

New Zealand Returned and Services Association

Memories of Service

James Murray

Born: Auckland, New Zealand

Born: 1928

Age: 88 (in 2016)

Able Rating: New Zealand Navy

Joined: 1945, aged 17

Serial Number: NZ 7998

World War II

Father's Service

My dad was in the First World War, he was thirteen. He was what they call a trimmer, down below on the fires. He went through Gallipoli and the Dardanelles; and then he joined the Merchant Navy.

The Navy



I volunteered for the Navy and you had to get your parents to sign it, and you waited. I went in when I was seventeen. You do three months down at Motuihe, which was HMS Tamaki, they used to call it. In that three months you got one weekend away to come to Teahan to see your folks and you went back again. Then you come to Philomel then they transferred us to Arundel racecourse and we were picked up to go on to the old rattler, the three o'clock train to Christchurch to pick up an oil tanker to take you to America, but I never got that far. I was taken off the train and taken back to Philomel then informed my mother had just died. They gave me

three days' leave and then back again to Philomel then straight onto a ship called the Nieuw Amsterdam.

From there we took ten thousand Americans over to Melbourne, from Melbourne we went through to Durban in South Africa and there was a gunnery school twenty five miles out there called HMS Assegai; and that is the national spear of the natives in Africa is the assegai, and that's where we waited until we got a ship. They found it easier there to crew the ships there and send them back to the Atlantic rather than send the crews over there because of the blitz.

And so that's how we started in the Second World War. At a gunnery school there where they took us through all the Oerlikon and pompoms and on to four inch and six inch. From there we transferred. I went on to an armed merchant cruiser called the Canton. They took me off at Colombo and I picked up the Gambia at Colombo. I went straight on to A turret which was a triple six inch. I done two commissions on her. That was our gunnery teaching and from there we went up to the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean.

Our main port was Trincomalee, that was a naval port, Trincomalee. From there we used to go out with the carriers and they'd bombard Malaysia, Surabaya, and do surface findings. From there we did a commission that was approximately just on a year and come back to New Zealand, we went into dock, and after dock we were done through our trials and from the trials we went back from the Eastern fleet we joined what they call the British Pacific Fleet. And we come under the American Admiral Halsey. From there we island hopped attacking all the islands until we got up to Japan.

One of the biggest naval battles there in the Second World War was Okinawa. We battered that place for four days. Prior to that during the course of being in the Navy especially in India we done a course in combat. Which stood us in good health when we went up to Japan. We were the first to land in Japan. But prior to that there was a platoon which is twenty four of the ship's company of the Gambia that was transferred to an American destroyer and that's when we saw the bomb go off on Hiroshima. We were about one hundred and eighty miles away when that happened. We thought what had happened was that they'd blown up Japan. It just looked like a big mushroom shape, sort of white and brownly smoky. And then four days later they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki but during that time we went in lending craft into Yokosuka which was a naval base in Japan and took over the naval base there.

From there I was Davis-Goff's right-hand man and I was his driver. He was the first naval rating to come from the lower deck and ended up Commodore of the Navy. So I went out and I got a Buick straight-8 car; confiscated that off the Japanese, and that was his car. We went right through Japan to Ōfuno which was the most northern prisoner of war camp. Bad one. And we liberated prisoners of war and we brought them back south down to a place called Wakayama. They were all deloused and everything there and then transported onto the two hospital ships and transported away to Australia, New Zealand, England, and America. The condition they

were in was just a bag of bones. Skin and bones. No wonder a man had nightmare when you got out the Navy. It takes about two years, three years to settle down.

Other than that, they were a defeated nation but they had mobilized over a million force to repel the invasion. But after they dropped the two bombs they refused to sign the treaty so Roosevelt said I've got seven more atom bombs I can drop if you don't sign the treaty. So they gave them four days, and on the fourth day they signed it. We got relieved from there by the K force and we came back to New Zealand.

Escapades

During that time there was quite a few little escapades like the British destroyer was hit by aerial torpedoes and we towed that for about two weeks doing six knots. And we're under attack by Japanese submarines at any time, but we got through to a place called Leyte in the Philippines. During the time, a tow rope parted because they hadn't, on the destroyer eased it through the fairings instead of using it just where it was it was just rubbing on the one particular link, of course the link broke and it was sisal, the tow rope, which floated on the water so we had to away sea-boats crew and in amongst all the sharks that were there we to pick this rope up and take it back and reattach it to the destroyer and then we took off again. There were just places you couldn't go ashore or anything, nothing like that. I think at one part there we had eighty five days at sea. We oiled and provisioned and everything again. That was the longest any ship had ever been at sea without striking land. There's a few photos there I'm showing you of oiling at sea, provisioning and all that. All in all, when you think of it now, it's gone, you know, but at the time you had to make sure that you done everything right.

Aerial Attack

We went up to a place called Kamaishi which is up the northern part past Fukushima up towards Ōfuno where there was a big steel works and we blew that apart with a naval bombardment. And the kamikazes, that was the first time we saw them coming out. This kamikaze plane came over and was intercepted and fired on our ship, the Gambia but it was disintegrated by none other than an American pilot who blew it up and part of it was scattered over the quarterdeck of the Gambia. They'd fly very low to get out of escaping the radar, and they'd aim for the aircraft carriers. The center island, which is the nerve center, and just blow themselves and the plane up. They'd go through tons of aerial firing from Bofors and the four inch and also the pompoms. Quite a few of them never got anywhere near us, but some did. Illustrious got hit, Indomitable, I think she got hit too, but it puts them out of action.

Turret

Well, we were closed up on the action stations in the turret and just lay there on the deck where we were. You had a boiler suit and anti-flash. And for using toilet there was only one could disappear you know. In the turret there was fifteen, no, sixteen with the captain of the gun, five for each gun and triples six inch. And a breech loader, range finder and you had two

rammers and a cordite number. The two rammers would ram the shell up and get to the rifling of the spout of the six inch gun. And then the cordite goes behind that then they close the breech and intercept and ready to fire. Then it's fired from up on the bridge when we get all the calculations. I was cordite number. You had to be pretty good with your foot to press the release button and the cordite would come up in a shell. What would you call it? A very hard plastic. And you take the lid off it, move your shoulder and the cordite would shoot out. And when it shot out, it went straight to the rammer who slammed it into the breech, into the spout. And then the breach, and then they would ram it and then they were ready to fire, and intercept it. I would say, about forty five seconds from when he opens the breech and then you go. The range finder he's setting his instruments and you've got the captain of the gun there.



Task Force 38

We were attached to Halsey and his was the aircraft carriers, Task Force 38. Illustrious, Indomitable, Saratoga that was an American one, that was the biggest one of the war, Saratoga. And that's the one we picked up at Shark's Bay which is on the northwestern side up north by Broome. None of those places were thought of then and that's where we met it and we went up to Malaysia and bombarded Surabaya. Blew the aircraft carrier and blew the aircraft and all that. Blew the aerodrome all to pieces and came back and went back up Trincomalee. We were the best gunnery ship in the Eastern Fleet and the British Pacific Fleet, the Gambia.

Yokosuka, Japan

That's an experience, going on a landing craft and this is the landing barge that we all, twenty four of us clambered into. Before we went in and took over Yokosuka in the mainland of Japan. And you're in this picture? Yeah, that's me down there, alongside the American motorman. I think you see my rifle there. We had a Lee-Enfield rifle with five bullets and that was our lot and bayonets. That's all we had. There wasn't many of us, only about fifty of us went into Yokosuka, that's about all. At one part I was looking after two hundred Japanese that had surrendered. And I'll tell you what, I was pleased when the Americans arrived in the jeep with a Lewis Gun on the back of it and they just took over. Well probably one of the best parts of being up there was Davis-Goff said we'll go over here and we went through a couple of tunnels and one tunnel was a brewery. And they had all these bottles of Saki there, flip the lid off and I passed it but he said, "No, you try it first." I tried it, not thinking for one minute it could be poison or anything like that, but it was all right. He said to me go back to the base and get as many men as you can and trucks and come back here and just then this couple of Jeeps come in. They were Yanks and I was sitting down there with him and all and when I come back he was sitting on a crate, he'd had plenty. And next minute we loaded up three trucks. Loaded them all up and there was still hundreds and hundreds of crates of beer. Next minute in come the air force from the America and they come in all the G.M.Cs and cleaned them out. And their next trip then was going to another town to work, which was an aircraft factory.

And then straight up into Ōfuna. In all Japanese prison of war camps they used to bow to a Bonsai tree. There was always a tree in the forecourt and they see them they never walk past without bowing. At any rate, this prisoner of war I was bringing back on the trucks and he was sitting in front with us he grabbed hold of the steering wheel and run over it. He said the rotten swines. Those poor nurses, terrible. But they used to parade them down there and the local inhabitants said they'd turn around and belt them with bamboo. And so a lot of them carried wounds in the head, you know, where the bamboo's had sunk into their skull. And I was talking to a captain in the army and what they done was to two red hot bamboo's they'd pierce through his Achilles tendon and he couldn't walk, he'd just shuffle like that. Terrible. And anyway we don't talk about them there, just forget about it. As I say, they'd just changed the guards there a fortnight before we arrived there. They were signing the treaty when we were there.

The Japanese

Well, it's hard to say because we couldn't speak Japanese or anything there. And they just looked because all Orientals are all same aren't they, they're very quiet aren't they. We shared our lunch which was four sandwiches and there were herrings[?] in tomato sauce. They were like sharks, these fish. That was spread into the sandwiches and then we had to get an orange and an apple and we'd share it with them, with the Japanese because they had nothing, no food, nothing, nothing at all.

R & R

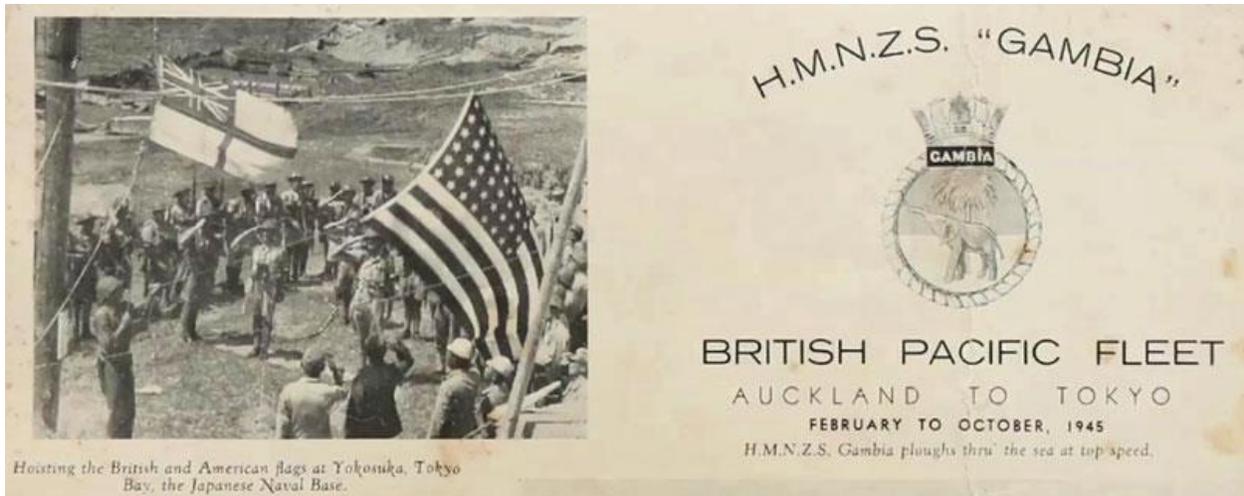
Well, the only breaks that we had was they had a rest camp, about four thousand feet above sea level in Colombo which he had to travel on trucks or the train to get there and it was called in school data Lauer Diyatalawa. And you just had a canteen there and that was it, so you spent three days there and that was the lot. And you go back and go aboard the ship and that was it. But at Trincomalee, if you played soccer, you could always get in the soccer team and go ashore, and they had all the Catholics, they went ashore, to their religion. Also, we had water polo players. You just put out a boom and we used to play there and swim. They would have a shark patrol, joker sitting up there 303[?]. I never saw any sharks. It was just a mass of ships there, Trincomalee. The other places, Manus which was an island, which is right on the equator. And there's only anchorage and they had a dry dock there. That's where the Achilles got, aircraft attacked her there when she was in the dock while we were there.

Aircraft Carriers

Well, we went on board the Indefatigable, yeah, I went on that. They've got big hangars and all that you know. They could have that job for me, sitting on all that gasoline. During the engagement they never wasted any time when they came in to land and saw a lot of them miss out coming down. They'd idling coming in and they'd miss and get waved off by the batman and all that but quite a few of them went straight into the tide. If any plane was damaged they just wheeled it over the side and got rid of it. So the destroyers would pick them up or they'd throw the old floats, Kali[?] floats over. So quick. Seen a few like that. Seen one joker, poor devil, he's struggling trying to get the canopy over and down she went, couldn't save him. When you're doing about twenty five knots and into the wind, it only shows the old destroyers picking them up. And they used to hit the mines too. Especially the Americans, they'd stop and they'd open fire with everything and just blow the mine out.

Rum Rations

Now I was under age, and we used to get a limus[?] what they call a lemon juice. That was our. They just finished at that time, twenty and onwards got the rum ration. We had to stand up while the other fellers drunk their rum. But they abolished that. If it's your birthday, you had a sip of the rum and then they got your hammock lashing and they lashed you to the form so they didn't jump overboard. Do some funny things when you get loaded up on that rum. We had one joker there in the hangar mess, he was on the hangar mess up with the pompoms and it would be up there twenty five, thirty feet up and he dived off there, reckon he's a kamikaze. And he was lucky because he just missed the eye bolt for tying down the motor boat on the deck, on the steel deck, just missed his back, went into his back, but not where his head is, backbone would killed him. Another joker, he was in the telephone locker, and all he had to do was open the door to get out, but he climbed there like a monkey. Different things hey?



After The War

I went in the merchant navy then. I was on the coal boats going down the south island and sailed out of Wellington and then I came back and we took one of those old wooden fishing boats the Sandford's[?] had over to Wallamaloo and Sydney for the Red Funnel Line fishing company. Took us three weeks to get across, under water most of the time. Only a skeleton crew on her, about nine I think there were, eight or nine of us on it. And I suddenly decided, well, this was no good so I went through the rehab. But they used to look after the returned men. We put in a ballot, my mate and I, for a sheep farm down at Rotorua. Anyway he got the sheep farm, I missed out, so they told me that I could go through for a trade so, I went through as a carpenter.

Multiple pompoms there, we had one on the starboard side and one on the port side. And our men, six members and there are rapid fire for anti-aircraft. An excellent gun could put up a good barrage. Here, this book was written by Jack Harker who has now passed on, a tremendous guy, and illustrates quite a few things about the Gambia. What a great ship she was and a great crew. Travelled tremendous miles and also fired a lot of shells. Mainly attached to aircraft carriers, for strikes. Surrounded by destroyers and a cruiser squadron alongside of the aircraft carriers.



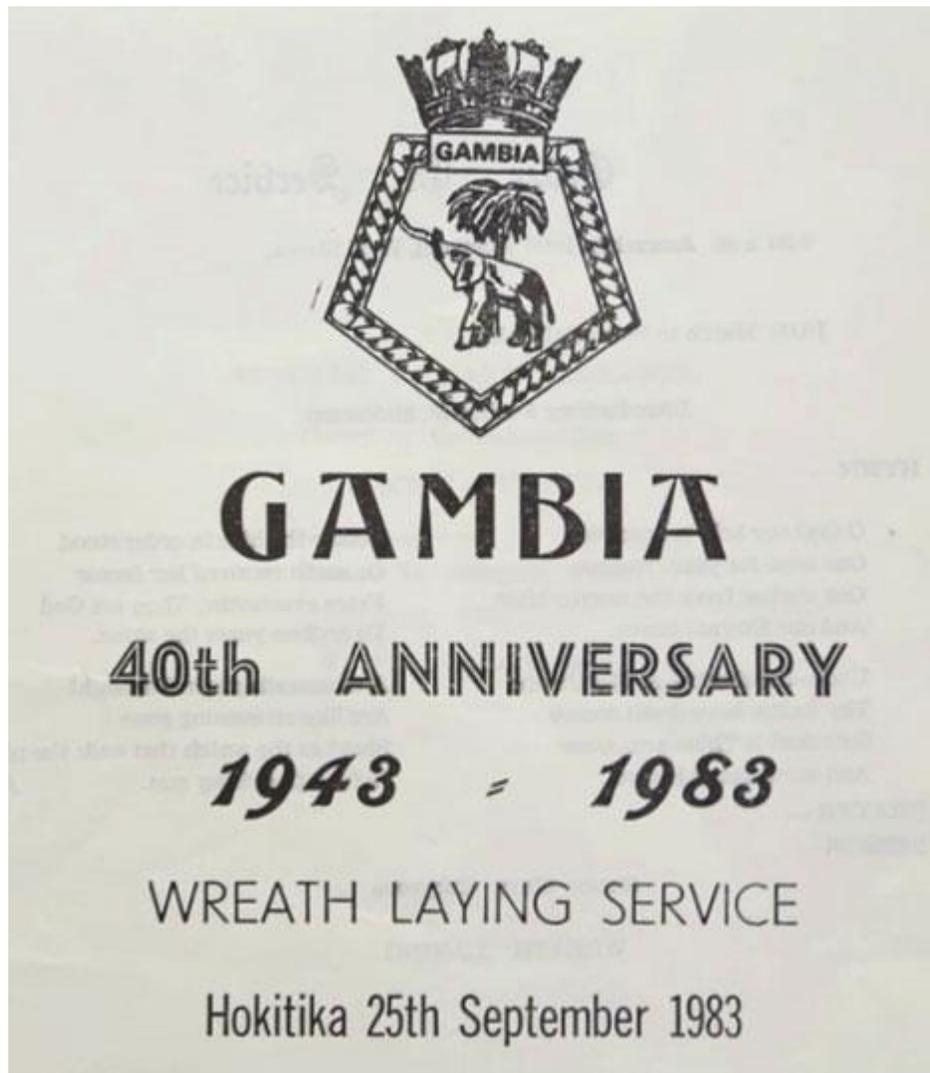
And these fellows here, are all shipmates of mine, and they've all passed on. Buster Hayes from Wellington was an amateur wrestler, fantastic guy. Ian Boys, who struck a ballot for a sheep station and ended up coming to Arriva and we were great fishing mates until he passed on, and Billy Marr who came from Matata and today his epitaph is the White Sands motor camp run by his son-in-law Murphy. And Bill was very fluent in Mauri. You wouldn't think he was full blooded Mauri there but he was a tremendous guy. And Merv Bovais who comes from Ashburton he died this year unfortunately through a heart attack, but I've never ever seen a person like him that he had a perpetual grin and was laughing all the time. He only went to about five foot three, but a great guy. I miss 'em.

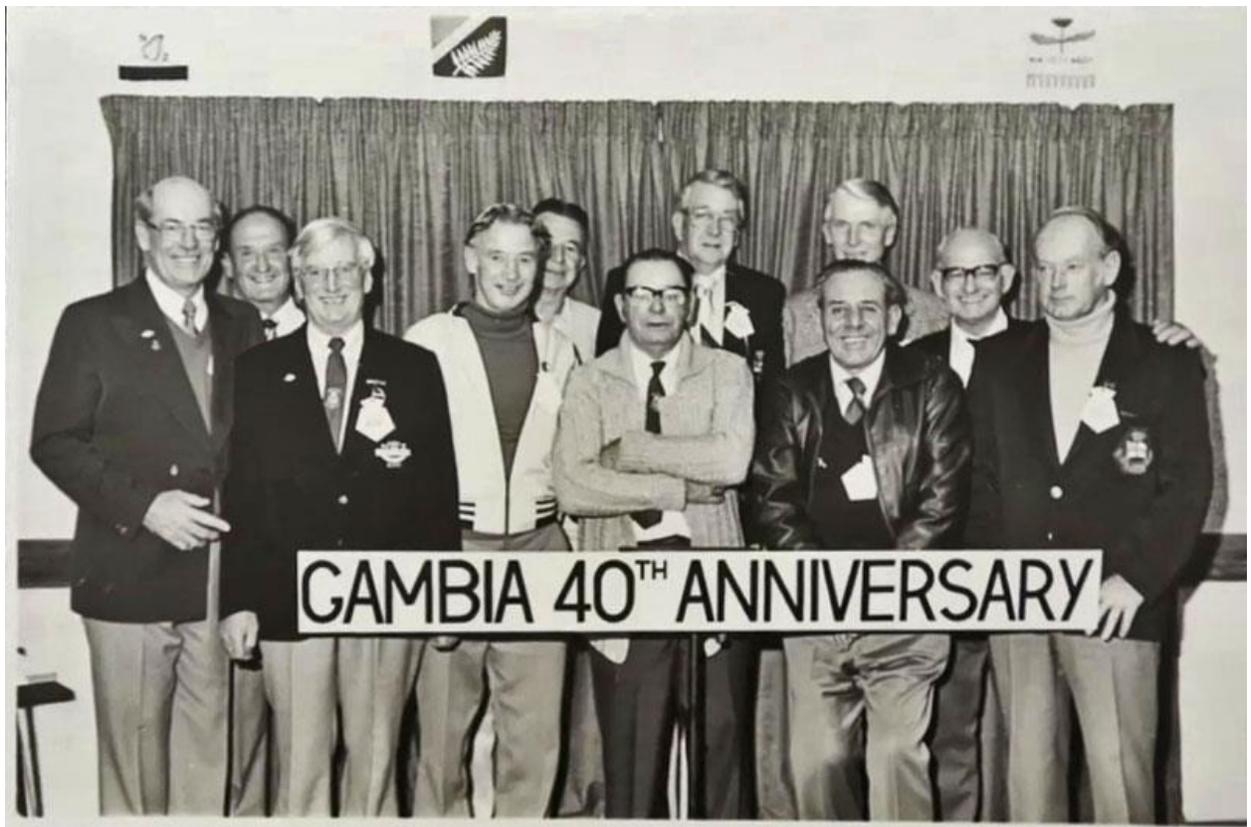


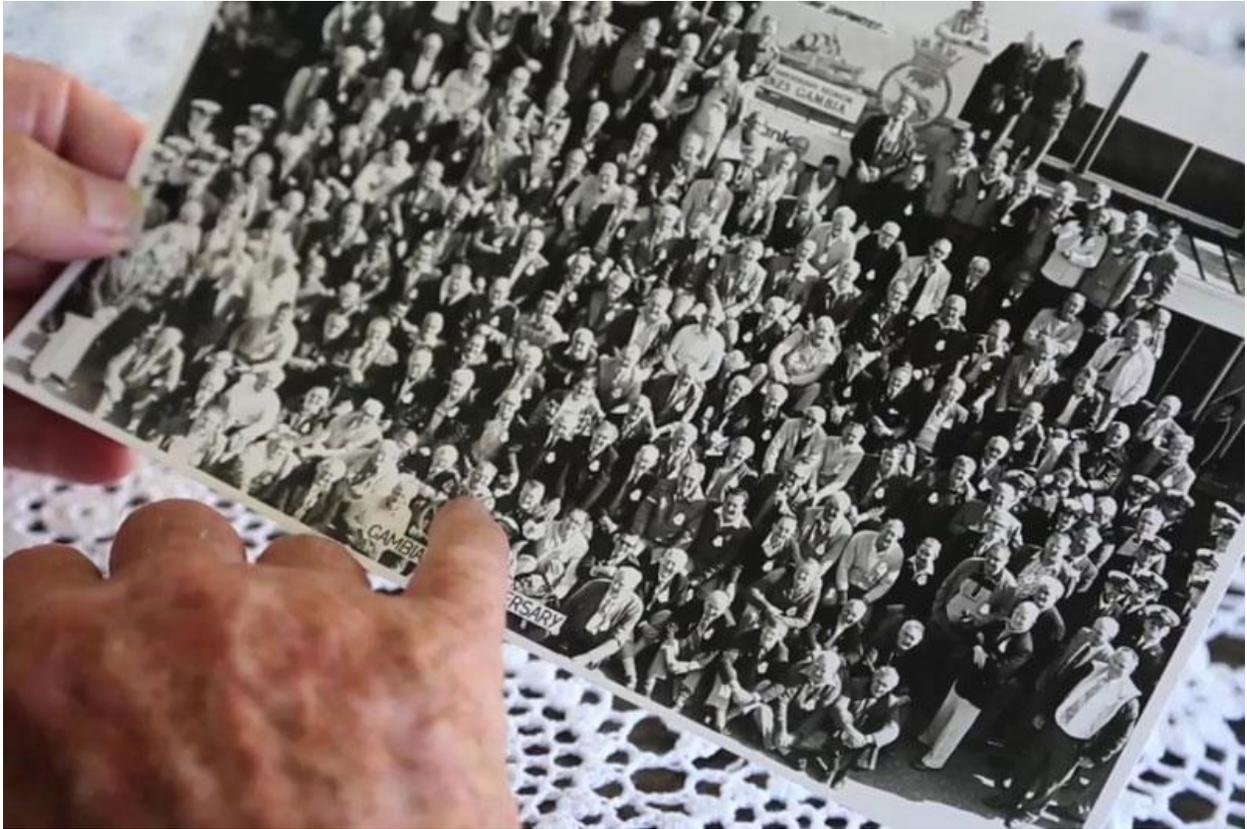
And this was my old shipmates, Ian Boys and the two Ragg twins, in those days the very, very lucky to have got away together because they liked to split them up. But they were both sailmakers and I have never seen either one of them since we came back. Where they are now I wouldn't know, but Ian died a few years ago and he was also a very good rugby player for Waikato; and he played in the possibles and the probables under the tutorship of, I've forgotten his name, Freddie Elam; and he played with a broken big toe and he had them taped together and Fred said to him after, he said you seemed to limp a bit and he said you played very well. But they've now, the three of them now, passed on to my knowledge.

At the time I was leasing a hotel called the Britamath, and we used to meet every Tuesday of the month, the last Tuesday of the month, and I would shout a round of drinks for them all from the Gambia. And we decided to go down, in 1983, to Hokitika and the only way of getting transport there was to use a bus. And a married mate of mine who was a member of the RSA in Warkworth, Charlie Railwiti was a bus driver and he decided to take us down. With all regalia and everything on the bus, fifty one of us, the fifty one seater and fifty one of us, male and female, took off. That is the ship's company taken at Hokitika on our first 1983 reunion. You'll see down here at the bottom, there's Tal Winniarthur, that's Rema Winniarthur's uncle and he is also the cousin of the great opera singer, Kiwi Arthur. And Frank Jeffries who carved a mahogany crest of the Gambia. And on this side, that's me there; on this side is Bill Cedric who is probably the greatest rigger the New Zealand Navy has ever experienced. A fantastic guy on

Macramé work and anything attached to wire rope and ordinary ropes. And this was taken at Hokitika on the first reunion in 1983.







And during our stint of eighty five days at sea. We used to oil and this is an example of what happens, that's the aircraft carrier illustrious, and she's getting oiled and what they could do and this is the Gambia here, is they put out one hose for there and one hose for there. And its just that the calm weather was good and we would oil ships there and provision and then take off again. But you can see where it's very important is the nerve center on the aircraft carrier. It's just like a big flight deck, mobile.



And this is the boys in Durban. Ian Boys is the centre one there, and that is the rickshaw puller. The natives down there doll up and they put all head dresses on and everything and they'd stand approximately nine and ten feet high, and bottle tops all round their ankles and they would get you in the rickshaw and away you'd go. And that's one of the only ones I've seen taken in Durban.



And there's the photograph I took of Tokyo when we landed in there. Just to show you the rubble, and that's part of the palace, and the rest is just rubble, that's all it was. And they cleaned it away to make a track for a truck. And you can just imagine what it would be like.

That was the Victorious, the aircraft carrier that struck a kamikaze. The kamikaze missed the island but done untold damage to the flight deck. This one was where they captured this sixteen inch gun. And the Japanese couldn't get over eating the bully beef. That's the Gambia, full steam. And this here, what's the name of the mountain there, Mount Fuji, Fujiyama. And there's a sailor standing guard here on the ship and for the first time for the Japanese, an invasion fleet, an enemy invasion fleet has ever been in the Japanese Harbour.



That is the 1939.45 star, if you're on active service during that time. That's the Burma Star, in the Indian Ocean and the Bengal, and you see that bar, "Pacific" you can't hold both medals, the Burma Star and the Pacific Star at one time so they, whichever one is the first you're on, which is the Burma Star, then you put the Pacific clasp on then. And that's defense of New Zealand is these three, and this one here is the signing of the treaty, the finish of the war.



That's the hari-kari knife for committing suicide. I don't know anything about the stain. To me, I never wiped it off. Whether it's been used, whether it was blood or not, I don't know.



This here was a decoration taken off a Japanese admiral's uniform which I had. And when commander Davis-Goff and I took over we had all the keys of the naval base.



So to stop the looting, he said, "You look after these Murray" and I said "Yeah" I think I was worse off than the looters. Because I went in myself and had a look, and that's how I got the Japanese uniform and I got these glasses. It's a beautiful green mottled crystal, never been used and I think that they would be in the vicinity now of about a hundred years old. They got the emblem of the cherry blossom and the naval anchor.



That was the shot glasses the kamikaze people had, they usually throw away and broke them, but seeing I had the keys there I got them, they haven't been used, and that's them and they've got a little emblem on there, the anchor and the cherry blossom.

Just that I missed all my old mates that used to be honest and it's only spasmodically now that you find somebody that's been on the Gambia. Matter of fact, I got a phone call the other day and he was 96 years of age, this fella, and I'm 89, I'm going on 90, but he said that the worst part about it is the injuries that they have, you know in civvy life, like deafness and eyesight. Got to have walkers and care givers.