all, even for the captain or the oldest members of the crew still were green in war experience. They would have been young midshipmen or something during the 1914 war but that's all they would know about it, so none of us had any wartime experience. But we were learning fast and that was essentially so, we just had to. You were all of a sudden in a war situation and as you said in the first place, that's what the navy was primarily for, to fight a war and it was not just a nice thing to do, to go round the world showing the flag, as pleasant as that might be.

> Right, that's most interesting. Well at the beginning of 1940, you made another of many moves to HMAS *Parramatta* and I think you were standing by at Mort's Dock during her building. How did that involve you as a stoker during the building - the final building of that ship?

Well, we were expected to go about and watch the dockyard maties at work, find out what they were doing, how our new ship works and that. Although, in this case I had already seen service in the *Swan* which we heard about and so this new ship was her sister ship, and therefore it was reasonably familiar to me and I had that little start on most of the others that I had already been in a sister ship of the one that we were standing by.

> And did the crew all assemble at one moment in a sense or was it a gradual accumulation of them?

No, a gradual accumulation of them. Just a few to begin with and gradually more and more came to live nearby the ship and to do their daily working hours on board the ship, wandering

around - the cooks to the galley of course, the stokers to the boiler rooms and engine rooms and each man according to his part of ship would be observing that bit which concerned him.

You were, I assume, attached to the ship when she commissioned?

Yes.

Tell us about that? Is that a very special moment or not in the life of a sailor?

Yes, I'd say it was. We always considered that a ship has a soul and you feel for her, she's going to be your home and your protector too and no, the crew and the ship meld together in some unexplained way and you would see many a tearful sailor really leaving a ship that he loved. You couldn't say any particular piece of it, but the ship itself seems to be a living thing.

The chief stoker I think, initially at least, gave you a rather disappointing place on that ship?

Yes, yes, he did. My ex-instructor from Flinders Naval Depot, Bluey Earl - I wasn't quite aware that we had any particular problems together in Flinders Naval Depot but he knew me, if he didn't know any of the other youngsters ....

Just a moment.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

This is Ed Stokes, corvettes, Frank Heazlewood. Tape one, side two.

You were saying, Frank.

Yes, this chief stoker of our new ship was my instructor in Flinders Naval Depot and I don't think there was any real animosity between us - I'm sure there wasn't - but he gave me a job, ERAs' messman, when I was in those day quite ambitious and I was hoping to do well in the engineering branch and it was a blow I suppose to my ego more than anything else, to be given a job that I didn't think sailors should have to do. Although I can't for the life of me think who ought to do them.

This was basically looking after the domestic needs of the ERA?

Yes, yes, it was and I felt that was rather *infra dig* but of course in later years I realised that, well you can't have stewards and that sort of thing just for that little job. But, overall, he was very fair and I wasn't there forever, I was only there for a few months and later on I got all the other jobs that you need to do in order to progress through your branch, you've got to have a good understanding of the boilers and the engines and the evaporators and the refrigeration plants and whatever else goes ....

Let's go on to that, Frank. You were saying, I think, that the *Parramatta* was involved in some minesweeping duties and then down to Port Lincoln and I think, via Fremantle, you went to Colombo where you arrived in June 1940. Besides that trip through South East Asia on the other ship, this was your first contact with the sub-continent, if you like, where you're going to spend a lot of time. How did that whole new world strike you, and how much was Colombo part of the war effort at that time?

Well I think it was only when we got to Colombo that we realised that really we're into a war now, even though we used to have dawn action stations and the like on board *Australia*, and the bells would ring at any time of day or night and everyone would charge off to their action station, we realised for the most part that they were dummy runs. They were schooling us to do what we would have to do when the chips were down and when we finally arrived in Colombo on the *Parramatta* and all these various war ships and cargo ships as well, with their flags painted on their sides and so forth, to identify them against enemies and to their own people, it was most forcibly brought home, arriving in Colombo harbour, that, yes, we've got a war on our hands and we're part of it now.

That's most interesting. I think after - or shortly after that - you were no longer the ERA's dogsbody and you began regular watch-keeping, the CO_2 plant, boiler room work, engine room work, evaporator - these are some of the things you mentioned.

Yes.

Could we just talk through them in some ... [Break in recording.]

The CO_2 plant, what did that involve? What was its function?

It's the refrigeration plant for the whole of the ship and like as in a domestic situation, required to keep the food - meat, milk and other foodstuffs that require refrigeration - and a ship is then able to go to sea for extended periods and still have edible food. So the CO_2 plant, that's its prime purpose.

(5.00) Right. Now the boiler room and the engine room I think are generally differentiated. The boiler room being the area of the engine compartment that generates the steam, is that correct?

Yeah, that is correct and generally speaking it is under a force draught situation and on entering those, you go through air locks. The air pressure in the boiler room being a bit higher than ordinary atmospheric and that becomes evident as you go through the air locks because your ears tell you so.

Did that make it difficult at all working, I mean, that heightened atmosphere?

Not really. All you knew were that you were in a enclosed space amongst whirring machinery - dozens of pumps and the like.

Is there anything of the operation of the boiler room that you could explain to us on tape, that would make sense to a lay person, or is it so complex that that's really impossible?

Well, ordinary water which had been created by us via the evaporators was fed into the boilers and these furnaces underneath were alight according to the amount of steam required and that was part of a stoker's job, to turn on and off oil - more oil fires to generate more steam as that steam is required.

Always the pressure in the boilers is the same, irrespective of the speed of the ship or even if it's mobile. So the water's heated through these boilers, steam is raised and it is that steam that gives power to the turbines, when it eventually goes to the turbines and the speed which that steam travels is something in excess of a bullet because there is generally speaking, about 250 pounds pressure per square inch in the boiler and there's almost a total vacuum at the back of the turbine, so that the steam has practically no resistance other than the turbine blades that it passes through, and so the velocity of that steam is great. And also the quantity of water being boiled can be in the order of a ton a minute.

Those are remarkable figures. That's given a very clear picture too. When the expression is used `the ship getting up steam', that refers to the boilers getting to this pitch of readiness, does it?

Yes it does, and unless there's some sort of an emergency on that, that's done with as much time as you do have at hand. Ideally, over about twelve hours because the metals are not under so much stress and strain if they're gradually taken up to working pressure. If it is done gradually well it's so much kinder, so to speak, on the metal.

And the engine room and the evaporators, were you concerned with them as a stoker, or was that the province of the ERAs?

Oh no. The ERAs are actually the mechanics that fix things that go wrong. The stokers are the ones and up through their grades, stokers, then you have more responsible jobs if you are say a leading stoker, and eventually a stoker petty officer would be then in charge of a boiler room on a smallish sort of a ship, or even up to, well, through the destroyer range. Beyond

that a chief stoker is then in charge of that situation. But no, it's all stoker's work and the ERAs are the mechanics.

I see, I hadn't realised that, that's a clear difference. The day to day operating of these different pieces of machinery if you like, what were the main tasks that stokers were involved in? Was it reading of gauges or oiling machinery as it worked, what did you have to actually do?

