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Student: Ian McQualter been employed to deepen the channel

Class: Thursday 10 am. have required state government

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Regional History Essay: Newcastle's Seamen. always been Newcastle,

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Newcastle. Newcastle was made up of people from working class

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companies such as The Australian Agricultural Company advertised

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Newcastle's workforce therefore was predominately from a British

working class background and many had difficulty finding work in

the early twenties and especially the early thirties. Men worked

at anything that paid, coal mining, coaltrimming or as seamen.

Seamen comprised a larger percentage of the workforce in the

early nineteenth century than today. Approximately ten percent

of the workforce were seamen in 1900⁵. These seamen like other

workers of the period laboured under poor working conditions.

1. J. H. Cross, *The Newcastle and Sydney Seamen 1800-1850* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1964), p. 10.

2. S. G. Cochrane, *Seamen of the Empire 1800-1900*, p. 10.

3. J. H. Cross, *Newcastle 1800-1850*, p. 10.

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Newcastle has a very scenic but in practical terms a rather ordinary port. It is estuarine and before the establishment of Nobby's breakwall in 1846* it was exposed to the sea. The port continually silts up and requires ongoing maintenance and dredging to allow ships to enter and dock safely. Blasting of the rock bottom has also been employed to deepen the channel. These expensive operations have required state government funding and have therefore removed the harbour from local control. The mining and exportation of coal has almost always been Newcastle, s primary economic function although it is now more dependent on allied industry. Coal was first mined in 1797 in Newcastle. The harbour and consequently Newcastle, s maritime culture has developed due to the coal trade. Throughout Newcastle, s history the city has played host and home to maritime workers. They have contributed to the character of Newcastle; it, s lighter and darker sides. The view of Newcastle from a ship's side provides Novocastrians with a perspective uncommon to other cities.

luxury when Newcastle in the first half of the twentieth century was a large coal exporting centre. Coal was mined and ferried to power stations up and down the coast and to Sydney in large quantities. (For example, Balmain and White Bay power stations). Many Novocastrians were employed on the ships as seamen and firemen. Very few were petty officers or held jobs within the seafaring professions.*² The working conditions of seamen in this period (1920, s to 1950, s) affected the working class people of Newcastle. Newcastle was made up of people from working class backgrounds predominately British and Welsh miners. Coal mining companies such as The Australian Agricultural Company advertised for workers in the coal mining areas of England and Wales.*³ Newcastle's workforce therefore was predominately from a British working class background and many had difficulty finding work in the early twenties and especially the early thirties. Men worked at anything that paid; coal mining, coaltrimming or as seamen. Seamen comprised a larger percentage of the workforce in the early nineteenth century than today. Approximately ten percent of the workforce were seamen in 1900*. These seamen like other workers of the period laboured under poor working conditions.

1. J.V. Turner. *When Newcastle was Sydney's Siberia*. 1980. Hunter History Publications, Cardiff.
pg. 14.

2. N. Cunningham. *Transcript of Interview*. 1989. pg.

3. J.C. Docherty. *Newcastle*. 1983. Hale & Izemonger. Sydney pg. 14-15.

4. J.C. Docherty. *Newcastle*. 1983. Hale & Izemonger. Sydney pg. 122.

resolve of many of the major unions was stiffened by communist party influence. Seamen's conditions have steadily improved throughout the twentieth century due mainly to the efforts of the Seamen's Union (established 1874)*. The reduction in the number of seamen and the increasing demand for more and more technical skills has allowed seamen to become a skilled minority with rights to demand more equitable pay and conditions. But during the first half of this century clear class divisions existed. The shipowners provided the seamen with as little as possible to reduce running costs and maximise profits. Sometimes work was difficult to get and therefore conditions were tolerated. Prior to the seamen's strike of 1925 the men had to provide their own bedding and linen when joining a ship. The seamen lived in a large open area in the bows of the ship where the ship's motion was at its worst. Living quarters were at or just below the waterline making it impossible to exercise or a very damp exercise to open a porthole. Often bedding was cold and damp and heating was nonexistent. Hot showers were rare and considered a luxury when encountered. There was little lighting, often only a single oil lamp in the middle of the mess room table. The meals had to be brought from midships where the galley was usually housed to the living quarters by the deckboys and it was often cold and upset by the time it arrived. The men worked a seven day week excluding manual labour on a Sunday. Living space was cramped and uncomfortable. Bunk curtains were not obtained until after world war two as were reading lamps, reliable showers and hot presses for warming meals. Tuberculosis thrived among the seamen of that era. A disease usually associated in endemic proportions with people living in poverty with low socioeconomic standing. The T.B. hospital established at Bobbin Head for seamen with T.B. to recuperate (established 1946) stands as testament to the atrocious working conditions of seamen.

