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TRANSCRIPT
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F4144 Forsyth, Robert John

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by: Margaret Rickard

Description

F4144 Robert John Forsyth, as an able seaman, Royal Australian Navy (RAN) corvettes HMAS *Cessnock* and *Dubbo*; Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, Australian and northern waters; 1942–1946, interviewed by Margaret Rickard

Robert Forsyth talks about his education and early working life; recruitment into the RAN in WA; travel to the Flinders Naval Depot; basic training; a subterfuge to get leave; pay and promotion to Ordinary seaman; colleagues from SA; missing torpedo school because of injury; being drafted to HMAS *Leeuwin*, Fremantle and duties there; joining HMAS *Cessnock* in November 1942; joining the British Eastern Fleet in Kilindini, Kenya; the tribulations of having an RNR captain; boat racing in Kilindini and Aden; operational routine in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean; being damaged during transit to the Mediterranean; recreation during repairs at Massawa; escort duties and recreation in the Mediterranean; supporting the invasion of Sicily; return to Aden–Bombay escort duties from October 1942; training to operate the *Cessnock's* radar that was fitted in Bombay; refitting and recreation in East London and becoming engaged there; return to escort duties in the Indian Ocean; joining HMAS *Launceston* for return to Australia for further radar training at HMAS *Balmoral*, Sydney; joining HMAS *Dubbo* in Fremantle; sailing to New Guinea waters via Darwin; supporting land forces from Torokina, Bougainville and Aitape, New Guinea; being hospitalized in Torokina; rejoining *Dubbo* in Madang and the return voyage to Williamstown, Victoria; appreciation of Lieutenant Allen's kindnesses; demobilization and thoughts on recording medical conditions; Rejoining the Merredin Brewery and his subsequent career there and with the Swan Brewery; marriage and family, and housing and War Service Loans.

Transcribed by: Chris Soames, February 2002

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Transcript methodology

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

Jack was born in Subiaco on 11 June 1924 and he joined the Navy on 5 March 1942 as an ordinary seaman, and served in the following corvettes: HMAS *Cessnock* and HMAS *Dubbo,* also being on a couple of others as a passenger.

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 and 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, 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.

And we'll catch up now with Jack.

Where were you educated, Jack, and first your early years were spent where?

My early education was at Nangeenan State School, the whole, I think, eleven or twelve pupils, and then, after 6 Grade, another young fellow and myself went on to correspondence lessons, but we also attended school – the Nangeenan School, that is, for eighteen months, until the teacher got sick of us and he arranged for us then to transfer to the Merredin State School where I completed my Junior Certificate of Education. The other young fellow was lucky enough, at the end of his second year, to join the postal service and got out of education.

And you joined the RAN from your work, you were working then?

When I left school, after passing the… doing the Junior Certificate Examination, I managed to get a job before the end of the school year at the Merredin Brewery and I was a junior clerk there – very junior clerk I might add. I mixed with people who were older than myself and they were all going away to the war, which left me very discontented.
In the meantime I joined the local Volunteer Defence Corps, along with my father and all the other old returned servicemen, which taught us a bit of square bashing – not much else because we didn't have any rifles, we used broomsticks.
In 1941 I was home from work because of a very bad dose of the flu, and I was thoroughly fed up to the back teeth. So I wrote to the Navy Office to have them send me the recruitment papers. They very smartly sent back a letter saying that my education qualifications weren't good

enough for them. So I thought, well, to hell with you so I went back to work and suffered it for a while.
But again, a bit later on I was sick with the same complaint, the flu, and this time I thought, well, here goes again, so I made another application for the recruitment papers. And I suppose by this time the corvettes were coming off the slips, and they needed men, so they sent back the recruitment papers. Being under eighteen my father had to approve, which he did. We had to go down to the JP, or a JP, and get them signed. I remember Saturday afternoon in front of old Jack Kendall, who was one of the local JPs in Merredin. My father only signed them on condition that I promised not to become a boozer; I think I've kept that promise fairly well, even to today. Any rate, in – it would have been early November or late October – I'm not quite sure of the date but having passed the local officer's medical in Merredin I was called down to Fremantle to HMAS *Leeuwin* to undergo the Navy medical, which was carried out under the supervision of, I understand, one of the medical officers off HMAS *Sydney*. And of course, within a few weeks he disappeared when the Sydney went down – that was in November '41 – and I wasn't called up until March '42. I can tell you, the wait was frustrating.

Just in time to catch the corvettes, obviously.

Yes, yes, it was. 5 March '42, a group of us gathered in the recruiting office in Forrest Place – Padbury Buildings, Forrest Place – as many sailors would remember. We put our hand on the Bible, or whatever, and swore that we would serve the King and all the rest of it. And from there, over to the Perth Railway Station to catch our transport to HMAS *Cerberus* – and a whole new world opened up.

What are your recollections of the trip?

How did you cope with the troop train?

Mainly one of crowding. None of us knew each other prior to this, of course, and there were eight of us to a second-class compartment, which were built for four. So it was two to each bunk, top and tail, or head to feet, and so on. And they were the old coal trains, old coal-engined trains, so it would stop and start all the way across the Nullarbor.

Stop for meals?

Yeah, and stop for meals. Of course, to us, young and silly, it was a great eye-opener, we thoroughly enjoyed it. Changed trains in Port ...

Pirie?

... Port Pirie, yes, Port Pirie, changed trains. Then we changed trains again in Adelaide, then to Spencer Street Station, it would have been, in Melbourne.

Yes, it certainly would have.

Yes. And then from Spencer Street and I can't remember how we did it but somehow we must have gone to Flinders Street to catch the train down to HMAS *Cerberus*.
The only thrilling thing that happened on that, some idiot threw a brick, or a stone, through the window and he happened to hit the chap that was sitting next to me, a fellow by the name of Smith – Ken Smith, I think his name was – and he finished up with the blood running down the

side of his face. But we duly arrived at Flinders Naval Depot, in the dark – well, almost in the dark – to be greeted by 'You will be sorry'.
We were issued with our bags, and hammocks – I don't think we got our kit the first night, I think it was too late for kit, but certainly we got our hammocks. And we were introduced to a leading seaman who took us over into the new entry block – I think we were in H Block, from memory – and shown how to put our hammocks together; and how to sling them; and how to get into them; and how to get out of them without falling and breaking our arms and our legs; and next morning, of course, how to lash up and stow. All a great experience to us.
Next day we would have been issued with our kit. Of course, time was then spent in making the kit shipshape – putting the seven creases in the trousers; and the three creases in the collar; and making sure our shirts were ironed correctly; tying the bows for our tallies. Oh, God, what an experience that was! I could never tie a tally properly. Some people used thruppences [threepenny bits] but I could never manage it, I alway had somebody else to do it for me.
I had five months in Flinders. Being an Ordinary Seaman Second Class, I wasn't allowed up the line, as we used to say, to go on leave to Melbourne unless I had somebody in Melbourne to say that they would be responsible for me. And I already was corresponding with a lass who lived in Richmond – I can still remember the address, 237 Punt Road, Richmond, it was right opposite the Richmond Oval, the old Richmond Oval – her name was Watson, Jean Watson. So I wrote to Jean and said, ‘Look,’ – she knew I was coming over because of our exchange of letters. I wrote to her and said, 'Jean, I won't be able to come ashore' – being old salts by this time, a fortnight – 'because I'm under the age of eighteen and I've got to have somebody in Melbourne to say that they will be responsible for me. So I'm stuck down here.'
It wasn't three days later, back came a letter from my Aunty Jean – she'd woken up very quickly and sent back a letter saying that Aunty Jean and her father, whatever his name was, I forget now – they would be responsible for me on my leave, and I was very welcome to come up and stay with them, blah, blah, blah. So I then had to put in a request to be permitted to go ashore, and presented the letter, and it was duly granted.
I'll never forget stepping up to my first request to the little two and a half ringer – I forget his name but he was always known as 'Toot-Dick-Pappy' – he was a little short fellow, little short officer, who'd come up through the horse pipe. He'd been a lower deck man in his youth and been in the Navy for many years and, of course, understood sailors thoroughly. He probably knew the letter was a fake too, but it was there and that was it, so he accepted it.

It proved everything.

Of course, we couldn't do much on the two shillings a day we were paid – that's Ordinary Seaman Second Class – twenty cents in today's value. And then, on – I'll just confer with my Service Certificate – on 10 June 1942, the day before my eighteenth birthday, I was promoted. I got my first promotion; I was promoted to an Ordinary Seaman. I think, I think my pay went up to three shillings a day; that was beaut.

High finance.

High finance. There were happy days, to a degree, in *Cerberus*, You know, we learned to adapt to service life and taken orders. But generally speaking, we got on well. The class I was in was Class 46 of 1942; it was a mixed class, mainly Western Australians and South Australians with a few Victorians. Somewhere I've got an autograph book with a lot of signatures of the people in it.

Oh, how interesting.

And one of them is a fellow by the name of M. Hill-Smith, who is Mark Hill-Smith from the Yalumba Wines people.

Oh, for goodness sake.

