



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	James (Jim) Paizis as a sub-lieutenant, HMAS Colac, interviewed by Harry Martin for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-1945.

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: this is one of the Australian Heritage Projects items about the corvettes. It's an interview with Jim Paizis recorded on 18th March 1991.

Jim Paizis, where and when were you born?

I was born in Melbourne on September 20th, 1924.

Tell us a bit about your family, what sort of things your mother and father did and what kind of people they were?

Well my father migrated from Greece in 1902 and settled originally in Perth and originally had a little café in Perth and after the first world war he moved to Melbourne and was one of the early fruit barrow men in Bourke Street. He had a fruit barrow on the corner of Bourke and Russell Streets for about forty years, until his retirement.

How do you remember him? What sort of character was he? Was he a warm man or strict or formidable?

Well he was a very quiet man, kept to himself a lot. I'm afraid I never got to know him so much. All the job of bringing up was left to Mum. Dad was the worker, he used to work very long hours getting up very early to go to the markets and getting home late at night from his work. He was a very quiet man. Didn't speak very much about his earlier life and I'm afraid, as children, I didn't enquire much and I'm very sorry now that I didn't because I don't know very much about what his earlier life in Australia was like.

What about your mother? Was she Australian or Greek?

Well my mother, she was Greek too. She migrated from the same island of Ithaca in about 1920 and there was quite a big age difference, about twenty years age difference. It was one of those typical European arranged marriages. Mum didn't actually know my father; only from conversations and photographs and she was migrated here to marry him, and it was a happy marriage. They survived it all and brought up four children.

Well, where did you come in that group of four?

I was the oldest. I was born in 1924 and I was the eldest.

Well if your mother was left as it were to bring up the children, with your father working such long hours, did that mean she was fairly strict? Would she beat you if you were naughty and so on?

Oh yes, we used to get the occasional clip over the ear. Yes, yes she was strict and she's still alive as a matter of fact. It was her eighty-ninth birthday just last Friday.

Was it a religious household?

Mum used to take us along to the Greek Orthodox Church. My father wasn't so strict, but my mother observes the religion well. As a matter of fact she still walks up from Carlton up to the Greek Orthodox Church in East Melbourne.

Was it a political household? Was it one where you discussed the social and political issues of the time?

No, not really. No, we weren't political at all.

So what sort of childhood did you have? Were they difficult times?

Well, like most children of ethnic parents I was a little Greek kid. When I went to school originally I could barely speak English and I suppose that's typical of the times where people seemed to keep to themselves more than they do now. Mum particularly seemed to have a fear of us mixing with other people because of lack of understanding, thinking that the Australians were going to do something terrible to us because we were foreign.

Were there terrible experiences at all?

No, I can't recall any terrible experiences. Mum just had those fears. I remember more or less struggling as a kid in the early grades, having to acquire English which seems strange to somebody who was born here. But of course Greek was just spoken in the household and consequently I can speak the language, not like a professor but I can get by with it - we all can.

In the immediate postwar period, that is the post second world war, when the great migrant wave - contemporary migrant wave began - there was quite a lot of hostility towards migrants who often had quite bad experiences and children at school could have a bad time, you preceded that. So what was your experience in terms of your relationship with other kids and so on?

I can never recall ever having any difficulty with any kids or ever being ridiculed or criticised for being Greek.

(5.00) What about the ANZAC tradition which was a very strong one in Australia between the wars? Did you become conscious of that as a child and what did it mean to you?

Oh, we were always aware. I think children of our era were made more aware of it than kids are today. We used to always have the celebrations at the schools and I remember the marches were always a big thrill for me because we lived in Drummond Street in Carlton which was quite near the city and it was easy for us to go down to town and see the marches and I was always very impressed with all the activity and the military.

Did you feel part of it? Did you feel, you know, that this was part of you?

Yes, well I felt more Australian than Greek really, particularly as I grew up. I've never sort of had a lot to do in Greek circles.

Where did you go to school then?

Started off down at Rathdowne Street State School in Carlton and then to North Fitzroy Central School and then to University High School.

What were your aspirations at that age when you were going to high school?

Well I didn't have any. I wasn't a brilliant student by any means. I left at, what today would be year eleven to go to work and that was - the war had started in '39. I left school in the end of 1940 and I just went to work as a clerk at the YMCA and I had no great aspirations about academics. I wasn't a brilliant student by any means.

It wasn't expected you'd follow your father and join him at work?

No, well, he .... I showed interest in that but he wanted me to be something a bit of a higher order he thought than himself. Although I think he had a reasonable living as a fruiterer but he didn't want me to be on the fruit barrow or a fruit shop. He particularly wanted me to have something, well higher, in his view.

So when war started, what were your feelings about that at the time?

Well, I would have been - '39, I would have been, what fifteen, at the time. It was a time of excitement for kids at that age and I think we all had the [inaudible] to do our country and we were all anxious to grow up and be old enough to be a part of it.

Was there almost a fear the war would end before you'd get your chance?

I suppose you could say that, yes. I remember all my mates that were involved. We used to watch the progress of the war and count the days when we would turn eighteen and be able to become a part of it.

What did your parents think of that?

Oh well, they weren't all that too keen. I had to do a lot of talking to let them agree to me signing up for the navy. I signed up before I turned eighteen and then I was called up just after my eighteenth birthday. I convinced them I think that it was either that or I'd - if I didn't volunteer for something I'd be called up into the army anyway and I preferred the navy.

So what was the actual process? How did you go about it?

Just talking to my Mum I think. I think Mum ...

But I mean the process of joining up? What was involved?

Oh, I beg your pardon. I went down to the recruiting office which was in the Olderfleet Building in Collins Street, which is now part of the Rialto complex, and just signed up there. I can remember seeing an advertisement in the paper just before I signed up where they were advertising for people who wanted to become officers in the navy. And of course that appealed to me greatly, you know, seeing that beautiful gold badge and I went down to this petty officer who was in the recruiting office and this brash kid, not quite eighteen, saying, 'How do you become an officer in the navy?', and he thought that was a great joke, you know, he almost resented the question - who's this young fellow thinking he's going to be an officer. But at any rate, a couple of months later the call up came and I found myself at Flinders Naval Depot.

Did you go through a medical and that sort of routine?

Yes, yes, there was the usual pre-service medical. I don't think they were very strict. I mean they were looking for people, so there was almost like an insurance company inspection, you know, just your pulse, blood pressure and stuff like that.

So at the point where you actually joined up, what happened to you? Where did you go for training and so on?

Oh, we started off, it was September 23rd 1942. We went to Flinders Naval Depot and we did the original recruit training course there. And while we were there they interviewed anybody that might have be interested in going to the officer's training school. It was at the time, quite apart from the permanent navy people, they were looking for reserve officers because there was a need and there weren't enough permanents about. So they interviewed several of the people who enquired and the interview board made a choice who they thought would possibly succeed in an officer training course.

(10.00) And much to my surprise, after I finished my recruit training, I was one of the ones selected and we went across to the officers' training school in Flinders Naval Depot and

at that point you took off your black cap band and put on a white cap band with HMAS *Cerberus* on it and that identified you as an officer cadet. And you weren't allowed, from that moment on, to go in and associate anymore with the fellows that you trained with over in the Depot.

Did that create some sort of antagonism amongst the rank and file?

It did really. I found that, personally, difficult and I found it difficult throughout my service in the navy - trying to behave the way the navy wanted me to behave and that it is to be a little off-hand and above the remainder because on occasions on various ships that I served in, you'd meet people who you served with as a rating and I got into strife on several occasions by those above me for not being ...

... aloof?

... aloof, fraternising too much. I had fellows calling me by my Christian name which was frowned on but I didn't mind it, but it was the way it was in the navy.

Well when you say you got into strife. What strife? What was done or said?

Well being spoken to by the commanding officer for being too friendly, too familiar.

Would it be seen as a detrimental note? I mean, would it be in your record that he was an officer who was disinclined to respect the nature of authority, in a sense?

Oh, I think on one occasion I was reported.

It's alright.

Will this get edited? Do you want me to ...?

No, no, no, I mean, all this important for the record to understand how ...

There was an occasion when I tried to defend a rating who was getting into trouble and I had quite a serious argument with the commanding officer of the *Colac* and that had a detrimental effect, I think, later in the war because - after the war I should say. I wanted to remain as a member of the Reserve and I did apply and I got a rejection. I didn't follow it up. People say I should've followed it up and I think the reason was that I've got a bad report because of this incident.

Did it sting, did that hurt?

Oh yes, I've never forgotten it and I've always regretted it. Because other colleagues have remained and they used to go on training courses and trips on vessels because I really loved the navy, and it did, I regretted it ever since.

Has it affected your relationship, say with the Returned Service League? Have you ...?

Oh no, no trouble there. The thing that really annoyed me about it, after I left the *Colac* I went to a bigger ship called the *Lachlan* - it was a frigate and it was a permanent navy commander in charge there, and after the war had finished, they were looking for people to stay on in what they called the 'interim navy' until they got things organised and people discharged, and he wanted me to stay on. The contrast of a lieutenant and the commander of the *Colac* disappointed in my behaviour and later on I had a permanent navy commander who was trying to press me to stay on in the service. I didn't follow it up. Maybe that would have helped if I had've followed it up.

Going back to the point where before you joined the officer cadet course, where did you do your training? Where were you living and so on?

Oh well we all lived in at Flinders Naval Depot.

What was it like?

Well life there was very interesting, it was all exciting and new of course. We'd had about three months there and we lived in barracks. We slept in hammocks which were slung on hammock rails. That was all very strict and behaviour was controlled by the petty officers mainly who were quite senior men - a lot of them ex-Royal Navy men who'd transferred here to Australia and they were tough boys and we wouldn't crack a 'boo'. If they said, 'Jump', we'd say, 'How high?' and leap into the air, you know.

How did that toughness express itself?

By the petty officers? Oh, they were very strict in their teaching. They were never rude. I often see movies on TV where instructors are abusive and use bad language to recruits, but in the navy I can never remember an instructor being rude or oppressive. They were almost like - almost fatherly in their approach because most of us were all eighteen - seventeen, eighteen - and they were older men.

