



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is Ed Stokes, Corvettes, Harold Murphy, tape one, side one.

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

Yes, I was born in Sydney on 17th May 1925.

I think you were a Bondi boy.

Yes, I lived all of my life up till I was twenty-seven years of age at Bondi, except for three and a half years in the Navy.

Just a few things about your boyhood years. The general tradition of the ANZACS - the achievements of the Australians and New Zealanders in the first war - was that a very conscious part of your boyhood, or not?

Yes, it was, because the family I lived with - my mother and I boarded with a family - they had several members who had fought in the first world war. One relative was subject to gas and was chronically ill for many years. ANZAC Day they would always go in the march and call by our place and talk about the march and the war. So it was part of my background in those days.

Although you were quite young in the late '30s, not into your twenties, the events in Europe - the political developments, the rise to power of Hitler, and so on - were you at all conscious of that, or not?

No, not especially.

I think you left school in 1941 and worked for a short time there with a Commonwealth department, and later with an oil company. Could you just outline those jobs?

Yes. The job with the Commonwealth Department of Information, its function was virtually a propaganda one at the beginning stages of the war. It was still interested in Europe at that stage. And their function was to make films and take photos and also they had a censoring obligation. As a mail boy, I carried copy from newspaper offices to the Department's offices where they had half a dozen official censors who would use the blue pencil. Then I would take it back to the newspaper concerned - sometimes the radio stations too, of course. When I left the Department of Information it was to join an oil company - a commercial organisation. There I was an office boy involved in running errands, sorting the mail, filing, and carrying mail around within the company between offices.

I think when you were seventeen you joined up, and it was to be the navy. Why the navy? Was that a conscious choice of yours, or not?

It was a conscious choice. I can't really recall a particular reason why. I think that I was impressed by photos of clean, neat, speedy destroyers plunging through the ocean with a big bow wave and it looked all so clean and nice.

(Laughs) A bit different to corvettes.

Yes.

You did go straight, I think, to Flinders for your initial training. What do you remember of Flinders? For a start, what was the initial induction into the general disciplined atmosphere of the service like?

Well, it was in the beginning of the first week fairly friendly and informal, I thought. We arrived there. We were given our quarters. The first surprise was that we had to sleep in a hammock. So we were given a hammock and shown how it should be put in order and how to get into it and how to get out of it, and that was quite a trick because we had no idea in the world. But we settled down to that and then we got our uniforms and that was great. We suddenly felt like sailors. The very first thing, of course, we noticed was that the trousers of our blue serge uniforms didn't have the traditional seven creases. But there was a silver-haired, old, long-serving able seaman who had a little business ironing the creases in for the new recruits at two and sixpence a time - and he was doing very nicely.

(5.00) That's a lovely story (laughs).

I'd say when life being different in the navy really hit me was at the end of the first week when I went to my kitbag to change my clothes and there were no clean clothes left. And I suddenly realised that all my life clean clothes had always turned up every week. They were ready to wear and I don't know where they came from but suddenly it was not so. So it was to the canteen to buy some sunlight soap and off to the laundry and do it the hard way.

So the dhobi wasn't sent away.

No. So the next thing that was a new experience was the medical check which included injections, and of course the smallpox vaccination. And inevitably for almost everyone that meant a large swollen arm, and getting into your hammock became a real challenge - it was full of pain whilst you tried to flex the muscles to swing up into it.

Then next we really started to get into training. It began with the navy's plan for us to be physically fit which meant getting up at 6 a.m. and running down to the parade ground in our shorts and sandshoes and doing half an hour's calisthenics, and then back to quarters to shave and shower and dress for breakfast. After breakfast then the training began in different areas. The first was with rifle drill and that was fairly constant for a period of several weeks where we learnt very many different manoeuvres but essentially to do it together in an ordered way. There were penalties imposed if after a reasonable number of mistakes you continued to be slack or slow or not listening, and that was that you were told to run at the double with your rifle at the slope from your point of drill to the flagpole in the far corner of the parade ground and back again - all on the double.

How much do you think that initial training, and the responses that that drill evoked, how much did that carry over into your day-to-day life at sea?

I think it carried over quite a bit because it taught us team work, but also you developed a sense of achievement if, after a couple of weeks, you were able to do the drill with a

professional look about you and completely in time and tidily. Because after all, life at sea is still a team thing in the handling of ropes and performance of various duties.

> Well, the other aspects of your training, did they include much practical seamanship, or not?

Yes, there was quite a bit of time - a whole week spent in what you might loosely call learning to tie knots, but the whole range of knots and the use of tackle and blocks and tackle and sheer legs - erecting sheer legs was another thing that we did - and subject to an exam at the end of the week where we were told to do something out of the curriculum, we had to do it well and do it properly. So that was valuable because at sea the handling of ropes is very much part of a seaman's life. We had a week of electrical training and including a knowledge of torpedoes. Now they are subject, on ships of course, in the hands of professional seamen-torpedomen, as it were - but we had to know how they worked and we were given cut away models to look and we learnt all about them and made sketches. But also in that world of the seamen-torpedomen - torpedo school - lies the navy's electrical activities. So we were given a week's training in the way ships' electrical systems work - the fact that they were [inaudible] and that they are a DC system and the way different circuits are made and the different generating equipment that's used typically on a ship.

> I know you did later opt to do ASDIC training. We might perhaps move on to that. Did your interest in ASDIC work stem from something prior to being in the navy, or was it that early electrical work that sparked it off?

No, I don't think it came from anything previous. Of the range of activities that we were offered to choose to specialise in, such as gunnery, we felt that - or be a seaman-torpedoman - it's just that the anti-submarine work had a certain attraction to it, I think, because we were probably going to wind up being called a submarine detector.

(10.00) That sounds good, doesn't it? You went to Rushcutter here in Sydney. What were the basic aspects of your ASDIC training?

It was to learn how the ASDIC equipment worked, which was .... The ship had a large quartz disc of about twenty centimetres in diameter by about fifteen in thickness. We were told the quartz came from Brazil, and it was mounted on a device which lowered it beneath the keel of the ship, housed in a special housing to protect it from the water. We had to learn all that sort of background to what it was. We had to learn about the electrical aspects of its operation and then we had hands on training and simulators on actually operating the equipment, coordinated with the training of ASDIC officers who were operating a simulator as well.

> I guess a key part of the training was the ability to differentiate the different sounds that come through the ASDIC.

Yes.

> Could you tell us about that?

The number one requirement of an ASDIC operator was that you must not be tone deaf because the essence of the operation is to detect differences in tones. It's not just a matter of hearing an echo, but whether the echo is higher or lower tone than the original transmissions

is an indication of whether or not the object - suppose a submarine - is coming towards you or away from you. So being able to choose tones was particularly ... as well as having quite good hearing in terms of average ability.

> The particular sounds that you were supposed to differentiate between, what were they? What different objects were you supposed to be able to tell between?

First of all submarines and the sound of an echo from a submarine would be largely the same as an echo from a ship, but the ship you can quickly, with your equipment, detect the ship as bigger and wider and longer, so it is not a submarine, and you should know where they are because they are often within sight, except in storms. But you had to be alert for the sound of an echo that might be a submarine. You had to be able to listen closely and track it because it could be a whale which would give the same sort of an echo but wouldn't be moving as fast, nor changing direction as quickly as a submarine's like to in its manoeuvres. Then we needed to be able to identify a mine field which was a rash of tiny little echoes. Schools of fish could give you an echo and then suddenly vanish as they turned away from you. So it's becoming familiar with all those sort of sounds. From a hands-on situation you develop your skills and your listening abilities.

> How long did it take to refine those hearing skills? And how did you get around a situation, which I'd imagine often existed at sea, where for long periods of time you might not have had actual contact, and therefore the hearing memory might have faded?