There were three South Australians; there was Hill-Smith, David Tolley – who was also connected with wines and spirits, he was Tolley [Stutten] Tolley. And there was another chap, Dick – and I can't think of his second name – he was also a wine and spirit crowd and do you think they were villains? Oh, they were real villains.

Silver spoon jobs.

Yes, the silver spoon.

Were you ever homesick?

No, not then, not really, because I was still in Australia. I suppose, a little bit I was, but nothing serious.

Too much happening to you.

There was too much happening, exactly. I finished up in hospital in Flinders. When we used to go up the line a group of us used to go to the Glaciarium for ice skating and this particular night I ...

At St Kilda?

No, no, no, the St Kilda one was different. Glacy was just in South Melbourne, just across the river.
And this particular night I fell over and fell back on the back of my head and finished up with a real bung eye – and was I in trouble!
But any rate, to cut the story short, I, on the Monday morning, fronted up at the sick parade and eventually got in to see the surgeon who immediately accused me of being fighting because my eye, by this time, was nice and filled up, and bloodshot – what you could see of it. And I told him that I hadn't and explained what had happened. Then he said, 'Oh, oh, well, righto, report round to the sick bay round the corner and get two Aspros and come back at one o'clock'.
So I got my two Aspros, which didn't have any effect, naturally. Suffered this in the forenoon, reported back at one o'clock, and was lucky enough to be sitting out in the sunshine, in the queue, waiting to get back in again to see a doctor, and a lieutenant commander surgeon came along and he looked at me and he said, 'What's wrong with you, sailor?' and I told him what had happened. I said, 'The surgeon commander I saw this morning reckoned I'd been fighting, but I haven't.' He said, 'I know what's wrong with you.' He said, 'You come with me.'
So he waltzed me off and half an hour later I was in the sick bay, in hospital. And what had happened, I had sinus trouble and I finished up for a fortnight in hospital, so I missed a complete fortnight's torpedo school which, in a way, didn't worry me, except that because I didn't do that torpedo school I lost – I'm not sure what it was, I think I lost a fortnight's seniority towards my Able Seaman rate.

What were you training for? What was going to be your rating?

Nothing, we were just trained as seamen, that was all it was. We did square bashing, and then we did a gunnery course; we had to do the swimming through the swimming pool; nothing else really. Then we were to do the torpedo course but, as I said, I was in hospital. Then we came home on leave and went back, and then I wasn't back there more than a few weeks and I was finished my new entry school and was then drafted into what they called Ship's Company, which was a sweet number. You shifted out of the new entry blocks, which were single-storey wooden–asbestos construction, and it was cold as charity, into the brick three-storey buildings – there were A, B and C, and you were – I forget what they were, but there was AT, AN and so on – A1, A2, A3 – and I was assigned to one of the messes as a mess cook, which again was a sweet number because if there was anything good coming along, the mess cooks got first go at it – and we were always hungry.

So that's what you were when you went to sea?

I was an ordinary seaman, yes. Then they drafted me back to *Leeuwin*, to the pool in *Leeuwin*, and that's when I first went to sea. I first went to sea in an old Broome lugger.

Oh, yes.

The B99 was its number, the *Peggy*. And there was a leading seaman who was an RN chap, he was an old – well, to me he was old , he was probably thirty-two or thirty-three, but to me he was ancient – a stoker and myself. We formed the crew of the *Peggy*, and we used to take a diver out to Cockburn Sound and the diver would go down and pick up chains, or anchors, or whatever they were after for the day, and the crew of the *Peggy* would become the diver's lifeline and provide the air pumps, and all that sort of stuff. And in between time, this leading seaman taught me seamanship. I thanked him a lot because he didn't waste time, he was prepared to put a bit of time into the young fellows, and I was the lucky one that got it.
The poor old *Peggy*, it had a one-lung engine and if the tide was doing more than four knots, under the traffic bridge coming home in the evening, we couldn't come under; we couldn't get up to the *Leeuwin* boat shed. We used to have to tie up alongside where the pilot boats now tie up in the harbour.

How long were you with her then?

Oh, I was only a matter of weeks with her, but in *Leeuwin* altogether I spent at that time, I got into *Leeuwin* on 14 August '42 – oh, no, it was more than that – I left *Leeuwin* on 17 November '42 and was drafted into the *Cessnock*.

I see.

So it was ...

Where did you pick her up – eastern states?

No, no, no, I picked her up in Fremantle. The *Cessnock* had come down from New Guinea – when she commissioned she went up to New Guinea and did work up there first, then came down to Sydney and came round across the Bight and spent a little bit of time in Albany, and then to Fremantle. And apparently – one shouldn't speak ill of one's officers, but the captain, he was RNR and he let everybody know it. He wasn't Australian Navy, he was Royal Navy.

I won't mention his name, but he was two and a half, a lieutenant commander. He apparently upset a few of the crew. Anyway, apparently what happened, when they got to Fremantle, he sent a few of them ashore and topped up from the *Leeuwin* pool. And two ordinary seamen came on, a fellow by the name of Kevin Hewitt and myself, we were drafted – we were the last two to join it in Fremantle.

Did you get home leave before you sailed, or anything like that?

No, no. I had had home leave, of course, from Flinders, and I'd got home probably for a long weekend at one stage, but most of my leave was spent in Fremantle or round the metropolitan area.
No, we joined her one day and a couple of days later we were off. We sailed for the Middle East – actually, we didn't sail for the Middle East, we sailed to join the British Indian ... no ... what did we call them? British ... the British ... oh, the Eastern Fleet, it was the British Eastern Fleet. We sailed in company with – how are we going for time?

Fine.

We sailed in company with the *Toowoomba* and the things I can remember about it were, the *Toowoomba* was J157, and if you add those three numbers together it's thirteen, and the *Cessnock* was J175, and if you add those three together it's thirteen.

Weren't very lucky then.

Yeah. And we were in company with *Adelaide* – HMAS *Adelaide* – and the Dutch cruiser, the *Van Tromp* or the *Heemskerck* – one of the two – I'm not sure which one it was now because it was so long ago[1] – and we had a tanker with us as well. At any rate, somewhere out in the Indian Ocean the *Adelaide* and the *Van Tromp*, or the *Heemskerck*, they got into some strife with a German raider,[2] and I didn't know anything about this; I was the youngest fellow on board, and very raw, and didn't worry at that stage, you know. But any rate, they turned around and came back to Australia. A British cruiser, or cruisers, or something, came down from Colombo and picked up this tanker and took it and all. And *Toowoomba* and *Cessnock*, we sailed on to Diego Garcia in the middle of the Indian Ocean.
You mentioned earlier about being homesick. That was the period when I was homesick for the first and only time – oh, well, for the only time that I can really recall. I was in what was called Four Mess Deck – Number 4 Mess, starboard side – and I had my head down on the mess table and some bloke came in and started to have a bit of a go. I can still remember the chap's name, Tailor [or Taylor], a little fellow by the name of Tailor. He said, 'Leave him alone, it's his first trip away, he's only a kid', and the chap gave it away. And with that I got up and I was right. Now, that fixed me up. I guess I wasn't the only one, but still, that's by the bye.
From Diego Garcia we went on to the Seychelles, the island of girls, but they wouldn't let us ashore. And then from Seychelles on to Kilindini – Mombasa's the town, Kilindini's the port, and that was a real eye-opener. A little Australian corvette, the whole 900 tons of it, sailing into see the might of the British Eastern Fleet: battleships and aircraft carriers and cruisers and destroyers. We could have tied up to the [HMS] *Warspite*'s boom. Yes, it was really something

[1] The Dutch cruiser *Jacob van Heemskerck* accompanied HMAS *Adelaide*. The *Van Tromp* referred to is probably the Dutch cruiser *Tromp*.
[2] The German blockade runner *Ramses*, which was scuttled and finished off by the allied ships. There were no casualties.

to see.

It came as a shock for you?

Oh, it was a real shock, yes, it was a shock.

Mombasa – or Kilindini – Mombasa we call it because that's easier to remember. The thing I can remember most about that is coming back aboard at night-time.
They had a pontoon landing stage, and of course, in the tropics, the darkness comes down very quickly. No ships were alongside, everybody was anchored out in the harbour, so everybody had to go ashore in a motorboat of some sort and get picked up in a motorboat. And there they would be, and there was – oh, I don't know what you'd call him – but he had a loud hailer, and he was always an English chap, and sometimes you could understand him and sometimes you couldn't. He was what the Yanks would call a beach master, I suppose and he would be calling the boats in. And he would be yelling out, 'Any more for the *Adamant*?' The *Adamant*, incidentally, was a submarine depot ship and I think later on it served time in Fremantle. 'Any more for the *Warspite*? 'Any more for the *Indefatigable?'*, or the *Indomitable*? – or the whatever it was, I forget the names – I still remember the *Warspite.* And 'Any more for the *Cessnock*? Any more for the *Toowoomba*?' and there they'd come in and you'd scramble aboard, and out you'd go, and he'd have them going in a circle like that. As I said in my little notes that I typed up, Heathrow Airport had nothing on it.