How were you addressed?

(15.00) By our surname mainly.

Was the fact of your Greek background a matter that caused any interest?

No, it didn't. I've never ever worried or oppressed by that at all, no.

So then when you became part of the officer training course, where did you live and what was the difference in the nature of the conditions and so on?

That was a very strict course. At the time it was - they used to call it the 'eight week wonder'. It was just eight weeks and we were kept in the school which was part of Flinders Naval Depot and the course ran non-stop for eight weeks with no leave and we went from six in the morning till about ten at night doing different parts of the course.

What did it cover?

Well, it gave you a broad understanding of navigation, gunnery, watch-keeping. Can I explain what I mean by watch-keeping? Up on the bridge of a ship there's always an officer in command and there was training in station-keeping in convoys, a basic knowledge of engineering, torpedo, signals. You can imagine in eight weeks you didn't learn a lot about most things. It was later on that I went back to Flinders again and did a more detailed gunnery course when I become a gunnery officer later on.

Was it just instruction or was there discussion? Could you ask questions? Could you challenge your test, the purpose of things?

Oh, I couldn't say that you could challenge anything because everything was pretty well set and stereotyped. You was more or less just taught, this is how it's done, and this is how you'll do it. It was extremely strict. You had to carry yourself in an officer-like manner if you like. I can remember ....

How was that conveyed to you? What was an officer-like manner?

Well, even the way you walked around the place. The instructors were always watching and if anybody was seen not to be appropriate they were just removed from the course. I can give you an example later of what happened to two of the fellows. But for instance, even when you were in an off-duty period, you couldn't be caught leaning against a wall. You had to carry yourself in an erect manner, even the way you stood was noted, leaning and slouching was frowned upon.

What about off-duty? Well, your course, during the training you said you didn't really have any off-duty?

No, we didn't have any off-duty time. We used to have our lounge rooms and our mess rooms. If anybody, an officer or one of the petty officers walked in, you had to leap to attention and stand at your feet until he excused you. I'll give you an example of the type of discipline that was involved there. I mentioned before about wearing the white cap band. Two of the fellows wanted to go back into the main depot to see their old mates. So they wouldn't be conspicuous, they removed their white cap band and put their black cap band back on again and they were seen by one of the instructors. The next morning they just disappeared from course, we never saw them again, they were just dismissed and sent back to the depot - couldn't be trusted, so they weren't allowed to proceed with the course.

Was the theory of that approach to command ever discussed or explained?

We were told - they tried to impress on us that we had to forget that we were sailors, that you are now going to be - if you passed you were going to be an officer and as such you had to carry yourself in an officer-like manner and be aloof from the men. You live on a ship and it would be easy to - particularly on a small ship - to become too familiar and the belief was that in that way you wouldn't be able to exercise authority if you were too familiar with your ship's company.

With the advantage of hindsight, what do you think of that approach? Do you think that it was a - well obviously it worked but was it necessarily the way?

Well I think it was. I don't think I applied it as well as I should have, but I think it was the right way really.

Well apart from being aloof, were you also being encouraged to see yourself as an elite group? Did you feel special?

I think you did. For instance, on the ships even the way you ate and the way you slept, your quarters were different. The ship's company slept in hammocks up in the fo'c'sle. They don't do that these days. Everybody has bunks in the navy these days, but we had the wardroom and our quarters in the stern of the ship and I had a bunk - a double-decker bunk, a nice cabin with a little wardrobe in it and a desk.

Well, what about at training school? What was the difference in conditions in terms of food and ...?

No, there was - I can't recall any difference at Flinders. We still used hammocks in the officers' training school and we still ate in the mess and the food was much the same as it was in the Depot. There was no - it wasn't until you became an officer and moved into the wardroom, then you had the stewards waiting on you which was, to most of us, very strange because none of us had silver spoons in our mouths when we got there and to be a Greek kid - well I suppose I could call myself a Greek kid from Carlton - suddenly finding yourself sitting in the wardroom at Flinders Naval Depot with a white tablecloth and silver on the table and

stewards waiting on you, who in some cases were older than you, was - felt uncomfortable to me, you know.

(20.00) What about your fellow trainee officers? Were you a bit unusual in the sense of your background in that social sense?

We were a mixed bag I would say. I had another fellow who became a friend, who was in my same class at high school, he was of the same educational level and same background as me, but there were others who'd been to university, who'd done higher courses, who maybe came from better-off homes.

Did you feel a bit self-conscious, or inferior in any way?

No, I don't think I felt that, no.

Given your keenness to become an officer, was there a sense of pride in then being in uniform? Can you remember going home in your uniform and ...?

Oh yes, extremely proud, yes. And my parents were too. Our other relatives in the Greek community to have an officer in the navy in the family, they thought that was really something great, yeah.

So at the end of your training course, where to?

Well I did a short course. I was a midshipman as soon as we finished there. I went to Sydney to HMAS *Rushcutter,* which is the depot at Rushcutters Bay, and they were doing training courses there for Fairmiles. Do you know what a Fairmile is?

Well you can explain.

There were a number of Fairmiles in the navy. They were of a British design. It was virtually the forerunner of today's patrol boat, not quite as fast, or an anti-submarine vessel, and some of us did training there. I did that course.

Had you been to sea before this at all?

No, never, no.

Were you worried that you might be one of those people who suffered terribly from seasickness?

I did. I think most of us did, you know, I did. But when we finished this training course, there were more of us than were needed for the Fairmile so I wasn't sent to Fairmiles. I was sent instead to the *Glenelg*, which was the first corvette, as a midshipman. I can recall joining the ship one evening in Sydney as an - what they called an additional officer for training. Most corvettes carried one above their normal complement. There was no accommodation for me so I just slept on a couch in the wardroom was my sleeping quarters. But when I arrived on the ship, they just come in from a convoy out at sea and all the other officers were keen to get ashore in Sydney and they said, 'You're on duty tonight'. So there I was hardly knowing which was the sharp end or the blunt end, as we used to say, and I was left in command of this ship for the night. Not that there was anything to do but very raw and very fresh, I'd never been aboard a corvette before.

It didn't go out though?

No, it was in harbour. No, no, I didn't have any duties apart from just being trained.

How did the ship look to you? What were your immediate impressions of it?

Well that was all very impressive, although they weren't very big. They were only about 180 feet long. They had a crew of about eighty. It was all very impressive to have a big 4-inch gun up at the front and 20mm on the wings of the bridge and the stern and depth charges and all that equipment. And you mentioned before the smells. There was always an oily sort of a smell about a ship, with the oil burning boilers and the fumes coming out of the stack.

With that very first night, where you're theoretically in command, did you sort of entertain the thought, what happens if there was a surprise attack ...?

Well just being in Sydney Harbour there was no worry about that really.

How long before you went to sea then, with them?

Oh it was only a few days. It was just in there just for refuelling and off we went to sea. And in those days we were mainly doing convoy work up and down the coast. The war was in the southern part of the Pacific then and all the operations were down south and the *Glenelg* was involved mainly in convoy work up as far as, at that stage, the Admiralty Islands which are just north of New Guinea.

Did you get seasick?

Yeah I did in the early stages, yes.

Did that worry you? Did you feel that somehow you were failing as a sailor?

Oh no, because there were plenty of others because they used to move around a lot those corvettes. It didn't take long to get accustomed to the movement though, and you lost it after a while.

Were you ever debilitated? Did you ever reach a stage where you just couldn't go on?

No, I was never that bad, no.

Did you have colleagues, or know people, who were just so devastated by it they just couldn't cope?

(25.00) No, I can't recall anybody that was that bad.

What was the feeling then as a novice going aboard this ship? Was there a sense of being tried out? Were you, sort of, kept apart a bit or were people welcoming and friendly immediately?

I didn't find any trouble with relationships with people. No, they were all welcoming.

Was there also then a pecking order in social terms based strictly upon your rank? That is ...

Oh yes. Being a raw midshipman. I mean, of course the nickname for a midshipman is the 'snotty'. Did you know that, the word 'snotty'?

Do you know its origins?

I don't know whether it means you're just a young runny-nosed kid I guess, that's a Royal Navy thing and it just carried through to here, yeah.

Was there at all the sense that older, able seamen who'd been around a bit would sort of recognise a snotty as you termed them and try them on a bit?

Oh yes, all the time, yes. A lot of the more senior fellows who were in the navy even before the war started, there might have been ten, twenty years service, you had to be very tactful say in handling a petty officer who more or less ran the ship in a sense. As far as the ship's company was concerned, he was the foreman if you like and without those senior petty officers there wouldn't have been a navy. Because we weren't of much value as a young midshipman just eight weeks out of Flinders, wasn't of much value as far as the day to day running of a ship is concerned. You were there to learn and they had all the knowledge.

Did you ever have other young officers or trainee officers who were unnerved by maybe able bodied seamen deliberately frustrating them or just pushing them as far as they could?

Yes, there was another - there were other sub-lieutenants who were not much older than us often saying that you got to watch that guy - he's a bit of a 'sea lawyer' was the expression they used. There were sailors on the ships who probably resented having a younger fellow giving them orders, and I found that a bit difficult. Trying to use tact and diplomacy, getting things done rather than waving your rank about and hoping that will be the only thing that sort of opened all doors to you, if you just waved your little red midshipman's patch or your single sub-lieutenant's stripe as if that was going to do magic.

I suppose if you turned to a superior officer for backup, there'd be a sense that you were sort of failing a bit anyway?

Yeah, well, yes, I guess that was right. I can't remember ever running to people though, saying 'Help me, help me'. I'd rather do it all myself and hopefully, reasonably well.

Did you ever have any bad experiences of that sort in terms of trying to maintain the authority that was required of you?

Yes, I can recall occasions when somebody might have committed an offence that required being taken before the CO on a disciplinary charge. People showing resentment because - particularly because somebody that you knew previously as a sailor. There were occasions when I had experiences of people who I trained with at the Flinders Naval Depot and I used to, probably incorrectly, take them aside and more or less ask for their cooperation rather than giving a direct order.

How did they tend to respond to that?

