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TRANSCRIPT
OF
ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

S01793

H1655 Appleby, John Walter

Recorded
at: City Beach WA
on: 6 December 1995
by: John Roberts

Description
H1655 John Walter Appleby as a stoker; Royal Australian Navy (RAN) corvette HMAS *Inverell*, tug HMAS *Forceful* and cruiser HMAS *Australia*; eastern and western seaboards and northern waters of Australia; 1941–1946; interviewed by John Roberts

John Appelby talks about his early childhood and education; recruitment into the RAN and initial training in Hobart and the Flinders Naval Depot; graduation as a stoker; assignment to a tug HMAS *Forceful* in Fremantle; being drafted to new corvette HMAS *Inverell*; working up and commissioning of the *Inverell*; convoy duties on the eastern seaboard of Australia and in northern waters; working and living conditions aboard ship; escorting a RAAF ship supplying engineers who were building an airstrip at Milingimbi NT: refitting in Melbourne in 1943; escorting the SS *Maetsuycker* to Onslow with Bluey Truscott's equipment on board; return to Fremantle in 1944; marriage in 1944; service at HMAS *Leeuwin*; transfer to HMAS Australia for an eastbound trip to Sydney; guard duties for a court-martialled seaman; comparisons between serving on a cruiser and a corvette; transfer to *Leeuwin* for discharge; post-war difficulties; training as a teacher under the CRTS; subsequent teaching career; family life and children; War Service Loans; participation in WA Corvettes Association and the Naval Association, and other interests in retirement.

Transcribed by: Chris Soames, May 2002

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Transcript methodology

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

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

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This is an interview with Jack Appleby, and forms part of the Oral History Project of the Royal Australian Navy Corvettes Association, WA. Jack, who is our current president, is a member of the Royal Australian Navy Corvettes Association and this interview relates to his personal experiences in corvettes.

Jack was born in Tasmania on 15 June 1922 and he joined the Navy in 1941 as a stoker, and served in the following corvette, *Inverell*, and some other ships which we'll discuss later.

Sixty of these small ships, officially Bathurst Class Australian minesweepers, commonly known as corvettes, were built during World War II in Australian shipyards as part of the Commonwealth Government's wartime shipbuilding program. Twenty were built on Admiralty order for the Royal Navy but were commissioned and manned by members of the Royal Australian Navy. These ships were named after the Australian towns - *Ballarat, Bathurst, Bendigo, Broome, Burnie, Cairns, Cessnock, Gawler, Geraldton, Goulburn, Ipswich, Kalgoorlie, Launceston, Lismore, Maryborough, Pirie, Tamworth, Toowoomba, Whyalla and Wollongong*. Also, of the sixty built four were for the Royal Indian Navy and named *HMIS Bengal, Bombay, Madras and Punjab*, and they all left for their home base independently in 1942. The remaining thirty-six were built for the Royal Australian Navy and also named after Australian towns. They were *Ararat, Armidale, Benalla, Bowen, Bunbury, Bundaberg, Castlemaine, Echuca, [Colac], Cootamundra, Cowra, Deloraine, Dubbo, Echuca, Fremantle, Geelong, Gladstone, Glenelg, Gympie, Horsham, Inverell, Junee, Kapunda, Katoomba, Kiama, Latrobe, Lithgow, Mildura, Parkes, Rockhampton, Shepparton, Stawell], Strahan, Townsville, Wagga, Warrnambool and Wallaroo*. Of course, some of these towns are now cities.

This interview is conducted by John Roberts on 6 December 1995 at City Beach [WA].

Jack, could you give me your full name, thank you?

John Walter Appleby.

When and where were you born?

I was born in a little place in the northern part of Tasmania called Northdown.

Could you give me some information of your early school like, where you went to school, and your occupation before you joined the Navy?

Yes, John. I went to school ... I started school in 1929, the year I turned seven, and I had all my education in one room, in a little country school. I started in Year 1 and finished up in Year 7, that's the only education I ever had.

And from there what happened after you left school?

Well, I left school when I was thirteen. In those days it wasn't compulsory to do high school. My father had motor trucks and I was very interested in that field, and so I had the option of going on to high school, by my parents; the option of going to high school or working with my father,

which I chose to do. And so for the years after I turned thirteen, until I joined the Navy, I was working on transport.

Did you have any previous service experience – cadets or militia forces?

No, none whatsoever.

Now, what was your motive for joining the Navy?

Well, my elder brother, out of a family of eight, he decided that he would join up and go and serve his country, but unfortunately he was discharged because of medical reasons. And so when he said, 'I can't go', I decided to join up and I chose the Navy because I had been influenced slightly by earlier in 1939 I saw the HMAS *Vendetta* come in to our country town of Devonport, and it brought in the body of the late prime minister, Joseph Lyons. And I went down to see that and this just stuck in my mind from that time until 1941 when I did join up. So I chose the Navy.

You chose the Navy, and by this time you were almost nineteen years of age.

Yes, I was eighteen – hadn't turned nineteen – but when I did decide to join I was eighteen years old, eighteen and some months.

Was it difficult to get into the Navy at that time?

No, not at all.

What sort of testing did they give you?

None.

Where did you go for your initial training?

Well, I joined up and went to Hobart; from the northern part of Tasmania I travelled to Hobart by train, down to Hobart.