Are we right again? Okay.

Our skipper, being our skipper, decided, because we were part of the British Eastern Fleet, we should be very pusser. So the motorboat had to have a forward hand, and the forward hand had to do boat-hook drill. I don't know whether you've ever seen boat-hook drill but I can't describe it after all these years, but it was absolute stupidity because the forward deck of a corvette's motorboat is a little triangular thing with just room to stand.
Any rate, muggins this day was doing the forward hand's job and we'd just pushed off – you had to push off, then you had to go through the proper drill of throwing your boat hook around and saluting, and all that sort of stuff. And as I was doing this, a jolly boat went by – and a jolly boat was a very fast little boat that was operated for skippers or captains of cruisers and admirals, and that sort of thing, mainly cruisers and battleships – and it created quite a bow wave and, of course, the *Cessnock*'s motorboat started to go left, right and centre, and with it I went and I finished up in the drink.
And as I was going over I thought of two things. Firstly, my cap; I mustn't lose my cap because it was my tiddly one that cost me money. So that went over into the boat. And the other thing was, I mustn't let go of the bleedin' boat hook because if I let that go and it sank I would be up for the cost of it, because what I'd completely forgotten was that the boat hook, while it had a brass or a metal end to it, it also had a long wooden handle and the wooden handle floated in a perpendicular fashion . But here I was, spluttering and spitting out water, and clasping the boat hook.
Any rate, they finally realised how stupid it was to be running boat-hook drill on the motorboat and it was very quietly dropped after that; so I'm glad I went into the drink. It helped out no end.

Did you rescue your cap?

Oh, the cap was in the boat; oh, I'd thrown that back. There was two things a sailor looked after, particularly when he had a cargo of beer aboard and was likely to throw up. One was his cap and

the other thing was his false teeth. He usually put his false teeth in his cap and it was safe. Now, in Mombasa we had – our chief bosun's mate, or the butler as he was known, was a fellow by the name of Rust. And we had a book on board, it was a western yarn, and the chief character in it was called Zeke Rust. So Petty Officer Rust was forever after known as Zeke – but he was a wizard at sailing boats – he was a Tasmanian and he sailed on the Derwent; he knew how to handle boats. So *Cessnock* use to put its boat in and sail against all the others. There was cutters, and luggers – not luggers, cutters and whalers, all sorts of boats, and old Zeke did alright. In fact, later on, when we got to Aden, we competed – and this is getting a little bit ahead – we competed in a civilian race against civvy boats, and Zeke, being the sailor that he was, he manufactured a spinnaker for a pusser's whaler – I don't think it had ever been heard of – so we threw that up and we won. There were other Navy boats in this particular race.
Any rate, after the race was over we were called alongside the senior ship – at that time was a British destroyer – and we were called alongside the destroyer, and Zeke was called aboard, and he said, 'Oh, crikey, what have I done now? What punishment am I in for?' He came back; he had a five pound note in his hand. The skipper was so pleased that a Navy boat had beaten all the civvies that he gave him five pounds for the crew to spend, which was really something.

It was big money in those days.

It was money in those days, that's true, yeah.

Now, we've left Mombasa, we've got up to Aden – that was where we got our first mail from home.

How long had you been at sea at that stage?

Oh, it was months, months away. I don't know how long it took but it was a long time without mail. Without any prompting from anybody there was an unofficial Make and Mend[3], nobody decided to do any work, we just retired and picked up the mail and went to town on it.
Aden; we liked the Fleet Club in Aden because they had fresh eggs, and boy, did we used to get into them. We used to get the powdered variety on board; you'd only scramble them, they were terrible things. The other thing I remember about Aden was the horrible tasting water. Oh, God, it was shocking. It came from the tanks, they had tanks further inland and nothing, but nothing, could disguise the taste of the water. We used to get lime juice and put in it, tea, coffee, nothing made any difference to it. So we were always glad to get to ...
We used to run – this is going on now – we used to run the convoys from Aden to [Khawrquway] which is at the bottom of the Persian Gulf. And then we'd go across the Gulf and anchor three miles in international waters – at least three miles – off a town called Bandar-e Abbas which was in, then, Persia, now Iran. The ships that we would take across from Aden would come down and come across the Mediterranean, down the Red Sea. They would be mainly empty tankers or full merchant ships that would go up the Red Sea [sic] [Persian Gulf] to Basra or Abadan, and would unload supplies for Russia or pick up oil from Basra or Abadan and bring it down. As they unloaded and loaded they would come back down the Persian Gulf and anchor off Bandar-e Abbas. And then when they had a full convoy we would then take that convoy across to Bombay. And from there it would be re-routed; some of the ships we'd take back across to Aden. So we were doing a triangular run. Oh, God, it was boring, but the one thing that was beautiful on it, in certain seasons of the year, the sea would be like glass and at night-time the phosphorous would come up and you can see the ships – it would be a

[3] Make and Mend – Originally, a half-day off from normal ship's work to make and/or mend clothing.

submariner's dream, you could see the tracks for miles behind you, but it was beautiful to look at – it was dangerous as well.
Of course, the other thing at Aden was the meat; we always reckoned it was camel, donkey or goat, all ancient and all tough.
Then they sent – when I say 'they', the powers that be – sent eight of the Australian corvettes up into the Mediterranean; we didn't all go up together. *Cessnock* was going up by itself, we left Aden, and we were going up the Red Sea and about midnight on a very dark night we were hit on the port quarter by an Arab dhow. It carried away all our minesweeping gear on that side, dented in the bulwark, did quite a bit of damage. So we were routed then into Massawa in Italian Eritrea, for repairs. They reckon Wyndham is a hot place, it's got nothing on Massawa; it was a stinking hot place. I think the ship was there probably about three weeks.
Any rate, they sent parties of us – they sent the ship's company in two parties, or most of the ship's company, they didn't send them all, I don't think, but most of us – in two parties up to a rest camp at a place called Ghinda – G-H-I-N-D-A – up in the mountains of Eritrea – much cooler than down on the coast. It was a rest camp that had been made for the British Army and it was right alongside a camp that was full of Italian women – yeah, it was – it didn't do us any good . They were the wives of the Italian soldiers who had been captured in Eritrea. See, Eritrea had been under Italian influence for many years and the soldiers had gone out there, they'd had their wives out, and every now and again they'd let them out and you could see the kids were in steps and stairs, they were all the same, there would be a whole group of them.
We didn't have to do a thing. They had Italian – some of the troops, the Italian troops – they left there and they were the servants for us. They did everything; they made our beds, they stripped, and they washed for us. They were only too happy to do the whole; we couldn't pay them, we didn't have the money. But they looked after us; it was a real rest camp.
Anyway, we decided – a group of us, about eight, that we'd go on to the capital, Asmara which is about another forty of fifty kilometres, or miles in those days, further inland, and higher up again. So we caught a ride with an American aircraft transporter truck, or a semi-trailer. The Americans had a field there, I think it was called Douglas Field, about four or five miles out of Asmara and they used to fly planes there, or they transport them by ship and take them by this truck arranged with this semi-trailer thing up there. And they were negro drivers and they were magic; you could shake hands with the driver as you went round the curves of some of the mountains.
We got to Asmara and didn't know anybody, didn't know a thing, and a British Army sergeant got hold of us in the street and he said, 'Who are you fellows? You've got 'Australia' on your shoulder tags'. 'Oh, yeah, we are Australian Navy'. 'Oh. What are you doing?' We told him we were at Ghinda, the rest camp.

You were in khakis, were you?

We were in khakis, yes – well, that's another story I must tell you; we were in khakis, so called khaki – and we are here – 'We've just come up from Ghinda for a bit of a spell, you know, to look around the place.' 'Oh,' he said, 'we've got Australian beer in the canteen.' He said, 'I'm at the transit depot.' He said, 'Where are you staying?' We said, 'We don't know.' He said, 'Well, there's plenty of room at the transit depot, there's nobody there and,' he said, 'I'm more or less in charge; come down with me.' So he opened up a hut and gave us palliasses, and blankets, and pillows, and told us where the showers, the ablution blocks and toilets were, and he said, 'When you are ready, come over to the canteen, it's over there.' The beer turned out to be Castlemaine XXXX beer from Queensland.

For goodness sake.

Yeah. How it got there we don't know, but we proceeded – well, the drinkers proceeded to drink it dry, almost. But, you know, to go all that way and find Australian ...

The sight of it would have made you feel good, wouldn't it?

Oh, yes, yes. Australia! It was really something.

Incidentally, we were talking about – going back a spot – talking about khakis. We had our whites dyed because we were all in white shirts, except our white shirts that we wore under our blues, they weren't dyed, but our tropical gear was all dyed khaki, but they were never the same colour because the pants might have gone through one lot of dyes, or one lot of things, and their shirts had gone through another. So you would have one lot of green khaki, and another with a brown khaki – oh, God! The only fellow on board who wouldn't have his dyed was the captain because he was Royal Naval Reserve, he was Royal Navy, he was not going to have his whites dyed, and he didn't, his was still white.