Well, it didn't seem to fade. I guess maybe I could say it's common for you to get an echo from a school of fish anywhere at all, so that kept you alert - the fact that you were listening to some echoes for regular practice as it were. But it didn't seem to diminish, except that if you had a long time ashore, as we had sometimes during re-fits, we would need to go to a training facility with a simulator to upgrade our skills.

> We might talk about that in the Durban context. The period at Rushcutter, at the end of that how competent did you feel to go sea as an ASDIC operator?

Quite competent because the simulator did a good job of creating the sort of circumstances and the sounds that you would face and you're working together with, in effect, an ASDIC officer who's also trained in the handling of a ship, and using the information you give, so that it was quite real in terms of what they could recreate there. So that at the end of the course when we were passed as having succeeded in it, we did feel competent.

> Well, perhaps let's move on to actually heading off to join the *Lismore*. The journey from Australia, I'd imagine for a young fellow of - were you still seventeen?

No, I had just turned eighteen when we left Australia.

> For a young man anyway, it must have seemed a great adventure. What were the thoughts going through your mind as you left the country?

Very much one of looking forward to joining the ship and becoming a crew member of an active unit - that's primarily. Secondary, was a certain pleasure at finding myself about to travel overseas as a passenger - be it second class - but that certainly was an unexpected and pleasant experience.

(15.00) Did you have any final leave with your family before you left, or not?

No, we had been moved from Sydney to Melbourne to await the ship in Melbourne - probably a week or something - before the ship came in and we joined it.

> Well, you were saying I think, Harold, that you travelled from Sydney, Fremantle, to Colombo, and there I think you had a two-month wait. It seemed quite an easy time but with some interest all the same.

Yes. We were stationed in Royal Navy barracks which was St Joseph's Catholic High School - it had been taken over for the war. There were several hundred RN sailors there, and we were - apart from the two chaps I went with headed for the HMAS *Lismore*, there were another half dozen headed for other ships - and the dozen of us were odd obviously in the view of the RN ratings. I don't know how we were different, but they saw us as being very different and we saw them as being different. I think we were a lot more active. The weather was very hot but we played tennis every day, and in the middle of the day didn't bother us, and we'd take opportunities to go swimming if we could.

> Well from there you did go on after that period to Bombay and here again I think you were in barracks for six weeks. Both Ceylon - now Sri Lanka - and India of course were very different to Australia. How much did that impinge on you as young men?

I think that when we got to Bombay we found ourselves in the very exotic situation - the famous Gateway of India down on the dockside, the Taj Mahal Hotel, which we of course couldn't enter as ratings, the Breach Kandy Swimming Pool which was quite a Hollywood-style set-up for the well-to-do there, regular swimming at the nearby baths, and being hosted by some local officials and sometimes businessmen - Australian businessmen - on assignment in India. All of it made for a bit of a mind-blowing exotic holiday, as it were.

> The general rule which I know existed about ratings and entering hotels and so on, did that grate, that differentiation between officers and men, or not?

Yes, it did I think because you could understand that officers would have special facilities, but we would have expected as ratings that if we could go to the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay and we could go into something like a public bar and have some drinks there and we go on our way, whereas the rest of the hotel might have been set aside for officers, the same way as the Galle Face Hotel in Colombo - that too was out of bounds to us. And that was our feeling that some part of it should have been available to ratings but it wasn't - that annoyed us.

> Was that the case in Australia, incidentally, in hotels, or not?

No, not usually in hotels.

So, I mean, were you experiencing here the somewhat different attitude of the British towards their men? Did you feel that, or not?

Yes, I'm sure that was part of it. It was one of the things that we disliked about the Royal Navy to which we were attached, that there was a much different attitude between officers and men towards each other.

Well, let's move on to the *Lismore* itself. I think it was November '43 when you finally met up with the ship. I think you were saying that the ship was then operating on a two-watch system so you were rather thrown into it.

Yes, from an exotic holiday situation we were suddenly into a two-watch situation which meant four hours on and four hours off. So the maximum amount of sleep you could get any time was four hours which was quite different to our lives up to that point, and together with the responsibility that on watch you were actually on active service with a job to do to try to detect submarines and protect the convoy. So it was suddenly very serious and quite wearing in fact, but probably was the best way to enter our active service, and of course it could only improve, which it did within a couple of months, as we were now back in the Indian Ocean and further away from major conflicts, the ship eventually reverted to a three-watch system.

Just to talk generally about some aspects of the *Lismore* perhaps, Harold - and this is referring not just to this moment but your time on the ship. You were saying before about the romance, perhaps, of destroyers and here you were posted to a corvette. What do you remember of your first impressions of this small ship?

Really that it was very crowded. I think it had been built for a ship's company of something like eighty and it had, I think at that stage, about ninety-six - mostly as a result of extra equipment being installed upon it. So it was very crowded and whereas in its original manning there would have been a set of hooks for every seaman or stoker to sling his hammock below decks, this was not the case when I joined the ship.

(20.00) So as the new chum, and somebody very young, there weren't any hooks for your hammock so you had to find a spot somewhere on deck. Now you couldn't easily do this below decks because people had to walk to and fro at night, coming and going on watch, so it usually meant that you had to be up on deck outside. That could be quite pleasant unless it rained and then you'd have to hightail it below decks and try to find a corner somewhere. So until you worked your way through your seniority, with people coming and going for at least six months, you didn't have a place to sling your hammock, and life was not all that comfortable.

That's most interesting. And that really was just a matter of finding any spot on deck where you were out of the way.

Yes.

What about messing - eating and so on - was that also made difficult by the lack of room, or not?

No, not especially. We were a bit cramped sitting together but the food was good and fresh and well cooked and presented and so except for being a little bit tight sitting on the forms at the mess tables, it wasn't a great difficulty.

> We'll come to talk about some particular bouts of bad weather later, but just in general terms, corvettes are always rather regarded as heavy rolling, badly pitching ships. Has that been exaggerated or was that really the fact?

No, as far as I'm concerned that is the fact. They were subject to movement. As soon as the sea began to get up they'd be rocking and rolling and those who's systems couldn't take that would be sick and stay that way as long as the ship was moving.

> What about turning at high speed? Did they really roll over then, or not?

I don't think they were especially different to other ships in that respect, but that was limited to a large extent by the fact that they were slow - comparing a tight turning corvette with a destroyer, for instance: a destroyer would lean much further out from its arc because of its high speed.

> You were referring before to sleeping on deck. A lot of the time you spent was in the tropics. How hot did it get below decks? How well ventilated, or otherwise, was the ship?

Below decks it had a mechanical ventilation system bringing in fresh air but despite that it was very hot below decks, but bearable because of the ventilation system. But it depended a lot on the weather. In very smooth weather, even during the day you could have your portholes open with air scoops out and it'd be well ventilated - quite cool if you had to sleep during the day between watches. But at night once the blackout curtains went up in the passageways or portholes were locked down, as the night went on it got very steamy.

> And spending nights on deck I'd assume lights were a key issue. You would have had to have had no light at all.

No, no light at all, no.

> One other aspect of the ship's spaces is your own working space - the ASDIC equipment and so on. Where was it situated and how well were you set up, or otherwise?

It was located up on the open upper bridge in what we referred to as a hut. It was about five feet high and about three feet - a metre - length and breadth and, say one and two-thirds metres high. It had a small seat in it and apart from that it was full of instruments and junction boxes and electrical connections. So it was quite cramped but we didn't have to spend more than a half an hour on watch because one loses one's ability to concentrate with this sound all the time after about half an hour.

> Yes, you were saying you had this half-hour on, half-hour off routine with the other man on the watch. We might come to that in a moment. The little hut you were in, in bad weather, did you have problems there, or not?

No, but because it was at more or less the highest level of the ship, when the ship rolled its movement was so much more than the men on the lower deck - below decks - so if any of the ASDIC operators were particularly affected by bad weather, as at least one was badly, such a person suffered greatly whilst they were on watch.

> We might just mention that person now, if you like. It sounds as if this mate of yours really went through great unpleasantness.