They responded quite well really. In the navy's eyes that was probably a wrong thing to do. In the navy's eyes, you just should - if the guy does a wrong thing you go through the processes of discipline, not going ....

[Inaudible]

Not trying to extract support almost begging, in a sense as an officer [inaudible] what a distasteful thing to do to go and ask a man for his cooperation, when you should just tell him.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

Identification: this is side two of tape one of the interview with Jim Paizis about the corvette - the *Colac* recorded on 18th March, '91.

Conversely, did you get some officers who just went overboard in terms of their sense of authority?

Oh yes, there were plenty of those. There were plenty of those. I image they would have been authoritative people in their normal way of life, whether they were in the navy or not.

Did it work though or did it act to the detriment of the smooth running of the ship?

Oh no, it worked I think because I think we were all subject to discipline and if disobedience of orders resulted in punishment of some sort, even to being sent to the cells. Although we didn't have cells on the ship, but we had occasions where fellows were sent to army prisons in New Guinea because the navy didn't have a prison system for disobedience.

What sort of offences would require that?

Oh, can I tell you the story that resulted in my altercation with the commanding officer of the ship? This occasion, on the *Colac* we were doing an anti-submarine patrol off an entrance to a harbour off Hollandia in Dutch New Guinea, which is now Kota Baru, I think it's part of Indonesia. They always had a ship outside the harbour because the harbour was filled with all sorts of shipping, and at the time I was on the bridge. Traditionally the gunnery officer had the watch from midnight to four, the middle watch, and the afternoon watch, from midday to four in the afternoon. I was on the bridge in the middle of the afternoon and the commanding officer, who was what they called a sea-going lieutenant, they were ex-merchant navy officers who transferred to the navy. He was a lieutenant, he was the 'old man' although he would have been only about twenty-eight at the time. We were patrolling and the officer of the watch had control of the ship and we were doing just an independent zigzag off this harbour and up on the masthead in the crow's nest was a young sailor - and do you want names?

Not necessarily but ...

... and young McCrystal was up there and on a certain leg of the zigzag the wind would blow the fumes from the funnel through into the crow's nest, with the wind coming right from the stern, and they were pretty pungent, uncomfortable fumes and always when that happened the guy would ring down and permission to come down from the crow's nest and he'd stand on the roof of the bridge. He was one of the main lookouts. In any case it happened that the fumes were blowing through and he phoned down and the CO was on bridge and I was about to give him the okay to come down and he said to me - the CO said to me, 'He stays up there, he's just malingering'. So what to do. I would see the fumes blowing through the funnel, see the fumes, so a few minutes later I ordered an alteration of course which was - we were doing

this all the time - I altered course. I did it deliberately and I did it earlier than I would have done. I did it to get the fumes out from the crow's nest.

Well, would that subtle alteration in the routine be noticed by other people on the bridge? Would they be aware that you were doing, you know, just changing the tack a little?

They may have been, yes. Certainly Ken Hopper did and he turned to me and he said, 'You did that deliberately, Paizis. See me in my cabin after you come off watch.' Any rate, down I went and he tore strips off me, that I embarrassed him in front of the ship's company, I did it deliberately. I argued back and that was it. The following day ....

(5.00) Was there - obviously it sounds like he saw it as some sort of reprisal against him.

Yes.

Was there at all an element of that in it?

I was only thinking of the guy on the crow's nest - up in the crow's nest. Probably there was an element of reprisal, 'cause it was a way out. He took it as that anyway. To follow on from that. The next day the same thing happened and it was in the morning watch and the first lieutenant who incidentally I'm still in touch with and he lives down in Highett - he was on the bridge and when McCrystal phoned down again to come down out of the crow's nest and ...

Would he have noticed do you think, that you changed tack a bit earlier? Would he have been aware of that?

I think he might have been. He - so the first lieutenant being aware of what happened the previous day, he refused him permission to come down. With that McCrystal come down anyway - direct disobedience of an order. He ended up having a week in an army prison on the mainland.

What sort of reputation did those prisons have? What was known about what it was like?

Well, they were pretty tough I think because the one feature of a military prison it has to be worse than fighting - because everybody would've committed an offence to get into prison for an easier life. But it wasn't - I believe, the guards in prisons made it really tough for them so they'd - being out with the unit in action wasn't as bad as being in prison.

Would 'tough' mean brutal? Were guards believed to be physically brutal?

I didn't hear anything about brutality. But I know McCrystal was glad to get back to the ship. There was a lot of physical activity involved, you know, breaking stones I believe and marching in the sun, stuff like that.

Going back to the *Glenelg*, in that early part where you're in the south, was there a sense of frustration, you wanted to get where the war was?

Well, when you say that, there were many ships sunk around the Australian coast and there were Japanese submarines operating all the way down towards Gabo Island. As a matter of fact, on one occasion we did have a torpedo attack on a convoy, where a torpedo was fired from a distance and it run amuck virtually and it was up on the surface, leapfrogging out of the water. So there was activity.

Did you pick up any evidence of submarines when tracking?

Well we did. We turned - there were three or four corvettes escorting a convoy of about twenty ships at the time and we were on the port quarter of the convoy. I can remember the alarm bells ringing round about midday and as I was running up to the bridge I could see this torpedo just running erratically alongside the ship about a hundred metres away and virtually coming out of the water. And we turned and raced back along the track of the torpedo and dropped all our stock of depth charges, but there was no ... all looking for the inevitable slick of oil and rubbish like you see in the movies but there was - we didn't get anything.

Incidentally, when you went aboard the *Glenelg*, would you be introduced to the captain. Was there a formal process where every incoming officer would meet the captain?

Oh yes, I met him in the cabin. Summerfield was his name. I met him - he was an ex-merchant navy man too. There were a lot of ex-merchant navy officers who transferred.

Was there a process where officers would get to dine with the captain?

No, the captain, he remained generally in his cabin. It happens in all ships. The captain is away up there on his own and he dines alone unless, on a special occasion, he comes down to the wardroom. But no, he never dined with us, he kept aloof.

What about alcohol aboard ships? Was there a ration for officers above what they was there for the able-bodied men or ...?

Well, in the early days, there was no grog for the sailors, although the officers in the wardroom had a wet cupboard. But later on in the war there was a ration of beer issued to the ship's company, but the officers were better set up and they used to have a - they would pay for it out of their own pockets mind you, it wasn't just supplied - but they had a supply in the mess.

Was there ever any problem relating to officers or some who'd maybe took more they ought?

No, I can never recall any ...

Sorry. How long were you in the *Glenelg*?

About - I've some dates written down here. It was a year and - thirteen months in both *Glenelg* and the *Colac*, thirteen months each.

So when was it you joined the *Colac*?

(10.00) *Colac* was in October 1944.

So where was it going at that point?

At that time I picked her up in Milne Bay and we were doing convoy work and army cooperation work from there further north. And the furthest north we got in the *Colac* was up to Morotai and towards the end of the war - and of course the most exciting part for me - we were involved in the landings at Wewak and later on over in the Solomon Islands where the *Colac* was hit by shellfire from a coastal battery. That was the most significant event that I can recall.

Incidentally what led to the transfer? Why did you go to the *Colac*?

Well, you were never told why. Men were moved around. A vacancy would occur on one ship for some reason or another and men were moved. I left the *Glenelg* to go to *Cerberus* to do the gunnery course in July 1944 and I was there for about three months and then I had to be reposted. I tried to get back to the *Glenelg* again but there was no vacancy there and I just got a posting to the *Colac*. You were never told reasons.

Had you moved up in rank?

Yes, I was a sub-lieutenant then and that was by age. When I was nineteen and a half you became an acting sub-lieutenant and at twenty, a confirmed sub-lieutenant.

So as a gunnery officer, what sort of guns and what would your particular role be?

Well you were more or less in control of the - you're responsible for the armament stores - ammunition and armament stores - training and the control of the gunfire in any actions. My station was on the bridge and I was in telephone communication with the gun. We had a 4-inch gun on the fo'c'sle, a 20mm anti-aircraft gun on each wing of the bridge and a Bofors gun on the stern plus several .5s in the ...

How would the process of command work where it was decided that the use of guns was appropriate? Could you, or the officer in charge, make decisions or recommend to the captain or how did it work?

Well the only occasions that we used gunfire was - we didn't have any aircraft attacks but when we were involved in the landings at Wewak, there were bombardments of areas before the army landed and it was a pre-programmed arrangement. It wasn't a sudden retaliation for an attack. We were directed to bombard a certain area and we'd arrive at the area and the captain would say to me, 'Right, away you go, twenty rounds or a hundred rounds', or whatever we fired, designate the target and from then on I'd take over and get ranging from the radar and direct the guns to fire. It was pretty primitive as far as spotting. You had to spot the fall of shot and fire several rounds at different ranges and at different bearings until you got onto the target. There was nothing very scientific about the gunnery from a corvette.

Well if you were participating in a bombardment where a lot of other ships would be firing as well, how on earth would you determine which was your shell and get a sense of ...?

Well that's right, we took it in turns actually. Off Wewak there was two corvettes and the sloop the *Swan* and we took it in turns to fire our lot, you know, whatever was required.

Going aboard the *Colac* for the first time, what were your feelings? Were you a bit apprehensive? Was there a sense of regret not going back to your old ship?

Well there was a little, although it didn't take long to get over that. Thirteen months living with eighty people in the confines of a corvette, I mean, you got to know one another pretty well. But it didn't take long to become acclimatised again.

Was there a different feeling at all? Could you discern a different sense of, if not morale, a different feel the way a ship would be run that reflected the captain's personality?

No, I don't think I did. No they were both of a similar type, ex-merchant navy officers and no, I didn't discern any difference.

Did your increased rank improve your lot? Did you have slightly better living conditions and so on?

Yes I did. I moved from the couch in the wardroom into a bunk in a cabin and I shared a cabin with a lieutenant who was in charge of the sonar - the anti-submarine warfare virtually. He was [inaudible] as I was gunnery.

What was the normal watch routine, or the duty routine - eight on eight off? Was that the ...?

No, we used to run three watches. I had the middle and the midnight to four in the morning and then midday till four in the afternoon and the rest of the time you'd have other duties. I used to maybe do gunnery training or look after the alterations to codes .... One thing I had to do was signals would come about codes being altered and you had to amend codes. I was also divisional officer for seamen and any fellows had any problems would come and talk things over with you.