He was painted like a colonial.

Yeah. And when we got to [Port] Tewfik [now Bur Tawfiq] on the way up to the Mediterranean old Tom was the only one who was allowed ashore because the port admiral said 'Khaki is not dress of the day, only whites is dress of the day'. Oh, there was one other RN rating that we picked up. Somewhere along the line we picked up this RN rating and he still had whites, so he was allowed off. Only the two of them that were allowed off.

Amazing.

Yeah, that was ... oh, talk about ... he didn't get a vote of thanks from us.

Were you under Royal Navy orders by then?

Oh, yes, yes, we were attached to the British Eastern Fleet so we were Royal Navy – although the admiral was Australian, the admiral was Sir James Somerville who was a Tasmanian – but, of course, he was Royal Navy – or actually, he was vice-admiral, I think – he was Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville. He, incidentally, was in charge of H Force that sailed out of Gibraltar and helped with the destruction of the *Bismarck*, he was tied up with that. Anyway, that's getting away from it.

That's his story.

That's his story, yeah.

When we left Asmara we acquired two things; we acquired a pup, a little dog, which we called Horrie the Wog Dog. We made a little life jacket for him. I've got a photo somewhere of this thing with his little life jacket. We also had a Jewish passenger. I think he must have been a NAAFI staff thing – and we struck some rough weather. And this poor fellow, he had his hammock slung up on X Deck as we called it, up on the Bofors platform and he got so sick. Once he said, 'Will somebody go and ask the driver to stop the ship?' Anyway, we lost him in Port Said, when we got there, he left the ship there. And Horrie the Wog Dog, he got himself a girlfriend in Beirut, I think, or Famagusta in Cyprus, because he just disappeared one day. We

finished up, we had four months in the Mediterranean, it was a very interesting four months. We got there – I checked up on my service certificate – we were attached to HMS *Nile* in Alexandria on 1 June 1943 and we left again on 30 September – yeah, 30 September 1943. And we were escorting convoys to and fro, across the Mediterranean.

What, from Gibraltar?

From Gibraltar to Alexandria, and Alexandria across to Gibraltar. I was only talking to my New Zealand friend the other day, he – that's another story I'll come back to – it seemed to me to be longer than four months, but it wasn't. We ran to and fro across there and the most interesting thing was, we were escorting an eastbound convoy – which, incidentally, we'd picked up outside Gibraltar, we'd gone out into the Atlantic about 200 miles, and picked up this convoy that had come across from the States. It broke up about 200 miles out, some went south to Dakar – no, not so far as Dakar, but somewhere down that way – and the rest of it was coming across the Mediterranean. We were escorting that towards Alexandria and the eight ships ... I must break in and say, the eight ships of the corvettes were in two different flotillas; there were four and four; we were the 21st or 22nd – the other was the 21st, we were 22nd.
The 21st Flotilla was escorting a convoy from Alexandria to Gibraltar and we crossed – and we could see each other, you know. They were south of us, we were north; we were closer to Europe and they were closer to Africa. And it was probably off – I'm not sure whether it was Oran or Algiers, somewhere in that general location – and the next thing they opened up and the Jerries had flown over us and attacked the wrong convoy. Their ships were mainly empty ones going back for refills, apart from the tankers, which were full – we had the full ships, apart from the empty tankers. And they either didn't see us or they missed, somehow or other, they made a mistake, they attacked the wrong convoy, which didn't hurt us at all, we were pleased about that. The other thing is, we were in Gibraltar the night that the Italians packed it in.

Oh, really.

Yes. Unfortunately, I was duty watch so I wasn't ashore, but it was on for young and old in Gibraltar, the bars turned it on and everybody was on top line.
We were tied up on the pier or whatever it was – it wasn't a pier, it was stone type of mole. We were tied up, I think astern of the USS *Texas*, which was one of their battleships, because they named all their battleships after their states. Well, this was the *Texas*, I can still remember that, and it was so ridiculous to see us, our 900 tons, astern of theirs. But we were standing out on this particular mole – there were two of us, talking away – and a couple of these Yankee sailors came along, and we were talking. They invited us back to their mess for 'chow' – oh, boy, did they live well, they really did live well.

Yes, Ray [inaudible] used to talk about them.

Yes, they lived well. We always liked Alex – Alexandria, we called it Alex – because of the Fleet Club there, it was a wonderful Fleet Club; the NAAFI – Navy, Army and Air Force Institute – they ran a great Fleet Club there. We were lucky enough to be there when Josephine Baker performed one night.

French singer?

Oh, yeah – well, she was an American negress really, but she adopted France – she was there. Again, we didn't go alongside at Alexandria, we were anchored out in the stream like most of

them. But there was a crashed Spitfire boxed up on the wharf, a bit of a jetty, where our motorboat used to pull in to land the Liberty men and they had some point five [0.5 inch] quick-firing machine guns boxed up. They just disappeared into our motorboat one night. They became additional anti-aircraft weapons for us. The ERAs fixed a couple of stanchions on the gunnels and away we went.
We made a run to Beirut from Alexandria – I don't know what we escorted up there, it's so long ago I can't remember – but we finished up in Beirut. Of course, Beirut was French speaking, the notes were Lebanese pounds. I can still remember buying strawberries in [came], it was a pound for a serve, beautiful, oh, God, it was lovely.
We got a recall. I was on board so it didn't matter, but we got a recall. We had an urgent run from Beirut to Famagusta in Cyprus, to escort a merchant ship over there, wanted urgently over there, and half our crew that was ashore didn't get back, either deliberately or they didn't hear it. So we sailed off to Cyprus. By this time… no, I'll go back on this one.
When we got to Famagusta – it's a funny town, there's an ancient Famagusta and there was a new town, and we were allowed off, ashore. And, of course, being Cyprus, they welcomed us with open arms. The thing that stuck in my mind was, wherever we were in this particular little bar, the first bottle of wine cost us one and sixpence; you took the bottle back and the next bottle cost you sixpence. It was a shilling for the bottle and sixpence for the contents.

Where was the wine made?

Oh, there was trouble in Cyprus and it was real rough, it was real rot-gut apparently, not that I had much of it, but still.
And then, the highlight, of course, of our Mediterranean sojourn, was escorting the reinforcements and supplies to Syracuse in Sicily for the invasion of Sicily. We took in… The other flotilla, the 21st Flotilla, they actually took in, I think, from memory, they took in the first troops or helped to escort the first troops. We were there the next morning with the reserves and supplies, and what have you.
I remember very clearly being on the upper deck. We, after we got them there, then we did an anti-submarine patrol up and down, outside, and I remember very clearly this German fighter bomber sneaking in – and nobody really saw it until it was there and it unloaded its bomb right on the middle of the American Liberty ship and it just went off, just went swoosh! Like that. It was over in a flash.
On the way back from that particular trip, two things I can remember clearly. Firstly, a German aircraft must have been shot down. We were tail-end charlie, we were on, I think, the port quarter of the convoy, and as we were coming along we could see this – the water was very clear – we could see this parachute in the water, and we couldn't stop, we could slow down but we couldn't stop. And there was a German pilot at the bottom of the parachute, we could see that. Anyway, we tried to – as we couldn't stop to retrieve the thing – we threw a grapnel – somebody threw a grapnel into it, but of course as usual, the rope broke and the grapnel is still there and the poor old German, nobody knows who he is, he's there.
The other thing is, a bit later on, we came across a floating mine, and one thing you do with a floating mine is dispose of it. We had about six fellows who were supposed to be sharp shooters, including a West Australian, [Allan Pyrmont], and they were put on the forecastle behind a few sandbags and what have you, to shoot this thing off. The one thing I can remember mainly was the noise that it created when it went off, it really – and the water that went up. There was no attempt made to tell us to get out of the way or anything; it really went off with a bang and there was little bits of brass going ...
Stan [Alderdyce], who was a Royal New Zealand Navy radar operator, was standing behind the bridge, no there and cut him, cut him like that, you see – a bit of blood, and the shrapnel was at

his feet, shirt on, and he got skittled with a little bit of shrapnel about that long, and it [inaudible] down and he went to pick it up and the damn thing was that hot he dropped it again. Any rate, the skipper at this stage poked his head out of the back of the bridge and said to him, 'How is it Alderdyce?' and Stan said, 'Oh, it's alright, Sir, just a bit of a scratch.' He said, 'I don't mean that, you bloody fool, I meant the radar set.' Poor old Stan was thoroughly deflated.
Okay, that was about the end of our time in the Mediterranean. As I said earlier, we came out on 30 September and came back – well, we came back to Bombay, I guess, I can't remember exactly. We probably went back onto the Aden–Khawrquway–Bombay convoy run. But I must go back awhile.

Well leave that for the second tape if you like.

Alright.

We can round this off.

Okay.

I've got to go back away now, or backtrack on myself.