Yes, yes, you read gauges and you very quickly learn to find if there's one of them not as it should be. Also you read via thermometers, the temperatures of bearings which might be screaming out for attention and then of course you would bring that to the attention of someone in a more responsible position. But that's what you were doing, reading gauges, taking temperatures and in the case of if you were firing the boiler, you would turn on more or less oil valves to deliver more or less oil to the boiler as directed by the stoker petty officer who would be in charge of the boiler, or if as I say, on a cruiser, where there might be four boilers in the one boiler room and all of this then is oversighted by the chief stoker.

(10.00) I see and I'd assume then that people in the engine room are doing similar tasks, but also passing on commands regarding the ship's speed to the actual control of the turbines?

Yes, and that is so. And in the engine room you would generally find that a chief ERA is in charge of the situation there and in a cruiser where there are two engine rooms at least, you would find an engineer officer of commissioned rank or higher would be in charge of the overall shift, or watch as we called it.

That's most interesting and I assume, Frank, that that these general details for work routines would apply to across ships, for example to the *Lismore*?

Yes. Things were very much the same one ship to another. You weren't given very much time to refresh or do any courses or anything else. You just go from one ship to another and of course the longer you're doing it, the longer time you spend in the navy, well the better you are able to adapt to this. No matter what job comes along then, you ought to be able to cope.

I was going to ask you, when you did do training at sea - if you did any training at sea - to upgrade your ...?

Oh yes, it was a learning process all the time. After, say, six months' watchkeeping on the refrigeration plant, to be going back to the CO_2, you could then say to your chief stoker, 'Look I think I can cope with this, Chief, and I'm ready for an exam on it', and you would go through that examination, maybe, there and then if the engineer on board was of sufficient rank to do that. But what you did, what a stoker's first move is to try and get his auxiliary watchkeeping certificate which means to say that he's proficient in a quite a number of these branches of the engineering department which cover the refrigeration, the generation of

electricity through either diesel or steam generators, the evaporators which create salt water and turn it into fresh water - of the highest quality I might add, because the boilers require to have perfectly clear, clean water. If there was any traces of salt it just won't do. Even most fresh water taken from ashore is not good enough for ship's boilers.

Right, well let's move on a little away from the actual engine room Frank, to some of the work that the *Parramatta* was involved in. I think you went from Colombo to Aden where you became involved in Red Sea convoys, Aden, Suez, the Persian Gulf, that region. What's your memory of that first convoy work?

Well the first was all quite exciting because we saw some wonderful ships that we wouldn't have had an opportunity of seeing otherwise. For instance, we convoyed the largest ships in the world up the Red Sea at time. The one or two exceptions being the *Queen Mary*, and ships about as big as that who were very often left to their own devices because their speed alone was their protection. They couldn't be overtaken by any submarine or that. They were far too fast for that, but generally speaking, the speed of a convoy is controlled by the slowest of its members.

Yes. The convoys as they formed up, did they normally form up in port and steam out as a unit or did they form up at sea?

Yes, they formed up normally outside the harbour that you were in and another thing about this particular phase of my life in the navy, on the *Parramatta*, our skipper, Jefferson Hurst-Walker was quite a wonderful man, a great skipper and a good seaman as we could understand it, but he was a very junior man and therefore if one of the ships in the convoy faltered, like one old coalburner of something or other broke down, whoever was the commodore of the convoy would say, 'Okay *Parramatta*, stand by so and so', and of course we would lag into port two days after everyone else. Which means to say that we had perhaps no shore time or we'd meet a convoy coming out and they would say, 'Well pick up with them, just go back to where you came from'.

(15.00) Did that grate, or did men just accept it as part of par for the course?

No doubt we grizzled a bit, and say, 'Why do we keep getting this job', you know, but it was obvious that - and our skipper was a good man and he couldn't help being junior - but unfortunately with that goes the job of picking up the stragglers.

You were saying that the first action you saw, I think, was on the 29th of June '40 - this is at Berbera, near Somaliland - that action, were you on watch at the time down below, or not?

No, I don't think I was. I can't recall exactly the moment of the day it was. But I do remember it was a solitary Italian plane dropping these bombs, probably just thrown

overboard by a crew member of that aircraft because there was nothing very sophisticated about it in those days and further to that the Italians were more or less reconnoitring I presume, and not out hoping to sink anything probably, but just to let us know that they were there.

> Your feelings after that attack, although a slight one, did that intensify the crew's feelings, or was this all to be expected?

Yes, it did intensify them. You finally realise that you are then in a war - in a fighting war - and you're very much part of it.

> I think it was in December '40 that the *Parramatta* went back to Bombay for degaussing - this is to counteract the ship's magnetic field. Just a personal recollection there, the tattoo, tell us about that, Frank.

Well we had this Christmas of 1940 in Bombay and six of us youngest stokers decided to band ourselves into a little club, in that we would look after each other in times of strife if that should happen - and almost certainly it would. But if any one of us was hurt or wounded or something like that, the others would - where they could - come to their aid, and we each had a little tattoo on our left forearm and we sort of shook hands, probably over a bottle or two of beer at some joint or other in Bombay, which was in those days a lovely city. Not so now.

> Was that common for sailors to make those kinds of pledges, or not?

I'm not really aware of any others, but I daresay they did exist. But with our own little club I'm sad to say that before one more year was past that I was the sole surviving member of that. The *Parramatta*, having gone into the Mediterranean when we returned to the Red Sea and I was, once again, given a draft to go back to Flinders and do a course there to further my advancement and the other five sailed with the ship in the Mediterranean and she unhappily, after some very wonderful work she did, again convoying, was 'tin-fished', as we called it, by two torpedoes from a German submarine and she was lost - 140 of the 161 crew were lost and unhappily none of my club mates were among the survivors.

> That's a sad memory, Frank. At the time when you were back in Australia, how difficult was that to get over?

It was quite hard. There were so many things that came up in my next ship that you used to think of the similar circumstances you had with your previous shipmates and that was saddening.

> Were you ever as close again to other shipmates or not?

I think in later years I come to become very attached to the boys in the *Lismore* as well. The bigger ships you don't seem to get to know the people so personally as in the smaller ones.

> Yes. As you were saying, it was April '41 you were drafted to Flinders Naval Depot for another course, I think this was to become a leading stoker. What were the key aspects of that training and how did they fit you for work on the *Lismore*?

(20.00) Well, as with everything else, the longer you're there the more you learn, or at least the more you're supposed to be learning, and having attained that experience in *Parramatta* with those various jobs on fridges and evaps. and so forth, makes you then able to accept more responsibility and when you become a leading stoker, of course then you get a leading stoker's duties which are a little more advanced than the stoker's ones.

> Was there any different training as such, any work with different kinds of engines during that training, or not?

Yes, now, when we came to the *Lismore*, or previous to that the *Warrnambool*, which is the ship that I stood by on ....

> And a sister ship of the *Lismore* I think?

