





# TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

| | |
|---|---|
| **Accession number** | S01040 |
| **Title** | (W/1136) O'Reilly, Sydney William 'Syd' (Signalman) |
| **Interviewer** | Martin, Harry |
| **Place made** | Not stated |
| **Date made** | 11 March 1991 |
| **Description** | Sydney William (Syd) O'Reilly as a signalman, HMAS Ipswich, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-1945. |

**Disclaimer**

The Australian War Memorial is not responsible either for the accuracy of matters discussed or opinions expressed by speakers, which are for the reader to judge.

**Transcript methodology**

Please note that the printed word can never fully convey all the meaning of speech, and may lead to misinterpretation. Readers concerned with the expressive elements of speech should refer to the audio record. It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. 'world war two' (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to 'second world war' (the official conflict term).

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [ ] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. Three dots (…) or a double dash (- -) indicate an unfinished sentence.

**Copyright**

Copyright in this transcript, and the sound recording from which it was made, is usually owned by the Australian War Memorial, often jointly with the donors. Any request to use of the transcript, outside the purposes of research and study, should be addressed to:

Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345
CANBERRA ACT 2601

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is side one of tape one of an interview recorded with Syd O'Reilly of the *Ipswich* on 11th March 1991.

Syd O'Reilly, where and when were you born?

Footscray, 24.10.1918.

Tell us something about your parents - what your mother and father did, and what sort of people they were.

Dad, early in his life, was a baker and later became a chemical worker at ICI, mainly during the war years. Mum was, I think actually worked the munitions in the first world war, as a young person. Mum was a confectioner and she owned a shop - Mum and Dad actually - owned a shop which used to be down in front of the old Trocadero Theatre, which was quite a thriving business at the time, but that was in the silent days. And the advent of the talkies put the Trocadero out of business because the theatre about half a mile up the road, the Barclay, got the talkies first and that was the end of the 'Troc'.

How many children in the family?

Myself and my sister and one brother who passed away early in life.

Where did you fit into that group?

I was the older.

So what sort of childhood was it? What are your memories of the period? Were they difficult times?

I thought they were quite good really - not like today's times, of course. People tended to make their own fun as the old toodlembucks as we called them. I don't suppose you're familiar with the toodlembuck. Well, a toodlembuck was a round flat piece of tin with drawings across it and in which the names of horses were placed, and the price, and the tin was nailed on to a cotton reel which was, in turn, on a stick. And you would spin the tin around and the arrow, which was on the top of it, would say, alright, `Phar Lap ten to one', so you got ten cherry bobs or some such. That was fun in its day I suppose. And, of course, everybody bowled hoops and rode bikes and did things of that nature. All in all, I think we were possibly a lot happier than young people are today because we all made our own fun.

Were you parents strict?

I wouldn't think so - moderately I suppose. Like everybody else: 'You can't do this' and 'You can't do that', but not over-strict I don't think, no.

What about your schooling? Where did you go to school?

I went to Geelong Road School, and later to Footscray Tech. And then, of course, like most people of my age, or vintage shall we say, the Depression came along and, of course, you leave school and go to work early.

> Was it a family that had been touched by the first world war? Did you have members who'd gone off to that?

Yes, uncles - many of them. Family originally came from Ballarat and most of my uncles in Ballarat, they went to the first world war. I don't know if they served at Gallipoli. I doubt it, but in France, yes.

> Was there a sense then of the ANZAC tradition as you were going to school? Raising the flag, and a consciousness of what ANZACs meant, and that sort of thing?

Yes, our headmaster at Geelong Road, of course, he was a returned man, and the flag was raised every Monday morning at school and the school band played and everybody marched off to their various classes.

> Was it a religious family? Church going?

Not strongly, no, not really.

> What denomination had the family been?

Methodists, but that's a bit elastic, I suppose - unless some were, what shall we say, Anglican or C of E.

> Would you go to church on special occasions? At Christmas or Easter, or that sort of thing?

(5.00) Only those days, yes, mainly, but not a lot of church. Of course, when the boy scouts, and they used to have quite a few church parades because they were attached to St John's Anglican Church in Paisley Street, and of course we'd go to church then.

> So you said when the Depression came you left school. Prior to that had you any particular ideas about what you hoped to do with your life?

Not a great deal. I think originally I would have liked to have been a carpenter. But when I went to work I went to work in a wool company. It was seasonal in those days and I was there for about nine months. I was fortunate to get a job in another wool company a bit further around the river and that was a mill so that was constant. And I had the chance to become a wool sorter and a wool classer so I forgot all about being a carpenter and took the opportunity of learning a trade that way, so I suppose it wasn't a bad way of doing it.

> You mentioned that you'd joined the Reserves before the outbreak of war. How did that come about?

This mill I worked in, a couple of chaps had joined the Reserve and I'd always been interested in the navy. In fact, other than being a carpenter I had great ideas perhaps of joining the navy

at one stage. And when these two chaps in a lower floor to us had joined the Reserve, there was a great bunch of us - possibly about ... eventually, I think, we grew to about ten - we all went and joined the Reserve. And we were all fairly young then. I was sixteen and a half at the time so we did what was known in the service as eighteen months' boys time or eighteen months' senior cadet time. On the age of eighteen then you transferred into the Reserve as a man.

So when you joined the Reserve what sort of things did you do? How much time would you spend, and so on?

We used to go down every week ...

To where?

To Williamstown. Yes, we joined at Williamstown, naturally bein' this side of the track. Chaps on the other side of town, they all went to - Reserves I'm speaking of - went to Port Melbourne, that's Lonsdale - actually it's Lonsdale as it is now. Well, yes. We went to drill mainly of a Wednesday night, if my memory serves me correctly. Then we'd go down again on a Saturday - this was optional of course - and go sailing in Hobson's Bay - in whalers and things of that nature. My rating, I joined the Communications Section. Well, that's probably wrong too. I can't say I joined the Communications Section, I was put there. So mainly the seamen chaps would go sailing but the fellows from other musterings could go along too, and learn sailing and what-have-you. Although I was a signalman, some Saturdays we'd go and we had those field pieces. We used to pull 'em apart, pull the wheels off, pull the barrel off and run like blazes with parts from the [inaudible], and put 'em all together again in a hurry - the field piece. Probably you haven't seen a field piece. I just can't think of how many pound they'd be. But they were like a gun you could see drawn along on a tank today but a smaller variety - they were manhandled. You could drag them along with two long ropes which had hand grips in them and you could tear along from one spot to another, stop, pull the barrel off, pull the wheels off, pull the undercarriage off, pull everything off, take it over to fifty yards if you wished, and put it all together again. This was quite something if your department could do that before anyone else - it was part of our competition style of learning things.

The sailing part of it sounds like it might have been fun ...

Oh, it was.

... but did it have any particular value, do you think, in naval terms?

I think, yes, it did because these particular vessels we sailed in, which were called whalers, they used the very same whalers - whalers and cutters - on cruisers and ships as lifeboats, et cetera, so yes, there was a lot of value in that.

So you did rowing practice as well as sailing?

And we did rowing, yes. Yes, we were in rowing crews and sailing crews. In fact at one stage, during an ACT, that's what they call an annual continuous training .... I forget to mention, you were saying how often did you go. Well, you had to go Wednesday nights or else you'd go Saturday.

(10.00) But then each year you did an ACT which was a fortnight duration. Sometimes you went on board ships and you did your ACT there or sometimes you might go down to Flinders Naval Depot and do it down there. And sometimes you did portion of it, perhaps, in your depot or barracks, which in my case was Williamstown. I did one week on one occasion on *Canberra* and when we came back, of course, I was the only signalman so there was no signal communications section going in Williamstown at the time but there were a lot of stokers and seamen there and they were doing mine sweeping practice. So one week I did mine sweeping although it was nothing to do with me at all, really, but still it was all good experience learning what the other chap did.

> Would you get paid by your employer during those periods where you were away for a week or two?

No, that was quite out then. No, you don't get paid by your employer, you got whatever the going rate was, which I can't recall now - it wasn't a lot, by the navy.

> That sort of association, did that result in you getting an earlier sense that there was trouble brewing, that war was coming, than may have been the case with the general civilian population?

Yes, I think so, because, well you could see, even when I left school that there was going to be trouble, because there was a continual build-up of Hitler's forces and I can recollect when he took over Alsace-Lorraine. And then it was Czechoslovakia. I just can't recollect the next one. I think he took Austria before he took Czechoslovakia, come to think of it. And then 1938, I think it was about September of '38 I was called up with the first lot. That was what was called the Munich Crisis. I was called up and stood to for a couple of days. They could see at that stage that nothing was going to happen - I think that was the 'peace in our time' bit with the piece of paper. So we were demobilised and sent home. But then of course, the next time it happened was September '39 - it was there for keeps then.

> Before the war started there was quite a lot of admiration for Hitler. A lot of people saw him as being a strong man and were impressed by the sort of achievements that he seemed to be bringing about in Germany. Do you recall what the sort of attitudes were at home - how Hitler was seen, and Germany seen, just before the war?

They saw him, from my point of view, as a warmonger, really. So what you're saying about some of the things he achieved, no doubt from the Germans' point of view, was very valid, because it was a nation - until Hitler took over - that people were starving. Well, he gave them work and possibly hope in those days. But from our point of view, no.

> So when you joined up, what was the process? How did you formally join?

You went to Williamstown and said you'd come down to join up. And you filled in several forms and then the executive officer who, in those days - I suppose it's all the same today - as the chap immediately below the commanding officer of the depot at Williamstown - you had to go and see him and you were sworn in, signed on the dotted line and that was it.

> Was the Naval Reserve background of relevance in the process as to where you went and what became of you?

When you went away later?