During one of our stop overs, or stops, in Bombay it was decided to fit the ship out with a radar. Prior to that we hadn't had radar – it had Asdic but no radar – so they called for three volunteers, like you, you and you – and being the youngest fellow on board – had no right-arm rating, no gunnery rate or anything like that, I was one of those that got a guernsey. And they sent us off to a place called Malabar Hill in Bombay for a fortnight's training, such as it was. On this particular set that they put on it was called a – I think it was the same as the infamous motorcar, a P276, and it had what was called a yagi array from the radar hut via hand-driven thing, which was alright if you were going with the wind, but when you turned it into the wind it was bleeding hard work. And of course, the skipper wasn't very happy because they took over his bathroom and made it into the radar hut. The skipper then had to use the officers' bathroom down aft.
Any rate, Allan Pyrmont, Kevin Hewitt and myself, we were the three bunnies that did this training course, and then they drafted three trained New Zealand operators aboard and they gave each of them one of us, there was Stan Alderdyce, Ron – I think his name was Ron Buckman – and Percy Bates. And I drew Percy Bates, or Percy drew me, whichever way you like to look at it. And while we weren't on the same watch, we were watch mates as far as the radar was concerned. And they also drafted on a little Welsh radar mechanic, from the Royal Navy, by the name of Peters and of course, he automatically got 'Taffy' so he was Petty Officer Taffy Peters. He didn't know much about the radar set either.
Any rate, *Cessnock* then went to war with the radar set, which was great, when it worked, which was fairly frequently, because it was brand-new and it was a new toy. And as a result of that, at a later stage, I applied – because I didn't have a right-arm rate – I applied to do a radar course. I thought, well, it's either gunnery or radar so I might as well – and I didn't want to do Asdic, that was out – so I applied to do a radar course, so that will come up later.
Any rate, it wasn't long after this – oh, we came out of the Mediterranean and, as I said, went back onto this Aden–Bombay–Khawrquway run. Then they sent us down to – when I say 'they' I am talking about the powers that be – sent us down to East London in South Africa to do a proper refit. We went via Diego Garcia, again, a second time, and then across to Diego Suarez in Madagascar.

Oh, fascinating.

Yes. A funny place, Diego Suarez, because it was the home of some of the Free French Fleet, or French Fleet, and they weren't very helpful to us, they didn't want to be pals at all but we were only there for several days so it didn't really matter.
Any rate, we went from Diego Suarez then down the Mozambique Channel, between Madagascar and Africa, to East London in South Africa. East London is south of Durban and, I think, north of Port Elizabeth. It's got a river so the ship was tied up there. The crew was then moved off into the Mission to Seamen quarters. They fumigated the whole of the ship and did whatever was necessary, boiler clean and whatever.
South Africans were very good to us – the English part of the South Africans were good. They had a very – and still there – the Afrikaans people were not so friendly, and a lot of the police force were Afrikaans. And they had a group down there called the Bruderbond or Bruderbund – Band of Brothers – and we were warned by the locals not to fall foul of them because they'd use any excuse to hurt us if they could, because a lot of them were German sympathisers.

Nothing's changed.

No, nothing's changed, nothing's changed.
We were sent off – remember, during the war here, the Australian Comforts Fund? – Well, they had a similar sort of thing over there; I forget what it was called. But we went off in groups to various places up country and I remember three, myself and two other chaps, went off. You know, I can't for the life of me think of the third fellow – the second one I can, he was one of the stewards, old Ted [Notting], he'd been a steward on Admiral Beattie's staff during the First World War – and he died a couple of years ago, as a matter of fact, old Ted. And the third one, for the life of me I can't remember his name.
Any rate, we were sent off to a town called Seymour – no, the lady we stayed with was Mrs Seymour. Her husband was a solicitor and he was also the local MP, so he was away in Cape Town while we were there. She had this beautiful, rambling home. The room that we were in was as wide as this room and almost as long as that area there, with three beds in it, and the three of us had the one room. And she looked after us right royally. I remember, she had a little singe-seater [sic] car, no – a car with a dicky seat. One of us used to sit in the front with her and the other two in the dicky seat at the back and she use to take us around everywhere. It was oh, a real home from home – Mrs Seymour – and I'm trying to think of the name of the town. Any rate, that's by the bye. But the other thing is ...

What, were you billeted with her?

We were billeted with her, yeah, they just sent us off, this Comforts Fund thing, said, 'Okay, you three go off there', and they gave us our rail tickets and, 'There you are, you go there and you come back at the end of the week.'
In the meantime, of course, I'd met this lass in East London and, much to my sorrow and disgrace, I got engaged to her. My wife and children know all about it, I told them.

You were nineteen and a half, or something?

Oh, something like that , nineteen at any rate. By this time the first captain had gone, the RNR chap, he'd gone; he'd come back to Australia to commission one of the River Class sloops, or frigates, whatever they called it and the new captain was a fellow by the name of Sweetman, and he'd been the first lieutenant.

Any rate, I wanted some money to buy an engagement ring and all I had was a few bob in my pocket and a Post Office savings book, because over there we used to use this British Post Office savings book but it wasn't any good in South Africa, we couldn't use it there. So I fronted up to this Sweetman in his cabin this day, knocked on the door – you weren't supposed to do it but it was a bit freer in South Africa – it was unofficial. He said, 'Come in, Forsyth; what can I do for you?' I said, 'I'd like to borrow some money, Sir,' and he went nuts and I was saying to him, 'I want ten pounds.' He said, 'What for?' And I said, 'I want to buy an engagement ring.' And, of course, if he had been any sort of an officer at all he would have immediately tried to talk me out of this, but he didn't, he said, 'Well, how am I going to get paid back?' I said, 'I have a Post Office saving account, but,' I said, 'as you know, we can't use it in South Africa'. And I told him, I had it with me, I said, 'There you are, it's got that much money in it, but I can't get it. But as soon as we can get to a place where I can you will have your money back.' 'Oh, okay.' So he forked over the ten pounds, he gave it to me. So I went out and splurged and bought an engagement ring and gave it to this girl.
Any rate, it's marvellous how you can remember names and places of things from long ago, and names and places from last week you can't. The girl's name was Joyce [Reedie] and she lived at 22 Castles Road, East London. There you are, I still remember that.

Not bad.

Any rate, we sailed and it was her and her family that told me about these Bruderbond people and not to walk with your hands in your pockets, particularly your overcoat, keep them free and all that sort of stuff – but others got the same warning.

How long were you there?

We must have been there about a month, I suppose, altogether. Oh, yes, it was a great old time because South Africa, apart from the natives, is very much like Australia – there's gum trees all over the place. The only thing is, you didn't see too many horses because of the tsetse fly thing, although up where we were, with this week's holiday place, there were horses. But actually, it was just the same as being home. They spoke English, although a different type of English. You didn't go to the pictures in South Africa, you went to the bioscope, things like that; and when the men went to the bar they had a brandy with a beer chaser, and that wasn't on for me.
Any rate, eventually we left East London and sailed up to Durban, and then back to Kilindini or Mombasa. And then we finished up going to Bombay, and then we were running from Bombay to Colombo, and then round to Trincomalee, and the last trip I think I had – and it was certainly the slowest – three of us escorted two tugs that were towing a dry dock. You know what a dry dock is and how huge they are; well, there were two tugs towing this thing, and they towed it from Bombay round to Trincomalee, and we had to escort it. They were doing fully two knots at a time, oh, slow.
Any rate, by this time, by the time we got back to Colombo, my draft had come through to go home to do a radar course. There were four of us came out of *Cessnock*: there was myself; a leading seaman, Paddy Gascoyne who was coming home to do a physical training instructor's course and he finished up a petty officer; Bill [Speckman] from Queensland, he was coming home to do some sort of gunnery late course; and a leading stoker, Jennings, he was coming home to do a PO stoker's course. There were four of us transferred into *Launceston* and four of *Launceston*'s crew was transferred over – they either transferred over or they put other people in – so that's where I parted company with *Cessnock.*

So you came home as part of the crew on the ...

Part of the crew of the *Launceston* – or, as we would usually say, 'Launston'.

Oh, well, that will do me.

Yeah. And when you look at it, of course, 'Launston' is another way of pronouncing it. Anyway, that's by the bye.
So I came home and had a month's leave, then went back to *Leeuwin* and immediately transferred over to HMAS *Balmoral* in Sydney which was the depot for people doing the radar course, which was at Watson's Bay, over the other side of Sydney Harbour. And the course there was – in those days it was called *Penguin* – and I went to *Penguin* on 25 October '44 and I left on 6 February '45, so it was November, December, January – it was a three months' course. Yes, I did what they called an RP3's course there, and then was drafted back from Sydney back to *Leeuwin*, to the *Leeuwin* pool, and was almost – how long was I on *Leeuwin*? – I wasn't very long on *Leeuwin*, according to this I was in *Leeuwin* one day. Well, actually, I wasn't in *Leeuwin* at all, they drove me straight from *Penguin* to *Dubbo*, but I didn't come back to *Leeuwin* and I was in *Leeuwin* for, I suppose, a week.

And they were probably out on patrol.

Yeah, came in, and as a matter of fact, I'd get almost what they called a pier-head jump. The chap that I relieved was waiting, with his bag and hammock, at the head of the gangway for me to come aboard so he could get out and get away. And it turned out, I was the senior radar operator in the *Dubbo* then; even though I'd only just finished a course, I was the senior one of them.