A sister ship of the *Lismore*, correct, was entirely different to us in that we were now looking at and dealing with triple expansion reciprocating engines and our entire training had been in turbine. But that doesn't apply necessarily to the auxiliary machinery. The evaporation part of it and the refrig. plants are still very much the same, although the refrig. plant on corvettes is more of an electric rather large domestic affair and not a CO_2 plant. But the essential difference there is that the main propulsion plant was going from turbines to triple expansion reciprocating engines and that was a whole new ball game for me.

> While you were down at Flinders, was there time for home leave? [Break in recording.] Frank, you were just saying about the general pattern of a soldier serving time overseas and the sailors, they were quite different?

Entirely different I thought. A sailor had the great advantage of always having his home with him. He had his gear, he had clean clothes and clean showers and reasonable food to eat, whereas I was full admiration for soldiers who very often had none of those things and added to that, they were missing from home for very extended periods, whereas if a sailor was away for more than a couple of years, that would be rare.

> And you were saying that during the war, you managed to get back five or six times to see your parents at Warrnambool. How did they feel about your involvement in the war and ...?

Well of course they were concerned as any parent would be, but my parents had a very good reason to be even a bit more concerned because the entire family - that is, my four brothers and myself, three of us were in the navy and two in the air force, my two sisters were serving members of the forces too. Correction there, my one sister who was old enough, was a serving member of the force and the other younger one, Nance, who joined the air force, joined that service late in the war.

Did you all come through unscathed, or not?

The whole lot of us. But the entire family, even Dad disappeared downtown one day and came back in the uniform of a soldier because he went guarding prisoners up in the Goulburn Valley somewhere. So that at one stage my mother at home alone, her husband guarding prisoners, her two daughters in the armed services, and her five sons were there.

That's quite remarkable. Frank, after the Flinders you went to the *Warrnambool* in July '41 and commissioned her as a leading stoker. You were describing the general duties during the commissioning of overseeing the building and so on and also watching how these new engines worked. After commissioning, I think the ship went on a convoy to Darwin and I think you were at sea when Pearl Harbor broke?

Yes, we would have been at sea when Pearl Harbor broke. I think we picked up the ship in off Cairns and took her round to Darwin because we were not there very long before this first Japanese raid on Darwin came about.

Well the news of Pearl Harbor, it must have been quite startling to say the very least, to a ship at sea, how do you remember it? How did the crew react?

Well, of course, it was a great blow to everyone and particularly the Americans to find out they're suddenly in a war that they knew probably they'd eventually need to be in. But it was brought to them very forcibly of course on that 7th of December. But our actual contact with the Japanese was not until the 19th of February, so I just can't say off-hand where I was now at the time of the actual bombing of Pearl Harbor.

(25.00) Do you remember a greatly heightened awareness of danger and so on, after Pearl Harbor or not?

Yes, the war then had come to us, you know, spread globally almost you could say, and then of course we had a new and fearsome enemy in the Japanese to contend with. Prior to this of course, it was a European affair, the war.

Had there been much talk amongst you or your shipmates about the activities of Japan and China and so on?

No, I think we foolishly thought, along with the British, that, well Singapore's there and that's impregnable, so no-one's going to take that and the might of the British navy was handy around the place, and no, I suppose we felt in our own foolish way quite secure. But we were anything but.

> Yes, well that came home obviously in Darwin on I think it was the 19th of February '42. I think you were shaving or something?

Yes, I was having a shave and there was quite a bit of a hubbub going on in the waist of the ship, which is an open area where you can sort of see around, and there was much admiration for these waves of aircraft going over because the general opinion was that, well, we didn't know we had so many goodies on our side. That was quickly shattered, that illusion, by the sound of these bombs cascading all around us and I was very well aware of that feeling because I'd had it in the *Parramatta* days.

> Could you perhaps just describe that, I think that's an interesting point, how you - even down below - you knew bombs were exploding?

Yes, it sounded to me - to everyone I think - like some giant hammer sort of hitting at the ship's side, as though there are two bangs sort of thing. I think it's the actual explosion of the bomb itself and then there's that wave that hits the ship, the secondary wave that thumps against the ship's side and it sounds, you know, very much heightened in its intensity.

> So I would assume you raced out onto deck, were action stations sounded immediately, or not?

Yes, yes they were and by this time of course, we were quite skilled in that and everyone knew their job and I must say that the sailors handled it very well. Each knew what he had to do and we believed ourselves to be quite proficient.

> The ship, the *Warrnambool* of course was in harbour I think, did you have steam up?

Yes, we did. We were laying at anchor but we had steam up and of course we were immediately then advised that - when all hell let loose when these waves and waves of bombers - I think there were about nine waves, eight or nine waves, each with about eight or nine planes in an arrowhead formation. But I think their target then was not so much the ships in the harbour but the oil installations and so forth and in that they were successful too, because in a very few minutes black smoke and flame was billowing into the sky. Unfortunately, they hit the post office mainly. That was one direct hit on a building but they did a lot of damage to the airfield and so forth.

> Was the *Lismore* involved in helping pick up survivors and so on, or not?

This was the *Warrnambool* at that ....

I'm sorry, that was a slip, yes, the *Warrnambool*.

Yes, we were running round. There were ships .... After these initial high level attacks, then the fighters came in and they were actually flying between our masts and this was very much down to our water level and of course there was untold damage being done .... We took fearful punishment because we had so little to fight with and they were down there with us, so you can't sort of go firing guns at sort of parallel or horizontal with the ship itself, otherwise you're firing into your own ships, sort of thing. So if you're repelling aircraft it must be at an altitude where you don't suffer from your own weapon.

Your own fire. Right, well that's most interesting. It must have been a sombre ship that night I'd imagine?

Oh, indeed it was, apart from realising all these ships that were on fire and sinking and sunk and that sort of thing and we're running around trying to pick people and ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Ed Stokes, corvettes, Frank Heazlewood, tape two, side one.

Frank, after the attack I know you were posted to HMAS *Platypus* which was I think a repair ship moored in Darwin Harbour and you were promoted I think to stoker petty officer. The work on the *Platypus*, how was that different from being on a seagoing ship?

Well it was entirely different in that the old *Plats* was a coalburner and that was new to me - even though we gloried in the name of stoker, few of us had done any actual stoking, it was a name carried over from way, way back from the coal days and we knew stokers had not even seen any coal, perhaps apart from the 'giggle house' in Flinders Naval Depot, but certainly none of us were conversant with coal-fired ships. So it was entirely different. So I went there, I became a stoker petty officer on board that ship without having fired a coal-fired ship, so I was actually in charge of a boiler room that even though you know all about the function of the boiler and pumps and so forth, its heat-raising medium was quite different.

I'd imagine being, if you are on a coal-fired ship, it's better to be a petty officer than a ... (laughs).

Very much so (laughs). Yes, being on the wrong end of a 'banjo' as we called it.

The shovel?

Yes.

Tell us about shovelling the coal?