And what are your recollections of Hobart?

Well, fortunately I had an uncle then, my father's brother, and I had a home base, but it was a lonely sort of a trip from northern Tassie to the southern part. I'd never been away from home, and I had no reason to go away from home in my early youth, and it was a bit of a lonely sort of a journey.

And what about Hobart Depot, what are your recollections of that?

Cold – snow down to the city – very cold; did my training on the Domain, physical jerks on the Domain.

So it was more initial drill, physical education, more than anything else, to prepare you for you later training?

Oh, yes. Hobart was only, more or less, a kitting up depot where I received my full outfit and getting used to a few Navy rules and regulations.

> Now, the kit that we received was a couple of sets of blues, and boots – I think we had to buy the shoes – but was your kit vastly different from that?

I didn't have to buy anything, John, they gave me the lot.

> But we received allowance later on to buy those things.

That's right, that's right.

> I think you mentioned whites or ducks and that.

Yes, the old white duck suit – I was issued even with a duck suit.

> Now, if you joined the Navy, Jack, you must have been a very good swimmer because that would be one of the requirements, I should imagine, wouldn't it?

No, John, that's quite the opposite because I couldn't swim. I had nearly drowned as a little boy of about seven or eight, my mother pulled me out, I was going down for about the third time and my mother rescued me, and from that time on I wasn't actually afraid of water, but I was afraid of being in water with people who might duck me, or do something, and that turned me off.

> So the Navy didn't give you any preparation for your future life at sea, as far as swimming, either at Flinders or anywhere else for that matter?

No, they never even asked me could I swim.

> Now, from Hobart I assume you went to Cerberus at Flinders. Can you give us some indication of your impressions of Flinders when you first arrived?

Yes. Well, I left Hobart and came north by train. I picked up an old passenger liner in Launceston called the [*Nirana*], and sailed to Melbourne – got on a train and went to Flinders, and there I met – I met my destiny there because it was a vastly different place to Derwent.

> Yes, I should imagine, it would be quite a different world from the quiet country town that you'd come from. Now, what about your initial training, or training out there? What impressions did you gain from that?

Well, I suppose, in the initial times, the first part of it was getting used to (A) new surroundings, (B) a different group of people – coming to understand naval routine as far as the depot went – discipline and all the things that went along with your training in Flinders because I can remember visiting the rifle range and going out in one of the old cutters and doing some rowing, which I never had to do before or afterwards; but we learnt to do it.

> As you were almost nineteen, were you regarded as one of the older men of the world, or was it the other, that the people were a lot older than you who went in with your draft at that time?

Well, I think, I suppose they were on both sides of the age range. There were some, a few, younger than myself, and a lot older than myself, but no, I was a real rookie as far as that was concerned.

> And coming in in 1941 there would have been still, I suppose, a permanent Navy influence, particularly at Cerberus at that time, which might have been difficult for you to adjust to.

Well, all of your instructors were most likely all permanent men who'd come in there to train we youngsters in the art of naval life.

> Now, after you left Hobart, what emotions were running through your mind after you left your little country town to go, firstly, to Hobart, and then to go to the mainland?

Well, it was a fairly big break for me because, as I said, I came from a family of eight children, we were fairly closely knit, in a little country area, I had no need to travel away from home prior to this time, so it actually was a fairly big break for me.

> Now, as far as – did you learn anything at Flinders? I mean, you became a stoker, I realise, and, no doubt, with your background in motor vehicles this was kind of no novelty, some of the work that, I suppose, was a totally different course from backyard mechanic which, no doubt, you were used to.

Oh, definitely, because it was such a wide ranging kind of a course that you did, the mechanical side of it was only a very minute part of it.

> What about the training you did as a stoker? Have you got any memories of that?

Yes. We did our daily lectures in the engineers' department with an old chief stoker – and old English chief stoker – who used to put us through our paces. But there were other sides to the training in that field because you visited areas outside the lecture room, and you went in and saw actual boilers where they were working, or the dummy boilers, if you like. They had a big coal-fired section at Flinders where they used to use the briquettes that came in from Yallourn, and they fired the depot boiler room, and we did some of our training in there.

> Now, you mention that you then qualified, or trained, as an engineer's writer. Could you tell me something of what course they gave you in that?

Well, I was a little bit clerically minded as a lad, and when the opportunity offered I then went into and did the course for an engineer's writer in which you became responsible for most of the clerical work in the engineering department on board ship in later life.

> Although you said you only had primary school education, you must have had a lot of good solid teaching at primary school to prepare you for the clerical side of that work.

John, I had two teachers in my whole life. To about Year 3 or 4, I had a lady teacher and the headmistress left and a headmaster came, and that was the extent of my schooling. I started at seven and ended at thirteen in a primary school.

> You must have had a very good basic knowledge of grammar and spelling.

Oh, yes, yes, we did.

After completing this course, what were you then, what rank did you hold?

I was a stoker – Stoker Class 2.

Stoker Class 2. In other words, what was that the equivalent of?

A real OD [derogatory term derived from Olive Drab, anyone acting 'green']

OD, alright. Now, when did you first go to sea, Jack?

I went to sea, I left Flinders, I was posted to ... came to Perth in Western Australia, with two or three other shipmates, to pick up a tug. And that tug had come from Brisbane, had been sailed from Brisbane by a civilian crew to Fremantle, and when I arrived in Fremantle and was placed in the old Leeuwin Depot, in Cliff Street, I was then taken down to the wharf and there was the mighty HMAS *Forceful*, which we commissioned into the Navy.