> Well, when you joined. The fact that you had some Reserve experience, was that seen to be of any import in terms of where you were going with the navy?

Not really. I only went to Williamstown because it was the closest barracks; it was on this side of the bay, you see. Living in Footscray, of course, naturally you'd migrate to Williamstown to join up. Most people on this side did that. Right throughout Footscray, Williamstown - well, Williamstown naturally - but Yarraville, Seddon, you'd find most of the chaps went to Williamstown to join up.

> Well, what I actually meant was that it wasn't said: 'Oh good, you'd been in the Reserve; with that experience you can go here', or 'You'll be able to skip this bit of training' or ...

I see. Well, I suppose it did because when we were called up I went down to Williamstown and I got kitted up, as it were. You had only one uniform when you were in the Reserves until the mobilisation period. Well, then you got kitted up with, I think, there were possibly eight or nine different sorts of uniform. I'm going down to uniform as shorts, et cetera - all different sorts of uniforms for different sorts of duties.

(15.00) Anyhow, after being kitted up, first I was told to stand by with my bag and hammock and I was going to go to Darwin. Well, no, that was cancelled, so once more I'm sitting with my bag and hammock. 'Get your bag and hammock', they said, 'You're going to join the *Hobart*'. And the *Hobart* was alongside of Princes Pier at that time. So I got the bag and hammock and out I go again but no, that was cancelled. So back we go. So the next time, they said, 'Well, come on, bag and hammock - you're going to go to Sydney and join the *Australia*'. So I thought, oh yeah, here we go again, but actually it was on properly this time - yes, I did go into the city, got the *Spirit of Progress* and went to Sydney, down the Man o' War Steps, and got the boat from there across to Garden Island, and joined *Australia* the following day.

> What was the feeling at home? Were they apprehensive about you joining the services? Was there any sense of anxiety or was the general feeling one of pride that you were doing your bit and that sort of thing?

I suppose, it was - a bit hard to define really at this stage - but I would say possibly one of anxiety mixed with pride.

> And for you, was it exciting to be going to Sydney and heading off and breaking away from home and where you'd been brought up and so on?

There were mixed feelings, wondering where I was going, what the people would be like, and what are we heading into, and how far we are going to go, and how long is it going to last, too - that was one of the main things we used to think about - how long? But things like that change after a period, as things just go on and on and on, you get to the stage you don't think any more just perhaps how long it's going to go; it's just there.

> So when you arrived in Sydney, where did you find yourself staying and so on?

When I went to Sydney? I went straight on board the *Australia*, and that's where I stayed, of course.

> Describe the conditions. What sort of accommodation did you have in the ship, and so on?

At this particular time the *Australia* was alongside Garden Island and it was just in the stages - the closing stages - of a major refit. This particular major refit they'd put new guns on the upper deck - twin 4.7s. It was a real fighting fortress when it was finished, the *Australia*. They put a nine-inch blister right around the whole hull of the ship, just below the waterline, which was a torpedo blister, really. It was nine inches thick, you could practically walk along it. Conditions, well, it was a bit dirty at the time, of course, because it was in dockyard hands.

> It was a destroyer, was it?

No, eight-inch cruiser. She was flagship for quite a long time and she got in and out of many scrapes - *Australia*. Conditions on board - well, as I say, it was a bit dirty at the time because in dockyard hands, well, that couldn't be helped. But between decks where our mess, I was in down one below the day-time deck, so in layman's language I suppose you could say I was about three decks down; it wasn't bad at all, really.

> What about sleeping? I mean what was the bunk arrangements and so on?

Hammocks in those days, you had a hammock; you just sling it up on the hammock bars and hop in.

> What about ventilation and ...?

Ventilation by day when the scuttles were open wasn't too bad but at night-time, not good - closed down, steamy.

> What about smoking? Were there any rules about smoking?

No, not unless there was some particular activity going on like, say, doing something around power magazines and things like that, of course, there'd be no smoking. Or fuelling, the refuelling section or, say, refuelling ship, or re-ammunition - things like that, there's no smoking in those areas naturally, but other than that, no.

> What was the daily routine in that very first part of your training? What were the sorts of things you were doing?

The sorts of things: well, I suppose, there's always every morning, in those days of course, was scrubbing decks. Other than that it was just daily routines, like, receiving signals. We didn't do much upper deck work when we were alongside Garden Island, of course. When I say upper deck work, signal work, because the ship itself was on a ship-shore telephone service so the signals were sent by phone and we just had to deliver them to the various people that they were addressed to.

(20.00) Was the role of a signalman, or the position, did you see that as a good one? Did you feel that, well actually, you'd got yourself into quite a good spot?

Yes, really. It's a fairly important job, of course, particularly when you're operating at sea in a fleet or in a convoy because you receive all the signals and report them to the officer of the watch if he's on call, if you're at sea, or perhaps if the captain's on the bridge at the time to him.

Were you just using flags or flags and Morse?

We used to use flags and signal lights which were like Aldis lamps or sometimes ten-inch or eighteen-inch signal projectors, and flags - semaphores type of thing. And then they had also mechanical semaphore that you could use by the making the angles of whatever the letters were with two handles and that had a mechanical - like a bike chain is exactly what it would be - a bike chain running up and on the top of the mast section of this particular - or pole it would really be - the signals were made up above you, possibly ten feet up, say. You'd make it down here but it was going on up there.

How adequate were you, did you find when you joined as a result of your previous involvement with the Reserves? Had you a certain degree of proficiency that was useful to you?

I'd say, not really good compared to the active service chaps, the permanent service reserves in any field, whether it's communications, seamanship, whether they were stoker mechanics, whatever, would have a lot to learn, because I couldn't see how anyone could learn, say, one night a week and Saturdays and on the ACT with a fortnight a year, could never learn what these chaps would learn, say in the case of seamen, fifteen months' straight training, and in the case of signalmen, which was longer - WT people - eighteen months'.

Did you do that sort of special purpose training?

After my stint on the *Australia* I did a six weeks' course at Flinders, which brought me up to what I would term reasonable proficiency.

When you were with the *Australia* did you go to sea?

Not for a long period. After the refit we went south towards Hobart - this is what I would call a working up program - and then we came back to Port Phillip and we did firings in the bay, possibly about a week. While this firing, et cetera, of course, was going on there was general activity all over the ship of bringing the people in each department up to a certain standard of efficiency. After that period we went up and down the east coast for a while and, of course, naturally we'd go into Sydney, and then I was drafted down to Flinders to do the course - for the six weeks' course.

Was it exciting to go to sea?

Well, I mean, oddly enough at the first time we went to sea, of all things, we ran into a southerly buster going outside Sydney Heads and boy, oh boy, she really did roll around, which surprised people - the size of that vessel.

Did you get seasick?

It's one of the only times I've ever been seasick in my life, and that was it. No, in retrospect, it used to amuse me a little bit to be seasick on a ship the size of that and never to get seasick on corvettes which would slide around on wet grass (laughs).

With the bit of experience you had, at least, sailing and that before, so you'd had some familiarity with the sea, did you find that there were other people who took the business of being at sea in that first southerly buster, as you called it, very badly, who found it difficult to manage?

(25.00) Yes, that's right, because .... Well, I've seen people so sick, not only on the *Australia* this particular time, but I was on the *Doomba* immediately after the *Australia* episode and there was one chap there, a supply assistant, he used to be so sick that he'd lie in the scuppers practically and people'd have to go and pull him in board, otherwise he'd have gone over the side; he was absolutely useless, poor fellow.

What about on that first occasion with the very bad weather, what was the attitude within the service towards the young blokes who were starting, hopefully, to find their legs and seasick? Was the attitude: look you've just got to get on with it and put it aside? How was it handled?

Really, people, they were sick except the style of the sickness I told you about, and once they'd been sick they just had to buckle down and try and get on with the job. If they were so ill that they couldn't do the job, well, other people would have to try and double up and cover up for them - do their stint and help.

Was there any sort of medication, or pills or tablets or anything at all?

No, nothing like that at all.

What about the notion of being with the *Australia*? Was there a sense of pride that this was a ship that impressed other people? If you met other sailors ashore and they said what are you in and you said I'm in the *Australia*, did it give you that feeling?

That's right, yes, because our two biggest ships in those days were the *Australia* and the *Canberra*. I did mention earlier, I think, that the *Australia* was flagship. It was flagship for quite a time, but as I mentioned also, it had been doing a refit - the working up program - during that period the *Canberra* was the flagship of the fleet, but later the *Australia* took it over. In fact, the *Australia* was the flag during the Lingayen and Leyte programs. John Collins was on board then as commodore in charge of the Australian fleet.

What about the period when you were in Sydney and getting shore leave? Was that an interesting period of your early introduction to the navy: going ashore and so on with mates?

It was a little bit. I was, I suppose, a bit fortunate. When I went to the *Australia* two other reserves had come to the *Australia* as signalmen, but they were from Rushcutters Bay, they

were Sydney natives. One of them I chummed up with immediately and when I went ashore invariably I went to his home with him and it was quite good.

> Well, was there a sense that, now you're in the navy you've got to be a man? Was there a tendency to have young fellows expect that, well, they should get along to the pub and show that they could down a few and hold their liquor - that sort of thing?

No, not really. There was nothing of that nature. If fellows wanted to go to the pub, well, yeah, for sure, but no sense of, no, you should do this or you should do that - nothing like that at all.

> What about socially to be in uniform, say, with young ladies and so on? Was it a useful asset in a way to make acquaintance with young ladies, that you were in uniform in the navy? What was the general social feeling?