Well, of course it was all so new to them that we all had to relearn what was a good fire and what wasn't and how to stoke it and clean it and we were very much in the same ship - if you'll pardon that - because, well, coming from oil-fired ships to coal is quite a big turnaround.

Right.

If I may say. One of the aspects of this thing, when eventually we did have to go to sea our captain - we had to take this ship round to Cairns eventually, this old *Plats* - and the captain wouldn't permit us to eject ashes through the day because it would leave a wake of this dirty-looking ash and so could be easy spotted from the air, but he failed to convince us that the smoke was still coming out of the funnel, so we in effect had to live with the ashes all day long and they were hot and steamy and mounting higher and higher in the boiler room and you couldn't get rid of them until the night-time and things were mighty uncomfortable then. But ....

And meantime, she I assume was sort of laying a wreath of smoke anyway.

Yes, there was nothing he could do about that. I mean, you can't have a coal-fired ship without smoke. You can on an oil-fired ship. In fact, smoke indicates that you're burning most inefficiently.

Just as a quick side-light, when a ship such as a corvette laid a smoke screen, was that simply done through a wrong mixture of fuel and air or what?

No, no, there's a special valve that's squirted .... In a normal sense the oil is sprayed under high pressure and it's also pre-heated oil, goes in in a fine spray and it's readily flammable, whereas if you want a smoke screen you get a thick jet of solid fuel that does not burn easily and that of course creates the black smoke and that will lay down a smoke screen immediately. As soon as you turn on this valve great jets of oil go in, not sprayed and not pre-heated.

(5.00) I've always wondered about those great billowing clouds you see. Frank, you went to another corvette after the *Platypus* but only briefly and then you were taken aboard HMAS *Nizam* ...

... *Nizam*.

> ... to Colombo. I think you were forming a pool of men. What was their function?

Yes, we were left by the *Nizam* in Colombo and went ashore into this naval barracks there called *Lanka* and we formed a pool of various branches and gradients in those branches of ratings and we were there to replenish any navy ship that came in that might be deficient in personnel of your particular breed. And so after about fourteen days there when we just used to have to report once a day and if there was no call for you, well, you could go ashore or lay about the barracks, do as you like. But of course the lack of rupees ensured that we mostly laid about the barrack. But eventually, after about fourteen days, I was sent to the *Lismore*.

> Well that in itself, I know, was something of an adventure because you were to join her in Bombay. Tell us about this memorable journey?

Yes, well we went to the police office this morning and they said, 'Heazlewood, Stoker Petty Officer.' `Yes'. `Right you're to pick up the *Lismore*.' There were several others too, some stokers and one or two other. I think our sick berth attendant Doc Murray was one of them. 'Yes, alright sir.' 'Your ship, *Lismore* is in Bombay. Arrangements are being made for you to embark on a train and go and join her there.' So after much kerfuffle we get on this train - this Indian troop train - and you know, heaven forbid that anyone's got to do it again, because it was a disaster. But anyway, we left Colombo and you go across the breadth of that island, Ceylon, and across what they call Adam's Bridge and rejoin another train over there. Adam's Bridge because some people held that Ceylon was the Garden of Eden and so hence that name. And we travelled part way up the east coast of India and then struck out to Madras and then set across the middle of the sub-continent to Bombay, not all that far by Australian standards but around 1200 miles, and it took something like a fortnight to do it.

> That long journey, things such as space, food, heat, what do you remember of that?

Well the heat was intense, the food - the train used to stop every meal time and somebody would rustle up some food from out of their stores from somewhere or other. They would feed the complement of the train and then we would chug on our way. But did I mention the bit in ...?

> About the ....

About the vultures and ....

> No, tell us about that? I think this was Madras?

This was in Madras. Yes, well, even though as bad as the food was, when we were at one of our - or all of the meal times while in Madras you had to contest the kite hawks and the vultures for the food. As bad as it was, you had to have some sustenance, but they felt an equal or greater right to it and you had a job to shelter your food on a plate or out of one of those army dixie type things - mess tin I think they called it - you had to shelter that as well as you could while you got some sort of a feed and the vulture and the kite hawks and that felt entitled to. It was quite a job to retain your food.

Yes, well it was obviously quite a journey. There was a catch to it too I think, to the *Lismore*, to meeting the *Lismore*.

Oh yes. We eventually arrived in Bombay and I reported to the depot there - of course we all did - the Braganza I think it's called from memory and they said, 'Oh, you're for *Lismore*'. I said, 'Yes'. 'Oh well, she's sailed.' 'Oh, did she? Well what now?' 'Well you've got to go after her haven't you?' So we were herded aboard the *Mooltan* to give chase to *Lismore* and needless to say we run her to ground back in Colombo.

(10.00) (Laughs) That's a lovely story. Those sorts of experiences, Frank, did people gripe about them at the time or was there just an acceptance that war has these uncertainties and so on?

Yes of course, everything used to be laid at the door of the war. No matter what the circumstances the stock reply was always, 'Don't you know there's a war on'. So irrespective of what happened and how bad it was you had to put up with that simply because there was a war on.

Seriously in that instance from what you knew of the ship's movements at the time, could it have been predicted that she was going to Colombo? Could that whole wasted journey have been avoided or not?

Probably not, because had this ship, when she was in Bombay, could have been directed anywhere pretty well. She might have gone to Karachi or the Persian Gulf or somewhere and I think it's fairly short notice of the jobs that they're going to get.

So there weren't long-range plans, it was more ships being used as they were around ...?

Yes, as the requirement arose and the appropriate ship was there, so that was the sort of job she was given. There was no way that when we left Colombo, that the people in Colombo would have known that she would be back so soon.

Right. Well it was the 9th of December '43 when you actually joined the *Lismore*, but I think you spent the first few weeks on guard duty outside Colombo. What did that involve?

Well someone guarding the harbour, even though they had on there an anti-submarine net across the mole - across the harbour entrance, they still required a ship to be patrol up and down. I suppose in case someone tried to crash the net or their favourite trick was of course that the submarines, to go in and out under ships so that the boom was opened for the ship but it also admitted the submarine beneath the ship if depth would allow.

> Well, in terms of your work on the ship, I think the engineer officer at the time you said was Alex Cameron and I think he told you soon after joining that you were to be the ship's chief stoker?

Yes, it seemed that after all this new complement came aboard the *Lismore*, we, the new draft, were able to relieve the older and original - most of them - crew. Now one of the people that went ashore was on his way back home, was Jack Voss, the chief stoker of the ship and when the new crew was looked at and it was discovered by the engineer officer that I would be the senior stoker petty officer, he sent for me and said, 'You look like being our new chief stoker. How does that sit with you?', and I said, 'I'm quite happy, sir and I feel capable, confident ...'.

> It seems a long way to have come in a fairly short time from joining the navy?

Yes, and so it was, accelerated promotion due to these wartime circumstances was a positive fact then because it was a full twelve years journey to become a stoker petty officer and I had done it, along with some others, in about four.