The seamen's saving grace ^{was the Seamen's Union} which battled to improve shipboard conditions on a constant basis. Before the 1920's the Seamen's Union was run by anyone with enough drive and aggression or really the man with the biggest stick, who could hold power. The union was infiltrated by the criminal element and improvements in working conditions took second place. During the 1920's the

* G. Greenwood, Australia, A social and Political History, 1953, Angus and Robertson, Sydney. pg. 153.

working class image. The predominance of English and Welsh migrants reinforced unionism in Newcastle as unions were strongly allied to the resolve of many of the major unions was stiffened by communist party influence and the union won respect and reverence. Dishonourable practices such as selling beer for a profit to the frontline troops during the war were punished and the strike breaker was shunned and ostracised; they were even forced to dine at a separate table. There is no evidence or record of any major union confrontations in Newcastle but certainly the Newcastle seamen were staunch union members and upholders of its laws in keeping with Newcastle's working class status. The communist party survived the purges of the 1950,s and even the attempt by the then Primeminister, Robert Menzies, to outlaw it in 1951*. The Communist party became a detrimental component of the trade union movement with popular anticommunist feeling of that decade. But it had stabilised the union and if nothing else it had made the ships run on time.

The sailors and seamen who visited Newcastle were an important consumer force. As well as being characters who enjoyed their time ashore to the utmost, they added colour to industrial Newcastle. They were probably greeted with wide grins by the owners of pubs, dance halls and other public houses. Although usually a nomadic labour force, many seamen called Newcastle home and they would return at all cost to Newcastle from other coastal ports for even the shortest leave. Such was the bond and feeling of belonging to Newcastle.

With the advent of oilburning ships and then motor ships, crew sizes began to shrink. The seamen and firemen were not required in such large numbers. Improved methods of land transport and the establishment of local power stations reduced the port traffic and the constant coming and going of seamen.

Seaman are not as prevalent or obvious in everyday Newcastle today as they were 50 years ago. Their demise has accompanied the decline in local and interstate coal trade but they have left their mark on Newcastle. Their militance and perseverance throughout the early decades of the 1900's has reinforced Newcastle's

6, Greenwood, Australia. A Social and Political History 1955. Angus & Robertson Sydney pg 325.
 J. L. Docherty. Newcastle. 1923. Hale and Tremenger. Sydney. pg 122.

working class image. The predominance of English and Welsh migrants reinforced unionism in Newcastle as unions were strongly allied to their English counterparts and union tradition and knowledge travelled to Australia and Newcastle with assisted and free migrants. Seamen and the Newcastle coalminer had this militant background in common. Certainly the coalminers of the early 1900,s were very stubborn and militant. Their local power and energy ^{were} was dissipated by the centralization of union power in Melbourne and Sydney. Newcastle's seamen were staunch unionists but there were few union disputes born in Newcastle. The local seamen tended to follow suit and abide by decisions made in the capital cities. As Docherty states of the coalminers, they did not originate large scale disputes but suffered them. The same applies ^{to} the seamen. Politically Newcastle has suffered under the same phenomena. It seems that the contribution to state wealth is great but the return is minimal. The seamen's labours and the local coal has supported the state's power demands for decades. Coal remains a national export earner but Newcastle receives little reward in the form of monetary assistance. In addition, Newcastle has been kept as an industrial area for the production and supply of goods and raw materials to the more politically labile areas of the state.

Despite Newcastle's harbour having a less facilitative function as a port in comparison to Sydney's, Newcastle has still developed a colourful maritime history. This history has complemented Newcastle's social and economic development. The seamen who sailed and worked on the ships were welcomed into Newcastle and felt comfortable here because they shared similar characteristics to the resident workers. The lack of outside interest in the way of developers and commercial businesses has perhaps saved Newcastle from the desecration seen in other cities. Presently, Newcastle remains an open city with many unscathed historical bulidings. The ordinary harbour and the working class origins have contributed to the survival as well as the underdevelopment of Newcastle.

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This is a fortyfive minute taped interview for a regional history project. The interviewed, Mr Neville Cunningham, is a retired seaman. The tape contains recollections of Mr Cunningham's early days at sea, his view of seamen's working conditions and description of union struggles toward better working conditions. Mr Cunningham provides an outside view of Newcastle and the role of the harbor and shipping in Newcastle's development or lack of in the years between 1945 and the present.

TWO PAGE TAPE SUMMARY

Mr Cunningham went to sea in 1943 as a deckboy. His first ship was the Dunroon which was involved in troop movements to New Guinea. On the Dunroon he was introduced to the seamen's union. Mr Cunningham recalls the work in which the union was involved and the many struggles which involved him personally. He describes his training to become a seaman and the conditions under he worked from the 1940's onwards.

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 little page with full
 details - your name,
 title etc*

Mr Cunningham also discusses the importance of Newcastle as a port and the support the idea that Newcastle is largely a coal town rather than a seaport. Newcastle is also described from a seaman's perspective. The people of Newcastle are discussed and emerge as friendly, parochial and working class.

The working conditions of seamen are discussed as well as the brutal justice of the lower deck which seems to embody the combative and reactionary nature of seamen. The effect of world war two on maritime technology is described and also the effect this changing technology had upon the numbers of seamen on board the ships, and the resultant weakening of the union.