It's hard to say. I suppose up to a certain extent that would be true but .... For instance, I've told you that I was a friend of this chap that was a Sydney native. Well, of course, we go to his home and his girlfriend - they got married, I suppose, about three weeks after I joined the *Australia* - three or four weeks. A lot of chaps were already married but, as you point out, a lot of chaps just hung around with various females around the place. There was always girls coming down to the Circular Quay area to meet people coming off the ferries from various ships and things.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

> Identification: this side two of tape one of the interview with Syd O'Reilly, recorded on 11 March 1991 about the *Ipswich*.

> I suppose inevitably in a large ship like that you're going to get some young fellows who really like to kick up their heels and maybe have a bit of trouble adjusting to the discipline of navy life. Did you get some characters who had that sort of difficulty in adjusting?

I can't say exactly any person in particular, but early in our time on the *Australia* - when I say our time, I'm talkin' about when the reserves first joined the *Australia* .... As I said earlier, I was fortunate being in communications, I suppose, because they were a very fine bunch of people and they helped me and taught me even though I was on board without having to go down to Flinders for instruction. But overall there was a bit of tension on the ship between, well, call the permanent naval forces and the reserve people that had come aboard, because there was no doubt about it, the average reserve, he had a lot to learn, and I don't suppose a lot of the permanent service people felt that it was their job to teach them or perhaps that they had the time to teach them. But a couple of times we had to clear the decks or clear lower deck, as the saying is, and we were addressed by the commander of the *Australia*, one Commander Armstrong, about the tension between the reserve ratings and the permanent service ratings. And it wasn't only between those particular two either, as there was another group which was the Royal Australian Fleet Reserve - I don't know whether you're aware of these people, or not, but they were people who had been in the permanent service, served their

time, say their time might have been twelve years, they leave the service but they're put on a reserve basis also and they're called Fleet Reserve. Well, there you had three different bodies in one ship and until they're moulded into one force there was quite a lot of tension.

How did that show? What do you mean by tension?

People arguing the point and perhaps some people trying to lord it over others, and things of that nature. And sometimes it led to fisticuffs in the mess decks, which is, of course, frowned on in the navy. If you've got some particular grudge with another person the correct way of going about it is you report this to the master-at-arms who, in turn, will probably take it to your divisional officer and then a bout is arranged on the upper deck; you can slug it out there. But to be fighting on mess decks is not permitted.

Were there any impressive grudge fights of that sort that you saw?

I didn't see any on the *Australia* but I did see one - well, of course, you know I'm an *Ipswich* - I saw on *Ipswich*; they slugged it out for quite a while on the upper deck. I can remember where it was in Port Said and we had a Polish submarine tied up alongside us and a lot of those chaps came aboard to see the fight. It was quite good entertainment for them I suppose. But yes, I've seen a couple. And oddly enough, as often happens, after the fight was all over those fellows became quite good friends.

What about the discipline side of it? How did you find that in the very first part of your joining?

Well, the first part, as I say, we were in dockyard hands so discipline at that particular stage wasn't bad. Later I thought, well, some things seemed to be a bit unfair.

(5.00) What do you mean by that?

Sometimes I think there was a bit of injustice, personally. If you were run in for some particular so-called misdemeanour, different to our normal thoughts of British justice, you were guilty until you proved yourself innocent, which was an aboutface of things as far as I was concerned. And I know on my own occasion I was run in and I got ...

For what? What had you done, or were supposed to have done?

What I had supposed to have done was not answer a ship that was signalling me while we were lying in harbour. And this particular first lieutenant was coming across and he said that I hadn't answered his signal, which was quite wrong 'cause I'd read the signal and I'd taken it down below, you see. And when he came on board he ran me in for dereliction of duty, and even though I argued the point the then captain - no names - said he had to uphold his dignity of his officers and I go four days' jankers for that.

Four days'?

Jankers.

What's that mean?

Jankers is traditional work after your watch-keeping periods. For instance, my particular four days was put in painting the ward room, which I took a dim view of, naturally. But it was just four days I had to take and that's all about it, but it was quite wrong, really.

> So with the special six weeks that you did in further training after you left the *Australia*, how intensive was that? Did it require study at night and that sort of thing?

It was fairly intensive. It would start from, say, eight o'clock in the morning till midday, an hour for lunch, then one till four, then they had a section .... At four o'clock you'd go to tea, so that'd be over, say, by five, then they had a section of an hour, an hour and a half, which was voluntary study, so-called, but you still went down and did it because it was more or less expected of you. Then after that, say, we'd go from five till six, perhaps quarter-past, then in the evening you would have to read the signal, say, at half-past seven - all signalmen would read a light from the masthead down the parade ground and put the results in the next morning. So it was, yeah, fairly intensive.

> Was it difficult? Was it the sort of thing where some fellows would have trouble getting through the course?

Some were a bit slower than others.

> Where did you stay during that period?

At Flinders, yes. They had these big blocks: A, B, C blocks. I was in A block at the time, yeah.

> How would you have found the food in the navy to this point?

Not too bad, really, yes.

> Did it differ from, say, being in the *Australia* to being at Flinders?

Basically the same.

> After Flinders, what then?

After Flinders what did I go to? *Doomba*, yeah, the food wasn't bad there either, on the *Doomba*. I was on *Doomba* for about six months, I suppose.

> What was the *Doomba*?

*Doomba* was a mine sweeper who had been refitted from a ferry which had come down out of the Brisbane River. But had quite nice lines, the *Doomba*. It had been, prior to being a ferry, a first world war mine sweeper, HMS *Wexford* it was called in those days. Oddly enough, when I first went to Alexandria I saw a ship in harbour and I thought, good Lord, that looks like the *Doomba*, and this was HMS *Durham* which happened to be a sister to this *Doomba*. But getting back to the *Doomba* temporarily, it was a coal burner and it was called 'Smokey Joe' because it used to make a terrible lot of smoke when it was underway - the *Doomba*. Talkin' about coal burning, too, everybody had to coal ship except the sparkers. That's the old

steamers because, you see, sparkers didn't coal ships because they might have hurt their delicate hands.

(10.00) They'd get a bit of chiacking[?], I'd imagine.

Did they ever. I used to think, well, signalmen shouldn't coal ships either because they might hurt their delicate eyes, (laughs) 'cause you get stacks and stacks of coal dust and things in your eyes. It's a filthy job. And, of course, once that was over ...

How long a shift would you do?

Pardon?

How long a shift would you do?

How long a shift, doing what? Coaling a ship? Oh well, once it starts you keep going, but you'd do it in four hours, I suppose. But the coaling ship with *Doomba* was really the old-fashioned way of the coal coming up in baskets and coming over the the side and going down the hold - real old-style [inaudible].

So a pretty dirty job, I take it.

Filthy - your filthy and the ship's filthy. When you've finished coaling ship you've got a big job then of cleaning ship, and washing down, cleaning up. It was forever on.

Did that affect the morale in the ship? I mean, was it the sort of thing where people generally would feel a bit angry - a different sort of feeling to other ships?

I don't think so. No, it was a job that had to be done so you did it. There was no arguing the point about it.

How many crew?

It's a bit hard to say. I would say possibly about sixty on the *Doomba*, yeah.

A different sort of feeling aboard a ship like that compared with the *Australia*?

A different outlook, I suppose. With a ship like the *Australia*, I suppose, you wouldn't know as many people on the *Australia*, whereas on the *Doomba*, well, you'd know everyone, whether he's a stoker or a seaman or a sparker or a steward or a supply assistant - whatever he may have been, well, you knew everyone. On the *Australia* - well for instance, on my mess deck - our mess deck was on the port side - there were seventy-five communication ratings on that section. And on our starboard side there were seventy-five torpedomen. Now, other than those torpedomen and communication ratings, I doubt if I'd have known another ten people on board - other than the officers - another ten people on board.

Were you disappointed not to go back to the *Australia*? Had you made some mates that you got on well with, or that sort of thing?

I was sorry I didn't go back to see this Len Keys[?] - he was the chap I told you about I used to go to his home - because I was great mates with him, but other than that, not really.

So where did you go on the *Doomba*?

*Doomba*?. She did mainly sweeping up and down - where to now? She'd sweep from, say, Wilson's Promintory round to Dorrit[?] and perhaps down to Cape Otway. Incidentally, *Doomba*, in company with *Orara*, were ships that swept all of Bass Strait for the first convoy to go through to the Middle East.

Did you in fact pick up mines at all?

Not with her I didn't, no.

How did she handle the rougher weather then? Was it a bad ship?

It used to roll around quite a bit. I can recollect on one occasion - it was on this particular sweep to let the convoy go through - the first convoy to the Middle East - the weather was fairly rough and we used to anchor overnight at Waterloo Bay, round near Wilson's Prom. and go out again the next morning. But anyhow, during one of the signals the tail of .... When you're mine sweeping - I must tell you this so you can get the picture - you hoist big black balls which were canvas and they opened up towards your yard arm to indicate that you were mine sweeping and that you've mine - you've got to sweep out on, say, the port side for instance.

How far did it extend out?

How far did it extend out? Well ...

What was the sweep exactly?

The sweep, on the quarterdeck of a mine sweeper there were huge winches containing wire and on the wire there's the sharp edge which cuts the mine if it's an anchored mine. These wires are fed through a fairly[?] and it's attached then to what they call an orapesa[?] float which looks like a small torpedo-style to look at - it's only a float though and it has a little flag put on it. That orapesa float goes out and it takes the mine sweeping wire out with it. Oh, it could go out two or three hundred yards,four hundred perhaps.

(15.00)You can have these floats out on port and starboard side so you sweep quite an area, and the ship you're working with, it does similar. It comes abreast of you and it puts out a sweep too, so that you work up and down covering an area with these wires. If there's any mines there you should be able to cut them. And if they can surface then you explode them by [inaudible].

So you'd be on the lookout all the time during that period trying to see if any came up?

Mm.

That in itself would be a fairly tedious job if you were in an area where it appeared there were no mines.