Now, at that time, what living accommodation was available on that ship?

Well, we had quite a crew because there was a captain, there was a first lieutenant, there was an engineer officer, there was chief ERAs. We carried a big crew for a tug because we were taking it overseas. And the accommodation down in the forward hold was pretty cramped, you can imagine, but we made it.

As you'd been on land until this time, what were your reactions about going to sea the first time, or your feelings of going on board a seagoing ship?

Well, if somebody said you'd never get seasick, I nearly told them they didn't tell truths because I had a terrible experience with the first few trips to sea. But it was never actually – even though I couldn't swim – I was never actually afraid of the sea in that respect.

This was a tug – I assume you were having trials off Fremantle to get the crew into running order. What was to be the future of this ship?

Well, the future of the ship was, we were to take it, via Colombo, into the Mediterranean to Tobruk, and that's what our aim was, and we had a shake-down of about a couple of months in Fremantle.

But you obviously didn't complete that trip; you were taken off and drafted elsewhere.

Well, we didn't complete the trip because at that time, if you recall – I don't know what Army division it was that came back from North Africa to be sent to New Guinea – and our ship was already prepared to sail to Colombo, we had victualled ship, we had coaled ship, we had tons and tons of coal stacked in potato bags on the aft deck to get us to Colombo, and then they said you are not going, take it all off, because we had to handle the shipping that was coming back, connected with the transfer of the division.

You made an interesting comment then about the coal. As the stoker, what was your

role?

Shovelling black diamonds.

And you've been aware of this ship since; could you tell me what your memories of this ship are recently?

Yes. In 1988 I went to a corvette reunion in Brisbane and I went down to see the expo, and there, tied up alongside was the *Forceful*. It's now the Maritime – I believe it's called the Maritime Historical Society in Brisbane has taken over the *Forceful*, has preserved it, and uses it for tours – or you can hire it for tours – up and down the Brisbane River.

When you obviously left this ship, what was your next move after that?

Well, my next move after that was, I had received a transfer, or a draft, to HMAS *Inverell*, which was being built at Mort's Dock in Sydney.

And when was this, what was the date?

This would be in July 1942.

As the ship was being built, obviously you couldn't live on the ship. What was your role there until the ship was commissioned for sea?

While I was what's called standing by the ship, I lived ashore at Johnny's, which was quite a little bit different to living in depot. I lived at Johnny's and each day would proceed to Mort's Dock and there, with the engineer officer and others in that department, we put together all the necessary arrangements for the engineers' department before we went to sea.

What, and the actual construction of the ship?

No.

Preparing the ship?

Preparing the ship's stores, and stock, and all that materiel, putting out your engineer's lists for requirements, everything concerned with preparing the engineers' department to go to sea.

Now, as our oral history is concerned with corvettes, what were your impressions of commissioning a brand-new corvette? Which was the...?

Inverell.

The *Inverell* – HMAS *Inverell* – and can you recall its number?

Yes, J233.

233. What was your feelings of commissioning a brand-new ship?

Well, it was like going from a hut in the desert to Buckingham Palace.

No coal?

No coal.

When it was commissioned and went to sea, when was that?

About September, October [1942].

What was it like adjusting to seaboard life, aboard a corvette? Could you tell me something about the routines and your life at sea, or your running-in trials, no doubt off Sydney?

Yes. We had our first run to Broken Bay, which was up the coast, north of Sydney, and we had a shake-down cruise up there. After we were actually fully commissioned we then did all the convoy work on the eastern coast for a few months.

Can you recall your feelings when you steamed out through the heads, the first time on a new ship going to sea?

Well, we had on board, on this particular day, we went to sea when the dockyard crew, and everybody else, went to sea to commission the new ship; and it was quite an experience because I had actually, by this time, gained my sea legs a little bit and I would stand back and watch everybody else who was suffering the nauseating feeling of going to sea for the first time. So I was a fully blown sailor after about three months.

In this ship, in its early stages, where did you go and what work was engaged in?

Well, if you recall, at this time in history, Sydney was being shelled and there was a lot of activity of Japanese submarines on the eastern coastline. During this particular time we did convoys to the north of Sydney, but basically to Melbourne and down through Bass Strait.

All along the...

All along the eastern seaboard, yes.

Eastern seaboard of Australia. Now, your duties on the ship, as you came on as a stoker, did you still remain a stoker, or did you become the engineer's writer?

Oh, no, every now and again I did my turn of duty as a stoker, but my job leaving and entering port was always in the engine room taking movements, and that is, that you record every movement that comes from the bridge into a log. In other words, when you get stopped, you have to record the time the engines were stopped, to slow astern, to slow ahead, everything was recorded.

Now, apart from this work as an engineer's writer you did normal watch keeping as well?

Oh, yes.

Give us some indication of the length of watches and what work was entailed in that.

Well, it was four hours on and eight off, our regular duties, and if you were in the engine room you would be doing, as an assistant down there, boiling engines. In the boiler room there would be a petty officer in charge and you would be on the boilers.

How did you find working in the bowels of the ship where you were, more or less, confined? The feeling I got was that you were locked in down there. Would that give you a feeling of security?