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Mr Cunningham went to sea in 1943 as a deckboy. His first ship was the Duntroon which was involved in troop movements to New Guinea. On the Duntroon he was introduced to the seamen's union. Mr Cunningham recalls the work in which the union was involved and the many struggles which involved him personally. He describes his training to become a seaman and the conditions under he worked from the 1940's onwards.

Mr Cunningham talks of the importance of Newcastle as a port then and now. His recollections support the idea that Newcastle is firstly a coal town rather than a seaport. Newcastle is also described as a social centre from a seaman's perspective. The people of Newcastle are discussed and emerge as friendly, parochial and working class.

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The prevalence of tuberculosis amongst seamen is mentioned as is the establishment of a T.B. hospital at Bobbin head specifically for seamen. This tends to support the description of the poor living conditions already portrayed. Working conditions and industrial unrest is described with reference to Newcastle. Although Newcastle was and still is very union orientated the major disputes seem to have occurred elsewhere.

REGIONAL HISTORY PROJECT. OPEN FOUNDATION 1989

The changing role of and character of Newcastle is outlined and the reasons for this change are suggested. Also Mr Cunningham puts forward his point of view as to why Newcastle has maintained its second class city status. The harbour level of activity, type of activity, and overall importance to Newcastle is discussed in relation to the state and the nation socially and economically. Newcastle's political status is also referred to and appears to be at the root of many of Newcastle's deficiencies.



This is a typed interview for a Regional History project for the part time Open Foundation Course 1989. Recorded August 1989. Interviewer is Ian McGuiliter, Interviewee is Mr Neville Cunningham, a retired seaman who was very active within the seamen's union. Mr Cunningham currently is involved in anti-nuclear and environmental issues. He has been a candidate in local government election.

Q. How old were you when you went to sea?

A. Sixteen. I went to sea on the 1st of September 1943.

TWELVE PAGE TRANSCRIPT

Q. What was your first job on the ships?

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REGIONAL HISTORY PROJECT. OPEN FOUNDATION 1989

NEWCASTLE'S SEAMEN

Q. So what were the conditions on the ships, the working conditions?

Laughs.....Stop tape

Q. So how old were you when you went to sea?

A. Sixteen. I joined the Duntroon which was a troopship in the 1st of September 1943.

Q. What was your first job?

A. There I was a young deckboy. In those days we had to do three years to become an able bodied seaman. It was a year deckboy and two years ordinary seaman. So yes, was deckboy in that ship which meant that I used to be in, looking after the bosun, carpenter and the petty officers. Cleaning their mess rooms, get their meals, make their beds, collect their linen and all that kind of stuff in the mornings and your on deck learning the skills of seamanship in the afternoon.

Q. So what was, how many hours a day did you work a normal working day?

A. Um in those days, we worked as we worked or something like 56 hours a week. It was a seven day a week job. It was a we worked an eight hour day seven days a week. There was an accumulation if I remember rightly we used accumulate something like if you did the seven days at sea you accumulate eight hours leave for a Sunday that you had off in your home port or when you paid off the ship you got compensated for leave in lieu. Um...

Q. What did the sailors think of Newcastle as a port? Like professionally as a seaport?

A. Yeah, well in those or when I first went to sea of course the ship that I was on, the Duntroon was a motor ship a um Newcastle being mainly a coal port. It always has been a coal port um the vast majority of ships on Australia's coast I'd say or a 90% of them were all coal fired ships, steamships and that was Newcastle's major role at the time they only supplied coal to the gas works in Melbourne and Adelaide and um they took coking coal round to Whyalla um so Newcastle was always a port of colliers and all the etc.

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sixty milers that run to Sydney cause they supplied all the coal to the White Bay power station in Sydney and in Balmain and the gas works in North Sydney and um there was one running over to the gas works in Manly, ar the little sixty milers as we callem. So it was a coal, but it was always only round Australia and only in recent years did they stuff exporting, oh well thats not true, they exported, exported coal during the last century, you know in the early days of last century they Newcastle so its always had a tradition there.

Q. Was there much to do for the sailors to do when they had leave in Newcastle was it a good place to have leave in?

A. Um Oh sigh, I suppose one ports as good as another. Um I always used to enjoy Newcastle because from the early days, when I well the first ship I ever joined out of Newcastle was the Ullollo, one of Adelaide's steamship companies ships and um to be in Newcastle meant the Palais Royal Dancing and um the other one up the top end of town the Railway Institute. Ah it was the dancing and the pubs were pretty good, it was a free and easy life in Newcastle. Yeah I always enjoyed Newcastle, most blokes did cause it was a working class town and you could always dance and you know it was as good as any other town in Australia I'd say.