Oh, it was just plain monotonous - boring - but it had to be done, you see.

There'd also, I suppose, be the feeling, well boring as it may be you couldn't afford not to be watching - that you couldn't pick up a book (laughs).

That's not on, no, because you've only got to miss one and there you go.

So how long did you keep doing that?

That was about a ten-day stint, that one.

And how long were you in the *Doomba*?

About six months, I'd say.

And from there?

From there I went - I joined, what did I join? I joined the *Heros*, that's right. The *Heros* was a converted tug, and it was an anti-submarine vessel - mainly training. They had - when I say mainly training - training anti-submarine personnel which were doing their courses at Rushcutters Bay. It was in a group called Group 58 which consisted of the *Heros*, the *St Giles* and the senior officer of the group was the *Bingera*. So we had three ships in the group. Around about 1940 HMS *Osprey* was the main anti-submarine school in England and it had been bombed and a lot of their equipment had been destroyed so they were training mostly anti-submarine people out here in Australia at Rushcutters Bay. And when they would do courses at Rushcutters they'd have to get their experience with the asdic machines on ships like, say, *Bingera* and *Giles*. And we used to take these people out the heads of Sydney and go up and down while they'd do their anti-submarine training. So that was quite good.

How long were you in the *Heros* then?

I was in *Heros* for about four to five months and then I was transferred to the *Moresby*.

By this time were you starting to feel in a way you were missing out on the war? Was there a sense that you wanted to get ...? Was there generally, with a young fellows, a feeling you wanted to get where things were happening?

It just seemed to be a bit of a phoney war, to me anyhow, at that stage, because you were only going up and down the Australian coast. But I suppose it all added to the training part of the business as it probably served you in good stead later.

With the *Heros*, where you were going to meet other ships and so on, did this give you more work as a signalman?

We'd go out in a group, you see, of three, and we were only single operator ships. When I mean that - I was the only signalman on board. So while you were out there, of course, you were the chap there all the time - you were on deck all the time [inaudible].

What were the sorts of things you would be saying to each other in an exercise like that?

Alter course signals and things like that, in that particular case - mainly alter course. And in the case getting back temporarily to *Doomba* and *Orara* and *Tom Gower*[?] and those things when they were operating together, of course, mainly the signals would be to do with mine sweeping.

The assumption was you'd be using signals rather than radio for security purposes. Was that it?

Radio was definitely taboo, oh yes. That would give the show away.

So from how far away could you effectively signal each other?

I'd say five or six mile.

And at night with lamps?

Well, yes, but they weren't .... They didn't like you using too much signals at night.

But how far could they be effective?

How far? Well, oh yes, five mile, six mile. If you could see something you could signal to it.

Was there a bit of an affinity with fellow signallers? That is, was it the sort of situation where you could make a mistake but your colleagues would be understanding and tolerant and try and help sort it out rather than immediately cause you problems?

(20.00) Oh yes, they're all - because you'd get to know the signalmen on the other ships.

Could you develop a sense of affinity with somebody that you'd have a special feeling with him because you felt you knew them when you'd never actually met them?

Sometimes you could - not always mind you - sparkers particularly more than signalmen, but they could almost tell you who was signalling to them by their [inaudible] on the key.

You talked of them having a hand. Was there a similar thing then with the way people use flags?

Well, sometimes if a chap would get up and make a signal flashing you could almost say oh, that would be so-and-so, because of his method. He'd perhaps signal quickly with the word itself and then pause and then send the next word. Other chaps were more deliberate in their styles of making a message.

What about flags, could you ...?

Flags no, because you wouldn't know who they were with flags.

> What was the ratio of use in terms of flags and signals? Would you use the lamps during the day?

Lamps during the day, and quite frequently semaphore too. When we were first going over to the Middle East, I was on *Bathurst* then, and we travelled with the *Lismore*. Incidentally, *Bathurst* and *Lismore* were the first two corvettes ever built. And I might add too, that the first three was *Bathurst*, *Lismore*, and *Maryborough*. Those particular three corvettes, in style, were different to all the other corvettes that were built because they had what we called a flying bridge which is an open style bridge. All corvettes after those three were built with a closed-in bridge and they had a lower silhouette then, you see - a much nicer vessel to work in too, I might add. Oh yes, getting back to our signals: we went over with - I was on *Bathurst* which was the lead ship - *Lismore* invariably was astern of us. And then we'd either use light or semaphore 'cause you could just walk out on the deck and attract the signalman on the *Lismore*'s attention and off you'd go, make your signal, and that's it. And that's when I used mechanical arms too, because you could make a signal. 'Cause every morning at sea you have what they call fuel consumption signals and things like that. If you've used - if you've got x amount of fresh water on board, x amount of fuel, et cetera, like that, *Lismore* would always make that to *Bathurst* because *Bathurst* was the senior ship so our skipper would know how much fuel he had.

> When you weren't actually signalling would it mean that you'd have to be there with your eyes glued to the adjacent ships to see if they were trying to signal you?

That's right. You would go on deck, say you had the forenoon watch for instance, eight o'clock till twelve midday, well, all the time you were there you kept a strict lookout all the [inaudible].

> Was it a strain? Was there a sense of relief to go off duty then?

It was always nice to go off because you get tired. It doesn't sound much, standing on a deck but not only are you watching the ship who's in company with you but you've got to scan the whole horizon for other ships that might be around - not necessarily yours either. And also you were scanning the horizon - not only the horizon - but the sea itself for things that might be in the sea, things that are floating, a periscope even.

> Was it easy to make mistakes when you were signalling?

Not really because it got to be second nature.

> You never had any really embarrassing signals where you'd inadvertently sent a totally wrong signal?

Oh no, because your signal's made. It's a message form and what you've got to send to the other vessel is usually there, unless it's just a quick verbal asking so-and-so. But no, that doesn't happen.

How many other ships from the *Heros* were you in then before you went to *Ipswich*?

I went from *Heros* to the *Moresby*. *Moresby* was an asdic ship also. Oddly enough it was a single screw vessel and it had quite a flared bow. It was HMS *Sylvio* in the first world war. And it was built in such - it was one of Campbell's 'Q' boats - it was built in such a fashion that if you saw it from a fair way off you wouldn't know which way it was going - the fore and aft sections were built very similar. It was supposed to be, to fool submarines in the first world war. That's why they're called Campbell's Q boat.

(25.00) Anyway, HMS *Sylvio* became HMAS *Moresby*. Prior to the war it was the 'white lady of the north' because she did all the surveys up there. When war broke out they brought her down to Sydney and refitted it and put it out on asdic work. She too, used to take people from Rushcutters for training but not a great deal, because we used to go up and down the coast quite a bit, the *Moresby*. Round about Christmas '41, yes, we went up to .... Before we went up there, incidentally, we bought on a lot of quite large cutters. They were specially made these cutters for survey work. So we bought all these particular cutters on with the *Moresby* and we went up to Cairns and refuelled there.

What was the cutter?

The cutter. Well, it was like a whaler but it didn't have the masts and you didn't sail it, you could ...

Oh sorry, for a moment I was thinking of something to do with mine (laughs) [inaudible].

No, I'm sorry. No, a cutter is a vessel. But these particular cutters are big strong fellows for sailing in and out reefs and things. And went from Cairns up the Great Barrier Reef into Torres Strait. We'd resume this survey. We were going to do survey. So they bought all the old survey equipment back on to the *Moresby* and the experienced crews that they'd had prior to the war. They brought chaps from different ships who were experienced survey men on to *Moresby* and we went up and we swept what they now call - or they called then - the Great Eastern Channel, because there was down in Flinders, they had a section which was called Y Section. These were all sparkers which were away from the signal school, they were in a section of Flinders by themselves. This Y group would monitor all the Japanese signals. That was their particular job - was monitoring Japanese signals. And they must have known then that the Japanese coming into the war was fairly imminent because *Moresby* went up to, and swept this Great Eastern Channel in company with HMS *Vigilant*. And when it was completed - that took quite a few weeks - it was a three-month job. When the actual survey was completed *Bathurst* and *Lismore* came up and they swept that channel. Then the *Bungaree* came up and mined the old channel which was formerly the Eastern Channel. And that was quite an interesting operation - that survey.

In what way? What made it interesting to you?

The way the survey was carried out. And we had on board a depth sounder and the survey officer would take sightings of various what they used to call survey marks. They'd go along and put up survey marks and then they'd read these survey marks and they'd say stop. And you pressed the echo sounder and that would tell you the depth of the water, and that's the

centre of the ship. So from the stop point to when you pressed it they knew how far they were out, where the reef was underneath, et cetera. It was quite good.

Did you go ashore on Thursday Island?

Once I went ashore on Thursday Island, yes.

How was the Torres Strait Island situation then? Were the islanders ...? Were you able to associate with them? What was the attitude towards the islanders?

I only went ashore at Thursday Island and it was just - wandered up and down the town a bit there. There wasn't much doing, really. It was quite a quiet place.

You weren't briefed there that you weren't allowed to fraternise or anything?

Yes, they .... I don't know. I thought it was a little bit on the Hawaiian side 'cause the native people played guitars and things like that, but it was fair enough - interesting. But talking about natives: one particular spot we were going - one island we were going past - we wanted to tie a survey mark up, was Coconut Island. So we anchored and the first lieutenant went ashore and asked the natives about putting up this survey mark. But to do so they had to cut out a couple of coconut trees and the natives wouldn't have this on at all. They weren't too keen on that lot so then our captain, who was Commander Martin, he decided he'd go ashore and had a pow-wow with the chief. And he told the chief that this was for the king and on telling him this - that was the shot. They were cutting down the coconut trees and helping to put up the ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

Identification: this is side one of tape two of the interview with Syd O'Reilly, recorded on 11 March 1991, about the *Ipswich.*

You were saying the native people came aboard with kerosene tins.