(15.00) What sort of problems would they come to you with? Maybe personal ones?

Mainly the younger fellas. The older fellas couldn't discuss personal stuff with somebody twenty. Younger fellas would come along, they might have trouble with their girlfriends and just want to talk about it to somebody, you know. Another thing we used to do too was censor mail which I found rather intrusive on people's privacy too. You had to read everybody's letters and with a razor blade, cut things out that might give away any secrets as to just where the ship was operating, what it was doing. Occasionally fellas who wanted to say something very personal, would come along and they'd say, 'Look I'm writing to my girlfriend, I just want to say something to her private, will you stamp the letter?'. And I used to often just stamp it and take their word that they weren't, you know, telling the enemy what terrible things the *Colac* was doing to the Japs.

And during the Cold War and later, the issue of homosexuality in the services became a concern. It was felt that they might perhaps be inveigled into, you know, giving secrets to the Russians or whatever and then again more recently there was the development of a process for the rights of homosexuals and theoretically in the armed forces today, to be a homosexual doesn't mean you'll be singled out and pursued. It seems that in the earlier part - or during the war it was a bit of a non-issue or not spoken about. What was the feeling about homosexuality? Was it a concern? Was it ever discussed or ...?

No, I'd never - I probably hardly even knew what homosexual was. I'd never come across it. It certainly didn't show up at all in any of the ships that I served in. I was never aware of it as a problem.

So nobody ever came to you and said, 'I've got a problem'?.

No, not like that, no.

They would have had a difficult time by the sound of it, if they had.

Yeah. No, I never come across it at all.

With the Wewak landing, what was the leadup to that? How did it ...?

I'd like to tell you about the *Colac*'s bombardment, of the shelling too later. The Wewak landing was interesting. The army - the Australian Army - was stationed in an area further north-west of Wewak and it was decided that the 6th Division would land there.

But how did it come to you as an officer in the ship? You know, was there a general assembly and briefed by the captain about what was to happen? How did it come about?

Well the captain - I can remember telling the captain telling us that we received a signal that we had to go to Aitape, just north-west of Wewak, to take part in the landing which had been planned, and there were several ships involved. The *Swan* was the senior ship, she was a sloop. And I remember the *Dubbo* and the *Colac*, two corvettes, and there was one other and I've forgotten which one it was. And the object was that we were going to transport the soldiers down to Wewak and the landing barges would come along with us, just with their crew and they disembarked from their ships into the landing barges and go ashore, and that's basically how it worked.

We did a few practice landings further up the coast and for about a week before the landing we were sent down into the area and told to bombard certain places where the intelligence indicated there might have been concentrations or ammunition dumps or something like that and we did that and that was pretty interesting because nobody was shooting back at you. You were just laying off the beach and firing rounds into different spots ashore. And just prior to the landing too, we went down during the night and did a sweep with our minesweeping gear off the landing beach. And on the appointed day we left in the early hours of the morning and arrived off the landing beach at daybreak and all the troops dropped into the barges from the ships and went ashore. We had the - General Stevens and his staff used our ship as their headquarters and he was in radio contact with the people ashore and was directing the operation until he too went ashore.

Was there a general sense of excitement?

Yes, there was because it was the first time we'd ever been involved in a thing like that. In addition to our bombardment some of the bigger ships - there were cruisers and destroyers were sent from - I don't know where they came from, they just appeared, and they also bombarded from away out at sea and they fired over our heads onto the beach and we could hear these shells zooming overhead landing on the beach.

During the practice landings, were there any mishaps, did things go wrong at all?

No, they just hopped into the barges and raced ashore in a friendly area. I can't recall any ....

(20.00) Did you have practice bombardments or such?

No, no.

So at the point then, where you were to engage with in the first bombardment where you would be in command, what did you have that you were responsible for?

Well I was told roughly where they wanted these shells and how many rounds they wanted lobbed there. And it was just a matter then of getting ranges and ...

How many guns? What type ...?

Well, mainly the one 4-inch gun we had. The sloops had twin 4-inch. We had - corvettes only had one 4-inch gun on them and it was - they used to call it a 'Woolworths special'. It was a simple sort of a gun with a very low velocity and you had to more or less fire way over in the air to get any range. I can remember, if you were standing behind the gun firing you'd see the black dot of the shell leave the gun and it used to take ages for the thing to reach its target.

Was it a moment of anxiety where you were to be in charge and, you know, worrying that you might get it wrong?

Oh yes, you wanted to hit the target with as few spotting rounds as possible. Often if you weren't too good at the job, I mean, basically when you're firing you had to get in line first so you could fire and the round would be to the left or to the right, so you'd go right eight degrees, left four degrees, right two, left one, until you got into line and then you had to go up and down, up 800, down 400, up 200, to try and straddle the target until you got a hit in the area and then fired. You can fire several rounds rapid at the particular range.

Did you have an experienced gunner on whom you could rely for maybe informed advice or ...?

Well they were pretty good the crew. You were talking to the - my telephone went to the sight setter.

You'd be in the bridge?

On the bridge, yes, with the telephone and the crew. There'd be a layer and a trainer and the breech loader and the ammunition crew and the sight setter. And the telephone went to the sight setter because the two fellows on laying and training through the telescopes, all they did was get the target on the crosshairs. So if the sight setter had the sight set correctly on the target, well they'd get a hit. So he was the only one I spoke to, just to the sight setter.

> So how did you fare? I suppose there'd be a bit of a sense that well you'd want to do at least as well as the other vessels of similar size and perhaps better?

Yeah, we got there and we hit the targets eventually after several spotting rounds. Sometimes more spotting rounds than others but it depended on cross-winds too and if the ship was drifting in currents it would make a difference.

> Was there a bit of pressure in the sense that a captain would be very eager that his ship perform well and you'd be for it if you didn't?

That's right, yeah. Oh yes, you were always conscious he was on the bridge right almost next to you and you had the consciousness of him watching and waiting and how long is this [inaudible] going to take to hit the target, yeah.

> So how did you fare in that [inaudible]?

I think I fared okay. I can never recall any problems there.

> How long did the exercise as far as your part in the bombardment was concerned, continue?

Oh, there were times when you would be going for a quarter of an hour. We did several bombardments and I remember we fired well over 500 rounds over a period off Wewak.

> What about the men on the guns? Were they adequately protected in terms of ear protection and so on?

No, they weren't, none of us were. The turret wasn't enclosed and unlike today with industrial rules about safety and protection, there was no protection. As a matter of fact I've personally got a constant ringing in my ears which I've had for about thirty years now - tinnitus they call it - and that's been there and it's there all the time. I've learnt to live with it, it doesn't worry me unduly, but I get .... In the last year or two I went to Repat. about it after advice from an ear specialist and I get ten dollars a week. A ten percent disability as a result of it.

> Were there some who'd be in an even worse position immediately adjacent to the guns?

Yes, well those that were right in amongst it - they were pretty deafening and you'd have a sort of a numb sensation when it was all over, just like, you know, if a loud double-bunger goes off close to your head, you get that numbness. Yes, they were.

Would it actually affect your hearing, it'd be a bit harder to hear?

I know of people who are wearing hearing aids who got closer to that.

So how long did the Wewak landing involve the ship?

Oh we were there for about three weeks, with the training and then the bombardments beforehand and then a few bombardments afterwards. And as soon as that finished we were sent over to the Solomons where an event took place. If you want to hear about the activities in the Solomon Islands?

(25.00) Well just before we get there, during that period, where you're there for three weeks with bombardment on and off, what about the routine of sleeping and your health and so on, were you able to adjust all right to that?

Oh yes, I can never remember having any problems with sleeping. I used to go to bed about nine or ten o'clock because I had to get up at midnight. And you formed a pattern after a while, you know, two or three hours before midnight and then into bed again after four and sleep for another three or four hours after that.

Would you get some people who just found that the noise and the activity would make it difficult for them to sleep and would affect their health?

I think you soon got used to it because at sea, ships were noisy things. You had the continual thud of the - there were twin engines on it and you had the continual thud of the engines, there are always fans going blowing air down to lower compartments and noise was a thing that you just lived with all the time.

At the point where you were briefed about the nature of the landing, what were the assumptions about how much of that information you could share with able-bodied seamen? Were they ever briefed in a general way or was it felt better that the less information about ...?

No, everybody was told what we were going to do. We were all gathered together, the lower deck was cleared, which is a expression that is used in the navy, and the CO just explained what was to happen, that we were to do this exercise and then take the troops off. Because it was an exciting thing because convoy escorting, which was the main task, was pretty boring unless something happened. All you did was just the zigzag up beside a flock of about twenty ships and there'd be a corvette up front and one either side, and one at the stern mainly. And

that's all you did. You just zigzagged listening with the sonar gear for submarines mainly, or watching for aircraft attack and of course it was really a boring time and to be involved in a landing where you could, you know, fire your guns in earnest. I remember everybody was young and having a shot with your guns was an exciting thing to do.

> Was there a little extra Kudos being a gunnery person in a sense that, you know, you were having some direct role in striking a blow?

Oh yes, yes. Well they - the guns crews, they felt more involved than everybody else who just stood by. You know, people like the engineers or the lookouts, the radar operators, they didn't feel as if they had as much involvement as somebody on a gun.

> What about leave? Were you given time ashore here and there at odd places?

No. Unlike people that were in the UK for example who were in the Mediterranean, in the Pacific there was nothing to go ashore to really, unless we returned ever to the mainland for a refit. There were occasions when the ship would need a refitting or a boiler clean or some sort of maintenance and you might come back to Townsville or Cairns and get ashore there for a while. But normally, when we're away there was no leave, there was nowhere to go anyway.

> Would the corvettes vary somewhat in their capacity? You'd get some ships that were good and would run longer, and others that would need a lot of maintenance and so on?

