

# **ANZAC Centenary Project Interview on 14 July 2016 between Andrew Allen and Navy Veteran Martin Peebles at H.J. Daley Library**

**AA** I'm doing an ANZAC Centenary Project interview this morning with Martin Peebles. Today is 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016. So Martin I'll start with where you were born first.

**MP** I was born in Sydney- Dover Heights in Sydney

**AA** You're father served in the war didn't he?

**MP** Yes he served in the Second World War 1939-1945. He was involved in the 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery on the island of Morotai. Morotai is a small island in the Netherlands East Indies which the allies needed as a base to support the liberation of the Philippines. At the time Morotai was held by the Japanese but the invading allied forces greatly outnumbered the island's Japanese defenders and secured their objectives in two weeks. Japanese reinforcements landed on the island but lacked the supplies needed to attack the allied defensive perimeter. Intermittent fighting continued until the end of the war with Japanese troops suffering heavy loss of life from disease and starvation. The 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Heavy Anti-aircraft Battery used 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns to protect allied ground forces from attack by Japanese Fighter planes. On discharge as a Corporal from the 63<sup>rd</sup> Australian Infantry Force on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 1945 dad was awarded the Pacific Star, British Imperial Medal and the Australian Service Medal for his service in World War II.

**AA** So he was pretty proud about all that was he? Did he talk about...

**MP** He only spoke about one incident once where they did actually shoot down a Japanese Zero plane. Like I said, Morotai was off New Guinea and at the time that the Battle of Morotai was going on it was preceding Kokoda, so the importance of having Anti-aircraft batteries on Morotai to the allied campaign was very essential because the planes literally had to fly over Morotai before they got to Kokoda.

**AA** Yeah I've heard of Morotai. I've know someone else who served on Morotai. How did he feel about the Japanese?

**MP** Well the pilot that ejected, like I said it was virtually the only time he spoke about it, but the pilot that ejected from the plane was shot down became a POW naturally, but dad did say when he opened his wallet he had limited English speaking skills, but he opened his wallet and you saw a beautiful wife and a family... the same as us virtually- the same as the Aussie guys. I mean the only thing I know from my own research on the allies is that I believe compared that to the Japanese and the Germans in World War I the allies seem to treat their prisoners of war pretty humanely in a lot of cases. But like I said that was the only incident and he, or the only time he talked about it, he just said as far as the guys in his unit were concerned, this guy was just another bloke doing a job. But they didn't, you know the way the agreement was signed from what he told me, they didn't go into any persecution. He was the only one virtually that they captured, or his unit captured. I mean they did the procedure they had to deal with him.

### **5 minutes**

**AA** He would've hated to have been captured too wouldn't he, the Japanese, because they hated that didn't they?

**MP** Oh yeah, it was really pride. I mean that's why you read a lot about Pearl Harbour. The job of the pilots in Pearl Harbour was to kill and be killed. It was a suicide mission and the honour of doing for their country. I think that's where Japanese viewed the war totally differently than our guys did. Our guys went over there...I mean I'm not saying they didn't believe...it's like anybody whose worn the defence force uniform I believe, is very proud to wear it on behalf of the country, but I don't think we had...no-one was ever told to be suicidal in defending Australia. You went over and you did your bit. I mean even though some of our guys, and it's proven now, in modern day war are put in serious harm's way, and I think they know that and that's why you see the issues in Afghanistan and some of those conflicts today where people are virtually put in really precarious positions.

So like most of dad's colleagues I did through pure coincidence happen to be in my school days, in my high school days, had a class mate that was in dad's uniform, actually he was the squad leader and that was pure coincidence, we were actually sharing a desk at one stage in one of our classes and the same thing, his father stayed in the Army after the end of the War, he became a professional soldier, but Rodney never told me his father spoke much about it. Dad was one of those people, he'd go to Anzac marches to march, but he didn't ever, particularly when I was a kid, didn't ever be real enthusiastic about going to the reunion and I always just thought, why people don't want to do that, and is it

because whilst they like to see their comrades if you like, that were brought together, but is it because the only reason they met each other in life was in a war situation, it always puzzled me as a kid as to why, whereas I'm the opposite, I enjoy catching up with my mates I served with, in the right situation. I just wonder is does it bring back memories you're trying to forget?

**AA** It's interesting, I find a lot of ex-servicemen don't want to talk about their experience and yet they'll still go to the Anzac march, mostly, I'm not talking about all but most, I find mostly that's the case.

**MP** Dad enjoyed the march and the parade but he didn't, sometimes he wouldn't be fussed about kicking on afterwards, mum used to take me in as a kid and we used to watch dad march, this was in the Sydney march and he was always very proud but as soon as the march broke up or after the service in Hyde Park, he would always come to lunch with us, he wouldn't think of going to his reunion, which was interesting, and as I've got older I started to think, Well is it bringing back memories he doesn't want to talk about and that is what an Anzac reunion is usually about, when you go and catch up with your mates and talk about old times and situations and as I got older I always wondered that.

**AA** Did your mother ever say that he talked to her?

**10 mins**

**MP** A bit but not much, mum was very involved, that's how they met. Mum during the war was a volunteer and she used to do a lot of work at the Navy club in Sydney and she was very supportive of our guys as a volunteer, I think at different functions between all the services I think that's virtually how mum and dad met and they married after the war. Mum spoke about her experience with some of the great people she met in the war and probably during my younger days as a kid it's not probably something you really used to bring up at the dinner table in the late 50s, early 60s when I was growing up as a teenager, wouldn't be a dinner table topic.