Yes, that's right. They came aboard with kerosene tins of fresh water. And while they were there, some of them - we had a four-inch gun up for'ard - and we swung the gun round on to the island and the natives would look through the telescopic sight to see what was going on on the island. They were most amused at that sort of thing. They all wanted turns at that. It was very good.

With those sort of runs how long a time would you be at sea before you had some shore leave?

During that particular period I suppose we were there about three weeks at a time.

Was that considered a long period? What was the feeling about that length of time at sea?

Not really, no, because later, I suppose, you'd have anything up to six weeks' you'd be ....

So after the *Moresby* what then?

The *Moresby* swept this Great Eastern Channel and *Bathurst* and *Lismore* came up, as I told you, to sweep the channel. A signalman on *Bathurst* had taken ill - a chap by the name of Miller - and they put him ashore at Cairns because he had appendicitis. So a signal was made to *Moresby* that I had to leave *Moresby* and join *Bathurst* - what we used to call in the navy as a pierhead jump; it wasn't a normal draft, you see. So I was drafted from *Moresby* to *Bathurst* in company with an officer's cook and a stoker. So three of us left *Moresby* and joined the *Bathurst*.

What was the *Bathurst*?

*Bathurst* was the first corvette built - *Bathurst* and *Lismore*. And I joined them and after the sweep was finished - the minesweeping was finished for the channel - they went to Darwin and from Darwin we went off to Singapore. That was my introduction of heading for the Middle East.

Was that exciting to finally be leaving Australia?

It was really. I thought, well, at long last we're going to see something different - like Singapore is a place I'd always wanted to go to.

Any particular memories of Singapore and time ashore and so on?

Not really. Actually I think I was a bit disappointed in Singapore because, I suppose - I don't know how some of my other signalmen went - but I thought, 'Gosh, I wonder how we're going to get on up here. There'll be a great big fleet there. I suppose there'll be signals going right,

left and centre. I wonder how we'll cope with this lot.' To my surprise, when I got to Singapore, I think there was HMS *Danae*, *Diomede* and *Dauntless*. They were three old C&D Class cruisers left over from world war one. And there was the *Scout*, *Stronghold* and *Tenedos*. They were old S&T Class destroyers. They were also left over from world war one. And a few old ships like *Dragonfly* and things like that were just auxiliary vessels. And so this was the great fleet that I was going to see in Singapore. What a disappointment!

What about Singapore itself?

Singapore itself. As a town or as a ...?

As a place to go ashore.

As a place to go ashore. Well, not bad I suppose. They had quite a lot of cinemas - theatres as we call them here. There was only a couple of places where you could go dancing, and one was called the New World and one was called the Happy World. But the dancing idea is not as it is at home. If you go to the New World or Happy World - I just can't recollect now the prices that you'll pay - but you had to go to a ticket office and get, say, a dozen tickets. And then if you wished to dance you'd go to the young lady and then give her the ticket and away you'd go. I think it was one or two tickets a dance or something like that.

(5.00) How long did you spend in Singapore?

At that time, I think, was about two to three months. We were operating out of Singapore, doing patrol work up and down what they call the Rhio Strait which is just between Singapore and Sumatra - along that area.

Did you get yourself into any trouble at all? You seem to have been a very conservative, mild-mannered young man from what you've said so far?

No. Oh, you mean ashore?

Mm.

No, not really.

Were there any fellows that did?

Not so much .... On *Bathurst* later, yeah. We'd been to a place called - this is much later - Ernakulam, which is in British Cochin, and some of our stokers used to get into a bit of strife now and then. Anyhow apparently they got well and truly full and decided they were going to wake up part of the town - well have a 'blue' anyhow. And they finished up in the local lock-up, so we had to send a patrol off the ship to rescue them. That sort of thing happened a bit.

You went along the Chinese coast then?

Just up a little bit towards Hong Kong. Do you mean when we were based in Singapore?

When you were on the *Bathurst*.

Yes, that's just up and down, mainly around the Rio Straits though.

What were you doing?

Sweeping - asdic sweeps, not mine sweeps, yeah. So it's sort of an anti-submarine patrol.

Did you have any alarms? Did you actually ...?

No, not at that stage, no.

Were you beginning to wonder whether there was a real war somewhere and somehow you were missing out on it?

It was very quiet and peaceful out there at night-time. You had plenty of time to think about all sorts of things. What'll you do when you go back home? Will you go back sorting wool? Will you try and stay in the navy? Wonder what everyone's doing back home. Lots of things to think about.

After the *Bathurst*, what then?

I was on *Bathurst* for about two and a quarter years.

You were on *Bathurst* then when the Japanese entered the war?

Yes, but by then ...

Where were you? Do remember how you heard that the war had started?

As near as I can say, I'd say we'd be in the Red Sea - around about that area - because when *Bathurst* left Singapore we went up through the Malacca Straits and were heading across to Colombo and we got caught in a south-west monsoon. This lasted for ten days. It was shocking. I've never seen ships roll and turn over like they did.

Did you get seasick?

I didn't get seasick, fortunately. A couple of times I did feel a bit 'squoonded'; it just went continually, day in and day out, night and day. The *Lismore*, travelling astern of us - I'd be watchin' her - I could just see the top of her mast in the water when she was in a trough, and when she came up, it'd come up and up and up and I could see the asdic dome under the ship. And the asdic dome is under the bridge of the vessel - corresponding - and she'd come out of the water and I could see the asdic dome and she'd flop down again and I could see the top of her mast. We had ten days of that. We were just, I suppose, about one day out of Colombo when the British cruiser HMS *Glasgow* came out and came alongside us and asked our captain, the skipper, did we want a tow because they'd given us up for dead. They didn't think we'd survive that lot.

Were there any injuries? Fellows pitched against ...

Yes, there was quite a lot of injuries. Fellows that had fallen down ladders, they'd broken wrists, and chaps were seasick - just lying on the deck. I know my opposite number, Kevin

Brown, he and I were doing twelve hours a day because the then leading signalman - he was a Fleet Reserve chap, incidentally - he was that sick he just couldn't make it to the bridge so we did twelve hours a day, day in and day out.

(10.00)We were pretty useless by the time we got to Colombo, too. You'd come off watch and try and snatch a bit of sleep. You'd get a bit of sleep and you'd dream. I can remember one of my dreams. I was dreaming that I was up on deck and a chap was signalling and I tried to answer him and all the lights had gone. And the ship was rolling too much for me to get out and make semaphores so I thought I'll use the mechanical arms. But for some reason or other the bike chain style thing, they'd broken, and I'll have to try and send the flag signals and the hailyard's come down (laughs). But what had happened - it was just in this dream - a stoker came along and he woke me which was [inaudible]. So up I got. He said, 'They want you on deck'. So okay. So I went up the bridge, and walked straight round the bridge, and I turned an eighteen inch signal projector on and swung around and started to make a signal. Brown said, 'What are you doing?'. I said, 'Didn't you want me up here?' - this was still running in my mind this dream. 'No, this wasn't what we wanted for you at all, actually.' Just wanting to pointing out the night and day, ship rolling and you're doing twelve hours a day and eating when you can and sleeping when you can, but it caught up with me I guess. But getting back to the injury bit, yes. As I say, chaps with broken wrists and some with broken legs. Some were terribly seasick. Seasick to the stage that they were startin' to bring blood up instead of bile and stuff. So when we got to Colombo, I think we put about twelve chaps ashore in hospital and we had to get twelve RN replacements.

Out of a crew of how many?

The crew, at that stage, was sixty-five. As I say, they were the first corvettes and that was the crew then. Later the crew of a corvette was - well, in the case of *Ipswich* for instance - we had a crew of 120.

The logistics of juggling crews around, to cover those sorts of contingencies must have been quite something in itself. It must have led, one might suppose, to a lot of confusion - people would just get misplaced perhaps. Did that happen at all?

The chaps themselves, when ashore in hospital?

With people keeping track of who was in which ship and where, with that sort of ...

When they went ashore a signal would be sent to ACNB, Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, to the effect that Charlie Brown and Joe Blow and so-and-so were sick on shore and they'd had three replacements from, say, the RN to cover this and things like that. But everybody knew where they were - what was going on.

How long did you spend in Colombo?

Colombo? We were there for about four or five days I suppose.

Would you get briefings before going ashore as to local customs or whether you should or shouldn't fraternise with the locals, the perils of VD; those sorts of things?

In some places, yes. They'd say, for instance, in certain areas so-and-so's out of bounds. I'm not sure about the .... The main hotel in Colombo is the Grand Oriental Hotel - that wasn't out of bounds. I think it was the Bristol might have been. With reference to VD, during our time on *Bathurst* going over to the Middle East, we went to Seychelles Islands and all the notice boards then it was to the effect that you shouldn't drink the local wine. I think it was some type of white wine. I'm trying to think just what it must have been made of, possibly coconuts, I don't know. And not to fraternise with the young ladies either 'cause the VD was absolutely rife then on the Seychelles Islands.

Were there penalties if fellows were found to disobey those orders?

From a disciplinary point of view, no. But they'd be sent ashore, of course, with their problems.

Anyway, from Colombo you went on to the Middle East.

Yeah, alright. From Colombo we went down to - we joined, the *Glasgow* came with us on this occasion and she went to Seychelles Islands with us. We had to go there to fuel 'cause we couldn't make it in one hit, you see. And from there we went to Aden. I think God forgot to complete that place. It was just a huge barren rock - that's the first thing you see. When you get into Aden it's just a coaling station from the first world war, oiling station now for us, but not much ashore at all. Anyway, we fuelled there and then went up the Red Sea to Tewfik and we were based in Tewfik for a while before we went into the Suez Canal and went into the Med.