(25.00) Yes, and I believe it's an example of the very best application of a person to his job, to his function, his attitude to his duty. I mean, the man concerned would just about go green once the sea got up and he'd remain that way for as long as the sea was up, would hardly ever go below decks. He would sit out on the waist of the ship in the fresh air, but always did his watch. He would take a bucket with him to be sick into and would do his half-hour watch stinically[stoically?], and that doesn't draw any medals or particular commendation, but it's certainly a great example to others to do their job.

> Did that sort of attitude, or that sort of example, did it spread around the ship, do you think? Did people talk about men such as that, who really did pull their weight?

Well, he wasn't talked about a lot but it was recognised with a sympathetic and respectful attitude that such people existed. It was really, my view, a fault in the navy of those days because you joined the navy without having been to sea, had no idea how your system would behave. I understand in the navy today that if you're a chronic seasickness case you're able to get out of the navy right at the beginning of your career.

> Yes, sure, that certainly makes sense. The general morale of the crew when you joined the ship, although you were obviously quite young and perhaps it was hard to judge, what do you remember of that?

I felt that it wasn't as good as it should have been now, and I see this as being a result of a combination of circumstances. The first, that most of the original crew were still aboard the ship, which would mean they'd been away from home for three years, and very few Australian servicemen were away from home for such a long period. They'd just come out of a campaign in the Mediterranean where they were worked long and hard and in substantial danger. And I think they were largely worn out. When I joined the ship it was at the beginning of virtually a complete crew change over the following two months, and suddenly we had a brand new crew, all of whom were new and all of whom were going to sea for the first time and we had a great rapport with each other and this great adventure in which we were involved.

> So over that changeover period are you suggesting the morale changed very much?

Yes, it did. It increased substantially with all new people and it was very much reinforced when we were sent to South Africa for a re-fit.

> Right. Well, we'll come to that a little bit later. Just finally, although I know it's perhaps a difficult thing to describe in some senses - it may have varied at lot - could you describe, of those early days, a typical day at sea? I know you

were generally doing escort work. How did days begin, and how did they go through?

If you were at sea and, for instance, you'd had a watch during the night, maybe eight till twelve or twelve till four, you got up in the morning at about seven o'clock, the ASDIC operator who was not on the set would come around with the boatswain's call - the whistle - and blow it loud and say, 'Wakey, wakey, everybody up', and then you'd wash and prepare for ... you'd have your breakfast and at eight o'clock - I'm talking as a seaman - we'd be called to fall in and be assigned jobs for the forenoon. And that would include, more than anything else, chipping rust and painting. But it was the constant need and it was the constant duty. But also ropes would have to be re-arranged, or a replace end for ended, and general maintenance sort of duties for the forenoon. No one worked in the afternoon, except to do your watch.

And catching up on sleep. That morning work, how much of that do you think was essential work, how much was it created work to keep people busy?

I think with a sea-going ship it's all a need. I think if a ship was spending a lot more time in port than at sea, it would become a means of keeping people busy. In fact this happened towards the end of the time I was on the *Lismore* and we were up north of Australia when to fill in time we really had done so much painting and chipping that it couldn't be excused to do any more, so we were set to washing down the paint to freshen it up.

(Laughs) It was one step better.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: Ed Stokes, Corvettes, Harold [Murphy], tape one, side two.

Just going back to the actual chronology of your work on the ship. You were saying about the work of the ASDIC people being half-hour on, half-hour off. I think that actually gave you an excuse at nights to get to know the ship perhaps better than others.

Yes, that's very true. We had a roving function not to please ourselves - but we'd be assigned to take messages and papers from one part of the ship to another, take messages, we might make and take coffee to different people on watch so it did give us access to people in their different work, and an appreciation of the work they did - and especially with the engine room people. We didn't have a lot of contact with them. They made their own coffee but we'd still have reason to go there at times and you formed a respect for the work they did under great heat difficulty.

How well did men on the ship, I mean besides your own specific mates, how well did you get to know the other members of the crew?

Very well. I think it was a bit unusual because we had this virtual complete crew change, so we all came in as new chums. It's not like joining a ship, one or two guys who are new and everyone else is old-timers on the ship - it's harder to get to know people and they have their

associations. But because after that crew change we were all pretty much new there was a great rapport. And this was evidenced in an unusual way in that, for instance, it's almost traditional in the navy that the stokers - engine room people - and the seamen don't get on and they can be quite hostile on some ships. But when we had our re-fit in South Africa and we'd going ashore at night we'd fall in for inspection and then disperse to walk up the wharf, and whoever you happened to walk up the wharf with that night - the two or three guys, whether they be signalmen, stokers, whatever - you'd stay with them for the night, and the social mixing ashore, and that was very unusual for many ships.

That's most interesting. One another thing just about the relationships within the crew. What was the degree of formality or informality in contacts between officers and men on the small ship? I'd assume the officers were always 'sir', but did things loosen up beyond that?

Yes, they did, quite a bit. I mean, you rarely wore a cap at sea, for instance, so if you didn't have a cap on you didn't have to salute. But that was a very informal atmosphere. I think probably because we were all so close together and we were all able to observe each other's performance, or the performance of each other's departments, I might put it that way. If you're on a big ship like a cruiser you would hardly - the people you never meet you'd never be able to judge, but we were able to judge each other all the time. We appreciated efficiency and good work, so officers or men, we got on well and with good respect, with a good degree of informality for that reason.

I think Lieutenant Lever was the CO when you took over.

(5.00) Yes, that's true. He was certainly largely responsible for the generation of this comradeship on the ship between different sections between the officers and the crew.

I think you were saying he was a merchant navy man, Harold. About how old was he?

I'd have to guess, I'd say he was probably forty-odd at most.

Therefore a good deal older than most.

Yes.

Not a young officer.

No.

What were the key qualities, do you think, that made him such a well-liked ...

Well, first that he was a good seaman - the handling of his ship. That's the first judgment we would make - how well a man handled his ship. How competent he was doing his job. If he did that competently, well, he'd immediately have our respect as a man holding his rank. Now beyond that, the next judgment would be the way he dealt with the problems of disciplining a ship's company. If somebody does something wrong, breaks a rule and is reported and is put on captain's report and trotted up to, at the appropriate time, before the captain and asked to explain, and then a decision has to be made as to his punishment. And it

was really a job for Solomon quite often. And he seemed to do it particularly well. That no one felt that they'd been badly treated. Whatever his decision, it was regarded as being a very fair one.

> That's most interesting. Well, let's push on to some of the actual journeys. It was in late '44, I think, that you sailed from Colombo to Calcutta, and then from there down to Diego Garcia.

It was late '43.

> Sorry, late '43, that's right. That was before we'd straightened out that date. You arrived at Diego Garcia, I know, on Christmas Eve and put to sea the next day. How difficult was that kind of thing in the navy, that breaking into what might otherwise be regarded as special days?

I give the navy credit for trying to make such special occasions times of recreation if possible. I don't believe that there's a carelessness about that. I think there was just a need on that day for us to leave harbour and join a convoy. Because we were tired to convoy work, so there wasn't a flexibility of a ship working on its own. You're going to work with other ships and other ships you're responsible for, so .... But it was a great disappointment that day because, as I recall, we were still in the two-watch operation and so life was difficult and we were looking forward to a day in harbour and a good Christmas dinner which we still had, but just the inevitable happy spirit that invades a gathering of people on Christmas Day.

> December '43 there were convoys, you were saying, to Trincomalee, Colombo, and then you went down to the Maldives. I think there was interesting anecdote at the Maldives about an old hulk.

Yes, the Maldives was a convoy gathering point and changing escort ships, but the facility existed there for refuelling operation which was done by stationing a tanker within the harbour there, but at a point in time an enemy submarine standing a couple of miles to sea was able to calculate that the space between the coral reefs - the entry to the harbour was just sufficient that on a particular angle they could fire off a torpedo and maybe hit this tanker. And in fact they did and the tanker was sunk, but it was then refloated and maintained as just a rusting hulk, but continued to be a fuelling point. It was topped up every now and again. It was a terribly rusty mess. A couple of men lived aboard and they had a few generators to operate the pumps and it still did its job.