> Well let's just turn briefly to your specific duties as chief stoker. You outlined them before as regulation of watches, in charge fire control and damage control and so on in particular. Taking the first thing, the regulation of watches, what did that involve?

Well each watch requires a certain number of personnel in that watch. You want a stoker petty officer in the boiler room and a stoker to do the firing duties. In the engine room there's an ERA, although the ERA himself did not come under my jurisdiction, he was under the jurisdiction of the chief ERA and they held petty officer or chief petty officer status because of their previous training prior to joining the navy.

> Besides the actual selection of men to fill the different watches and time slots and so on, how much day to day supervision of their activities was there as the chief?

(15.00) Not a lot because we were confident they were well trained and they knew their work and did it well and willingly. There was no - supervision wasn't required as such. We were wholly confident in one another's ability to do their particular job.

In the case of action stations where was your place physically in the ship as chief stoker and what was your role?

Well mine was a general factotum because I was the sort of boss of this damage control unit and that was required wherever it might be required. If we suffered any damage well, of course, you would concentrate your efforts there, or if a fire broke out or a leak or something in the bilges or any compartment, which sometimes happens through sprung rivets and that from exploding depth charges and so forth. It was a general oversighting of whatever was going on. You were a pretty busy boy really.

What were the greatest risks to a ship such as the *Lismore,* was it from fire or was it from water?

No, fire, strangely enough, seems to be a sailor's greatest enemy when you would think it was obviously have to be the sea. But no, fire was our greatest enemy.

Was that because the ship was so well fitted with watertight compartments that it was difficult to physically sink her or what?

No, it's just hard to say. You've got a lot of volatile stuff in the ship like oil fuel and various types of oils and sometimes there's even petrol and cleaning agents and things like that. Sailors for instance were not allowed to have cigarette lighters, not because the lighter itself was a menace but the little fuel containers that each sailor would have in his locker and they all became a menace. Suitcases and things like that, burnable material, were frowned on. So we had to try and protect ourselves against fire in every direction you could.

Were small ships, such as the corvettes, were they more vulnerable in that, for example, if something were to set off a depth charge on the back of the ship it was really just a very short distance to the bridge, compared say with the destroyer where the depth charges on the stern were that much further from the critical area of the ship, or not?

Well, that would depend a good deal on the setting of explosion device of the depth charge. Sometimes they were needed to be set off at just fifty feet and of course these things weigh about 300 pounds and they quickly attained that depth, so that the ship hadn't travelled very far when the thing would actually explode and they had these depth charge throwers that generally threw them clear of the ship itself. But they pack a terrific boot and water sort of being incompressible, that boot the ship itself received and very often could raise the thing - lift, thump a ship like the corvette clear of the water, like the stern end of it.

I think you were saying before Frank, that the previous chief, who was one of the old school I think you were suggesting, had trained his men to a high pitch, what do you recall of the overall morale and training of the engine room crew?

Yes, well when I went aboard and it soon became obvious that Chief Stoker Voss had done a good job of these men and they must respected him very well for it too, because they spoke of him highly and he was one - a chief stoker of the old school and trained in the hard days when you would have had to work very hard to become a chief stoker really. Not so much with us, because as I say, this accelerated promotion due to the war, people getting killed and so many more required, that you were more or less hurried through these phases. But no, Chief Stoker Voss had done a great job and the men knew that he had, and he'd trained them well and so that my job was made so much easier because of his previous efficiency and ....

Right, when you joined the ship, I think Lieutenant Lever was the captain, what do you recall of him and what do you recall of the general morale, not only of the engine room crew but the entire ship's crew when you joined?

Yes well we knew and respected Lance Lever as a good captain, a man that you were fully confident of. Now that isn't true of some of the other officers because they were very often hurried in from various jobs outside and didn't know much about the navy and this was particularly obvious to me, who had been trained in the peacetime navy and I think we had good basic training, whereas many of them came in from all sorts of jobs and they took on some of these jobs, such as gunnery officer or paymaster or something like that, simply because they were good with figures.

(20.00) It didn't make them necessarily good gunnery officers because most of them wouldn't know one end of a gun from another. But some of our seamen, our gunnery rate seamen did, even though the officer was the boss. If you wanted to know something about it, you wouldn't ask him (laughs).

Did that create tensions on ships?

I don't think so. It was just we knew that somebody needed to be responsible to do the paperwork say, but when it came to firing the guns, you'd leave him behind and the gunnery ratings would look after that quite well.

Talking generally, not so much about specific areas of expertise, but the general, I suppose, qualities of leadership if you like, what were the differences that you'd remember between good and not so good officers?

Well, I only remember having one skipper whom I didn't have much confidence in and if you didn't have that, you didn't feel very comfortable at all. After all, he was the boss and you relied on him to know his job thoroughly and in this case, Lever was certainly one of those. And it didn't matter so much whether the gunnery officer could do his job or not because the fellas that used the guns, they could do theirs.

But with the captain it was different?

With the captain it was different. You relied on him because after all, your life is in his hands and most decisions were made locally and he was the one that made them and you couldn't feel very confident in a person that was obviously incompetent, who shouldn't have been there in the first place.

> But in judging a captain, Frank, did men look first at the qualities say of seamanship of a captain ...?

Yes.

> ... or general attitudes to men and so on?

No, I don't think we would care - you would care so much what sort of a man he was providing he was competent in his work, and that was our captain.

> Just while talking generally about some aspects of the ship itself and of course you'd been on another corvette. It's said that they roll very heavily, that they pitch terribly. Has that been exaggerated or do you think that's true?

No, it certainly is very true. I've been in seas in corvettes where they dip first one lifeboat into the water and then the other and they're strung very high up on the davits on either side, but it's not unusual to be dipping first one and then the other - the port one and then the starboard one - in the water, and yes, they buck and bounce a bit. But in my opinion, they're still more comfortable the sea ships, than destroyers.

> Right. And by the stage that you did actually reach the *Lismore* had you overcome your problem with seasickness, or is that a recurring problem in heavy weather?

No, I'm very happy to say that I did overcome that and I don't know why because we always held that the only cure for seasickness was a good book and a shady tree. But if you couldn't have that, then you just had to suffer it. But no, I believe - a lot of people will tell you that that doesn't happen, but it certainly did in my case. I don't remember being sick after the first four years but even that, to me, seems quite a long time.

> (Laughs) Yes, that sounds long enough. You spent a lot of the time aboard the *Lismore* in the tropics, how did that affect both your living conditions and working conditions in the engine compartments?

Well they for the most part were very hard and tedious with not much to look forward to but the next port where the chief thing that you look for there was mail from home. It ....

How often did that catch up with you? Was that very difficult given the random nature of the ship's movements, or not?

Well almost always, whatever ports you got into, the authorities somehow knew where that ship was going to be next and they were as efficient as they could be at getting your mail through to you. But the first thing many of us used to ask was how many bags of mail come aboard and so forth and that might indicate how many letters you might get.

Was the tradition of men sharing letters and swapping news, was that how you remember it, or was it a more private affair where people went off to peruse their own mail?