Yes, quite often. When you did go into action you often looked up to see where the waterline was above your head. But I can say quite honestly that I never, ever had any fear of that, it never stopped me from going into those positions with trepidation. I usually went down there and never worried about it.

I think these ships had a range of roughly about a little over a week before they had to return to port; is that correct?

Well, that would be about it, yes.

Now, when you were at sea – I mean, I realise that mess decks were fairly confined, and I suppose the normal complement on board would have been around about eighty to ninety or so. How did you find the mess deck situation?

Well, I thought it was quite good. You learnt to actually adapt yourself to the situation and to the accommodation, and I never had any worries about it.

And you slept in a hammock?

Yes, the best bed that was ever made.

The best bed that was ever made. What about washing facilities, or laundry and your own personal showers and that? Were there any complications with this?

It was very handy being in the engine room because you could boil your washing underneath the steam pipe.

Oh, good, perks there.

Had a few perks, yes.

Wasn't there some problem over supplies of fresh water?

Oh, we used to have to pump the water up to the fellows who were using the showers too often. We usually argued with the seamen about too many showers.

So you had to kind of work your passage in order to have a shower?

That's right.

What about entertainment? How did you relax at sea? Were there any forms of amusement?

Well, you made your own amusement with, maybe, doing a little bit of sly gambling with a pack of cards when nobody was looking. Yes, I think that mostly people would either do reading, sitting down quietly reading – I read a lot of books when I was at sea – and playing cards. There were a few other games that were used on board.

There weren't a great number of amenities though, were there?

No, there were no amenities; you had to make your own fun.

Also, I suppose, the point that at least a third of the people were on watch at one time or another so there wasn't undue crowds in the mess deck.

No, well, you see, there was a third on watch, a third sleeping, and a third working, practically – a third sitting around.

After you left Sydney on the *Inverell* – no doubt it shifted to other stations – what were some of the next stations?

We went into the Pacific, in the north.

Where were you stationed there, Jack?

We did a lot of work between Thursday Island and Darwin, across the Arafura.

What type of work was that?

Convoy.

You were never involved with the hydrographic survey?

No, no hydrographic.

So it was mainly from Thursday Island over to Darwin?

Yes.

How did you find Darwin?

Well, when we first got there it was just after some of the early bombings had taken place, and then we were in the thick of it early when we got there.

Did the ship ever come under serious attack?

Well, you can say not serious attack, but you were one of those ships that were moving around so that you dodged the bombs.

Yes. And you were there for some of the initial bombing?

Oh, yes.

So that was the first action that the *Inverell* participated in?

That's right.

What went through your mind when you heard the alarm – the real alarm – sound for the first time?

I think you froze a little – it's now real – and I think that was the first thing that ever came to my mind, this is it, because previous times you'd always had your dummy runs, as the saying goes, but this was for real and you just sort of, for a few seconds, realised that the game was on.

What was your action station in this situation?

Well, my action station in this situation was down in the engine room. I had to be down there because of any movements that were taken on board ship. As I said, as we were coming into or going out of port, all had to be recorded so that in a future case, if a case ever came up, it had to be presented to, maybe, a court of law that the ship had received instructions in the engine room to stop engines, or do such and such a movement.

And so you had quite a responsible position?

Oh, yes, I was down in the engine room.

Now, the aftermath of these attacks, was there any damage done to your ship?

No, fortunately we escaped.

Any injuries?

No.

But no doubt, when you went ashore in Darwin, you could see the real extent of the damage.

Oh, yes, I was ashore at one time when a raid started and couldn't get back on board.

And what happened to the ship?

Well, she just got under way as they usually do; ships don't sit still when there's an attack on.

So they you had to wait until the ship returned...

Yes, yes.

...and rejoined it then? I'm sure you weren't AWL, Jack, you were on shore on official business or doing something important.

Oh, yes, I was doing something important, but I'd crawled up a big gutter to protect myself from any falling debris that might be going on.

> Now, you mentioned you were in Thursday Island and in Darwin. Were there any other areas that the ship served in?

Not a particular area away from that area, we did many things in that area. We helped build a big airstrip at Milingimbi, which is down the Gulf of Carpentaria – just off the Gulf of Carpentaria on the western side. We spent quite a number of months convoying an Air Force ship. The Air Force had a ship of its own, flying its own Air Force flag, and they were bringing stores into this place where a strip was being built by Army engineers.

> And so this ... now, when you went into the Gulf and that, there must have been some relaxation there, when you were on anchor. What did you do – anything?

Well, we travelled up a long, narrow, muddy creek – if you can call it a muddy creek – we could only go in on high tide. It opened out into a fairly large waterway, and all the stores from the ship we were convoying was taken ashore on barge. We used to relax over those two or three days, while they were there, by going ashore and mixing with an aboriginal tribe that used to come into the Milingimbi Mission. We used to go ashore and enjoy ourselves amongst these people.

> This would have been your first experience, I should imagine, with the wildlife. You would have seen bucks, and crocs, and things like that.

All sorts of things – and big mud crabs, mammoth mud crabs.

> And what did you do with them, Jack?

The aboriginals caught them for us and we used to eat them, they were very good.

> So you enjoy mud crabs?

Yes. I spent my twenty-first birthday there.

> And have you ever had a twenty-first birthday celebration?

No.