Q. Was it a good place for sailors to sort of settle down?

A. Well one of the things about Newcastle was it was high proportion of people living in Newcastle that had been to sea. I found that a lot of blokes that you met in Newcastle while they they didn't continue going to sea, they nevertheless had alot of experience at sea, you had a lot of foreign seamen that had settled down in Newcastle. Places like Carrington and Cooks Hill was full of em at the time and Stockton always had a lot of seamen that belonged to Stockton and Mayfield um yeah and um you know the other thing about it, the first thing that I noticed was that um their was a peculiarity about seamen out at Newcastle they were much different to most seamen I'd ever met. I think it was a very parochial nature they had. I used to always laugh when I joined a BHP ship. You get a bunch of seamen on board and you'd get down to Whyalla and they'd come back to Port Kembla instead of coming to Newcastle. They would all be jumping on taxies, buses, trains and christ knows what you know they couldn't get back to Newcastle even though the ship was only down there for two or three days ya know. They always belonged to Newcastle. Ah I always found that when you joined a ship out of Newcastle a bloke didn't say he came from Newcastle, he usually said he came from Stockton or a ar he come from Cooks Hill and you sort of had this impression it was my impression that all these blokes on board a ship, they didn't see themselves as coming from Newcastle. They all had their own areas. You had Stockton seamen and they were a pretty wild bunch and ar the Ullollo everyone down below figured themselves as world beaters and ar and it was a great port for the blokes who were well versed in the art of 'fistycuffs'. You know, um maybe because it was a coal burning ship because there was so many fireman and all these ships and so many of em had firemen that came from Newcastle thats probably why there was such a proponderance of blokes from Newcastle, they played a big part yeah. The Ullollo was a coal burner yeah ar they they...

full

full Newcastle crowd on that well down below anyway. I think the deck crowd were mainly Sydney blokes but nearly all the firemen down below were from Newcastle.

Q. That was for coal burners?

A. Yeah yeah

Q. When did they stop?

A. Well, coal see when I went to sea, it was I think it was through the war years. See the war interupted that period that the whole industry was going through was a gradual transformation to motor vessels um rather than coal. Some of the ships if you take for example the Duntroon she came out on the coast here in 1935. I think she was one of the early motor ships to come out and from 1935 onwards um there was a whole transformation taking place in the transport industry in Australia in as much as Maritime industry and I think it was ar by the time the war hit here the um there was a number of motor ships not oil burning vessels but motor ships and um it wasn't till after the war years then um that was all held up then till after the war years. Um I think it was around about 1946-47 about 1946-47 that um they started to change over from coal to oil and that was for good reasons economical reasons that the development of the ships and cargo carried capacity because coal took up a hell of a lot of space tween decks and bunkers, ar which reduced space for cargo to be carried. So I think it was a economical development which determined type of ship and the structure of the ship.

Q. That reduced the crews then didn't it? You didn't need the fireman?

A. Yeah well the ail burners were the first ones to start eating into it. What happened was normally you'd have a ship take the Ullollo she's only a small ship by today's standards. She'd have been about a three thousand ton ship and she had about twelve men down below in the engine room. Um you know fireman, trimmers um but after the war of course the Ullollo never went back to oil. But the other ships which had been built like the river class ships toward the end of the war they had a oil jet put into the file and it was virtually like a blast furnace. They just blew the um hot oil in it it was egnited and I think it got more heat from the oil and that was more economical all round and yeah it did reduce the crew. I think in most ships where they need three fireman and a trimmer per watch they only need a oil burner or a burner and I think there was no if I remember right there was one maybe two burners and all they had to do was change nipples in the burner. They had a very similar nipple as they have in primus stoves and lamps and that kind of thing. So that was the beginning um and that sort of almost revolutionised the very nature of ship board organisation as well because prior to their the advent of the oil burners the um firemen used to predominate. They had the numbers on board a ship you see so when ever we use to make union policy we had arguments and discussions in the mess room and anything to do with the union the firemen reflected a greater had a greater say. And they were more militant you know going to the extreme as people would call them today extremists um as I say

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they were a lot of blokes a lot of knuckle men round in them days you know so they had a big influence.

Q. Yeah, so when did you become involved in the union work?

A. Um with the union right from the word go um I'd mentioned to you about this before the fact that um when I look back at it. Prior to my going to sea I left school at thirteen and a half and I'd mentioned to you before that I'd um got a job as a telegram boy and I'd been a rebel right from the word go day one. I always used to think it was me because I'd jackup on this this post master who was trying to make me do more than I should have been doing 'e had me there as telegram boy. I was getting twelve and six a week and um they were short of a postman you see so he was always loading the postman's job on me as well as the telegram boys job and I had another bloke who was doing postman's job also and he had the salary that was provided for the postman that wasn't there being divided up between the postmaster and the other postman and because I was a thirteen and a half year old kid they obviously thought I wasn't intitled to it and I'd jackedup and was told by the postmaster who was then somebody in the community that in a small town like Narabeen that if I didn't pack me bags he'd put me boot in me arse. You see and that went on and for different reasons and things like that. I had seventeen jobs between when I was thirteen and a half and sixteen and in every incident I was ar given blasts and all that and I started to develop a bit of a complex and it wasn't untill I went to sea you see that um I found out that there was somebody and when I joined the Duntroon and I'll never forget it because the Duntroon had a big crew she had about thirty men on deck and we all ate in a big common mess room. And there was a bloke who was befriending me by the name of Jack O----- always remember this Jack and I didn't no this see, but O----- had been a 'scab' during the 1935 strike. And on this Duntroon there was still three scabs which was a remnant of the 1935 strike which was another big water shed in the Maritime industry 1935. And these blokes these scabs they use to make life bad for them. Because O----- was talking to me and I thought he was a nice bloke and he was being friendly to me and I was being friendly to him and I thought O yeah nice sort of a bloke, and I remember the union delegate pulling me up one day and he was going crook on me cause I was talking to this bloke. And I said yeah you know, and he said 'listen son, that blokes' a scab, nobody talks to scabs'. And you ignored them as much as you could on board a ship you see so you know I never thought any more of it then. But the union was functioning and whenever I'd any trouble you know always had a delegate and it was my first introduction to a union and I thought wow you know, this is great and everything come into place from then on yeah.