(15.00) What was it like on the ship as far as conditions and the heat and so on was concerned?

Very hot. They had a type of air trunk running along the deck with small apertures which forced draught air but they weren't really good ships for the tropics at all.

Did it bring some men down - that they couldn't tolerate the conditions?

What happened with a terrible lot of crew, particularly the stokers, they would get prickly heat. I saw 'em in a few stages of prickly heat from the back of their necks right down to their ankles. Just a mass of pimples style of thing.

How would they treat that?

It was a bit hard. They used to put calamine lotion and things on but it didn't help much. The poor chaps, they really suffered, particularly the stokers.

Did you get it at all?

I only had traces of it and I tried to overcome it. I got a kerosene tin and I put a lot of holes in the bottom like a shower and I used to take it in the waist of the ship and hang it on a part of

the bulkhead. Then I'd put a hose in it and turn it on - sea water - and I would sit on the [inaudible] and let the sea water run on me for quite some time. Then I'd turn that off and go into the shower and wash off with fresh water. And whether that helped or not I don't know, but anyhow I didn't get any great lots of heat rashes like a lot of people. As I say, stokers were shocking. And some of our sparkers, too, because they would be sitting in a WT cabin, you see. I suppose continual perspiration and they got quite a bit of it.

So you were continuing to do submarine sweeps during this period?

Yes, that's right.

Did you have any sightings or soundings at all, where you picked submarines up?

Not at that stage. From Tewfik we went in through the Suez Canal to Alexandria. The idea, at that stage, that we were join - this was only *Bathurst*, *Lismore* stayed back in the Red Sea - the 10th Destroyer Flotilla, which we were attached to as soon as we got there, and go up on the 'spud' run. But they didn't think we were fast enough for that duty so we used to do anti-submarine patrols off Alexandria.

Incidentally, I've asked you before and somehow we'd slipped it, as to where you were when you heard about the Japanese entering the war.

Oh yeah. Well, I think it'd be somewhere in the Red Sea.

What was your feeling and the feeling generally when the news came through?

Not too happy about it, naturally.

You felt a long way from home.

Well, that's true. We thought, well, should we be back there instead of up here, type of thing. That's the way we felt about it. And then when it came to the fall of Singapore, of course, that was a great blow. By that time we'd got back to, we'd finished duty in the Mediterranean. After that we'd gone to the Persian Gulf for quite a while and we'd come down doing convoys from Aden to the Persian Gulf, and the Persian Gulf down to Bombay or down to Ernakulam or perhaps to Karachi, and down to Colombo.

Had you had any attacks or involvement where there'd been a sense, well there *is* an enemy?

No, not at that juncture. We were going to leave Colombo and we were heading for Singapore. We had about half-a-dozen RN signmalmen on board, too. We were going to take them to Colombo so they could help me in the signal stations there because with the advent of more ships to the Fleet - the Eastern Fleet had gone in by then - of course, you need more communications personnel - shore-based, too. However, we got to about four days, or three days, from Singapore when it fell. So we about faced then and went back to Colombo.

Did you know that Australian troops had been taken?

We didn't know at that juncture. But we turned and returned to Colombo then and we stayed there for quite a while.

How long then before it was realised that a lot of Allied, and particularly Australian, servicemen had been captured in Singapore?

(20.00)I suppose, actually, about a week before I realised that so many troops had been taken.

What was the impact of that?

You mean in the mess decks?

Mm.

The thoughts then arose should we try and make a break and get back home or if Australia was in great peril should we perhaps stay where we were and act like Free French agents; we'd be free Australian agents. There was a lot of contention that way. Of course, we didn't have the say anyhow. We went where we were told, but that was some of the feelings that we had. What's the best thing to do? Try and get back home and help back there or perhaps stay here with a stronger force and get back home that way? Which would be the best way to go about it?

With that would you get some captains who would feel there was a need to have some sort of relationship with the crew and to talk about issues at a broader level? Or was there always a certain aloofness, that that kind of thing wasn't done?

No, well, it didn't happen on *Bathurst*, I can assure you of that. Nothing was ever said about there is a chance that we'll make a break for it because, you see, we were under RN orders so really the choice wasn't ours.

Had you had anything to do with, by this stage, the British at all, personally? Had you had any direct contact with members of the British Navy and so on?

Oh yes, with the British Navy, yes. Got along very well with them, very well. And of course, as I say, we had quite a few RN chaps on board by then because they were replacing our fellows that had gone sick on shore or ....

What about Australian troops in the Middle East on shore leave? Had you met members of the AIF and so on?

Yes, we met quite a few of them, and New Zealand chaps too, immediately after Greece and Crete.

How did you get on with them?

Very well. We'd go ashore together. Like if we were going and saw a swottie well, we'd first go and have a beer with him.

There were some fairly famous incidents between British MPs and Australian troops in the Middle East. Did you get to hear of that or ...?

No, I didn't even see anything like that, actually. Of course, you don't spend that much time ashore really because you had to be back on board every night.

With the amount of tape we have left, I suppose we'd better move on to the *Ipswich*. Was it from the *Bathurst* that you went to the *Ipswich*?

That's right, yes. Actually, I was in the Persian Gulf when my draft come through and Brown, this chap I mentioned to you before, was the signalman of the watch and I come over to take up - we were in harbour, we'd just brought a convoy in from Bombay - and he said, 'Oh, you're on draft'. I said, 'Oh yes, where am I going?'. He said, 'I dunno, you're on draft, and they're going to tell you that.' 'Big deal'. So when we went off watch I called up the signal station ashore and I asked him for a repeat of the signal that was in the book. I thought he just put it there as a joke for me, you see, but no, it was actually true. So when I went from there - that's from the Persian Gulf back to Bombay - I was drafted ashore to an Indian barracks and I picked up HMS *Brittany* and went from Bombay to Port Said and from there I picked up HMS *Belvoir*, which is a British Hunt class destroyer. In fact that's the first ship I'd been on where all the crew were aft and the officers were for'ard. All other ships it's the other way around. The officers on the *Belvoir* were all round the bridge area, which is quite a good idea, I think, and all the crew were in the aft section of the vessel.

What was the reason for this?

That made sense to me because officers would do mainly most of their work on the bridge area so that's where they should have been anyhow.

Was that a personal initiative of the captain involved?

No, that's the way the ships were designed. But then I thought, well, signalmen, they should have all been in that area also but they were aft where the stokers were, too. I thought, well that's only a half-measure. They got it half right. Anyhow, I got from *Belvoir*, I picked up *Belvoir* and then I went Alexandria where I went to HMS *Nile*, waiting for the *Ipswich*. She was at sea when I got there. And then I had quite an odd experience. I was given a lot of envelopes which had what they call secret hand messages.

(25.00)I had a great bundle of these and I went to Alex harbour where I was with a cutter crew and I went around all the merchant ships in the harbour and up to the bridge of every ship and gave them one of these brown envelopes, which were obviously sailing orders of some sort. When I returned to *Nile*, it must have been about just short of midnight, they said, 'Right, your ship's in, you better go and join it'. I said, 'What about tomorrow morning?. I've been out in the harbour all day. I haven't even had a meal yet. 'No, right now.' So off I went and I joined the ship just after midnight and we sailed the next morning. We sailed from there to - that was from Alex. We went to Tobruk and from Tobruk we went to Benghazi. We were in Benghazi that day and the captain had gone ashore and he came back on board and he cleared lower deck - expression 'clear lower deck' and everybody's got to clear the lower decks up to the foc's'le while he addressed us. And he told us we were going to take part in the invasion of Sicily.

Was this Lieutenant-Commander McBryde at that time?

That's the person, yes. Lieutenant-Commander McBryde, that's right. We were in company with HMAS *Gawler*. We cleared the breakwater that evening, round about midnight I suppose, and we joined *Maryborough* and *Lismore* and HMS *Shoreham*, she was a British sloop. She was going to be the commander of our flotilla - senior officer flotilla - and four British corvettes: the *Hythe, Whitehaven, Romney,* one other which I can't recollect [*Rye*]. We were going to pick up sixty-four landing craft and take them into Sicily but as we went along we picked up small convoys of landing craft and troopships, et cetera, and by the time we got to Sicily the overall area was about 300 vessels in an area. And it was our job to land the 231st British Brigade at Cape Passero, which we did. And when dawn broke and we put these people in, from Cape Passero to Port Augusta and Syracuse there was 2,500 ships in the area. When I say ships, that's ships of all sorts - little ships, big ships. The whole of the Med fleet, of course, was backup. They were all on the perimeter. Aircraft carriers and battleships and cruisers and destroyers. You name it, they were all there.

It must have seemed quite an astonishing sight.

I was amazed. I thought how the heck don't they run into each other, there's so many. After our episode of getting this brigade ashore we formed what they call an endless chain patrol, which means we're, each ship was astern, one astern of the other. This was our complete flotilla and we did a chain patrol around one particular area with the troopships, et cetera, in the centre. The idea was to keep on searching for submarines in that particular area. Other units were doing a similar thing further away. But during this, of course, this particular period I could put binoculars on the shore and I could see various troops going up the hills. And one particular street was running straight down to the water, I could see chaps jumping out the window and running (laughs) and troops chasing - pursuing - them, which was quite good.

Were there signs of battle at that point?

Oh yes. Well, actually, the battleships which were out on the perimeter, they were firing over the top of us and you could see the shells hitting the shore as they, the top of the mountain.

Intense noise of the bombardment?

Yes. I had the middle watch. That means I went on at midnight prior to the invasion, it was on the day of the invasion. I went on at midnight and I suppose at one in the morning I could hear the aircraft going ahead where they were going to ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: this is side two of tape two of the interview with Syd O'Reilly, recorded on 11 March 1991 about the *Ipswich*.

