BOLTON REMEMBERS THE WAR

Transcript of interview with Bill Brown (BB) • Royal Navy

Interviewed by Ken Beevers (K) 22.06.2005

K: What's your name?

BB: Bill Brown. William Joseph Brown.

K: When were you born Bill?

BB: 1925.

K: Where did you go to school?

BB: St Patrick's, in Dawes Street, Bolton.

K: So you were born in Bolton?

BB: Yes, yes.

K: And did you have any brothers and sisters?

BB: I had three sisters. One of them joined the ATS.

K: Were they older than you?

BB: One was younger. Two were older.

K: And what did your parents do?

BB: Well, my Mother died when I was just 15, she had been a mill worker, and a Mother of course, bringing up children, and my Father was a carter, there wasn't many lorries about, motors round, he was a carter, horse and cart, used to take deliveries and that.

K: Who did he work for?

BB: That's a difficult one. Jobs are very difficult then, so if you kept a job for a few months you were very lucky and he moved about from different firms. The firm he worked for most, Longhis, was actually Liverpool and he used to travel every week, come home just at weekend. He used to travel to Bennett's at Liverpool because he, you know, had better work there, better pay, but of course he lost out on the travelling. Sometimes he would set out in the early hours and hitch-hike a lift along the East Lancs to Liverpool and then get down to his job and stay at his parents until the weekend then come back home to us. And then when he worked in Bolton, I remember one job, he was carting the cinders from the old gas works on Moor Lane at Bolton. He would take the old used cinders away and the clinkers from the boilers and take them to the tips on Manchester Road and just tip them and that was a trip backwards and forwards that he did.

K: Which mills did your Mother work at?

BB: Ormrod's. That's on Great Moor Street.

K: Well, what did you do when you left school?

BB: Well, when I left school I had two or three jobs and I finally got a job through a friend of mine, but it was travelling I used to go round the country and it was mostly on War work, you know building the factories or War factories or shadow factories that were there to deceive the Germans and all the factories and the Industrial towns that were being bombed were re-built out in the country and camouflaged against future bombing and we worked on them. I was a pipe fitter, like steam fitter, apprentice, and it was a reserved occupation, so I didn't have to go but at sixteen I volunteered for the Royal Navy. I tried to volunteer for the Merchant Navy at fifteen, went to Manchester, to the shipping companies and got my name down, said take this home and get your parents to sign, because I was only fifteen, they knew that. My dad just tore it up because he'd been in the First World War and he said 'You're not going' but then at sixteen while I was away from home working for this firm, I went and volunteered for the Royal Navy. At sixteen then, because I wasn't called up in three weeks I thought they had forgot me, so I went to a different call up station and volunteered again. Gave the wrong age each time, said I was eighteen. Nobody asked any questions. They could probably tell you weren't, nobody asked any questions.

K: Can you remember when you heard War was declared?

BB: War was declared on the third of September 1939. I became fourteen on the fifth of September and I had started my first job at Hudsons Steel Works on the seventh of September. On the third of September when War was declared I remember people coming out onto the streets and I remember all the women crying, weeping and wondering what was going on. And you know at

that age, fourteen, thinking the War's starting. And I remember at that they called it the Phoney War because here there was nothing happening, you know, no bombing, just as normal, nothing happened. But the Expeditionary Force was already in France and I had two uncles who were in that, and they were the ones who came back - Dunkirk, you see. The Germans used to ask them "Why do you celebrate Dunkirk? It was a defeat" - but it wasn't. The Belgians and the French both surrendered, collapsed and left our lads in the middle so they fought a retreating action and a lot of lads stayed there so that their mates could get away, and a lot died while the others got out - rearguard action, they were heroes and of course the Navy came into its own then and bringing them off.

K: When you heard that War had been declared and you thought what that meant to you, had you always wanted to go in the Navy?

BB: Oh yes, yes. I didn't want to go in the Army. I don't know why I wanted to go in the Navy. The thoughts of going to sea, just being at sea was, like excitement, and I certainly didn't want it to finish before I could get in there, you know. There were people who waited until they were called up and they had good reasons. Some had wife's and children and they didn't want to go and that was understandable, so they waited until they were called up and made to go. And then there were others who, like I was, in a reserved occupation who, if you like, well got out of it, by staying at a job and getting a decent wage. They were rationed were everything, but at least they were home with their families. And then there was volunteers like me, who, you know, call us patriotic or idiots or whatever you like (laugh) - I don't know what we were, but we just had to be in there! And when I did join at sixteen, seven months of basic training to become an *Ordinary* Telegraphist. There was a joke about that you know, saying that when you become an Ordinary Telegraphist, treat your men kindly (both laugh) then when I was a fully fledged ordinary Telegraphist, I was waiting for a ship - any ship - and I was being shuffled about and that was really annoying you know, I thought 'when am I going to get into this War?' But then when you get into it it's not what you thought it would be.

K: Where did you do your training?

BB: Erm, well the first three weeks I went to Butlin's Holiday Camp at Skegness. It wasn't a holiday camp! And we did three weeks kitting up and basically getting you fit and then after three weeks we were transferred to Glasgow and I went to a civilian Wireless Training School, Marconi School of Wireless in Glasgow and we were based at a pregnancy hospital, you know, for women, and they had taken it over. An old thing - all tiled walls and very primitive - and they moved us in there and that's was were we stayed, that was our home. And we used to march from there every day to the school and then march back again.

And then after eighteen weeks there, because we had civilian instructors - and when you got into Naval codes they are only allowed to know so much - we had to go then to another Butlin's Holiday Camp at Ayre in Scotland and there they gave you another eight weeks of training in the Naval codes and all the other things that you know, civilians weren't to know. These were very complex. You didn't trot out pages like, if you had a ship on fire, sinking, just a few letters would say when you transmitted "I am on fire". Usually, every hour, from the compass platform they would tell you exactly where you where - that's us in the radio room and a Chief or a PO or a Leading Hand would put that up in code on the bulkhead so that each one of us could just look and see it and if we were hit, not to mess about, you'd transmit it. "My position, course and speed is..." that's what it meant. It was only a matter of maybe twenty or thirty letters. "I'm bombed, I'm on fire, I'm in danger of sinking, I've been torpedoed" it was all there in the code. So immediately you got that, you were transmitting. If the order to abandon ship was given, everyone that could go, would go - except the Telegraphist, because he'll be on that key, tapping out. He wanted someone to know, to come and rescue his pals, you know, they're in the water. So you would be tapping that out and that, I imagine, would be a great trial. Because if you're nervous or frightened, you know, just to touch that letter 'E' and him at the other end, he doesn't know you didn't mean that, he puts 'E' down and it doesn't gel, he thinks what's all this, it doesn't make sense. So you had to do it again until you got it right. When you got into it, it was pretty complex but it was amazing.

Change of course... You know, you didn't let the Germans know where you were going or the Japanese in my case. You didn't sail straight to a place, you were tacking all the time, so that if a submarine was following you, he didn't know where the hell you were making for. That was the theory, but it didn't work out (laughs) ...and you would then get this signal, well one of them CO or the Admiral or whoever - and he would say like "OK, let's change course to" ...whatever and then down from the bridge, they'd shout down "Change of course" and they'd give you the course and then you would, in code, make to the rest of the fleet sailing with you a change of course to Red New One Nine - whatever. And then having sent that you didn't know that they

had got it so you would ask one of them - anyone or maybe a group, destroyers - IMI that means 'repeat' or AR – 'have you received it?', and they would come back and whoever's seen it, they would come back and give "Roger, de-dah-de-dah-dit Roger Out". They have got it. You had to be brief because you can be, what you called DF'd. They could swing around and pick you up and tell exactly where you were, so we were trained to be very, very quick – get off, so they couldn't find you. And you would give this change of course, but not straight away to do it, once you realised that everyone had got it, and if someone hadn't got and you realised, say one of the battleships, he was there, he would think you know, 'well I've missed that, I've missed some of that' now he had to come back and ask for a repeat IMI, repeat, so you would send it back for him, to make sure he had got it, and if anyone else had missed it they would say 'thank God, I'll listen now' and they would get it. When they got it then, you on the lead ship would hear the officer shouting down to you 'Shout, standby... standby' and every time he said 'Standby', you would go 'de-dit-de-dit' on the Morse and all those lads on the other ships were all shouting up 'standby' and when the officer shouted 'Execute,' you pressed down for five seconds and all those ships were shouting 'Execute' and every ship turned in unison – you hoped! (Laugh)