> It sounds very different to the paradisical aspect of the Maldives themselves.

Exactly, yes. We only travelled to Addu Atoll which today, I think, isn't particularly a tourist place.

> Did that aspect of this general part of the world you were travelling through - well, the paradisical aspect of the tropics - the seas, the islands, and so on. Did that have a strong impact on you and your mates, or not?

Yes, but I think that we were more interested and noticed more, the different cultures we were coming in contact with. That had greater impact on us than the tropical paradise aspect of it. We were moving all the time into new places and seeing new cultures and new other aspects

of cultures we've seen in other places and it was .... If there was one particular moment or time which is of great interest, it was when we were approaching landfall, and especially if it was a place we had not visited before, men off watch would be up on deck searching the horizons for the first sign of land. And then you'd stay watching it until you were called to stations for entering harbour, you watched the development of that land mass as it grew and grew over the horizon.

(10.00) That's a very evocative description. Harold, you were saying at the opposite end of a voyage, in a sense, leaving port, that there was something very special, at least for you.

Yes, because once you cast off the last lines from the wharf and you steamed out into the stream and out through the harbour entrance you were cutting all bonds to the earth where, as a human being, you belong - your roots are in terms of homes and schools and most of your life your on *terra firma*. When you steam out of harbour you're really cutting those bonds and there is a real feeling of adventure as you venture forth into the sea.

Do you think that was a feeling shared by many of your mates on the *Lismore*, or not?

Yes, I believe so. And that realisation really grew from their interest in watching the approach of a landfall - finding a landfall and watching the approach to a coast.

And I guess at sea there was always - I mean obviously there were times of tedium, I'd imagine, but there most often have been the interest just in the changing moods of the sea and so on.

Yes, I could remember a particular activity that a lot of us had on a clear sunny tropical day at sea with a convoy where the sea was almost still but just a little bit of movement. The ship would be moving very slowly and you would stand in the waist, leaning on the gunwale and you'd become mesmerised by the breaking of the wave which your ship was making as it cuts through the sea - this tumbling, bubbling aerated greeny-blue mass that you just stare into and the mind drifts off to other things, in the same way people sit and look into a fire round their hearth at home and you dream of other places.

Yes, that's very interesting. Just turning to the actual convoy work, or escort work, that took up most of your time, Harold. Speaking generally, how do you remember the size of the convoys? Were you mostly dealing with large numbers of ships, or quite small numbers?

No, mostly small - half a dozen ships would be typical - they could be less and they could be more - but I'd say half a dozen ships, so for our particular work it was only small convoys.

And what about the speed of the convoys? Were you normally able to travel at the corvette's full speed, or were you often travelling much more slowly?

I'd say mostly much more slowly because the speed of a convoy, they say, is the speed of the slowest ship and you always had one that was pretty slow and that slowed everyone down, so they could stay together as a pack and get the maximum protection from the escorts.

> Would it often only be yourself as an escort, or were there normally a number of escorts?

Mostly one or two others. Not often just the *Lismore* on its own.

> I know there were a few engagements later which we'll come to, but in the general run of this escort work did you have any ...? How often were there moments when you really thought from either security information or your observations that you might be close enemy submarines or other ships?

Well, the ship would get reports of submarine contacts or sightings in the area so apart from our general responsibility to be alert we'd be additionally alert if we'd had reports come to us that they had been seen or contacted in the area in which we were travelling or planned to travel.

> Regarding your own ASDIC work, how much was that affected, if at all, by changes in weather conditions and the movement of the sea itself?

It wasn't affected by the sea - the movement of the sea - at all. It was affected only by extraneous noises that might come from a school of fish or a whale.

> Even after the watch keeping system changed to a three-watch system, how long could you be at sea keeping the work going before tension or tiredness really began to set in?

Most of the time it wasn't a problem because our convoys typically would seem to be a week. I think once we had a convoy in one particular place which took us just on three weeks, and that became quite a drag because it was a slow convoy, it was hot, the sea was smooth, and it was quite enervating.

> Well, I know it was about this time, or fairly soon after you'd been aboard - January '44 - that you did in fact have a rest camp in Ceylon. This sounds something of a wonderful break.

(15.00) Yes, and it was unexpected because we hadn't heard of this facility existing, and suddenly we were given information that the ship would go in two groups for the best part of a week near the mountains of Ceylon, or Sri Lanka as it's now known, to a place called Diyatalawa. It was a rest camp. It was an army camp and actually only in recent years I've discovered it was actually the prisoner of war camp for Boer War prisoners who were shipped from South Africa to Colombo during the Boer War. But it was a great facility. I can't remember how many feet elevation - it must have been 3,000 feet or more. Days and nights were cool. The days were sunny and fresh, the nights cool so that you could enjoy the need for a blanket as distinct from being on board the ship where you didn't. We had a complete break from routine in what were the best of holiday circumstances - beautiful mountains, good food, good rest.

> Sounds wonderful, and I know you did tell me there was, I think, a wonderful twenty kilometre downhill bike ride.

Yes, that's right. A group of us, four of us, hired bikes one day and rode from Diyatalawa to Badulla, a distance of about twenty miles but a fall of 2,000 feet. And except for a couple of hundred yard stretches through villages it was downhill all the way so we didn't have to pedal. We just sat back and watched the scenery go by.

> Sounds a great ride. It was early in the next year, in February, that you were escorting from the Maldives, two ships I think. The 25th February there was an act of contact, I think.

Yes. Mid-afternoon, I happened to be the ASDIC operator on watch and I found a contact and it proved to be a submarine that was moving between the *Lismore* and the two ships we were escorting. And we went to action stations and dropped about thirteen depth charges and then lost contact, and we continued to search. Just on dusk a Catalina RAF plane from Addu Atoll, the Maldives, came searching as well and sighted the submarine on the surface, dropped some flares. We went to action stations again and the submarine dived and we dropped another thirteen depth charges. There was a strong smell of diesel fuel but no other evidence, so we couldn't be sure whether or not we destroyed the submarine or it escaped. But for me it was a pleasure to be able to have first-hand opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution in the particular navy job I'd chosen.

> Sure. And in a situation like that, would it have been possible for the *Lismore* to stick around and hunt that submarine down, or was it essential to go on with the convoy?

It was essential to go on with the convoy, but frankly which would only please the crew because one of the things that does happen in anti-submarine warfare occasionally is that a submarine will surface - be forced to the surface - and the attacking ship will attempt to sink it by ramming it. And you might say that that would be a fair objective for a commanding officer to endeavour to do. But it was always a matter of concern for us that any attempt by the *Lismore* to ram a submarine could very likely result in the sinking of the *Lismore* because the thickness of our steel plates was only about a quarter of an inch compared to a long ocean going submarine which would have much more steel in its plates and much more likely to puncture ours and we'd be sunk.

> Yes, and I guess you really didn't have the exact armament to engage particularly effectively in ...

No. Most of those long range submarines had a bigger main armour than we had. But on that particular evening, as I say, it was on dusk, the Catalina dropped the flares, and when they sounded action stations I came tearing up the ladder towards the bridge and as I came up to level with the foc's'le, I could see ahead of us this flame of the flare on the surface of the water. At that stage, we the crew didn't know, the men on duty on the bridge knew, but the rest of the crew didn't know the origin of that flare. And I had a personal concern just at that moment that it may well have been a flare from a Japanese submarine, in which case if it had been on the surface it would have all the advantages of dealing with us, or taking us in tow, capturing, anything could have happened. It was quite a moment of fear for me.

> I was going to ask you about that, in that particular moment, and I think there was another contact at some later point, how strong was your fear and how much was that common, do you think, with the men you knew?