**AA** Did you think about a career in the forces early on in your life?

**MP** Probably it started off early in high school when I was about 14, I got involved with the cadet unit. I served two years in the cadet unit in the Marist Brothers College. Dad's father died when I was very young but he was Scottish and he was a merchant mariner. He served at the end of World War 1. I haven't been able to get much on his file but I know he was a reservist and he was given a rank of Lieutenant Commander in the Australian Reserve Navy. Being at Dover Heights and having that in my family, dad used to take me down to the Navy

open days. We had some friends both civilian and navy lived in the area and worked at HMAS Watson, South Head so I used to go down there. He used to take me to Garden Island open days on the ships when I was a kid. When I was about 15 I joined the Naval Reserve Cadets and I used to go to the training ship the HTS Sirius based on the Cooks River at Arncliffe and I used to go down there every Saturday. I went on and joined the Reserve for a little while when I was too old for the Cadets.

I joined the Navy in 1970. I always used to joke with some of the guys from my old school who went into the Army, the thing I hated in the days before we had camouflage paint we used to go down to the wet river bed when we were playing war games and get a stack of mud. A funny instance was I was out at Glenfield when I was in Cadets and we were doing some work with some Commandos who were helping us with our training. He reckoned I didn't have enough mud on my face and he got a hand full of mud, the biggest mud pie I have ever seen in my life and whacked it on my face. After that experience that was one of the turnoffs.

Then I went to Singleton for a week with the Cadets in the August school holidays. In those days they used to do the big camp there. We were on the side of a ridge in a little hutchy which was basically a bit of canvas slung between two trees over a rope and it was pouring with rain. The rain was coming down and the mud under my sleeping bag and I thought there was no way I was doing this.

## **15 mins**

Probably with the water in my blood I saw myself in the Navy. Two years after in 1972 my name came out in the only lottery I have ever won, but probably the wrong one, the conscription ballot. In those days the conscription was your birthday and my birthday was 30 July and that date was drawn out. I had been in the Navy for two years then and I got a letter from the Government saying you are doing a great job, keep on doing what you are doing we aren't going to put you in khaki.

At one stage I served on HMAS Sydney. The ship had been converted then from an aircraft carrier to a troop transport and it was known as the Vung Tau Ferry because it conveyed troops from Australia to Vietnam. I wasn't on there for long because I mainly served on destroyers and I served on Swan, Stuart and Hobart. Hobart was my last large fleet unit. It had done three tours to Vietnam. It was on what was called the gun line, basically to prevent shore batteries. The Australian Navy through the ANZAS Treaty fortunately was on the third gun line. The Americans ships were usually on the first gun line particularly with their large

battleships at the time, like the Missouri and some of those. We were on the third gun line so if the shore battery actually hit us we were in real trouble. Shore batteries would probably have the range to get to the first line. With a bit of luck if they overshot probably the second line, but not the third line. That was an experience. Because I wore glasses back in those days they were very thorough with vision in the Navy and if you wore glasses, in those days they were glass and not Perspex as today, you couldn't serve as any gunnery rate mainly because if any projectiles came back and obviously broke the glass you would be blinded. So I was in supply and served as a steward on the large vessels and for a time I spent the best part of 18 months on patrol boats and I was on HMAS Archer. In those days there was a large amount of illegal fishing, or that is what they said it was, off northern Australia primarily from Taiwan and Vietnam and the Australian Fisheries got us to patrol for them, however some of these Taiwanese and Vietnamese boats were smuggling illegal arms for Russia. They were also spying off northern Australia particularly in the Arafura Sea to Darwin. To this day we still have six patrol boats in Darwin and six in Cairns. The remainder of them these days, there was 20 in total, are off the Western Australia coast patrolling for illegal people smuggling.

**AA** What was your role on these?

**MP** I was a cook on the patrol boats. On the destroyers everybody is multi skilled. The supply guys in war time would be stretcher bearers, first aiders and also could work if needed in damage control. So basically if there was major damage where they needed large shoring to occur you would work with the damage control guys to virtually carry the wood or whatever to plug the hole. For that I received the Australian Defence Medal for six years.

**20 mins**

**AA** It must have been a proud moment for you.

**MP** Yes, I got a nice letter. It's a proud honour for anyone who serves. I am still fortunate to have some friends of mine that continued and went on quite successfully. A good friend of mine who served with me is now a Commander in the Royal Australian Navy. Up until last year he was Deputy Director of Naval Careers in Canberra. This year he has been posted as the Executive Officer of HMAS Kuttabul in Sydney. He also served on patrol boats with me. We joined together in 1970 and we did our training together. He now lives in Sydney so every now and then I catch up with Andy.

**AA** Was there one particular boat that you have fond memories of?

**MP** Oh yes. I think the patrol boat experience even though they would literally bounce around like a cork in a bathtub in a 5 metre swell. They are fun. There is only 19 crew in them on attack class, 3 officers and 16 other ranks. So basically it is what is called a team exercise, so everyone has a job to do you don't have enough crew for anyone to slacken off. When you are at what we call action stations, everyone has to pull their weight or the whole thing goes pear shaped, compared to a destroyer like the Hobart where there was a crew of 330. But bear in mind when we talk to about the large fleet units like the Hobart there was a hierarchal structure. There was the Wardroom Mess which was obviously the commissioned officers: you had the Senior Sailors Mess which was the Petty Officer, Chief Petty Officer and Warrant Officer and the Junior Sailors Mess which is Leading Seamen, Able Seamen and Ordinary Seamen on the lower deck.