We had one, the Quilliam, and she was our following destroyer. She was there to pick up any aircraft that went over the side, the pilots you know, not the aircraft. We used to leave them. We lost more aircraft over the side than we did from enemy action, you know. Very often they used to go over the side. She was there to pick up any pilots and that was a thing to watch, it was marvellous! And she was behind us and her Telegraphist didn't get the signal - so you've got 'Execute' - everybody turned but him, and he come wham! straight into the back of us. Put a great big dent in us - but he got about seven feet of bows stove in and there was a few lads killed in there. And he had to back off and because he wasn't sea worthy at the front - all the watertight doors are shut of course - they had to pull him stern first. Another destroyer took him in tow, and towed him back stern first to harbour for repairs. And then that Telegraphist then was for the drop because, what was he doing? Every other sparker that was there all heard it, why didn't you? And we had a Warrant Telegraphist and he worked for the BBC in peacetime and he was a wonderful radio engineer. And he went in his defence and he proved that that lad - you may understand this, when you send out a signal, at first they are just small tiny waves and as they get further away they start bouncing and they touch the sea and back up to the sky, but if you're in that dead space - and that's where he was, following us - it bounced over his aerial, and that Telegraphist was sitting there thinking 'oh, it's quiet'. But personally, as a Telegraphist, I could fault him because if it's quiet for just more that ten minutes, you want to know why, so you say to a Senior 'I haven't heard anything for ten minutes' and then they start wondering why and they find out. Now he didn't bother, so really he did have some responsibility, but they got him off, he didn't do too badly, and I am pleased about that, because it could have been me, although I think I'd have been questioning!

K: Did you get back to Bolton during your training at all or..?

BB: No. In fact I got one five day leave. My wife was my sweetheart then and I went down to see her. And then, you know you're going, you don't know *where* you're going, but you know you're going, you know. So I got just the one leave and then I go no more leave at all until we joined the Pacific Fleet and I got a four day leave and I went up into the Blue Mountains, in Australia. We spent four days up there, four of us, free.. free...

K: So what was your first ship?

BB: The Indomitable, and then I went to two other ships, and then back to that one again. That was my happy ship and she was my home, and she *was* a happy ship. She saw her share and she was in that Operation - Pedestal, that took this relief to Malta when Churchill had decreed that if they didn't get these supplies through to Malta, then the island had to surrender because they were so besieged.

K: What year would it have been when you joined Indomitable?

BB: Erm, the end of 43. She had just come back from America after being repaired after being torpedoed. She had been to America for repairs - our ship yards were so full and busy that America used to take a lot of our ships and repair them and they would send a skeleton crew. You were lucky if you got one of those. Skeleton crew would go over and just stay there and just mess about basically, have a good time and then come back with her! And when she came back at Rosyth, that's when we joined her.

And then a buzz goes round, you know, we're going to the Far East! But nobody knows, the captain knows, but of course he doesn't tell everybody, and I didn't really want to go to the Far East. I didn't want to be fighting against the Japanese, but in those days I compared it to a

Russian convoy and I didn't want one of them. No. So I just consoled myself by saying 'It could have been worse Bill, you could have been on a Russian convoy!'

So we went to the Far East. Most of the time it wasn't enemy action. I got the Burma Star, the medal and I am very proud of that. And this will surprise you - I am not proud of being a sailor for the Burma Star - I'm proud because it represents those lads who waded through swamps and jungles and malaria and flies and leeches, and all of the horrors they had to go through and then when they came to terms with that had to fight the Japanese as well, who were a very tenacious enemy. The one thing that amuses me now though is that they detested their prisoners - our lads - because they'd surrendered. And to them surrender was terrible, so they thought very, very little of them and treated them abominable, there's no doubt about that. But all those lads did was to surrender when their officers told them. When their officers said 'right lads, stop fighting' they obeyed it. If the officer had of said 'right no lads, to the last man' they would have fought to the last man. I know that. They would have fought to the last man. But they obeyed orders. That's what we were brought up to do. The Japanese - who didn't do that sort of thing - I wonder how I managed to go into Hong Kong and take the weapons off these Japanese if they never surrendered? How come they gave me their swords and their guns and piled them all up? Obviously *they* surrendered because the Emperor told them to. I never had any regards till... my granddaughter's just had 12 months and she's been to Japan and she was full of praise for the Japanese and I'm sure she was right, I'm sure they are wonderful people, but not then, not then.

I was asked on the VE, by one of the Bolton Evening News Reporters, and she reported me quite wrongly - I never said a word of what she put in the paper. But she asked me about the bombs you see, and I get the feeling she wanted me to say 'Oh, how horrible, should never have dropped them...' I'm just sorry they didn't drop them twelve months before, I could have got home earlier. I lost all respect and regards for them, what they did, and I *saw* what they did. There was no excuse, no excuse at all. And what happened to the Japanese in Hong Kong when I was there wasn't done by us because of... 'Feather bed' them, that's what we were told 'Oh, don't touch them...' you know, don't hit them or anything cruel like that. But the Chinese Communists didn't go for that and everything that we saw, bodies of Japanese floating in the harbours - you could walk across in some corners over the bodies - but they did that, not us. I wasn't sorry to see them, you know? Didn't do a thing to me. I didn't feel anything at all, only good riddance, you know.

K: Can you just go through the sort of route of your War, if you like. So you went to Australia..?

BB: No, No... I joined the Indomitable at Rosyth and we set sail and called at Glasgow. That was the last port of call, and there the lads were told 'You can go ashore now' - one run ashore, and we knew where we were going, but they said 'but if you don't come back, you'll be waiting for us when we get to the other end.' That's what they were told. And surprisingly only a few jumped ship. They knew that they had to do the job and they did it, shrugged their shoulders and got on with it. But one or two jumped ship at Glasgow because they didn't want to go. But when we arrived at Bombay, sometime afterwards, they were there waiting for us and of course they were all looking pretty sorry for themselves because they got treated pretty rough.

The Navy had some wonderful ways... and they had some means of punishment that didn't make you too keen to have any more. We had a thief once, and he got away with some things, but when they caught him, they didn't go to the Captain. You know the Chief Petty Officer - the policeman if you like of the ship – he just said to the lad, 'right you're guilty. You've done this. Do you want to accept my punishment or do you want to go before the Captain?' he said 'I'll take your punishment' and the punishment was - all the lads who'd had things stolen, which was a terrible crime in the Navy, lined up each side and the lad was put at one end and the Chief said to him 'OK mate, all you've got to do is get to the other end and your free, but your having a draft chit. You're not staying on this ship, you're going. Now all you've got to do is get there'. Now as soon as he set off running, the feet were out and he was on his hands and knees by the time he got to the other side, and they just said 'right, take him down to the showers' - sea water showers, water was precious – 'and clean him up'.

Another time I was going ashore in Australia - and that was a rare thing to get to somewhere decent - and we were all lined up and they came along inspecting us and when he got to me he said 'Two paces forward' so I took two paces forward and then I was looking down, you know, what was wrong with me, my shoes are polished, I looked tidy, what's wrong with me? And then when the officers disappeared at the other end of the line, I was turning to my mates and saying 'What's wrong?' they didn't know what I'd done wrong. So after the order was given like, you know, single file, double march and all those going ashore was running to the gangway and out onto the boats and taken ashore and there was six of us left stood in the middle of the flight

deck. And the Petty Officer came walking up with his little stick and said 'Right you lads, get back into the working gear' because we were all tiddleyed up and he said 'and report to me', so we said 'well, why' and he said 'because I said so' and that was enough so we all ran off, got back into our working togs, went to the Chief and he said 'Right, follow me' and we followed him, and we went into ablutions - shower area - and there was this rating there with the petty officer and he said 'Right, you want to know why you're not going ashore?'. He said 'This lad has been told time and time and time again to clean himself, to clean his clothes, do a bit of dobhi-ing and he doesn't do it and you can't go near him, he smells that high, so your going to clean him' and he said 'this is what your going to clean him with'. You know the scrubbing brushes, these big yard brushes and a great big bar of soap, and he said 'Clean him up' he said, and I want him shining when I come back. I'll be back in half an hour'. Well you can imagine, six of us who were going ashore and he stops us, you know? No mercy. Hit him with a scrubbing brush and bump he gets down, and we scrubbed him! (Laugh) and when we were finished he was clean and he was bleeding and the chief said to him 'OK, get down to the sick bay and get a couple of plasters on there' and he said 'Right lads, if you hurry up' he said 'you might get the next boat' ...which was about, you know, six hours adrift, so we'd lost six hours shore leave. But they knew how to punish that lad, and they used you to do it.