Q. So you were happy to find someone who was prepared to protect you.

A. Yeah yeah, well ar you know I thought it was great at that time um something I never ever you know the old idea of the old scab you know. I guess I fell in with everyone else if it was popular in them days to hate scabs you know and I guess I was sided with the union but I'm happy to say later on the union had a different attitude and a different policy to blokes that got off side with

the union and ar they found that the need for unity amongst the workers themselves that if they wanted to build a big strong union you couldn't afford to have this friction within the ships and within the union and they set about not to make amends entirely but treat them as ordinary civilised human beings and fellow unionists. Yeah, so I found the union very good for the first time I started to realise it wasn't just me. I sort of it was duck to water and I guess I found all these blokes that were beating and screaming and complaining and um, they were able to make demands on their ship owner bosses you know which I'd never ever had that possibility in the past.

Q. So what sort of work did you do in the union?

A. I never did that much in the union in them days it was virtually do as was told like laid in the Duntroon. We had shipboard meetings and I seen how the delegates operated and the delegate was elected from the members and he was the spokesman. And I guess it wasn't until the Ullollo, the Ullollo always stuck in my mind because it was the first ship that I was in as an able bodied seaman you see and of course when you come from deckboy to ordinary seaman to able seaman and I was a young able seaman cause I was only eighteen they lowered the age from three years down to two during the war years cause they couldn't get seaman right, they had to make it able bodied seamen and we became the 'Hollywood Sailors' they use to call us, you know we'd they'd say you wouldn't know the front end from the back end ya see cause they rushed us through. They used to give us all kinds of bad names but never the less when you become able seamen and I was in this Ullollo, um I felt then that I could stand up and say my piece and be equal to everyone and that I did. And ar of course I joined it here in Newcastle, the Ullollo and we went up to Brisbane. There was this bloke I'll always remember. He was sitting at the table with me, we used to call i'm Seaboats this bloke and um he used to be growling at the deckboys this bloke, and it always come back into my mind blokes growling at me as a deckboy and so I defended these deckboys and told this bloke what I thought of him and to get off their back you see. I grew to dislike this bloke in a friendly kind of a way until we got to Brisbane and it happened one night up there this was stewing over in my mind, this bloke being horrible to these deckboys you see. We went up to the Bridge hotel and we were laying under the Storey Bridge and we were coming back this night, three parts pissed and this bloke Seaboats was walking up ahead of me along the alley way as we come on board ship and I looked at this, I seen this mop that the steward had been using to ar mop out the refri@gerator in the morning you know, it was pretty full of smelly greasy shitty water, so I picked up this fucking mop and I wrapped it round this blokes head. It was about six foot in front of me, Seaboats you know you know 'whack' and Seaboats took me down and um you know I thought I was pretty tough then eighteen years of age able bodied seaman fully member of the union you know I knew the bloody lot you see. And I thought I could handle anything and um I went down the big open folksal we lived in then pretty bad conditions shipboard wise and ar he took to me and we had a fight down there you see. And this bloke I'll never forget it, he beat the living daylight out of me. It was the first fight I had onboard a ship that's what I was building up to tell. But there was that

to work like mad to get hot presses put into your folksal or to

kind of disciplinary way of ironing things out. And he give me the biggest hiding I'd ever had in me life. Couldn't do me hair for a bloody fortnight after that he pumbled me head and I couldn't eat anything but pea soup all me lips were pulverised blackened me eyes so I learnt a big lesson there yeah.