> Well, I was in this category too, as matter of fact – quite a few people would have been. The *Inverell*, what, then stayed in that run? Did it go anywhere else after that?

Yes, we returned to Melbourne in 1943 for a refit, and leave, and naturally, my leave was home to Tasmania because I had previously met the girl who was to be my wife in later years. I'd met here when I was on the *Forceful*, but I could only get leave to Tasmania because that was my home state. And then we went back again, into that area, again, into the north.

> How much leave did you get?

A fortnight.

That would have been your first leave, first after what? – two years or more.

Yes, yes.

What was your reaction when you came home? The conquering hero returns, to your family, the country town you originated from?

Yes, it was. All the friends that I'd ever had as a young lad were there to greet me and we had a little bit of an evening. But it wasn't long enough, naturally.

But you couldn't make your trip back, part of you leave back, to Fremantle in any way whatsoever at that time?

No, it wasn't allowed, you see.

Now, after that you returned to your ship; what happened then, Jack?

We went back up north and we continued our convoy work. One of the trips we did, we bought the late Bluey Truscott's equipment from the north, down, when he was moved to Onslow. Bluey Truscott was killed at Onslow in later years. And in company with the *Warrego* – HMAS *Warrego* – the *Inverell* and *Warrego* convoyed a ship called the [SS] *Maetsuycker* – the old Dutch liner that used to ply from Fremantle – and we brought her down to Onslow with all of his equipment on board.

You seem to be getting closer back to Fremantle. What happened then?

Then we turned around and went back the other way.

So you were left at a disadvantage.

That's right.

Now, by this time, what was your future story of the *Inverell*?

Well, we went back north and continued with our work, and one day we came into Darwin from a convoy we'd been bringing in, and the ship tied up alongside the wharf was the *Bunbury* – I believe it was the *Bunbury* – and out airing was all the blue suits, and dicky fronts, and we actually said, 'I wonder where they're going.' And when we pulled in alongside and received our message from shore that we were also going – to Fremantle.

You were going to Fremantle?

Now, Jack, you've got your best suit out – I hope you've still got it – and you are on your way to Fremantle. So could you carry on with your story from there?

Yes. We eventually set sail for Fremantle and arrived, I think, on 29 September in 1944. I had been away from the west going towards two and a half years – two years and three or four months. Prior to leaving here I had met the girl that was to be my wife and we hadn't seen one another for, well, that length of time. And her brother was in the Navy and I could not let her

know that I was arriving – and he was a signalman, or a Tel [Telegraphist], and worked at the station on top of the old wheat silos in Fremantle.

It was the one where the dingo was painted.

That's right. He eventually went home on this particular day, about 28 September, and told his sister that possibly she could see me tomorrow – and I turned up after that length of time.

Now, Jack, as you said, you'd been in correspondence with your wife over that time, and no doubt the mail bag used to be full and things like that. Now, you've come to Perth, and the ship arrived in Perth; did it stay here or what happened then?

Yes, yes. I applied for leave straight away to get married. We were married on 14 October in 1944 which is just over fifty years ago. I got leave to get married, had a short holiday, and then went back on board again after that.

Why was the ship in Fremantle? Was it based in Fremantle at that time?

Yes, it was based in Fremantle, in came down and did work outside of Fremantle.

What, submarine work?

Yes. And I left the ship very soon afterwards because I received my rating of a leading stoker and we had enough on board. So they put me ashore at HMAS *Leeuwin*.

And by this time you were living at *Leeuwin* but you were married and you had accommodation, I assume?

Yes, I had good accommodation – by this time I had good accommodation ashore.

Now, at *Leeuwin*, what was your role at *Leeuwin*?

Well, along with about four other leading stokers we were in charge of the boilers, inside the boilers, and lots of other equipment inside *Leeuwin* Depot.

And what would the boilers be used for – mainly hot water?

There were boilers in the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] area, there were boilers for hot water systems in those days – they had a hot water system running on boilers and we looked after all of those things.

Now, you are married by this time, Jack. Could you tell us how this affected your way of life, from being a sailor in foreign ports?

Well, I don't know whether it affected me so much because I'd led a fairly – if I might say so – a fairly easygoing but not a reckless life, and so settling down to a married life didn't affect me in any way.

Now, how much longer did you stay at *Leeuwin* for?

I was in *Leeuwin* for quite a number of months; as a matter of fact, I was there by the end of the war, at HMAS *Leeuwin* – which was in August '45, so I'm there for about eight months.

> Now, this is interesting. Could you tell us what reaction you had when the war was over? Or how was the news given to you?

Well, it came through by radio in those days; I think it just passed around the Depot like a bushfire. Suddenly somebody got the word and it just spread, it was like oil on the top of water.

> And did you have any idea of what really happened then, or did that come later?

No, we didn't; all we knew [was] that there had been a surrender.

> And so straight away you thought of discharge and going home and resuming your normal civilian life; was that so?

Well, I suppose this was one of the things that crept into your mind, but then again, if you recall, you got out on your point system – the longest in was the first out in those days, and until your number came up you still remained a part of Her Majesty's Royal Australian Navy.

> And that was the end of your seagoing career, is that correct?

No, no, a little bit later on I was drafted to the HMAS *Australia*, the cruiser, which called in to Fremantle and there was four of us got a quick – very quick – draft to *Australia* to take her to the east – that is the eastern seaboard of Australia.