When we talk about the lower deck, that is anything that is noncommissioned, so the senior sailors fall into that category even though they have a separate mess to the junior sailors. However if we talk about a guided missile destroyer like the Hobart, Brisbane and Perth, we had three of them; they had a crew of 330 and only had 29 officers. So if you think about it to get those ships to sea whilst you need your leadership group you also need the rest of the crew otherwise the ship doesn't go anywhere. For instance in the engine room you have only two officers, a senior engineer who would probably be a Lieutenant Commander on a large unit and an assistant to him and that could be a Sub-Lieutenant or Lieutenant. So you only have two officers and you need a lot more than that to run an engine room on a large warship. The difference on a patrol boat, your engineer could be a Chief Petty Officer or a Warrant Officer because your patrol boat officers would be a Commander, your Navigator and the third officer could be an XO. Your Navigator could be a Sub Lieutenant which is the most junior officer.

## **25 mins**

A good friend of mine who was a Senior Chief Petty Officer was on patrol boats. He was a Senior Coxswain in the Sydney area for the Royal Australian Navy. He had 30 years. We had a very junior officer on board the Archer who was on his first sea posting after coming out of college. So a Chief with 30 years' experience in the navy would have a lot more experience compared to a green Sub Lieutenant, and working in the wardroom on a large ship like the Hobart we used to see that because we'd get Sub Lieutenants on board and it was literally their first posting out of the college and of course some of them came out with grandiose ideas and they had one pip on their shoulder and they were an Admiral, I hate to say it, the last skipper that I served on the Hobart, the last seagoing skipper was Captain Peter Sinclair and in the history of New South

Wales of course after Peter retired he became one of the Governors of the state of New South Wales for a couple of years and he was only thirty nine and going to add four rings, you know to be thirty nine and a four captain in the Navy in my time showed the potential of that person. He was a great bloke because he never expected any crew member whether you were his XO who was a commander in rig right down to the most junior ordinary seaman to do anything he wouldn't do. For three years in a row, that ship won the Gloucester cup, named after the Duke of Gloucester is the award for the most efficient ship in the Royal Australian Navy. It is awarded once a year, and the Hobart won it three times in a row and most of that was during his leadership.

**AA** So he would have had the respect of the crew because he was like that?

**MP** Of everybody yes, whereas in comparison to others, not so liked. I had an interesting experience on HMAS Swan because we had a Commander, just for the record here, I will say, the Navy has certain protocols regarding what they call capital ships, so HMAS Swan was a Destroyer Escort Type 12, Hobart was a DDG - larger ship. Most of the skippers on the larger ships could be four in captains. On the Type 12s or the River class escorts junior to the Hobart for instance, the Swan could have a Commander as a skipper. When we used to have carriers the skipper was always a four ring Captain. Smaller ships down to the patrol boats could have a Lieutenant Commander or Lieutenant as a skipper. So the smaller the ship, lower the rank of the skipper.

### **30 mins**

We had a person on tour and he wasn't a people person. Some of the guys, the slightest thing would have an argument. This guy had done a lot of training in the Royal Navy. Under our ANZAS Agreement and our Commonwealth Navy Agreement each year on most ships we had two exchangees. So on the Hobart we had two American Officers when I was on board. Again they have different ways of dealing with people. There is a joke in the Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy that to earn what is loosely called scrambled eggs on a cap (in the Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy our ranks are exactly mirror imaged to the Royal Navy, because that is where we came from as a branch of the Royal Navy back in 1861) you have to be a full ranking Commander to earn those decorations on the cap. In the US Navy you get two stripes, a star and that braid around your cap if you are a Lieutenant. We also had a joke about decorations. I did some research and we hear the common term in the US Defence Force about the Purple Heart. On the HMAS Archer I cut myself in the galley one day and one guy said that it was a pity I wasn't in the US Navy; they would have given me a Purple Heart for that. I honestly stress when I refer to the

Royal Navy, even to this day that is what the disciplinary code of the Royal Australian Navy is based on. So when our people fail to do their duty in accordance with the code, the penalties that our Australian Officers give out are based on the British Naval Disciplinary Code.

**AA** Did you enjoy being the ship's cook?

**MP** Oh yes. I was dirty recently because I came across another patrol boat cook who I met down at the Maritime Museum in Sydney. He showed me a business card he had. Actually Bob served on the patrol boat that is on display down at the Maritime Museum now, HMAS Event. On the business card it said:

Rule 1: The cook is the most important person on board.

Rule 2: If in doubt refer to rule 1.

Rule 3: There is always beer in the cook's fridge.

I asked him who he gave that to and he said every officer on board. We were having a chat about old times and I asked him if he had any trouble. He said only when a Sub Lieutenant came out of college and thought he knew everything and he didn't want to play the game. I said what did you do and he said after he starved for the first 24 hours he came to the party. In all seriousness that was the fun on the patrol boats because literally that was the way I was treated. I didn't have that card but that was the way I was treated. When you were at sea it wasn't a pleasant job being the cook. You are the first up.