What was the sister ship with the *Dubbo* by that time?

... um, after joining *Dubbo* we spent a little time out in Gage Roads and then came back into Fremantle. The West Australian members of the crew, or most of them, were granted some leave. I have an idea it was a weekend. I can remember Kevin Gray, who was from Kalgoorlie, and myself, caught the Kalgoorlie Express, Kevin going to Kalgoorlie and myself to Merredin. On our return to the ship we then sailed north to go round to link up in the Pacific Ocean troubles. On our way north we stopped off in Geraldton first and had an overnight there. I can recall that the locals turned on a dance for us at the Geraldton Yacht Club. From Geraldton, next day, we then sailed north with the intention of going to Darwin, but part way up the coast we had a cyclone warning so we were diverted into Broome for two or three days. That was most unusual. I can recall seeing the remains of the Dutch Dornier flying boats that were still stuck in the bay after being bombed.
Broome in those days had three pubs which we frequented fairly often. From Broome we then went north around to Darwin and did a bit of guard ship work there and general working around the harbour. Then, after several more days, we took off again and sailed around past Thursday Island to Port Moresby. We were in Port Moresby only for a limited period and then again took off and sailed around to the north coast of New Guinea, from memory, round to Madang where we eventually linked up with the *Colac* and *Swan*, and became interested in ...
From Madang we then sailed across to Bougainville, and in company with – probably still the *Colac*, I can't recall exactly – we used to sail out of Torokina on the west side of the island, go north, about, past the little island on the north end of Bougainville called Buka, and then come down the east coast and do bombardments for the Army. Daytime ones were directed by – I think it was a Wirraway aircraft used to come in, and fly along the coast and direct our shooting.

Night-time; we did a couple of shoots on the north end of the island, very close to Buka Passage, and I believe that this part of the island was held by Japanese marines, and they were not the usual Japanese short soldier but quite tall Japanese.
Any rate, we – at this particular shoot that I can remember, there were four of us involved, and *Dubbo*, being the junior ship, was the last one to go in – and they went in in single file, blasted off their twenty rounds, or whatever, and then came out. *Dubbo*, being the last one, started to shoot off its twenty or so rounds – and I can remember, on this particular trip, we had an RAAF officer, one of the pilots, who came with us for a trip, I suppose, and to see what went on. He and I were standing behind the bridge, the radar not being used at that particular time, and the Japs started to shoot back. So we hightailed it out of there very quick, and it was a race between this Air Force officer and myself was to get back into the radar hut, who could get back there first.
After that we went over, back to New Guinea, to a place called Aitape, again with *Colac* and *Swan*, and some other corvettes, I forget which ones they were. And we loaded off the beach some troops who were going to – later that week or the next week – attack Wewak. Now, Aitape itself, there was no jetty of any sort so these troops came off in whatever they had – a couple of ship's motorboats, and the whalers, and all that sort of stuff – were packed on board. We then went out to sea for several kilometres, or miles, or whatever, and turned around and came back.
The number of troops aboard completely swamped the space, but I can remember coming back. My mess was Number 1 Mess, which was the port side forward, and I tried to go down the port alleyway, and couldn't. I thought, oh, blow this, I'll duck through the galley and come out the starboard side and see how I go there. And as I came out the starboard side door there was an old mate of mine from Merredin, Stevie Webb. He was there in his full gear, dying of thirst, like most of them. So I said to him, 'Hello, Steve', and he said, 'Who the hell are you?' or words to that effect. So by this time, of course, I was growing a beard and I had on my famous homemade work shorts made out of a AWA's skirt. Any rate, it took him a while to decide that it was me so I then managed to get him up to my mess when we brewed the tea, and imbibed that.
Strangely enough, many years later, my next-door neighbour, who came from Tasmania, turned out to have been in the same unit as Steve, although he didn't embark on the *Dubbo*, he was on one of the other corvettes. Any rate, eventually we re-embarked the troops later on and took them off, and landed them at Wewak, and they successfully managed to take that.
Steve, in the meantime, between the two embarkations, had asked me to come ashore and visit his camp, which I duly did. As I said, there was no jetty or anything so we just had to jump off the bows of the boat and into the surf, and wade ashore.
Any rate, Steve asked me to bring home for him a Japanese helmet that he'd acquired, one that had a nice old bullet wound through the front of it, and a Japanese radio – and there was another piece of gear as well but I can't recall what it was.
Getting back on the motorboat to come back to the ship I managed to drop the whole lot in the drink, which didn't do the radio any good. When I eventually left the ship I had that much gear of my own that Steve's stuff had to go over the side any rate, so he didn't get his helmet or his radio.
We then, after that, went back to Bougainville again, fiddled round there. And then again, being junior ship [inaudible], sent us off alone to a town on the north coast of New Guinea which was then called Hollandia, but of course, the Indonesians have changed its name – it was a fairly big port with a big American depot. We loaded up with ammunition and took it back to Torokina, and then had the job of unloading this stuff. I can still recall it; it was all covered in grease, and came out of our magazine and was pushed up through chutes on to the pontoon, jetty, or wharf, or whatever they had there.
My particular job at that stage was standing on a rubbing strake between the ship's side and the

pontoon, catching the shells as they came up. The last one I got, I didn't catch properly, the chap down below shoved it through with such force. Because it was covered in grease it slipped out of my arms and dropped onto the wharf with one of my fingers on the right hand stuck underneath it – which caused, as the official paper called it, a 'crush injury to the terminal phalanx of the fourth finger of the right hand' for which I now have a hurt certificate. The end of my finger came up like a mushroom so the sick bay attendant whipped me off to hospital for attention.

It turned out to be the 2/1st AGH Hospital – Australian General Hospital – which, when it came back from the Middle East, had a stop-over in my home town of Merredin. And my mother, in those days, used to work in the Comforts Fund shop and got to know a few of the boys, and got particularly friendly with three of them – they were all New South Welshmen. I expected just to go to the hospital and get treated and go back to the ship, instead of that I finished up staying there in the hospital for a fortnight, or longer, and a week in a convalescent depot.

Because we Navy chaps couldn't tell, in our letters, where we were, I arranged for one or two of these chaps that mum knew – and I knew their names – to come and visit me so they could write and tell mum that they'd seen Jack because he was in hospital. And then she knew where I was, she knew I was on Bougainville, otherwise she wouldn't have had a clue.

The convalescent depot was an Army unit, obviously, and I landed at the front door, or the front gate – the guard house – with my AWAS skirt shorts on, a pair of sandals that I'd bought in Bombay, no shirt, and my Navy cap. That was the only gear I had, oh, apart from toilet gear, toothbrush and a towel.

The lieutenant in charge of the guard said, 'Who are you and what are you doing?' and I explained to him what had happened, and my ship had gone, and I'd been sent here for waiting for it to come back so that I could pick it up. And he said, 'Well, where's your gear?' and I said, 'It's all on the ship.' So he said, 'Oh, well, you'd better go around and see the quartermaster sergeant and get fitted out.' So they gave me a set of jungle green trousers and shirt, underclothes, boots, socks, everything but what I wanted; I really wanted an Australian Army slouch hat but they wouldn't give me that because I had a Navy cap, and a little kitbag to put the stuff in. So I raised the issue with the quartermaster sergeant, who was to pay for this gear, and he said, 'Oh, you will', and I said, 'When?' He said, 'Oh, they'll catch up with you.' Well, today, fifty-odd years on, they still haven't, so I owe the Army for something but they'll never get it these days. When I came home, eventually got home after the war, my dad claimed the boots.

The next part was getting from Torokina back to Madang because word had come through to the convalescent depot that I was to pick up the ship in Madang on its return from Australia. I duly rejoined *Dubbo* in Madang, we went from there over to Rabaul, and then back to Torokina, and back to Madang, and eventually back to Brisbane via Townsville. Unfortunately, in Townsville I was duty watch – we were only there the one night so I didn't get a chance to get ashore. Then that's about the finish of that part of the islands interlude, if we can call it that.

From Brisbane we went south to Sydney – we were in Sydney for some little time – and then eventually sailed south to Melbourne – or actually to Williamstown – where we linked up with – oh, I think there were seven other corvettes and a couple of bigger ships, I forget the names of them. We were minesweeping then in Bass Strait until my demobilisation came through. I came off the ship in Melbourne, came home to *Leeuwin*, and was finally discharged on 9 April 1946. My total service then was four years, four weeks and four days, my official number was F4144, so the fours came through the whole way.

This is where I got the best job, because I've got to backtrack a little bit for a moment. The gunnery officer in the *Cessnock* was a lieutenant called Lieutenant Allen. He was a little – oh, not so little, but he was a gentleman, put it that way. He'd rather ask you to do something than tell you to do something; people thought he was soft, but he wasn't really.