> And would you like to mention, was there any reason of why you were pulled out of the Depot to do this work?

Oh, yes, well, there was a little bit of trouble on board. We weren't taken on board to quell the trouble; we were taken on board to fill the vacancies that were caused by this trouble. I had the unfortunate position of being a guard, marching one poor fellow down to the quarterdeck where he was court martialled and discharged dishonourably from the Royal Australian Navy – I'm not saying for what reason but it is one of the things in my life that I actually regretted, being put in that position.

> When you were on the cruiser, what work did you do there?

I was in the engine room.

> This would be a contrast to shovelling coal on the tug and then being on the corvette, I should imagine.

Well, I went on board and I had no sooner hit the deck and they said, 'You are on duty', and I said, 'Where?' and they said, 'The starboard engine room aft.' I said, 'Well, please lead me there because I'll never find my way' – and I think I had to have an escort for the first week, getting backwards and forwards from my point of duty.

> What about cruiser routine, did that affect you in any way? Did it make you feel that you would have been happier on the small ships?

Ah, definitely, definitely. It was a very cold sort of a situation, I felt, on the cruisers; there was no friendship or mateship, you only knew the fellows around you on your own mess deck, and then you didn't know them all. It didn't gel with you like it did when you were on a corvette.

Now, you went to Sydney; what was your future in the Navy after that, Jack?

Well, I went to Sydney and one of the experiences I had when I was on the cruiser was I went ashore one day with a couple of friends and had a bout of sickness took on, I was put into a hospital by ambulance. A few days later, after they'd diagnosed that there was nothing wrong with me – nothing serious – they put me into Balmoral Depot which was, to me, the last place on earth anybody would want to be. They put me ashore on that day to do some afternoon leave, and I was walking up George Street in Sydney and saw one of the engineer officers off the HMAS *Australia*. So I went up to him and introduced myself, and told him, look, for God's sake, get me back on board ship as quickly as possible. So the next day I was drafted back onto the *'Aussie'*, and I was there until I was discharged in May of 1946.

You are in Sydney and you were discharged; how did you get back to Western Australia? And what were the circumstances of – well, what information did you get on your discharge?

That I would be drafted back to *Leeuwin* – I was actually discharged from HMAS *Leeuwin*. So we came back by passenger train, first-class too.

Oh. And when you got to *Leeuwin* did you feel that you were being prepared for civilian life in any way? Or was it just a matter of checking your gear in and that was it?

Well, that's about it. You had an aptitude test, if I remember correctly, and they said you are either good enough to be a baker, a butcher, a candlestick maker, then said bye-bye, ta-ta.

And so you were discharged in...

1946.

Discharged in 1946 and then you went home to Muriel and started to commence your civilian life?

That's right.

Now, could you tell us something about your early, you know, the year or so after discharge? Did you have your own house by this time or were you camped on the back veranda of your in-law's house? Which seemed to be the feature of married couples at that time.

Yes, you've hit the nail on the head. Yes, we were living with my wife's parents. By this time I had a son and he was born in 1945 – and so this is now 1946 – I had a son and we had no home, very little money. As you know, the small amount they gave you, as a deferred pay, didn't amount to very much, and so I had various sort of jobs here, there and everywhere. But in 1947 I decided to take my wife home to Tasmania to meet my family and parents, which we did. And then on return I had a job with the Air Force Disposals down at Pelican Point which was the

home of the Catalina flying base, and they had a disposal place there where they got rid of surplus Army/Air Force material such as tarpaulins, and buildings, and you name it, that went through there.

> So you had this job, but this wasn't the end of your career because you then embarked on a totally different career. Could you tell us something – I think you took advantage of CRTS [Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme] training...

Yes, I did.

> Could you tell us something about what happened then?

Well, I applied for a motor mechanic's course which, I thought, would stand me in good stead because on my discharge they said I was mechanically minded – they were half-way right. I applied to be a motor mechanic and was put through a course, or a testing course, in the old Perth Tech. On the day we went in there, there was about seventeen or eighteen of us that applied to go, and we were put through the course, starting motors from scratch, timing engines and getting them going, and then finally sat down to do a written paper.
Well, by this time, I think, the market had been flooded with motor mechanics and they didn't want any more, unless you were an expert, so I failed because I couldn't pass the written paper which was actually set to the standard of somebody who had been a mechanic in their own right.

> And then what happened after that, Jack?

Well, then I went back to CRTS, went back to rehab and said, 'Well, I can't be a motor mechanic; what can I be?' Well, that then took me back to my childhood days when I left school because my teacher had wanted me, instead of working with my father on motor trucks, he wanted me to go to high school and be an accountant or a teacher. And when I did approach the rehab people again they said, well, you can be one of these things, and one of them was teaching. And so I thought, well, I maybe able to open the gate which was offered me thirteen years ago. And so I applied to go for teaching and eventually that became my profession.

> Now, Jack, you mentioned you had seven years of primary schooling, you'd been in the Navy, but then you came into teaching. Now, you just couldn't come into teaching like that. Now, what preparation did they give you before you came into the actual teacher training course?