**35 mins**

On my boat even though I wasn't on duty, I was up at 5am every morning, because I had to have breakfast ready for the 19 crew at 7am. They always got three square meals plus snacks per day, so it was always a cooked breakfast. They also had the choice of cereals and juices and tea and coffee as well. The bulk of it was a cooked breakfast because these guys were working hard, particularly the seamen. They needed that to be fit for the day for what they had to do.

**AA** Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. What sort of breakfast would that be?

**MP** It would be bacon and eggs. This is what took the time. It wouldn't necessarily be to order but we would do eggs a couple of ways, so we would do fried and scrambled. We would do bacon, eggs, and sausages and sometimes throw in a grilled tomato. I was always amazed when I first went on patrol boats of how



quickly people would build up a thirst. We had no sooner left the dock in Sydney and going down the harbour and ten minutes later the boss wanted a cup of tea. I thought we had only just left the dock. Between meals there were snacks and they could come and help themselves to fruit and whatever was available.

For lunch it obviously depended on the season. In the summer months it could be pretty simple; it could be just salad and cold meats. By cold meat it could be chicken salad which would have to be cooked in the morning and cooled. One of the other benefits of being the cook, you never had to wash up courtesy of the Executive Officer you had the luxury of two people volunteering to wash up. Volunteering means you and you. So after you have served breakfast you can go away and have a bit of a break for a little while. After the galley has been cleaned up you go back and start again.

In between there could be interesting interruptions like they are rehearsing the Third World War. Someone comes in whilst you are preparing lunch one day and you are going down the harbour and you hear “fire, fire, fire in the galley” and three big burley men come in with every fire extinguisher known to man and tell you that you are suffering from smoke inhalation. So you send a message back to the Skipper and say don’t blame the cook if lunch is late.

And then comes the evening. This is where there is a different routine. In the winter time chances are evening meal could be a roast dinner or steak and vegetables or chicken and vegetables. In the summer there is a bit of a different routine. As I said six of these patrol boats are based out of Cairns. Of course around Cairns there is the luxury of the Great Barrier Reef and some beautiful islands there and again this is one of the perks being the cook. They have a portable gas barbeque on board. In those days that would go into the tinny and we would go into an island and a couple of very nice seamen with their coxswain’s certificate would be seconded to drive you ashore to set up the barbeque. They would bring in the eskies and everything else and that is where you would have your beer rations that night which was two cans per man per night.

#### **40 mins**

Being creative cooks most of us used to have a bit of a perk on the side when you talk about of the beer rations. Usually when you go to an island they would drop anchor maybe about 100 metres off shore depending on the depth. We would set up the barbeque and we would see all the tourists on the island. This would be on a Saturday night and the tourists would come up and say that they have a young lad is there any chance of them having a look at the boat in the

morning and they would say here is a couple of cans for your trouble. Myself and Denis one of my colleagues the coxswain used to have a little thing. It would depend on the Skippers but most of them were pretty good as they also saw it as a bit of PR for the Navy, none of them would usually object unless we had specific orders to get away pretty early on the Sunday morning cause usually we wouldn't go until about lunchtime. Denis and myself had this thing. On this particular night, we went back on board after we had had a few more beers than the two cans beer ration. I was forgetting that you had to climb a rope ladder on the side of the patrol boat which would probably have been about 20 feet. I got up there and tripped and went onto the deck. The deck was made of steel and it wasn't a pretty sight. The Officer of the watch was there and he said "Peebles, have you only had your two cans beer ration?" Denis was in the same boat because he had had a few as well. By the way the coxswain on the patrol boats is literally the divisional officer for the lower deck. Next minute we had an esky literally full of cans of beer. We had to get the boys to get that up the ladder. Of course the Officer of the watch asked us what was all that. Then we had to explain that there would be about 20 or so kids coming on board in the morning.

In all fairness the reason we got away with that type of thing is literally that the boat would bounce around like a cork in a bath tub outside and living conditions on board wasn't the best. Back in the 70s if you went to sea in the Navy the difference to serving on a shore base there was a bit of a financial increment. The financial difference in your pay was an extra 38 cents per day which was to make up for sea sickness. I think today they get a bit more, it depends on the vessel. I knew a sub mariner and he said the financial increment serving on the subs was more than surface ships and surface ships was more than on shore. I think today it is a lot more than 38 cents a day.

**AA** Because you were the only cook on board, what happened if you got sick? Did you ever get sick?

**45 mins**

**MP** Because of the type of food that you cooked, it was pretty basic not cordon bleu. The range on the patrol boat was divided up into four hotplates with a divider through so nothing could spill. Beside it was a grill plate like a barbeque. Most guys onboard would know how to do a barbeque so if the worst came to the worst they could probably throw a salad together and do the steaks on the plate like I used to do. When you went on as a junior sailor (I went on as an AB and left as a leading seaman) the cook's bunk is right at the bottom of the ladder so when they come to wake you up in the morning, they don't wake everybody else up. So because of all the harder work you do as a cook, in war time you still have to

double up as maybe a stretcher bearer or in damage control. This is another thing I had to do once, and only once, one of the guys was seriously sick and he was supposed to be a lookout. So I had to do a lookout shift all one afternoon going up the north coast. We were steaming up to Port Stephens looking into the sun on the wings of the bridge. Then I still had to go down and expected to get the afternoon brew for the boss and still expected to go down and cook. I was feeling crook that day, it was a rotten sea going up the coast that day. Where I was lookout was on the bridge of the ship looking straight into the sun. So that wasn't pleasant. Then I got into trouble from one of the blokes because the exhaust fans weren't working in the galley. It was a common problem by the way, with all the technology in the world. One of the first things to go down on any ship seems to be the exhaust fans in the galley which is very unpleasant when you are in that confined space I can assure you.