(25.00) Oh no, I think I can often remember somebody bursting out with ... Of course, everyone's reading their letters at once and they're avidly interested in reading their letter, but someone now and again would let out a screech that his girlfriend has shot through or his (laughs), or something's happened like that. No, we shared those very joyous moments they were, really, to have mail from home and now and again of course, there'd be a sad one. Someone's relative or even parent died, but mostly if it was a death that came through on the radio and that rating was informed and where possible, was sent home.

As leading stoker, were you - sorry chief stoker - were you very much involved in that, if you like, pastoral aspect of your men's lives?

The ...

Well dealing with younger sailors who were perhaps receiving bad news or difficult emotional news from home?

Well no, no, not me. In this case we had Alex Cameron who was our engineer officer and he was a bit of a 'father confessor' to us all. He was good, probably, and again like the captain, the engineer officer was necessarily qualified as an engineer and therefore you had some respect for him - a lot of respect in this case - not so perhaps with the gunnery officer or that. It didn't matter whether he knew anything about guns or not. But with Cameron he was probably ten years older than me and I would be maybe two or three or four years older than many of the others, even though at that time I was about twenty-four.

Mmm, yes, that's interesting. The heat in the tropics, Frank, both as it affected your living, sleeping conditions and so on and work in the engine compartments, how do you remember that?

Well, they didn't understand very much in those days about salt replacement and it wasn't until some time later that people used to get cramps and things like that and a lot of it, I think, was traced to lack of salt in your body, it being flushed through all the time and not replaced, that they came up with some salt tablets later on and that had a beneficial effect in that some

of those symptoms would disappear, even though you still sweat profusely. Some of the minerals were retained by taking the salt tablets that came into vogue later on. But in the early days, like the *Parramatta* and so forth, in the early days in the Red Sea, they didn't know about it and some people suffered most severely from heat exhaustion.

How hot did it get down below, both in the living compartments and particularly in the engine room?

Oh well, it's intensely hot, where for the most part, you couldn't hang onto hand rails and things, which you needed to do to steady yourself against the roll of the ship. You would most often need gloves to get about with and of course your clothing was very limited, although you were supposed to be done up in a boiler suit, very often that was wringing wet.

Right. Just another final general question about the ship's life, Frank. The degree of formality or informality on the ship, in the context of other ships perhaps, how formal were these little ships? For example, as a chief, did things ever loosen up between you and officers where you would get on first name terms, or not?

Yes, they did. You could say that there was a fair degree of informality there, but you had to be careful with that too because the discipline of the navy had to be maintained and you can't go singing out 'Hey Jack!' or Tom or something to this captain and expect the same sort of control if it was 'Aye aye sir'.

Parades. Church parades, inspections of messes and so on, were they as rigorous or common as on a bigger ship or not?

No, no, they weren't. That sort of thing especially in the smaller ships became an almost non-event. And just as well too, because life was tedious enough and hard without being over-stringent with petty little regulations like that.

Just a moment.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.

This is Ed Stokes, corvettes, Frank Heazlewood, tape two, side two.

Frank, of course, the *Lismore* spent much of 1944 in the Indian Ocean, general convoy work. If you could picture a typical day at sea on escort duty in the

Indian Ocean, could you talk through a typical day's activities, or were they all too different to be able to do that?

I'm afraid there were too much sameness about them to - unless there was something absolutely outstanding, one day was much the same as another and I think that was the trouble with it all. If you had say a long-drawn-out convoy it was difficult to know what day it was sometimes, because there was just nothing changed.

I guess the highlights were very much the ports?

Of course so, yes they were. Just occasionally like when you'd have a little bit of an action stations alarm, someone on lookout would see something that looked like a mast appearing in the distance that ought not to be there or something and bells were pressed and you'd charge off to action stations. Sometimes to find that it was quite a harmless and other times it was there to be noted and sometimes, just occasionally, some action to be taken.

If you were to focus on one of these perhaps tedious days at sea on a convoy, could you describe how your day began and how the pattern of the day went in terms of watch keeping and other duties, in your position as chief stoker?

Well I was privileged of course in not having to keep a night watch therefore I had what the sailors loved to call 'an all night in'. That meant you didn't get up out of your bed through the night, and of course that was the envy of everyone to attain that. But just occasionally - well often in fact - I used to keep, as well to keep my hand in as much to relieve the tedium of the others, would keep the first watch and that would give one of them then - the stoker POs - all night in, and that was very much appreciated. It also keep your own hand in to keep reasonably efficiently watch keeper yourself.

So on the normal day though, you'd have the night in ...

Yes.

... when would the ship's company be ...

You'd go to breakfast around seven, something like that, and the morning watch, that was the four till eight, would be coming off. They would shower and have their breakfast and the forenoon watch, which had just relieved them at eight o'clock, would have had their breakfast, gone down below for their four hours and looking forward to coming up at midday. But my job would be just going round the compartments and measuring our fuel tanks, give the engineer an indication - well a very precise indication - of how much fuel we had, how much water we had, percentage wise how far we could go or how long we could go before it was necessary to fuel somewhere or to make water with the evaporators.

Right, and then the afternoon, was that spent in a similar fashion or not?

(5.00) Well it would be, depending on what needed to be done. You would be striking down lubricating oils or something in the case of these corvettes which a lot of this was done by hand in the case of corvettes. And so you used to have to carry drums of - those forty-four gallon oil drums and continually replenishing the tanks of that. Making sure that all the fire-fighting equipment was kept up to date. The fire extinguishers were tested and those that were found to be faulty were replenished or repaired. There seemed to be no end of little jobs to do.

Mmm, I can imagine.

Lots of pumps pumping around water and fuel and that sort of thing was a common thing to do.

Right. It was during the period during 1944 that the ship refitted at Port Elizabeth and I think on route from Durban to Port Elizabeth you'd experienced some exceptionally heavy weather. How bad was that?

Yes, well, in my twelve years at sea - which of course hadn't been twelve years at that time - but when it finally expired my time, that was as rough a sea as I had seen and it was quite fearsome really. These enormous great waves rolling in breaking and the ship would seem to be lost in foam and you'd wonder, you'd see them coming and then wonder how on earth the ship is going to ride over the top of this. It surely must engulf you, you would feel. But it always - the buoyancy of the ship always picked itself up.

Was it so extreme that people were making preparations to have to get off if the ship foundered, or not?

Yes, you'd get the impression that you can't possibly last in that. Sooner or later one's going to strike you where you're just not able to recover from it. It didn't happen but ...

Somebody had told me that people were rather gathering on the - near well, companionways and so on, to get off the ship if need be, do you remember that or not?

No, I don't remember that. But it could easy be possible but I don't know where you'd gather, you wouldn't know when it was going to come and when it did, it would be very sudden. You wouldn't know - if the ship was engulfed, whether she was going to come out of it or whether she would capsize or not. But it's a strange thing, in the construction of ships, that the greater the list on the ship the greater are the forces that tend to right her. So that the further over she goes the stronger is the force to bring her back again, until they reach a critical point and then they go flip.