Well, we did a course down at the old 'White City', I think they called it, down at the foot of Williams Street, and we were put through a course which was supposed to be, in one year, the equivalent of a Leaving Certificate – and we had to pass that in one year. Now, I had been away from school for thirteen years, never been to high school, and had no training whatsoever, academically, in that thirteen year period. I went down there and I did that course, and I might say, not boasting, I came through, I entered college with what we called a top certificate from rehab. And then I did two years in Claremont Teachers' College and came out with what they called a B2 Second Year Certificate which was, to us then, the top certificate – you could get a B1 or a B2. So I felt pretty proud of myself, considering my background.

> But obviously this meant a lot of hard work on your part to achieve this three years of training – where I know an allowance was paid, but then again, I mean, this probably was just barely keeping the wolf from the door, I should imagine.

Well, in my spare moments – when there were very few of them, on weekends and holidays – I worked at McKay's Cordial Factory. Every time we had a break I went into McKay's Cordial Factory, which was in East Perth, and I worked there on bottling machines, and washing bottles, and driving trucks, and carting cool drinks, and I did this every time we had a break. So there was no rest at all.

> Now, when you went into college you did the qual. course – qualifying course – and these were people who were somewhat your own age and somewhat your own experience, but it must have been quite a shock to your system to suddenly turn up at Claremont Teachers' College, and there were you, the veteran, shall we say, returning to school after many years, and then all the rest would have been young students, male and female of about eighteen or nineteen years of age. How did you react to this mixed grouping?

As a matter of fact, I suppose we were the pride of the College, the older fellows, because we knew the ropes, and the young ones – which had only just done their Leaving the year before – they had come green from school. See, we'd had a few years experience in the wide, wide world of – wartime world – and even grew up from prior to leaving school to the going to the war – so we held the sway, we led the young ones, we told the young ones where to go and how to advance in life.

> And Tommy [Stenn] was very favourably disposed to you.

Yes, Tommy [Stenn], and Neil [Tralen] – very good, yes, two older – and I went through college with people who later became – who were in my college – Rolf Harris – Rolf Harris went through with us.

> Dick Jones.

Yes – and Warren Louden, who became the Director General of Education. So I rubbed shoulders with some famous people on the way through.

> Now, college just wasn't a book-learning experience; tell us about your first practice, Jack – practise teaching, in case you don't know, is where students are put out in schools under the supervision of a teacher, to prove whether they wanted to be a teacher or whether the Department wanted them as teachers.

Well, I had a very, very wonderful first practice. I practised in the North Perth Primary School under old Ernie Smith. Ernie Smith, in those days, was noted; he got the most students through the qualifying course to go to modern school – he had the records to prove it – and his classroom was like a factory, they turned out – they graded those children from the time they went into Grade 1, and by the time they reached Ernie's class they were brilliant kids. So he had all the brilliant ones. And a great friend of mine who went through with me is Stan Carroll – old Tich Carroll – and Stan and I had our practice in that room. Well, the children were just – you know, you had to be excellent to keep up with them – I was behind them, they were in front of me, there is no doubt about it. But it was a wonderful experience to be in Ernie Smith's class.

> And from there you had other practices throughout the year. Are there any of those that you recall? What can you recall of your two years in college – experiences that you'd

never had before, at camps or...?

Yes, we went on camps, we took students on camps – we went on camps as students ourselves, up into Araluen, to Pelican Point. We had some really wonderful outings and actually they knitted you into a group exceptionally well.

So you graduated as a teacher – well, your first teaching appointment, what happened?

As it was, I was married with a family and it was very difficult to get a country appointment for a married man unless he was the headmaster going into his own school. He was the only one that had a house, everybody else lived on the local farm, or in the local pub, and having a family I did not get a country appointment. My first appointment was to Rivervale, Rivervale School, under an old headmaster called George Williamson, a real character of a man, he really was.

Where were you living this time, Jack?

I was living in Leederville.

How did you get to Rivervale?

I had an old motorcar – I had an old Morris Cowley motorcar which I had paid £130 for in those days, which, believe me, was a lot of money.

And by this time you and your family are living in a house, like your own house or house in Leederville, and that was the start of your stay in the metropolitan area?

I was still living with my parents-in-law, even then, and that was the start of my teaching career.

And then what appointments did you have after that, Jack?

Well, I only stayed at Rivervale for one year; I then went to Floreat Park. Floreat Park in those days was *the* metropolitan school, with a capital T-H-E. And the headmaster, a fellow called Bill Potts, was an exceptionally great headmaster – a little hard, a little tough, but he was one of the greatest men you could wish to serve under. And I served there for eleven years straight, and I suppose, in my lifetime there, I taught some wonderful kids and it had a great reputation as a school, the scholars that came out of it, the discipline of the school, everything was A1. I taught a lot of great sportsmen there that came out in later years – [Kemmy Blackmore] for one who died as a young man – [Kemmy Blackmore] was a student there when I was there – and many, many others.

Do you think your career in the Navy gave you a background for teaching?

I think so, I think what you learnt, living as a group of men, especially on corvettes, gave you a certain background that you could actually learn to adapt yourself, no matter where you found yourself in later life.

And you'd had a life of, well, a life of discipline which obviously was a requirement in the school situation – then – which seems to be sadly lacking now.

Well, I had a life of discipline right from the very day I was born because I had a family

discipline at home as a youngster, as a young lad growing up, and I worked with my father – discipline in the Navy and discipline afterwards, and it was just tops.

> Now, Jack, would you like to continue with your career in the Education Department?