I did the lookout duty, we get up to Port Stephens, dropped the pig, they were doing a club run that night and turned around. Because of the exhaust fans and all the condensation, I started to feel crook when I was cooking the steak and chip. I was one of the ones that had leave that night to go to the club. Then I really felt crook, one of the ways if you don't take drugs for it, Quells was the thing in my day, you need to take that at least an hour preferably two hours before you sail for it to have any effect. I was really starting to feel nauseous, I didn't get sick just nauseous, so the last thing I wanted to do was go to the club and have a beer. So I thought no I just wanted to put my head down. My mate asked if I was going and I said no I was feeling crook. He said to just put your head down and sleep it off that is the best way to cure seasickness. One of the other blokes found out about it and he said you old so-and-so, he was looking forward to it but he was on duty and if he had known I was crook he could have gone. He got over it in about a week.

## **50 mins**

Talking about seasickness, we had another young bloke who came with us on his first patrol. The cook on the patrol boats doubled as the officer's steward but for only one person and that was the skipper. Everyone else had to come and get their meals but the cook would take the skipper's meal to him in the wardroom which was very small. The young bloke came on board and was standing there with a glass of water taking the Quells and I walked in. He said don't tell the boss that I am taking seasickness tablets. I said that is strange I just gave him his half an hour ago. I would say to you that anybody in the Navy that says they haven't been seasick at least once in their career is telling you a fairytale.

**AA** That is interesting to know. Did you get sick fairly regularly?

**MP** No, not as much. When I went on to the Hobart I had just come off the patrol boat Archer. A wily old chief was on the gangway at Garden Island when I reported for duty. He was up there smoking a pipe like a lot of them used to do in those days. He was puffing on his pipe and looked at me and could see I was a bit green and he took a swig on his pipe and said son do you get seasick? I said no I had just been on the patrol boats which were only 107 feet and this is 330 feet. I think I can handle it, before the patrol boats I was on destroyers. He said believe me you will before the end of this cruise. I had completely forgotten we were going to Hobart across Bass Strait. So if you have seen a DDG, they are diving wrecks now, but if you had seen one in the 70s they have a box radar in difference to a type 12 or a destroyer escort which have a convex radar. The convex has slats in it so the wind goes straight through it. But on the DDGs the box radar is just the black box type radar so the wind doesn't go through it, it hits it. So when the radar is moving the wind will hit it whichever way it is going round and instead of just having what we would call a starboard/port or left/right hand roll you would have a bow/aft roll as well as a starboard/port roll. So the DDG rolls around literally like a patrol boat but in a larger sense because you have got a larger mass, like a cork in a bath tub. So this enterprising Chief Petty Officer with about 30 years' experience said to me as I walk across before I have even put my bags down, gets out a \$20 note out of his pocket and says here is a lazy lobster as they were known in those days. He said I'll bet you that lazy lobster that by the end of this cruise you will have been as crook as a dog. I thought that sounds good to me, a good easy way to make twenty bucks.

## **55 mins**

Little was I to know that three days out of Sydney after we had refueled at Western Port Bay in Victoria before crossing Bass Strait we would hit one of the worst storms you could ever imagine. You couldn't even go out on the upper deck without a lifeline on. We went down with the Perth and with two subs chasing us because we were rehearsing what I call World War III in Bass Strait. The waves were virtually hitting the bridge on the Hobart that is how bad it was for 24 hours. I'll tell you how bad it was, a good example was when we talked about cooking, 29 Officers on board on that Saturday night after we left Western Port sometimes the wardroom got a bit of cordon bleu cookery compared to the general crew. They had their own chef by the way. That night the chef was supposed to cook beef stroganoff. At 4pm I get a phone call in the wardroom, I was on duty in the wardroom with some of the boys getting ready to set up for tea after cleaning up after the afternoon tea. We did what was called the glass test. We would get a glass, get a steward at one end and a steward at the other end of the table to roll the glass and we would time it and it took five seconds to

go the length of the wardroom table which sat about 12 people in one sitting. So I get the phone call and it is the XO and he says what is for scram or dinner tonight. The chef was standing alongside me and I said the chef told me it is beef stroganoff and the rest of the sentence is that there is no way that it can be cooked in these conditions. The XO said what is the alternative. The chef said to me soup in a cup and a toasted ham sanger for those that want it. The XO said not to bother setting the table because he didn't think that anyone would be coming up. He said if any wanted it were any of our boys prepared to take it down to their cabins. By the way that is the only time that Officers would get food in their cabin. The steward would wake them up in the morning when they were on duty and take them a glass of juice. Only two wanted that, that was how bad it was. We came back to Sydney and everyone on that cruise, 330 people including Peter Sinclair the skipper was crook. I came back, after that I had a couple of days leave. I was coming across to the gangway and there was this wily old officer puffing on his pipe. He clicked his fingers and said son you are forgetting something. I said what and he said you owe me a lobster, he said have you forgotten the bet. I said but everyone was sick including the skipper. He said the moral of the story son I only had the bet with you. A mate of mine, another steward was standing behind him and he winked at me and said as we were going ashore, you know that old bastard is the richest Chief in the Australian Navy. He said wait until we get someone else new on board next week and he will go through the same rigmarole again because we are going back to Hobart to do some more games. From then on I never had another bet with anyone in the Navy.