You were saying that aircraft were flying overhead for the attack.

Yes, that's right. Well, about an hour later, of course, we'd steamed that much closer and we could see there are tracers going up the shore and it wasn't long after that that dawn broke and we were putting these people ashore - the 231st Brigade. Just prior to dawn breaking the bombardments had ceased because a red Very's [sic] light had gone up in the air and that indicated that the commandos had already been dropped in and landed and were taking various posts. So actually, it was plain sailing for us from there on in.

Were there any collisions that you know of which such a big fleet?

No collisions, no.

Did you come under any sort of attack?

We were attacked by enemy aircraft during these operations and a little bit hostile most of our fellows, because they hit a hospital ship not far from us. Not a lot of damage was done but nevertheless it did hit it.

Did your own ship come under attack?

We left Passero that evening and in company with *Gawler* getting out heading for Malta where we had to take some ships back and also, naturally, refuel we were attacked by enemy aircraft and bought one down.

What was the sense for you at that point to have spent so long where there was no involvement with an enemy to then find, well good heavens, somebody's trying to kill us?

(Laughs.) Well, actually, didn't actually think that way. There was no sense, at that stage of fear or anything of that nature. Actually, I think fear .... The only time I really experienced it to any great extent was just prior to going to *Ipswich*, I was with *Bathurst* in Alexandria harbour and there was an air attack and you could hear the bombs coming down - this whistling bomb. And you're laying on the deck and for sure it's going to hit you - this is what you think - and it's going to hit you right in the middle of the back. Never mind about the fellows laying near you or somewhere, not him,*you* - that's the one.

That's about the only experience I had of that nature. I can recollect we were attacked by twenty torpedo bombers and about fifteen high level bombers off Gilbraltar. And one of these particular bombers - they all come in low, the torpedo attackers - but this particular chap, I didn't realise it was an enemy plane. I thought it was one of ours who got mixed up in this melee. It was coming down the port side and he had a white light going, which I thought was a signal light. I thought, oh, this fellow's in trouble, so I walked out in the open, put my aldis light on and started to call him up and all of a sudden there's whhhhhhhh down the deck. That was tracers, these white, 'cause our tracers are red. I realised that these fellows had white ones and it slipped along the deck, straight along our ship and collected the chap in the same position on the stern of me on the *Gawler*, and shot him through the thigh. But there was no question of fear at that stage, it was .... Your mind's on something else; this chap's trying to talk to you.

(5.00) As soon as I tumbled to what it was I made myself scarce on the deck, naturally. But during an attack everybody had to do all sorts of jobs. It went for quite a while. So I was shot

down to an area where they were pushing ammunition into the magazines for the Alderton[?] guns because they were getting hot and running out of ammunition, so helped them to fill up the magazines. So your mind's on all those sort of things. You're not thinking about fear.

Were you instructed to do that or were you in the position that because ...?

You could see that they wanted help so you just dive in. As I said, I was a signalman but my mate on *Ipswich* was the quarters ordnance rating and he's the chap that pulls down all the guns and fixes them up. And I got to the stage, I was with him so often, and when we were in harbour he come up and we had two Oerlikon guns on the bridge, but under his tutelage I could pull a whole Alderton gun apart and put it together and fire it, which wasn't my job. But we got to the stage we could all do bits of somebody else's job, which was a good thing on a ship like that. And we all knew what we could do.

What was the feeling on the bridge during an attack like that? Was there an extra sense of tension? I mean, how was it handled?

Not tension, I don't think. It was just that every fellow knew what was going on. They could all do their jobs and they all did them.

Was there a possibility in that sort of convoy then under attack for ships to run into each other or was it still planned?

No, what happened, during this attack - it was beaten off very well really considering they tried to press home this torpedo attack so hard. The ships of the convoy threw a barrage up over the convoy - the ships of the escort - up over the convoy and the ships in the convoy must have tumbled to this and they threw their barrage up over the escort so that you had a complete crossfire for these planes to fly into. And there was only two ships hit in the convoy and several planes were brought down. And the ships that were hit were towed into Gilbraltar successfully, so we didn't actually lose anybody.

I gather the *Ipswich* claimed to have brought down one of the planes.

That's right, yes.

What was the feeling about that?

Oh, it was jubiliation. Unfortunately, one of the planes that was brought down was just on our port beam and I told you that one of the chaps was hit in the thigh on the *Gawler* astern of us. I'm assuming, and we all assume, it was his mate must have been a bit upset about this, because when the pilots of the plane got out on the wing - the pilot and gunners - he sprayed right across the top of them with ordnance, which is not supposed to be on.

Did anything happen as a result of that?

No. Fortunately, he missed them, but the intent was there.

Were they picked up?

They were picked up and taken to Gilbraltar and interrogated.

By your ship?

Not by us. They were picked up by one of the RN ships, I think.

Incidentally, when did you get news about the *Armidale* being sunk?

Gosh, *Armidale*, I think we'd be back in the Indian Ocean then. It must have been some time in '43 I'd reckon.

What was the impact of that? Did that affect morale or ...?

Not to that extent. We were all very sorry to learn that this had happened but then, of course, we experienced the same feelings when *Yarra* was sunk, you see.

Did you know anybody who was in either of those ships?

I knew the chappy who went down on *Yarra*. I told you earlier that I went to Sydney on the *Spirit of Progress*. Well, the chap that travelled with me was a Williamstown fellow, Clarry Piper. While I was on draft to *Australia* he was on draft to the *Yarra*. And just prior to the *Vampire* being sunk in the Bay of Bengal, *Yarra* was in Colombo harbour with *Bathurst* and I saw this Clarry Piper and it's the only time I'd seen him since 1939 when we both went to Sydney together. And of course when the *Yarra* went down unfortunately he went down with it.

I gather after the attack on the convoy that you just described that you picked up German broadcasts claiming the convoy had suffered big losses.

(10.00) Yes, played merry hell with us.

Did you hear the broadcast itself?

Didn't hear the broadcast, no we just heard that they had made these claims. Of course, it wasn't true. But I must admit that it was certainly hard-pressed home, this attack. I can remember coming along the starboard side of our vessel and I looked across and I saw these planes. It was just on sunset. I said, 'By crikey, someone's going to cop it tonight'. I thought they were ours. But they were flying along the coast, you see, and when they got up ahead of us that's when they turned to come in to press home their attack, not knowing that there was other than the torpedo bombers, they also had high level bombers on top. So it was a two prong attack plus the fighter planes.

About how many planes would you suppose were involved?t

I think there was about thirty planes involved overall. [Inaudible] over there somewhere.

What was the sense of the extent to which the personality of an individual captain affected the ship and the running of the ship? Were you conscious of there being differences in the various ships you'd been in as to the morale and the role of the captains?

Yes, particularly in *Ipswich*. I suppose without any fear of contradiction they would be the best crew I've ever served with and the best ship I served in. And the captain, they were all his boys - they could do no wrong, so to speak.

> Did it give you a greater sense of security to feel you were with competent people?

Yes, and oddly, I think it helps make you lift your own game, that sort of feeling.

> What rank were you by this time by the way?

I was what they would call a trained operator. That's just one short of a leading signalman, really.

> So what was the relationship like between officers and ordinary able-bodied men in terms of the formalities at sea, and so on?

On *Ipswich* it was very good. You could have a conversation with the officer whoever he may be if you were on watch at night and things were quiet.

> Was it formal nonetheless? Would you always address your officers as 'sir' and rank?

Oh yes, my word. You wouldn't do anything else but that. That's only fair, I'd say. But ordinary conversation about .... On *Ipswich*, it was a great sporting ship, we played a fair amount of rugby when we could ashore. And of course the officers played in the same team as you, so that helped the friendship in general, I suppose.

> Was there a tendency at all for fraternisation in off-duty hours between officers and able-bodies or were they kept strictly to their own messes?

Oh no, they were strictly in their own messes. Only, as I say, if you went ashore in a sporting team, you played football or cricket, or whatever. After the game perhaps then, yes, well, we'll go and have a beer together. But that'd be about the only time.

> If you felt that the *Ipswich* was a particularly well run ship with a very good captain, conversely, were there some ships you felt there was a sense of tension that reflected on a lack of capacity by a captain?

Not lack of capacity. Some of them were perhaps strict disciplinarians, and although they were highly efficient I didn't feel the affinity with that ship that I did with the *Ipswich*.

> Was there a difference, do you feel, on the nature of discipline in the forces? The Australian armies have traditionally had a reputation as being a bit irreverent when it comes to officers and discipline. That while they may work very efficiently they don't, say, have the same respect for discipline and authority as was the case with the British Army. Was there a noticeable difference in the attitude to discipline do you feel at all between the navy and the ...?

I would say that naval discipline would be much stricter than army discipline. And RAAF, I don't know too much about the RAAF people.

> Did it rankle at all? Did the nature of discipline ever sort of make you feel it went a bit over the top at times or did you accept that it was the most efficient way of running a ship well?

I think you had to have it, for sure. It'd be the clash of personalities any old time, I suppose, between different people and you had to have discipline. Except occasionally, as I've quoted to you, I think it was always wisely used. In my case that was just one, I suppose other people felt the same way.

(15.00) Did you ever have instances where officers just couldn't get on for whatever reasons in a particular ship and had to be transferred?

No, I haven't had that experience but I believe that that had happened in some ships.

> I gather food became something of a problem, serving in the Middle East area. It became rather monotonous and so on. How do you recall the food?