I think most of the time we didn't harbour fear. That was just a set of circumstances where I suddenly thought, well, your face to face with the enemy within a few hundred yards, and that's why fear arose. But generally we weren't, we were very confident of our ability to seek out and find submarines and sink them with our depth charges without ever having to fight it out hand to hand, as it were, on the surface with our main armament.

(20.00) Well, going on from there, I think there were a couple of other voyages in between, but from Colombo I think you escorted down to South Africa a British destroyer. I think it had been damaged itself.

Yes, the story we were given was that that destroyer had aimed to ram a submarine, at the last moment decided against it because of the sight of the submarine, and had swung away and in the process the stern of the ship on one of the quarters hit the submarine and its plates were pierced by that collision, as it were. So that they patched it up and it was going south to be repaired. But that gave us a good indication of the strength of the enemy submarines.

You yourselves were destined for a re-fit. I think this was at Port Elizabeth and it took some three months. You were saying, Harold, that there was some feeling that there were at least elements that were attempting to sabotage the work.

Yes, well, South Africa was different to other Dominions during the war. They took three weeks to decide to come into the war and then it was a split decision that they would do it on a voluntary basis. So most of the volunteers in the forces, but not all, were of the English speaking stock. There were very few from the Afrikaner community. But on the other hand, in the Afrikaner community there was a movement which was very pro-German and anti the British, or the Allied, cause. And the firm that did our re-fit was a typical marine dockside ship and repair company, but as all of its English-speaking employees had gone off to the war it had only the Afrikaners. And there were problems in the re-fit. Things went missing, things took too long, and we were quite convinced that they were carrying on minor sabotage and delaying tactics to keep us from going to sea. Another indication of - or background to those feelings - was the fact that when we took recreational leave in Johannesburg, we were told to move only ever in pairs, never singly, because there was a youth organisation called the Ossewa-Brandwag in Johannesburg who were very anti-British and had been known to attack Allied servicemen walking the streets alone.

That's most interesting, but despite that, in the history of the *Lismore*, I know there was a photograph of sailors apparently on parade, I think, for ANZAC Day. Do you remember that? How much was made of ANZAC Day?

ANZAC Day was unknown in South Africa, as you can imagine, because it's a day in Australia's history we commemorate. But as we were servicemen on leave and it was an important day in the Australian defence calendar, you might say, talking with the people of British - or Australians - who lived as civilians in South Africa in Johannesburg, there'd been talk about ANZAC Day coming up. Normally we have a parade and it was agreed that it should be arranged with the City Council that we could gather for a ceremony on parade - but it was a wreath laying ceremony - but there was no problems with that from the community at large.

I know you yourself went to Johannesburg twice. As you were saying, it's a long way from the sea. It appears that at least from the British community in South Africa did rather fete you.

Yes, that's very true. We were made very welcome and billeted in private homes and taken for tours and rides around. An indication of how strange we were - we were really something exotic, I think, to the locals - typically one or two men would be walking down the street in Johannesburg and a lady would come along with a little boy and she'll say, 'Oh, pardon me, sailor, would you let my son touch your collar?'. So it was really paying tribute in a way that was embarrassing really, but an indication of how we were regarded - highly regarded.

I think for yourself at least some very welcome personal contact.

Yes, a lady who'd been a good friend of my family in Bondi many years before had married a New Zealand chap and settled in South Africa so I was able to visit her and renew that family contact. And actually it was great because she was able to write as a private person without breaking any security rules to my mother and say Harold's alive and well.

(25.00) That's an interesting issue perhaps just to touch on, Harold. In all this toing and froing, how regularly did mail from home catch up with you? And how often could you get mail away?

When we were based in Colombo on normal convoy duties, it came fairly regularly because there's a succession of individual ships moving to and fro across the Indian Ocean, but when you get away from there it usually took a long time to catch up with you. The powers that be, I guess, had to say where's the *Lismore* likely to go, and we'll send some mail there and hope it catches it. So there were times when you go a month or more without any letter from home and it got to be a time for a little bit of unhappiness. You wonder what's happening. Particularly news from home because you had no news to give. I mean, our mail was censored by the officers on board, that was the rules of the navy, so what could you say? You couldn't say where you were, what you were doing.

Could you talk at all about just the daily routines of life aboard and that sort of thing?

Well, not in any interesting way. You could only say occasionally or often, 'we're still chipping the paint work and repainting', or something. But really, there's nothing you can much say except, 'Oh, the weather's been nice', and 'I'm very well. I think I've put on a bit of weight', or 'I've taken off a bit of weight', 'the diets are great' and that was it.

Did men resent it at all in that, looked at rationally, perhaps, at least, the information that you might have passed on, say, that you'd two months before had escorted a couple of ships from the Maldives to Colombo, for example, really can't have been of much significance to anybody by the time it might have been gathered?

Well, I'd be a bit inclined to think that, but I can't really make a judgment about that. That was the navy's rules. I don't know whether it would be value to the other side, or not, but it just wasn't allowed. If that was in a letter it would be cut out. But I think that as far as censorship was concerned the thing that I found the most uncomfortable - I was a single

person, I didn't have a family - was the fact that if I wanted to say something in affectionate terms to, in my case, my mother - for somebody else it might be a wife - I didn't like the idea of another third party, the officer who was a censor for the week, reading my emotional expressed thoughts.

> Yes, that must have been a real issue, perhaps more so where there were lovers or wives, or whatever. Harold, you were saying that after the period on leave - or not at sea, this three months' re-fitting - there really was a rustiness in your ASDIC work. How was that overcome?

We went from Port Elizabeth up to Durban to go into dry dock to have the bottom scraped and painted. And whilst we were there arrangements were made with the local training establishment ashore for us to go there and have some training on their simulator which we did for a succession of days. In the event we were pleased that it had happened because we found that we were very rusty and really not competent in our duties, having had that long time away from it. So at the end of that training we went to sea happy that we had brought our skills up to date.

> Do you know if men in other specialties had a chance to brush up on their skills, or not?

Not that I'm aware of. I think maybe our situation is a little bit different because of the nature of our work.

> I think an interesting point, too, that you were saying that the labour in that particular dry dock where you were in Durban was apparently prison labour.

Yes, it was. They were Africans from a local prison which didn't affect us much at first thought, we just found them interesting to look at, but we got to the point of asking their prison warder, supervisor, who they were were and what they'd done, expecting them to be in for all sorts of minor things. But we found out quite a few of them were in for murders and that put quite a bit of concern amongst us. We didn't know whether they were violent men because some murderers are, others they're not, but it was a matter of concern to find ourselves surrounded by these huge black Africans.

> Well, it was after leaving Durban, I think, you were steaming towards the Mozambique channel, that there was another contact, but I think in this case a spurious one.

Yes, we were going north with a convoy but another ship, part of the escort, was in physical fact a US coastguard cutter but actually a unit of the South African navy with a South African navy crew. And we were keeping station on each other at the head of the convoy and at about ten o'clock at night this ship came within range of our ASDIC and I was on duty ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

> Identification: this is Ed Stokes, Corvettes, Harold Murphy, tape two, side one.

... and I reported the contact but was not asked for an identification, and again I think because we were all a bit rusty, the alarm bells were pushed. We went to action stations and it was quickly identified as being our fellow escort. And there was a lot of cranky, tired men who'd had their sleep interrupted.

> But I think later, I'm not sure that night, or soon afterwards, there was an actual contact.

That's right. That action stations had been taken place at 10 p.m. and then 2 a.m. the next morning we came across a submarine on the surface, recharging his batteries I guess. And it was probably as surprised as we were but we quickly went to action stations seriously then. The submarine fired off a torpedo and dived. The officer on watch manoeuvred the ship to minimise the ship as a target for the torpedo which passed under the ship. As I say, we went to action stations, we dropped some depth charges but were unable to make a contact, and eventually carried on our convoy.