**AA** So you lost your lazy lobster.

**60 mins**

**MP** I sure did. The other experience I had on the Hobart which was a bit of a sad experience but he learnt the hard way. I did say to you that the Sub Lieutenant is the most junior of the commissioned ranks. Senior Chiefs and even Warrant Officers with 30 years' service in the Navy compared to probably from joining with their degree at the Defence Force Academy which may take 3 years to get an engineering degree and they come out after possibly four and a half years with doing 18 months Officers course with a stripe on their shoulder. What you have to realise is that the other guys who are junior to them could have a lot more naval service. We had a guy come on to the Hobart who thought he was an Admiral, one stripe on his shoulder, first night in the wardroom sits down for the main meal and clicks his fingers. All the other Officers had eaten including the XO. He said to the XO sir what do you have to do to summon a steward to bring you your dinner. He is still clicking his fingers. The XO said what are you doing.

He said I am clicking my fingers. Without a word of a lie the XO looked at him and he looked at me and looked at this young bloke and said something they didn't tell you at the college is there are no dogs on Australian warships. He said what do you mean sir. The XO said well you were calling a dog not a steward. So all the other Officers got up and he still there and hadn't been fed and the XO came to me as he was going out the hatch from the wardroom and said, feed the bastard otherwise he will say that we are starving him. He never did it again. The other joke about that is that the XO also said to me that he would be having a good laugh on the dog watch at one in the morning because that is, when you divide the work day; the dog watch is the first watch in the early hours of the morning. Believe me the Captain is never on the bridge at one in the morning in peace time, he is below the doona as we say and the most junior Sub Lieutenant the last person on board is on watch.

We carried a couple of Midshipmen as well. Midshipmen are a nothing rank literally when you look at it on paper because they are not non-commissioned Officers and they haven't graduated as an Officer so they are in a limbo situation so they are purely on board for a very short time, possibly only a few months to do part of their sea training component in their qualifications. They eat in the wardroom, referred to as mister and not afforded a salute by junior sailors because they haven't earned a salute yet. They virtually do all the horrible jobs that Officers don't want to do. They shadow an Officer. If they are training to be a navigator they are what is called a navigator's yeoman. Another interesting thing when we talk about yesterday's navy or the time when I was serving compared to today's navy, we talk about the huge amount of technology we see on warships.

## **65 mins**

During the fleet's review a couple of years ago, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I went on some of the modern ANZAC class and a couple of months ago I went on one of our current minesweepers the HMAS Yarra and I mentioned about navigators. Navigators had to draw up the charts in those days. Going back to the patrol boat days, we used to have enough food and ammunition for what was called a 21 day deployment. So 21 days charts had to be drawn up. Now in the bridge of a modern day warship ANZAC class they have three computer screens suspended from the bridge roof and that is the charts. On the Yarra for instance the Navigator hitches in the coordinates and they show up on the screen. We all know that technology can fail. I played the Devil's Advocate and asked what happens if something goes wrong. This is also where technology can be labour intensive because they now have to carry on board all ships a navigator's yeoman or a deputy navigator who is usually a Sub Lieutenant who has to draw all the charts up by hand in case the technology breaks down. I can tell you now

if you were travelling “up top” as we call it, which is Asia; you have to travel across blank waterways. If the technology fails and you don’t know where you are. Whereas on the Hobart we used to primarily have one Navigator and other seamen Officers who could assist if needed. Now all ships have to carry two qualified Navigators, one could be a Sub Lieutenant and the other a Lieutenant who is a Navigator. They have to carry an assistant. So for what technology is worth, technology in the Navy has created extra labour rather than reduce it. But if you are lost sea, you wouldn’t want to be lost at sea.

A good example is the distance between the end of land on the east coast before you see the start of land of Tasmania as you go across the Tasman Sea into Bass Strait. You see the lighthouse at Eden, Two Fold Bay and you do not see another light until the St Helens light on the Tasman coast. That is virtually 12 hours of steam. Another thing I tell people when I am guiding down at the Maritime Museum is when you travel south along the coast you are travelling into the tide and travelling into the wind. So to give you an example from Sydney to Tasmania on the Hobart would take two and a half to three days but coming back it would take two days because you have a following tide and the wind. A good example of that is flying time from Sydney to Melbourne is an hour and a half, but last time I flew back it was only about 40 minutes because the wind is behind.

## **70 mins**

To give you an example of speed at sea, the maximum speed of a DDG or the Hobart class destroyers was 35 knots. During that storm in Bass Strait we were pushing 12 knots with great difficulty and none of them went to 35, usually the average was 30 because they vibrate like blazes the faster they go. Destroyers are built for speed, so they are built very light. Most of them are aluminium based, it is very light. The XO on the Hobart ended up being a very good friend of mine. One day we were in the wardroom, there were only a couple of them in the wardroom having a coffee, and we were speaking about speed of DDGs. He was a very smart seaman. I was saying about the motion, the vibration and everything else and his reply to me was “if you want luxury Marty go for a cruise on the Queen Mary. This is built as a lean, mean fighting machine.” So the comforts of the crew were the last consideration when they built a warship. Young boys will say to me these days that they are looking for a career in the navy and want to be an Officer and looking forward to having their own cabin. I tell them that is good, that means that you will get your own cabin when you reach the status of Executive Officer or Captain. They think they get their own cabin when they come out of college. In most cases Junior Officers at least share a cabin with one other. In some cases with Sub Lieutenants there may be four in a cabin. This is the dream navy compared with realistic.

Again this is how things have changed since the 70s. When I went on the ANZAC a couple of years ago when the Fleet Review was in Sydney, the Officer who showed me around was a female Lieutenant. I had never served on board a ship with a female. The other interesting thing was her position on board ship was the Assistant Maritime Warfare Officer. People that served with me would turn over in their graves literally if they knew females were on board ship in the first place and secondly to have female Seaman Officers or Warfare Officers. She showed me a couple of cabins. She was sharing a cabin with another female Lieutenant. So you are virtually a Commander on the ANZAC class before you even get considered for a single cabin. They aren't huge cabins. With Officers their cabin is an office during the day and sleeping quarters at night.

**AA** Did you have any problems with the confined spaces? Did you find it claustrophobic or anything like that?

**MP** No, probably one of the smartest and best bits of advice that I ever got was a week after I joined the navy was to never volunteer for anything so I didn't. One of the things that was voluntary in the navy and still is, is the submarine service. Submarine service is very confined and in my days you had to be in it for two years and be proficient at every emergency situation on a surface ship before you were even considered and it was voluntary.

## **75 mins**

I never volunteered for anything. I can understand why because when I am at the Museum now there is a bit of a joke with the boys at the Museum. When I first started as a guide in the Museum in 2012 my first shift was for three and a half hours on HMAS Onslow and the coordinator knows that the joke was that the Maritime Museum was able to achieve something that the Navy couldn't in 8 years and that was to get me on to a submarine. Now every day I am virtually on the Onslow for at least three hours every shift showing people around which I enjoy. If you look at the Junior Sailors Mess on a destroyer there are 40 people in there. So you are still confined, the only difference between that and a submarine is that you can stand up and move around a bit more. But it is still confined in terms of space. The actual area near the wardroom where the Officer's cabins are on most destroyers is very small. It is virtually the same size as the mess for 40 people except they are divided cabins but the actual area in total is no different to the open mess style of the men. The only one who gets a bit more luxury of course is the boss who gets an en suite. The other Officers don't have an en suite. They have a general bathroom. They still have to go to the end of the alleyway to their facilities.



**AA** I was going to ask you how you felt about retiring. I suppose with working at the Maritime Museum that helps.

**MP** A friend of mine told me about it. I was down there one day and I saw that they were advertising for volunteers. I made some enquiries and they said yes. Of course it is like anything, I had to do a bit of an interview but the actual coordinator of guides at the time was a Master Mariner himself. He is retired now. We were talking about things and he was particularly interested in my service on the attack class patrol boats. We do have the Advance down there. It is like anything in a museum, all the notes for all the ships have been written by some well-meaning Curators. But none of the Curators at the Museum have ever worn a naval uniform. They will look at facts and figures. As a person who served on them I think for the public or visitor that doesn't know too much about patrol boats some of the notes on the Advance are too technical. When I do a tour myself and Bob the other cook we talk about the experience so we can put in a bit more human stuff rather than that gun can fire so many rounds a minute at a range of 5 miles. That goes over a lot of people's heads whereas I show them the galley.

This is where I have told the Curator you are creating a false image that never happened in the 70s when they were in commission, because as simple as it may seem they have a microwave in the current galley of the Advance. There wasn't a microwave in any of the 20 patrol boats that we had in commission. They don't come to people that know.

## **80 mins**

This is the greatest laugh I have, they have a model of the harbour bridge in the canteen on HMAS Vampire made out of match boxes and soft drink cans. By the way canteens were operated by sailors who were off duty. It wasn't a permanent job of any of the crew of a ship. The canteen wasn't open all day; it usually opened at 4pm. Without a duty watch the normal work day of the Navy for non-duty sailors is 8am to 4pm. If you're not on duty you do just like a normal civilian does a normal day, that's your work done. So everyone reports for duty at 8am if you're not on a special duty watch you just work that day. At 4pm if you are lucky enough to be ashore at Garden Island, back in the 70s and I think it still happens today, without the navy half of the pubs in Kings Cross would go broke. At 4pm there used to be a pilgrimage from the bottom of the hill up to the pubs at Kings Cross. This was particularly with the crews that had interstate crews on them. A good example of that was HMAS Swan. The Swan was named after the Swan River in Western Australia. I was one of 12 New South Wales sailors on the Swan. The rest of the 250 were Western Australians. They had no relatives in Sydney so when it came to 4pm those guys would make their pilgrimage up to

the old Chevron Hilton it used to be. All the bars in the Chevron in the 70s were named after naval names. The favoured bar was the quarterdeck bar and that was frequented by the navy every day. If it wasn't for the navy some of those pubs would have gone out of business in the 70s. That was before the politicians said we can't have any more nuclear ships in Sydney Harbour and the US used to do their regular R&R trips over here for their crew. The US Navy used to come and also frequent Kings Cross. Most of the sailors went there.