The food in some ships, particularly in the latter stages of *Bathurst*, we didn't get a great deal of food. When I say a great deal, it was food as we think about it. For instance, we were doing blockade work out of Aden - working out of Aden - blockading Italian Somaliland, and during those periods there wasn't a great deal to eat at all. Our stores people would go ashore and they'd bring back on board goat and yak and camel or whatever, and what could they do? I mean, there's no fresh meat as we know it available so that's what you had. And fresh vegetables, well, they were at a minimum and you would get dehydrated potatoes which were nothing to write home about. No, the food was not the best at times.

> What about fish? Were you able to get much fish in the Persian Gulf?

Occasionally we got fish, yes. In fact, one particular spot, I just can't recollect, somewhere in the Persian Gulf, I forget where it was ...

> How would you get them? Would you buy them? Were you ever allowed to fish from the ship itself?

We did a little bit but not that much. I remember for some reason or other at one particular spot we dropped a depth charge and there was fish everywhere after that. Then they all just floated to the surface - stunned. And we lowered a boat and filled it up with fish; it was quite good.

> Was there ever any temptation to replenish supplies that way?

Not really, no (laughs), but I can just recollect that - jolly fish everywhere.

> The *Peshawur*, when that was torpedoed, were you involved then in ...?

*Peshawur*, yes, that's right. The *Peshawur*, I'm just trying to think what time it was, but I can't recollect. However, I remember that I was in our mess deck. Our mess deck on the

*Ipswich* was segregated from all the other for'ard messes. It was below the seamen's mess and right over the asdic domes. So we were just down sitting on the waterline. And when *Peshawur* was torpedoed you could feel the vibration right through the water. We could feel, so we just dropped everything and started running before even the alarm bell went. We thought, well, there's something doing. And we were up running ...

Did you think your own ship had been hit or you were just [inaudible]?

No, we thought there was something hit close by as was the *Peshawur*. On that particular occasion - I'm just trying to think of the *Peshawur* because in the following convoy the *Athelstane* was hit. I think it was the following convoy, the *Athelstane*, where we got the submarine - that's right. The *Peshawur*, we picked up the survivors and we took them to Maxadras.

Were there any who you picked that were wounded or badly wounded?

Yes, some of the Lascars, the seamen, had bad gashes in their heads and were bleeding. Our sick bay people did rather a good job, I thought, cleaning them up and ....

Did it create a certain amount of anxiety about being below decks and the possibility of being torpedoed?

Well, most chaps didn't like being below decks. Well, as far as below decks at night, I would never sleep below the deck. My opposite number on *Ipswich*, the signalman, was a chap by the name of Bev Caust, and he and I would sleep around the searchlight platform which was above the bridge of the *Ipswich*. I would sleep on the starboard side and he would sleep on the port side of the searchlight so any time they want us we were never far away. If it's action stations just had to jump up and here I am - straight down the ladder. When he was on watch I would sleep on the starboard side and when he came off he'd be asleep, I'd be down on the deck.

Did it tend to be there at the back of your mind when you were going to sleep, the possibility of being torpedoed?

(20.00) It was always there. It was ever present, naturally, in those ships because that's what you're doing, convoy work, and that's why you're there, to stop submarines from attacking the convoy. I always thought never catch me between decks at night, and in the event of me being on the searchlight platform if the ship was torpedoed I even had to worked out which way I was going to go about it. It'd be up the mast and out on to the yard arm and into the trig (laughs), 'cause we always slept with the Mae West alongside us. It's a blow up type life belt.

Did you ever get to meet any Australian submariners?

No, because we didn't have Australian submariners then in those days. It would be some years before that that the last Australian submarine had been in operation. I think they'd be the *Otway* and *Oxley*, from memory.

Can you describe the operation where you got the Japanese submarine, the *RO 11O*?

*RO Eleven*, I think. When the *Athelstane* was torpedoed, naturally we were close up to action stations and fortunately our asdic people got a ping fairly early and went into attack, and also *Launceston*, who was operating with us, they went into attack at the same time.

> Had you previously had signals that had turned out to be false alarms, say, shoals of fish or maybe even whales or anything of that sort?

Not shoals of fish but there were a few times on convoy I thought I'd seen a torpedo headin' straight for us and I've reported it and it turned out to be, say, a dolphin coming, and it just looks like the wake of a torpedo in waters where there's phosphorous, but they just dive straight under the vessel. But for a while it wasn't funny.

> So, sorry, you started to go into attack.

Yes, went into attack and we ...

> Did you have a claxon for stations in that sort of ...? How was the signal given to ...?

It was alarm rattlers on the bridge. They would just press the rattlers and, of course, they'd sound right throughout the ship, everybody would close up to action stations immediately.

> What was your role in that circumstance?

I had to go to the bridge and we were making signals. Just above the bridge we had a ten-inch signal projector, just for'ard of the searchlight platform. Bill Davies, who was our leading sig at the time, he and I would spend most of our time up there making signals to *Launceston* or, I think, *Jumna*, I'm not too sure, I think it was an Indian vessel, HMS *Jumna*.

> Was it day or night?

It was daytime, round about midday.

> So what happened?

We carried out this depth charge attack and when we'd completed ours and turned to come back in, *Launceston* went across and dropped a pattern also. Then we turned again and came back and asdic chap got another ping and we dropped another pattern and then we stayed, hovered around there for a while, and we couldn't hear any movement, any machinery, nothing. So what happened, we had a depth charge, sorry, a depth sounder, machine in our chart house, so they went across, slowly across, the attack area and they switched the echo sounder on. And they watched and they could see the reef and then we got the outline of a submarine and I knew it was sitting on the bottom. And you could see from the outline ...

> Were you there? Were you able to see this?

Yes. And you could see that, it would look that there'd been a direct hit just for'ard of the conning tower[?], because as the line came through there was a dip and the outline of the submarine again. So we stayed there for several hours till they, a motor torpedo boat came

out - a British motor torpedo boat - and it stayed over the area then and we went with the *Athelstane* into Vizagapatam - that's right.

How were you to know that it wasn't just resting, damaged as it may have been that it still could have had a capacity to [inaudible]?

Oh, we weren't to know for sure, so that's why the other one came out, the motor torpedo boat and sat over the same area.

But how was it able to confirm that the ship was incapacitated, or the submarine was incapacitated?

They were still there, you see, it didn't come up again.

But couldn't it rest there indefinitely or, at least, for quite some period?

I think they'd run out of air. It'd have to resurface to charge their batteries and get fresh air. No, it was still there days later.

Again, was there a sense of excitement and achievemnet that you'd struck a direct blow?

(25.00)There was there because we said, 'Well, that was a beauty', because we don't know for sure whether that's the one that sunk the *Peshawur*. We've always thought, well, we've made up a little bit, because the *Peshawuar* was sunk on our trip and it was the next convoy up that the *Athelstane* was torpedoed.

Were you in the *Ipswich* when it went to Japan for the surrender?

No, by then .... I came out of *Ipswich* some time in '44, 'round about April '44, I'd say, and I joined HMS *Suffolk* which was going to do a - it did a pre-run down the coast of Sumatra just prior to the Eastern Fleet attacking Sumatra and going on from there to Fremantle.

If the *Ipswich* had been a well run ship, what were your feelings about leaving? Were you sorry to leave or was it interesting to look at the prospect of serving somewhere else?

Oddly enough I was a bit down in the dumps leaving *Ipswich*. By then I'd been overseas just short of four years straight. You're only supposed to do two-year hits but it was because I got that pierhead jump from the *Moresby* to *Bathurst* that started this whole train of things. And then I got a jump from *Bathurst* to *Ipswich*.

Did you feel badly done by?

I wasn't too happy about the early part of *Ipswich* - of going to the ship - because I thought, well, at that stage I'd been over two years and six months and I was already six months overdue to return home.

What sort of correspondence were you getting from home by that time? Were there regular arrangements that you could get mail and ...?

Fairly regular. Most times we got into port there'd be letters.

What would be the turn around then, if you wrote and then got a reply?

Yes ...

A month? Two months?

That's a bit hard. I suppose it'd be six weeks perhaps, but that's a bit hard because the mail might be in, well say Alexandria - the mail might be in Alexandria but you're in Malta. Now, if you went from Malta to - or Gibraltar if you like - it's when you come back to Alex you get the mail unless it went to Malta while you went to Gib and you come back to Malta, well then it'd be there, so it's a bit hard to judge, really.

Apart from family matters, through correspondence, were you kept abreast of what was happening in the country and other affairs as far as the politics of the country and other incidental news things?

Not a great deal, no. Some of the chaps used to have papers sent to them but they were always months old papers by the time you got them. My wife, she tells me - letters were censored, of course - and you'd get a letter and then there'd be a piece cut out of it. Something might have seemed to be irrelevant to me when I wrote it, that'd be cut out.

So where were you when war ended?

I'd come from Biak down to Darwin, that's right - Darwin.

Was that a good feeling then, to finally get back to Australia after that period away?

My word, yes. Actually, although I was in Darwin there then we went to - I was in *Wagga* then. *Ipswich* was in the group that was going to go to Tokyo. I was in *Wagga* and we went back to Morotai, and from Morotai to Subic Bay. While we were in the Morotai-Biak area we were attached to the United States 7th Fleet. When I went to Subic Bay, at that particular point we were transferred from United States 7th Fleet to the British Pacific Fleet. And we learned then that we were going to go into a section called Rescue Party. And we went from *Subic* Bay to Hong Kong. There were nine Australian corvettes, nine British submarines, one Canadian cruiser and one British supply vessel. When I say supply vessel it was a supply, repair, stores. It was a huge thing called HMS *Maidstone*. And we were to go into Hong Kong, and it's called Rescue Party because the submarines were taken - the nine subs - the thoughts were that when we got to Hong Kong the Japanese might have put all the power stations out of action and things of that nature, and the British submarines would go alongside and use their generators to provide the ship-shore power, lighting, what-have-you. We got to ...

END OF INTERVIEW