Oh no, I think they were all much of a muchness. There was always camaraderie or loyalty if you like to your own ship, almost of a competitive nature, competitive spirit, between ships. I can remember one example of that. There was always the desire to get hold of more guns than the ships were originally fitted with. Remember I told there was a 4-inch and two 20mm and a Bofors and if you could hold of some twin .5s from an American base and mount them here and there, you were really up there with the best and the best scroungers you had aboard the better armed you were. And I can remember coming alongside other ships and they'd say, 'Gee look at them, they've got six twin .5s, where the hell did they get those'. And there was a lot of scrounging went on, getting ashore to American air force bases and getting hold of guns from wrecked planes and mounting them on your ship and they weren't strictly allowed, but they were handy to have in case you ever had a need for them.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

> Identification: this is side one of tape two of the interview with Jim Paizis about the HMAS *Colac* recorded on 18th March 1991.

What extra guns did your ship pick up?

Oh we did pretty well. We had a - on the roof of the bridge, the bridge was covered, we had a twin .5 mounted up there and we had two twin .5s, one on either side of the stern, but we realised later on that the twin .5 on the bridge was a bad mistake because there was enough noise going on anyway when you're firing, but with that thing opened up up there the vibration through the steel structure of the bridge was deafening. So we had to stop using it.

What about the captain? Did he share that aspiration? Was - for the captains was it extra status to have more guns?

Yeah, he used to look for it and ....

What would you trade off then to pick up guns like that?

The Americans were pretty liberal and they had a different attitude towards their armoured stores than the Australians. We had an armoured stores ledger and that was your lot. But the Americans, once they sent equipment out to the Pacific it was written off as used. And it was very easy to go to an American air force - or an American airstrip or a navy thing and get their cooperation or to get armoured stores given to you.

I'll give you a classic example. The 20mm Bofors gun for example were issued with six brushes for cleaning the barrels out and they were a brass wire brush was on the end of a rod and you cleaned the barrels out. We were allowed to have six. I remember going ashore once with a group to an American airstrip in Biak, north of New Guinea, hoping to get some used .5 guns and I explained where we were from and he said, 'How many do you want?' and I said, 'Oh can we have two?'. And he just went to a shop and he got two crates, brand new, still packed in the boxes and handed them over - we're all in the same war sort of thing - and then I timidly said, 'Oh, would you have some 20mm cleaning brushes?'. And he said, 'Yeah Mac, how many do you want?', and I said, 'Oh, could I have a dozen', and I'd think, you know, wow! having a dozen and he said, 'Jesus Mac, we don't break open cartons', and he gave me a full box of a hundred and of course that was Christmas to have a hundred cleaning brushes. That was the different attitude in stores. I mean, America was a wealthy nation and all their equipment was readily available.

Was there a sense then that Australian politicians and the Australian Government was mean-minded, that it really didn't back up its service people properly?

I don't think we went as far as thinking that. I know we used to always be very critical of having to keep these records in the ledger of how many rounds you fired and what stock you held and even towards the end of the war, I suppose it was necessary for conservation, we had to keep all the empty brass shells. And they were kept and returned for recycling, even back in those days. But it was a terrible waste of resources heaving these brass shell cases into the

sea because they were beautiful, solid brass solid brass shell cases and somebody realised that, in the later stages of the war, and we were asked to return them.

Did you ever get anybody who saw, or hear of people, who saw commercial opportunities, get into the scrap metal business?

Oh well they used to make souvenirs out of them. I don't think we have anybody doing that. You couldn't do that anyway. You couldn't keep the stuff and store it.

Well the air force, in various sectors, developed a bit of a reputation getting into smuggling and were taking advantage of the opportunity to move cigarettes and stockings around, were there those opportunities?

Oh yes. Well the Americans were totally dry and there were ships that used to load up with grog on the mainland and sell gin and whiskey to the Americans at enormous prices.

(5.00) As a matter of fact it got that bad in one particular place, and I think it was in Hollandia, that on occasions where an Australian ship came alongside a wharf a jeep with American MPs would come along and they'd just park on the wharf, just to watch if anybody was bringing grog ashore. Because particularly in the smaller ships, I believe in Fairmiles, that used to happen a lot. They'd load up and they'd trade or sell.

Well, conversely, would Australians be looking for stockings and cigarettes?

There used to be a fair bit of trading, yes, yes.

Well at what level? Were some who obviously saw, here was a really good line and got into it in a fairly developed way?

No, I was never aware of anything big, 'cause it was mainly a bottle of whiskey in exchange for maybe somebody would pinch a pair of binoculars from somewhere.

What about the attitude of Australian Customs when you came back into port? Would they look at that possibility fairly seriously or was there a sense that well, you know, you're doing your job for the country and be a bit lenient?

I never struck any Customs checks anywhere until after the war finished when I returned to Australia by plane and landed in Brisbane and I went through a Customs check there. But that was the first time. You were free to move back and forth in and out of dockyards all over the place, particularly in Sydney where we were operating most of the time, or a lot of the time. And I was never aware of any Customs check anywhere.

What about your shore leaves in Cairns and Townsville? Were there any notable events there? I mean, if you were out on long boring convoys would fellas let their hair down a bit?

Oh they did, yeah.

What about you, as a young man, I mean ...?

Oh, I didn't drink then. I was a real good guy, you know (laughs). I ...

Were you single?

Yes. I told my wife and kids these days, it makes me sick to think back how good I was. No, I didn't drink and I never got into any strife ashore. I used to go to a dance, go to a church dance and you'd meet somebody there and some nice girl would take you home and Mum and Dad would give you a cup of tea and biscuits. Well that's about the worst it ever got (laughs).

Did you have any of your fellow officers or able-bodied people who really got into big strife ashore?

I was never aware of any of the officers getting into strife. Sailors did. They used to get drunk and get arrested and we'd have to go ashore to the police station and bail them out. They were pretty lenient with them. The ship on occasion would sail with somebody who'd miss it and then he'd be punished for being absent without leave.

How seriously would that be dealt with?

Oh, they'd - there wasn't much opportunity to give anything other than extra duties on the ship. The corvettes, didn't have cells and I think the CO would be loath to give anybody a sentence ashore for being AWOL. Extra duties - a guy would be chipping and painting when all his mates would be just relaxing on the mess deck.

By 1945, how were relations with the civilian population? Was there at all a sense that some - say Cairns or Townsville - that the armed forces people were beginning to wear out their welcome a bit, or were relations generally good?

I think there used to be trouble mainly between the services. You may have heard of the interservice brawls, it'd mainly be between Americans and Australians and that's documented I think. There were riots and fights ...

Did you see any of that?

No. I didn't.

What about even at a small level? Did you see odd brawls?

No, I didn't come across any. I never ever hung around pubs much and that's where most of these events used to occur.

What about rivalry between the Australian services? Was the rivalry ever translated into hostilities?

No. It was always a friendly chiacking more than anything else. I was never involved in any brawls but you'd have guys more or less picking at one another, but I was never involved in any brawls. I never saw any.

What about American servicemen? How did you find them?

Always very friendly, very cooperative.

Did you share any of that sense of resentment that many Australians did about them coming and taking Australian girls?

No. Of course we weren't in a position. We were involved very greatly 'cause you lived your little cloistered life in your ship and you weren't more or less mixing very much with the other services except occasions if you got back to Cairns or Townsville, or Sydney. Otherwise you were just in your own little environment. Maybe seeing them when you went ashore on a base somewhere, but there was no problem there because there were no girls about, there were just men.

(10.00) It seems that the American services had a policy of not allowing black service people down to the major cities, like Sydney and Melbourne, that if they had shore leave it was up north? Did you meet black American service people at all?

Mainly in the New Guinea area. I used to see them - I'd seen them in Sydney and Cairns, I was never aware that there was a policy on that one.

Did you ever meet black service people?

No.

Was there an attitude? Was there a conscious sense - I mean, did Australians see them as different? Was there that sort of feeling?

I think they probably did, because they were generally given menial tasks. If you went anywhere, you'd often find that they'd have black servicemen acting as stewards and cooks and that sort of thing. I remember going on American ships and you'd always find that there'd be blacks doing menial jobs on the ship.

It was the days of the White Australia policy when also there was the general assumption that white people were superior. Was there a consciousness of a sense of superiority in those terms do you think?

I think there probably was. Although I didn't come across any resentment of the black - of black servicemen.

What about native peoples in the Pacific? Did you have any encounters at all with indigenous people?

Yes, everybody used to see them if we went ashore on some little island for recreation.

Were you briefed about how you ought behave towards them or ...?

Well we were, and there were fellows that had breached that. I remember guys being spoken to severely by seniors on the ship for stripping off and swimming naked - disregarding totally the natives on the beach and it was offensive to their standards. A lot of people used to say, 'Oh bugger it, who cares, they're just "boongs"', you know, but I found it pretty embarrassing to offend people that .... They always showed friendliness towards you and to have guys posing like this in front of them, you know, was a bit offensive.

What about fraternisation? Were people told they ought not fraternise?

I was never told that, although we didn't because we didn't have any opportunity to anyway and didn't - more than just a casual greeting, that was about all.

Well despite the limited opportunities were you also formally briefed about VD and the perils thereof?

Yes, yes, they were given - every now and then there'd be lectures and the sick berth attendant used to have condoms if anybody wanted them. There were lectures now and then about taking care.

There also were - well during the Vietnam war there were rumours of particularly virulent strains of VD. They were supposed to be so bad that if you got it you would never come back to Australia. Were there those sorts of rumours?

No, oh never, never come across that no.

So you went to Bougainville at one stage?

Yes.

Did that impress you in any particular way?

Well that was one of the most significant events of the whole time I was in the navy. We were sent to Bougainville - do you want me to go on and tell you the story?

Yes, yes, do.

We were sent to Bougainville just after the Wewak landings, just this one corvette, and we were advised - or directed to carry out a patrol between the two islands, the Bougainville and the next main island south of Bougainville, which is called - and there's two pronunciations - 'Schwazel' some people called it, 'Choisel' other people called it - C-H-O-I-S-E-U-L.

What did you call it?