> Well, it was after that, I know, that the *Lismore* was part of the Arabia-Bengal-Ceylon escort force, headquartered in Colombo. [Interruption.] Just to talk generally about food which obviously is an important issue aboard ships, Harold, I think you were saying that generally you ate pretty well.

Yes, I think we ate exceptionally well considering it was wartime and we were operating for lots of places that didn't have good facilities. The navy supply system seemed to be able to give us very good food, well prepared. For instance, five days a week we'd have freshly baked bread aboard the ship. They made extra for Saturday, Sundays. Almost every Sunday, midday meal, we would have roast pork and vegetables. The day of the week when we had the least palatable food was Saturday's lunch time because Saturday morning was a serious scrub everything and clean up sort of a day and everyone was to apply themselves to this. The ship was absolutely spotless by luncheon on Saturdays. But of course this involved the galley so they couldn't cook a normal meal so they had two big pressure cookers in which they'd cook carrots and potatoes typically, and we would have corned bully beef with that.

> You were saying, and I think it's an interesting point, that although obviously the navy generally supplied all the ship's food, you did for a short period at least experiment with a kind of a self-catering system.

Yes. Full revictualling it was called. It operated on the basis that the navy allowed so much money per day per crew member for the provision of food. And the crew in their different mess groups would take that money and then use it to buy the food. They would pay the navy for the cooking of it. They would pay the navy for any food that the navy supplied, such as flour. And otherwise they would import - buy fruit, vegetables, or anything that they wanted, but they were obliged to live within their budget.

I think you were saying that for one of the two months at least, you and another fellow were the mess managers. Did this involve an enormous amount of finicky book keeping?

No, the book keeping was fairly simple as it happened. Probably the most difficult thing was given the fact that we were suddenly free to buy anything that we wanted, that everyone wanted something different when we could go ashore. But they were always happy overall with the result that we were able to achieve.

Tell us about the baked beans.

Yes, well, baked beans were a favourite of mine but they generally were not a favourite at all, and other men were having their turn as mess management were told in serious terms whatever you do don't buy any baked beans this month. But I happened to like them as did my fellow mess manager so we took advantage of our month of authority to really stock the mess up with lots of baked beans and we were able to have them any time we liked for months and months thereafter.

What about beer? What was the situation aboard ship with beer? Did you ever get any, or not?

(5.00) Not until we went up into the Pacific. Up to that time the navy didn't have any alcoholic drinks for the ratings. Officers always had them, the ward room always had beer and spirits but the ratings never did until late in the war we went up into the Pacific and we started to get a beer ration.

During your time on the *Lismore*, Harold, just sticking to domestic matters for a moment, were there any men who operated any other little systems that - on the sideline - washing, ironing, this sort of thing?

There's only one. A man that I must say I envied his initiative. He was the ship's barber. He was actually an engine room artificer, but he brought aboard a pair of clippers and a comb and a sheet, and he was the barber without any training or skill. He developed it slowly in lots of patients that couldn't go anywhere else. But for his twenty-five cents you'd get a haircut which you had to have often - the navy insisted on you being neat and tidy - and I really envied his enterprise. I thought it was great to have all that extra money and this captive clientele.

That's interesting. I guess - I don't know on bigger ships, I'd imagine, do they actually have barbers, or not?

I don't really know. I've no idea.

August '44, Harold, there was this episode for a week at the Straits of Hormuz, at the head of the Persian Gulf, you were saying this was one of the hardest periods on the ship.

Yes, it was one of the most physically demanding. Most of the Allied oil was coming out of the Persian Gulf. There was a great stream of tankers to and fro all the time, and there was an anti-submarine patrol maintained across the Strait of Hormuz and we were assigned there for

a week to relieve a ship that normally did that. We anchored in a bay near the shore by day and the temperatures were typically fifty degrees C, a hundred and twenty-four degrees farenheit in the shade day after day, and it was so enervating that the executive officer said, 'Well, we'll do the absolute minimum during the day. The things that must be done we'll minimise because it's just too tough.' So what we did was drink water and shower with sea water to try and cool ourselves down and look forward to going to sea at night when the ship would make its own breeze passing through the air, travelling to and fro across the opening of the Strait.

How intense was the actual patrol work which I understand was to prevent submarines getting into the Gulf?

It was one of the seriously patrolled points in the world, I'd say, because the majority of the West's oil was coming out of there and there's no risk could be taken and I think there's quite a substantial British military presence in the area just to keep the order and to keep things open. It certainly was highly patrolled. But we were glad we only had one week of it.

There are a couple of other interesting sidelights to the work. One, I think, was your warnings about the Arabs at Bandar Abbas.

Yes, the eastern point of the patrol area was within sight of the village of Bandar Abbas and the instructions given to the ship was that we should not steam within rifle shot of that village because we could expect to be shot at by the Arabs, even though they were a neutral country and not involved, but that was apparently their sport.

I think there was a brief encounter with a few Arabs on a rocky islet where you went to cool off.

Yes, when we were anchored by day in a bay near the western shore. As I say, there was nothing we could do, it was too hot and our officers decided we might be able to run ashore for a swim. So they loaded up the whaler and towed it ashore to a little beach and had a bit of a swim there. But whilst that was happening the hill above this little beach two Arabs suddenly appeared and this was a moment of great panic for us because everyone jumped into the whaler and boat and headed back to the ship because in fact that beach was on neutral territory and we were quite concerned that we were breeching the neutrality of another nation, we didn't know what they might do. But in the event they disappeared as fast as we did.

There was one final anecdote that I thought was particularly interesting, and somewhat distressing, about the, I think, an RN depot ship.

Yes, the ASDIC operators on the *Lismore* had an in-harbour duty of motorboat coxswain. And on one of those days in that area I was motorboat coxswain and had to take our postman across to a Royal Navy depot ship which was anchored there fulltime for up to six months at a time to provide extra supplies and other things to the ships on patrol. And when our postman got on the gangway and went up the gangway they motioned to me to come up onto deck and just stand in the shade whilst he went about his business.

(10.00) And in this area it was all covered by a large awning and there was several dozen folding stretchers there on most of which sat, or some laid, but mostly were sitting some Royal Navy ratings. And I was quite concerned at the fact that they were obviously affected

by this constant heat. They almost were not conscious. Their eyes were open but they didn't respond to a greeting. They just sat there staring ahead of us - quite a disturbing sight.

> It sounds a very bleak situation. The *Lismore* was involved in, obviously, some very different operations and one in the later period here was travelling from the Seychelles to Colombo. I think you had a troublesome time with some motor launches.

Yes, that was expected to be a not very fast passage anyway because there were seven motor launches belonging to the South African Navy and we had the job of escorting them to Colombo via the Maldives for fuel and so we thought we'd be held back a bit by their speed. But as it turned out we left on a particular day and we'd gone less than fifty miles before we had to turn back with one of them with its engines non-functioning at all. So we spent some few more days in harbour at the Seychelles until they were patched up, and we set off again. But they continued to have breakdowns and it took us several weeks to get up to Colombo and it was quite a worrying time, and frustrating time, because when one of them would break down we would have to stop and come back and offer help. We did have a responsibility to give them supplies which we did - pass to at sea - but to have to heave to in the open ocean we immediately became a target whilst we were tending to their problems.

> Sure, it must have been good to have that particular task over. We've talked, or touched on briefly, the weather before, and you were saying that generally in the Indian Ocean you had fairly favourable conditions. There was one episode though between - this is stepping back, I know, when you were sailing from Durban to Port Elizabeth - when you apparently had a very tense time in heavy weather.

Yes, that was on a passage from Durban to Port Elizabeth for the re-fit. More or less halfway between those two ports we ran into very big seas there and the length of the ship was such that it could not bridge the gap between successive waves so typically we'd plunge down into a trough, a wave would break over our bow, the ship would shudder and raise, and up over the next one and some of the waves were of such size and power that we'd actually lose steerage way, the ship would be actually physically stopped by the wave we plunged into and this was a matter of concern for us because we felt that if in that period a wave had come on a bit of an angle and turned and pushed the ship side on that there was a real risk that we would capsize because we'd had a lot of extra armament added. In that period men who weren't on watch below all stood up on the upper deck with their Mae Wests on because we felt it could happen in seconds.