The nice thing about the Navy was that when lads got killed - and lads *do* get killed - they used to take all their belongings... All the private personal gear was sent home to the parents. That was theirs, with a lovely letter saying how brave they'd died - something nice. But then all the Navy equipment that you'd been issued with, that was all taken up on a special day and it was auctioned, and they would auction a pair of socks one at a time, and lads who were getting 30 shillings, £2.00 a fortnight, would bid a pound for a sock. It'd have holes in, but they would pay a pound, and then when they got it they would give it back and say 'Auction it again' and those things were auctioned over and over again and it was nothing for £400 to be raised at an auction for that lad, and then it would be sent to the parents. Not as a gift - it's the sale of his possessions - and the parents knew no different, and I always thought that was a wonderful... That was the Navy for me. Yeah.

K: Where did you go to from Bombay?

BB: Bombay, we went down to Ceylon which is now Sri Lanka. That's where we operated from. We used to sail from Trincomalee as a fleet. We sailed out with the Victorious - another carrier, sister carrier - very much like us, and when we got out there, waiting for us, was the Illustrious. Now there's a name that brings pride to me as a sailor because if there was any action, she was in it. I mentioned Taranto. It was the aircraft, Swordfish, which I thought were laughable aircraft! If you fired a revolver in a Swordfish it went the other way, backwards! And yet these lads flew in them and they sank half the Italian fleet. And the reason they got away with it was because they would come in so low and so slow, the Italians couldn't train their guns on them, you know (laugh), they just weren't used, they were used to more speedier planes, you know, the Seafires, Spitfires, and there... everybody had better planes! I felt so sorry because it seemed to me that the Fleet Air Arm in those days was... 'Here you are. Here's your aircraft lads. The RAF don't want these, you can have them'. But yet they were loved, the swordfish... called them the Stringbag, the old Stringbags, and the reason they called them a Stringbag was because the Army, these SAS commando groups behind the lines in the desert, they wanted re-supplying with some stuff and they, the Swordfish flew to them and a couple of officers were stood there watching them unload the Swordfish and out comes a pushbike, wheels, all sorts of things were coming out of this cockpit and this one officer said 'Look at that lot coming out of there' he said 'it's like a string bag' and in those days the women went shopping with a string bag and it got the name the Stringbag, because he could not believe how much stuff had been stored in that aircraft! So that was the Swordfish.

We operated there for quite a while, and we went regularly to Palembang, Sumatra and Subang and all those places along there, raiding the oil fields and Japanese installations that they had took, you know, a few years before, and we were giving them a bit of a hammering and these lads, these are the heroes. They are the ones who went and then they flew back and while they were out there we would move off because we didn't want them to find us. But of course they had homing beacons. They were able to find us with them if they worked all right, and they would come back and land on, and then they had to go again, and sometimes go a third time, knowing what they were going to face... and I know I used to stand on the flight deck and watch them go, and I used to pray. We had one lad in our mess, a Telegraphist, and his brother was a TAG, his elder brother. They had both been brought up in St Bernardo's, so they were very close, but one brother was a TAG, a Telegraphist Air Gunner and he was the third man in these bombers, and I watched this lad, and his brother used to come and talk to him, and one day the

lad who was with us who waited for them to come back, just blew his top and he said to his brother 'If you don't put in for a transfer, I'm putting in for one' he said 'I can't bear to be here waiting for you, so either transfer or I'm gonna transfer'. Of course the brother said 'You're worrying about nothing'. I never knew what happened to that lad, but the Telegraphist in our mess, he got a transfer because he couldn't bear to be with his brother.

So like I said I used to pray, and we used to ask that they all got back, and they didn't always get back, but then on that last operation there was the Illustrious, and as I said she was a ship to be proud of, and I was pleased at first when I saw her, because I thought that if she's there, there's going to be some action, because she's always in it, you know? There's a great deal of love and comradeship... There's a few words here which get to me because this lad has put into words something that I couldn't but I know what he's saying. He's a World War Two veteran and he is talking about the ravages of war:

K: "*There's a comradeship of men conceived in war, which though impaired by time, space and age, lives ever on. A bond not made by ministers or kings nor writ by men of high degree, to danger shared a record writ in blood which only time and memory can dim"*

BB: Now when I was stood talking with that group of men at the last VE day and that boy came up to take our photographs. He took a photograph of comrades. We probably weren't in the same theatres of war, but we all had that... love, if you like, for each other, and it's still there. I still correspond with four of my old shipmates even now, to this day... I get letters from them.

K: What year were... would we be then now ?

BB: Well then, now we are getting towards the end of 1944, and there were ships in the base there at Trincomalee, which didn't seem to sail anywhere. One of them that rarely went to sea, but she did sometimes, was the Cumberland, an old warship, World War One - maybe because she was too old and slow. But they were in a hell of a place in Trincomalee, you know? I mean people go there for holidays now and think it's wonderful but we didn't think so at the time! There was nothing there only a cinema, and it was corrugated iron, and when you went in although everything was left open, they were carrying men out who had just collapsed with the heat. In the ships you know, you were actually soaking wet all day long, all night long. I slept on a form along side a table, one lad slept on a table, one lad slept on a deck underneath, and another form somebody slept on, and I slept on those for about eighteen months, and never fell off! (Laugh)

K: So you didn't really have any proper sleeping quarters?

BB: Ah no, well you couldn't sleep on a hammock, it was too hot and they had these things directing what they called "fresh air" but the lads used to fight to put them on their bodies, and you were riddled with prickly heat, and the prickly heat would go septic. Because the decks were steel and we used to curse them because we used to long for a wooden deck ship where you could take your shoes off and go in your bare feet - that was then - and if you touched any of the rails when you were going down because we were always stripped to the waist, just shorts at sea, and if you just touched a rail then you got a blister because it was so hot you just burned. So everything was mad hot and it was terribly uncomfortable and of course were reading now about the seas and the typhoons and the hurricanes and that was another enemy because she could be vicious the sea, you know, she could have us on our hands and knees praying when it got really rough. There was seventy foot to the flight deck out of the water and just thirty foot underneath, so when she rolled - she *rolled*, and... I got used, I didn't suffer too badly, but a lot of lads did. And when she pitched it was like going up in an express - I worked in the pits for a while and the cages go down very, very quickly, well it's like that, you used to go up to the top and then you'd come down very, very quickly and then she's settle in and then you'd feel everything come up and then...

I went one day, I was feeling a bit under the weather and it was really rough, and I thought I've got to get some fresh air. I just had to get some fresh air. So I made my way to just below the gun deck which is just about six feet below the flight deck and there was a hatch there that you come up at, so I just knocked all the clamps off and I just raised the hatch about two or three inches and I bobbed my head up and I saw this scene I remember, we're seventy feet, now she may be rolling then but the sea was towering above me and I saw that coming so I just pulled it down again and put all the clamps back on, and that's how rough it was, and we just had to grin and bear it, you know? But if they were prone to seasickness they would come on watch as a Telegraphist - I'd be sitting at a table ready to take messages and he would come and sit beside me and he would put a bucket, for him, in between and you would say 'Oh, don't put that there, put it...' (laugh) because you knew if he started being sick... I mean it's not very nice to see, but it had to be. You see seasickness, it wasn't recognised in the Navy. Something that people don't

know, and it may be worthwhile recording while we've got it on - the D-Day landings, the soldiers were given seasick tablets and they were invented for D-Day, and the soldiers were given these so that they didn't go ashore, seasick which would have been terrible. But not one sailor got one, not one, unless he scrounged one off a soldier! It wasn't recognised on a ship, unless you started vomiting blood and bringing things up you shouldn't, they didn't recognise it. You just got on with it. You weren't allowed to stop working or anything, you just had to carry on, and you know it was a pretty common sight to see people really ill, and vomiting and back again and vomiting, but still doing their job.