Any rate, I left *Cessnock*, as you know, and came home to do a radar course. And when I was

doing the radar course about a fortnight and who should turn up as first lieutenant of the radar school but Lieutenant Allen. And it was a little bit like old home's week, you know – 'Oh, what are you doing here?' 'I'm doing the radar course'. blah, blah, blah. So I left radar school to join the *Dubbo* and the first lieutenant in the *Dubbo* was a fellow by the name of [Reichbeth] who had married a West Australian lass. He left the ship somewhere up in the islands – I forget where – and who should join as the first lieutenant but Lieutenant Allen. So I picked him up again – or he picked me up again – three times.
So when we got to Brisbane – as I said, a lot of the crew left and came home for demobilisation and what have you – and Lieutenant Allen, as the first lieutenant, or the 'Jimmy', and he called me down to his cabin one day. He said, 'How would you like to take over the job as ship's writer?' and I said, 'Oh, what does it entail?' So he told me. I said, 'Well, if you think I can do the job.' He said, 'Of course, you can do the job.' So I became the ship's writer. That was a real sinecure, you know. Used to have to do the pays and write up this, and write up that, but he was there all the time checking – and I used to work down in his cabin. Oh, God, it was a real ...

That was amazing.

…it was a real good job; it was, more or less, what they call a 'green-card job'. If you were a liberty man with a green card you could go ashore every night.
Any rate, when the time came for me to… my demobilisation draft note came through, I said to him, 'Gee, I'd like to go to Sydney before I go home', and he said, 'What, have you got a girlfriend up there?' I said, 'Oh, yeah, I've got a girl up there.' He said, 'You want to get engaged?' I said, 'Oh, it's not that serious.' He said, 'You want to get engaged.' So he said, 'Leave it with me.'
So next day he said, 'Now today is – whatever day it was'. He said, 'Tomorrow, you are going off to… Port Melbourne' – I forget what they call it – oh, *Lonsdale* – 'You are going off to HMAS *Lonsdale*.' He said, 'When you get there immediately put in a request to see the first lieutenant and ask for a week's leave, request a week's leave.' He said, 'You want to go to Sydney to become engaged before you go home.' He said, 'I can't do anything about a rail warrant for you, you'll have to pay your own fare, but I've arranged the leave for you.' I said, 'Thank you very much.' And that's what he did for me, and he didn't have to do a thing, and he did it. That's the sort of man he was.

And you got a week's leave in Sydney?

So I got a week's leave, and then I had to go around to the RTO in Melbourne and arrange transport; but they arranged the transport. I had to pay for it but they arranged the fare up and back.

I hope it wasn't to get engaged again.

Oh, it wasn't, no, I didn't. It was more or less to say goodbye to the people in Sydney; they'd been very good to me. There was a family up there that had been good to me. In fact, the girl's brother went through radar school with me, that's how I came to know them. I thought, oh, well, I'll go up and say goodbye to them because I know I won't get back to Sydney for many years. So that's what happened.
He was first-rate and I've never run across him at any reunion since, he just seems to have disappeared. He still lives in New South Wales apparently, this chap. Hopefully, one day, I'll see him and pass on my thanks.

Some people just don't worry about reunions, things like that, Ray wasn't particularly. He was in the ex-Naval Association several years when we lived in Cottesloe, but until he joined the Corvettes – and that was only through the *Wallaroo* reunion – they roped everybody in.

He was a *Wallaroo* man, was he?

Mm.

A survivor?

Yes, oh, yes. Only three men died as a result of that crash.

Oh, yeah, I knew he survived, but I mean, he was on it when it ...

[Break in interview]

Okay, off you go.

You right? I was going to go on about something I missed out on East London.
In the middle of the main street, on the right-hand side as you go up from the harbour, there's a bit of a civic square and there's a statue there with a soldier on horseback, and he's got a rifle type of thing slung over his shoulder – or he's got it at the port, I'm not quite sure now. But one night some of our blokes got up and shoved cigarettes down the barrel of the rifle until they had one poking out the end. And to compound it, there was a Boer War cannon at the base of thing so they wheeled that out into the middle of the main street and left it there. And, of course, that went over like a lead balloon with the locals. Yeah, it wasn't very popular at all.

No.

It was the wrong thing to do, of course, but still, high jinx, that's the sort of thing that went on. When I came home for demobilisation, in retrospect now, in looking back, I reckon it was handled badly by the authorities. And of course, my own father is partly to blame, I suppose, because he didn't give me the advice. There must have been a lot of fellows who were that pleased to get out of the services that they couldn't get out of that gate quick enough, and when the medical officer said, 'Have you got anything to complain about? Or have you got anything that's worrying you?' your immediate answer was, 'No, let's go'. Whereas, if you'd have stopped and thought about twenty, twenty-five, thirty years on, you would have had every bleeding complaint in the book to go on your record.
And it was just a small thing with me, my finger. You know, it's really never been much difficulty to me except when I was playing sport. I always wore a bandage and a pad over it because the bone is very close to the top of the skin. But I was that pleased to get out of the Navy and to get back into civvy life, and to get back into work, that it was no trouble – 'Oh, no'. Good God, if I ever had a son and he ever went into the Navy, or the Army, or the Air Force, I'd tell him, Look, when you get demobilised, you have every complaint you've got listed, not for today, but for the future.

The way I feel about the ex-servicemen is, quite frankly, they should have all been getting their pensions much earlier than they did. Most of it shortened your life expectancy by anything from five to ten years.

Not only life expectancy, it the little things, like – well, I've got a pension, I've got a disability pension, I get a little bit of service pension too – but it's the little things that bug you. See, I forget things these days, that's why I write it down. I can remember things from way back in the war time, like my ex-fiancée's name and address, and all that, and people I served with, I can remember their nicknames. But your name next week, somebody says, Who interviewed you? I probably would have forgotten. And my wife often says – now, her father was in the First World War, lost an eye on Gallipoli; her brother was in the Second World War, he was a prisoner of war of the Japs on the Burma Railway. Now, if there's a man who should have got a disability pension from the day he got back ... He's never, ever put in for anything, he just wouldn't; I don't know why. His widow will get the benefit of it eventually, of course, but, I mean, when Bill goes she automatically will get a widow's pension, but that's too late for Bill.

She might have trouble with that too. I'll tell you something.

[Break in interview]

I'll now back track a bit because something that I've overlooked previously is my twenty-first birthday which I celebrated in the Pacific. In those far-off days we used to get a bottle of beer a day issued to us, and they were issued with the caps off so that you couldn't store them up or something like that. But by arrangement with the leading supply assistant I managed to have a little stock put aside, unopened. My actual birthday, we were at sea, so I had to wait until we came into Manus Island in the Admiralty group, and anchored, and that night a few of us – oh, I suppose some six of us – gathered on the Bofors deck and proceeded to… correction, I'm sorry, it wasn't bottles, they were USA cans of beer, it was Paps Blue Label, or Blue Ribbon – Paps Blue Ribbon beer[4], it wasn't bottles. We then proceeded to open these cans and drink them, but being Yankee beer it was pretty weak sort of stuff and all I finished up with was a headache next morning. So that was my twenty-first birthday.

As a follow-up to that, after demobilisation, and I was back in Merredin, my sister, Norma, had her twenty-first birthday and mum and dad threw a little bit of a party for her at Merredin, in their home, and much to my surprise, they presented me with a twenty-first birthday present. I forget what it was – I think it was a gold tie pin, or a gold stud, or something gold at any rate. Any rate, by this time, after demobilisation, I was back to my old job at the Merredin Brewery where I spent a further nine months. I can still recall, my wage was five pounds a week; the basic wage was five guineas, or five pounds five shillings, a week. But the brewery was in pretty dire straits and it was no use in applying for a rise because I knew I couldn't get one. And after nine months I was transferred to head office in Kalgoorlie. The dispatch office officer had been sent down to Southern Cross to look after a hotel, and they wanted somebody a bit senior to come up and take over the office where there were two younger clerks, who both knew far more than I did; they had to teach me my job.

I remember, I boarded for the first fortnight at the Railway Hotel which was run by the Brewery under management – George [Tighe] was the manager. My salary had been increased to six pounds a week – and the board at the hotel was seven pounds a week so I was a pound a week down straight away.

Anyway, after the first fortnight, Percy Johnson, the manager, called me in and said, 'How are you going? Are things okay?' and I said, 'Yes, but I can't survive on the wages.' I told him the story of the Railway tariff and he said, 'Oh, well, as from today you are on seven pound a week,

[4] Probably Pabst Blue Ribbon beer

but,' he said, 'you'd better go and get yourself a boarding house.' but I'd already started that any rate. But he must have dropped the word to George Tighe because he eventually found myself a place and for quite a while I lived up in Varden Street. I can still remember the address: 102 Varden Street, Kalgoorlie. And from there, after about twelve months, I shifted down to Brookman Street to what used to be called the Mundy-Mundy Cottages. And Kevin Gray, who was a shipmate of mine in the *Dubbo,* and afterwards became an apprentice cooper at the Merredin Breweries – so we were together twice – said his mother and father lived in the first of the Mundy-Mundys opposite the police station, go and see her. So I subsequently did and shifted in. And until I was married – six weeks before my marriage I shifted out over to the York Hotel where I had a room upstairs there, until Jean and I got married on 25 November 1950.