What was it like being down in the engine room in those sorts of conditions? What were the greatest dangers to people working in those confined spaces?

Well getting around from one place to another, you can't just stay anchored, you've got to go and feel bearings or take temperatures and that sort of thing and consequently you're moving about and you're moving about on what must necessarily be oily sorts of plates. Even those - they're patterned those plates in order to try to make them non-skid but it's very hard to do that and you've got leather-soled shoes on which eventually become oil-impregnated and they're inclined to be a bit greasy. But the menace seemed to be of tool boxes and the like of things. If they break loose or .... Prior to leaving port very often you would hear a pipe to secure for sea, which meant that you should be tying up those sorts of things that are liable to cut loose during a storm at sea or if the weather became a bit wild and these things hurtling around, and you know, they could do untold damage. They would go hurling across from one side of the ship to the other and having reached there they would come flying back again.

Was it easier in these sorts of heavy sea conditions to be up above somewhere where at least you could see what was going on, or was it better being down below away from it?

Actually the lower you are down - the further down you are the movement is not quite so pronounced and so I suppose, that the least movement would be down on the very bottom plates but that's where you had to be anyway and providing things were secure and you took reasonable care with your handholds and things like that, you could get about comfortably enough.

(10.00) Well, let's just move on to the refit, Frank. Of course, you went to Port Elizabeth where the ship was worked on. Were you involved in any way at all or not?

No, mainly the dockyard maties take over. They were supplied with a list of jobs that were required to be done which were of course compiled by us. We knew just exactly what needed to be done when the ship got into port and well before it did get into port you would have to make out this list of jobs that required to be done and our engine room list was quite extensive.

The rumours of sabotage during this refit operation, how real do you think they were?

Oh, they were quite real in South Africa because a large percentage of the people down there didn't want to be in the war anyway and if they were to be in it, they would have just as sooner been on the other side and so consequently there were a percentage people working on ship in whose interests it would be to detain her.

I think you were saying, you were referring in particular to OBs, what did that signify?

It was some sort of a Ossoper Brandavar or something. I'm not really sure of what the words are but the meaning was that they were fifth column. In other words they would ostensibly be working for us but in reality, against us.

Right. Well I know you did at some stage get up to Johannesburg on leave and you were telling about the sort of sad loss of thirty pounds in a wallet on the train. That must have been a blow and a half.

Well it was. It was a very sad thing to happen to a sailor going on leave. Mind you, we were billeted out and we were going to stay with people who, with their wonderful hospitality - and the South Africans are unsurpassed I think in that - and that no money was actually required for that sort of thing but of course a sailor must have his spending money and in this case, where no-one could speak higher of their crew mates than I should be able to because when I lost my money - my wallet was stolen on board this train going from PE to Johannesburg and I was left with six bob in my pocket - I remember it well because I thought now, 'What I must do here is not to leave the train at all when it gets to Johannesburg, I'll see the railway transport people and I must get the first train back again'.

This very quickly got around amongst our sailors of which there would have been about thirty from the *Lismore*, roughly half of our crew - or nearly half of our crew - were on board that train - some thirty guys. That message spread very quickly through the train and on being passed by one of the fellows, I remember it was Leading Stoker Lewindon - Wally Lewindon - and he pressed something into my hand. I didn't know what and when I did have time to have a look, that he and some others had been through the train and sort of taken their hat around amongst those sailors whose money was already very, very scarce, could ill-afford to part with any of the cash to help someone out, but that's what they did. And when I was able and I counted this money, I said, 'Wally I must have a list of these people who donated this because eventually I would like to pay it back'. He said, 'Oh yeah, you can forget about that', and on counting it, it was somewhere round about thirty pounds, the amount that I'd lost.

That's a great story of generosity, but there were obviously these great bonds with the crew. Well perhaps if we might just pass over the period of the leave, because time is getting on a little bit. On rejoining the ship after leaving Port Elizabeth and then Durban, I think you were in convoy up the Mozambique Channel, well I think you did actually have a contact with a submarine?

Yes, we did and it was a very positive contact and the asdic boys were quite positive that we've got a submarine with us and indeed she surfaced not very far from us and we were hurling - I did not see the submarine myself - but we were hurling depth charges right, left and centre.

(15.00) She submerged again I assume?

Yes, yes, but I believe later on we were credited with her kill. But at one stage I think we did almost as much damage to ourselves as we did to their sub. because these depth charges were going off at a fearful rate and so horribly close to us that it was lifting our stern clear of the water often.

> It must have been an amazing force. After that particular encounter, was the overwhelming feeling on the ship as you recall it, one of elation at this encounter or fear that might be amongst a nest of other submarines?

I think we were quite elated because we felt that we were able to carry out the job that we were designed to do and instead of the tedium of pinging away up and down convoys and the like, here was an expression of it all where we actually did what we were designed and supposed to do.

> Right. Well it was after I think that you were involved in some patrols off the Persian Gulf, or in that region. I think particularly across the Straits of Hormuz - there'd be a ship or two there right now, wouldn't there? What do you remember of that anti-submarine patrol work?

Yes, once again it was just hot and tedium and the heat was fearful indeed. We used to, in our leisure time when we could get ashore, go ashore very often and just sit in the water with a pith helmet on or something of that sort, or a towel or something wrapped around your head, and just sit there for an hour or two maybe and then go back to the ship in the ship's motorboat, but just something to break up the tedium from shipboard life.

> I think you were saying before, or you remember, the actual temperature of the water?

Yes, it was always a fairly steady ninety-three degrees. We knew that from the incoming temperatures of the sea water mainly, but probably in those harbours it would be higher again because the water was stiller and the eternal sun sort of baking it and it leaves of course a very high brine content. Very easy to swim in that water because you're very buoyant.

> Yes. Did you have any contact with local people during that work or not? Were there any ports you called at?

Yeah, we were in Bandar Abbas a few times and I think we used to trade bits and pieces of broken-down ship's gear, like old files and possibly raid the ragbag or something, to trade with those people who'd come out in little boats to bargain with you. From memory, mainly we got back fruit and maybe dates and stuff like that. Maybe a few locally made trinkets to take home to our loved ones and ....

> Right. The rest of '44, Frank, I think was spent generally in doing convoy work and as you said, without being unable [sic] to keep diaries and so on, the

> events rather blurred together. Do you have any other specific recollections of that period during the Indian Ocean work in the *Lismore*?

Specifically when is this?

> Frank, you were just saying how the convoy work did become very tedious, how exactly do you remember that?

Probably from the tedium itself and the only break in this thing was if something - someone imagined they sighted an aircraft or something of that nature, the alarm bells'd go and you'd close up to action stations but they were almost always false alarms. I can remember once we engaged Venus - the planet Venus - because it can be seen sometimes in the daylight and it was a silvery looking object much the same as a high flying aircraft is and we engaged that unsuccessfully (laughs) with our low-angled four-inch gun.

> Did people in the crew who made any false report like that get stirred up for dragging people to action stations or not?