K: Before we started recording you were telling me about one of the other dangers of the job where you had to repair...

BB: Aerial Party... First of all you've got to imagine that lads who were up on the, what they call the bridge reception room, that's just below the bridge, there the one's who got the voice pipes up to the bridge and they are all taking messages on different receivers. And then down below, just above the stokers - way down below - all us lads are all on sets. If you imagine that flat table there is a carrier, at the edge of the deck, sticking out, were these aerials like a hockey stick at the top, and there were structures sticking up from the edge of the flight deck. When the planes were landing on, or taking off, hydraulically they would be dropped out of the way, so they stuck out of the side of the ship, but once there was no landing or taking off to be done they came back up again, so they would be stuck twenty feet above the flight deck, which again was seventy feet above the water, and at the end of the hockey stick were the aerials strung across from one to the other. Now you would be stuck in your little cubby hole with your length of aerial, wires, pair of pliers and a little tool for tightening the clamps and things and you'd be sat in there, two parties, port and starboard. And if a lad was up on deck, and our own gunners were the biggest culprits because they were shooting at planes coming at us, and they didn't stop because they saw a wire, they just shot, and if the wire was in the way, tough, it came down. But the lad in the office, if you like, he would shout out 'I've gone dead' - got no aerial. So somebody who was walking about in there would... great big board in there with all these plugs in, like a house plug, and he would look at what the bay number he was to find out which plug he was using, pull that out and plug in another one, and that lad would say 'OK' and he'd set off taking his messages again. They were vital. You couldn't stop. You couldn't say 'Well leave the aerial we'll do them after they have gone', you couldn't do that, you had to be there. Then up there on that bridge or down below, they would get on the blower, phones, on the bulk head, and they would phone into this little cubby hole on the flight deck where we were and the buzzer would go, and they would say like, you know 'Aerial gone dead', such and such... So then the Petty Officer would just say 'Right, come on my lads' and if he was your Petty Office you followed him. And he knew what to do, you looked up and you'd see a wire training down, that was the one that was the problem. So you would climb up one aerial and you would string a wire between you, and another mate would climb up another aerial and you would go to the top and we used to take about six to seven feet of rope and when you got to the top of the hockey stick bending over, because you were bent over looking down to the sea reaching for these things, then you had to tie yourself. Some didn't - I did. If she turned quick to get out way of a bomb or something you're (laugh) taking a swim! So I used to tie myself on, but not too tight because I had to undo it afterwards, and then you used to put a new aerial up and then tighten it something reasonable, and when the Petty Officer or the Chief or whoever was there down below would shout 'Right let's...' and they came up to sometimes, they didn't used to duck out. Some of them were braver then we were. But while you are up there you have got to remember that our guns, Oerlikons, machine guns, pom-poms, they were all firing away at the aircraft who were coming at you, and you were bothered about them, so I find that when I went up there, I'd be looking to see where these aircraft were. At the same time I'd be looking to see which way the guns were pointing, pointing towards me? I worry a little bit, you know, and then of course as soon as you got the OK, your mate had got his fastened his end and everything was OK again, the chief would say 'Right come on down', and you didn't need telling twice! And you came down and you got back out again. But on this one day, to my shame, and I still weep when I think about it, we were sat there and the buzzer went, and just in my mind - I didn't say anything - and my mate had just been winking and laughing at me, you know. We all tried to pretend we were brave, nonchalant you know. We all put on the act... and he looked at me and he was smiling and I knew he was just as afraid as I was. Hoping that we wouldn't have to go and that no aerials had come down ...and the buzzer went, so we thought 'Here we go' and in my mind I just thought 'I hope it's them' - I meant the other party. I just thought it... and it *was* them, and he just gave me a little grin and he ran out. I knew what they were doing, and our petty officer was having a look, and just a few minutes, I don't know how long, it wasn't long too long, but he suddenly said 'Come on lads' and I thought 'Well, why us?' you know, we hadn't been called, the buzzer hadn't gone you

see, so why us? But we followed him, I mean that's what we were trained to do, and we followed him, and when I ran out... my friend was dangling on his little bit of rope... Not with the pom-poms, this chap and his aircraft had come in... you know, and he was gone, and he was just slowly turning, parts of him gone (voice breaking up) so we had to get up and untie him and bring him down and, I always say 'I'm sorry Jock' because I blame myself (upset) I think if I hadn't have said 'I hope its them...' it would have been us and I don't know, but , (sniff) he's gone now, and you know they say this, don't they, you've heard it, and they mean well, they say 'they shall not grow old, as we that are left to grow old, age shall not worry them, nor the years condemn, at the going down of the sun in the morning we will remember them', well that bit is true, but the rest of it I find hard to come to terms with, because I *know* that they wanted to grow old, because that would have meant that they had a life. They'd come home, married, brought up children respectably to be decent adults as I've done, and then have wonderful grandchildren, and then lived in something of a happy retirement with the woman you love. They didn't get to do that and I know if I went back to any of those lads and said 'Would you like to swap places?' they'd jump at the chance, they didn't want to die, they were just in the wrong place at the time. He was a personal mate. If it's someone else, you know, gunners - you hear they hit a pom-pom, and six to eight lads go at once, and that's a bit impersonal. You know them, you've seen them, but there not oppos, you know? ...and you look at it coldly. It's not too bad, and in a couple of days - you don't forget them, but its over and you get on with your life, and you wonder what's happening tomorrow for me. When you see that bag... body being tipped off the board and into the sea, there's no markers, you know. They say that there are no flowers on a sailors grave... Ah, very emotional, but if you don't know them, they're just a body in a bag.

But to me, the ones that got to me were the (sniff) accidental deaths, you know? There used to be handling parties, air handling parties, and they were on the flight deck and that was a risky job, and they used to get each side of the aircraft, one each side, and they used to hold the chocks under the wheels, and while they were there all ranged, they were running the engines ready for takeoff. The pilots would be wanting to listen to the engines before takeoff, and these lads would be holding the chocks, and then in the turn they would range them ready for takeoff. The first few were shot off on a catapult, you know, so they would have to range them, get them over the catapult and shoot them off and make some room for these at the back to have a run, and they'd have a run and they would take off. The ship would turn into the wind of course, to help them, and these lads were holding the chocks and they were just running the engines. They weren't ranging ready for takeoff those lads, and they'd done it time and time and time again. They were drilled into it, and I cannot understand what happened to this lad, he just must have forgot for a second what he was doing, and when they came to run the aircraft they took the chocks out so they could push into position for takeoff, and he got his chocks underneath and then he walked round the front... and I saw him coming towards me. I was up on the gantry at the wireless room looking down because it was something to look at watching them go off, and I saw the lad walking towards me and then all of a sudden... he disappeared and I saw things flying through the air and I thought 'What's that?' and then I realised, you know, it was him, it was him, and... that's just a pure accident. Now that sticks in your mind...

And then there was a lad... now I didn't know anything about it until I was off duty and I read messages and I saw this lamp, early morning it was, very early in the morning, this destroyer was along side and she was flashing a signal, and she signalled to our ship, said 'Rating a board reports seeing someone or something fall from your after deck, suggest investigate' so the next thing the Tannoy was blaring out 'Presidents and Leading Hands of Messes, check personnel, and report. All personnel not in Messes report to your Mess Decks'. So all of us who were out like me, I... nearest phone, got back and said I'm OK, because we knew that there was somebody missing, and eventually they started piping for this one lad. He was a Royal Marine, and they were piping for him and then next thing I found out was that we had an air protection, what we used to call our umbrella, and they were our aircraft which used to fly around, about 20 miles distant from the ship. Just protection to stop anything coming on us and it was their job to have a go at them if they came, and they sent one of these back to re-trace our course to see if they could spot this lad, and the pilot found him, saw him in the water, and he dropped him his dinghy, the pilot dropped him his own dinghy, and dropped some marker dye, which was supposed to keep the sharks at bay, I never believed that, and the pilot reported that he made no effort to get in the dinghy, he just ignored it, nor did he swim into the dye, which would, you know, mark his position, and a destroyer turned round and went back and of course the plane flew round until she was within his vicinity, and they got there, they found a dinghy, the marker dye, the dingy had drifted quite a bit, but there was no lad, he had gone... And then everybody was wondering, you know, what had happened there? I mean, lads fell over the side, it wasn't uncommon, but he'd gone and they wanted to know why. Well when they looked into his locker

they found a bundle of letters and there was one which was un-opened, it was opened sorry, and he'd left it, and when the lads had a look at the letter, he'd written across the letter 'Oh my darling' (sniff). She'd wrote to him to say that she'd met a Canadian soldier, and that they were getting married, and he couldn't cope, so he quietly just slipped over the side... ended it, and I often think of him coming up and not caring, and watching the fleet sail away. I think about that, but I'm thinking with a reasonable mind. He didn't have a reasonable mind and I feel that had he just left it, he's have met another girl, he would have loved her. Waste... a lot of wasted lives. Anyway they are the ones that stick with me.