After I'd been at Floreat for about eleven years I received a promotion as a deputy principal and went to Midland School – I taught at Midland, Balcatta, came back to Floreat as deputy there at Floreat, and relieving principal at Floreat for about twelve months.
After the period in Floreat the second time I was appointed to a lecturing position in Mount Lawley Teacher's College. I spent three years in Mount Lawley – which is now the Edith Cowan University – I spent three years there on the practise staff which is the practical side of the teaching of young students in the teaching profession.
After leaving there I went to Nollamara – I was posted to Nollamara – and finally finished up at Karrinyup where I spent eight years as deputy and relieving principal over periods of time until I retired in 1982, on the day I turned sixty.

> Jack, now, you retired at sixty and you've had thirty years with the Education Department. Could you tell us something about your home circumstances in that time? I know you said that you were sharing a house with your in-laws but we'd like to hear some more on that if you wish.

Well, John, in 1951 I was able to scrape together enough finance and through the War Service Homes we bought a home of our own in Joondanna and we still live in that same home. It was, in those days, was called 'asbestos and tiled roof'' and we still live in the same old home – with my wife who is now in a wheelchair, with all the facilities in our old home we feel that it's useless for us trying to find somewhere else to live at our age, so we look like spending the rest of our days at 143 McDonald Street, Joondanna.

> Now, one of the things you mentioned, a War Service Home; how did you get one of these? Or what were the requirements?

Well, firstly, you had to be an ex-serviceman, naturally, and you could apply for the War Service Homes to give you a loan.

> It was quite a large sum of money, wasn't it?

Well, it was £1,800-odd they would give you. My home cost me £2,240 and so I had to find £400, which, in those days, was a lot of money.

> And so all this, while on your teacher's salary at that time, which certainly wasn't great – although I think one of the advantages of War Service Homes was the fact of the low monthly repayments, not that you ever finally paid that amount off, and the cheaper insurance, I think that was one of the good things about it.

Well, that was one of the benefits, John, was the cheap insurance, the cheap interest rate on the money that they loaned you. They were good to you; I will say this, that the War Service would always be behind you. If you wanted a little extension on it you could always borrow a little bit more later on in years because they increased the allowance that you could borrow; and if you borrowed to the maximum when you first built it, there was a little leeway as they increased the amount and you could go and borrow more. So if you wanted an extra room, which we did as

the family grew, more rooms and other things within the home, you could borrow for that.

> Now, what about your family? I mean, you mentioned that you had one child born whilst you were still in the Navy; could you give us a little detail about your family?

Yes. I have two boys and a girl. Both of the boys grew up and went to Tuart Hill High School; both of them became the captain of the school – they were the school captain; both of them played state football for state school football. One of them – my second son – went on to become a league umpire in the Western Australia National Football League – Brian. At the moment he's a teacher. My eldest son is tied up with a soccer organisation in a capacity of running a soccer organisation. My daughter is tied up with a school, she is a teacher's aide and she is also a president of the P&C and she's in the Tuart Hill area, and at the moment is negotiating with the Minister for Education for the two schools to be amalgamated.

> What about your own interests, Jack, at this time? Although you were a teacher you had other interests, I believe.

Well, I was a director of one of the league football clubs for thirteen years at West Perth; I have been associated with sport most of my life – never played it because I had a bung knee. I couldn't play sport but I've been in the administration of sport nearly all my life – junior and senior. And then after I retired I became associated with the Corvette Association.

> This is the next, I'd like you to now tell us of your interest in the Corvettes Association, as to when it initially got off the ground, and then lead up to the most successful – or the second most successful – reunion that we've had, you've just recently conducted in Western Australia.

Yes, well, John, the Corvettes Association was formed in 1980 in Sydney, and being a teacher I couldn't go to that, I was busily at work. And in 1981 – early 1981 – we formed the West Australian branch of the Corvette Association. I was elected to that first committee and, strange as it may seem, I'm still there, I've been on the committee ever since. I don't know whether that's a record or whether it's a ... somebody else wishes to take my place, but they can whenever they like.

The Association has grown from strength to strength. In Western Australia our association has about 480 members at the moment – in the vicinity of 480. We have quite a strong backing of our ladies who are automatically a member of our association – once a member joins his wife becomes an associate member – and the women are, we might say, the backbone of our association by keeping us together.

I have been president twice, I've served a three-year term way back in about 1985 and 6 and 7, and I'm now again the president. We hold reunions quite often – have done over the years, every two years throughout the nation. And we just held a successful one here in Perth where we had 1,158 applicants who arrived here, to join with us. We had a successful luncheon at Gloucester Park Racing Centre where we sat down 1,100, in the vicinity of one or two, to dinner. On the Friday and on the Sunday we took twenty-four coach loads to Garden Island for a spit roast, and on the way over there we held a big memorial service at our memorial at Fremantle.

> Relationships with the current Navy? We seem to have a very good rapport with them.

Well, I've got two hats; I'm also state president of the Naval Association and we do, we have a great relationship with ex-Navy, and especially have a great relationship with the Navy, the

serving Navy, itself, we are very closely tied up with them.

Identification: This concludes the interview with Jack Appleby, stoker – finished up a leading stoker – official number H1655 – and the interview was conducted by John Roberts. Many thanks, Jack, for your cooperation.

05/02