Q. What were the conditions like on the Ullollo, the sleeping conditions?

A. Well most of the ships most of the cargo ships anyway and again I was lucky again the Ullollo they had better conditions than most we lived down aft, everybody lived right up in the eyes of it right up in the bows of it um because of the balance of the ship you see but we did have the familiar big folksal with double bunks all round the um bulkhead in the folksal and there was very little ventilation um you only had we'd won bunk lights by that time which was a struggle which the union had put on to get reading lights at the head of your bed and might I add that prior to this they used to have kerosene lamps and that used to just um light up in the middle of the table in the folksal um quite often when your in port not on the Ullollo but in a lot of these other ships, motor ships they used to just have kerosene lamps and all that kind of thing but anyway the Ullollo we had electric lamps on the top of our bunks we were fighting to get bunks curtains we didn't have port hole curtains or anything like that yeah. It was pretty pretty grubby it was like most ships you were down below decks which meant you were pretty near the waterline when your at sea you couldn't open your porthole and that it was alright in fair weather but in foul you had to close em down and everyone was coming down wet and bedraggled and of course one of the major diseases in them days was TB. There was quite a lot of blokes that used to be ironed out in the industry um and it was to such an extent that after the war or around this time probably a little bit after they, this Princess or Queen Julliana hospital down there at Bobbin Head, where they used to go up there for recuperation. Yeah I had a couple of mates in there that had TB and you know it used to be contagious and used to pick it up quite easy on a ship because of the foul air and breathing the same air and the dampness and all this kind of thing. Although that wasn't bad though the Ullollo wasn't bad when I seen some of the other ships like the Kangarange and you lived for ar, you know they were the foulest bloody conditions cause ya lived right in the bows of the ship and it was blacked out during the war and they used to have a shelter over the break of the folksal head to stop any lights glaring back at the bridge at night time and ar they were bad you know. In the morning when they used to turn the steam on on deck, you used to get all this steaming running down through the folksal and ta bloody folksal used to be all wet and full of steam. Oh christ it was bloody rough you know and um during heavy weather ya ploughed into a sea and you had, you'd come out from the folksal head and you'd have to run along the forard well deck and up onto the the midships maindeck. Nearly all your food was bought from the gallery in a in every ship the gallery used to be midships and you had to run down and pick up your dinner and they used to have these little dixies that the deckboy used to have to run down with you know there all on a rack and he'd run down and get em of the cook and most times by the time you got it it was cold. So the union had to work like mad to get hot presses put into your folksal or to

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the mess room up in the folksal which was usually adjoining the folksal in some of these more civilised ships and they put on a hell of an adgitation and activity to get these. Of course what it meant to have a hot press up there were all steam operated hot presses to keep your meals warm to the ship owner it was a drain on the boilers that they had to rub right along alongside the bulwarks and into your folksal and you know they were reluctant to do anything like that the same thing they had to pump fresh water along there to you and you used to have steam showers with them water as it went up the pipe and went up to the shower rose and um these were always a tortuous bloody experience because quite often the ship used to roly you get one and try and have a shower and the little tank that was on top of the ontop of the deck on the folksal head they'd um you know the ship would roll and the cut of the water supply into the shower and steam would come through and then you know the next minute when the ship would roll and the cut of the water supply into the shower and steam would roll and the cut of the water supply into the shower and steam would come through and then you know the next minute when the ship rolled back this way you know so one minute ya getting scalded one way and getting freezing to death the other bloody way oh you know it was a bastard. They were the major complaint when I went to sea you know my early days at sea all the blues were over bloody showers or ar mattresses on ships. The union had won this prior to the 35 strike. There was a you know seaman used to have to bring there own mattresses and oh christ, you know and some of them would be left in their for any length of time and then they had to put on a struggle to get em changed every six months. Ar but they were pretty hard and uncomfortable. Yeah it was prettyrugged and that you know and it was pretty miserable on board this ship you know not at not at sea but it when ya went in port nobody ever drank at sea in them days. There was a lot of self-discipline attached but you know when you got in port there was a great encouragement for drunkeness and I guess ya sort of had to blot it out to make life bearable aboard a ship yeah.

Q. So when did conditions sort of start to improve, sort of gradually?

A. Yeah well I'd say they were improving from I'd say 1935 onwards cause that was when the communist leadership was voted into the union as a result of the 1935 strike um in 1935 it was a catalyst sort of thing. It was there the boil sort of burst and all the poison flowed out that ad been pent up for years ar that had taken place um butthen came the intervention of the war years. When thestrike finished in 35 of course there was only one ship that sailed union on this coast. I think there was a fleet of about 120 ships that sailed this coast and only one of em sailed union and so even just getting the blokes organised ready for a fight it just didn'tcome overnight. There was all kinds of hoods run the bloody, there was a criminal element that run the ships or run the coast or you know they were in there on the ships and you had to develop better ship board organisation before you could hope to correct that you know where the man with the biggest muscle didn't control you know didn't stand over everybody else. Which used to be the case before this so I guess that it was after the war years that we began tosettle old scores really. I mean during the war years it was union policy that I remember

quite well that the ship had to be taken to sea because there was a war on and our fami blokes were fighting up at the front up in New Guinea and when I was on the Duntroon as a deckboy, it was against union policy for a bloke to sell beer to the troops for anymore than what you paid for it which we used to pay only 10 cents or a shilling for a bottle of beer. So if anyone was selling a bottle of beer up there for a profit it was union policy that you'd lose your book over if you know there was great discipline measures taken as so we were quite conscious of that. I think the ship's owners took advantage of it to project you know to continue to have these bad conditions. I didn't think about it till later on but ar nearly all the motor ships traded around to the west you know, ships like the Monbrow and Mundulla and one or two others when the old coal burners were coming up to New Guinea and I think that they were glad to ar you know, if they'd have lost a bloody ship, they'd have claimed their compensation which they did any ship lost during the war was reimbursed cause the government took em over during the war years. Um, yeah, so the answer to your question as to when it started to improve, well I think it began to improve just after the war we had, the Chiefly labour government in and we come out of the war years thinking we'd served em well so ar so well, during the war effort and the needs of Australia and to fit union policy. And ar if it was a great disappointment to everybody when the Chiefly labour government did very little to help facilitate this in fact he come in and if there were any propositions put forward any struggles ar he pulled out the Red Bogey right away and we began to be classified as a bunch of communists and you know greedy and unnecessary and selfish and um you know the economy was just getting back on the rails so don't interfere with the economy you know. I and there still saying if if the industries buoyant they say you know we cant give you wage increase or do anything for you because you know the economics buoyant and you'll only rock the boat um if your um if the economy was you know steaming ahead they were, cant give you anything now cause it'll only fuel inflation. And if it was in the doldrums they'd say oh no we cant give it to ya now cause we cant afford it you know and so on every occasion and this is the one of my first experiences after the war you know. No matter what we went for oh the ship was too old and it wasn't economical and if we press for these conditions we'll have to lay the ship up and you'll be all out of jobs and this that and the other ya see and it was all a load of crap. It was all a lot of crap so um we had to take it. It was an up hill fight all the way along the line we had to get rid of china mugs and chipped bloody china plates and all that kind of thing get supplied with China. And everything was an effort. We had to have a struggle to get eggs for breakfast and then when we got eggs we first got eggs it was first got eggs and um then they changed Thai you know the union fought these were long drawn out struggles to get it from eggs on bloody Wednesday to and Sunday to. One egg a day then it went from one egg to two egg and I'll always remember I joined a ship called the Age and as to give you an indication of how it was in them days, I'm lined up in Adelaide looking for a job and um here this block block this union organiser, he used to yell out the jobs. He'd say he wanted too ABs for the Aged and nobody would move see and he'd turn around and say she's a two egger! This meant that this ship was giving two eggs. You see it was an added inducement to join this bloody ship you see and

we used to greet each other in the pub and say what are ya on mate? Oh I'm on the Dilga you know someone would say what is she a one or a two egger. And finally we'd ar what we were actually after was a common menu cause that was a big battling point. Little common things like that. Years ago ar you know they used to give you chicken um when you chicken on Sunday the officers would get the breasts and the seamen would get the bloody wings and they couldn't but help distinguishing between the two of you there was all these wags in which they you know, the officers got till and one thing you got something different and it causes dissention until we got common menus then we fought the midship accomodation then we got three berth cabins then we had to press to get single cabins and so it was just one whole grind and it just kept on going. Its still going today cause seamen have still got a battle on their hands today because there are almost becoming extinct with bigger ships and smaller crew um the days are just about gone where the um union plays any part at all in it you know, they play a part thats wrong but they don't carring theweight that they did before.

Q. With the reduction of workers, were there more specialised workers on the ships?

A. Yeah, because there moving into high tech and cause they got different style winches, different style propellers you know and automatic steering and all this kind of thing you know.

Q. Anything that the seamen tried toget you know that upset the economy if they stopped working that would affect the economy ofNewcastle wouldn't it?

A. Yeah, the thing was there was very seldom any ships held up in Newcastle. A lot of ships come in with quick turn around. There was a bloke Reg F----- was the union official here prior to John B----- whose here now. Reg was here delegate through from 1935 right through till I suppose till roundabout 1949,1959. Or something like that when John come here and um there used to a lot of beefs here but they were they were usually rapidly fixed up here in Newcastle but they never ever any they never made any fundamental changes. They were all made through head office and controlled by the federal body of the union with the ship owners and BHP and companies like that you know. Yeah they were usually little skimmishes you know what I was saying over the menu or the conditions over saltey conditions or foodand things like that caused most of em youknow that affected Newcastle anyway. They'd patch em up and some of em well nearly all of them affected your life aboard the ship cause they really, what it was all about cause they was they were daggy old ships um you gotta remember that when the war came on Australia was caught with an absolete fleet of merchantmenthat had been trading on this coast as a result left over from thefourteen /eighteen war a lot of D class and the E class ships were all excommonwealth line ships from the fourteen/eighteen war. The Billy Hughesfleet they used to call em and BHP had four of em sailing on the coast here right through the war and ar well after and that was the Iron Warrior the Iron Nob, The Iron Prince and ar I forget what the other one \$s called but they were old E class ships you know I mean they were pretty bad. They might have been alright in 1918 but by

jesus

charter

Jesus they were pretty rough. Good ships as far as ships were concerned but ar with things like the likes of the showers you know, yeah.

Q. So whats the difference between Newcastle when you first got here and Newcastle now?

A. Well to give ya a bit of an idea and I think this is important to realise this you know, I mentioned before that when I first came to Newcastle in 1946 to join the Goolaloo Newcastle was always full of Australian ships. There was just a rare occasion you'd see a foreign ship ar in this port. mainly because and all this coal that came out of here went either to west Australia Whyalla Adelaide or Melbourne or a or ar Sydney and and Newcastle. And it be nothing to see ar five or six 10,000 ton river class ships lined up here either discharging iron or loading steel or loading coal down ar here plus a few BHP ships I'd say that you'd have 99% Australian ships and over where the dyke was um um round you'd see colliers loading Newcastle you know milliers colliers and all that. But today when I first come up here back here to Newcastle a few years ago I was I had reasons to be going round the waterfront to be selling the tribune you know, which was a communist party newspaper and I was going to sell the tribune and I walked round here for about a fortnight and I hardly seen an Australian bloody ship in this port. The only Australian ships that I seen put that time were lugged up and for sale. Two of em come to mind there was the Iron Monarch and the um the um other one the Iron Monarch and the Iron oh christ what was the other one there was two or three BHP ships was for sale there-heavy ships. I don't know ya know but here was very few now the bulk of the ships coming in and out of Newcastle the day when I first came here and most of the Iron boats were about five or six thousand ton ships now ya got the likes of the Iron Pacific thats 240 thousand tons you know now the BHP ships of those days were Carrington about 35 seamen which a 6000 ton ship now ya got 240 thousand ton ships carrin, 26 seamen and their gonna reduce em further down to 22 thats the total I mean thats the total crew I'm talking about. 35 seaman as against 26 and the um and the um the size of the ships have grown. Whats that um you know 20 told almost you know ar so and then they talk about the tonnage that goes out of Newcastle their shipping something like ar 30 million ton of coal out of here a year which is going over seas. The thing that I wonder about with that is that to day we're shipping out 30 million ton over-seas annually out of Newcastle and we've got a great national delbt you know. the wheres it all going? Ar you know and most of our coal is going overseas...um and we got to be and um in them days we only used it internally and there was no such problem ah you know it er ite er , a big thing and as i say the point of view from the seamens as what compared to those days um there's very few seamen ship out of newcastle today as what compared to those days um there's very few ships in here you can go through any time you like ah you might see one or two Australian ships in here and even you , and even you've got the B.H.P ships um like the Iron Hunter I see was registered in Hong Kong you know they have ships on charter

they haven't got the fleet that they've got today you know the national line fleet has been halved so there isn't the jobs and there's another another um they reckon another thousand jobs seamen got to go out of the industry by the end of the year. or so you know that's the difference really you know then you can work that out for yourself that that what's happening ah where it's all going to end an and and what does it mean to the average Australian, and the average citizen of Newcastle um the decimation of the whole maritime industry. Ah so we don't have the ships we don't have the jobs ah ar and we don't see much for all the coal that's going out of the port any way.

Q. So we're always sorta always losing stuff out of Newcastle not only the seamen but the resources as well

A. Yer well you know I often , ah it amazed me having been a Sydney bloke of course remember I'm not a native born Newcastle bloke and I grew up in Sydney and me first ships were out of Sydney um you know you look at Newcastle and see the heavy industry that that exist in Newcastle you see that most of the power that, that, that, supplies all of New South Wales comes from Newcastle I mean all the power industries have been closed down and they've been built all round here um all round Lake Macquarie and and up in the valley um so Newcastle supplies most of the power most of the raw materials um between Newcastle and Port Kembla but um so much comes from Newcastle , so much of the heavy industry that that doesn't exist down in Sydney um and you see what we've got for it, you know and you see what we got for it you know and I believe that ah you know that alot has got to do with politics I believe alot of it is got to do with the fact that Newcastle always been ah ah a labour held town you know um and I think if you look at the politics of Newcastle and why it's always been a labour held town ever since federation ah and and see what we've got I think it's part and parcel a business of of labours play the role of keep Newcastle as a second rate bloody city you know , while we've been able we've been bled dry um of the wealth that's gone out of this city uh and gone elsewhere it certainly hasn't come back into Newcastle.

Q. A lot of political decisions are made out of the town concerning.....

A. Yeh well I've got one of my pet theories about the role of labour you know um that the system we call capitalism couldn't function without it. And um when ever Australia the the economy be in crisis or capitalism um the role of getting it out has always been handed over to Labour and I think and and and um the the capitalists in this country like nearly all of western Europe is there is no country in Western Europe that the capitalists have been able to govern themselves its one of the peculiarities of this they've got to have a safe alternative to hand it over when they when they can't ah when they run out of steam. Themselves they can they can the capitalists can govern for a short period but but inevitably they its a very short period of time they can't have any length of continuosity and they always have to have this twiddle dee twiddle dum role youknow and our Labour party has always been ah traditionally played the role of the pied piper as they did during the war years and they did during the depression years youknow and and wherever there's evry major economic upheavel um and the system gets into trouble ah thats when they hand it over to to Labour. Newcastle having it has had a militant background from miners and seamen you know the very working class nature of this town that I think liberals would feel very uncomfortable in this town I that the the the ah the people like B.H.P. and all this would prefer to have labour politicians who ar play the role of the pied piper much better than a liberal could you know and I think that one of the major reasons it its developed its character all of its own um mind having said that I I still like the atmosphere of this town. I mean thats why I'm living here I think its one of the best I've ever lived in in my life its because its a working class town its its a friendliness and ar in this town you don't find very often in other places yeah.