No because he's doing his job and it's a genuine mistake. He wouldn't do it for the fun of it. But unless something like that happened it was almost impossible to remember one day from another or to divide one day from another because they were so precisely the same. And I think that's the hardest part of all of that is that nothing happened to put a bit of spice into our life, you know.

> Well as you were saying before, I guess that very much did come in the ports. What, for you, was the most memorable port of the region, a place where you had the best experiences or the most interesting time?

(20.00) Well I'd say our little time that we spent in the Seychelles Islands were lovely. Of course, that was - even though it was in the middle of that area, it was not all that badly affected by the war and the local populace were sort of Creole French I think or something of that sort, and they were very lovely people, nice to be with, and we used to play football and so forth there during our sporting - like that part of the afternoon say - and then probably go to the bars and have some beer if you could afford it and some different food, some shore food and that sort of thing and I suppose frivolity with the locals ....

> Good times ...

... yes. They were very much needed too because otherwise you would become so bored and fed up with things that you would, that your morale would sink altogether and if it wasn't for little interludes like that, well your sanity would be at risk I'm sure.

> The Seychelles I think are very beautiful too?

Yes, yes, it is really lovely and one could be excused for wanting to go back. Not so with Addu Atoll and the Maldives and the Laccadives and those various places that we went to where there'd only be oil tankers or something of that sort and nothing diverting to do. Not so with the Seychelles, they were beautiful islands and we would love to go there. I think we did a couple of times for, you know, reasonable periods, maybe a week or so at a time.

That's a good memory. Well moving on a little bit, towards the end of '44 the *Lismore* was shifted back to Australia and I think came back through Colombo and so on. Once the news came that you were to proceed to Australia, was this good news in that you were going home or regrettable news in that you were leaving some interesting areas?

No, it was in no way regrettable, it was accepted wholeheartedly as being wonderful news. And it took about fifteen days for the journey because the engineer sent for me before we left Colombo and he said I'd like you to pack every last ounce of oil and water into this ship. This was before I knew. He must have known because the skipper would have told him but it was still a pretty hush-hush thing. It was always in the wind I think because these `buzzes', as the sailors call them, they have a remarkable history of becoming true because whether they sense what might be happening or not, I don't know, but someone seemed to .... There always seemed to be some basis of truth in the rumours.

Mmm, that they normally would work out?

Yes.

So that final voyage back across the Indian Ocean, are there any particular memories of that, or not?

Yes, that was our first experience of oiling at sea. Generally we were able, in this corvette, to stay about probably twelve-fourteen days at sea without replenishment, but of course by that time you would be very, very light in the water having burned up your 150 tons of oil I think roughly is what we used to carry, and also your water tanks would be very low. So the ship became quite buoyant and a little unstable in that circumstance.

I see, so it wasn't just a problem of range but of actual stability without that ballast?

Yes, although it could have been overcome because they can always swamp them with sea water if that became a real problem. But it is a real test when you've got a voyage of that distance to do, say from Colombo to Fremantle is a very long way and I think it took us about fifteen days and I think we had to oil at sea on one occasion.

Was that a difficult operation, or not?

Well it was a different one. We had to learn how to manhandle the hoses like while they hoisted over by crane from the tanker to the ship itself, and it was a different operation but essentially the same. You're taking in oil but you're taking it from a moving platform so to speak, when normally it's done from either an oiling wharf or buoy or alongside a wharf.

(25.00) Well, coming back to Australia, I know you went via Fremantle and then Christmas was in Melbourne, were you able to get home there, or not?

Yes, I got a quick run to Warrnambool then but it was a very quick dash I remember and our Leading Cook, Ed Rigney, took advantage of that very short time in Melbourne to get married and I had the privilege of being his best man and that was a lovely day for them but their honeymoon was a very short-lived affair too, because we were recalled at one stage and had to charge off to sea with little more than half of our crew because the rest couldn't be contacted and ...

Wartime marriages such as that, this one of your friend, was there a particular intensity to them, or not?

I think you could say that to be true, yes. There would be although Ed and Peg's had been long planned but when the final event came it was a very hurried affair because of course they're not allo - you can't say where you're going to be. No good saying, 'Well meet me there love and we'll bring the parson with you', sort of thing because you couldn't always make it.

Yes, of course. Well moving on a bit. Of course, after some other leave in Australia the ship went up to the Admiralties and to Leyte Gulf, but I know the memory's a little bit sketchy there. I think you though were describing this great armada of ships in Leyte Gulf?

Yes, it was like a forest of masts in there, really it was and ships, their jobs completed, the war was over say, and everyone sort of going back home and no-one seemed to know .... There'd been no overall plan of what we all should be doing. Whether it was that it happened so quickly in the end. Just prior to the war finishing it looked as though we were going to have to fight the Japs out of every island - island by island - until you hunted them back to where they came from. Instead of, as this bomb did, it cut them off at their source and of course the whole thing collapsed.

Yes, of course, that I think was just a little later, but I know the ship was hardly used there. But I think there was an escort up and an escort back and then there was this final voyage to New Zealand, I think, in May/June or '45. What was that doing?

Yes, I think we escorted a submarine from .... I fancy we left from Brisbane as you've correctly said - the memory on these things is become a bit hazy - but the submarine part of it was not hazy, we took her across alright to Auckland and after some days there we were then

bound for Fremantle and coming round Cape Leeuwin it was then that we received this news that the first atom bomb had been dropped and of course, there was great cheering and much enjoyment and frivolity on the ship. So much so that somebody dug out a bottle of home brew that they'd made out of god only knows what, maybe torpedo spirit and boot polish and whatever, and I remember the predominant colour was beetroot, that was the predominant ingredient for the colour, and I remember it made one of our fellas fearfully sick, but he seemed to think it was worth it.

> Sounds a fairly potent brew. Well the ship went for refit in Fremantle. While she refitted there was leave. You went east I think at Kalgoorlie?

At least half of the crew once again was sent on leave during this refit and of course most of us came from the eastern states and on the way over in the train, at Kalgoorlie, we received the official announcement that the war was indeed over. So that train crew had a real job on their hands to get the *Lismore* crew out of the pub and so I think we detained the train for maybe an hour or two, but that's not quite clear. But I remember there was much rejoicing about that because the war was finally over. No more fear of being killed - or very little - most of us then could return to our homes and so forth. Not me, I was still a member of the permanent navy so I had to soldier on.

> It must have been a great feeling - the end of the war. Of course, you went on as you say in the peace time navy until 1950 and even I think brought the carrier *Sydney*, a new generation of ships in a sense, out to Australia. What were your feelings at the end of it, at the end of the war?

At the end of the war? Well one of extreme relief and happiness that it was over and we personally were unhurt. We lost a lot of good mates but you sort of say, well that's part of the price of it all. No, one of extreme relief and thanksgiving I suppose you'd say.

> Right. Well on behalf of the War Memorial Frank, for making this tape, thank you very much.

I thank you, it was a great pleasure.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.
END OF INTERVIEW.