



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

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Object description

Australian officer served aboard HMS Bluebell in Atlantic, 1941-1942; trained with X Craft in GB, 1942-1943; served aboard submarine X9 during attack on Tirpitz, 9/1943; commanded submarine X24 in GB and during attack on Bergen, Norway, 1943-1944; commanded submarine XE4 in GB and Far East, 1944-1945

Content description

REEL 1 Background in Perth, Australia, 1918-1940: family origins; extended family; family life in south Perth; relations between GB and Australia; early interest in aviation and naval matters; degree of knowledge of First World War; interest in technological advances; reasons why father didn't serve aboard during First World War; degree of interest in world events; reaction to Munich Crisis, 1938. REEL 2 Continues: reaction to evacuation of Dunkirk, 1940. Aspects of enlistment and training with Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve in Australia, 1940-1941: background to enlistment in Freemantle, 10/1940; importance of engineering education; attitude to naval service; receiving white feather; visits to relatives in GB; question of seniority during naval service; reputation of German submarine arm; question of quality of asdic; anti-submarine training on Attack Teacher in Sydney; learning circuit for asdic dome; attitude to leaving Australia; time of night when U-boats attacked convoys. REEL 3 Continues: Aspects of voyage from Australia to GB, 1941: work in engineer room; anti-aircraft watch duties; arrival in Liverpool amongst wrecks in River Mersey. Recollections of operations as officer aboard HMS Bluebell in Atlantic, 1941-1942: reporting to ship in Clarence Dock, Liverpool; impressions of Liverpool and London; use of Australia House during leave in London; public morale in GB; reception on board ship; initial impressions of ship; action station with depth charges; firing of depth charges; inexperience of depth charge crew; speed of first convoy to Gibraltar; watch keeping duties; primary duties of convoy escorts. REEL 4 Continues: need to zig zag ship; attitude to not being used as Asdic officer; reaction to convoy being attacked by U-boats; picking up survivors from sunken ships; question of maturing during convoy service; countering threat German Air Force Focke Wulf Condor aircraft with Catapult

Assisted Merchantmen; importance of introduction of escort carrier HMS Audacity; importance of air cover for convoys; actions on being ship being torpedoed; watch system; responsibilities for confidential books and coding of messages; reading reports on convoy actions. REEL 5 Continues: German U-boat tactics and Royal Navy intelligence gathering; technique for escorting convoys at night; importance of air cover over convoys; use of radar to detect U-boats; ashore in Gibraltar; visit to Spain; trade in alcohol; initial impressions of submarine on visit to one in Gibraltar; attacking U-208 whilst escorting convoy 12/1941; effects of move of U-boat campaign to east coast of US, early 1942; method of handling of German U-boat POWs; question of Australian personnel transferring back to Australia, early 1942; cleaning clothes; use of cut throat razor on board; improvement in US anti-submarine techniques as war progressed; volunteering for special service; attitude to leaving ship. REEL 6 Continues: Recollections of training with X craft in GB, 1942-1943: posting to submarine service at HMS Dolphin; selection process; reaction to discovery that X craft were to attack Tirpitz; removal of piece of bomb damaged keel from HMS Victory in Portsmouth; move to Isle of Bute; outline of how training and operation would be conducted; question of volunteering for miniature submarine duties; workings of submarine ballast tanks; crew; character of X craft; role of diver; how diver exits and re-enters X craft; effect of loss of diver, 1943; taking command of X5 and orders to concentrate on cutting anti-torpedo net; plan to cut anti-torpedo net surrounding Tirpitz. REEL 7 Continues: method of cutting anti-torpedo net; character of his diver; problems encountered by his diver during first exercise to cut anti-torpedo wire and Shean's subsequent cutting of wires; second incident of diver losing consciousness; background to taking command of X 3; problems of towing X craft; German defences for Tirpitz in Altenfjord; negotiating minefields on later raid on Bergen; use of Joe Brook's cartoons to highlight training mistakes; problems encountered in training; question of security for operations in north of Scotland; living conditions for civilians in Scotland. REEL 8 Continues: Aspects of attack on Tirpitz in Altenfjord, Norway, 9/1943: preparations for attack on Tirpitz; receiving signal from towing submarine that X8; loss of his own craft X9 during tow; character of attack by X craft on Tirpitz and fate of different craft; continuing patrol outside Altenfjord; attitude on return to GB; engagement to future wife on return; wartime relationships; memories of commander of X5; composition of crew of X craft. REEL 9 Continues: execution of X craft attack on Tirpitz. Recollections of operations commanding X24 in GB and during attack on Bergen, Norway, 1943-1944: background to taking command X24; loss of X22 in towing accident; exercise attacking Scapa Flow's defences; memories of Ian McKintosh commander of towing submarine HMS Sereph; problems with compressor on route to Bergen; approach to Bergen; entering Bergen harbour; sinking of ship in Bergen harbour; discussion of how submarines torpedo ships; how X craft lay mines under ships; degaussing of X craft; avoiding engine noise being detected; use of periscope. REEL 10 Continues: use of X craft during D- Day landings, 6/6/1944. Recollections of operations commanding XE4 in GB and Far East, 1944-1945: standing by construction of XE4; use of special railway train; nature of working up trials;

marriage, 14/6/1944; experiencing first V 1 attack on London; obtaining rations from US liberty ship; role of X craft in Pacific cutting telegraph cables; method of finding telegraph cables; loss of divers in Hervey Bay, Australia; cutting of telegraph cable from Saigon. REEL 11 Continues: further details of cutting of the telegraph cable from Saigon; abortive plan to attack Japanese cruiser in Singapore. Reflections on service with Royal Australian Navy during Second World War, 1940-1945: role of Royal Australian Navy personnel in Battle of Atlantic; character of submarine service; conditions on board X craft; controlling X craft; question of threat of German U-boats in 1945; reaction to dropping of atomic bombs. Demobilisation and return to civilian life in Australia, 1945. Adjusting to civilian life. REEL 12 Continues: Reflections on service with Royal Australian Navy during Second World War, 1940-1945: question of survival in naval service; fate of HMS Bluebell; loss of Australian personnel serving in X craft; lessons learnt from naval service; standards adopted from naval service; competition amongst ex- servicemen and non-servicemen for jobs on return. Attitude to recording his experiences.

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