Choiseul at the time but I heard later on that 'Schwazel' was the correct pronunciation. We were carrying out a patrol in the straits between these two islands with a view to stopping Japanese barges from moving from Choiseul up to Bougainville because the army was operating there at the time. And we bombarded several little coastal installations around Bougainville. And this particular evening at the request of an army - we had an army officer on board who was an army intelligence officer - suggested we might go into this enclosed harbour on the northern tip of Choiseul because there was some Japanese activity - installations in there. So we steamed into this harbour and much to everybody's delight these were all there huts and there were Japs running around everywhere. We'd never seen them so close.

How distant were they?

I suppose 500 metres.

That must have been very exciting. I mean ...

It was exciting yes, and we opened fire on them. We opened fire on the huts and it was a real turkey shoot. They all ran into the bushes and we fired on the huts and turned and steamed out of this one entrance of the harbour down past all these installations and out ....

Incidentally, at the point of determining to open fire, as a gunnery officer, did you have a role of making recommendations to the captain as to how the guns ought be used or did the captain just ...?

(15.00) Oh no, the captain just said, 'Okay, open fire on those installations', virtually and I directed the 4-inch gun with ranging a number of shots to fire but all the smallarms were firing independently. So we got out of that. We went through, fired and everything, did minimal damage, you know, wrecked a few grass huts and out we went. And the next day just on dusk, we just thought we'd go in again, have another look. What we didn't know was that they'd brought up some light artillery and had it behind the shrubbery on the beach anticipating another attack. And of course, we blindly went into this enclosed harbour and started firing and we were doing a U-turn virtually - an 180 degree turn - so as we were turning everybody stopped firing while the ship was turning and I saw a puff of smoke come out of the bushes and I heard this shell whistle overhead. I can remember the hair just bristling on the back of my neck, and they were firing at us from behind the bushes and it turned out to be a little 75mm - about a 3-inch ...

Like a little anti-tank gun type of thing?

[inaudible] short barrelled thing. At any rate, we desperately opened fire on their men and as we were turning, we turned to get out of the harbour because we were more or less caught in a very enclosed space, turning to get out, our guns were firing like blazes and they fired about ten rounds at us and our 4-inch gun got close to a hundred rounds back in the time, but during the intervening period a shell landed and hit right on the quarter deck, right at the feet of two of the crew on one of those twin .5s and two fellows died. One of them was, you know, the steward, the officer steward - Percy Shute - and an engineering guy Stan Smith who died on the spot.

A few seconds later a shell - another shell landed right on the waterline in the engine room and it blew a hole about two feet by one foot right on the waterline and the engine room started to flood. So they ordered the crew out of the engine room, they left the engines running at full speed and left the engine room which was slowly filling with water. If I can explain to you, they were steam driven vessels, they had two engines and two boilers. The boiler room was a different compartment to the engine room with watertight bulkheads in between. So even though the engine room eventually virtually filled with water and the engines were almost totally submerged and they were about ten feet high, they were still working.

Was there an anxiety that with the damage the water might get in and make contact with the heated areas and cause an explosion?

Oh there was and we - of course lucky for us the bulkheads held. They used timber shoring either side of the bulkheads. The wardroom was on one side of the engine room and the boiler room was on the other and we had timber and they shored up the bulkheads and the bulkheads held and steam still kept coming through the engines until eventually the condensors failed to work and there was no water getting to the boiler. So after we got out of that harbour, dumping movable cargo as we went out because the ship was slowly settling by the stern and anything moveable was heaved over the side. All the depth charges were heaved over, all the minesweeping cables ....

The Japanese were still firing at you through this period?

No, they were gone. We left them behind. We were out of the harbour entrance and that was the end of that.

Well would they have seen that the ship was hit and distressed?

Oh I think they would have seen it. I don't know why they didn't - they could have - as later events showed, they could have come out with a barge with a gun on it later and they could have fired anything they liked because we eventually, after running out of power, we managed to anchor on a deep reef and we'd sent out radio signals and the ship was just anchored there on this reef about two kilometres off the shore and they could have easily have come out with barges, but they didn't.

At any rate, on the next day an American supply ship was sent and they towed us to a small island off the south-west coast of Bougainville, the Treasury Islands, which were occupied by the Allies and we were met there by an American salvage ship was sent, and they met us there and they put some heavy equipment on one side of the ship - big generators, and that heeled the ship over until the hole came out of the water. And they welded a big plate over the hole, righted the ship again, pumped all the water out and then the ship was towed by another corvette across to the mainland of New Guinea to Finschhafen. And then the *Swan*, and this was the ship that was the senior ship at the Wewak landings, towed us from there to Sydney - it took eleven days under tow and then the ship commenced a refit.

(20.00) During that period where you were under fire and then the ship was hit, was there at all the sense of panic?

Oh yes. Oh well, we were doing our jobs but everybody was terrified of the ship sinking in the lagoon because there was just nowhere to go. And we often recall the incident of Wally Washington, the first lieutenant who I saw just recently, he said, 'You know, you don't know how lucky we were that the ship didn't founder in that harbour because it would have been the end of us all because there was nowhere to go. There was no other - we were alone there, there were no other troops, no other ships.'

Did you see the men who were killed and injured?

I didn't see them. I was on the bridge, I didn't see them. We didn't have a doctor on board, we had a sick berth attendant, like a medical orderly I guess. He treated them. When I saw them, they were all wrapped in canvas and we had a burial at sea.

What was the effect of that? I mean, how did the - was there a sense - was there a quietness almost descend on the ship?

Oh yes, there was almost a resentment that we ever went in there. Why the hell did we ever go in there in the first place, you know, what were we doing? Because a lot of the operations - this was May and the war finished in August - a lot of the operations that the Australians were involved in were ....

... mopping up ...

... mopping up and unnecessary. There was a book written as a matter of fact, called *The Unnecessary War*. I don't know if you've read it, about those later operations, because at that stage the Japs weren't doing anything. The Americans were bombing Iwo Jima and the Japanese mainland and the Japs that were down this far south were more or less abandoned. They weren't getting supplies, they were just living off the land.

You don't suppose the irony is at the point where you went in and found Japanese and were able to shoot at them, in a way would have made it a fair dinkum war for you in a way that perhaps it hadn't been?

It was. Yes, another exciting event but thinking back on it, strategically it wasn't doing anything.

What about the decision to go in? Would that have been entirely a decision made by the captain do you suppose, or would have he had orders to ...?

Yes, he was ordered to intercept barge traffic and we went in there just to see if there was any in there.

Do you think he would have felt that since there was [inaudible] the ship, that it'd been a mistake to go in and ...?

None of us ever knew. You know, we often wondered how he personally felt but like most captains, he kept to himself, kept aloof, and none of us ever knew really how he felt about that.

Would there be an enquiry within the navy? I mean, during wartime when there were so many things happening would there be any sort of formal

process to look at here's a ship seriously disabled as to why and whether there was a responsibility or so on?

I was never aware of any formal enquiry. He was probably questioned about it when he made his report. As a matter of fact I've got a copy of the report of proceedings. Commanding officers used to send a monthly report into navy headquarters and that's available to people now under FOI and just out of personal interest I've got the typed report that he sent in of the Wewak landings and of the event and it was basically as I've related it to you.

There was no subjective sense of putting a value or otherwise on the events?

No, no.

Well was there a feeling at all that here you were going off with your tail between your legs? Was it demoralising in that sense?

Oh, everybody felt a bit upset that the ship being damaged, although there was - after the sorrow of losing the fellows was accepted, everybody was excited at the thought of going home because we were on our way to Sydney and that was a big deal to get back to Sydney again. And the thought of, well it's damaged now, and we're going to have a few weeks' leave in Sydney.

How long since you'd had a decent leave?

Oh, I suppose we'd been away for about six months but not as long as the fellas that were away in the Middle East and places like that.

How did you get on for correspondence and all the rest of it?

Oh mail used to get to us rather spasmodically. It would be loaded onto merchant vessels that were in convoys or other warships and delivered to bases where you would be known to be operating and every now and then a heap would come aboard and you'd get a lot of mail.

I remember looking at a little diary I kept, I remember one time I got fourteen letters in the one mail, the most I ever got and that was an accumulation of several weeks - girls from work, family.

Did you have films aboard?

I had a little camera. You weren't supposed to take photographs, but I had a little bakelite Kodak and you couldn't get film readily so if ever you were in Sydney or Cairns or Townsville, you'd hopefully buy a film, take a few snaps.

(25.00) What about projectors for entertainment? Did you ever have newsreels or films - feature films?

No, we didn't although on occasions you might get ashore to a base where there was a theatre or you might be alongside a bigger warship or a tanker taking fuel or .... On one occasion I remember we were in an American floating dry dock which had a screen and movies and you'd see movies now and then, but we didn't have any on board our ship.

Did you get *Salt* - the services magazine?

No, I don't remember that, *Salt*, no.

What about briefings where the war was at? I mean, if there was a fairly rigid process of censorship to contain information getting around, what was the attitude towards the importance for you to know how the war was going and how things were going in Australia in terms the government and how it was doing and those sort of things?

No, we weren't kept informed of anything like that. Occasionally we'd have newspapers mailed to you and that was about the main source of information really. We were never addressed by the captain or anybody to be told what was happening elsewhere.

Was that frustrating? I mean, was it a source of concern that you ...?

Yes, you wondered what was happening and where the war was going. Any major events, the ship would get signals of anything involving the area and that could be passed on to the ship's company, but no great detail really about what was happening in Europe or back in Australia.

Where were you when the war in Europe ended?

We were in Sydney for both the ends of the war because the *Colac* had this extensive refit to make good all the damage, so we were in Sydney.

Do you recall where you were when you heard about the end of the war in Europe?

Well, August - when did the war finish in Europe? - it was May - June. I can't remember. I can remember the end of the Pacific war. News of that ....

Was there celebration or excitement about the end of the war in Europe though first. Because the Japanese were there as a continuing threat ...?

I don't think it was as great as the end of the Japanese war. I can remember being in the city of Sydney - we learnt of it on the ship or alongside the dockyard just with a skeleton crew on board and I can remember the news coming over the radio and the first opportunity of getting ashore in Sydney, people, typical dancing in the streets and excitement.

What about in the ship? Did people shout and cheer?