Before Jean and I were married I arranged to rent a little house up in Hare Street, Kalgoorlie. It was one bedroom, one lounge, one kitchen, a side veranda with a bathroom on it, and a laundry down the back steps, and the toilet was the old pan system way down the back yard. Any rate, Jean and I lived there for, oh, about eighteen months, I suppose – our first daughter was born there, Beverley – and Jean, with her marriage to me, brought over her dog, old Lassie, so we became a complete family. Until, having got sick of paying one pound five shillings a week rent, we bought a house down in Egan Street, Kalgoorlie. The advantage was that it was a much bigger place, and it was on deep sewer, which was a vast improvement, even though the toilet stuck out in the back yard, but not as far away as it was in Hare Street.

The house was old; in fact, it was an old Wiluna house that had been brought down in bits and re-erected in Kalgoorlie, mostly flat iron inside. With the help of Jean's brother-in-law we did a lot of work; pulled off the flat iron and the years of dust that was lying in ceilings, and replaced the flat iron with Swedish hardboard – we couldn't get hold of Masonite, things were short. We put concrete paths around. And Jean's father and an old family friend took off the old bull-nose iron on the veranda and replaced it with ordinary straight galvanised iron. Generally, we made a nice little home out of it and that's where our second daughter was born, in 1954.

Now, whilst I was first in Kalgoorlie I started a rehab post-war reconstruction rehabilitation course, part-time, at the Boulder – then the Boulder Technical School – which meant riding a pushbike from Kalgoorlie out to Boulder. I was too poor to pay for tram fares all the way, all the time. Then later the accountancy courses, which I was doing, shifted into what was called the Half-Way in Kalgoorlie where they opened the technical school in place of the Boulder Tech. I got through as far as Intermediate Auditing and what have you, and then what, with a growing family and other outside interests cropping up, I gave away the course, much to my sorrow in later years. When you are young and silly it's much harder to study than when you get a bit more mature, but by the time I'd got to that stage it was too late.

Social life in Kalgoorlie was what we made it. Jean, of course, had her family there, and my family lived in Merredin, so it was mostly family orientated stuff. Jean's father, Bill [Dearing], his favourite thing on Sunday afternoon was to visit a few of the hotels in Boulder – nothing too much – but we'd go down to the Grand and buy a beer each, and then over to the Metropolitan and buy a beer each, or to the Cornwall and buy a beer each. But we managed to fill in Sunday afternoons.

Before my marriage I played a bit of football at the Railways B Grade side – I was never much good as a footballer, but it was interesting.

In Merredin I'd been a member of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, but I dropped that when we went to Kalgoorlie. The South Kalgoorlie was too far away from me, and North Kalgoorlie was the other way, and I just lost interest in it.

Now, my life in the Brewery in Kalgoorlie, as I said, started in 1947 as the Dispatch Office Clerk in charge. Gradually, over the years, I took on, or was given, more responsibilities, looking after ledgers and what have you, and finally was promoted to a joint title, which didn't

mean much, but it was Sales and Properties Manager. The Brewery owned quite a few hotels and had leases on others, and it was my job to look after that side of the business – fix the rents and generally keep an eye on them as far as maintenance, and what have you, was concerned. The sales manager business didn't amount to a hill of beans really, it was pretty easy. We had a traveller, Bob Miller, that everybody in Kalgoorlie knew, and it was his job out on the road, and it was my job in the office, keeping eyes on bad debts, and who was to pay, and who could get beer on credit, all that sort of stuff.

And it was that, mainly the properties side that led, eventually, to my transfer and promotion down to Swan Brewery. I was told one day that the properties manager in the Swan Brewery was coming up to Kalgoorlie, and I could take the company car and show this gentleman – his name was Bill Levy – show Bill around the traps in Kalgoorlie and generally show him a good time.

I had no idea what his purpose was until the day he was leaving. He was to fly out on the MMA aircraft about one o'clock, or something like that, and that morning Tom Hoskins, the manager, called me in, and Bill was there, and I was told that there was an opening in Perth for an assistant properties manager – the Assistant Properties Manager – and the job was mine if I wanted it. At the same time I was told that if I didn't take it my future in Kalgoorlie would never be any more, I couldn't go any higher, and that I completely understood.

While I was prepared to accept on the spot, I thought, well, I'd better consult with Jean, my wife. At that stage we were living in the Gala Hotel because Arthur Dunstan, the manager, had arranged with Tom Hoskins, the Brewery manager, for me to take the place over for three weeks while he and his wife went on holidays – not that we had that much to do, there was staff doing all the work, but just somebody in charge, somebody to do the banking, open up, close up, and all that sort of stuff. So I said, 'Well, could I have quarter of an hour on the car to go and see Jean?' and Tom said, 'Yeah, go for your life.'

So I high tailed it around to the Gala Hotel and put it to Jean, and the answer was immediately, 'Yes, we'll go to Perth tomorrow if we can' – which didn't quite happen. I had to come then down to Perth to interview the managing director – or for him to interview me – which duly took place, and I was informed that the salary would be – oh, I forget what the figure was but it was quite an increase on the Kalgoorlie figure and what's more, I would be entitled to a company car, and how soon could I start. So I gave him a date, a month ahead, or thereabouts, and we started – or I started in Perth on 1 July 1957.

In the time that we shifted down to Perth, of course, housing was very short. The Brewery put us up at a hotel for six weeks and then we shifted in which Jean's sister over in Como – in Ryrie Avenue, Como – which wasn't completely satisfactory – not that we weren't friendly, we were, but it's never the same as having your own place.

Any rate, in the meantime we discovered a home being built within about half a mile of Ryrie Avenue, it was being built by W T Chamberlain, and it was up to – I think they called it 'plate height' in those days, it needed the roof on and fitting out. So we went and made enquires and finished up, we bought – we arranged to purchase the home.

In those days, ex-service people were entitled to a housing loan from the War Service Housing people, but unfortunately you couldn't get the money immediately. The amount involved at that time was £2,750 or $5,500. We needed more, which we were able to finance from the sale of our house in Kalgoorlie and the sale of my little Ford Anglia motorcar, which I no longer needed, having acquired a company car.

Any rate, because there was a tiding over period between the house being finished and the War Service Homes people coming good, I'd already arranged with the Brewery that they would – or it would – finance me temporarily. So that's what occurred, the Brewery took an unregistered – no, it was decided in the end to register a mortgage over the Como property, which was subsequently discharged in the War Service Homes, when they ... The waiting period was

supposed to be eighteen months, but after nine months, or thereabouts, they came good with their fees – money – and we paid out the Brewery and gave the War Service People their mortgage in place.
The interest rates astound a lot of people today. The interest rate was three and three-quarter per cent, and not only did you get a very favourable interest rate, but you also insured the home with the War Service people at a very, very nominal insurance fee; it was so low that it was almost funny. I think we paid rent at the rate of two pounds a week – we had forty or forty-five years to pay it off. Any rate, it was very affordable and one of the benefits of being an ex-serviceman.
We had two children, of course. The younger one took the bedroom inside – it was only a two-bedroom home – took the bedroom inside and we closed in the back veranda and made a sleep-out for Beverley, the elder one, and she enjoyed that. It was cold in winter and hot in summer, but it was hers.
We stayed on in Como until, oh, many, many years, until we finally decided to up stakes, after I'd had my third promotion – increase in salary – and we finally built a home in Booragoon, just down from the garden city and the Booragoon Hotel. We moved there in 1971, built that home, and we are still there, and not likely to move out.
As to the children's education. Beverley, our elder girl, started at the Kalgoorlie Central School – and when we shifted down to Perth she stayed on in Kalgoorlie for a while with her aunty, my wife's sister, until we'd got settled into a home; then she came down to Perth and was then enrolled at the Coonawarra State School, at which school Glenda also started in due course. And they both completed their primary education at Coonawarra School and then went on to Beverley High School. Both my kids enjoyed their schooling, different to the old days of mine – any excuse to stop at home for the day was used up if we could.
After coming down to Perth, in the Swan Brewery – I came down as Assistant Properties Manager, to Bill Levy, who was the Properties Manager. And then the department started to grow because we were buying more hotels; knocking old ones down and rebuilding, et cetera, et cetera. So eventually they brought in two assistant properties managers and promoted me to Deputy Properties Manager. Then Bill Levy, who had a heart condition, decided to retire before he was sixty-five – he got out at sixty-two, I think it was – so I was promoted, first of all, to Properties Manager. And I can remember the salary for that, it was the grand sum of £4,000 per annum, or $8,000 in today's figure, still plus the car and memberships of clubs and what have you.
Then, as the department got bigger, and bigger, and bigger, they made certain changes in the organisational structure and I was made General Manager, Properties. All that meant was an increase in salary, no difference in the job. And then, after the then chairman and managing director retired as the active man in the place, we got a new Chief Executive, and he changed the whole structure round again and my title was changed to Group Properties Manager – same job, same problems, same salary.

[Interview ends]

02/02