When we got to Australia it was a case of teaming up with the Americans, because we had to do things their way, not ours, and their way was totally different. We used to write with a pencil and carbon copies, and they used to touch type, and they sent us for a week to a touch typing school in Sydney, Australia, one of the Remington places, but it was a waste of time because we couldn't learn in a week, so we couldn't do it. We couldn't get to the speed. I learned to touch type, without looking for the keys. I learned to do that, but no speed and they were doing 30 to 35 words a minutes and we could write with a pencil at 4, 25 or 28 words per minute if you were good. But you couldn't write it down quick enough. All the letters had to be block capitals, you didn't write ordinary, so that the coders could see what you had written and de-code them. So we had to learn to touch type they said. But when it came to the nitty gritty, you'd sit at a typewriter and when they'd start to fade, as they did, our way you could lean over and tune it in and keep on writing, because to miss a signal and not to be able to prove that it was not your fault, is a criminal offence, so you mustn't fall asleep and miss them! So we found that this was ridiculous, because if your typing, you've got to stop. You can't keep going with one hand while your tuning with the other, and we found that the Americans who were liasing with us and teaching us - supposed to be - they used to just sit there and when it went they just used to say 'I've lost them, Chief' and he used to say 'OK, swing around'. Nothing mattered. Well, you know, (laugh) our chief wouldn't let you get away with that! So he devised a scheme as he would do, he was all there with his lemon drops, and he made us sit in two's, and on the sheets that we used, the old sheets, there was like five blocks, and you wrote five letters in each block for the coders, so I would sit and take at their speed. I would take the five blocks of letters, but the last five letters might be in my head, I hadn't got time to write them down, but this lad knew where I was at, because he was listening, and he knew that I'd got to the end of that, so he would start on this line, and I would get my last five letters in and watch where he was, and then I'd take over, and then at the end we would put the two together and we had a signal. And this is perfectly true - those people who were teaching us and didn't want us in America, in the Pacific, we weren't welcome, they didn't want us, you know, they didn't want us to steal any of their thunder. And we were there because Churchill, who realised that Americans and Chang Kai-Shek were getting together with a view to the Chinese taking back all those territories, which were theirs anyway, they could have had them for me, but he didn't want that, Churchill said 'I want a fleet out there, to look after our territories', so Churchill got us there and they objected to it. But you're not being asked you're being told, so they had to have us. But as I said we did it our way, and the Americans, realising that we were getting these things, they were coming to us and ask us for signals that they should have been getting but didn't because they were typing. So we gave *them* the messages. That's perfectly true.

Another thing that happened - this was the Fleet Air Arm not to do with the Navy - was they had these new American planes, which was terrific for the pilots, it gave them the chance, they had something to fight with. And one of the planes that the Americans didn't like was the Corsair. If you ever see them, it's the one that the wings used to fall over this way, rather than swing to the back along the fuselage. The Corsair was a lovely plane, according to our lads, but the Americans didn't like it because when they were coming round to land on, it obscured the view somehow, and their pilots couldn't see the deck, and... too many accidents. So the Americans, like, kicked them into touch, said 'No, no, they're all right for other duties', on the big air strats on these islands they'd taken, they could use the Corsair and they were a good plane, but landing on a ship was a different kettle of fish, so they said 'No, we don't want them'. So our Fleet Air Arm said 'We'll have them' so they said we could have them. So they gave us these Corsair, and the Fleet Air Arm had to adapt them to shorten the wings because our hangers weren't as big as theirs, and to get the wings to come over they had to shorten them and then they had to adapt the plane in other ways, and then the pilots took off and they found, if they came in a nice slow arc and left the actual straightening up until the very last minute, they could see the deck all the time, and they perfected this method of coming to land on, and they did it wonderfully. And for six months we were using the Corsairs and the Americans said 'Hey, what's going on here, these lads are managing...' so they came across and said 'How you doing this?' and when we

told them how it was done, they did it. I'm recording that - that's the truth, that's the truth! We weren't wanted but we could teach them something.

We were slow. We had a Fleet train. You've got to imagine that the Pacific's so vast that you can't come back to re-fuel, you know. It would take you all your time getting there and all your time coming back. There'd be no time to do any action. So they used to get you out there and keep you there. I mean you didn't stay there in the one spot, you kept ducking about so that they couldn't find you -but they did - and then the Fleet train would come out to you, and it would come alongside. A tanker would come, and he would re-oil two or three ships at once. They would all sail together at a certain speed and he would re-oil, and then he would get out the way and the petrol tanker for us, he would come and pump all his petrol into you, because you needed petrol for the aircraft, and then the armaments ship used to come with the bombs and the shells and all the things... We were a floating explosion, we were, (laugh) you know, but they used to come and do all that and then of course there was the food that you needed...

K: What was the longest you were at sea then?

BB: Oh, about 90 days. On the first strike they asked us to go, they were landing at Okinawa when we got there, and on the way the Captain said 'If you want to see what's happening to the carriers out here lads, one of the Americans is going to be passing us in 10 minutes, so we all went up on deck that were free, to have a look at her and she came back listing very, very heavily. Steam and smoke was pouring from her, and we looked at this carrier and we thought 'Oh dear, you know, we're in for something here. Look at that - what they do to carriers here', they were using the kamikazes you see, besides the bombs, but then we realised that these hot decks which were burning our feet and causing all this discomfort and the sweating we did and everything - they were going to be to our advantage because when the kamikazes came they hit the deck and they stayed there. Caused some damage, but an hour, and the flight deck was cleared, patched up if they had to do, and the planes were landing on again, so I preferred the kamikazes to the bombs. The bombs used to penetrate and blow down below. Now the Americans had the wooden decks, and they could run about in their bare feet, wonderful, they had iced water, and at Okinawa ice cream in at the back of the troops! Ice cream! (laughs) But when the kamikazes hit *them* with the wooden decks, they went down two or three decks, and *then* blew up, and one kamikaze was enough. That carrier was out of action. If she stayed afloat, she could limp back home, and because the carriers were having such a hammering, because the Japanese were going for the carriers first, because those lads who flew off us they were our spearhead, they were our shells, they were the ones who was damaging the Japanese. So they used to come for the carriers all the time, and the Americans were having a real bashing, so then they were *glad* that we were there!

So we were asked then if we would go to the Sakishimas, a group of islands, and we were asked to bomb, strafe, do whatever... these Japanese airfields and the skipper told us there was 57 airfields there, and it's our job to make sure that no plane takes off from there to harass these lads who are going in at Okinawa. So we went in there and we did that and we were replenished and re armed and all the stuff we needed, and they kept on going in and on that occasion even the big lads, the battleships and the cruisers, they went in and they had a pop as well. You know they left us, and while they left us, they were supposed to be looking after us, the Japanese came and found us and they gave us a pop or two (laughs) too, tit for tat, we gave them some and they came and got us, and then of course, the big lads came back and said 'Sorry' (laughs), we weren't protected.

But we went then to Leyte, which was an island they'd not long taken... moved on, but it was a big American base and we went there to replenish and rest because you needed it, you know. No runs ashore you know, in the Pacific. We had a run ashore at Australia, we never saw ashore again - I tell a lie, I once, I went ashore, at Leyte on duty with the Marquis of Milford Haven. He was the Queen's best man at her wedding and he was our Signal Officer, and for some reason he took a shine to me and said 'Tell Brown to get into the rig of the day and we're going ashore', now what we was going ashore was for some equipment, transmitters, crystals for the transmitters, and a big box which probably had transmitters in... theirs, I don't know. We had to bring them back and there was a typhoon blowing and one of the lads said to me, 'be careful Bill if you're going with him' and I said 'why' and he said 'Well there's a lad just stepped into the boat off the Victorious' he said 'and he just went in between and... never seen again' and I thought I was being wound up, you see, because they did that, (laugh), so I went along quite happy. But when I got to the quarterdeck, which is where we were going to get the boat from, I saw that the lad in the boat who was taking us, the coxswain, and one of the crew, and it was their job and they were fighting like mad just to stop the boat from hitting us and of course we were rolling a bit, but that was coming up on a 30, 40 foot wave, and then disappearing

again down below, so one minute you could step into it and next minute she was gone, 30, 40 feet below. So I was stood there on this gantry waiting and the coxswain came up and I remember he said to me 'When I say jump, jump - but not before' and I was watching the boat come up and behind me these two officers Milford Haven and another officer going ashore, and as it came up I was waiting for him to say 'jump' and I thought 'Well I'm not waiting for you mate', so I jumped, and I landed in the boat, and scrambled up forward because that was my place, get out the way. And then the two officers, and I often think, they made me go first to see what happened (laugh)! Maybe not. He was very brave actually, Milford Haven, very brave, you know the officers said to the coxswain like 'Pick us up at 1800 hours' and he said 'Not me sir. My instructions are not to make a return journey until the weather improves', so that was it, you were stuck. We went off and Millford Haven just said to some American 'Give him a chit, give him something to eat, give him a meal', but we had to go on these lorries to the jungle and all that's when we saw what it had been like for the Americans. And the Japanese were still there, there was these notices up about snipers, and not to travel less than 40 miles an hour, you know, so we learned all that, but also I took some coins with me, just coins because a lot of the sailors and solders there were bored stiff, and they used to make bracelets and necklaces out of any coins to send home, you see, to pass the time. So I was told to take some coins with you, but don't pull them all out at once, just a few at a time, and it finished up that all these Americans were saying ' Have you got any coins pal?' I said 'I've got a few Australian coins, do you' 'can I have them' so I said 'Well yes' and I'd pull a few out, and they'd peel off these American bills, you know, so I had quite a wad, you know (laugh) and then I went to their PX stores and I walked in and these blokes are behind a big long counter 'What do you want?' and I was wondering, what can I have, but anything, they didn't care what they gave you, so I finished up with two sets of their dungarees and shirts and cigarettes, Lucky Strike and all these Camels, all of those and I had a big pile like this, so when Milford Haven came back he said 'Oh I can see you've been busy' (Laughs) so I said 'Yes sir, these Americans you know, they are so generous I said, they push things on you.' I said 'You can't refuse' so he said 'I know that' he said 'I know that'. He had two little brown paper bags, it's true, and they contained crystals for the transmitters and I said' Alright I can manage them' and he said 'no, no, I can carry these' and he did. So I was there with all the rabbits that I had bought (Laugh). Went back in the American landing craft just a troop lander, just a small one, and its still rough, and these waves are coming over and all the working parts were below deck, so it kept getting swamped. They'd cut out, and they started wiping and drying to get it going again and these two American sailors were violently seasick over the side. Milford Haven was just sat at the top where the ramp was, smoking. Weren't a bit bothered, and I was stood at the back watching these two vomiting, the two Americans - being British you know? (laughs) So after a while he said to me, he said 'Have they got a Aldis lamp, Brown?' so I said 'I've no idea sir, I'll find out' he could have asked them himself mind you, so I said 'have you got an Aldis lamp lads?' and they said 'What's that?' so I said 'It's a signal lamp, a small hand lamp' they said 'Oh yeah, we've got one of them.' - they were using it for a torch, you know? So they gave me that and Milford Haven said 'Right, now hop up here' that was where the ramp was, because we didn't know where we were, in the dark, and he was telling me you know, use our Pennant – Pennant 9 we were - so I was flashing Pennant 9 and just sweeping round until eventually we got a signal back. So gradually they directed us back to our ship, and then we had to get back aboard. I was pushing this big box to help these seamen to get it and Milford Haven said 'You've done your duty, Brown, get back aboard. Go and get your tot' so I went back with all this parcel and I just plonked them in the middle of the mess and took a couple of lots of Lucky Strikes for me and said 'Right lads, help yourself!' Oh, and there was spearmint. That's another thing that is not generally known. Only the American forces then could have chewing gum, the civilians couldn't get it apparently, only the servicemen, but of course I had a couple of packs of them, (laughs) and all lads were chewing for a fortnight (laughs).

We got there and we hadn't really time to drop anchor before, we got a signal to say we'd done very well. They were pleased with us. Could we go back and do it again? What we found out later was that the Americans' surface ships - wooden decks - the Japs had come at them and they were just knocking them down like ninepins. The men killed were in the thousands, and all I say was that we were built for the North Sea, so they were just bouncing off us. So we had to go back and do it again, which we did. Stayed there again and they were going out and pilots were saying that they'd bombed these landing strips but as they went back the next day the Japanese had been and filled them all in again. So it was a never-ending job, but they were hitting aircraft on the deck. Again, some lads, especially from the Formidable who was with us, she had joined us then, one of their pilots won the VC. Even the Japanese said later that they admired his courage. He was killed, you know, he didn't get to wear it, but he got the VC, and also I learned about that time, and later read more about it, the attack that we did in Palembang when we were

leaving the Indian Ocean and coming to form the British Pacific Fleet. Palembang, where all the fleet sailed together, and when we got there, it was one massive raid. The officer in command of the oil fields - which was devastated - they had about three trips, and the Americans had been there about a fortnight before with their Liberators. Flying from Bombay they had a lot of petrol they'd wanted so it gave them very little bomb power and apparently they didn't hit so much, so they didn't do very much damage, and they'd asked us 'Would we try?' and of course - not me but somebody up there was saying 'Oh lets show them what we can do', so the carriers went in, sent their aircraft off and the raid was so successful that they took 60% of the oil suppliers away from the Japanese, which they needed. Because at the very end their ships were coming out with only enough oil for one way, they couldn't, no oil to get back, just suicide, they didn't have the oil because we had taken so much. And the officer in command, Japanese office, he wept, tears.

And then eventually we came back because the Illustrious had been in Sydney and she'd found a lot of underwater damage that she didn't know she's got, so she was sent off back home for repairs and nobody begrudged it, you know, she's done her share, and they all said, like, 'Good luck, you deserve it' and then the next slot was our turn. We'd been there longest, we needed some repairs, we'd had a bit of a bashing too, so we went into Sydney and we were tied alongside at Woolloomooloo and early morning, the very next morning we heard this shouting. Very early. All the portholes were swinging open. We saw this Australian dock worker, whatever he is, up and down this dockside shouting 'It's all over lads, it's all over! They've surrendered, they've surrendered. They've dropped a bomb!' and we were all looking at each other and saying 'Dropped a bomb, what's he on about? They've dropped tons of bombs and that's never made them surrender. What' on about?' But when we were going out to strike and we were told to come back all the fleet was told to turn round and come back, nobody questioned it, we just thought 'good-oh, were not going' so all the fleet turned round to come back, and we didn't know then that we were going in that area and they wanted us out because they hadn't been able to try these bombs, had they? So they didn't know what was going to happen. They dropped the Little Boy first and they wanted unconditional surrender and the Japanese weren't having that so they said 'OK, we'll give you another reminder' and they dropped another one, and well, you all know about the atomic bombs, Well then, that's what they dropped, but then we were in Sydney then, we didn't know that.

When it came to our notice that it was true, the Japanese had surrendered, all the lads were getting in their tiddley suits, you know, waiting for shore leave and a few bevies but as they got to the gangplank... I was duty anyway, so I had no problem, I couldn't go anyway, but the lads were trying to go down the gangway but the Marines were there with fixed bayonets telling them to get back, 'You're not coming ashore' and the lads were telling the Marines what they would do to them, you know, but then the skipper came on, and we all got the message, he said 'All our armaments and many of the aircraft are going to be taken off, and we are going to load with medical supplies and foods and things that the prisoners of war needed', he said 'and before we can get there' he said 'we don't know how many would have died because we can't get there soon enough' so everybody was subdued, you see everybody, ashamed I suppose, because... forgotten about those lads, but we didn't need telling twice, and everybody turned to and worked with a will, and they did work, they didn't wait for the dock workers. The lads were getting the stuff on as quick as they could, and when we sailed out, massive fleet, we all sailed out, and those ships that weren't coming – some of our own as well, for whatever reason - the lads were booing them, as they went past, because they weren't going, shame on you, you know (laugh), so we sailed out and we went out to sea a massive fleet, and it *was* a massive fleet, but then when we got well out to sea, we didn't know this but they split up. Some were going to Singapore, some Shanghai - we were going to Hong Kong, and some were going to Tokyo, and the lads that went to Tokyo and the Formidable was one. They were their little part of the fleet with the main American fleet were all sailing together and they ran into a typhoon, and the American admiral said 'Right, turn about and sail with it, let it blow past us' so the Americans all turned about and let the typhoon blow right past them, but our lads said 'Right lads, plough on', but the smaller ships, the destroyers, were always told 'Typhoon coming lads, get out of it, and meet us later on' so the destroyers all took off and looked for something a bit easier, and the big lads just ploughed through, and of course when they got to Tokyo they weren't allowed to go in because that was the Americans you see, that's why, they didn't want us to steal their glory. So they waited outside, the destroyers re-joined and they were all there at anchor in the bay, Tokyo Bay waiting, and the American ships came sailing up and the first thing the Americans flashed was 'How did you make out in the typhoon?' and they flashed back 'What typhoon?' True (laughs) you know, there was a lot of rivalry. And we knew we were better than they were, we proved it time and again, but that wasn't us, we got...

These sparks came aboard us, they were different to us, and we didn't know why, so we asked them, 'And what are you, what's your jobs?' and they said 'Oh, we're trained in Japanese codes, so what were going to do is communicate with the Japanese in Hong Kong.' We were told that any lads spare, if you want to lads, get on set and see if you can find anything that sounds funny, anything foreign, and if you hear anything then shout one of these lads over. So if you got a funny set that you couldn't understand, Morse you couldn't, you'd shout them and they would come and plug in and listen and say 'No, that's not them' and then one lad, I'm sure his name was Harry Delbad - he came from London, he shouted 'I've got something here and I think this is them' and the lad plugged it in and he said 'You're right' he said, 'Move over' so the special lads took over then and they started, in signals, communicating with the Japanese, and when we told them we wanted plain language because Admiral Harcourt was stood at the back of us, looking at the messages, back came their signals, 'This is Hong Kong, Japan' - always started with 'This is Hong Kong, Japan' and like, we were at the back saying 'ah, but not for long!' and they said like, you know 'Who are you?' Admiral Harcourt said 'well just tell them - British Pacific Fleet' so back went this code, and it came back 'How many ships are you?' and he said 'Tell them 'Enough'.'

So they'd had enough and then eventually we were joined by the Venerable and Vengeance, two more carriers who'd we'd never seen before. Both new carriers and their aircraft flew off when we got to Hong Kong, and they got there. Three planes flew, landed, one burst a tyre and had to wait until they brought a spare wheel, and they were told to bring back the higher ranking officers, Japanese. But the top man had committed Hari Kiri you know, with the knife, Hari Kiri, committed suicide, shamed, and the other one had done a bunk, he'd disappeared, he wasn't going to commit Hari Kiri (Laughs) so it was the third in command, little fellow, all wear baggy trousers, and he came and they interrogated him, and they asked him like, 'You've got a minefield - where are the mines?' and there was no way he was telling us - he said 'Oh, they've drifted' He wasn't telling us. He was just sticking two fingers up to us, you know. I'd have tied him to the bows and said 'OK, you sit there pal, were going through it', because we had to go through, and we just used to sling a pair of vanes out, which are like, to sweep the mines if there are any there, and then we had a destroyer in front of us (laugh) because we had the Admiral, 'You go first and we'll follow!' Anyway Harcourt then transferred to the Swiftsure, cruiser and she was the first in.

And er, on the way then we trained, I was one, shore party and they armed us, I was given a Lanchester which was like the British Sten gun, and all you had to do was do that to the button, 40 rounds'd go off and you couldn't stop 'em. Even with the safety guards on! Ridiculous things they were! So they gave me one of these and we were warned, what to do and what not to do, and a Marine captain was shooting in the sea, to see a way of shooting it and he was telling you to fire one, fire two, out the 40 rounds. Course if you kept your finger on that just a second too long it fired about 12 shots, so he was training you just to fire one shot, because he said 'Aim it down here and you'll only need the one' so we trained to do that, and eventually we all got into, not landing crafts, didn't have them, just ordinary ship's boats, and I was sat at the back because as the sparker I had the radio set on my back and a little key strapped to my knee to keep communicating and this Lanchester, and when we got close to the jetty all of a sudden the firing started, you know, a lot of shooting going on, and I was at the back and all the lads were stood up waiting to disembark and I thought 'Oh, they've started already, they're after us' but what had happened is that one lad in the front had said to his mate in the bows 'I'll nip out then I'll take your gear off you, pass it up' so he climbed out, you know, the jetty's up here and your down under, but, of course the boats rocking, so he climbed out and then he turned round, knelt on one knee to kneel down to his mate to take his weapon, and pass the one and then he had a Lanchester, and as he passed it up, the boat came down, it hit the jetty and it went off and he was holding it. So the shooting I heard was him, and I didn't know what was happening at all then, the lads were all climbing out. I just heard this officer say you know 'Who's the Tiffy, sick bay, Tiffy, see what you can do for this man' I heard this Tiffy say 'There's nothing anybody can do for that man sir, he's gone' and of course when I climbed out he was there and he's got the lot, the whole 40 rounds, and the poor lad there, was obviously distraught, it was his own mate, accident again, waste. And the officer said 'Right OK laddie, get back in the boat' and said 'You two take him back', I never knew what happened to him. I hope it got glossed over because it wasn't meant - it was just one of those things.

And of course you went ashore, we got these Japanese, and you know the way they had been, they were totally different, they were bowing and scraping to us and we had to take all their weapons off them, lads were coming out with swords and allsorts (laugh). I got one but it got pinched. Somebody who hadn't gone ashore decided they liked it better than me, and they pinched it from the back of... you couldn't put them in your locker, your locker was too small, and

it was sticking out you see, so, I thought someone was hiding it as a bit of fun, but they weren't, it had gone. I got a Japanese Sergeant's tin hat and a truncheon. The truncheon really surprised me because these Bobby's truncheons and them were much more hazardous, it was almost like one of our officers sticks it was nothing, but I brought it home, gave it to a lad at Westhoughton. His brother was in the Navy, and I brought it home for him. And the Japanese, like I said, were very, very subdued. We rounded them all up and we were told where to send them and what to do with them, and I was with the officer and the driver of a jeep. We got a jeep. Must have brought that with them somehow... But as we were going in one of the aircraft which was patrolling saw these motorboats, three speedboats coming out towards us while we were still coming into harbour through this minefield, and he radioed to say that these three boats were coming out So he said... just told them to give them the warning shots and if they didn't give no response to that, then just to let them have it. So they mustn't have responded so he went in and he gave them a burst. One exploded, the other one was so close, the pilot said he didn't shoot that one - the explosion of one set the other one off. So that was two exploded and the third one thought better of it and he turned round and went back and eventually the Royal Marines who were going up in the mountains and looking at all these things, were tipped off about these caves, and when they got to these caves, they were filled with these craft, you know, like a suicide boat, which were obviously there waiting for us and they were going to use them, surrender or no surrender - these lads weren't going to surrender. And they had snipers up in the hills, and for the first couple of days you didn't used to walk across the deck, you used to run because they'd take a pot shot at you, but the Marines went up and sorted them out, brought them down, then because we'd been there the longest I had my birthday in Hong Kong

K: Which birthday was that?

BB: Twenty,

K: Twenty?

BB: Yes, twenty,

K: Yeah, 1945?

BB: Yes, well the surrender was in August wasn't it, so I had my birthday, and then the next thing we were told was we were going home. I was up on the deck, and why this happened was because it was peace time then, if you like, they were all talking in plain language, no codes and I was up there I was on cleaning duties and I heard this over the Tannoy, saying 'Hello Lancashire, hello Lancashire' and my brother-in-law was on that, and I didn't know she was in there, so I went up to the flag deck and the bunting tossers with the flags and I said 'Which is the Lancashire?' and they pointed her out, she was like a repair ship, and my brother-in-law was a petty officer, engine room artificer, you know, do all repairs, and I hadn't seen him for ages, so I said to that lad 'Can you get a private signal?' I said 'My brother-in-law is on that' so he said 'Yes, what do you want to say?' and they could do it without the officers knowing, you see, (laughs) - there was all sorts of tricks, so they got a signal to the Lancashire, and told the brother-in-law that I was here, and he got one back to say 'Meet him ashore' in Hong Kong'. so of course I had to get leave then. He was on a more lenient ship. There were boats every half hour from his ship. So I went down to see the officer on watch and said that my brother-in-law was on the Lancashire and I hadn't seen him for ages and could I have permission to go across? So he said 'Yes, get in the rig of the day, come and see me.' So I went back, got changed and when I got back to the quarterdeck he said 'Drop this lad off at the Lancashire and then carry on dropping ashore' so I got to the Lancashire and they said 'Oh, your brother-in-law is working on mine sweepers, ashore' so they said plenty of liberty boats, get on the next one and they told me where he was working and anyway I went and found him down in the engine room of this mine sweeper, and I waited while he did a couple of repairs, and we had a couple of hours together in Hong Kong. There wasn't a lot to do then, I mean we were still trying to get things going, railway trains and things, trying to get them working, but we had a bit of time together and he said 'If your going home I'll send something across' for my sister, my eldest sister. He's married to her, so he sent her some odd parcels, cigarettes and other bits and pieces I suppose for me to bring home for her and I did that and when I came to go back to my own ship I saw this landing stage and this officer there and I said 'Excuse me sir, where do I get the boat back for the Indomitable' and he said 'Here, you're all right here.' So I waited and all these boats were coming and going off, and I was there hours and I thought 'This is not right. There's got to be a boat sometime.' So I kept going back and he was getting annoyed, this officer, he said 'Look, do you not think I know my job?' and I said 'Well, there's not been a boat in yet for Indomitable' I said 'and I've got to get back' so he said 'Look, don't you worry about it' but when it got too late and I said 'I'm now adrift Sir, what do I say when I get back' he said 'Well just refer them to me, and I'll vouch for you'. But of course when I got back to the ship it, eventually, it was the very last ship, with all the drunks. I

don't know how they got drunk, but they did, and we were holding them on to stop them falling them off the ship, they were that drunk, and we dropped them off, ship in turn, and I was the last one to get off and of course as soon as I went up the gang plank the Jaunty was there, and when he said jump, you jumped! And he said 'Right, come in here' he said 'Where the hell have' you been' so I told him, 'Not my fault chief. I couldn't get ashore - this officer, there was these people, embarkation people, and they'll vouch for me' and he said 'Captain's report' so eventually I was on the Captain's report, and he said 'Right, where were you, you were adrift' and I told him 'Not my fault' he said 'There were boats by the score' he said 'taking lads back. Why didn't you get one of them?' I said 'Because I didn't know where they were coming in Sir. I'd been to the Lancaster first, and I didn't know where our boat came in. I only knew where their boats came in, and where ours came in was a totally different area'. I said 'I just didn't know.' So he listened and he finally said 'All right Brown. I think you're a fool and not a knave' and I thought 'Well, I don't even deserve that' (laughs), but, there you are, it was better than getting some punishment.

K: And was it not long after that, that you came back?

BB: We came back then, via Sydney, we dropped... Just one more thing that I think needs to be said, when we were coming back we brought a lot of prisoners back, the fit ones, and the ones that were fit were cleaning brass and we objected. These were prisoners of war who were ill, but not ill enough to go on a hospital ship, and we objected, and we said 'We'll do them' and they said 'No' their officers said they wanted something to occupy their mind. It was rubbish, so we used to say to them privately, 'Leave that, lad, go get your head down. We'll polish the brasses' and we did.

Anyway this one early morning I was going up and we were almost at Australia, expecting to sight land at anytime, and I saw this lone figure sat on a chair, just an ordinary chair, right up forward and I could see he was wearing an officer's white shirt but no hat, and some officer's shorts. We clothed them as we found them, you know, and I walked up because he seemed lonely, I thought he's on his own, I'll go and talk to him, and I walked up to him, and when I got right up to him, I was horrified because he had the officer's shorts and an officer's white stockings pulled up over the stumps. Bottom halves of his legs were gone. So I mean that pulled me up with a jump, you know. I thought 'what's happened here' so I spoke to him, and he was an aborigine, native Australian, obviously been fighting with the Australians, and after a while I said 'What happened to your legs lad?' I said, 'You stand on a mine or something?' and he said 'No, no', he said, 'This is Japanese punishment' and he told me that they made him kneel, and they got split bamboo and they put it across the back of the knee joints as he was kneeling down and it was protruding at each side by about two foot, and the Japanese solders were running round in twos, two each side, stamping on the bamboo as they ran past, going round again, all stamping, and he said 'At the end' he said 'an officer surgeon, one of ours, a British surgeon' he said 'he took the stumps off' he said 'with a pen knife' he said 'and that's all that's left' and he was sat there, and I apologised because I realised then he said 'I'm just sitting here' he said 'first sight of home' so as soon as it comes up like a cloud, you know, you see the cloud first, but it's not cloud, it's land, and he was waiting for his first sight of home, and I apologised I said 'I'm ever so sorry' I said 'I didn't realise' I said 'I won't intrude anymore' and I shook his hand and said 'The very best of luck to you'.

Now in Australia he was like second class, it's true that, I went on Moore Park in Sydney and I saw them throwing spears - sort of a game, like darts but over a long distance, and I went and watched, interested, and they asked if I wanted to have a go, and I said 'No, I might kill somebody!' and I watched and I talked to them, and when I was coming back, an Australian civilian, a man, asked me 'What do you think you are doing?' and I said 'What do you mean, 'What am I doing?'' So he said, 'You're talking to them over there' and I said 'Yeah, I'm talking to them' and he said 'They're abbos.' He said 'you don't talk to the abbos' and I said 'Who are you to tell me who I can talk to' so he said 'Well you don't talk to them. Not here you don't.' So I said, 'Well' I said 'I'm talking to them. This is *their* country, have you forgot that?'

We used to pull their legs and say 'Show us your chain marks' you know, the Aussies, 'Show us your chain marks' and then what we loved to rile them about was the... you know the Sydney Bridge, always, 'How do you like our bridge?' and we used to say 'Yeah, we built that!' Dorman, Long's, they did, they went over and they built that bridge for them and also we sailed their ferry boats over, the British, built them here, boarded them up for the sea, obviously, then sailed them out to Australia, their ferry boats, they didn't like to be told that. Most of them were all right. We, we got on with the civilians fine, their Army and their Air Force, great, but their Navy couldn't stand us. They just couldn't abide us and for a long time I used to pass, always a group of their sailors, never a single one, and I noticed that when I passed they used to say to me 'Hi kipper'

and I used to say ‘Hi’ and I used to walk past, thought nothing of it, and one day when I was going up the Blue Mountains for that four day leave, you could sit outside their carriages and I was looking at all the scenery. It was wonderful, and as we were travelling up, this Aussie sailor came stepped on the one side onto my side and said ‘Hi kipper’ slid the door and went into the compartment. Next thing I heard this shouting and banging and all the people shouting ‘Oh come on, don’t fight. Come on, break it up there...’ these were the civilians, so I slid the door and went in to see what was happening, and it was our lads, and they were hammering him, they were giving him something to go on with, and I said ‘What’s going on?’ and they said, ‘You heard what he called you didn’t you’ I said ‘All he said was ‘Hi kipper...’’ They said to me ‘What’s a kipper?’ I said ‘It’s a fish.’ They said ‘It’s a fish with *no guts*...’ Now, I’d never given that a thought, you know, and they’d said that to me a few times, but like I said, always when there was a group, but this lad was brave, he’s done it on his own! (laughs).

ENDS