Well there were only about a dozen of us on the ship. Most of us had all been sent home on leave while the ship was being refitted and I remember having a beer - everybody coming down to the wardroom and we had a beer in the wardroom and the dockyard foreman and some of the dockyard hands were there with us too I can remember that.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.

Identification: this is side two of tape two of the interview with Jim Paizis about HMAS *Colac* recorded on 18th March 1991.

Do you have memories of vivid things in Sydney? Were the streets packed, people shouting and yelling?

Oh yes, I can remember being up in Hyde Park. One of the other officers I still keep in touch with, Roy Christie from Perth, he and I went ashore and there were a couple of girls that we knew and we were, you know, holding hands and dancing around the streets and people were just going berserk.

How long did that continue for?

Oh, a couple of days that I can remember. There was a feeling of elation, you know, with the thought of everybody coming home again.

Was there any sense that it got out of hand at all in places, or ...?

No, it was all very friendly and all very jovial really. I can't remember anything getting out of hand with it.

What about the tow back to Sydney, how long did that take?

Eleven days.

Well what were conditions like?

It was very difficult. We had no power at all except the salvage ship left us with a portable generator and they put some temporary wiring around the ship and we had lights, but there was no power, no steam, so you couldn't steer. Even though the ship was being towed you still had to steer to keep astern of the towing vessel, so we had men down in the emergency steering compartment, just above the rudder in the stern, and the ship was being manually steered. Normally there was a steering engine that turned the rudder. So there was communication by a temporary telephone from the bridge down to the stern for any rudder alterations. On one occasion, I can remember - quite a violent storm, the tow line snapped and it snapped right at the towing point at our fo'c'sle. So the *Swan* had the entire steel tow hanging right from its stern and as soon as the signal to commence hauling in your end of the tow and we were able to send back, 'Sorry you've got the lot', and they had all the task of hauling in the tow and the difficulty then of passing another line in a rough sea.

Were you floundering? Did ...?

Oh the ship was just wallowing. There was no control at all until the line was - the tow was passed.

Was it an anxious period. Were there feeling that subs might set you up and you'd be gone?

No, there was no activity - there was no sub. activity much. This was May/June '45 and they weren't operating at that stage further south.

What about when other corvettes had been hit? There were a couple of incidents where other Australian corvettes had been sunk or badly damaged.

The *Armidale* was one, wasn't it?

Did you have - were you kept in touch with that or was it only much later you found out what happened?

No, I didn't know about the *Armidale* until well into the war. Those things weren't released.

Wouldn't word get around, I mean ashore and so on, 'Oh, didn't you hear that so and so ...?'

No, I wasn't aware of it, no.

How important was that business of not talking about military matters ashore taken? You know, there was that there are ears, the enemy might be listening. Did you take that seriously?

Most of us did, although some people used to be critical of it, say well, you know, don't tell me the Japs don't know what we're doing, how important's the operations of a little corvette, you know. That's what made it a bit ridiculous with censorship. A guy would, for instance, say in a letter that he'd picked up a coconut and some over-zealous officer would cut out the word 'coconut'. I never ever did that. I mean some people took it [inaudible]. I used to say to them, well, you know, they might know we're in the tropics, well what the hell, the whole war's on in the tropics, everybody's in the tropics, what the hell.

(5.00) Apart from that particular incident where the tow broke, did you run into any other really bad storms or typhoons or hurricanes during your service?

We did, and they used to roll very badly, those corvettes, and I can recall being thrown out of a bunk in rough seas or falling from one side of the bridge to the other when the ship would roll and it would roll quite heavily and sometimes you'd wonder if they'd ever come back. It'd heel right over and then almost stay there for a while until the weight of the engines and the fuel and the thing would ....

Did you every lose anybody overboard?

No.

Or men get injured being thrown around?

Oh yeah, there were occasions of a guy with a broken arm once. He was thrown up against a steel stanchion in a rough sea. You know, furnishings and belongings and food and the poor old cook trying to prepare a meal in the galley when we were in a rough sea was pretty difficult.

During that tow where presumably you wouldn't be engaged in normal duties or activities or such, was there a feeling the men have got to be occupied and people would be made to be scrubbing decks and doing all sorts of unnecessary things?

Oh no, the ship was on its way back for a refit. Just to give you an example of the attitude on that. After it was hit, and we were in the Treasury Islands getting this temporary repair done, the first lieutenant decided that we should do a bit of scraping and painting and get the ship cleaned up a bit for return to Sydney and the ship's company didn't agree with that. Oh what the hell do we want to paint the ship for, it's going in for a refit and overnight all the scrapers and paint brushes just disappeared. Somebody had just got them all and just pitched them overboard into the harbour.

So how would you respond - I mean, that might be taken as tantamount to mutiny or did you ignore it and pretend it didn't happen?

No, no, when we got to Finschhafen Wally went ashore and got hold of a fresh supply of brushes and the ship was painted anyway. But ...

Was there an attempt to find the culprits?

They did try but everybody clammed up of course.

So when you got ashore, how long did you have then as leave?

In Sydney? Well I was in Sydney, the ship was - this was about the end of June and it wasn't until about October, it was a fair while.

So you could get down and see your parents?

Yeah, I had twenty-four days' leave, I came ashore, came home.

Were your parents notified or again that was a matter of information that shouldn't be passed around?

I told them what had happened, although they didn't know, and it wasn't even reported in the press.

But you were able to tell them you were coming?

Oh yes, yeah. I mean, I thought you meant about the incident of the ship being hit. No they - yes they knew I was coming. The ship actually, it was completely refitted and new radar put on and the top of the bridge was cut off and it was made to look quite sleek. But then the war finished so it was paid off. It was refitted then paid off and recommissioned again after the war and it was involved with the minesweeping - post-war minesweeping - flotilla that was going around all over the place cleaning up any old mine fields.

Incidentally, with that long tow coming down was there a sense of relief to finally get to the Heads and feel safe, you're home at last?

Yes, because you felt vulnerable even though we knew there was no submarine activity. You were still conscious of the possibility of it because you couldn't do anything.

And then coming into dock? Was there almost a funny sense of pride of here you were, visible victims of war, that the ship had been damaged and you'd been through it, that sort of thing?

Oh yes. The big heroes coming ashore. I can remember we were placed alongside a New Zealand frigate originally and they invited us aboard and we were just chatting about what had happened, yeah.

Were there some ships conversely then where they just, through circumstances, never really saw anything in the way of what you might term real action that felt very frustrated by that?

Oh there would have been because there were fifty-six corvettes altogether in the navy and there would have been some, I'm sure, that just had boring convoy escort work mainly, nothing much else.

So how long did you remain in the navy then after the war officially ended?

I got out in about March '46. It ended in '45, wasn't it August? - then it was March '46. I left the *Colac* ... Did you want to talk about other ships or ...

Yes, yes.

(10.00) I left the *Colac* ... I can tell you an interesting little story. I left the *Colac* after it paid off in Sydney ....

Did the captain bid his officers farewell? I mean, was there a ...?

Oh yes, we all said goodbye.

Any little letting down of the aloofness, any affection or ...?

No, he wasn't that - Ken Hopper wasn't that kind of a guy, no. It was just a matter of well, goodbye and I'm off and you're off sort of thing and thanks very much. No, he wasn't - he didn't show any emotion at all.

Well what about for your colleagues, your contemporaries?

Oh yes, well I was sorry to see a lot of them - part with a lot of them because they were all good fellows and we were very close. Well I left the *Colac* and I was appointed as gunnery officer of the *Lachlan*, which was a frigate and a luxury compared to the corvettes because it

was about double the size, and quite spacious. And she was involved in doing hydrographic work and doing surveying of different harbours. During the war she used to go in and survey harbours before landings and to note any obstacles for landing barges and that sort of thing. Well I left Sydney and I was instructed to proceed to join the *Lachlan* which at the time was stationed doing some surveying in Milne Bay.

What rank were you by this time?

Sub-lieutenant still. Doing some surveying in Milne Bay, which was on the - right down the south eastern tip of New Guinea. So I left one Sunday morning, left Garden Island, went to Central Station, and I had my travel orders, and I went by train to Brisbane. And everywhere I went I was trying to get to Milne Bay, because during the war there was air transport. Both the RAAF and the Americans had air transport transporting stores and people around the area. But the war having finished, a lot of the air transport routes had been discontinued. So I got to Brisbane and wherever I went I reported to the transport officer and I said I'm trying to get to Milne Bay and he said, 'No, there's nothing directly going from here to Milne Bay, you'd better try Townsville'. So I flew to Townsville, reported in there ....

Domestic aircraft or ...?

No, no, military aircraft - reported at Townsville at the naval depot and they said, 'No, there's nothing from here to Milne Bay, you'd better try Cairns'.

Well, what were you flying? Would it have been DC3s?

DC3s. There were all sorts. There were military aircraft, there were flying boats, there was a Catalina, DC3s mainly - Martin Mariner which is a twin-engined flying boat. So we from Brisbane to Townsville, Townsville to Cairns, still nothing for Milne Bay, you better try Port Moresby. So we flew to Port Moresby. There was no naval ....

We? - were you with some other people?

There were other people flying for other purposes, yeah, but I was the only one going to Milne Bay.

Well how did you feel about that? Was it an interesting sort of an epic?

It was interesting, yes. So from Port Moresby I stayed with the air force in Port Moresby because there was no naval establishment at that time there, still no contact. So they flew me from Port Moresby right over New Guinea to Madang. Same story, nothing for Milne Bay from Madang, try Finschhafen. This is true. I flew to Finschhafen.

Where would you stay when you arrived in these places?

Generally in the naval depot. I stayed with the air force at Port Moresby, with the navy at Madang and then with the army at Finschhafen.

Were things generally more relaxed by this time?

They were, they were, everybody was on their way home. At any rate I got to Finschhafen, this is about the fifth flight and there for a few days and then a signal came through that the *Lachlan* had left Milne Bay for Sydney. I kid you not. So they put me on a Liberator bomber which was carrying - I was the only naval fella on board, there were a lot of Australian army fellas on board and we flew non-stop from Finschhafen to Brisbane. I caught the train from Brisbane ...

What were conditions like in the Liberator, they'd be pretty ...?

Pretty tight, yes. We were just lying all over the floor, all over the deck you know.