> What sort of force wind was blowing?

It wasn't particularly a heavy wind, it was more the size of the sea. It may have been whipped up by winds a day or two before but at this particular time the wind wasn't a factor, it was just the size of the waves, the height and the depth of the troughs, and the fact that our ship wasn't big enough to bridge the gulf.

> You were saying, it's an interesting comparison I think, that the destroyer that of course you were escorting was taking it fairly easily.

Yes, hardly moving at all because they had a good fifty per cent greater length than we did, and their ship's hull did bridge the gap between those successive waves, and they had hardly any movement. And here we were concerned for our future.

> Well, mid-November '44, you were in Colombo and this was when the ship was posted back to Australia. How did you greet the news that you were to come back? Was there a reluctance to leave these, perhaps, interesting waters, or a relief to be turning home?

No, it was a matter of excitement because whilst we generally enjoyed our life at sea and our work, there was a variety there, and seeing new places, nevertheless for almost everyone on the ship had been away from home for eighteen months and we were therefore very much looking forward to getting back.

> Well, it was Fremantle, then a rough crossing, I think, over the Bight to Melbourne, where I think you had Christmas on Australian shores.

Yes, we had Christmas aboard in Melbourne. Of course the Melbourne natives got home leave, everyone else was aboard, and that was our Christmas home in Melbourne.

> On arrival in Sydney there was apparently something of a vexed issue over your leave that, I think you were suggesting, forced Lieutenant Lever from the ship.

(15.00) Yes, our stay in Melbourne was only short and everyone was looking forward to a spell - we didn't know what it would be, one week, two weeks - home and there was no sign of it happening. We went up to Sydney and Lieutenant Lever, our commanding officer, was aware that everyone was looking forward to leave and nothing was happening. And there was a concern amongst the crew in morale so he went ashore and went to battle for us. And apparently didn't get much of a sympathetic hearing but spoke quite forcefully about our situation and the need to the extent that he was immediately moved from the ship and made port officer at Madang in New Guinea where he saw out the rest of the war - in a backwater.

> How did you come to know of those conversations, and exactly what he was saying on your behalf?

I can't answer that. I don't know where that information came from, but there's no apparent reason why a commanding officer of an efficient ship with a good record should be taken off at instant notice and put ashore where he couldn't contribute at all. There might have been a lot of supposition there but he certainly came back without any knowledge of any advice about leave but it happened when his successor took over within the week, or something, Lieutenant Thomson. We got a week's leave and ...

> That changeover from a commanding officer who'd obviously been popular and had done this last thing for you, in a sense, must have been quite a difficult changeover for the new commanding officer.

Yes, it was difficult for him and I think it was difficult for the crew. We were probably overly critical of Lieutenant Thomson because we'd had a very good seaman as commanding officer, so we looked at him longer and harder than we probably should have. I don't think

that we were probably too friendly towards him. And he wasn't a personality that could encourage friendships between ranks without affecting discipline, which Lieutenant Lever could.

> Did that stay throughout his time as commanding officer, or did things improve?

Yes, they came to improve. I think that he didn't ever do anything that was bad and didn't do anything that was beyond the ordinary, but seemed to fulfil his duties fairly reasonably. And of course for a commanding officer, or for the crew, efficiency of both parties depend on working together.

> Sure. After he joined the ship, the 21st Mine Sweeping Flotilla was formed and I think you sailed in March for Manus in the Admiralties. There was a journey up to Leyte Gulf later in March. How did that general work that you were doing in that period in the Pacific region differ from what you'd already been doing?

We were part of the 21st Mine Sweeping Flotilla, although we did little mine sweeping, but we became part of the escort of the British Pacific Fleet train, moving up into that area. It was interesting to be working with dozens of other ships where we normally had worked with one or two other escorts at a time. You might have read in the history that we referred to the ship with real fond terms as the 'Old Offal Barge'. Well, it was in harbour at Leyte that we were given an assignment one day to go round ship to ship and collect their garbage and take it out to sea, so we felt we earnt that name.

> I hadn't realised that's where it stemmed from.

Well, that's one time that I'm very conscious of it happening where we actually were the garbage man (laughs).

> About that sort of time, or generally - and now you were working perhaps more closely with other bigger ships - was there ever any resentment that corvettes were seen to be the dogs' bodies of the fleet, that could do the jobs other people didn't want to do?

No, I think we took a bit of pride in our ability to do anything thrown at us. Not to say that we'd always enjoy the doing, or enjoy what was given us, but we accepted the challenge to do whatever was asked of us, and to do it well.

> Well, after that - it was really only a fairly short time up there - you then came southwards to Australia again and there was the escort to New Zealand. Are there any particular recollections of that period?

For me personally there were because the day that we steamed out of harbour for New Zealand, escorting a Royal Navy submarine, there was a very big sea on, and before we got through the boom - within the harbour, around Watsons Bay - the ship was starting to move up and down with the swell. And as we fell out from hands for stations for leaving harbour I was called for and informed that as we were headed for a re-fit they sent one of our cooks on leave to Hobart to rejoin the ship in the west, in Fremantle where we were headed for

eventually, and that in his place I would be a cook. And so it was. I wasn't much of a cook but I did my best, but I always recall that my supreme effort was cooking two fried eggs for ninety-six men for breakfast one morning all on my own.

(20.00) (Laughs) That must have been quite a feat. And did the seas moderate, or were you working heaving galley?

No, it was very rough passage and I think we probably bore it with less complaint than usual because the submarine travelled on the surface and it had a really bad time.

I'd imagine working in a galley with obviously hot implements, if not hot water around, must be quite tricky in rough sea conditions.

Yes, well, a lot of the cooking's done on a very large cast iron stove which had steel rails and divisional pieces to hold pots and pans from sliding.

Coming back to Australia. Lieutenant Sutherland took over as commanding officer in August and you then went over to Fremantle for the re-fit. Any particular recollections of that changeover in command or the re-fit of the ship?

No, it was a time of change because we arrived in Fremantle one day before VJ Day, so the war ended the day after we arrived. Most of the crew went east for leave, a skeleton crew stayed aboard. I'd had my leave, I was part of the skeleton crew. But with the sudden ending of the war, a lot of the crew members were given the opportunity, if they wished, to take instant demobilisation. Many of them did. They stayed over in the east so we started to take on quite a few new crew and that was really a time of change in the ship. There's a handful of old hands and a lot of new young men.

I think also the actual total size of the complement fell somewhat.

It did. We didn't need ASDIC operators unless you were getting involved in mine sweeping. The need for radar was less. The need for twenty-four hours radio contact was less, and so forth and so on.

Did that make living conditions on the ship significantly easier, or not?

We had more space and the problem of places to sling hammocks disappeared.

I'd imagine by this stage, from being the young boy joining the ship, you were something of an old hand.

Yes, I was an old salt at this stage, and could tell all sorts of stories about past experiences to the new young guys.

Well, I don't think in the past, at least, you'd been involved in towing barges but that was really your first task.

Yes, that's right.

What do you remember of that fairly difficult towing operation?

The first thing was that it took three weeks at very slow speed and was very uninteresting, but there were difficulties with the tow. I think the tow line broke at one stage. A different exercise for us was that several occasions the whaler was loaded and rowed over to one of the barges to check the bridle and the towing line, et cetera, so rowing the whaler at sea was a new experience. But that whole period from then on to the decommissioning of the ship, a lot of new seamanship tasks were undertaken which made it interesting and challenging.

Yes, that's interesting. The period of basically the end of October through December and, I think, into early January you largely were toing and froing from Darwin to different islands in the region of Timor. That's correct, I think?

Yes.

It's impossible, I think, to try to cover them individually, there were obviously so many short journeys, but speaking generally what do you remember of that period? What were the highlights? What were the lowlights?

Generally speaking our tasks were to collect Japanese from different islands and move them to central gathering points, as it were, preparatory to their journey home and/or interrogation. That was one thing. The other job we had to do was to take officials of the Netherlands East Indies civilian government back into Indonesia to take up the reins of administration. And on some islands we visited on that task we were welcomed and flags and bunting were flying, and others there was really a sullen silent attitude towards us, bringing back people who weren't apparently very welcome.

Was it possible to differentiate, or to work out why the mood was quite different on different islands, or not?

One factor I think was that islands that had a substantial part of the population who were of the Christian religion, they seemed to have a more friendly attitude, but it wasn't that alone. I think it was a matter of degree of political activity during the Japanese occupation. On some islands some locals were politically active and getting ready for after the war and others weren't.

(25.00) Another vexed issue, I think, was the treatment of Japanese prisoners of war, or at least their transport. For yourself and perhaps for the men who you knew well, Harold, how did that affect you? Were there difficulties, or not?

There weren't really difficulties except with our own feelings. We were gradually hearing through the news reports, news of the Japanese atrocities against Australian servicemen, which made us very angry and annoyed, but on the other hand we didn't feel that we should respond physically towards the captors we were moving. We didn't know what they'd done. Their presence was unsettling to us because we had very mixed emotions about being so close to them.

Were there any instances you knew of where individuals took it out on the Japanese, or not?

Only to the extent that some of the guys would take their watches and say, well, we're only taking it back, they probably got it from an Australian anyway. That was excused in that way, but that was as far as it went.

> I think you were also saying that in terms of your own activities on some of the islands that by and large you stayed on the ship, but I think there were a couple of occasions when you did go ashore and get around a little bit.

Yes, the place in particular we had the best opportunity to do that was on the island of Flores where we came into anchor at the township of Ende on the south coast, and this was a place where we were welcomed. We went ashore, we had a game of soccer against some locals and a few of us commandeered a car and drove up into the mountains and found ourselves at a Catholic mission station, convent and church, and were entertained to morning tea by the nuns there, who were Europeans and had been in the country for twenty, thirty and more years. And it was interesting how ready they were to welcome us with their very short supply biscuits and sugar, et cetera, and we'd gone into the mountains there loaded up with soap to barter for all sorts of good things with commercial aspects in our thoughts. So we were so touched by the hospitality of these particular nuns that we gave them the soap as a gift, and they were grateful for it.

> The sort of archetypal soft-hearted sailors.

Yes.

> Did they tell you, incidentally, anything of what they'd lived through, or not?

No, they didn't say anything more than life had been difficult because - more because of the shortage of food than anything else.

> I know there were some occasional sporting contacts. And I think there was one lovely anecdote of a boxing match in which you yourself were involved.

Yes, Lieutenant Sutherland looking for some opportunities to give us some recreation arranged for us to go ashore in Kupang. This particular day we were anchored in the harbour there and some boxing matches were arranged between likely, fairly well matched couples, but to add some humour to the situation a very tall ferocious-looking seaman, ASDIC ranger, by the name of Jim White - had a huge black beard and terribly loud, growly voice - took the part of the jungle man and I was the simple short boxer. And he came roaring out of the jungle shouting aloud and making a terrible noise like a wild man from Borneo, as it were, and into the ring and we fought. And I'm busy pummelling his stomach to no effect whilst he's hammering my head and hammering me into the ground, as it were. It was a light-hearted moment which was a bit of fun and recreation for the fellows.

> All to keep a ship's crew happy.

Yes, it was.

Just finally, of this period working in the islands north of Darwin, did you feel, yourself, a satisfaction in what you were doing, or was there a feeling that - not that it didn't have to be done but - you wished then to be elsewhere?

No, we didn't really have information sufficient to make a judgment about whether or not we should be taking the Netherlands East Indies government back in. Not enough had been said, not enough was known generally about the attitude of the Indonesian people so I think I'd have to say we were probably a bit surprised when we went to a place where we did get this frosty reception.

Actually, I had meant that, Harold, not so much in a political sense, but more that with the war over, was there just a feeling of wanting to be out of it and back home, or were you pleased to be still involved?

No, we were pleased to be still involved because we were still seeing new places and steaming around those Indonesian islands was very pleasant in circumstances where we didn't have all sorts of night watches and lookouts and things. It was on a different scale, your work, and the places were interesting to see. And as I say, we were seeing many new places.

Yes, well, they are beautiful islands, I think.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Identification: Ed Stokes, Corvettes, Harold Murphy, tape two, side two.

Harold, after you left Darwin you did have this tow of a motor launch to Thursday Island and then you picked up there the *Anaconda*, a wooden vessel to take down to Newcastle. Do you have any particularly significant memories of that period?

No, not really. I think we stopped at Townsville on the way and it was long and slow, but less interesting, I guess, because we weren't any longer looking at the horizon for new lands to see.

Well, after Newcastle there was, I know, the visit to Byron Bay that was cut short by bad weather, but you yourself went down to Lismore. How much did that visit to the *Lismore*'s home town, how much did it touch you and the other men, or was it just a bit of perfunctory flag waving?

Well, it was a bit of a holiday thing for us. It was pleasant, the idea of going to the town after which the ship was named, with which we'd really had no contact over the years, but knowing that we would be welcomed and feted, I guess. It was just a pleasant experience to look forward to.

And in Brisbane, I know, just some final work involved the demolition of a ship that had been sunk in Moreton Bay, I think. Were you involved in that or had you left the ship by then?

I'd left the ship by then.

Well, this obviously was part of the general demobilisation. Were you pleased that yours came then, or would you have been happy to have stayed longer?

I was happy to be demobilised because the reason for our being really had changed. There was no longer a war, there was no longer a real job to be done and we were dispersing. The crew was changing all the time, so I was quite happy to go.

You were in an unusual position, I'd imagine, compared to many other men in that you'd only served on the one ship through the war. How strong were your feelings to the *Lismore* when you left? How much was there a real breaking of feelings when you left?

It wasn't difficult for me because the crew had changed so much, you see. Once we'd finished our re-fit in Fremantle we'd had a largely new crew, and whilst I'd certainly got on well with them all, and I now had the status of being a very long serving member of the ship, that had some pleasure in it, but the ship had changed so much in terms of crew. So many of my friends had gone and left the navy that it wasn't difficult to leave it.

Looking back on the whole period of your war experience, what stood out most when you left, and what stands out most now in retrospect?

I went into the navy because I wanted to, with some difficulty getting my mother to agree to sign the papers, instead of the alternative was to have continued to study. Whilst I had left school but I still had the opportunity to study if I wanted to. My mother was keen for me to go on to Leaving Certificate to finish my education but I chose not to. But by the end of the war, coming out of the navy, I was firmly of the opinion and have been ever since that I had much better education for life through those years I spent in the navy. In particular, the thing I learnt was that you can have very best friend relationships with people with whom you have nothing in common in terms of religion or politics or all sorts of things.

That's a most interesting point. I think the travel had rather touched you.

Yes. Ever since and until today I still maintain an interest in travelling to new places and revisiting old places. I do like travel.

(5.00) In a more general sense perhaps, had there been any other gains and losses through your time in the navy for you yourself?

In terms of achieving more in a commercial career, I would have done better had I finished my education - that became a restriction to some extent. But it hasn't concerned me, it's just a fact of life. I still was happy to have had the education I've had in the navy rather than the academic.

Just a final question I put to anybody. Is there anything you feel you'd like to add to this record that isn't on already?

I'd only like to comment that I'm pleased to see this activity taking place because I believe that the corvettes in total were a very significant part of our war effort in that particular war and in the development of our navy and of our nation.

Well, for that and the other thoughts on the tape, Harold, thanks very much.

I'm pleased to help.

END OF INTERVIEW