I have always kept in touch with my mates particularly my good friend Andy. A really good friend of mine was a Catholic Priest, he is a Monsignor now, was the senior Catholic Chaplain in Sydney Port for the RAN in general. He is retired now from his naval duties because he is back in the Diocese of Sydney. He got me on a very special list where I get invited every year to the ANZAC vigil at St Mary's and I go to an invitee only function after it in the Cardinal's residence at St Mary's and that is attended by the State Governor and at least one or two Admirals. Andy usually gets invited to that from his rank capacity so I catch up with him there. It is good. I had a good chat to the current captain of the Darwin.

## **85 mins**

I learnt a bit about why it is cheaper to convert a decommissioned naval vessel into a diving wreck rather than a museum ship. There has been some discussion down at the Museum where we have the Vampire which was a Daring class and went out of service in 1986. They were superseded by the type 12s, the river class and then the DDGs like the Hobart which I also served on as well as the Swan. Now we have the FFGs which was the HMAS Sydney. The last Sydney to be decommissioned was the fourth Sydney to be named that.

The argument by some of us down at the Museum was wouldn't it be great to have an FFG at the Museum to show the visitors the difference between a Daring of their era and a modern day destroyer of the current era. I asked the Commodore about that. It would be great if we could get the Sydney for instance, because of the City of Sydney and because of the history that goes with the name. That's when he was telling about the logistics are it is cheaper for the government to sink them as diving wrecks than it is to maintain them as museum pieces.

**AA** I was wondering the same thing myself about that. It is interesting to hear.

**MP** To give you an idea, they tell me that to maintain the Vampire without the sub costs a million a year. It was decommissioned in 1986. Each year we have to get it scraped because of erosion below the water line obviously. To do that we have to get it towed around to Garden Island and to do that we are at the mercy of the

navy. We were supposed to get it towed earlier this year and particularly the submarine as well. We have to rely on the availability of the Captain Cook dry dock which is in the navy's possession at Garden Island. Obviously if they have a priority with one of their serving vessels at the moment, that puts the museum ship back. That's what happened this time. The Stuart needed some urgent below the water line repairs and so we have been deferred. You can understand that as well. But the trouble is, from my knowledge what is called the major refit cycle continues. I can't remember from my time serving when there wasn't a serving vessel in that dry dock. I think that is one of the problems.

## **90 mins**

There is a lot of history with the name Sydney synonymous with the city with the names of the ships. If we go back to the Sydney/Emden thing which was the worst naval disaster in Australian history, 645 people lost. The significance of the city and the history of Garden Island, yes it would have been great to have.

One consoling factor with the DDGs is down at the War Memorial in Canberra. If you go up through the Vietnam Gallery where it has the Naval Gallery you go on through there up the stairs attached to the building is the bridge of the HMAS Brisbane which was the sister ship to the Hobart. At least something off the DDG has been maintained because from the outside you can actually see the steel bridge of the Brisbane. It is very graphical because the floor moves; the screens move and shows them firing the guns. It has everything in the bridge, the Officer of the Watch or the Captain's chair and all the other instruments. It is the best thing you will get to the DDG in Australia.

**AA** Well Martin, I might wrap it up now. Do you still get up at 5am every morning?

**MP** Not so much during the winter time, however when I go into the Museum I am usually up at 4am. I go in early. I am usually in there at 8am having a brew with the boys going over a few things preparing myself for the day. The Coordinator comes in with our rosters a bit after 9am. The Museum opens at 9.30am but the vessels don't open until 10am so that gives us time to get into position ready for the visitors. I'm doing that two days a week mostly, Wednesdays and Fridays. It also gives me an opportunity to learn a fair bit about Australian history because one of the enjoyable things I do away from the Naval vessels is I do some guiding on the Bark Endeavour which has brought me right up to speed with how they lived in the 1800s and learn a lot about Cook's voyage which was nothing less than incredible. Three years to travel all that distance.

**AA** He was an amazing man.

**MP** If you want to compare chalk to cheese in terms of different situations of the Navy in those days Cook was only a Lieutenant by rank. In modern day Navy for a ship with a crew of 92 the size of the Bark Endeavour you would have a lot more crew senior officers than a Lieutenant particularly for a voyage of that distance in charge of that boat, a total difference. The only other thing in terms of terminology that I tell the visitors because they are a bit green to some of this about trivia in names. The patrol boat is obviously a boat even though they have HMAS in front of their name, HMAS Her Majesty's Australia Ship that ordinarily means. In the case of submarines, they are termed as a boat so the HMAS in front of their name is Her Majesty's Australian Submarine. All larger fleet vessels are obviously a ship. Another friend of mine who is still serving told me this. The helipad at HMAS Watson has HMAS Watson in a big circle. This is a true story. The Chief of the Navy was flying over there for an inspection of the base one day and some enterprising sailor had gotten up in the middle of the night before and changed the letters around. so in the middle of the helipad it had HAMS Watson. So when Ray Griggs who is the Chief of the Navy now, he was the Deputy Chief then, landed his helicopter the first thing that he could see when he landed at 10am was HAMS. So as soon as he got out of the helicopter he said to the Captain of the Base, I am here for two hours and before I leave I want to look down and see HMAS Watson on that helipad. Sure enough while he was in the board room the base fairies came out and when he departed, HMAS Watson was back on the helipad. So the Navy does have a sense of humour.