No stewards with tea and coffee?

Oh no, nothing there (interview laughs) just crowded with people.

Noisy too I suppose?

Noisy, terribly noisy, yeah.

They had a fabric fuselage didn't they, the Liberators?

No, they were a big four engined bomber, no, they were metal.

They were metal?

Yeah. At any rate I caught the train from Brisbane to Sydney and I got to Central Station, I caught the taxi to Garden Island, rang the signal station to say you know, where's the *Lachlan* and he says to me, 'She'll be in in a couple hours'. So I was back, two weeks later, where I started from and there the ship I was trying catch came into Sydney. The guy I was relieving I knew and his first words were, 'Where the bloody hell have you been. I want to get home.' And I said, 'Sorry I've been trying to get to you for two weeks'. And the *Lachlan* started a refit in Sydney, so I had another month in Sydney while she was refitting and then we left and we went around the coast doing surveying and around the South Australian coast and I was discharged in the March and I left her in Adelaide.

(15.00) Well was there a little bit of prestige attached going aboard another ship to have come from one which had seen action and been damaged? Was there was a sense of, oh, you know he ...

Oh some of them knew about it. We talked about it a bit because I knew a lot of the younger officers there. I'd met them, because we used to meet in different places. I can remember me telling you the difficulty of dealing with people you knew as an officer who you knew who were sailors. There was one young guy, Doug Goodluck, who was a boyhood friend of mine in the scouts and I knew Doug was a seaman on the *Lachlan* and he met me at the gangway and I remember the first thing I said to him, I said, 'Listen Dougie, I'll hope you're not a "chook"'. A chook is a fella who's always in strife in the navy but I had a fear of him being a chook and him being brought up to me on a charge when I knew him when we were in scouts together.

Was he?

No, no, he wasn't, he was a good guy, yeah.

Did you ever subsequently run into fellows who'd been a bit embittered by that process, where you'd known them and got on well and then you were an officer and had to be aloof and never quite forgave you?

No, I can never remember that.

So at the point where you were leaving, what was the process? Were you eager to get out and were pushing to get out or ...?

I was eager to get out. I went back to my original job at the YMCA for about a year and that's where I met Val. Val was a typist there.

What about the actual day that you finished? What happened? I mean, how did it work?

Oh. Well, I remember the signal came through that my discharge was through and I had to leave the ship. I was just saying goodbye to the guys on the ship and I was given a travel order on the train to come to Melbourne. They sent - a naval car drove me to the station.

Had you accumulated any souvenirs or special things that ...?

The *Lachlan* had done a trip around a lot of the bases after the war taking surrenders and they had quite a stack of stuff on board, binoculars and swords, and I got hold of a Japanese *Samurai* sword. Not a ....

And as you're leaving, what about your uniform? Were you allowed to keep your uniform?

Oh yes, I've still got it. There was nothing handed back like that.

In that immediate period then, was it odd suddenly no longer getting up and being in the navy as it were?

Yes, it was. As time went by I regretted not staying on a while because .... I was just saying this to my wife the other day, I said, 'Although this is nothing to do with me meeting you, but I went back to being a clerk at the YMCA again and, I said, 'I left the life I really enjoyed'. They went away, they were doing surveys. They went right up to the north-west of Australia and they were surveying around Broome and Darwin and I thought afterwards, that would have been far more interesting than what I went back to. There was an anxiety of the war's over, let's get back to normality again.

Was it hard to settle down?

Yes it was, it was difficult. You enjoyed the comradeship and the discipline. I know I did.

How long before you started to meet up then with some of your former colleagues?

For a couple of years we had some reunions of guys that went through the officers' training school at Flinders Naval Depot and we had, for two or three years, we had a function at the old Federal Hotel which was - remember the Federal in the city - and it was good to see them again. I don't see many .... We exchange Christmas cards. The only guy that I do contact and keep in touch with is Roy Christie in Perth and he shared a cabin with me in the *Colac* and Roy and I communicate - he's been here often and I've been to his home.

Did you join the RSL?

Yes. I belong to that and I belong to the Naval Association and the corvettes Association and the Maritime Trust which is ... you know about the Maritime Trust, that they're restoring one of the corvettes down in Williamstown, the *Castlemaine* is an interested group there that are trying to bring it back up to scratch.

So how much involvement have you had with those different associations?

Oh, not a lot, apart from membership and attending functions. I don't go down to - on the working bees on the *Castlemaine*.

What about entitlements in terms of maybe study opportunities or low interest loans for the housing, all those sorts of things?

Well, we were very well looked after in that. Although I didn't take it up I'd already had a course, I was doing accountancy at the time at the YMCA and I just continued on with that. I didn't take up the study, but certainly the low interest loans compared to what people pay these days, they were a Godsend and that's how this place was built, with a low interest loan.

What was the interest, do you recall?

It was only about three and a half percent. We pay twenty dollars a month. I'm still paying it off. It's not worth paying that off. I haven't got far to go because it was a about a forty-five year loan and it's a bit embarrassing to tell my kids this, but compared to what they pay, we pay twenty dollars a month. It cost about £3,500 to built the place, £180 to buy the block here.

(20.00) You didn't have any health problems then, apart from the ear?

No.

Did you ever - how long before you ever looked at ...?

That was this business?

Yeah.

It was several years until it came to light. I didn't associate it with the war at all. It was just when the 'hiss' came and I went to a doctor and he said, 'Oh yeah, you get tinnitus and there's nothing you can do about it. But then in later years I went to an ENT specialist because my career was in hospital administration for most of my life?' And I got to know many doctors and one of them, I went to an ENT specialist and he tested my ears and he questioned me. He said, 'Were you ever exposed to any loud noises, any acoustic trauma during your life and I was only thinking of my work and I said, 'No I haven't, I've only done clerical work all my life', and he said, 'Yeah, but you were in the navy weren't you?'. I said, 'Yes', and he said, 'Well were you ever exposed there?'. And I said, 'Yes, I certainly was'. He said, 'Well that could have been an original cause of what you're suffering now'. 'Cause then I learnt later this man is a specialist for the Repat. He said, 'I've had many cases of this being accepted as a war caused disability'. He said, 'have you ever applied?'. I said, 'What twenty, thirty years after the war? I never ever thought of it.' He said, 'Well you should'. So I did and originally it was rejected, but he said to me, 'No, they're wrong'.

What did you think of that?

Well I just accepted the rejection, but I showed it to the doctor and he, 'No, they're wrong'. He said, 'They're wrong. I've give you another letter. You have to appeal.' And I appealed and I went before an Appeal Board and they questioned me and much to surprise they reversed the decision of the original doctor that saw me and they said, 'We'll give you a ten percent disability'. So I get ten dollars a week.

Well what do you think of that? I mean, how does that seem to you as a ...?

Oh well that was okay. If anything happens to me now, to my hearing, it'll be accepted as a war caused disability. But it doesn't affect me [inaudible] except for my high frequency hearing is affected. I can't hear very high notes unless I have the highest turned up very high on the radio.

How do you feel then about the years of service? I mean, is it a period that you look back to with some fondness of ...?

I do, it's - remember I was only in the navy just under four years, it's a very significant part of your life and I was - there's hardly a day passes when you don't recall it as a highlight.

Did you ever feel you had disadvantaged yourself in civilian life by being away for the four years that, oh, if you'd stayed at home and ...?

I don't think that, no. It was like - nearly everybody was of that age group and everybody, you know, lost their teenage years virtually between eighteen and nearly twenty-one and a half when I got out, but I didn't resent it. I didn't think I lost anything by it.

Well after the war, when immigration became a big boom period and then Australians and working class Australians became much more conscious of foreigners and 'wogs' and those sorts of derogatory terms that evolved, were you ever identified in that way?

No, I've never been troubled with Greek background, no.

But you would have become conscious of the way many migrants were being perceived and received in this country?

Oh yes, yes.

How did you feel about that? Did you ...?

I was always very defensive of it. On occasions I used to hear people critical of migrant groups forming enclaves if you like, and sticking together and Australians have been critical

of it. And I always resented that because I used to argue with them in that Australian are no different. I said, you think of Australians in London, there were areas in London, where Australians would gather together and I used to more or less give them an example. What would you do if you went to live in a - work took you to a foreign land and somebody said to you, 'Where are you going to live? I know there's an empty house in such and such an area and that there a dozen Australian families nearby?, I said, 'Would you say no, I won't go there, I'll go and live ....'. I said, 'You'll do it, everybody would do it as a feeling of security'. Even in shopping, if somebody had told you, you were in Bangladesh and there was an Australian butcher nearby, I said, 'Would you go and shop at the Australian butcher or would you go to the Bangladeshi butcher?'. 'Oh yeah, I suppose I would', they said.

(25.00) What about for your children? Have your children ever been identified in that way that hurt you?

No. They've never been troubled. They often say that they wish they'd been able to speak Greek. My eldest son particularly has been to Greece and he's been to the island of Ithaca where my grandparents came from, as I have too on one occasion. And he was sorry that he wasn't able to speak Greek. And I know Greek people often say to me, 'Oh can't your children speak Greek'. But I said, 'How can you, my wife's not Greek', and unless you speak it in the home, you don't - it's very difficult to learn. You just can't say, 'Today I'm going to teach you Greek'. I mean, it isn't clever that I can speak Greek because it was my first language. Your mother's tongue virtually is learnt like any child learns to speak.

With the passing of the years, some service people have been involved with particular features, like Catalina pilots have a great sense of sentimentality about their flying boats, do you have that sort of feeling about the corvettes?

Oh yes. I went to the - there's an annual reunion. You know about the reunions the Association has in each capital city? We had ours here in Melbourne in 1986 and for the first time I met fellas from the *Glenelg* and the *Colac*. We all sat at our tables and there were sixteen hundred people at the gathering and it was very emotional to see these guys again. I remember one of them from the *Glenelg*, one of them greeted me and they saw me walking towards them and they said, 'Oh, look', he said, 'he's Nick the Greek', and he said, 'You didn't know we called you that, did ya?'. I said, 'You bugger, did you?'. (Laughs) It was good to see them, you know, forty years on to see them all again.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW.